

The Role of Facebook Affirmation towards Ideal Self-Image and Self-Esteem

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Although research has found that people often use Facebook to present their ideal image, it is not clear whether Facebook can bring out the best self of its users. The present research investigated whether Facebook would help its users feel their best and have higher self-esteem through affirmation of the ideal self on Facebook. In particular, such Facebook affirmation might be most beneficial among moderate users. Using a correlational research design, 330 Thai participants (aged 18-35 years) were recruited through Facebook advertisements and asked to complete a set of online questionnaires. Using a moderated mediation analysis, results showed that Facebook affirmation had a positive effect on self-esteem ($\beta = .14, p < .05$). Such an effect was partially mediated by actual and ideal-self congruence ($\beta = .02, p < .05$). In addition, time spent on Facebook moderated both direct and indirect effects of Facebook affirmation on self-esteem. The direct effect of Facebook affirmation was more pronounced among moderate users ($\beta = .24, p < .05$) than heavy users ($\beta = .02, ns$). Moreover, the indirect effect of Facebook affirmation was more pronounced among moderate users ($\beta = .04, p < .05$) than light users ($\beta = -.00, ns$). These results supported hypotheses that users who experienced Facebook affirmation reported having increased levels of self-esteem as a result of experiencing actual and ideal-self congruence. Specifically, moderate users benefited mostly from using Facebook, compared with light and heavy users. Key findings from this study could contribute to literature on social media behavior and the benefits from using Facebook.

Keywords: Facebook, affirmation, ideal self, time spent

With over 2.27 billion users worldwide in 2018 (The Statistics Portal, 2019), Facebook has become a part of people's lives in this generation. Not only has it enabled users to control the pace of conversations (Boyd & Ellison, 2008), manage their physical appearance during their social interactions (Amichai-Hamburger, 2007), or find a perfect romantic partner (Sangkapreecha, 2015), but Facebook has also provided an ideal space for people to present their best self (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013; Lee-Won, Shim, Joo, & Park, 2014). Unsurprisingly, previous research found that many people utilized Facebook for self-enhancing benefits (Kim & Lee, 2011; Malik, Dhir, & Nieminen, 2016; Tosun, 2012).

Prior research on social media has shown that some Facebook activities (such as self-description on Facebook) help its users construct and express their ideal self (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). Moreover, with its unique characteristics, including privacy settings, and information filtering, Facebook seems to elicit positive interactions (Lin, Tov, & Qiu, 2014). Consequently, expected positive feedback from others may likely occur and play an important role in fulfilling such ideal self-projection. This process is consistent with that of behavioral affirmation which suggests that receiving behavioral affirmation from romantic partners is essential in assisting movement towards the ideal self of one another, yielding both life and relationship satisfaction (Kumashiro, Rusbult, Finkenauer, & Stocker, 2007). Once applied to Facebook, it is highly likely that people may act out their ideal self on Facebook and attain positive affirmation in return.

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However, spending extensive time on or being addicted to Facebook may lead to mental health problems. For example, excessive use of Facebook was found to lower levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Błachnio, Przepiorka, & Pantic, 2016; Faraon & Kaipainen, 2014). Similarly, it increased the risk of other mental problems such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders (Frost & Rickwood, 2017). Therefore, the extent to which individuals benefit from using Facebook may depend on their time spent on Facebook. In particular, moderate usage is expected to be most beneficial because the decent amount of time allows users to have positive interaction with others, without overexposure to other negative outcomes (Thuseethan & Kuhanesan, 2014).

Drawing on research about behavioral affirmation (Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009), best self-presentation on Facebook (Lee-Won et al., 2014), and mental health concerns such as low self-esteem among heavy Facebook users (O'Sullivan & Hussain, 2017), this study examines whether Facebook can provide affirmation of the ideal self and promote actual and ideal-self congruence to its users. Specifically, an overlap between actual and ideal self may increase users' self-esteem as it brings a sense of self-worth through accomplishing an ultimate goal. Yet, because heavy usage of Facebook can lead to lower self-esteem and other negative outcomes (Pantic, 2014), it is expected that this affirmation of the ideal-self process should mostly benefit the moderate users. This study mainly investigated such process in a Thai sample. Since the nationwide number of Facebook users is approximately 47 million users, Thailand is ranked among the countries with the most Facebook users worldwide (Thaitech, 2019). Therefore, a Thai sample may represent more active users of Facebook.

Facebook and Ideal Self

Facebook is a social networking site that provides a large number of activities in which users can engage. Facebook users can choose to update their Facebook statuses, share their pictures or videos, leave comments on their friends' profiles, tag other people, and approve the tags added by others to their own posts, as well as send instant messages (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Furthermore, Facebook users have full control over their personal information and privacy as they can set their profiles as private or public and filter whom they would like to include in their social networks (such as friending or unfriending). Therefore, these functions of Facebook not only offer users with opportunities to establish or maintain connection with others within a bounded system (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), but also facilitate users' identity construction (Tosun, 2012) and help project users' ideal self (Seidman, 2013; Zhao et al., 2008).

