

Motivations for social network site use and users' well-being: mediation of perceived social support, positive self-presentation and honest self-presentation

Social network site use and users' well-being

171

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aimed to investigate positive associations between three main motivations (social interaction, information and entertainment) for the use of social network sites (SNSs) and users' well-being, as well as the multiple mediating effects of perceived social support, positive and honest self-presentation.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample of 759 active users of SNSs (WeChat Moments, Qzone and Weibo) aged 14–43 years was measured with online questionnaires. Correlation analysis and structural equation modeling were implemented to examine the corresponding hypotheses.

Findings – The results showed the overall intensity of motivations was positively associated with users' well-being; perceived social support and positive self-presentation played intermediary roles and honest self-presentation and perceived social support had a chain mediation effect. However, the motivations of social interaction, information and entertainment indirectly affected users' well-being through three different mediation paths.

Originality/value – Although some studies have investigated the effects of motivations (including social interaction, information and entertainment) for SNS use on users' well-being, there has not been a consistent conclusion. The findings may shed light on the motivations for SNS use and how they may affect people's well-being in the digital era, thereby promoting their healthy use of SNSs as well as improved interface design and user management of SNSs.

Keywords Motivation for SNS use, Well-being, Perceived social support, Positive self-presentation, Honest self-presentation

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In nations with Internet access, social network sites (SNSs) are well established. Facebook is the most popular social media platform, with 2.85 billion monthly active users worldwide followed by YouTube, WhatsApp and Instagram (Statista, 2021). The number of Internet users and SNSs in China has exploded in the last decade, owing primarily to the mobile Internet. There are 1.01 billion Chinese Internet users, with 99.6% using the mobile Internet, and 271,000 social messaging apps (CNNIC, 2021). WeChat Moments, Qzone and Weibo are the top three SNSs in China (CNNIC, 2017) and are among the top 10 most popular social

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Ethical approval: The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Liaoning Normal University. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.



media platforms in the world, with over 2.37 billion monthly active users (Statista, 2021). Users can post (including text, photographs and videos) and update their status on WeChat Moments and Qzone, but they can only browse and engage with content provided by online friends or public accounts (including likes, comments and private messages). Weibo allow users to create different types of posts, as well as view and engage with others' profiles and public posts. Moreover, according to a recent poll conducted in 46 regions, global netizens spend an average of 144 min each day on social media, with Chinese netizens spending 117 min (Statista, 2020). This shows that an increasing number of people in China and the world have integrated SNSs into their daily lives.

A great deal of studies from various disciplines have investigated the influence of SNSs on people's adjustment, with a focus on the relationship between SNS use and well-being, which is frequently quantified using life satisfaction as a major indicator (e.g. Kim and Lee, 2011; Oh *et al.*, 2014; Verduyn *et al.*, 2017). It is a common assumption that using SNSs leads to decreased well-being or other undesirable consequences. Excessive or problematic use patterns, fear of "missing out," and upward social comparisons have been linked to SNS addiction, social isolation or overload, low self-esteem and some negative feelings such as depression, anxiety and envy (e.g. Satici and Uysal, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2018a; Schmuck *et al.*, 2019). However, some encouraging findings suggest that using SNSs may help people find fulfillment in various ways. This is because enhanced perceived social support, relational certainty and social capital from online friends can lower psychological stress, promote problem-solving and improve happiness among SNS users (e.g. Nabi *et al.*, 2013; Verduyn *et al.*, 2017; Lian *et al.*, 2020; Brailovskaia and Margraf, 2019). As the co-existence of these two distinct connections, researchers are looking into potential mediators in the relationship between SNS use and well-being.

These studies were based on diverse SNS usage behaviors, which are broadly divided into two types: active and passive. This explains the inconsistency. Generally, passive SNS use refers to the observation of other people's lives by browsing their profiles, status and posts, whereas active use comprises interactions with other SNS friends in a private or public setting, such as posting on one's wall, updating status and commenting (Burke *et al.*, 2010; Frison and Eggermont, 2015a). Directed communication may encourage content creation, information exchange and social interactions among SNS users, whereas content consumption will more likely minimize social engagement and boost comparison. Active SNS use is positively connected with well-being, whereas inactive SNS use has the opposite effect (Verduyn *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2018a).

Another cause may be the various motivations underlying SNS use behaviors (Lin *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2019; Brailovskaia and Margraf, 2019). Although extensive research has explored why people use SNSs (Yang and Brown, 2013; Syn and Oh, 2015; Wen *et al.*, 2016), few studies have examined the consequences (Boyle and Johnson, 2010; Krishnan and Hunt, 2015; Pittman and Reich, 2016). Most discussions on the relationship between SNS use and well-being have addressed motivations or needs driving SNS use behaviors. SNS users who consume content, for example, are often motivated by a desire to relax or escape from the real world (Wang *et al.*, 2018a); those seeking information and entertainment are not likely to make social comparisons (Schmuck *et al.*, 2019). Initiating interactions or active posting on SNSs is associated with a desire for belongingness and self-presentation (Lian *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, the study aimed to investigate the associations between motivations for active SNS use and well-being, as well as the mediating role of self-presentation and perceived social support, which were consistently linked to active SNS use and positive outcomes (Meng *et al.*, 2017; Pang, 2020). Self-presentation is central in active SNS use, whether for information-sharing, communications with others or just posting a photo or status update (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2021). Self-presentation on SNSs could benefit users' well-being directly or indirectly through the perception of social support on SNSs (Pang, 2020). As a vital source of human well-being,

perceived social support represents the outcome of social interactions or the psychological resources provided by social interactions (Wang *et al.*, 2019; Pang, 2020). Although diverse types of SNS use can boost perceived social support (Wang *et al.*, 2019), when SNS users actively, rather than passively, engage in social interactions, perceived social support can lead to enhanced well-being (Meng *et al.*, 2017). As SNSs have become an indispensable part of people's lives, this study will aid in improving their understanding of the mechanisms underlying the relationship between active SNS use and well-being, encouraging their healthy use of SNSs, and promoting SNS interface design and user management.

