
Psychological factors behind status updates: A qualitative analysis of the display of personal information on social media

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✎ **ABSTRACT.** Questo studio ha cercato di indagare i fattori psicologici che stanno alla base della pubblicazione di informazioni personali sui social media e in particolare ciò che spinge gli utenti a continui aggiornamenti. Il campione ($N = 100$) era costituito dagli studenti (fascia di età 21-35 anni) di una delle università finanziate dal governo centrale del Punjab, in India. I risultati hanno rivelato che gli aggiornamenti frequenti rispondono al desiderio di accettazione sociale, di attenzione e combattono i problemi di insicurezza. Coloro che pubblicano frequentemente post sono in genere soggetti estroversi che trovano soddisfazione dal riscontro che i loro post ottengono. È stato anche riscontrato che coloro che aggiornano spesso potrebbero essere apatici o narcisisti, soggetti con una scarsa soddisfazione di vita e legami sociali e familiari non appaganti. L'obiettivo principale di questo studio è stato quello di discernere come fattori individuali contribuiscono all'autostima, allo stato emotivo, alla personalità e al benessere psicologico di coloro che hanno bisogno di aggiornare frequentemente i propri profili.

✎ **SUMMARY.** Social media has become an open platform to display one's personal information that is accessible freely to an infinite audience. This study has tried to investigate the psychological factors behind the posting of personal information on social media. Since the construct of 'updating' is recent in origin and is least researched, the study followed an in-depth approach of focus group discussions (FGDs). The sample ($N = 100$) for this study was the students (age range 21-35 years) of one of the central government funded universities of Punjab, India. The findings revealed that updaters update frequently since they long for social acceptance, seek attention, ensure self-verification and combat insecurity issues through updating. Extroverted participants upload frequently and introverts' posts rarely. Emotional upheaval makes updaters post more. And updaters feel better not after posting, but after getting viewers, comments and likes for their posts. Many updaters could be either apathetic or narcissistic. Updaters were also found to have low life satisfaction and unsatisfactory societal and familial bonds. Finally, the major focus of this study was to discern how these individual factors contribute towards the self-esteem, emotional state, personality and psychological well-being of updaters. This has been thoroughly discussed in light of previous research in this study.

Keywords: Social media, Status updates, Personal information, Self-esteem, Emotional state, Personality, Psychological well-being, Updaters

INTRODUCTION

Short presentation

The present study was undertaken to understand the psychological factors influencing updating on social media. The sample consisted of university students ($N = 100$; age range 21-35 years) from Central University of Punjab, India. The study found WhatsApp and Instagram to be the most popular social media platforms among the respondents, followed by Facebook and Snapchat. The majority of participants used social media for sharing personal information, such as travel pictures, selfies, and family photos. A smaller proportion used social media for sharing educational or news-related content, creating public awareness, or sharing finance and trading-related content. Through focus group discussions, several themes emerged regarding the reasons for posting personal information on social media.

The participants indicated that seeking social acceptance and approval was a prominent motive for sharing updates. They sought validation and positive feedback through likes, comments, and shares on their posts. Additionally, attention-seeking behaviour was another significant factor, as some participants reported that posting updates was a way to gain attention from others. Self-verification also emerged as a theme, with participants sharing idealized versions of themselves to seek confirmation from others. Furthermore, some participants displayed reaction formation, where they posted the content that was the opposite of their true emotions or feelings, possibly as a defense mechanism to resolve their insecurity issues.

Regarding offline and online connections, participants generally preferred offline connections but showed a dichotomy in their online behaviour. Introverted individuals tended to have more online connections and observed others' posts without sharing much personal information themselves. Extroverted individuals, on the other hand, had both online and offline connections and actively participated in social media, frequently updating their personal information.

In terms of mood and posting behaviour, the study found that participants were more inclined to post during emotional upheavals, particularly when experiencing negative emotions. Some participants posted content that aligned with their current moods, seeking attention and support from others. Others posted the content that was opposite to their true emotions, potentially using reaction formation to cope with

their insecurities. Participants reported feeling better when their posts received viewers, likes, and comments, indicating the importance of social validation and instant gratification.

Regarding the participants' thoughts on others' experience of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) due to their posts, most participants mentioned that they did not consider others' feelings before or after updating. They emphasized that viewers had the freedom to choose whether to view their posts or not. This is particularly of interest to future research, as to whether social media behavior moderates empathy formation in individuals.

Finally, these individual factors contribute towards the lower self-esteem, confused emotional state, apathetic or narcissistic personality and low psychological well-being of updaters. These findings are especially important keeping in view this recent trend of endless postings on social media.

A brief history of social media

The word social media is conceptualised as the ability of creating, sharing, exploring and collaborating contents online. The advent of social media in the 1990s heralded a new age in online communication and interaction. Using the conceptual and technical framework established by Web 2.0, social media "is a set of online applications that facilitates the production and dissemination of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The evolution of social media could be traced starting from the advent of the Telegraph in 1792, when long-distance communication was completely transformed, rendering the actual transfer of objects superfluous. After this, the telephone (1876) and the radio (1895) arose as innovative forms of communication (Dhingra & Mudgal, 2019). The 1940s saw the introduction of the first truly powerful computers, known as supercomputers. In addition, advancements in computing network technology afterwards set the ground for the birth and growth of the Internet (Lile, 2023). Users were able to sign in and interact with one another in a manner that was analogous to present practises, but at a substantially slower speed, on Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), which emerged as the initial type of social networking site in the late 1970s. UseNet, an early computer network communication system that developed in 1979, was the precursor of the World Wide Web (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). In 1985, General Electric introduced a text-based platform known as Genie, which was an acronym

for General Electric Network for Information Exchange. Genie emerged as a direct competitor to CompuServe by providing a diverse range of features, including gaming, e-commerce, email functionality, and a deliberation platform referred to as round tables (Emerson, 1983). When Facebook was first launched in 2004, it was a website accessible only to students enrolled at Harvard University but later expanded its horizons worldwide (Boyd, 2004). Both Facebook and Twitter remained among the most popular social networking sites since 2006 subsequently more social networking sites that catered to specialised subcommunities, such as Pinterest, Foursquare, Tumblr, and Spotify, came into existence (Lile, 2023).