Photo sharing and wall posting are examples of constructing and expressing ideal self on Facebook. As Facebook enables users to manage the attractiveness of their image presented within their networks, individuals can post appealing photos to present their best side (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013; Zhao et al., 2008). For instance, users can choose to post photos of their happy moments during vacation. This idea is consistent with the results found in Siibak's (2009) study, which showed that youngsters selected an ideal photo as a profile image to form a positive impression to others in order to achieve their ideal goal as being popular. Additionally, the advancement of digital photography technology allows individuals to beautify their photos as they wish to be perceived (Amichai-Hamburger, 2007; Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013). Consequently, individuals might exercise their control over physical appearance by choosing an attractive profile picture on their web page just to look appealing in others'

perceptions. Thus, at some point, users are capable of controlling their image and constructing their best self on Facebook.

Facebook Affirmation

Literature on close relationships and motivation suggests that significant others are very important for facilitating personal growth and development (Kumashiro, Rusbult, Wolf, & Estrada, 2006). In particular, people who consistently receive behavioral affirmation from their loved ones over a long period of time are capable of moving closer to their ideal selves or reaching an ultimate goal (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999). The term “Michelangelo phenomenon” has been coined to describe this process as it was inspired by an influential artist, Michelangelo Buonarroti, who believed sculpturing was to uncover the beauty hidden inside a block of stone (Rusbult, Finkel, et al., 2009). As such, in relationships, partners who help each other bring out the best side of one another can eventually reach their own ideal self (Kumashiro et al., 2007).

Even though the concept of affirmation of the ideal self was initially proposed in the context of romantic relationships (Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009), it is possible to apply to other contexts involving mutual interaction such as Facebook. This is partly because most activities on Facebook such as sharing, clicking like, and instant messaging facilitate supportive interactions and elicit positive feedback from others (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012). Specifically, Facebook users are likely to receive likes or positive comments from their Facebook friends (Chin, Lu, & Wu, 2015), which may in turn help affirm their ideal selves. Moreover, the notion that people have freedom and power to control the contents or whom they desire to share those contents with (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) may enhance the possibility of their ideal characteristics to be noticed and affirmed (Wong, 2012). Specifically, as Facebook users can disclose their personal information to their friends via status updating or photo sharing, their friends are able to know their ideal self or aspiration. Therefore, it is highly likely that individuals may experience affirmation of the ideal self on Facebook or “Facebook affirmation”.

It is noteworthy that affirmation of the ideal self differs from self-affirmation. The self-affirmation theory suggests that individuals are motivated to maintain their self-integrity by reflecting on other values of life or responding defensively (Sherman & Cohen, 2006), especially when the self is threatened (Cohen & Sherman, 2007). However, Facebook affirmation in this research refers to the perception of Facebook users that other people on Facebook regard them in ways consistent to their ideal selves, regardless of whether the self-threat is present or not. Specifically, ideal self in this case refers to the characteristics that Facebook users ideally wish to have—not what they already possess. Thus Facebook affirmation can occur only when their ideal qualities or attributes exhibited on Facebook are consistently affirmed by others. Therefore, Facebook affirmation seems to be a route for self-improvement or personal development, rather than self-verification or self-validation.

Modified from the Michelangelo phenomenon model, the present research proposed that receiving Facebook affirmation could lead to actual and ideal-self congruence. Prior research found that individuals who experienced affirmation of the ideal self from their partner reported moving closer to their ideal selves (Kumashiro et al., 2006; 2007). This suggests that movement towards the ideal self is a product of the affirmation of the ideal self process. According to this,

those who receive Facebook affirmation may also perceive that their actual selves become closer to their ideal selves on Facebook or report higher levels of actual and ideal-self congruence. Thus, it was predicted that:

H1: Facebook affirmation would positively predict actual and ideal-self congruence.

In addition, research has shown that self-esteem or a sense of self-worth can be interpreted as an outcome of congruence between the actual and ideal self (Rogers, 1959). Given Facebook affirmation should yield congruence between actual and ideal self, they should also increase levels of self-esteem. That is, being affirmed and achieving one's own ideal self on Facebook should bring about a positive sense of self-view. Moreover, recent research found that receiving likes or positive comments from friends on Facebook increased levels of happiness because such experience represents an act of caring or being interested from their friends (Zell & Moeller, 2018). Thus, it is highly predictable that receiving Facebook affirmation may also increase a positive sense of self-view. In particular, actual and ideal-self congruence may be a mediator of the association between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem. Therefore, it was predicted that:

H2: Facebook affirmation would positively predict self-esteem.

H3: Actual and ideal-self congruence would positively predict self-esteem.

H4: Actual and ideal-self congruence would mediate the relationship between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem.

