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YouTube as a source of information on narcissism: self-diagnosis and labeling

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This study aims to examine videos about narcissism and narcissistic individuals published on YouTube as sources of information. By analyzing video content and user comments, the study investigates individuals' tendencies toward self-diagnosis and labeling others as narcissists. 150 videos identified through YouTube searches using the keywords “Narcissism” and “Narcissist” were examined, and 40,860 user comments posted on the 15 most-viewed videos were analyzed. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study employed both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques to evaluate the videos and user comments. The findings achieved in this study indicate that the contents predominantly focus on the manipulative behaviors of narcissists, that psychology-themed channels create the largest portion of such content, and that the highest number of uploads was made in 2021. Furthermore, relationship and marriage counselors constituted the largest group of information providers, whereas most videos did not cite academic sources. Spouses and romantic partners were the individuals most frequently identified as narcissists. Overall, the findings suggest that YouTube has become an important source of information on narcissism; however, user comments revealed that narcissism-related content is associated more frequently with the labeling of others as narcissists than with self-diagnosis.

KEYWORDS

labeling, narcissism, narcissist, self-diagnosis, YouTube

1 Introduction

Narcissism is characterized by a pattern of attitudes and behaviors in which individuals excessively affirm their sense of self, perceive themselves as superior in terms of status, intelligence, creativity, or beauty, and regarding themselves as special, privileged, and unique (Twenge and Campbell, 2010). In this context, its core feature is the exaggerated elevation of self-perception (Alanka and Cezik, 2016). Thanks to the popularization of digital technologies and the integration of social media into daily life, the number of narcissism-related contents has rapidly expanded, which transformed the public understanding regarding this concept. This transformation suggests that narcissism is no longer perceived only as a clinical phenomenon but has increasingly become part of everyday discourse through which individuals evaluate and label one another.

A general lack of public understanding regarding personality disorders, together with the increasing circulation of psychological terminology online and on social media platforms, may encourage individuals to interpret themselves and others through clinical or quasi-clinical labels. Narcissism, in particular, has become associated with

the social labeling of individuals based on perceived traits, while such labeling may contribute to broader processes of stigmatization under certain conditions (Sheehan et al., 2016). Indeed, NPD was identified as one of the most highly stigmatized conditions in today's society (Alam, 2024).

A stigma, whether based on an innate characteristic or something acquired later in life, is a social label shaped by the reactions and attitudes of others within a society (Slattery, 2014). A descriptor, expectation, or attribution ascribed to an individual (defining who that person is supposed to be) is referred to as an “assumed social identity”. In contrast, the actual attributes and categories to which a person genuinely belongs constitute their “actual social identity” (Goffman, 2014). Stigma, in this sense, signifies the gap between these two forms of identity. Individuals who fall into the space between assumed and actual identities are subject to stigmatization (Ritzer, 2013). As stated by Goffman, stigma, whether physical or social, is a marker that diminishes the individual's value and prevents them from “being fully accepted” in society by stripping away their social identity (Slattery, 2014). As a form of value devaluation, stigma manifests in many different forms (Giddens, 2012). Approaches to stigma are rooted in judgment. These judgments are shaped by the surrounding conditions, such as established social norms, and evolve into normative expectations (Goffman, 2014). Becker (1966), who focused on the mechanisms and dynamics of stigma in social life, particularly through the concepts of “deviance” and “social labeling”, defined deviance as a labeling process that occurs when social norms are violated. While labeling, as a process, shapes individuals' roles and identities within society, it does not inherently carry an exclusionary function. However, certain labels may have negative implications over time within the framework of social norms and eventually become stigmatizing (Link and Phelan, 2001). On the path to stigmatization, attitudes and perceptions are widely influenced by perceptions (either incorrect or partially accurate) and stereotypical representations (Giddens, 2012). Even in case of a completely accurate source of information, superficial interpretations of such a source may yield misrepresentations and distortions, resulting in stigma. In this context, the tendency of individuals, who consume narcissism-related content on YouTube, to label people around them as “narcissists” illustrates how a clinical concept can be used in daily social judgments. Although such labeling does not in itself constitute stigmatization, it may become part of a stigmatizing process when accompanied by negative stereotyping, devaluation, or exclusion.

As both a source of information and a participatory social platform, YouTube has become one of the most influential social media networks globally. As of 2024, the platform offers localized versions in over 100 countries and 80 languages, attracting nearly 3 billion active users (YouTube, 2024). Google's advertising metrics indicated that the number of YouTube users in Türkiye was 57.5 million at the beginning of 2024. These data show indicate that YouTube's advertising reach in Türkiye corresponded to 66.8% of the total population and 77.3% of the internet users in 2024 (Kemp, 2024a, b).

YouTube has increasingly become a central platform for the production and consumption of health-related information. However, the reliability and quality of the content available on

the platform were frequently questioned in recent studies (Chan et al., 2021; Osman et al., 2022). The primary objective of this study is to critically evaluate narcissism-related videos published on YouTube as sources of information. Although many studies examined YouTube in the context of general health-related content, the number of studies investigating a specific psychological construct such as narcissism from the dual perspectives of content characteristics and user behavior is remarkably limited. This study was designed to address this gap in the literature.

Accordingly, the present study first examined who produces narcissism-related content, which channels generate the highest number of such content and reach the widest audiences, the topics emphasized in these videos, and which types of content receive the highest levels of viewership. Thus, this study provides a descriptive explanation of YouTube's role as a source of information on narcissism. In the second part, this study analyzes user comments posted in response to these videos. Specifically, it investigates whether users label individuals in their social environment as narcissists, toward whom these labels are most frequently directed, and whether users exhibit a tendency toward self-diagnosis. From this perspective, this study extends beyond viewing social media merely as a source of information and explores its role in shaping how individuals interpret psychological concepts and evaluate their social relationships.

