

The Relationships of SNS Use, Social Achievement Goals, and Life Satisfaction: A Study of Korean College Students

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Social networking sites (SNS) provide efficient communication. However, SNS use sometimes risks a user's life satisfaction. Based on the prior findings that one's social orientation influences the impact of SNS use on life satisfaction, this study examined the pathways to explain how SNS use affects individuals' life satisfaction through social achievement goals. A main path model and two gender-specified path models were tested using 438 Korean college student samples. The results showed that social development goals mediated the relationships between active SNS use and life satisfaction across all three path models. The social demonstration-approach goal was positively predicted by active SNS use in the main model and the male model, but it did not predict life satisfaction in both models. The social demonstration-avoidance goal was positively predicted by active SNS use in the main and female models. Still, it negatively predicted life satisfaction in both models. Implications and directions for future study are discussed.

Keywords: SNS, social achievement goals, life satisfaction, Korean students

INTRODUCTION

Social Networking Sites (SNS) have been increasingly used among young adults to maintain, enhance, and extend their social relationships (Ellison et al., 2007, 2011; Steinfield et al., 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2014). The popularity of SNS is shown in the global SNS usage trend which has increased approximately an hour within a decade from 90 minutes daily in 2012 to 145 minutes in 2020 (see Statista, 2021). In the U.S., 95 percent of U.S. teens have used an SNS app or site, and 54 percent of them reported hard to giving up social media (Pew Research Center, 2022). Korean young adults are also in the flourishing SNS usage trend. According to Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS, 2020), over 95 percent of Korean young adults have one or more SNS accounts, and over 65 percent of Korean college students reported using SNS for more than one hour daily (Yang & Whang, 2018). In addition, Korean college students manage their social relationships mainly through SNS; over 50 percent of Korean college students reported that more than half of their social relationships are maintained exclusively through SNS (Hong & Jeon, 2017).

Despite the popularity of SNS, scholars have been concerned that using SNS has implicit risks threatening users' psychological wellness. Specifically, SNS consumption activity, which refers to passively looking at others' SNS postings, has been discussed as a detrimental factor causing negative

impacts on life satisfaction (Frison & Eggermont, 2016). Since SNS postings proffer only a glance at others' lives, which they have selectively displayed, a user's SNS consumption activity can cause negative appraisals of one's life when comparing oneself with others they perceive to be doing better. Indeed, the negative impacts of SNS consumption activities on users' psychological wellness have been repeatedly reported in multiple empirical studies (Kross et al., 2013; Verduyn et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2018).

On the other hand, some studies indicated that the effects of SNS use on users' psychological wellness could differ depending on users' adaptive or maladaptive social orientations. For example, college students who were satisfied with their social relationships were more likely to attain positive emotions while using SNS whereas those who had high levels of social comparison tendency or high social anxiety were more likely to feel negative emotions during using SNS (Hu et al., 2017; Krestes & Stulhofer 2020). Consistently, South Korean college students with maladaptive social orientation are vulnerable to depression during SNS use and are more likely to suffer from SNS addiction (Jeong & Hyun, 2015; Yang & Whang, 2018)

However, the current knowledge of the roles of social orientations in the relationships between SNS use and life satisfaction is limited. Also, existing studies focus relatively little on students in non-western countries despite their heavy SNS usage. The present study aimed to investigate associations between SNS use, social achievement goals, and the life satisfaction of Korean college students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SNS Use and Life Satisfaction

In general, SNS use refers to the user's behavioral tendencies when using SNS. SNS use can be classified into two types: active and passive (Krasnova, Wenninger, Widjaja, & Buxmann, 2013). Active SNS use refers to information production activities, such as updating status and commenting on others' posts (Verduyn et al., 2015). On the other hand, passive SNS use refers to information consumption activities such as looking at friends' pages and pictures but rarely interacting with others (Verduyn et al., 2015). Prior studies have documented that active SNS use has no relationship or favorable relationships with life satisfaction, while passive SNS use has negative relationship with life satisfaction in young adults (Chen, Fan, Liu, Zhou, & Xie, 2016; Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Krasnova et al., 2013; Verduyn et al., 2015; Vigil & Wu, 2015). Specifically, passive SNS use leads users to negative self-evaluation because the persons engaged in passive SNS use may receive little attention and feedback from others, which may undermine their positive perception of themselves (Chen et al., 2016). Also, when SNS users have an upper-comparison tendency that compares themselves with others who are better off, they are likely to have adverse psychological outcomes such as materialism or depression (Jeong & Hyun, 2015; Liu et al., 2017).