2. Literature review

2.1 Motivation for SNS use and well-being

According to the uses and gratifications theory, people who utilize mass media to fulfill psychological needs or desires are engaged, goal-oriented and motivated (Katz *et al.*, 1973; Rubin, 1994). The theory is more suited to the social media context, which allows users to actively publish and exchange information rather than passively receiving it (Papacharissi, 2002; Basilisco and Jin, 2015). The internal force that drives people to utilize SNSs to meet their needs or desires is the motivation. Some researchers suggested that considering the motivations for SNS use would shed more light on its relationship with well-being (Nabi *et al.*, 2013; Wen *et al.*, 2016). Satisfaction of SNS users' needs or desires by the functions they employ, rather than the frequency or length of use, enhances well-being (Guo *et al.*, 2014; Manuoğlu and Uysal, 2020). Furthermore, SNS usage has been strongly associated with interpersonal utility, information-seeking, entertainment and other motivations in prior studies (e.g. Giota and Kleftras, 2014; Basilisco and Jin, 2015; Wen *et al.*, 2016).

A few studies have linked SNS users' motivation with their well-being. Wang *et al.* (2014) found that university students who used Qzone for social interaction (i.e. status updating, comment giving and blog writing) had a high level of well-being, while those who used it for entertainment (i.e. passively browsing friends' pages and playing games) did not yield the same result. Similarly, Guo *et al.* (2014) found that among Weibo and Facebook users, using the SNS functions for social activities and information (i.e. interacting with friends, meeting new people, looking for news, seeking information) increased the level of users' perceived well-being, whereas using them for entertainment (i.e. browsing the posts, having fun, passing time online) did not. Conversely, Baek *et al.* (2014) conducted a survey among Facebook users and discovered that interpersonal motives significantly negatively predicted well-being only among users with secure attachment, whereas information and entertainment motives had no effect on well-being. According to a new study on adolescent Facebook users (Jarman *et al.*, 2021), social interaction motivation was not correlated with well-being, while information-sharing and other motivations (including passing time and escapism) were negatively correlated with it.

Researchers primarily focused on three motivations of using SNSs in the aforementioned studies: social interaction, information and entertainment. However, there is no consensus on the relationship between these three motivations and well-being. One possibility is that the effect of motivations is explored across multiple SNS usage behaviors. For example, when social and information motivations were positively connected with active SNS use, they improved well-being (Wang *et al.*, 2014; Guo *et al.*, 2014; Baek *et al.*, 2014). However, when they were not connected with active SNS use or were strongly correlated with passive SNS use, they did not promote well-being (Wang *et al.*, 2014; Guo *et al.*, 2014; Jarman *et al.*, 2021). Another possibility is that there are some discrepancies in the definitions of motivation. Information motivation includes two meanings: seeking and sharing. Information-seeking was positively associated with well-being (Guo *et al.*, 2014), while information-sharing had the opposite effect (Jarman *et al.*, 2021). When entertainment motivation is equivalent to the

incentive of passing time and escapism, it is connected with passive surfing (Wang *et al.*, 2014; Guo *et al.*, 2014) and lower well-being (Jarman *et al.*, 2021). To regulate these influences, researchers must describe the motivations for SNS use and clarify the corresponding use behaviors in their investigations.

2.2 Mediation of perceived social support

Many people use SNSs to get social support, which can help them cope with psychological stress caused by unfavorable life events and improve their overall well-being. Perceived social support has gotten more attention than actually received social support in the literature (Nurullah, 2012). Perceived social support relates to the belief that social networks can provide help, and generally includes emotional support, instrumental assistance and information-sharing (Lakey and Cohen, 2000). In the last several decades, the manner in which social networks provide support has changed dramatically, shifting away from face-to-face encounters, letters and phone conversations to emails, SNSs, and other new media. With the rise of SNS users, online and offline social networks are no longer distinct, but significantly overlap. Families, relatives, friends and classmates are on the contact lists of 70% of Chinese SNS users (CNNIC, 2014). Previous studies have demonstrated that SNS users obtained considerably more social support from their online rather than their offline friends (Indian and Grieve, 2014) and that perceived social support from SNSs predicted users' well-being (Olson *et al.*, 2012).

Perceived social support should be a key mediator in the relationship between SNS use and well-being. According to some studies, it mediated the relationship between the number of SNS friends and well-being (Valkenburg *et al.*, 2006; Kim and Lee, 2011; Nabi *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, the amount of time spent on SNSs and other commonly utilized SNS features were positively related to users' perceived and received social support, which decreased stress and improved well-being (Meng *et al.*, 2017). As a result, perceived social support may also play a role in the link between motives for using SNSs and well-being. Some common types of motives for SNS use (e.g. interpersonal utility, information-seeking and entertainment) were positively connected to SNS use time and online social support (Giota and Klefaras, 2014). Other types (such as intrinsic and external, exhibitionism and voyeurism) were also associated with the number of SNS friends (Wen *et al.*, 2016), content generation and content consumption (Mäntymäki and Islam, 2016).

2.3 Mediation of self-presentation on SNSs

Self-presentation is important for relationship building and development in offline and online social settings (Ellison *et al.*, 2006; Boyle and Johnson, 2010). Similar to impression management and self-disclosure, it refers to the action of people revealing themselves to others and attempting to influence others' and their own impressions (Leary and Kowalski, 1990; Boyle and Johnson, 2010; Yang and Brown, 2016). Compared with face-to-face encounters, there are more possibilities and instruments for users to present themselves online with diverse objectives, such as information, entertainment and contact with friends and families (Papacharissi, 2002). Prior studies mainly compared two types of self-presentation on SNSs (Kim and Lee, 2011; Niu *et al.*, 2015): first, positive self-presentation, which refers to the selective broadcasting of personal information, thoughts and feelings (e.g. only posting "happy" status updates or stunning images, and sharing good or favorable information); and second, honest or authentic self-presentation, which means the nonselective posting of personal information, ideas and sentiments in a true-to-self manner (e.g. uploading happy and negative feelings or unaltered photos).