1.1 Literature review and theoretical framework

1.1.1 Narcissism

Nowadays, the concept of narcissism is widely investigated in many disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, media studies, political science, organizational behavior, law, and philosophy. This concept, which has been interpreted differently in different disciplines and historical periods, originates from the Greek myth of Narcissus. Narcissism is commonly defined through characteristics such as an inflated sense of self-importance based on perceived superiority in status, intelligence, creativity, and beauty, as well as a tendency toward entitlement; and a persistent need for admiration and attention (Campbell et al., 2011; Evans, 1996; Gnambs and Appel, 2018; Javanbakht, 2006; Miller et al., 2017; Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006; Twenge and Campbell, 2010). In the psychological literature, narcissism was first conceptualized by Havelock Ellis in 1898 as a clinical condition of “perverse” self-love (autoerotism), based on the myth of Narcissus (Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006).

In psychology, narcissism is often associated with NPD and tends to be approached from a predominantly negative perspective (McNeal, 2007). However, it is not always framed in a negative way and is generally classified in the literature into two main categories as pathological and normal narcissism (Pincus and Lukowitsky, 2010; Wink, 1991). Although the psychology literature generally distinguishes between normal and pathological forms of narcissism, the present study does not aim to empirically test this clinical distinction or classify the individuals discussed in those videos into these categories.

Instead, this distinction aims to illustrate that narcissism has been conceptualized in different ways in literature. This study primarily focuses on how narcissism is represented in YouTube contents, how these representations are interpreted by users, and how “narcissist”, which is a clinical term, is used as a daily social label in user discourse.

According to Lacan’s “mirror stage” theory, first introduced at a congress in 1936 and illuminating the developmental trajectory of narcissism, the individual does not initially perceive themselves as a whole during infancy. However, upon seeing their reflection in the mirror, they start recognizing themselves as a subject. This process, which plays an important role in children’s development and is intricately linked to narcissism, is not a simple process. It simultaneously creates a alienation from the self. Narcissistic personality structures are characterized by the individual’s dependence on external validation and a persistent pursuit of admiration (Evans, 1996; Nasio et al., 2006). Nowadays, this process is increasingly mediated through social media platforms. Individuals seek social approval through the curated identities they create in digital media (Bianchi and Phillips, 2005). Besides integrating individuals into a new culture, social media also creates a virtual reality in which narcissistic rituals are commonly enacted. From this aspect, Twenge and Campbell (2010) claimed that success-oriented cultures in modern societies contribute to the increase in narcissistic tendencies. Accordingly, in an era dominated by digital technologies, individuals often engage in behaviors such as taking and sharing selfies to idealize and present themselves, making social media a significant factor in both personal identity formation and the increase and reinforcement of narcissistic inclinations (Buffardi and Campbell, 2008; Halpern et al., 2016). At the same time, narcissism intersects with processes of social labeling, which may contribute to stigmatization at both individual and societal levels when accompanied by negative stereotyping, devaluation, or exclusion (Grubbs et al., 2019). Although narcissism is commonly associated with negative characteristics such as selfishness, manipulation, and a lack of empathy, it is a multidimensional and heterogeneous construct (Pincus and Lukowitsky, 2010; Sprio et al., 2024).

On social media platforms, individuals’ tendency to engage in personal commentary on self-diagnosis and psychological concepts reveals the underlying need for external validation in identity construction processes. In this context, the intersections of narcissism with social media, self-diagnosis practices, and processes of labeling and stigmatization offer a rich and critical field for understanding the psychosocial dynamics of contemporary society.

1.1.2 Stigmatization

Stigmatization, the roots of which date back to Classical Greece, refers to a social approach toward marginalized groups. The concept, which drew particular interest from American sociologist Erving Goffman, was introduced to sociology as part of his broader inquiry into the “presentation of self” during the 1960s and 1970s (Marshall, 1999; Slattery, 2014). Far from being a fixed attribute, stigma is a type of relationship (Goffman, 2014) that reflects dynamics of devaluation and centers on the

dramaturgical interaction between stigmatized individuals and those considered “normal” (Ritzer, 2013). Stigmas emerge from labels shaped by the reactions of individuals within a society (Slattery, 2014). In this regard, stigmatization is a process that encompasses discrimination, manifesting at the individual level as unequal treatment and at the structural level as constraints in access to opportunities and resources, based on a wide range of status attributes such as race, sexual orientation, disability, HIV status, and obesity (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013).

Link et al. (2001) define stigma as the convergence of elements, including labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination. As a form of communication, stigma aims to shape attitudes, encourage protective behaviors, and promote emotional and cognitive responses through the sharing of stigma-related messages. These messages typically revolve around specific contents such as markers, labels, attribution of responsibility, and perceived danger (Smith, 2007). Thus, stigma is inherently rooted in social relationships. Routines of social interaction play a crucial role in how individuals come into contact with “others”. In the process of social interaction, especially during encounters with strangers, initial impressions often stem from the social categories and traits the individual is perceived to belong to. These perceptions, linked to social identity, can give rise to stigmatizing judgments (Goffman, 2014). Stigmas, whether based on congenital or acquired characteristics (Slattery, 2014), are understood as a social process. This process may expose or reproduce power dynamics, social inequality, and social exclusion (Parker and Aggleton, 2003).

As stated by Goffman, there are three distinct types of stigmas. The first one involves physical deformities, described as “abominations of the body”. The second type includes blemishes of individual character such as weak will, unnatural passions, rigid or deviant beliefs, and immoral behaviors. Mental illness, addiction, homosexuality, unemployment, and radical political orientations may be considered in this category. The third type involves tribal stigmas, referring to race, nationality, and religion, traits that may be transmitted through lineage (Goffman, 2014).