Thus in the current scenario a wide number of social media platforms are easily accessible to almost everyone. As of January 2021, the global active social media user population is 4.2 billion individuals, which represents approximately 53% of the world's total population. Facebook remained the most widely utilised social media platform with a monthly active user base of 2.8 billion. However, other social media platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram are also highly popular with respective monthly active user counts of 2 billion, and 1.2 billion (Kemp, 2021). In India, the number of Internet users has surpassed that of any other country in the world. As of January 2021, nearly 33% of India's total population was active on social media platforms (Kemp, 2021). By the year 2023, India is projected to have more than 900 million users of smartphone technology and 829 million users of mobile internet (Cisco Annual Internet Report 2018-2023).

Thus more and more people are enrolling each day over various social media platforms. Many studies have also found that online platforms serve as outlets for emotional expression and support, thereby making people feel happier and less lonely (Andalibi, 2020; Burke & Develin, 2016; Menon, 2022). Many users therefore have started using social media as a platform to share opinions, beliefs, knowledge and even personal information. Many times such personal information is irrelevant to most of the viewers yet it is shared with a known as well as strange audience. Social media has some unique features like large audience, asynchronicity, and sudden feedback which reinforce users to disclose personal information (Andalibi, 2020; Burke & Develin, 2016). Social media can also be a way for people to tell their stories and get support from others (Malak, Shuhaiber, Al-amer, Abuadas & Aburoomi, 2022; Subramanian, 2017; Teo & Lee, 2016).

Along with the benefits of sharing on social media, there comes the harmful effects of excessive sharing on social media and its psychological impact have drawn more attention from the public health sector. For example, Thompson, Wang and Daya (2020) utilised PLS structural equation modelling to examine data from 188 Facebook users in order to determine which factors contribute to news sharing on the platform. Results show that information sharing and status seeking gratifications effect news sharing differently depending on the setting. It has been observed that when the importance of news quality is downplayed, the impact of status-seeking satisfaction on news sharing increases. Similarly, in order to thoroughly examine the nature of the association between social media self-disclosure and psychological well-being, Tsz Hang Chu and colleagues did a meta-analysis using 38 empirical research. Using a multidimensional notion of self-disclosure, they investigated the relationships between psychological well-being and the quantity (volume and depth) and quality (intent, valence, and honesty) of self-disclosure. The findings showed that honesty and self-disclosure valence were positively connected with psychological well-being; however, the self-disclosure quantity was not substantially linked. The study discovered that the relationships between a variety of self-disclosure-related characteristics and psychological well-being were significantly influenced by the participant's gender, age, and cultural upbringing (Chu, Sun & Crystal Jiang, 2022). Also, people tend to report higher life satisfaction when they express themselves more honestly on social media and the inverse is also true (Bailey, Matz, Youyou & Iyengar, 2020).

Further, platforms like Instagram tend to encourage users to evaluate themselves by making upward social comparisons, which draws emphasis to parts of the body that are seen as less attractive. Instagram use has increased, which draws attention to areas of the body that are prone to worry and encourages comparison and body dissatisfaction (Couture Bue, 2020). Further, individuals with low levels of self-esteem accept requests from unknown people on Facebook (Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013). People with lower self-esteem and higher levels of loneliness were more willing to share personal information on social media (Stone et al., 2022). Self-esteem was shown to be positively connected with the number of likes people received on their Facebook profile pictures. Further, the relationship between liking and self-esteem was less for those with more compelling goals (Burrow & Rainone, 2017). The frequency of sharing solo selfies and edited selfies was

significantly predicted by narcissism. Additionally, narcissists updated their Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp stories with a lot of frequency (Menon, 2022). The need for popularity, extraversion, and agreeableness all predicted the posting of group selfies (Balta, Emirtekin, Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2020). FOMO and narcissism have a positive correlation with Instagram usage, while FOMO has a negative correlation with self-esteem (Serrano, 2020). Overall updating on social media does seem to have psychological connotations.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

There are various names for daily updates on social media, fleet for Twitter, pin for Pinterest, status for WhatsApp, and story for Instagram and Facebook. For the purpose of this study, the general term updates has been used for all. The primary aim of the study was the qualitative inspection of the factors associated with the posting of personal information on social media. In this study personal information pertains to postings that do not have any significance to the viewers, since it is not adding to the knowledge base of anyone, nor is spreading any kind of awareness in the society. Also, this personal information is not providing any kind of monetary gains (such as in YouTube reels) to the updater. Postings of personal pictures, and sharing information about one's holidays, trips, shopping, sharing daily routine, etc. come under the domain of this study. The study aimed to find out what is making people post their personal information on social media. The study aimed to find out why people are posting so much these days and why people don't feel hesitant in making their personal information available to an audience completely strange to them. Based on these what's and why's, the following was the main objective of this study:

to understand the psychological factors (psychological well-being, emotional state, self-esteem, and personality) that might be contributing to some people regularly updating their personal information on social media.

METHOD

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of university students ($N = 100$; age range 21-35 years) from Central University

of Punjab, India. This university being a central university has students from all parts and cultures of India, and also has some international students. Thus the sample suggested a diverse range of students. Convenience, purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to obtain the final sample for the study. The participants were either using social media actively or had deleted their social media accounts because of social media fatigue, but all participants had complete familiarity with social media.

In all twelve focus groups, each with seven to eleven subjects, were formed. This is consistent with the general belief that each focus group should have 7 to 11 individuals in order to facilitate productive conversation (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Materials

A self-made questionnaire asking participants about their demographic details, the kind of information posted on social media, and consent for participating in focus group discussions, was used.