Self-presentation on SNSs may mediate the relationship between motivations for SNS use and well-being. First, online self-disclosure acts as a link between online communication and well-being (Valkenburg and Peter, 2009). This benefit was evident in teenagers who used the internet to maintain existing connections, rather than those who used it to indulge in solitary activities. Second, SNS users, according to the functional model, employ multiple functionalities for self-disclosure with varying levels of intimacy, depending on their objectives (Bazarova and Choi, 2014). On Facebook, where wall posts are a type of public communication, the most popular incentives for self-presentation are relationship growth and social validation, with information and entertainment playing a minor role. When interacting with diverse people, from strangers to acquaintances, selective disclosure can help achieve the intended results while reducing the danger of information control loss. Third, self-presentation on SNSs is linked to well-being. According to Lee *et al.* (2011), the level of self-disclosure on Cyworld had a positive effect on the users' well-being through increased social capital. Self-disclosure on SNSs was not just a confession, but also an anticipation that SNS friends would reciprocate with their self-disclosure and social support. Authentic self-presentation does not generally imply disclosing all unpleasant experiences or sentiments, but only some portion thereof. This process aids SNS users to create genuine social ties, and promotes well-being (Reinecke and Trepte, 2014). Although the type of self-presentation was not considered in these studies, it is plausible to assume that more highly motivated SNS users will present themselves more deliberately and consciously, whether positively or authentically, resulting in enhanced well-being.

Furthermore, a mediating factor between self-presentation on SNSs and well-being may be perceived social support. Kim and Lee (2011) found that positive self-presentation on Facebook had a direct effect on users' well-being, whereas honest self-presentation affected Facebook users' well-being through perceived social support. The following studies have confirmed that honest self-presentation on SNSs affects life satisfaction through positive online feedback (Liu *et al.*, 2016) or enacted social support (Zhang, 2017). Some other studies have found an association of positive or authentic self-presentation on SNSs with audience feedback (Yang and Brown, 2016; Bareket-Bojmel *et al.*, 2016). Given that audience feedback was measured based on self-reports of SNS users, it could reflect the level of social support that they perceived online. According to these findings, positive and honest self-presentation may also have a chain mediation with perceived social support in the relationship between motivations for SNS use and users' well-being.

3. Research questions, hypotheses and models

3.1 Research questions and hypotheses

3.1.1 Three main motivations of active use and well-being. In order to better understand the relationship of motivations for SNS use and users' well-being, this study limited SNS use behavior to message posting, which is a typical active usage of SNSs. According to the research of Syn and Oh (2015), message posting on SNSs can be motivated by 10 different factors, the first two being social engagement and learning. The desire to connect with others through SNSs is referred to as social interaction motivation in this study. Learning motivation—information motivation in this study—refers to seeking information, assistance and opinions from people on SNSs. When people use SNSs to maintain existing interpersonal ties, the higher their social motivation, the happier they are while posting (Wang *et al.*, 2014). By bridging social connections and getting information support, active SNS use for social-information motivation correlates positively with life satisfaction (Guo *et al.*, 2014). Information-seeking was a predictor of sharing information on SNSs, which may satisfy the current informational needs of oneself and others (Lee and Ma, 2012). Furthermore, many studies on SNS motivations indicated that entertainment is also one of the most important motivations for SNS use (e.g. Lee and Ma, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2014). Regarding the need for

escapism, emotion release and anxiety relief, entertainment motivation was not a significant predictor of news-sharing in social media (Lee and Ma, 2012), and did not have a favorable impact on users' well-being (Guo *et al.*, 2014). Regarding the intrinsic motive of enjoyment or fun, entertainment motivation could positively predict online social participation (Nov *et al.*, 2010) and well-being (Wen *et al.*, 2016).

Given that SNS use is often driven by multiple motives, the overall intensity of the three positive motivations based on an active use behavior may positively predict users' well-being. Therefore, the first goal was to examine if the three main motivations of posting on SNSs (social interaction, information and entertainment) were positively associated with the posters' well-being.

- H1a. The overall intensity of motivations for posting on SNSs is positively associated with the posters' well-being.
- H1b. Social interaction motivation for posting on SNSs is positively associated with the posters' well-being.
- H1c. Information motivation for posting on SNSs is positively associated with the posters' well-being.
- H1d. Entertainment motivation for posting on SNSs is positively associated with the posters' well-being.

3.1.2 Mediation of perceived social support between three main motivations of active use and well-being. As mentioned above, there is evidence that perceived social support might mediate the relationship between motivations for SNS use and users' well-being. Specifically, the three main motivations for SNS use may all have relations with perceived social support. Internet use (including Facebook) for relationship maintenance and information-seeking was shown to be positively associated with perceived social support from online and offline sources, but the use of the internet for entertainment/escape and social recognition was not (Leung, 2010). Furthermore, recent studies on Facebook and WeChat usage revealed that motives for social engagement and information acquisition have favorable effects on social capital and perceived social support (Frison and Eggermont, 2015b; Ahmad *et al.*, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2019). In this study, posting on SNSs for social interaction and information is typically directed toward communication, and posters will perceive more social support through feedback, such as likes, comments and forwards. Posting on SNSs for enjoyment, not for passing time or escapism, may satisfy posters through online supportive feedback (Giota and Kleftras, 2014).

Therefore, the second goal was to investigate whether perceived social support might be a mediator in the relationship between the three motivations (social interaction, information and entertainment) for SNS use and well-being.

- H2a. The association between the overall intensity of the three main motivations for SNS use and users' well-being is mediated by perceived social support.
- H2b. The association between social interaction motivation for SNS use and users' well-being is mediated by perceived social support.
- H2c. The association between information motivation for SNS use and users' well-being is mediated by perceived social support.
- H2d. The association between entertainment motivation for SNS use and users' well-being is mediated by perceived social support.

3.1.3 Mediation of self-presentation between three main motivations of active use and well-being. As mentioned above, self-presentation may play two mediating roles in the relationship between motivations for SNS use and well-being, however, the three motivations for SNS use

and two self-presentation strategies may have different connections. An incentive for social interaction can lead to positive and honest self-presentation. Users with higher motivations for connecting with friends and networking had more frequent self-presentation, such as expressing personal interests and insights (Papacharissi, 2002; Boyle and Johnson, 2010). Furthermore, Chinese college students with higher social motivation had more self-presentation on WeChat, such as updating self-introductions and sharing information; online self-presentation and social support had a chain mediation in the relationship between social motivation and the sense of belonging (Pang, 2020). However, self-presentation is uncommon in using SNSs for entertainment (Wang *et al.*, 2014; Pang, 2020). Users who are motivated by entertainment are more likely to engage in passive use behaviors such as perusing friend sites or playing games, causing overindulgence and limiting their desire to give personal information (Wang *et al.*, 2014; Pang, 2020). However, in this study, entertainment motivation was assessed based on an active usage behavior. It is unclear whether users who post for fun on SNSs may disclose themselves and obtain positive feedback. As self-presentation is also less essential when seeking information, there may be no link between information motivation and SNS users' well-being mediated through self-presentation and perceived social support.