The concept of stigma is not based on a rigid dichotomy between the “stigmatized” and the “normal”; rather, individuals may assume both roles at different stages of life. Therefore, instead of drawing an absolute distinction between stigmatized individuals and those considered normal, stigma should be understood as a dynamic process in which a person may both stigmatize and be stigmatized in varying contexts. Moreover, “normal” and “stigmatized” do not refer to concrete individuals but rather to socially constructed perspectives (Goffman, 2014). In this respect, the distinction between “normal” and “stigmatized” does not represent two fixed categories but rather the two ends of a complex process, one that varies across time, space, and situation (Slattery, 2014) and that impedes social acceptance while fostering discrimination (Parker and Aggleton, 2003; Slattery, 2014). The construction of an individual as either normal or stigmatized can be shaped by multiple sources. Consequently, individuals may be stigmatized for different reasons and within different contexts (Özmen and Erdem, 2018).

Corrigan and Shapiro (2010) examine mental illness stigma in two major components as self-stigma and public stigma. Self-

stigma arises when individuals with mental illness internalize prevailing stereotypes and apply them to themselves, leading to diminished self-esteem and reduced self-efficacy. Public stigma, however, refers to the widespread endorsement of negative stereotypes by society at large, and it results in the marginalization and exclusion of the stigmatized individual. Stigma associated with mental illness may lead to perceptions of individuals as dangerous, incompetent, or morally flawed (Corrigan and Shapiro, 2010).

Health condition is also an important factor, which contributes to the emergence and perpetuation of stigma. Individuals who deviate from established social norms or fall outside societal expectations may face the risk of stigmatization due to physical or psychological differences. In this context, the stigma directed toward individuals exhibiting narcissistic tendencies can be situated within Goffman's second category of stigma, which he characterizes as moral or character flaws and typically associates with various health conditions. Narcissistic personality traits may be subject to negative labeling within society. However, such labeling should not in itself be equated with stigmatization. Instead, labels may become part of a broader process of stigmatization when they are accompanied by negative stereotyping, devaluation, separation, or exclusion.

This study is theoretically grounded in Erving Goffman's theory of stigma, Howard S. Becker's labeling theory, and the conceptualization of stigma introduced by Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan, who defined stigma as the convergence of labeling, stereotyping, and discrimination processes. Within this theoretical framework, the present study examines users' tendency to label people in their social environment as "narcissists" in relation to narcissism-related content on YouTube. Such labeling is considered to be analytically distinct from stigmatization, which represents a broader process involving additional components such as stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination (Link and Phelan, 2001). Accordingly, this study focuses on how narcissism-related terminology is incorporated into users' self-evaluations and evaluations of others, without identifying every instance of labeling as evidence of stigmatization.

2 Methods

This study aims to examine how YouTube is utilized as a source of information on narcissism and how users engage with this information through comments. In this context, the most viewed videos on narcissism on YouTube were examined, and user comments on these videos were analyzed. When analyzing the comments, particular attention was paid to users' tendencies toward self-diagnosis and labeling others as narcissists. This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Accordingly, statistical data from the videos (e.g., views, likes, number of comments) were subjected to quantitative analysis, while the qualitative content analysis was used for the content of the videos and user comments. Content analysis is a research method that enables researchers to draw valid and replicable conclusions from texts and other meaningful forms of communication within the contexts in which they are used (Krippendorff, 2004). An AI-

assisted tool (ChatGPT) was used in this study to improve the clarity and fluency of expression. All revised texts were reviewed and approved by the authors.

2.1 Data collection

The study data were obtained from YouTube, the most popular video-sharing platform in the world. YouTube's algorithm is dynamic and, in some respects, opaque, determining recommended content based on various user interactions such as viewing, liking, commenting, and sharing, as well as variables including watch time, click-through rates, prior content consumption habits, and even demographic factors such as age, gender, geographic location, and viewing history (Davidson et al., 2010; Hussein et al., 2020). A cleaned web browser was used during the data collection process to minimize the influence of personalized recommendations and ensure a neutral dataset. Data were collected on 21 February 2023 using the Turkish keywords "Narsisizm (Narcissism)" and "Narsist (Narcissist)". The search results were filtered and ranked from most to least viewed. Initially, the top 500 most-viewed videos were listed for preliminary screening. Specific exclusion criteria were utilized to determine the scope of this study. Accordingly, duplicate videos, those in languages other than Turkish, those lacking audio or visual elements, those longer than 1 h, those unrelated to the research topic, and YouTube Shorts were excluded. The remaining videos were ranked from most to least viewed. The sample was limited to the 150 most-viewed eligible videos because, beyond this point in the ranking, view counts decreased substantially and the videos generally received only one or two comments, indicating a remarkably lower level of user engagement. Accordingly, the final sample consisted of $N=150$ videos. To focus more specifically on user engagement, comments from the $n=15$ most viewed videos were analyzed, yielding a total of $N=40,860$ user comments. The data were systematically organized into an Excel file under categories including channel name, channel type, presenter and their area of expertise, video title, video topic, use of sources, publication date, duration, number of views, likes, comments, and video URL. A second Excel file was created to facilitate in-depth analysis of user comments. The comments were retrieved using the ExportComments platform. All stages of the preliminary screening process were conducted by the researchers. Duplicate comments, advertisements, spam content, and irrelevant comments were removed from the dataset. Sarcastic and ironic expressions, emoji use, and linguistic context were considered during the screening process. Each comment was evaluated in relation to the video which it belonged to as well as the parent comment-reply structure. The counting units applied to the coded categories are described in Section 2.2. Particular attention was paid to preserving contextual integrity throughout the analysis. After the initial screening, 40,860 comments considered suitable for analysis were systematically coded into three main categories in the second dataset: "self-diagnosis", "labeling of others as narcissists", and "targets of labeling".

2.2 Data analysis

In the quantitative analyses, descriptive statistics were presented regarding the structural characteristics of the videos (e.g., number of views, comments, duration, channel type, content type, etc.). Frequency analyses of the statistical data were conducted using the SPSS 21.0 statistical software package. In this context, the following research questions were addressed:

Q1: What is the distribution of the number of views, likes, comments, and durations of narcissism-themed videos on YouTube?