Time Spent on Facebook

Excessive use of Facebook can be a risk factor for mental problems such as decreasing self-esteem (Faraon & Kaipainen, 2014; Kross et al., 2013; Pantic, 2014). One possible explanation is related to the social comparison process. Heavy users of Facebook have higher chances to encounter information of others in their networks (Vogel, Rose, Okdie, Eckles, & Franz, 2015). Given that people are likely to share positive things in their daily lives, heavy users may have a higher tendency to witness a large amount of positive experiences and may perceive others to be in better situations than themselves (Pantic et al., 2012). Thus, their sense of self-worth can be lowered (Arad, Barzilay, & Perchick, 2017; Pantic, 2014).

On the other hand, moderate Facebook usage has been found to enhance mental health and well-being. Hobbs, Burke, Christakis, and Fowler (2016) compared 12 million Facebook users to nonusers in order to examine the association between social interactions and longevity. Their findings showed that balanced levels of interaction on Facebook were associated with lower risks of a number of health problems. In particular, such benefits were due to social connection, which has been found to play an important role in improving well-being (Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014) and increasing self-esteem (Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). Thus, it is possible that the extent to which Facebook can lead to positive outcomes, including Facebook affirmation and actual and ideal-self congruence, may depend on the time spent on Facebook. In particular, moderate usage might be an optimal amount of time for users to attain positive experiences and avoid negative consequences.

Taken together with the proposed model of Facebook affirmation, time spent on Facebook should moderate the relationship between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem. Moreover, it should moderate the relationship between actual and ideal-self congruence and self-esteem as shown in Figure 1. Hence, it was predicted that:

H5: Time spent on Facebook would moderate the relationship between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem, such that the relationship between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem would be stronger in the moderate use group, as compared to other groups.

H6: Time spent on Facebook would moderate the relationship between actual and ideal-self congruence and self-esteem, such that the relationship between actual and ideal-self congruence and self-esteem would be stronger for the moderate use group, as compared to other groups.

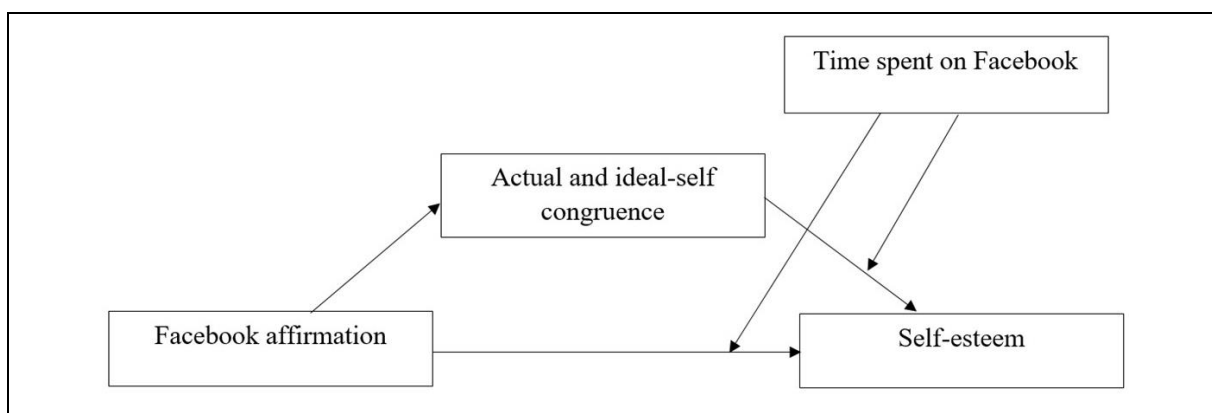


Figure 1. Hypothesized model

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through Facebook advertisement between September 2017 and January 2018 using convenience sampling. The Facebook advertisement was designed to target active Thai Facebook users aged between 18-35. The age range was chosen to represent the Millennials or Generation Y, a cohort which grew up using social media (Bergman, Ferrington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011). Overall, there were three hundred and thirty Thai Facebook users who volunteered to participate in this study (122 males, 208 females, $Mean_{age} = 20.79$).

Research Design and Procedure

A correlational research method was used. The present research was granted approval from Ratchadaphiseksomphot Endowment Fund, Chulalongkorn University. Once it was reviewed and received ethics clearance (COA No. 155/2560) through a Research Ethics Committee at Chulalongkorn University, the Facebook advertisement was launched. Participants who were interested in taking part in the study were asked to complete a set of online questionnaires and inform their demographics information. All participants were also asked to grant their consent to participate in the study before completing the questionnaires.

Measures

Facebook affirmation. Participants were instructed to complete a Thai version of Facebook affirmation scale developed by Isaranon (2016). The scale consisted of 4 items and was originally modified from scales used in Kumashiro et al. (2006). An example of the items was “When I’m on Facebook, I feel free to display the kind of person I ideally want to become” (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) ($\alpha = .72$).

Actual and ideal-self congruence. A Thai version of actual and ideal-self congruence scale developed by Isaranon (2016) was used. The scale was also modified from the Michelangelo phenomenon model (Kumashiro et al., 2006). Participants were presented with one item comprised of nine pairs of circles portraying how close their actual self is to their ideal self. The circle on the left represents their actual self and the one on the right represents their ideal self as shown in Figure 2.