Further, a semi-structured discussion guide consisting of a series of probe questions based on Krueger and Casey's principles (2000), was developed. Opening, introductory, transitional, and key inquiries are the four main types of questions that typically appear in the questioning route. The opening questions (such as participants' introduction, likes-dislikes, university life, general awareness about social media etc.) were designed just to spark conversation and to increase comfort levels of the participants. Introductory questions (such as spending time on social media, types of social media, and preferred types of social media) allowed participants to concentrate on the talk and to begin thinking about the research objective. Transition questions (such as personal benefits of social media, habit-formation for social media, posting on social media, kind of stuff posted on social media, etc.) made participants delve into greater detail than introductory questions. Finally, key questions were framed in a way so that the general aspects pertaining to psychological well-being, emotional states, self-esteem, and personality could be discerned. Following were the key questions that were discussed during all FGDs for the participants:

1. Do you post personal information on social media? If yes, why do you post on social media? If no, why don't you post on social media?

2. Do you have more online connections or offline connections?
3. When do you post more; When you are sad or happy, anxious or calm, stressed or relaxed?
4. Does it bring happiness or bring some change to your mood?
5. Do you feel good or bad about the thought that others could experience Fear of Missing Out on your posts?
6. How satisfied are you with your life?
7. Do you feel you are an important part of your family and society?

Key questions had direct implications for the research objectives. Only the scripts from the answers to key questions were analysed.

Procedure

Before the start of FGDs phase of study, the self-made questionnaire was sent to the participants through email. Only the participants who gave their consent for participating in FGDs were enrolled for these. All the participants were randomly divided into 12 groups. In each FGD, the participants were provided a comfortable environment that allowed them to disclose their thoughts, perception, and attitude about updating. The participants were allowed to discuss their thoughts in their regional language or in any other language to enhance their comfort level, since the moderators and the researcher were familiar with English and most regional languages spoken in the university. It was made clear to all participants that the conversation was being recorded by the research assistant and participants' right to privacy was assured. Each discussion lasted roughly 100 to 120 minutes (with a ten-minute interval). After the conduction of FGDs, the next step was processing and analysing the data from key questions thoroughly.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was taken from all the participants before the start of the study. Required information related to the study was given to participants and all the queries of the participants were resolved before collecting data. The participants were aware of audio recordings. No videos were recorded in order to maintain the confidentiality of

the participants. Participants were allowed to talk in their regional language also. The participants were aware that they were free to leave the study at any point of discomfort. No participant was judged throughout the study, every participant was clear that there were no right or wrong statements, just the opinions of other participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One not acknowledged purpose of social media platforms is to keep people online and monitor their screens for updates which also persuade people to share their personal information with the virtual world. This trend of updating is recent in origin and not yet widely researched, the approach for the study thus was qualitative. Along with the objectives framed, the investigators were also interested in knowing what more could come through the focus group discussions. Excess of everything is bad, so is this the excess of updating on social media? Or is this just the beginning of this trend? Are we making it a habitual response to check updates of other people regularly? Habits generally become a part of an individual's lifestyle. So, is updating and checking for other people's updates has become a habit for us? And is it a good habit or a bad one? The current investigation might not answer all these questions, but could definitely provide a food for thought to future investigations.

The general information collected from the participants suggested that the most popular choice of social media among university students is WhatsApp followed by Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat respectively (see Figure 1). 79.4% of the total participants are updating their personal information such as travel pictures, selfies, family pictures, shopping pictures, and daily routine pictures, etc. in the virtual world. Meanwhile, only 40.7% of them use social media as a platform for sharing educational or news-related content. 31.4% of participants use social media to create awareness across the public on various topics and 3.6% share content related to finance and trading. 16.5% of participants update their social media with other content such as writings, memes, politics, music, and health-related content (see Figure 2).

Results from the focus group discussion were structured into different themes based on the key questions used. The following are the themes that emerged from the transcript analysis:

When asked about the posting of personal information on

Figure 1 – Social media used by the participants

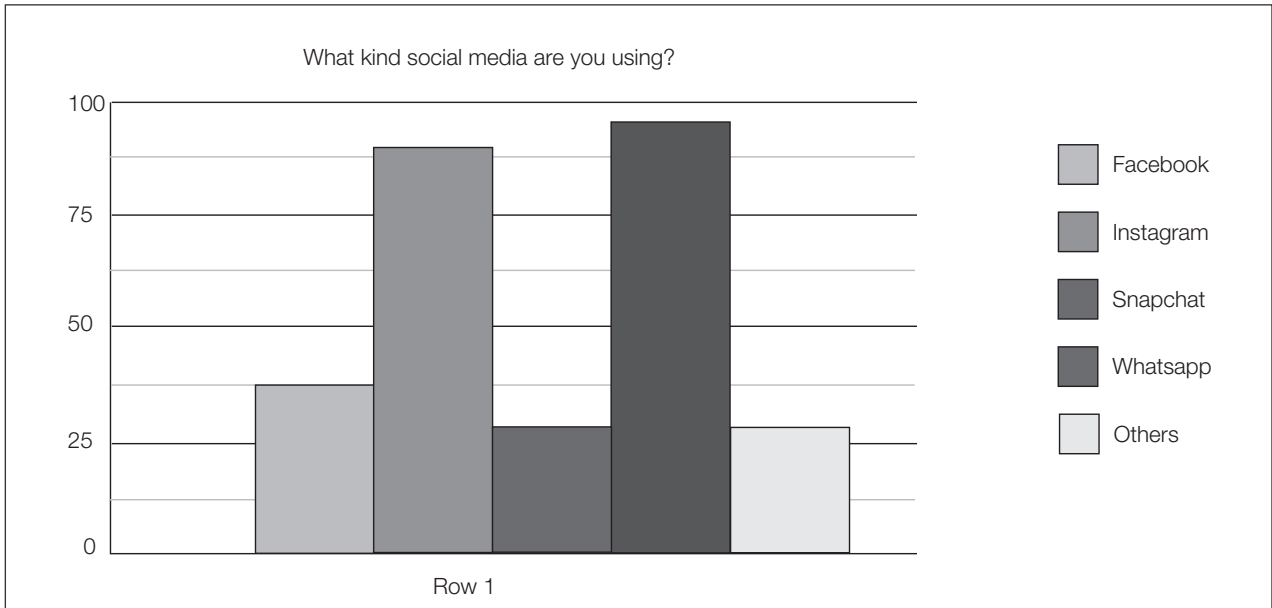
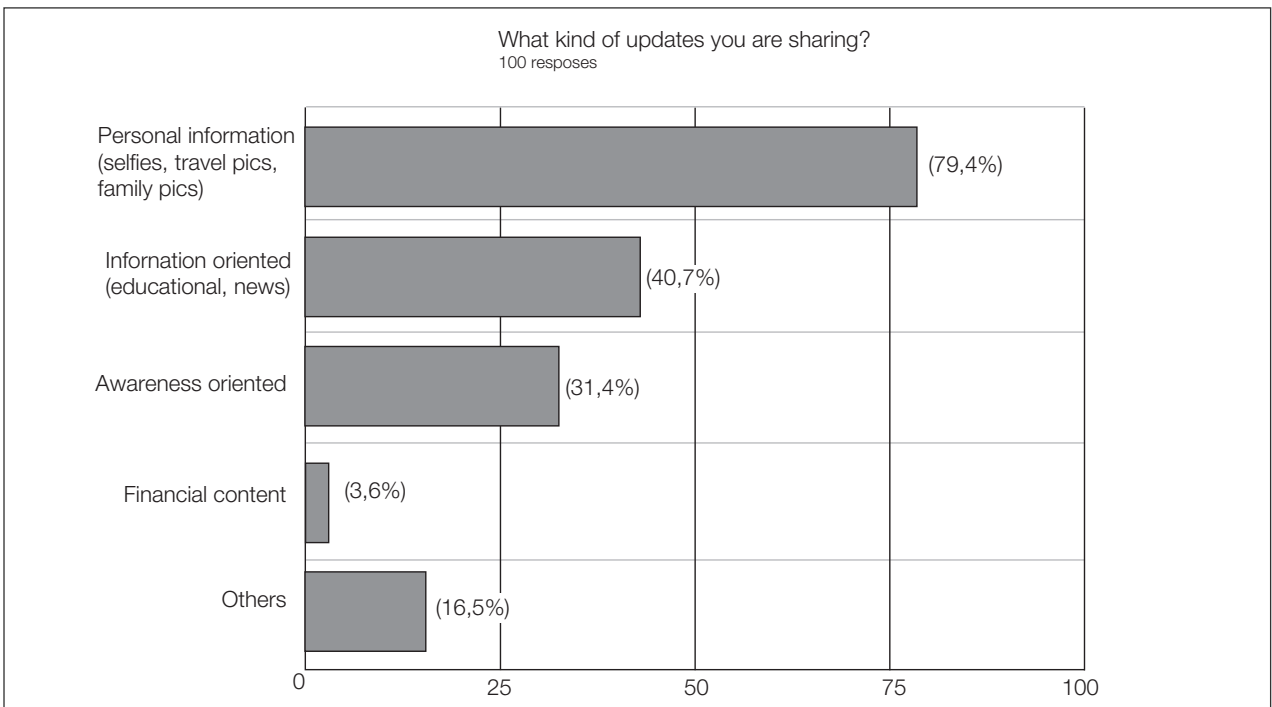


Figure 2 – Information uploaded on social media



social media, it became clear that most of the participants do post their personal information frequently on social media. The themes reported following:

The reasons why they post, that emerged from the themes, are mainly social acceptance through approval and recognition from society. Seeking approval from society and peers was raised as a popular theme in the focus group discussions. This approval can come in many ways such as from comments (or compliments), likes, and the number of views. Participants tend to maintain uniformity on their feed and make it more aesthetically beautiful in order to gain more recognition and approval from their followers. More likes, comments, and shares on a post make participants feel more socially recognized and accepted. As reported by APA, social acceptance is the formal or informal admission of an individual into some group, and it indicates the absence of social disapproval (APA, *Dictionary of Psychology*). When people get more views, likes or comments on their posts, it might confirm that their view is shared by others also, indicating the absence of social disapproval. Like as told by one of the participants:

“I feel more accepted by my friends if they like my post and if they share... then that would mean I am accepted by everyone. Just imagine you are putting a post and no one is viewing it, no one is liking it... Man! You will feel completely unwanted” (as told by a male subject, age 21 years).

Another main reason for posting was found to be attention seeking. Participants reported that the updating is sometimes the only way they get attention from others. Being seen sometimes is necessary to feel one is valuable to others. Attention-seeking behaviour is an unconscious or conscious attempt to become a centre of attention, to gain validation or admiration from others. Such behaviour may be driven by low self-esteem, jealousy and loneliness (Frothingham, 2020). Just as reported by one of the participants:

“How long can you stay without getting noticed by others? We all love to get attention. That’s a humane thing, we can’t stay lonely, without getting noticed by others... I want everyone to notice my new dress, notice my new phone. What’s the point in hiding stuff from the world” (as told by a female subject, aged 22 years).

Further, from FGDs it was discerned that for many updaters self-verification could be the reason for posting on social media. Participants in study tend to share selfies, travel pictures, family moments, and other personal happy moments with their followers to show others that they are

living a happy life, but in reality this could be a call for self-verification. As mentioned in self-verification theory, people form their self-views by observing how others treat them (Swann, 2012), and they want others to perceive them the way they themselves perceive (Evans, 2023). In other words, people want to be known and understood by the world according to their firmly held beliefs and feelings about their own-selves (Swann & Read, 1981). So, updaters might be posting an ideal image of themselves and in return might be expecting viewers to consider them like that only. As reported by one of the participants:

“I am a cool-type, happy-go-lucky person, and I want everyone to see only that side of mine. So I make sure I never miss uploading my vacation pictures. So that my friends don’t find me boring and a dull person” (as told by a male subject, age 23 years).