Q2: How frequently and at what rates have these videos been published over the years?

Q3: What are the main topics addressed in these videos, and which topics are most prominent?

Q4: What are the publication frequencies and rates according to the video topics?

Q5: What are the professional identities of the individuals providing information in the videos?

Q6: What is the rate of academic or scientific source usage in these videos?

A deductive approach was adopted for the qualitative content analysis. The coding categories were established *a priori* based on the research questions and the relevant literature. User comments were then systematically coded in line with these predefined categories. Comments could receive more than one code when they contained content relevant to multiple analytical categories. Comments that did not exhibit self-diagnosis or the labeling of others as narcissists were retained in the dataset but were not assigned to either of these two categories. Self-diagnosis was operationalized as comments in which users explicitly identified themselves as narcissists or described themselves as having narcissistic traits. Questions, uncertain statements, and ironic or sarcastic expressions were not coded as self-diagnosis unless they contained an explicit self-identification.

In the present study, labeling was operationalized as users' attribution of the label "narcissist" to individuals in their social environment, their interpretation of these individuals through perceived narcissistic characteristics, or their placement of them within a narcissism-related category. Labeling was distinguished from stigmatization because the attribution of the term "narcissist" alone does not necessarily constitute stigma. As stated by Link and Phelan (2001), stigmatization was considered a broader social process in which labeling may be accompanied by stereotyping, separation, status loss, or discrimination. Accordingly, comments that merely identified another person as a "narcissist" were coded as instances of labeling rather than automatically classified as stigmatization. For the analysis of labeling, the unit of analysis was the individual labeling rather than the comment. Within the full set of comments for each video, every instance in which a commenter labelled another person as a narcissist was coded as a separate labeling. When a single comment referred to more than one person (e.g., a mother, a father, and a sister), each reference was coded separately under the relevant target category. Accordingly, the labeling frequencies reported in Section 3.2 represent the

number of labelings rather than the number of comments, and a single comment could contribute more than one labeling. The target categories were spouse/partner, parent, child, sibling, relative, friend, employer, unclear, and other.

Within the scope of the qualitative content analysis, user comments were coded under three main themes to address the following research questions:

Q7: Do YouTube users exhibit a tendency toward self-diagnosing narcissism in their comments?

Q8: Do YouTube users label individuals in their social environment as narcissists in their comments?

Q9: If such labeling tendencies are present, which individuals are most frequently identified as narcissists?

Categorical coding of YouTube videos and user comments was carried out independently by four researchers. During the coding process, themes related to narcissism were identified. Coders received prior training, conducted pilot coding, and established a finalized coding framework through consensus in cases of inconsistency. Additionally, the coding process was validated through external expert review by an academic with relevant research expertise. Accordingly, inter-coder reliability for the coding of user comments across the predefined analytical categories was computed utilizing Fleiss' (1971) Kappa (κ) for all 40,860 comments, yielding an overall coefficient of 0.82. A separate Kappa coefficient was not calculated for the video-level variables since these variables were primarily based on directly observable characteristics of the videos. Given the interpretation scale for Kappa values proposed by Landis and Koch (1977), this score falls within the range of 0.81–1.00, which indicates a "near-perfect agreement" level.

3 Findings

A total of 150 videos and 40,860 comments from the top 15 most-viewed videos were analyzed in the study. In the first phase, findings derived from the analysis of the videos were presented; in the second phase, findings obtained from the analysis of user comments were reported.

3.1 Findings related to videos

The 150 videos included in the present study were viewed a total of 19,216,945 times. The vast majority of these videos ($n = 128$) fell within the range of 1–200,000 views. Only one video (0.7%) surpassed one million views.

The total number of likes across all videos was 631,012. The combined duration of the videos amounted to 42 h, 40 min, and 14 s. Most of the videos ($n = 110$) had a duration ranging between 2 and 20 min. The total number of comments across the 150 videos was 57,743.

The most-viewed video was titled "7 Phrases Narcissists Use", published by Clinical Psychologist Beyhan Budak. This video, which discusses manipulation techniques employed by narcissistic individuals, received 1,389,204 views, 45,000 likes,

and 6,885 comments. It ranked first among all analyzed videos in terms of both likes and comments.

An examination of the publication dates of the 150 videos revealed that the highest number of videos were published in 2021 ($n = 57$, 38%). The second most active year for content production was 2022, with 42 videos (28%). The earliest video was published in 2013. The three videos released in 2023 focused on the topics of “healthy narcissism and other types of narcissism”, “sexuality in narcissists”, and “narcissistic men”. The two videos published in 2013 consisted of content aiming to define the concept of narcissism. These findings revealed that, within the sampled videos, uploads were most frequently dated 2021 (38%) and 2022 (28%). However, since the sample was selected considering the total view counts, the distribution by publication year should be interpreted as a characteristic of the sample rather than as an indicator of changes in public interest over time. The distribution of videos by year is presented in [Table 1](#).

Examining the YouTube channels that published the 150 videos included in this study, it was determined that the most prolific channel was “Sezer ERGÖR, Specialist Psychologist and Clinical Hypnotherapist” ($n = 33$, 22%). This was followed by “M. Karahan Akgül” with 26 videos (17.3%), and “Beyhan Budak” with 11 videos (7.3%). These findings indicate that narcissism-themed content is predominantly created by individuals who claim expertise in psychology-related fields. However, it is also evident that creators without formal psychological credentials contribute to this content area.

The data demonstrate that a significant portion of YouTube content on narcissism is created by well-known professionals within the field. The top three channels alone account for nearly half (46.66%) of the total videos that were analyzed in this study.

Channels were classified by considering the types of videos published, the thematic focus of the content, and the descriptions provided in the “About” section of the channel. Channels categorized under “psychology” published a total of 122 videos (81.3%), making this the largest group. In contrast, channels classified as “Other”, which include those focused on news, entertainment, and film, had 15 videos (10%). Channels

focusing on personal development produced 7 videos (4.7%), while health-themed channels shared 6 videos (4%). This distribution suggests that while narcissism is primarily addressed by professionals in the field of psychology, it also draws attention from diverse disciplines.