Besides the role of social orientations between SNS use and life satisfaction, some studies have pointed out gender differences in relationships between SNS use and life satisfaction. For example, female students' feelings of depression were positively associated with their passive SNS use, while male students' feelings of depression were positively associated with their active SNS use (Frison & Eggermont, 2016). The gender difference in the relationships between SNS use and life satisfaction was also found in Keresteš and Stulhofer's study (2020). The study reported that female students' SNS use reduced their life satisfaction regardless of parental engagement status. In contrast, male students' SNS use increased their life satisfaction when parental engagement was low. These studies indicated the need to consider gender in SNS use and life satisfaction studies.

Social Achievement Goals

In this study, the social achievement goal framework (Ryan & Shim, 2006) was applied to investigate social orientation. Social achievement goals refer to an orientation toward social competence, such as social skillfulness and social abilities. Three types of social achievement goals have been proffered in the literature: social development goals, social demonstration-approach goals, and social demonstration-avoidance goals. As described by Ryan and Shim (2006), a person who pursues social development goals focuses on one's growth and improvement as a route to social competence. Thus, a person with social development goal strives to deepen one's social relationships or develop one's social life more generally. On the other hand,

a person with social demonstration-approach goals or social demonstration-avoidance goals focuses on how others perceive one's social competence. Specifically, a person pursuing social demonstration-approach goals focuses on being judged positively by others and being perceived as socially desirable. Thus, the person with social demonstration-approach goals strives to garner positive feedback from others, social prestige, good reputation, or popularity. At the same time, a person with social demonstration-avoidance goals focuses on avoiding negative judgment from others or revealing one's social undesirability to others. Thus, the person with a social demonstration-avoidance goal strives to avoid negative judgments from others as socially awkward or lacking a reputation, including being seen as a "loser" or "geek".

An empirical study examining the relationships between SNS use and social achievement goals (Brinkman, Gabriel, & Paravati, 2020) found that active SNS use was positively associated with social development goals and demonstration-approach goals. Also, the study indicated that SNS users receive different psychological impacts from SNS use depending on the social achievement goal types, in that SNS users with social demonstration-approach goals were more likely to feel 'close to others' during using SNS while those with social development goals and social demonstration-avoidance goals were not. The relationships between social achievement goals and life satisfaction were examined by Shim and colleagues (2017). The scholars documented that life satisfaction was positively associated with social development goals but negatively associated with social demonstration-avoidance goals. However, the role of social orientation in the relationships between SNS use and life satisfaction is unclear and needs further studies.

Current Study

The present study attempts to start bridging the gap in the associations among SNS use, social achievement goals, and life satisfaction of young adults. Specifically, this study examines possible pathways to explain how SNS use affects individuals' life satisfaction through social achievement goals. Concerning the primary model, including the whole sample, we hypothesized that social development goals and demonstration-approach goals would mediate the relationships between active SNS use and life satisfaction. In contrast, social demonstration-avoidance goals would mediate the relationships between passive SNS use and life satisfaction. We also examined two gender-specified path models (male and female) to explore possible gender differences in the relationships between SNS use, social achievement goals, and life satisfaction.

METHOD

Participants

438 college students in a metropolitan city in South Korea (201 males, 237 females, $M_{\text{age of all participants}} = 22.3$, $M_{\text{age of males}} = 22.9$, $M_{\text{age of females}} = 21.8$) participated in the study. Participants were invited to respond to the set of online questionnaires, including the items to measure SNS use, social achievement goals, and life satisfaction. The respondents were asked to rate each statement's truth on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely not true to 5 = completely true). Participation was voluntary. A reimbursement value of 2 USD was given to the participants who completed the responses.