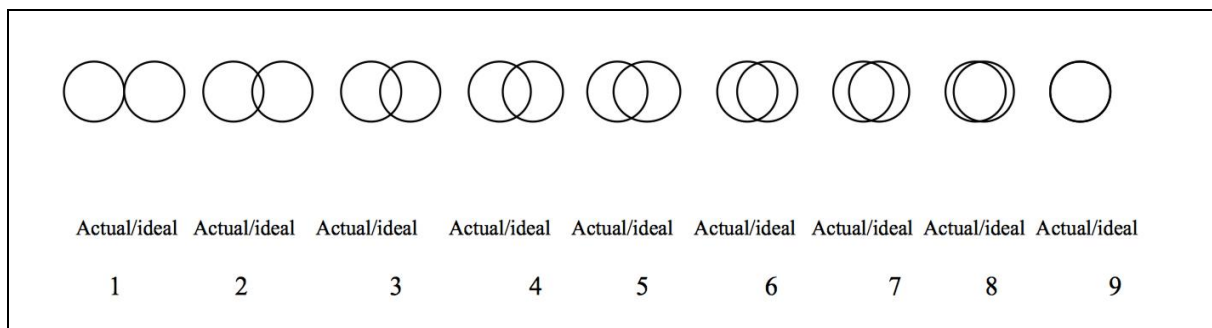


Figure 2. Actual and ideal-self congruence measure

Participants were then asked to indicate which one of each pair represented themselves the most when they were on Facebook (1 = their actual and ideal selves do not overlap at all and 9 = their actual and ideal selves are the same).

Self-esteem. Participants were asked to complete a Thai version of Rosenberg’s (1965) self-esteem scale developed by Isaranon (2016). This measure consisted of 10 items assesses individual difference in the extent to which people report self-esteem levels, such as “On the whole, I am satisfied with my life” (1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree) ($\alpha = .76$).

Time spent on Facebook. To assess time spent on Facebook, participants were asked to indicate the duration of time spent on Facebook in each day (0 = less than 10 minutes, 1 = 10-30 minutes, 2 = 31-60 minutes, 3 = 1-2 hours, 4 = more than 2 hours but less than 3 hours, 5 = more than 3 hours). According to findings from a research by Primack et al. (2017), people who spent more than 2 hours per day logging onto social networking sites were more likely to experience negative outcomes such as isolation, compared to those who spent less than 30 minutes a day. In particular, prior research defined those who spent more than 2 hours per day as heavy users (Bélanger, Akre, Berchtold, & Michaud, 2011; Ryan, Reece, Chester, & Xenos, 2016) while those who spent from 31 minutes to 2 hours per day were defined as moderate users and those who spent 30 minutes or less per day were defined as light users (Ryan et al., 2016). Thus, time spent on Facebook in this study were categorized into 3 groups based on such findings: 1) light use = 30 minutes/day or less; 2) moderate use = between 31 minutes to 2 hours/day; and 3) and heavy use = more than 2 hours/day.

Data Analysis

This study sought to explore whether Facebook affirmation could predict self-esteem via actual and ideal-self congruence. Moreover, it attempted to investigate whether the effects of both Facebook affirmation and actual and ideal-self congruence on self-esteem were moderated by time spent on Facebook. Thus, the PROCESS macro program (Hayes, 2018) was used to test such moderated-mediation model of the relationships among Facebook affirmation, actual and ideal-self congruence, self-esteem, and time spent on Facebook. In addition, two dummy variables were created; light (light use = 1 and otherwise = 0) and heavy (heavy use = 1 and otherwise = 0), whereas moderate use was treated as a reference group. Aiken and West (1991) suggested that a comparison group in three dummy variable coding systems is a group that is assigned a value of 0 for all dummy variables. Therefore, the light use group compares the light users with the moderate users, and the heavy use group compares the heavy users with the moderate users.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

In this study, time spent on Facebook were categorized into 3 groups; there were 94 light users who use Facebook 30 minutes/day or less, 115 moderate users who use Facebook between 31 minutes and 2 hours/day, and 121 heavy users who use Facebook more than 2 hours/day. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among study variables of the three groups are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations of Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	M	SD
Light use ($n = 94$)					
1. Facebook affirmation	-			4.29	0.93
2. Actual and ideal-self congruence	.07	-		5.63	2.35
3. Self-esteem	.14	.00	-	4.51	0.69
Moderate use ($n = 115$)					
1. Facebook affirmation	-			4.44	0.88
2. Actual and ideal-self congruence	.12	-		5.76	2.08
3. Self-esteem	.24*	.30**	-	4.71	0.81
Heavy use ($n = 121$)					
1. Facebook affirmation	-			4.55	0.93
2. Actual and ideal-self congruence	.17†	-		6.13	2.13
3. Self-esteem	.03	.26**	-	4.43	0.72