Content analysis revealed that the most frequently addressed topic was “manipulative behaviors of narcissists”, with 35 videos (23.33%) focusing on this theme.

In second and third place, the topics “Defining Narcissism” and “Coping with Narcissists” are each represented by 28 videos (18.67%). These findings suggest that content related to narcissism on YouTube generally focuses on how narcissistic individuals affect those around them and the methods for coping with such individuals. Furthermore, topics such as “Narcissistic Partner” ($n = 9$, 6%), “Narcissism Treatment” ($n = 9$, 6%), “Narcissistic Men” ($n = 8$, 5.33%), and “Narcissistic Parent” ($n = 8$, 5.33%) also occupy significant positions. These topics indicate a growing interest in the impact of narcissism on romantic relationships, family dynamics, and psychological treatment processes. These findings point to the consumption of narcissism-related content on YouTube primarily by individuals seeking psychological support or wishing to develop personal awareness. The distribution of video topics is presented in [Table 2](#).

When examining the expertise of the individuals conveying information in the videos, it was found that the highest number of videos (38; 24.36%) were presented by relationship and marriage counsellors. Following closely, 35 videos (22.44%) were presented by expert psychologists, and 21 videos (13.46%) by clinical psychologists, while 18 videos (11.53%) were presented by psychologists and 16 videos (10.30%) by psychiatrists. In Türkiye, the legal status of professional titles such as “psychologist” and “specialist psychologist” remains a matter of ongoing debate ([Türk Psikologlar Derneği, 2022](#)). Therefore, in this study, content creators were classified not through an independent verification of their professional qualifications but according to how they described themselves in their channel profiles or within their videos. Consequently, the categories used in this study are based on the individuals’ self-declared professional identities instead of officially verified credentials. When considering the experts within the field of psychology collectively, it can be seen that a substantial portion of the narcissism-themed videos were presented by professionals with expertise in psychology. The distribution of presenters’ expertise in the videos is shown in [Table 3](#).

When examining the number of videos and their percentage distribution by sources, it can be seen that a total of 133 videos (88.70%) did not include any academic or scientific sources. This result indicates that most of the narcissism-related content on YouTube does not rely on any academic or scientific references.

Only 17 videos (11.30%) referenced or suggested academic or scientific sources. In these videos, quotes were made from prominent figures in the fields of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and psychology, including Sigmund Freud, Heinz Kohut, Erich Fromm, Jean Piaget, Tennyson W. Lee, Otto F. Kernberg, Robert Hare, Paul Babiak, Martha Stout, Robert Lindner, Dr. Judith Orloff, Adam Phillips, Jacques Lacan, Alexander Lowen, Laurie Endicott Thomas, Craig Malkin, John Locke, Karly McBride, Wendy Behary, Aaron T. Beck, Nancy McWilliams,

TABLE 1 Distribution of videos by years.

Criterion	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Date of publication	2021	57	38.00
	2022	42	28.00
	2019	14	9.30
	2020	14	9.30
	2016	7	4.70
	2018	5	3.30
	2015	4	2.70
	2023	3	2.00
	2013	2	1.30
	2014	1	0.70
	2017	1	0.70
Total		150	100.00

TABLE 2 Distribution of videos by subject.

Criterion	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Subject	Manipulations by Narcissists	35	23.33
	Defining Narcissism	28	18.67
	Coping with Narcissists	28	18.67
	Narcissistic Spouse	9	6.00
	Narcissism Treatment	9	6.00
	Narcissistic Men	8	5.33
	Narcissistic Parent	8	5.33
	Post-relationship with Narcissists	7	4.67
	Narcissism and Sexuality	5	3.33
	Covert Narcissists	3	2.00
	Healthy Narcissism and Other Types	2	1.33
	Narcissists and Empathic Personalities	2	1.33
	Reasons Why Narcissists End Relationships	2	1.33
	Flying Monkey ^a	2	1.33
	Narcissistic Women	1	0.67
	Problems in the Lives of Narcissists	1	0.67
	Total	150	100.00

^aFlying Monkey: A term describing the individuals whom narcissistic individuals use to manipulate others in their environment.

and James F. Masterson. Additionally, the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition) was cited as a reference. These findings suggest that most of the narcissism-themed videos examined in this study are primarily based on personal opinions and experiences. However, they also show that some content creators have presented the topic within a scientific framework, utilizing academic and theoretical sources. The distribution of source usage in the videos is presented in Table 4.

3.2 Findings related to user comments

The total number of comments on the 150 videos included in this study is 26,905. However, when including the replies to these comments, the total number reaches 57,743. This indicates that YouTube users demonstrate a high level of engagement with content related with narcissism and actively participate in discussions about the topic.

TABLE 3 Distribution of presenters by area of expertise.

Criterion	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Presenter	Relationship and Marriage Counsellor	38	24.36
	Expert Psychologist	35	22.44
	Clinical Psychologist	21	13.46
	Psychologist	18	11.53
	Psychiatrist	16	10.30
	Voiceover/Narration	13	8.33
	Other	8	5.10
	Doctor	3	1.92
	Psychological Counsellor	3	1.92
	Personal Development Expert	1	0.64
	Total	156 ^a	100.00

^aSome videos featured more than one presenter; therefore, the total number of presenters ($n = 156$) exceeds the number of videos ($N = 150$). Percentages were calculated based on the total number of presenters.

TABLE 4 Distribution of videos by source usage.

Criterion	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Source	No Source	133	88.70
	Source Present	17	11.30
Total		150	100.00

Due to the large volume of user comments, the analysis was limited to the comments on the top 15 most-viewed videos. In this scope, a total of 40,860 user comments were thoroughly examined. The analysis addressed the narcissistic self-diagnosis tendencies of users based on the content they watched, the tendency to label others as narcissists, and the individuals targeted by such labeling.