Overall, the last two goals were to investigate (1) the simple mediating effect of positive or honest self-presentation in the relationship between the three motivations (social interaction, information and entertainment) for SNS use and well-being; and (2) the chain mediating effect of positive/honest self-presentation and perceived social support.

- H3a.* The association between the overall intensity of motivations for SNS use and users' well-being is mediated by positive or honest self-presentation.
- H3b.* The association between social interaction motivation for SNS use and users' well-being is mediated by positive or honest self-presentation.
- H3c.* The association between information motivation for SNS use and users' well-being is not mediated by positive or honest self-presentation.
- H3d.* The association between entertainment motivation for SNS use and users' well-being is not mediated by positive or honest self-presentation.
- H4a.* Positive or honest self-presentation and perceived social support has a chain mediation in the relationship between the overall intensity of motivations for SNS use and users' well-being.
- H4b.* Positive or honest self-presentation and perceived social support have a chain mediation in the relationship between social interaction motivation for SNS use and users' well-being.
- H4c.* Positive or honest self-presentation and perceived social support do not have a chain mediation in the relationship between information motivation for SNS use and users' well-being.
- H4d.* Positive or honest self-presentation and perceived social support do not have a chain mediation in the relationship between entertainment motivation for SNS use and users' well-being.

3.2 Research models

Two conceptual research models were proposed based on the aforementioned demonstration (see Figures 1 and 2). The first considered the impact of overall SNS usage motivation on users' well-being and the mediating roles of perceived social support and two types of self-

presentation. The second depicted the various pathways of motivations, including social, information and entertainment, on the well-being of SNS users.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research participants and procedures

We conducted a survey on a Chinese website (www.wenjuan.com) dedicated to data collection between November 2016 and January 2017. All participants were required to have an active account on at least one of the top three Chinese SNSs, namely, WeChat Moments, Qzone and Weibo (CNNIC, 2017). We recruited the participants through snowball sampling. According to official data, the majority of Chinese SNS users in 2016 were under 40 years old, accounting for 78% of the total; 32.1% were 20–29 years, 24.3% were 30–39 years and 21.6% were under 19 years (CNNIC, 2017). Hence, we randomly selected 100 junior, senior and graduate students from our university and provided them with the survey's website link. At the end of the questionnaires, the participants were required to share the survey with other SNS users (i.e. online friends, offline friends and family members) on WeChat Moments, Qzone or Weibo. The online survey had 866 responses in total. After eliminating unproductive replies (such as picking items in a predetermined order or completing the questionnaires in a very short time), there were 759 valid questionnaires. The sample's demographic profile is shown in Table 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual research model for the overall intensity of motivations for SNS use (Model 1)

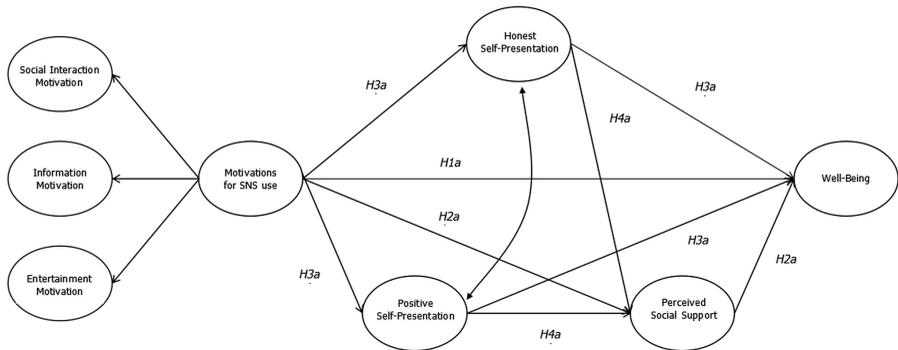
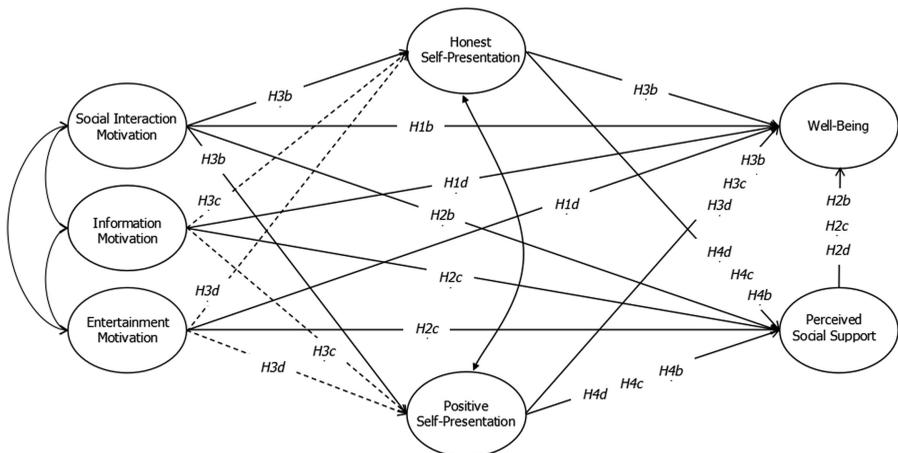


Figure 2. Conceptual research model for three main motivations of using SNSs (Model 2)



Measure	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	424	55.9
	Female	335	44.1
Age	14–19 years old	169	22.3
	20–29 years old	367	48.3
	30–43 years old	223	29.4
SNS use experience	<1 years	24	3.2
	1–2 years	25	3.3
	>2 years	710	93.5
Time spent on SNSs (per day)	<30 min	58	7.6
	30–59 min	107	14.1
	60–119 min	168	22.2
	>120 min	426	56.1