Note: † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

One-way ANOVA was also conducted to explore whether there were differences in scores of Facebook affirmation, actual and ideal-self congruence, and self-esteem among the three groups. Results showed that although there were no statistical differences in Facebook affirmation ($F(2,327) = 2.14, ns$) and actual and ideal-self congruence ($F(2,327) = 1.61, ns$), there was a difference in self-esteem between group means ($F(2,327) = 4.47, p < .05$). In particular, moderate users reported higher levels of self-esteem than heavy users ($M_{\text{moderate}} = 4.70, SD_{\text{moderate}} = 0.81, M_{\text{heavy}} = 4.42, SD_{\text{heavy}} = 0.72, t = 2.92, p < .01$).

Simple Mediation Analyses: Actual and ideal-self congruence as a Mediator

Results from the PROCESS macro program supported Hypotheses 1 and 2 that Facebook affirmation was a significant predictor of actual and ideal-self congruence ($\beta = .14$, $t(327) = 2.41$, $p < .05$) and self-esteem ($\beta = .14$, $t(327) = 2.41$, $p < .05$). In addition, actual and ideal-self congruence positively predicted self-esteem ($\beta = .17$, $t(327) = 3.19$, $p < .01$), supporting Hypothesis 3. The mediation analysis also supported the mediational hypothesis. Using a bootstrap estimation approach with 10,000 samples, the indirect effect coefficient of Facebook affirmation on self-esteem via actual and ideal-self congruence was significant ($\beta = .02$, $SE = .01$, $95\% CI = .00, .06$, $p < .05$). In particular, the effect of Facebook affirmation on self-esteem reduced but remained significant after controlling for the mediator, actual and ideal-self congruence ($\beta = .12$, $t(327) = 2.21$, $p < .05$), consistent with partial mediation. Therefore, these results supported Hypothesis 4 as shown in Figure 3.

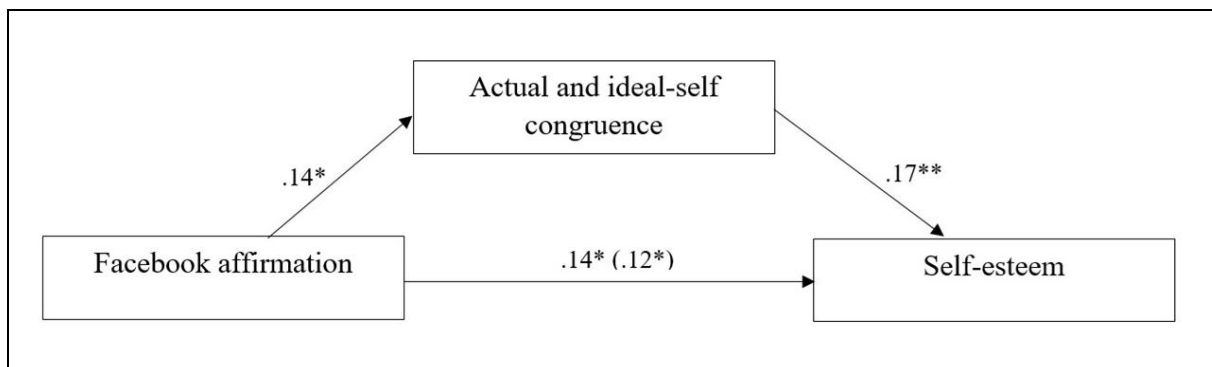


Figure 3. Model of mediation of relationships between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem
Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Moderated Mediation Analyses: Time Spent on Facebook as a Moderator

Time spent on Facebook (2 dummy variables: light use and heavy use) was further tested whether it moderated the relationship between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem, and the relationship between actual and ideal-self congruence and self-esteem. The PROCESS macro program was employed to test the moderated mediation model 17. Results revealed that heavy use group (heavy vs. moderate) was a significant negative predictor of self-esteem ($\beta = -.39$, $t(327) = -3.15$, $p < .01$) while the light use group (light vs. moderate) was not ($\beta = -.14$, $t(327) = -1.04$, ns). That is, heavy users reported lower levels of self-esteem than moderate users. On the contrary, there was no difference in self-esteem between light and moderate users.

The standardized regression coefficients between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem ($\beta = .23$, $t(320) = 2.55$, $p < .05$), and between actual and ideal-self congruence and self-esteem ($\beta = .29$, $t(320) = 3.20$, $p < .01$) were also significant. Additionally, the heavy use group (heavy vs. moderate) marginally moderated the relationship between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem ($\beta = -.21$, $t(320) = -1.69$, $p < .10$). However, it did not moderate the relationship between actual and ideal-self congruence and self-esteem ($\beta = -.04$, $t(320) = -0.32$, ns). Conversely, the light use group (light vs. moderate) did not moderate the relationship between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem ($\beta = -.10$, $t(320) = -0.79$, ns). However, it moderated the relationship between actual and ideal-self congruence and self-esteem ($\beta = -.30$, $t(320) = -2.32$, $p < .05$) as shown in Figure 4.