The coding process was carried out by four independent researchers. Comments were systematically analyzed within the framework of the predefined categories. The results of the coding process are presented in Tables 5, 6. Upon examining the data in Table 5, it is observed that 811 of the 40,860 analyzed user comments indicated a tendency for self-diagnosis of narcissism, while 7,853 labelings of others as narcissists were identified in the analyzed comments. The videos with the most self-diagnosis and labeling of others as narcissists were those discussing narcissists' manipulations and how to deal with narcissists. The video with the highest frequency of labeling others as narcissists was titled "7 Phrases Narcissists Use". In this video, a total of 1,470 labelings of others as narcissists were identified. Regarding self-diagnosis, the highest frequency, 238 comments, was also associated with this video. As shown in Table 5, the rates of self-diagnosis and labeling of others varied across the analyzed videos.

These findings show that narcissism-related YouTube content is accompanied by user comments involving both self-diagnosis

TABLE 5 Distribution of self-diagnosis and labeling of others as narcissists in user comments.

Rank	Video title	Subject of video	Frequency (n)				
			Comment	Self diagnosis (n)	Self diagnosis (%)	Labeling of others (n)	Labeling of others (%)
1	7 Sentence Patterns Used by Narcissists	Manipulations of Narcissists	6,885	238	3.46	1,470	21.35
2	What is Narcissism?	Defining Narcissism	475	9	1.89	4	0.84
3	Falling in Love with Your Executioner: 4 Stages of a Relationship with a Narcissist	Manipulations of Narcissists	5,823	162	2.78	1,251	21.48
4	10 Sentences Frequently Used by Narcissists	Manipulations of Narcissists	2,386	60	2.51	531	22.25
5	Types You Should Avoid in Intimate Relationships!/Nilgün Bodur/Hakan Mengüç	Dealing with Narcissists	1,718	10	0.58	166	9.66
6	Living with a Narcissistic Man	Narcissistic Men	5,017	56	1.12	1,009	20.11
7	How to Deal with a Narcissist and a Selfish Person?	Dealing with Narcissists	2,639	14	0.53	585	22.17
8	How to Recognize Narcissistic People and Protect Yourself?	Dealing with Narcissists	686	29	4.23	149	21.72
9	Explaining Effective Sentences to Use with Manipulative Narcissistic Men	Narcissistic Men	3,005	26	0.87	531	17.67
10	4 Sentences to Neutralize and Silence a Narcissist	Narcissistic Personality Disorder	1,433	9	0.63	450	31.40
11	How to Recognize Covert Narcissists?	Covert Narcissists	3,362	121	3.60	555	16.51
12	If You Can't Escape a Narcissist, Here Are 10 Ways to Manipulate Them (If You Can't Escape!)	Manipulations of Narcissists	2,284	10	0.44	216	9.46
13	How Do Narcissistic People Maintain Control? Protect Yourself from Their Traps!	Manipulations of Narcissists	2,352	16	0.68	334	14.20
14	If You're with a Narcissist, They Won't Rest Until They Drain You, But You Can Succeed If You Do These Things	Dealing with Narcissists	1,553	9	0.58	327	21.06
15	6 Things Narcissists Never Do	Manipulations of Narcissists	1,242	42	3.38	275	22.14
Total			40,860	811	1.98	7,853	19.22

Comment refers to the total number of comments analyzed for each video. Labeling of Others (n) refers to the number of individual labelings identified within those comments; therefore, a single comment could contribute more than one labeling.

and the labeling of others as narcissists. However, the observational design of this study does not allow causal conclusions to be drawn about the influence of such content on users' self-assessments or evaluations of others.

Given the data in Table 6, a total of 7,853 labelings of others as narcissists were identified. Of these, 4,340 labelings targeted spouses or partners, making them the most frequently labelled

group. In 1,643 labelings, the target was unspecified. The label "narcissist" was directed at parents in 779 labelings, relatives in 295, friends in 282, siblings in 182, children in 117, and employers in 68 (for all categories, refer to Table 6).

These findings indicate that the labeling of others as narcissists was predominantly directed toward individuals in close relationships. In particular, spouses or partners constituted the

TABLE 6 Distribution of targets labelled as narcissists in user comments.

Video rank	Frequency (<i>n</i>)									
	Total labelings	Spouse/partner	Parent	Child	Sibling	Relative	Friend	Employer	Unclear	Other
1	1,470	669	222	24	49	56	83	19	318	30
2	4	1	1	–	1	–	–	–	–	1
3	1,251	861	41	5	17	25	31	1	251	19
4	531	240	69	11	18	26	28	2	132	5
5	166	65	29	1	6	3	8	4	34	16
6	1,009	750	75	13	10	28	13	4	105	11
7	585	329	39	17	11	26	7	5	146	5
8	149	52	10	1	3	5	18	4	49	7
9	531	347	34	6	3	12	4	1	112	12
10	450	187	52	20	12	31	3	2	140	3
11	555	227	68	5	14	25	50	8	144	14
12	216	101	24	3	10	15	14	11	34	4
13	334	211	29	6	7	13	7	1	58	2
14	327	184	41	3	8	23	2	1	59	6
15	275	116	45	2	13	7	14	5	61	12
Total	7,853	4,340	779	117	182	295	282	68	1,643	147

Frequencies represent individual labelings rather than comments. When a single comment referred to more than one person, each reference was coded separately under the relevant target category.

most frequently labelled group, while such labeling was also observed for parents, relatives, siblings, and children. These findings indicate that the use of the label “narcissist” in user comments frequently occurred in the context of close personal and family relationships.

Examples of comments illustrating users’ tendencies to self-diagnose narcissism are presented in Table 7. As shown in Table 7, some users described themselves as narcissists in comments referring to the videos they had watched. The examples illustrate how users employed narcissism-related concepts when reflecting on their own characteristics and evaluating people in their social environment.