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics
for the sample

4.2 Measurements

4.2.1 Motivations for SNS use. Motivations for SNS use were measured with a questionnaire developed by [Syn and Oh \(2015\)](#). After translation into Chinese, the instructions were slightly revised to address the conditions in China. The sentences that began with “I share wall posts on Facebook because . . .” or “I tweet because . . .” were revised to “I post on SNSs (such as WeChat Moments, Qzone and Weibo) because . . .” “Facebook” and “Twitter” were replaced by “social network site.” The questionnaire originally included 30 items covering 10 motivations. Each item was measured with a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the construct validity. The 10-factor model fit well ($\chi^2 = 502.064$, $df = 360$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.023, standardized root mean square of residual (SRMR) = 0.032, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.969, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.962). Factor loading of the items ranged from 0.551 to 0.764. This study adapted three factors (social engagement, learning and enjoyment) as social interaction, information and entertainment motivations for posting on SNSs. For each factor, composite reliability (CR) values were 0.761, 0.710 and 0.743; average variance extracted (AVE) values were 0.515, 0.451 and 0.492; Cronbach’s α values were 0.812, 0.805 and 0.811, respectively. For the three factors, the CR value was 0.885, the AVE value was 0.462 and the Cronbach’s α was 0.853.

4.2.2 Perceived social support. The perceived social support scale ([Zimet et al., 1988](#)) included 12 items reflecting the support from families, friends and others. Participants were asked to answer the items according to their experience on SNSs (such as WeChat Moments, Qzone and Weibo). Each item was responded to on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). The three-factor model fit well ($\chi^2 = 112.784$, $df = 51$, RMSEA = 0.040, SRMR = 0.027, CFI = 0.980, TLI = 0.974). Factor loading of the items ranged from 0.620 to 0.780. For each factor, CR values were 0.810, 0.766 and 0.802; AVE values were 0.517, 0.450 and 0.503; Cronbach’s α were 0.809, 0.765 and 0.801. For the factors, the CR value was 0.920, the AVE value was 0.490 and the Cronbach’s α was 0.865.

4.2.3 Self-presentation on SNSs. Self-presentation on SNSs was measured with the positive self-presentation index and the honest self-presentation index ([Kim and Lee, 2011](#); [Niu et al., 2015](#)). One scale had six items and the other had four items. A 5-point Likert-type scale was adapted for each item (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree). The two-factor model fit well ($\chi^2 = 106.695$, $df = 34$, RMSEA = 0.053, SRMR = 0.032, CFI = 0.972, TLI = 0.963). Factor loading of the items ranged from 0.665 to 0.761. For each factor, CR values were 0.842 and 0.821, AVE values were 0.470 and 0.535 and Cronbach’s α values were 0.841 and 0.821.

4.2.4 Well-being. Well-being was measured with five items from the Life Satisfaction Scale ([Diener et al., 1985](#)). A 7-point Likert-type scale was adapted for each item (1 = completely

disagree, 7 = completely agree). The one-factor model fit well ($\chi^2 = 5.509$, $df = 5$, RMSEA = 0.012, SRMR = 0.010, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 0.999). Factor loading of the items ranged from 0.626 to 0.743. The CR value was 0.816, the AVE value was 0.471 and the Cronbach's α was 0.815.

4.3 Analytical strategy

The software Mplus 7.4 for the structural equation model of latent variables was used to test our hypotheses. The following indices and criteria are often adopted to determine if the model fit is adequate: The χ^2/df ratio is less than 3.0, the CFI or TLI is more than 0.90, the RMSEA is less than 0.08 and the SRMR is less than 0.05 (Schreiber *et al.*, 2006). Bootstrapping was used to test the values and significance of indirect effects in the model, because it is superior for reducing errors. The indirect effect size is statistically significant if the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the parameter estimate does not contain 0, indicating a mediating effect (Preacher and Hayes, 2008).

5. Results

5.1 Common method variance assessment

Harman's 1-factor analysis was used to examine the possibility of common method bias. For all variables, we used an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) without model rotation. The EFA results showed 15 different components with a single factor accounting for 14.28% of the total covariance explained. CFA was also used to investigate a one-factor model. The model did not fit well ($\chi^2 = 5641.934$, $df = 594$, RMSEA = 0.106, SRMR = 0.113, CFI = 0.388, TLI = 0.350). These results indicated that the data obtained did not have any serious common method bias.

5.2 Descriptive statistics and correlations

The descriptive statistics, gender *t*-test and correlation analysis of the variables, which are all the average scores of their respective items, are shown in Table 2. Excluding positive self-presentation, which had a strong negative connection with honest self-presentation, and information motivation, which was not statistically correlated with well-being, all the variables were significantly correlated in a positive way. Furthermore, some had significant age correlations and gender differences. Hence, age and gender were added as covariates in the structural equation models that followed.

5.3 Examining structural model

The variables in the models were latent constructs that were estimated using the values of the items. Motivations for SNS use and perceived social support were second-order latent variables, while positive or honest self-presentation and well-being were first-order. First, we built a simple regression model with the motivation for SNS use as the independent variable, well-being as the dependent variable and age and gender as controlled variables. The results showed that the model fit well ($\chi^2 = 180.776$, $df = 99$, RMSEA = 0.033, SRMR = 0.038, CFI = 0.963, TLI = 0.956). Motivations for SNS use significantly, directly predicted well-being ($\beta = 0.195$, $p < 0.01$, 95% CI = [0.082, 0.297]).