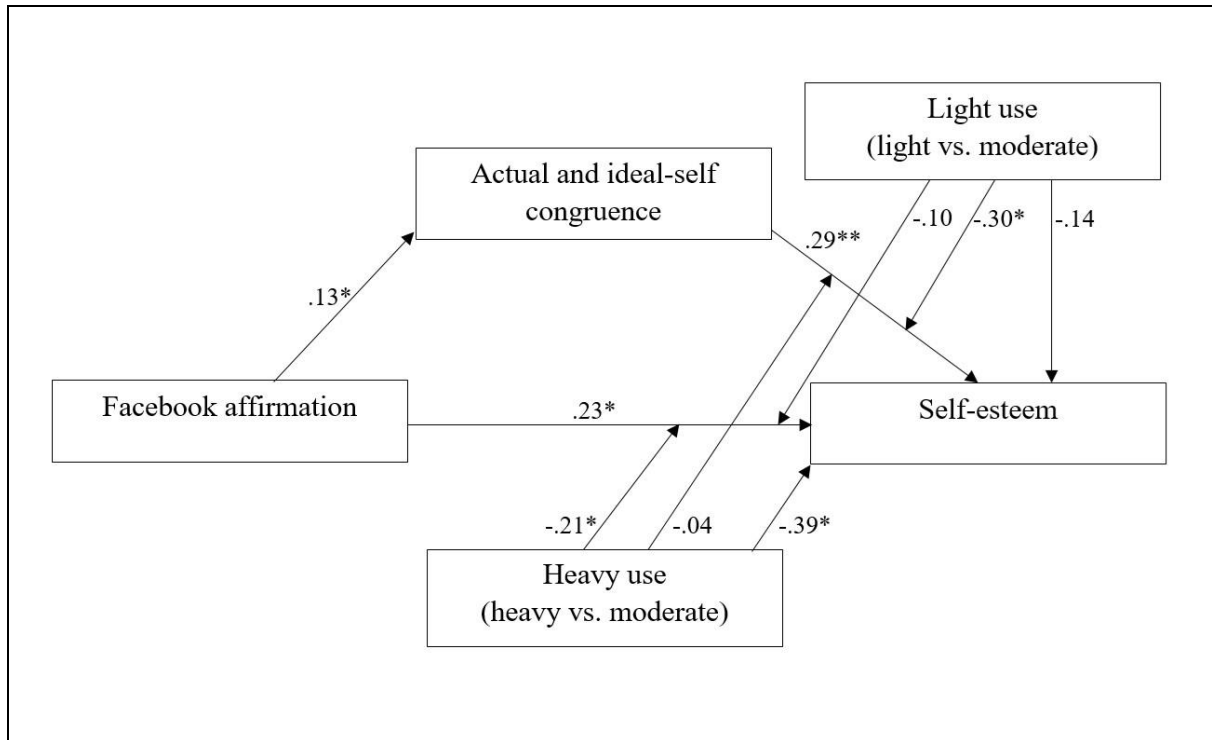


Figure 4. Model of moderated mediation of relationships among Facebook affirmation, actual and ideal-self congruence, and self-esteem by using time spent on Facebook (light use, moderate use, and heavy use) as the moderator

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The significance of the conditional direct and indirect effects was further explored. Results showed that the conditional direct effect was significant for moderate users ($\beta = .23$, $SE = .09$, $95\% CI = .05, .41$, $p < .05$). On the contrary, levels of self-esteem among light users ($\beta = .13$, $SE = .10$, $95\% CI = -.0612, .3177$, ns) and heavy users ($\beta = .02$, $SE = .09$, $95\% CI = -.15, .19$, ns), were not directly influenced by their Facebook affirmation experience. The heavy use group (heavy vs. moderate), unlike the light group (light vs. moderate) moderated the relationship between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem. These findings indicated that moderate users would have higher self-esteem than heavy users, but not than light users, when they experienced Facebook affirmation. Thus, these results partially supported Hypothesis 5.

Additional results also revealed that the conditional indirect effect was significant for moderate users ($\beta = .04$, $SE = .02$, $95\% CI = -.12, -.00$, $p < .05$) and heavy users ($\beta = .03$, $SE = .02$, $95\% CI = .01, .09$, $p < .05$), but not significant for light users ($\beta = -.00$, $SE = .01$, $95\% CI = -.03, .02$, ns) as shown in Table 2. Moreover, the index of partial moderated mediation, a test of equality of the conditional indirect effect for dichotomous moderators, was significant for the light use group ($\beta = -.04$, $SE = .02$, $95\% CI = -.12, -.00$, $p < .05$), but not significant for the heavy use group ($\beta = -.01$, $SE = .02$, $95\% CI = -.06, .03$, ns). These demonstrated that the indirect effects were different for the light use group (light vs. moderate), but indifferent for the heavy use group (heavy vs. moderate), suggesting that the moderated mediation only occurred for the light use group. Thus, these results partially supported Hypothesis 6.