Table 8 presents examples of comments in which users use the label “narcissist” for individuals in their social environment. Users labeled a wide range of people as narcissists, including parents, spouses or partners, siblings, and friends. The relatively high frequency of comments labeling family members and romantic partners as narcissists indicates that narcissism-related terminology was frequently used in the context of close interpersonal relationships. The data also indicate that employers, friends, and public figures were sometimes described as narcissists.

These findings indicate that users employed narcissism-related terminology when evaluating both themselves and people in their social environment. The comments particularly reveal a tendency to label others as narcissists, and such labels were most frequently directed toward individuals in close personal relationships.

In the present study, instances in which users described someone as a narcissist were not interpreted as either clinical

TABLE 7 Examples of self-diagnosis of narcissism in YouTube comments.

Sample comments
After watching the video, I said to myself, “I’m a narcissist”.
It’s been 12 min since I found out I’m a narcissist.
Hello, professor. While watching your video on narcissists in our lives, I came to the conclusion that I myself am a narcissist. I had actually used some of those behaviors on my spouse in the past. I’m so glad I discovered your channel—you’ve held up a mirror to me. I will discard this ugly trait like cutting off my hair and beard. Thank you.
Thank you. After watching this video, I realized I am a narcissist.
I realized that I’m a narcissist.
After this video, I diagnosed myself: I’m a narcissist.
I just found out I’m a narcissist, and I feel terrible. How can I stop acting this way?
I learned from this video that I’m a narcissist.
I realized I’m a narcissist after watching the video.
Turns out I’m a total narcissist.
When I watched this video, I realized I’m fully narcissistic. How do I get rid of this? I need urgent help.
After watching the video, I realized that the narcissist is me.
The way you explained it, professor, it turns out I’m seriously a narcissist.
I understood that I’m a narcissist when I watched this video.
Professor, you described me exactly. I found out I’m a narcissist.

TABLE 8 Examples of labeling others as narcissists in YouTube comments.

Sample comments
Thanks to you, I realized that my 59-year-old mother is a narcissist.
My father is a narcissist. He constantly tells me I can’t do it, I’ll never succeed. Then he says he said it to motivate me. Then he insults me until I cry. Then he says, “Well, if you were going to cry, you shouldn’t have done it”. He even says, “Go ahead, cry some more”.
Now I’m certain my mother is a narcissist.
Thank you so much. My older sister is a narcissist. She praises me while also humiliating and degrading me. I cry because of her, she’s ruined my mental health. Life has become meaningless. At least now I know this is a psychological disorder.
Everything you described, my mother does it. Now I know she’s a narcissist.
Every word you said is spot on. I already had a sense, but now I’m certain; unfortunately, my husband is the king of narcissists.
My own mother said those things to me. And just now, thanks to you, I’ve learned she’s a narcissist. What should I do?
It’s like you were describing that person exactly. I suspected they were a narcissist, and now I’m sure.
I’ve been talking to this person for three weeks, and this video made me realize what a narcissist really is, and that they fit the description.
Turns out my mom, dad, and older sister are all narcissists. May God help me. I’ve been living like this for years. Because they’re family, I’ve had no choice but to stay. I’m 24, and I’ve always endured and suffered because of them.
My father is a narcissist. I was also deceived by a covert narcissist. I’ve only just escaped. He lost all humanity, even with his own family.
I just realized that my 80-year-old father is a narcissist, and he has ruined all our lives. How do I cope with this?
Watch Beyhan Budak’s video titled How to Recognize Covert Narcissists. I realized my mother was a covert narcissist after watching it.
I now understand that my father is a narcissist.
I found out my mother and father are narcissists, thank you.
My dad’s a narcissist, my sibling’s a narcissist, and so was he. This system doesn’t acknowledge anyone else, and I hate that the most. I lost five years of my life, what else can I say?
My sister is a narcissist. What should I do? Having a close relationship is impossible, but keeping distance also pains me. She doesn’t care about being apart. I try to be kind, and I hope for a bond in return. Am I the bad one?
My sister is a narcissist. If there’s nothing in it for her, she won’t even call. The moment you say “no”, she either has a meltdown or becomes aggressive. This personality disorder developed in the workplace. Some people can’t handle others being in important positions.
Professor, thank you. What you described fits my boss exactly.
My coworker is absolutely a narcissist. Whenever I point out her mistakes, I end up apologizing. Whenever you talk about narcissists, she instantly comes to mind.
I’m thinking of showing this to my narcissistic friend.
My former close friend was a narcissist.
Professor, my mother-in-law is a narcissist. She put me through so much. Thanks to you, I found out she is one. I’ve cut off contact.
I don’t know any covert narcissists personally but *** ** (a public figure) is clearly a narcissist.

diagnoses or direct evidence of stigmatization. Instead, these comments were examined as instances of social labeling in which a clinically rooted term was applied to individuals in users' social environments. Although such labeling may constitute one component of a broader stigmatization process, the present analysis does not establish the additional components required to identify stigmatization.

4 Discussion

This study examined the use of YouTube as an informational resource on narcissism, together with users' tendencies toward self-diagnosis and the labeling of others as narcissists. The findings indicate that narcissism-related content on YouTube is predominantly created by individuals who have expertise in psychology; however, most videos (88.7%) did not include academic or scientific references. The comment analysis revealed a relatively low frequency of self-diagnosis (811 comments), compared to a substantially higher frequency of labeling others as narcissists (7,853 labelings). Spouses or partners constituted the most frequently labeled group, followed by parents and other individuals within users' social environments. These findings indicate that the term "narcissist" was frequently employed as a social label in the context of close interpersonal relationships. This pattern should be considered within the broader context of YouTube's personalized content environment, in which recommendations are shaped by users' platform activity (Davidson et al., 2010). Previous studies also discussed the potential for algorithmically curated information environments to reinforce selective exposure and existing attitudes (Kitchens et al., 2020). However, the present study did not directly examine YouTube's recommendation algorithm or its effects on users.