Second, the aforementioned model incorporated perceived social support, positive self-presentation and honest self-presentation as mediators between motivation for SNS use and well-being, while controlling the effect of age and gender on well-being. The multiple chain mediation model (Model 1) fit well ($\chi^2 = 1069.718$, $df = 648$, RMSEA = 0.290, SRMR = 0.040, CFI = 0.950, TLI = 0.946). The direct prediction of motivation for SNS use on well-being was not significant after the mediating variables were added ($\beta = -0.066$,

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Social interaction motivation	0.515 ^{***}								
2. Entertainment motivation	0.335 ^{***}	0.451 ^{***}							
3. Information motivation	0.285 ^{***}	0.305 ^{***}	0.492 ^{**}						
4. Motivations for SNS use	0.747 ^{**}	0.746 ^{**}	0.709 ^{**}	0.462 ^{**}					
5. Perceived social support	0.243 ^{**}	0.205 ^{***}	0.225 ^{***}	0.305 ^{***}	0.490 ^{**}				
6. Honest self-presentation	0.167 ^{**}	0.161 ^{***}	0.085 [*]	0.189 ^{**}	0.213 ^{**}	0.535 ^{**}			
7. Positive self-presentation	0.188 ^{**}	0.096 ^{***}	0.086 [*]	0.170 ^{**}	0.114 ^{**}	-0.151 ^{**}	0.470 ^{**}		
8. Well-being	0.082 [*]	0.154 ^{***}	0.053 [*]	0.131 ^{**}	0.311 ^{**}	0.110 ^{**}	0.178 ^{**}	0.471 ^{**}	
9. Age	0.085 [*]	-0.070 [*]	-0.141 ^{**}	-0.054 [*]	0.115 ^{**}	0.78 [*]	0.103 ^{**}	-0.53 [*]	
<i>M</i>	3.819	3.820	4.017	3.885	5.220	4.403	4.500	4.081	25.150
<i>SD</i>	0.723	0.699	0.670	0.512	0.782	1.121	1.012	0.955	6.968
<i>t</i>	0.915	0.768	-4.272 ^{***}	-1.063 ^{**}	-1.114 [*]	1.089	1.145	1.409	4.755 ^{***}

Note(s): Factor correlation matrix with squared roots of AVE, on the diagonal; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2.
Description statistics,
t-test of gender, and
correlations of the
observed variables

$p > 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.210, 0.084]). Figure 3 shows the regression coefficients for all the pathways in Model 1.

The results of indirect effects from motivation for SNS use to well-being in Table 3 were consistent with the findings in Figure 3, indicating that the mediation of perceived social support and that of positive self-presentation, as well as the chain mediation of honest self-presentation and perceived social support, were established. However, neither the mediation of honest self-presentation nor the chain mediation of positive self-presentation and perceived social support were established.

Another multiple chain mediation model (Model 2) was used to examine the indirect effects of the three motivations for SNS use on well-being. They were interrelated independent variables, as well as first-order latent variables. The model fit well ($\chi^2 = 1050.885$, $df = 640$, RMSEA = 0.029, SRMR = 0.039, CFI = 0.951, TLI = 0.946). As shown in Figure 4, social interaction motivation predicted honest self-presentation and positive self-presentation significantly, entertainment motivation predicted honest self-presentation and well-being significantly, and information motivation predicted perceived social support significantly. The results of Model 2 were consistent with those of Model 1 regarding the links between positive and honest self-presentation, perceived social support and well-being. Table 4 shows the indirect effects of the established mediation paths.

6. Discussion

6.1 Positive effect of motivations for SNS use on well-being

The results showed that the overall intensity of motivations was a significant predictor of well-being. This finding confirmed Hypothesis 1a and suggested that SNS users with higher

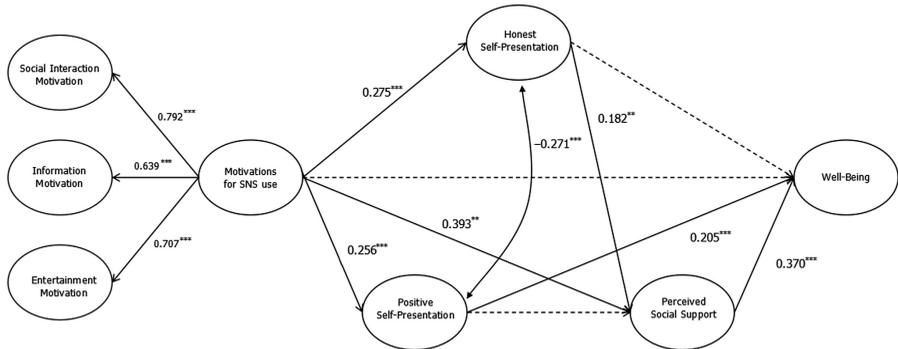


Figure 3. Regression coefficients of the paths in Model 1

Note(s): ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Indirect path	Average indirect effect	95% of CI	
		Low	High
MSU → PSS → WB	0.145	0.081	0.241
MSU → PSP → WB	0.052	0.024	0.101
MSU → HSP → WB	0.025	-0.004	0.076
MSU → HSP → PSS → WB	0.018	0.006	0.037
MSU → PSP → PSS → WB	0.006	-0.005	0.023

Table 3. Indirect effects in Model 1 (bootstrap analysis)

Note(s): MSU, motivation for SNS use; PSS, perceived social support; WB, well-being; HSP, honest self-presentation; PSP, positive self-presentation

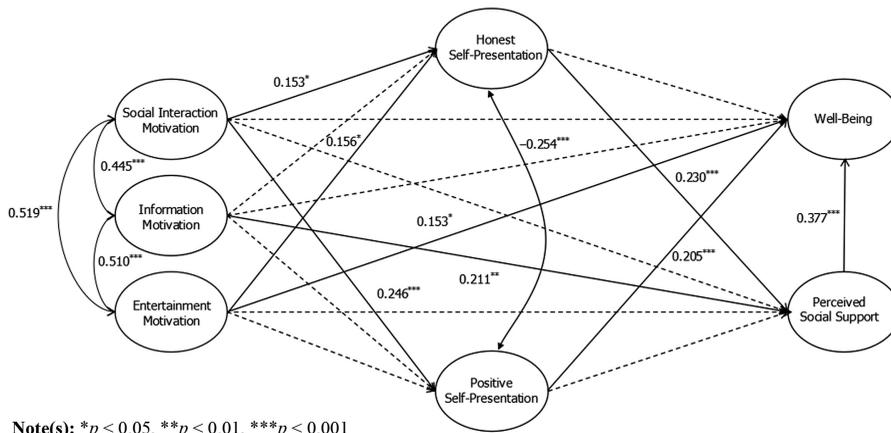


Figure 4. Regression coefficients of the paths in Model 2

Indirect path	Average indirect effect	95% of CI	
		Low	High
Social interaction motivation → PSP → WB	0.050	0.022	0.093
Social interaction motivation → HSP → PSS → WB	0.013	0.002	0.035
Entertainment motivation → HSP → PSS → WB	0.014	0.001	0.033
Information motivation → PSS → WB	0.080	0.030	0.149