Table 2

Direct and Indirect Influences of Facebook Affirmation on Self-esteem by Using Time Spent on Facebook as the Moderator

Conditional effects of Facebook affirmation on self-esteem at different levels of time spent on Facebook	Direct effect			Indirect effect		
	β	LLCI	ULCI	β	LLCI	ULCI
Light use (30 mins/day or less)	.13	-.06	.32	-.00	-.03	.02
Moderate use (31 mins - 2 hours/day)	.23*	.05	.41	.04*	.01	.10
Heavy use (more than 2 hours/day)	.02	-.15	.19	.03*	.01	.09

Note: LLCI = lower level confidence interval; ULCI = upper level confidence interval. Bootstrap sample size = 10,000; * $p < .05$.

In general, results mostly supported the hypotheses that Facebook affirmation was positively associated with Actual and ideal-self congruence, both Facebook affirmation and Actual and ideal-self congruence were positively associated with increased self-esteem, the link between Facebook affirmation and self-esteem was mediated by Actual and ideal-self congruence, and such mediation was more pronounced among moderate users than light users, but not than heavy users.

Discussion

Facebook, the most popular social networking site, has been recognized as a platform for positive self-presentation (Lee-Won et al., 2014), self-expression (Seidman, 2013), and social discourse (Thorkildsen & Xing, 2016). Yet, little is known whether Facebook can bring out the best self of users. This study, thus attempted to explore the possibility of having increased self-esteem through the process of ideal-self affirmation on Facebook. Particularly, it sought to investigate whether time spent on Facebook would play a role in this process.

Modified from behavioral affirmation process, the current research proposed a new idea that Facebook might serve as a platform for bringing out the best self of users by providing affirmation of the ideal self. It used a correlational research design to explore the process and benefits of the affirmation of the ideal self on Facebook. Results showed two important findings. Firstly, Facebook users who received Facebook affirmation experienced greater actual and ideal-self congruence and had increased self-esteem. Secondly, time spent on Facebook affected these positive outcomes.

Facebook Affirmation and Actual and ideal-self congruence

Previous research has shown that consistently receiving behavioral affirmation by significant others in close relationships over a long period of time facilitates movement towards the ideal self (Kumashiro et al., 2007; Rusbult, Kumashiro, et al., 2009). Consistently, this study provides additional evidence that people can also feel affirmed and experience greater actual and ideal-self congruence on Facebook, where interaction can be made either with close friends or acquaintances. Given positive mutual interaction is the basis element of affirmation of the ideal-self process (Drigotas et al., 1999), and Facebook interaction is mostly under the control of users (such as deleting negative comments and sharing selected contents with certain friends) (Ellison et al., 2007), positive feedback is likely to be elicited. This is in line with previous

research which showed that presenting desired images or characteristics on Facebook was associated with receiving social support from friends (Wong, 2012). According to this, Facebook users who present their ideal image or characteristics in a way that they wish to be perceived have a high tendency to attain positive feedback in return. Thus, Facebook affirmation is likely to occur.

It is worth noting that the ideal self on Facebook in this study may apprehend only the dimensions of positive self-description and physical appearance on Facebook which users can manage on their own. This is in accordance with previous studies on self-presentation, which mostly examined personal characteristics described on profile photos of the users (Amichai-Hamburger & Hayat, 2013; Seidman, 2013; Siibak, 2009; Zhao et al., 2008). Additionally, the sample in this study was between the age group of 18-30 years, which the concern of physical appearance is mostly predominant (Harris & Carr, 2001). Thus, the effect of Facebook affirmation found in this study may be partly because of the match between Facebook activities and sample's interests.

Furthermore, this study was conducted in Thailand, a highly collectivistic country where expressing one's own ideal self in face-to-face circumstances is less discouraged, compared to focusing on group's goals (Triandis, 2001). As a result, there may be a higher tendency for people in collectivistic cultures to pursue an ideal self on Facebook to compensate and balance between their personal desires and social motives (Peters, Winschiers-Theophilus, & Mennecke, 2015).

Influences of Time Spent on Facebook

Although Facebook users reported that they came closer to their ideal selves on Facebook and had higher levels of self-esteem after receiving Facebook affirmation, moderate users (between 31 minutes and 2 hours a day) seemed to benefit the most from such process. That is, moderate Facebook users reported higher levels of self-esteem when being affirmed on Facebook. They also reported higher levels of self-esteem than light users when experiencing greater actual and ideal-self congruence. Moreover, moderate users had higher levels of self-esteem than heavy users.