Measure

All the questionnaires used in the present study were first translated into Korean by the first author and back-translated into English by a bilingual Korean/English faculty at the Nanyang Technological University.

SNS Use

Active SNS use was measured using three items adapted from those used in Frison and Eggermont's (2016) study. The three items used in the present study are "I often update the status on my own SNS timeline," "I often post a photo or a video on my own SNS timeline," and "I often comment on others' and my posts." Passive SNS use was measured using five items adapted by Chen et al. (2016). The sample items used in the present study for passive SNS use are "I often browse social networking sites but don't post

status updates,” “I rarely interact with others on social networking sites,” and “I am relatively passive on social networking sites.”

Social Achievement Goals

Social achievement goals were measured using the Social Achievement Goal Questionnaire (SAGQ) (Ryan & Shim, 2006). The SAGQ consists of 12 items that measure social development goals (4 items), social demonstration-approach goals (4 items), and social demonstration-avoidance goals (4 items). Sample items from the SAGQ subscales include: “In general, I strive to develop my interpersonal skills,”; and “It is important to me to work on improving the quality of my relationships with my friends” (social development goals); “I want to be friends with ‘popular’ people,” and “It is important to me to be seen as having a lot of friends” (social demonstration-approach goals); “I would be successful if I could avoid being socially awkward,” and “I try not to goof up when I am out with people” (social demonstration-avoidance goals).

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS includes five items: “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal,” “The conditions of my life are excellent,” “I am satisfied with my life,” “So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life,” and “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.”

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Descriptive statistics and correlations of active SNS use, passive SNS use, social achievement goals (social development, social demonstration approach, and social demonstration-avoidance goals), and life satisfaction are displayed in Table 1. All the subscales showed normal distribution as the skewness values were less than 2 and the kurtosis values were less than 7 (Curran, West, & J. Finch, 1996). All the subscales’ Cronbach’s alpha coefficients in this study showed acceptable to high levels of reliability ranging from $\alpha = .76$ for social demonstration-avoidance goals to $\alpha = .85$ for passive SNS use. The CFA results were estimated in an acceptable fit to the data. CFI = 1.00, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .03, SRMR = .01 for passive SNS use, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, SRMR = .00 for active SNS use, CFI = .98, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .05 for three-factor model of social achievement goals, and CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00, SRMR = .00 for life satisfaction.

Testing Hypothesized Model

Path analysis in the present investigation included life satisfaction (outcome variable), social achievement goals predicting life satisfaction (all mediator variables), and SNS use predicting social achievement goals and life satisfaction (all independent variables). This multivariate model was estimated, yielding a perfect model fit to the data because it is a saturated ‘fully forward’ model (CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00). All significant substantive parameter estimates at $p < .05$, $p < .01$, and $p < .001$ are presented in Figure 1 (main model), Figure 2 (male model), and Figure 3 (female model). To test the indirect effects of SNS use through each social achievement goal on life satisfaction, we performed bootstrapping (1,000 draws, maximum likelihood bootstrap, 95% CI) for each model.

Main Path Model

In the primary path model, active SNS use significantly and positively predicted social development goals ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), social demonstration-approach goals ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$), and social demonstration-avoidance ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$). However, passive SNS use predicted no social achievement goals nor life satisfaction. Social development goal positively and significantly predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$), while social demonstration-avoidance goal negatively predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .05$).

There was a significant indirect effect from active SNS use on life satisfaction through social development goal, CI: [.06, .16, SE = .03, $p < .001$] with no direct effect from active SNS use and life satisfaction.

Testing Gender-Specified Path Models

Multigroup analysis was followed with gender as the grouping variable. The model for two gender groups (male = 1 and female = 2) showed a good fit of the data and yielded a chi-square value of 336.71 with 28 degrees of freedom, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00. Descriptive statistics and correlations of active SNS use, passive SNS use, social achievement goals (social development, social demonstration approach, and social demonstration-avoidance goals), and life satisfaction by gender are displayed in Table 2.