Note(s): PSS, perceived social support; WB, well-being; HSP, honest self-presentation; PSP, positive self-presentation

Table 4. Indirect effects in Model 2 (bootstrap analysis)

motives felt happier when publishing messages on SNSs. An explanation is that message posting is an active-SNS-use behavior. According to the uses and gratifications theory, highly motivated SNS users are more likely to engage in active SNS usage activities to meet their needs or desires. Participants in this study were virtually active SNS users, with 93.5% having used at least one SNS for two years and 92.4% spending more than 30 min each day on SNSs. SNS users' positive usage behaviors were associated with their well-being (Verduyn et al., 2017). Another explanation is that all the motivations examined in this study were positive. Prior research revealed that most seemingly positive motives resulted in high life satisfaction or other good consequences (Guo et al., 2014; Wen et al., 2016). Undesirable motives, such as escape, fear of missing out and passing the time, were linked to several negative behaviors or outcomes (Throuvala et al., 2019; Jarman et al., 2021).

Although social interaction and entertainment motivations were significantly positively associated with well-being in this study, information motivation was not. These results supported Hypothesis 1b and 1c, but did not support Hypothesis 1d. As prior studies showed, social interactions on SNSs can help the users build and maintain social networks, making them feel accepted and trusted, and have higher self-worth (Yang and Brown, 2016) and life satisfaction (Lian et al., 2020). Also, the intrinsic motivation (enjoyment or fun inherent to the behaviors) for using SNS positively predicted well-being (Wen et al., 2016; Manuoglu and Uysal, 2020). In this study, posting hobbies and funny experiences satisfied enjoyment or amusement needs, which can bring positive emotions and directly improve subjective well-being. However, information motivation had no direct correlation with SNS users' well-being, although there was some evidence in prior studies (Guo et al., 2014; Manuoglu and Uysal,

2020). Information motivation mainly refers to information acquisition from others, which will not be satisfied without feedback. Overall, these results further indicated that the impact of SNSs depends on why and how people use them. The reasonable and active usage of SNSs can promote users' psychological functioning or social adaptation.

6.2 Mediation of perceived social support in the relationship between motivations for SNS use and well-being

The mediation effect of perceived social support existed between the overall intensity of motivations for SNS use and well-being. This finding was expected by [Hypothesis 2a](#) and was consistent with previous research ([Nabi et al., 2013](#); [Giota and Kleftras, 2014](#); [Oh et al., 2014](#)). When highly motivated SNS users were exposed to more helpful social interactions (such as giving advice, showing empathy or teaching something new), they felt greater support from online friends. Furthermore, posting on SNSs is a quick and cost-effective approach to request assistance, ensuring that users receive fast and meaningful assistance. It can assist them in resolving problems and improve their perception of their capacity to cope with difficult situations ([Frison and Eggermont, 2015b](#)).

There is a difference in the relationships between the three main motivations for SNS use and perceived social support. Although information motivation had no direct effect on SNS users' well-being, it indirectly affected well-being through perceived social support. This finding confirmed [Hypothesis 2c](#). As mentioned earlier, information motivation mainly refers to information acquisition in this study. It is positively associated with social, emotional and information support online as SNSs are a tool for maintaining and increasing social capital ([Wang et al., 2019](#)). The results rejected [Hypothesis 2b and 2d](#), because social interaction motivation and entertainment motivation had no direct effect on perceived social support. However, these two motivations affected perceived social support through honest self-presentation, as discussed below. Interesting or self-entertaining posts can increase interpersonal attraction and social interactions. Meanwhile, interpersonal interactions on SNSs are helpful for bonding and bridging social connections, providing SNS users more support online when they need it ([Wang et al., 2019](#)). In summary, although the paths are different, the three motivations for SNS use enhance users' perceived social support online and promote users' well-being.

6.3 Mediation of positive self-presentation in the relationship between motivations for SNS use and well-being

The results showed that the mediation effect of positive self-presentation existed between motivations for SNS use and well-being while the mediation effect of honest self-presentation did not. The results partially supported [Hypothesis 3a](#). Consistent with prior studies ([Kim and Lee, 2011](#); [Gonzales and Hancock, 2011](#)), highly motivated SNS users would more frequently present their positive aspects in the posts and thus feel more satisfied with their lives. A reason is that SNS users can experience well-being by presenting their ideal selves on SNSs. Users often review their profiles and posts, even their comments under the posts. According to [Gonzales and Hancock \(2011\)](#), updating and viewing profiles could improve their self-esteem, specifically, when they selectively presented their data, because it could make them focus on their positive information and evoke positive emotions within themselves. Another reason is that positive self-presentation on SNSs can also reflect a positive self-image ([Kim and Lee, 2011](#)). According to the positive illusion theory ([Taylor and Armor, 1996](#)), exaggerated self-perceptions help cope with self-threatening events or stressful situations and promote happiness.

Specifically, only social interaction motivation could affect well-being through positive self-presentation; information and entertainment motivations could not. These findings partially supported [Hypothesis 3b, 3c, and 3d](#). People who were developing intimate

relationships would want to obtain a commitment from others by presenting their ideal selves (Boyle and Johnson, 2010). Positive self-presentation on SNSs is helpful to establish or maintain interpersonal relations, and the presenter experiences greater well-being (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2021). As the hypothesis, information motivation and entertainment motivation did not show a direct effect on positive self-presentation on SNSs. Users who post on SNSs for information acquisition and enjoyment rarely try to manage others' impressions of themselves (Wang *et al.*, 2014; Pang, 2020). Their focus is on information or fun and not the purpose for sharing information about their life and identity (O'Donnell *et al.*, 2021). Conversely, information-sharing may correlate with self-presentation because it has often been considered as a kind of communication activity or social exchange (Jarman *et al.*, 2021).