Findings from this research are consistent with those found in other studies examining the association between time spent on Facebook and outcomes in life. For example, prior research showed that moderate use of Facebook was an optimal amount of time that individuals were able to establish social connection with others, yielding to higher levels of self-esteem, an indicator of social acceptance (Arad et al., 2017; Hobbs et al., 2016; Pantic, 2014). Moreover, medium usage also minimized to an extent which individuals would extensively engage in social comparison, causing unhappiness and life dissatisfaction (Faraon & Kaipainen, 2014). As such, results from the current study suggest that moderate use seems to be most beneficial for reaching an ideal self and elevating self-esteem.

Implications

Findings from the current research have several implications. First, the notion that affirmation of the ideal self could occur on Facebook contributes to literature on ideal self and

goal pursuit that positive interaction which helps affirming an ideal self of individual may not limit to close relationships. This is due to the characteristics of Facebook which allow users to manage their contents and audience (those who provide feedback) (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Thus, those who are unable to find supportive interaction from their loved ones in face-to-face circumstances may find Facebook as another venue for pursuing an ideal self. Additionally, Facebook may establish other functions that can be more helpful for users to achieve their ideal characteristics in relation to self-description or physical appearance.

In addition, as the process of experience actual and ideal-self congruence could occur on Facebook, there might be a campaign or encouragement for using Facebook to attain such self-improvement benefit or promote well-being. In particular, Facebook might be used as a practice-based platform for expressing the ideal self. The lack of face-to-face interaction on Facebook may assist people who feel constrained to exhibit their personal aspirations in real life, especially those in a collectivistic culture or those with social anxiety, to try achieving their personal goals without worrying about their physical appearance or the negative feedback they may attain.

Another significant implication is that Facebook usage behaviors could also reflect the need for ideal self-fulfillment. Although the majority of research on social media show that most people use Facebook for maintaining or establishing relationship with others (Amichai-Hamburger, 2007; Boyd & Ellison, 2008), the current study provides additional evidence for behavioral science research that people may also utilize Facebook to achieve their ideal selves. As such, behavior expressed on Facebook may not only facilitate communication among Facebook users for relationship maintenance, but also enable them to act or behave in ways that they desire to be regarded in order to achieve their ideal aspect of self. This suggests that Facebook usage reflects both intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors.

This study also found that moderate use between 31 minutes to 2 hours a day was the most optimal level that users would benefit from using Facebook, whereas heavy use for more than 2 hours a day was harmful for users' self-esteem. As such, there might be a policy to monitor time spent on Facebook. For example, Facebook might develop a system in which a notification of heavy use would pop up after reaching 2 hours of Facebook usage per day. On the other hand, an awareness of the danger of excessive use of Facebook may be raised among users. Specifically, young women who are highly concerned with ideal image (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008) should be informed about how harmful extensive use Facebook is to their self-esteem.

Limitations and Future Research

This study examined affirmation of the ideal self only on Facebook. Therefore, it might be insufficient to generalize the findings to other social media platforms. As a result, a replicate study in other social media platforms, such as Twitter or Instagram, should be conducted to study whether other types of social media would yield similar effects. This is because each social networking site has its own functions. For example, Twitter is recognized as a platform for seeking and gathering information and news (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2014) whereas Instagram is considered to be a venue for sharing photos and videos (Lee, Bakar, Dahri, & Sin, 2015). According to this, the affirmation of the ideal self may occur differently.

Moreover, the current research solely used a self-report method as the main assessment. Therefore, it may be inaccurate. For example, time spent on Facebook in the current study was assessed by asking participants to estimate their average time spent on Facebook in each day. It is possible that some participants may log onto Facebook all day and check their Facebook account from time to time during the day. As such, it may be too difficult for them to accurately calculate their average daily time spent on Facebook. Therefore, future research should be conducted and use other measures to assess time spent on Facebook.

On the other hand, the current research did not include other factors that may be related to the extent which people would be able to experience affirmation of the ideal self. This may include the number of friends on social media. For instance, it is possible that those who have more friends on social media might have a higher chance to receive consistently supportive affirmation after their ideal selves have been expressed on social media, compared to those with less online friends. Thus, future research may also consider such factors in social media usage.

Additionally, personality and personal background of social media users may influence both time spent and motivation to use social media. Previous studies have shown that personality such as the Big Five personality traits affect usage patterns, motivation to use, as well as time spent on Facebook (Błachnio & Przepiorka, 2016; Chua & Chua, 2017; Lönnqvist & große Deters, 2016). Moreover, early research also found that the purposes of using Facebook among people with different personal backgrounds (such as age and ethnicity) may vary (Hargittai, 2007; Rae & Lonborg, 2015). According to this, individual differences may have an impact on the platforms individuals choose to engage in and how well individuals present their ideal selves and attain affirmation of the ideal self in return. Hence, future research should study the effects of such internal factors.

Conclusion

The present research investigated whether Facebook helped its users feel their best. Overall, this study offers novel findings that Facebook users can feel their best, experience greater actual and ideal-self congruence, and have enhanced self-esteem. However, the extent to which users who experience affirmation of the ideal self would feel their best on Facebook and have increased self-esteem may depend on their time spent on the platform. Ultimately, Facebook is most effective with moderate use.

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