Another main theme that emerged was that many of the updaters were found to have insecurity issues. Some had relationship issues, some were having inferiority complexes, some felt they are not good academically, etc. and such updaters were posting completely opposite status. For example, someone who perceived herself as not meeting beauty standards of society, will use filters to post a picture as per the beauty standards of society. A participant was having relationship issues, yet was posting happy couple pictures on Instagram. So, this in some way resolves the insecurity issues of updaters. In other words, updaters might be unconsciously using the defence of reaction formation. Reaction formation is a defense mechanism proposed by Sigmund Freud where people tend to express the opposite of their true emotions and feelings. Just as reported by a study, people who constantly post Facebook status about their relationships are insecure and they post in order to get attention so as to get themselves distracted from their own feelings of insecurities (Hutchinson, 2015). Thus, updaters might be updating photos that are not reality, but a dream or longing for that fake-reality. As reported by one of the participants:

“I used to post my parents’ happy photos to show others that my parents are an ideal couple, but in reality, they won’t talk to each other” (as told by a male subject, age 22 years).

When asked from participants who don’t post or post little, most of them talked about valuing their privacy and never felt a need for sharing with a wide audience. Overall, the schematic analysis of themes for the question ‘why do people post on social media’ reveals that updaters might be longing for social acceptance, or seeking attention, or might

be posting for self-verification or finally they might have insecurity issues.

When investigated if updaters have more offline connections or online connections the themes suggested two categories of participants.

One category was more comfortable with online connections and hence had more online friends. Such participants were more comfortable with friends and even strange people of the virtual world. They felt that they don't have to do much for communicating in social media. For example, they don't have to worry about the feelings of their audience much; they don't have to display offline skills of communication such as manners, etiquettes, gestures, eye contact, body language, etc.; don't have to dress up nicely for any kind of usual conversation; don't have to worry about language issues such as stammering, lack of confidence, etc. Further online communications are self-paced, where replying back immediately is not required and it is not generally considered offensive to reply as per one's convenience. Online communications are generally straightforward and to the point, hence the awkwardness of formal, polite, wilful or non-wilful communication is not there in online communication. The ease of communication in the virtual world makes them interact more with online people. Thus, participants with lack of communication skills for the offline world had more online connections than the offline ones. But one noticeable trend for this category of participants was that although they had more online connections, they did not update much on social media. They generally are the observers of the happenings in other people's lives rather than displaying their personal information on social media. Introverts generally come under this category. Although they are more comfortable with online connections and have more online connections, still they don't post much about their personal lives on social media. As reported by some of the participants:

"Real life conversations are clumsy; I prefer to be in my own world of social media. But I also like to keep an eye on the lives of my friends through social media, instead of telling what I am going through" (as told by a male subject, age 25 years).

Then for the second category are the participants who were high on both online and offline connections. These are the people who do not fear the communication of the real world and also actively participate over social media. They don't hesitate for self-disclosure and sharing their personal

information on social media. These are extroverted people who enjoy both online as well as offline communication. Thus, the extrovert participants had both online as well as offline connections and also tended to post their personal information on social media. As reported by one of the participants:

"Most of my friends know that I got engaged, but I want others, such as friends of friends, my school friends, college friends and many others to know the same. It is really exciting to let people know about big happenings in my life. So, post it on social media..." (as told by a female subject, age 30 years).

Both categories have empirical evidence in their favours. Introverts are often successful in online interactions, as they find it easier to express themselves online, and therefore sometimes prefer it. Since, introverts feel the need to control the amount of social interaction and social media is the platform where they get this ability (Baxter, 1990). Social platforms, such as Facebook, offer introverts a painless and promising alternative to real-life face-to-face interactions (Harbaugh, 2010). Therefore, introverts prefer to use social media more for online interactions, but due to their personal nature might not be sharing their personal information much on social media platforms. Furthermore, extroverts are more outgoing and gregarious; thus, they may post frequently, interact with others, and actively participate in social media conversations. Extroverts are very active on social media updating their personal information frequently (Ross et al., 2009). Online social sharing highlights their high level of sociability thus extroverts are eager to share their experiences with friends. Along with being passionate, cheerful, self-assured, and extroverted, extroverts are also talkative. These traits suggest that extraversion may be particularly associated with online self-disclosure and hence might be uploading more personal information on social media.

This section will be explaining the outcome of the thematic analysis for next two questions of FGDs: when do updaters post more; when you are sad or happy, anxious or calm, stressed or relaxed? And does updating bring happiness or some change in your mood?

When asked about their mood while posting pictures most updaters reported that although they post whenever they feel like, but when they are undergoing emotional upheaval that time, they have more urge to post on social media. It was found that the experience of negative emotions makes the updaters post more. Such as some participants revealed that they post more when they are angry, sad, hurt and are

feeling low. Another finding from the thematic analysis for this question is that there are two categories of people who update during stressful and emotional times.

One category consists of updaters who post updates which are exactly similar to their current moods. For example, an updater reported to post quotes pertaining to heart-break when she was having a break-up. Another reported of posting sad and gloomy animated pictures when he himself feels low. Some reported to upload sick pictures of themselves when they get sick. This category of updaters reported that when people reply to their posts, they feel better and that changes their mood to some levels. More attention they get from viewers, the better their mood gets. The posts of such updaters may be a cry for seeking attention, as attention seeking, just explained previously, is an important reason for frequent updating on social media.