6.4 Chain mediation of honest self-presentation and perceived social support between motivations for SNS use and well-being

Unlike positive self-presentation, honest self-presentation showed a chain mediation effect on the link between the overall intensity of motivations for SNS use and well-being. This finding partially validated Hypothesis 4a. Higher incentives encourage SNS users to provide a more realistic image in their posts, which will be helpful to establish real interpersonal connections (Boyle and Johnson, 2010); nonetheless, they cannot directly lead users to feel better until they receive positive feedback. Self-disclosure that is unfiltered and profound is known as honest self-presentation. The degree of self-disclosure was due to the objects, context assessments and personal worth, such as building vital relationships and seeking emotional support (Greene *et al.*, 2006). People tend to make more frequent, intimate and honest disclosures when they are stressed. Disclosing some difficulties or negative aspects for reciprocal self-disclosure or social support from others can shield people from life stress and increase their well-being (Lee *et al.*, 2011; Liu *et al.*, 2016; Zhang, 2017).

Hypothesis 4b partially received the support from one of the findings that there was a link between social interaction motivation and well-being through the chain mediation of honest self-presentation and perceived social support. This result is consistent with prior studies (Pang, 2020). First, honest self-presentation on social media is generally for social connection (Wang *et al.*, 2018b). Users with social motives would like to include personal information in their posts (Boyle and Johnson, 2010). Second, when SNS friends realize someone needs help, they are more inclined to offer support through honest self-presentation rather than positive self-presentation (Kim and Lee, 2011). Candid admissions about one's struggles and bad feelings can help one gain interpersonal trust and get emotional support or advice from SNS friends, which are beneficial to well-being. However, failure to receive encouraging responses from SNS friends may aggravate the user's depressed mood (Moreno *et al.*, 2013; Park *et al.*, 2015).

Between entertainment motivation and well-being, the results demonstrated a chain mediation of honest self-presentation and perceived social support, but not between information motivation and well-being. Hypothesis 4d was confirmed, but Hypothesis 4c was rejected. The findings differ from those of Pang (2020), who found no link between entertainment motivation and online social support, but did not specify whether online self-presentation was honest or positive. This study found that posting on SNSs for pleasure can also be used to present oneself in an implicit way (Yang and Brown, 2013). Although SNS users may be engaged in the entertainment functions and have no intention of disclosing their personal information, this study looked into the impact of posting for enjoyment, which also displays one's interests or preferences. Funny photos or unpleasant experiences shared for pleasure on social media can inadvertently disclose the uploaders' actual selves. They will feel happier with themselves and others as a result of subsequent encouraging feedback from others. Information motivation, on the other hand, was unrelated to any type of self-

presentation. This is most likely because information-seeking motivates users to focus on information-exchanging on social media sites for current and future information requirements rather than self-related information presentation (Lee and Ma, 2012).

7. Theoretical and practical implications

This study presented a model for understanding the underlying process between active use and enhancement of well-being in SNS users with various motivations. The findings confirmed that self-presentation and perceived social support are two significant mediators in the construction of three pathways from motivations for using SNSs to well-being. The mediating roles of positive and honest self-presentation are different. Each of the three main motivations for using SNSs (social interaction, information and entertainment) has unique pathways to well-being. This study backed up the uses and gratification theory by demonstrating how SNSs can fulfill a variety of needs.

The study's findings can help people learn to utilize social media healthily. Why and how people use SNSs determines their value as a communication channel. Not only should educational institutions or the media tell the public about the problems or negative consequences that improper use of SNSs might create, they should also instruct the public on how to utilize SNSs effectively and productively to benefit. Everyone's active use facilitates the creation of a favorable online social or public opinion environment. As a result, SNS users should clarify their goals and needs (mainly social engagement, information-seeking and entertainment), engage in more active use behaviors (particularly message posting) and connect favorably with online friends via likes, comments, forwards and other features.

According to the findings, SNSs should optimize their functional modules to support self-presentation and social interaction, such as rewarding with points, improving user group division, increasing content management and guiding social interactions in a supportive way. SNSs can also tailor their functional modules according to their target users' multiple motivations. Furthermore, SNS administrators can encourage and favorably steer users toward self-presentation and social interaction on SNSs by supporting or hosting activities. SNS use can also improve their sense of belonging to the site while satisfying their needs. Their sense of belonging makes them conversely engage in more postings, reading and issue conversations. A great example is the "Ice Bucket Challenge" for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. This activity not only met its public welfare goals but also improved users' self-presentation, perceived social support and well-being, as well as the data and social impact of SNSs.

8. Limitations and future research

There are a few limitations in our study that should be discussed and addressed in future research. First, the hypotheses were examined with cross-sectional data. However, the hypothesized model was tested using a structural equation model of latent variables, controlling the measurement error effect. The models will be a good foundation for further investigation. Future studies should consider using a longitudinal or experimental study design to investigate the causal links between variables. Second, the average daily usage time of SNSs was significantly connected with the motivation for SNS use, but not with the other variables. Although this finding is consistent with that of some studies which found that time spent on a SNS was not related to users' well-being (Lee *et al.*, 2011; Nabi *et al.*, 2013; Guo *et al.*, 2014; Baek *et al.*, 2014), future studies should measure it as a continuous variable to examine its direct or moderated effect on other variables. Third, age and gender had some effects on research variables and were controlled in this study, suggesting that they could be used as moderators in future research. Finally, this study simply defined SNS use as message posting

and looked into three positive motivations for message posting. Researchers can look at the negative motivations (such as passing time and escape) for passive SNS use and how they relate to SNS use outcomes in the future.

9. Conclusion

This study found that the higher the overall intensity of the motivation for using SNSs, the greater the users' well-being. There were three intermediary paths between them: the simple mediation of positive self-presentation (indirect path A), the simple mediation of perceived social support (indirect path B) and the chain mediation of honest self-presentation and perceived social support (indirect path C). Specifically, social motivation encourages users to make more positive self-presentations in posts, leading to their improved happiness (indirect path A), or to make more honest self-presentations, enhancing perceived social support and further improving well-being (indirect path C). Users' happiness cannot be directly increased by posting messages for information acquisition; rather, their life satisfaction can be improved only when their posts receive more feedback and increase in perceived social support (indirect path B). Users' happiness can be immediately boosted for the enjoyment while posting, and their unintended authentic self-presentation and subsequent feedback from others can also further enhance their life satisfaction (indirect path C). The prior findings suggest that a combination of positive motivation and active usage behavior on SNSs can have a favorable impact on users. There are three common mediation paths between SNS users' posting motivation and their well-being and different motivations have varied influence mechanisms on the latter.

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