This study aligns with previous studies associating narcissism-related discourse with processes of labeling and stigmatization, in which individuals may be characterized through negative attributes such as being "bad" or "lacking empathy" (Alam, 2024; Friedman, 2020; Sheehan et al., 2016). Similarly, the use of narcissism-related labels in users' evaluations of others can be considered alongside previous studies associating narcissism with traits such as selfishness and manipulateness (Pincus and Lukowitsky, 2010). The frequent use of the label "narcissist" in the analyzed comments is also relevant to Alanka and Cezik's (2016) discussion of the increasingly negative meanings surrounding narcissism in digital contexts.

Previous studies suggested that ordinary people may have limited understanding of the causes, manifestations, and treatment of narcissism and that individuals exhibiting narcissistic tendencies may experience social exclusion (Büttner et al., 2025; Wright and Furnham, 2014). Grubbs et al. (2019) similarly reported that misconceptions about narcissism are present in popular discourse. The present study did not directly assess users' knowledge of narcissism or the accuracy of their interpretations; therefore, its findings should not be taken as evidence that users' understanding was inaccurate or superficial.

The findings achieved in this study indicate that users frequently labeled others as narcissists, particularly individuals within their immediate social circles. Barry et al. (2019) reported

that self-image posting behaviors on Instagram influenced how users were perceived by others, with greater selfie posting being associated with perceptions of lower likability and greater self-absorption. In the present study, the label "narcissist" was most frequently directed toward spouses or partners, followed by parents and other individuals within users' social environments. While previous studies largely examined narcissism-related perceptions in relation to behaviors displayed on social media, the present findings revealed that narcissism-related terminology was also used by YouTube commenters when describing people in their offline interpersonal relationships.

The findings highlight that YouTube functions not only as a source of information on narcissism but also as a platform where users discuss and apply narcissism-related terminology in relation to their own experiences and interpersonal relationships. Even though the present study did not assess the accuracy of the information presented or establish a causal relationship between the absence of references and users' interpretations, the limited use of academic or scientific references in the analyzed videos draws attention. Accordingly, this study contributes to the literature by documenting how narcissism-related content and user-generated commentary coexist within the YouTube environment, particularly in relation to self-diagnosis and the labeling of others as narcissists.

The findings also have several practical implications. Given the limited use of academic or scientific references in the analyzed videos, content creators may benefit from presenting clinical concepts such as narcissism with clearer reference to relevant academic evidence as well as distinguishing clinical terminology from its everyday use as a social label. Furthermore, initiatives aiming to strengthen mental health literacy and media literacy may help users critically evaluate narcissism-related content and distinguish between clinical concepts and everyday interpretations.

4.1 Limitations and future directions

Despite offering a significant framework by analyzing how YouTube is used as an information source on narcissism and how users engage with this information in the comment sections, this study also has certain limitations. Although the data were obtained from YouTube, the world's most popular video-sharing platform, the exclusive focus on this platform limits the generalizability of the findings to other social media platforms. Future research could examine narcissism-themed content across different social media platforms and explore the variations in content representation across these platforms. The analyzed videos were selected from among the most viewed ones. Even though this approach allows for evaluating content with broader reach and higher popularity, it may also exclude less-viewed videos that could be academically or clinically important. Therefore, future studies might include a broader sample that includes less popular but more in-depth videos. Another limitation is the timing of data collection. The data were collected on 21 February 2023, and subsequent changes in YouTube content, user discourse, and platform dynamics may not be reflected in the present dataset. The anonymity of user comments restricts the ability to obtain direct information about

the demographics and motivations of commenters. In future research, qualitative data collection methods such as surveys or in-depth interviews could provide more detailed insights into how users respond to content and interpret the information presented. While this study's focus on Turkish-language videos addresses a notable gap in the literature, it also poses limitations in terms of understanding the representation of narcissism in different cultural contexts. Analyzing content in different languages in future studies could offer a broader perspective on self-diagnosis and the social labeling of others as narcissists on social media and contribute substantially to literature.

This study fills an important gap in the literature by examining how YouTube functions as a source of information on narcissism and by investigating users' tendencies toward self-diagnosis and labeling others as narcissists through engagement with this content. In future research, different methodological approaches, platforms, and broader datasets could allow for a more nuanced examination of the relationship between social media, narcissism, and the social labeling of others as narcissists.

5 Conclusions

The findings achieved in this study, which makes a significant contribution to literature, indicate that narcissism-themed content is predominantly created by individuals who claim expertise in the field of psychology. However, much of this content lacks scientific references. User comments revealed that while individuals show a low tendency to self-identify as narcissistic, there is a high tendency to label others as narcissists. Notably, partners, parents, and individuals in one's close social circle are most frequently labelled in this way. These findings indicate that YouTube serves as both a source of narcissism-related information and a platform where users engage in self-diagnosis and label others as narcissists. However, the present study did not examine the accuracy of the information presented in the videos or establish whether the absence of scientific and academic references influenced users' interpretations.

Even though narcissism is addressed from various aspects in academic literature, the results indicate that public discourse tends to emphasize its negative aspects. One of the most important findings obtained in this study is that YouTube does more than disseminate information; it also provides a space in which users engage with psychological constructs through self-evaluation and the labeling of others as narcissists.

In this regard, the growing prevalence of narcissism discourse on social media highlights the importance of examining how psychological concepts are interpreted and used as social labels in digital environments. Overall, this study provides an important framework for understanding how the relationship between digital media and psychological discourse is evolving. Even though platforms such as YouTube enhance access to information, the findings also demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between clinical concepts and their everyday use in digital discourse. Therefore, it is essential (both academically and socially) to examine the use of psychological concepts in popular culture from a more critical perspective.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Author contributions

AZ: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. AÇ: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Validation, Writing – review & editing. İZ: Conceptualization, Data curation, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. YÇ: Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Writing – original draft.

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