The other category consists of updaters who post the complete opposite of their current moods. For example, an updater reported to post his travel pictures at times when he feels bored and tired. Another told about posting healthy food pictures when he started gaining weight. Thus, for this category of updaters, it could be asserted that, as explained in the previous text, they might be unconsciously using the defense of reaction formation to deal with their insecurity issues.

Overall, it could be concluded that those who share personal information on social media revealed that posting pictures changes their mood, meanwhile those who are not active users said that posting doesn't make any impact on their mood. A person's mood can be affected in a variety of ways by sharing a photo on social media. According to research, sharing selfies on social media may affect self-esteem, and 'likes' on those posts may alter how young people feel about themselves. Face pleasure increased more after sharing selfies which received likes and comments (Coulthard & Ogden, 2018). Just as reported by following updaters:

"I used to share photos whenever I am feeling lonely, sharing stories helps to start the conversation with others which makes me feel better... also getting comments and likes from social media boosts my energy and it feels good for me" (as told by a male subject, age 26 years).

Overall, both categories of people reported that they feel better when people reply back to their posts. And definitely they feel better not after posting, but after getting viewers, comments and likes for their posts. And if they don't get viewers, likes or comments for their post their mood

deteriorates further. On the whole, it could be discerned that emotional upheaval makes updaters post more, since it could be providing them instant gratification when people view, like or comment on their posts. Getting reassurance from others is mandatory for social network users and the algorithm of social media is designed for this. According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) people use media for the gratification of various needs including cognitive, affective, tension release, and social integrative needs (Ruggiero, 2000). Research suggests that social networking sites provide similar gratification (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

This section is discussing the schematic analysis of the next question, asking about if the updaters feel good or bad about the thought that others could experience Fear of Missing Out on your posts. The participants were made clear about the concept of Fear of Missing Out (or FOMO). FOMO is an emotional response to the belief that other people are living better, have more satisfying lives and they are missing out on important opportunities in life (Brush, 2023). Majority of the participants were already aware of this concept. But when asked about participants' thoughts on others' Fear of Missing Out because of their posts, most of them responded as they never think about their viewers' feelings before or after updating. They mentioned that viewers watch their posts at their own choice. The viewers have all the freedom not to view their posts. The updaters never force anyone to view, like or comment on their posts, just as mentioned by following updaters:

"If you feel that your life is lacking something after viewing other people's posts, then simply don't watch. Use your brains..." (as told by a female subject, age 30 years).

Most of the updaters had a neutral response for this question, where they don't intentionally want to make their viewers feel good or bad about their updates. Although few reported that through updating they simply share their happiness or feelings with a wide audience. But there were many who reported to be concerned only with their own emotionality while updating. Such updaters could be either apathetic (where they simply don't have any concern for the feelings of their viewers); or narcissistic (having exaggerated view of one's attractiveness and wants to share it with others, where they are preoccupied with themselves only or lack empathy for their viewers). While people with great empathy would likely feel concerned for others, resulting in prosocial online behaviour, those with high dark triads would likely find offending others or acting selfishly appealing (Sparavec,

March & Grieve, 2022). Further, social media platforms such as Facebook, could be promoting narcissistic traits in its users (Alloway, Runac, Quershi & Kemp, 2014).

The next theme analysis is for the questions meant to have an idea about the general perception of participants about their lives, specifically how satisfied they are with their lives. And also, about how do the participants feel if they are an important part of their family and society, the themes that emerged report the following:

the FGDs revealed that participants who either don't update and update a little, were more or less satisfied with their lives. They were found to have goals and were working to achieve those goals. They were happy with their relations with family, teachers and friends and were having a support system when they needed that in crises. Overall, such participants were found to have adequate satisfaction from life. On the other hand, most of the updaters were found to be not much satisfied with their lives. Updaters were not clear about their life goals and some of them even had dissatisfaction with the fields they have chosen, which also adds to their dissatisfaction with life. They were dissatisfied with their interpersonal relationships and either lacked a support system or could not rely on the support system during crises. Just like Erikson's theory of psychosocial development in young adulthood, individuals feel dissatisfaction when they are still confused about their identity and when they feel isolated when not finding an intimate relationship (Hatano et al., 2022). Just as told by an updater:

"I don't feel satisfied maybe because I didn't reach anywhere, I am confused with my life and I don't know what to do next and most importantly I don't have anyone to guide me on this" (as told by a male subject, age 30 years).

In the context of family and society, those who don't update or update a little, most felt themselves as responsible and therefore an important part of their family and society. But the updaters were not sure about being an important part of either, they had certain doubts responding yes or no. Most of them responded that they are not accountable to society much and hence could be considered as not of much importance to society, and only a few considered themselves as important to their families. Such participants felt exhausted with the questions from the society and family regarding their personal life, career and future prospects. A significant number of updaters felt not being loved by family or had disputed families. They were not getting enough validation both from society and family. As mentioned

above, that updaters are pressurised with many stressors and societal and familial pressures and demands could be one of these. As reported by following participants:

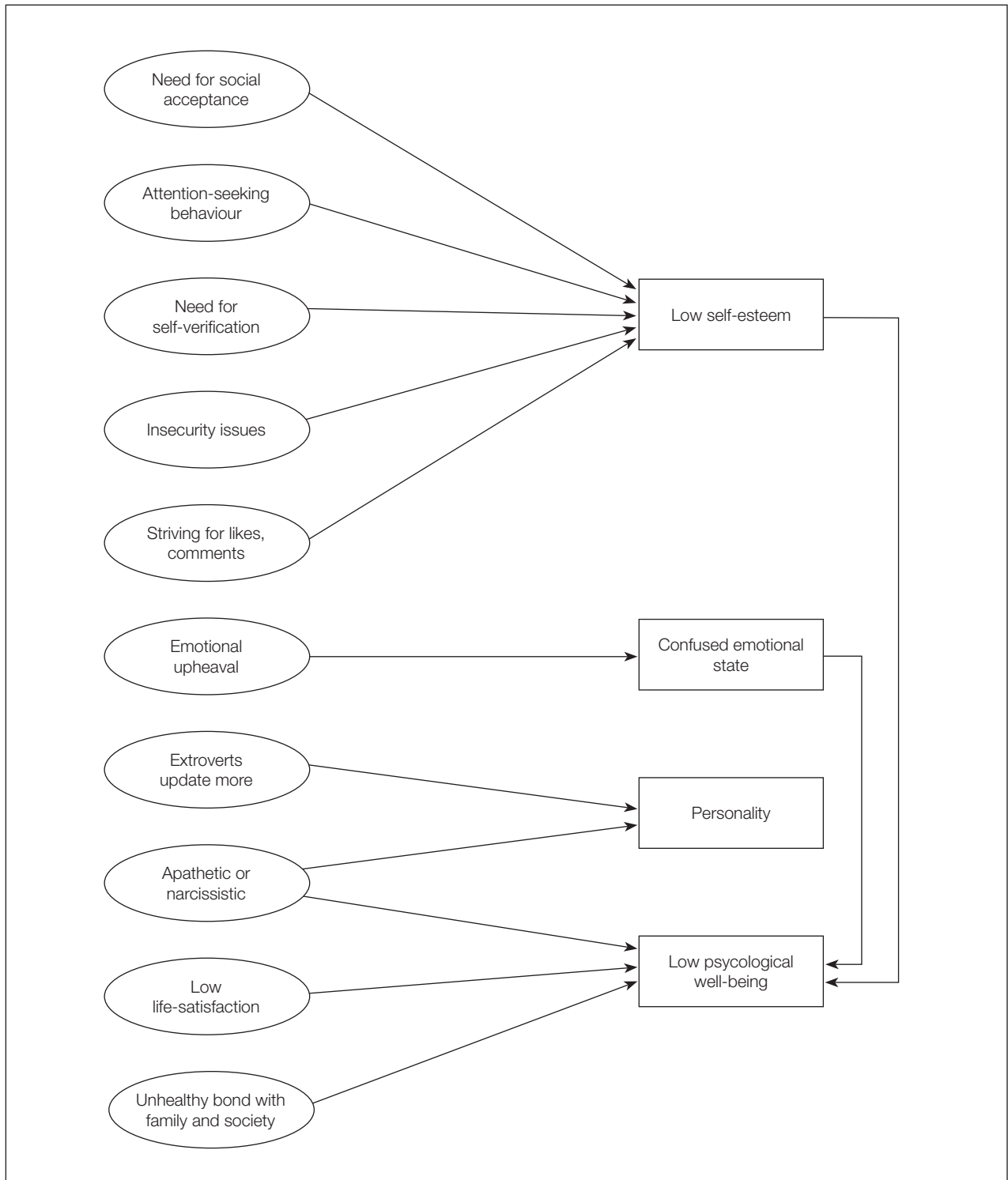
"I often feel that I am not good enough to be loved by others and am not sure whether I am important to society, I never felt that I am a responsible person" (as told by a female subject, age 29 years).

So for such updaters, who are facing life stressors, social media could be serving as an escape or distraction from daily stressors of life. Staying occupied with social media and playing an active role over it, such as updating frequently could serve as a temporary distractor for them. This could be an unhealthy way of coping for them. Social media usage has been found to be a maladaptive coping mechanism (Maftei, Merlici & Danila, 2023). Social media use can be an emotion-focused coping as a distraction (Dilek, 2020). Social media usage provides coping during stressful times for many individuals (Wolfers & Schneider, 2020). To conclude it could be stated that many times updaters could be posting to get distracted from a dissatisfied life owing to their life stressors, familial and societal pressures, posting and then getting occupied with the cycle of viewers, likes and comments could be a temporary relief for them.

The major findings from the theme analysis of FGDs has been discussed in the above section. But the major objective of this qualitative study was to investigate how various psychological elements interact to affect people's decisions to update their personal information on social media. These themes shed important light on various psychological factors which make people update or disclose personal information on social networking sites. All this has been summarized in Figure 3.

As shown in the figure, updaters have a high need for social approval, along with attention seeking behaviour, need for self-verification and various insecurity issues. These factors contribute to a lower self-esteem for updaters. Since self-esteem is the way an individual values and perceives himself or herself. In short, it is an individual's sense of personal worth or value. According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem is one's favourable or unfavourable attitude towards oneself. Various factors contribute towards self-esteem, such as personality, life experiences, social circumstances, reactions of others, social approval, etc. (Ackerman, 2018). A person with high self-esteem does not seek much for external validation. Although positive social factors add to self-esteem, yet it is not entirely based on these. But for updaters factors

Figure 3 – Summary of themes



such as need for acceptance (Kimble & Helmreich, 2013), attention-seeking behaviour (Frothingham, 2020), need for self-verification (Talaifar & Swann, 2017) and insecurity issues (Abdulgaffar, Eluwole, Dambo & Abdulbaqi, 2021) clearly indicate low self-esteem, as self for them is perceived from the external validation through viewers, likes and comments.

The support from low self-esteem of updaters also comes from the finding that the more the views, likes and comments for the posts, the better the mood of the updaters will get and vice versa is also true. Updaters are interested in sharing their ideal self on social media rather than real ones. Self-presentation on social media depends on different factors. The triangular theory of self suggests that during the social media era, the self can be presented in three ways, represented self, registered self, and inferred self. The user can represent their autobiographical memory as represented self and the technological characteristics of social media help the user in sharing information based on this motive which can be turned into a registered self. Virtual spectators make an inference from the registered self which creates an inferred self (Wang, 2022). Some people may have low self-esteem and use social media to get approval from others. From analysing the transcript, participants can gain likes, comments, and attention by posting personal images, which momentarily improves their self-esteem. Their vulnerability to variations in validation arises from an overreliance on social media feedback for their sense of self-esteem. According to a study, self-esteem was positively correlated with the number of likes people received on their Facebook profile photographs (Burrow & Rainone, 2017). Another study revealed that increased feedback relevance was linked to lower self-esteem and social standing; low social standing was also linked to increased engagement in several Instagram activities and opting to have a public profile (Diefenbach & Anders, 2022).

Further, the updaters generally post more under emotional upheavals, under the situations where they face negative emotions such as anger, sadness, despair, etc. The instant gratification that comes from the views, likes and comments comfort their emotionality at that time. And if they don't get viewers, likes or comments for their post their mood deteriorates further. According to Stsiampkouskaya and colleagues (Stsiampkouskaya, Joinson, Piwek & Ahlbom, 2021) also, users felt excited and enthusiastic after receiving more likes and sad and upset after receiving less likes. This clearly suggests that the on-off switch for making their

emotions better during the crisis is in the hands of viewers. The updaters themselves can't manage their emotions well under such situations. And the updaters themselves are not aware that viewers are managing their emotional state, since instant gratification happens at the level of unconsciousness. Therefore, the emotional state of updaters can be considered as a confused emotional state.

The themes also suggested some important observations about the personality of updaters. Most updaters were found to be the extrovert individuals. Although introverts were found to be more comfortable with the social media world, yet they don't display much of their personal information on social media. Just like the real world, in the virtual-world also introverts are quiet observers. Extroverts are more enthusiastic to share their experiences with others on social medium, as for them it is a platform that helps to reach people (Bowden-Green Hinds & Joinson, 2020). Extroverts often want to start a conversation with others by updating themselves on the virtual world. They also work to expand their social connections and build new networks (Guo et al., 2018), thereby being more active on social media, hence updating frequently on social media.

Other personality traits observed for updaters were apathy and narcissism. Updaters could demonstrate either being apathetic or being narcissistic. Apathetic updaters lack a general concern for the feelings of their viewers, whereas narcissistic updaters are consumed with their own attractiveness on social media, seeking too much attention and a need to be admired by viewers. Social media usage and being continuously active on it is making its users apathetic (Alfiah et al., 2021). Owing to the increased use of social media, a study in 2010 reported that 75% of students rated themselves as less empathetic than an average student of 1980, 30 years ago, with an exceptionally steep decline in empathy from 2000 to 2010 (as cited in Chan, 2015). Hence exploitation and over indulgence in social media might be making updaters comparatively more apathetic, where they generally are not concerned with viewers' experience of FOMO after viewing their posts.

Another set of updaters was found to exhibit narcissistic traits. Where such updaters were just concerned with the display of their pictures, lacking the ability to understand or care about the feelings of others such as those of FOMO in viewers. According to Angela Karanja, social media has created an environment where the number of followers and likes are a measure of success, and social media has fueled

youths' obsession to update for attention and validation. This often starts a cycle of addiction for getting more followers and likes, in order to fuel self-esteem. In an attempt to maintain the online image, users get obsessed with how they are perceived by viewers (cited in Yara, 2023), thereby posting the best pictures of theirs every time, and hence maintaining the cycle of likes and posting even better. Where every like might be strengthening their belief towards their own attractiveness, strengthening further this belief more and more with every new post, to the extent of rendering updaters indifferent to the feelings of viewers with a heightened self-occupation finally paving towards narcissism.

Finally, the analysis revealed updaters to have low life satisfaction due to various stressors of life, with unhealthy familial and societal bonds adding more to it, thereby suggesting the low psychological well-being of updaters. Overall many factors were found to indirectly contribute towards the low psychological well-being of updaters. These are low self-esteem (due to the need for social acceptance, attention-seeking behaviour, need for self-verification and insecurity issues of updaters), confused emotional state, and apathetic or narcissistic personality traits. Thus, for updaters lower psychological well-being could be concluded from the thematic analysis. The research on social media use and activity supports this. Where the higher the indulgence, the lower the psychological well-being has been found for the users (such as Chatterjee, 2020; Choi & Noh, 2019; Chotpitayasonondh & Douglas, 2018; Jiao, Jo & Sarigollu, 2017).

Thus, this qualitative study has found that updating statuses on a frequent basis does influence the self-esteem, emotional state, personality and overall psychological well-being of updaters. Social media use has become an inseparable part of our lives. While on one side social media can be a powerful tool, on the other extreme it could be an ailment too. It is affecting human psychology. This study was an attempt to highlight that even a small activity on social media i.e., updating status is exerting its influence on human psychology and behaviour. Most of the unhealthy behaviours through social media are considered normal and acceptable in today's world. Think rationally, is it normal to be online even while doing business on a toilet seat? Is it normal to carry a smartphone throughout the day in our pockets? Is it normal to show separation anxiety to smartphones and cyberspace even for a few minutes? Is it normal to be immersed in a virtual world at the cost of complete absence from the real-world? Is it normal to display personal information through

status updates to an endless audience who is completely strange to us? Why have all these previously unacceptable behaviours become a part of today's techno-culture? All such questions seek answers through research. All such questions could not be answered just through one investigation. More research investigations should be aimed in this direction. This study was just one attempt to highlight that even a minor activity of updating frequently can impact updaters, and the results have suggested that this impact is highly negative. Not all unhealthy activities on social media need approval and acceptance from all, status updating when excess, becomes one such unhealthy activity that definitely needs to be controlled. This investigation has suggested that future investigations should also aim at finding interventions specifically in the context of cyberspace and framing policies for the implementation of appropriate behaviour and etiquettes in cyberspace.

Limitations of study

This study did have a few limitations. The first limitation was the sample of this research. The sample for this study was quite small and although composed of students from diverse backgrounds still needs little caution in generalising to other populations. Further gender differences in updating were not considered. Another major limitation of this study was the non-availability of sufficient empirical support, due to the absence of research in the field of study. The problem under investigation is a highly under-investigated topic. Hence the empirical support for obtained results either come from a few research publications or from some published articles.

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