The path model for male participants showed that male students' active SNS use positively predicted social development goal ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) and social demonstration-approach goal ($\beta = .40, p < .001$). In contrast, their passive SNS use did not predict social achievement goals nor life satisfaction. Social development goals and life satisfaction were positively associated ($\beta = .24, p < .01$). The bootstrapping method was again used to test the indirect effect of SNS use and life satisfaction for male students (1,000 draws, maximum likelihood bootstrap, 95% CI). There was an indirect path from active SNS use to male students' life satisfaction through social development goal, CI [.03, .17], SE = .04, $p < .01$.

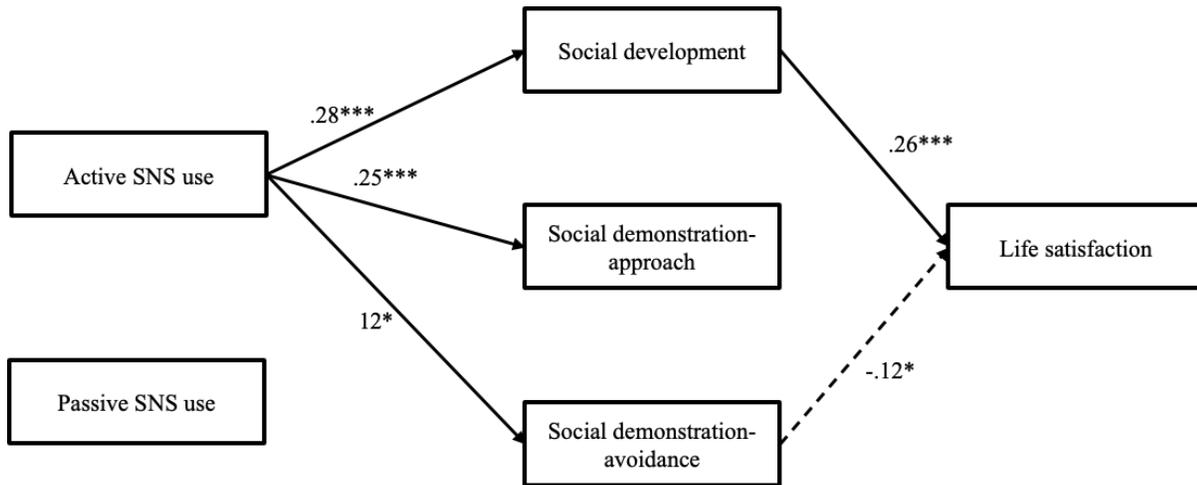
The model for female students showed that female students' active SNS use positively predicted social development goals ($\beta = .35, p < .001$) and social demonstration-avoidance goals ($\beta = .19, p < .05$). In contrast, their passive SNS use did not predict social achievement goals or life satisfaction. Social development goals positively predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = .24, p < .01$), while social demonstration-avoidance goals negatively predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = -.21, p < .01$). There was an indirect path from active SNS use to female students' life satisfaction through social development goal, CI [.02, .14], SE = .03, $p < .01$.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, CRONBACH'S ALPHA, AND CORRELATIONS OF SNS USE, SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION OF THE WHOLE SAMPLE

	AT	PS	SDE	SDAP	SDAV	LS
Range	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5	1-5
Mean	2.72	3.17	3.54	2.78	3.09	3.07
SD	1.03	0.62	0.73	0.82	0.77	0.75
Skewness	0.10	-0.12	-0.51	0.14	-0.29	-0.22
Kurtosis	-0.65	-0.38	0.72	0.01	-0.01	0.05
Cronbach's Alpha	.81	.85	.81	.83	.76	.84
CFA range (mean)	.78-.87 (.82)	.59-.85 (.73)	.48-.76 (.68)	.61-.85 (.72)	46-.84 (.68)	.61-.88 (.73)
AT	1					
PS	-.57***	1				
SDE	.40***	-.27***	1			
SDAP	.28***	-.16***	.40***	1		
SDAV	.07	.04	.15**	.36***	1	
LS	.12*	-.07	.29***	.18***	-.03	1

Note. AT = Active SNS use, PS = Passive SNS use, SDE = social development goal, SDAP = social demonstration-approach goal, SDAV = social demonstration-avoidance goal, and LS = life satisfaction. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

FIGURE 1
MAIN MODEL OF SNS USE, SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION



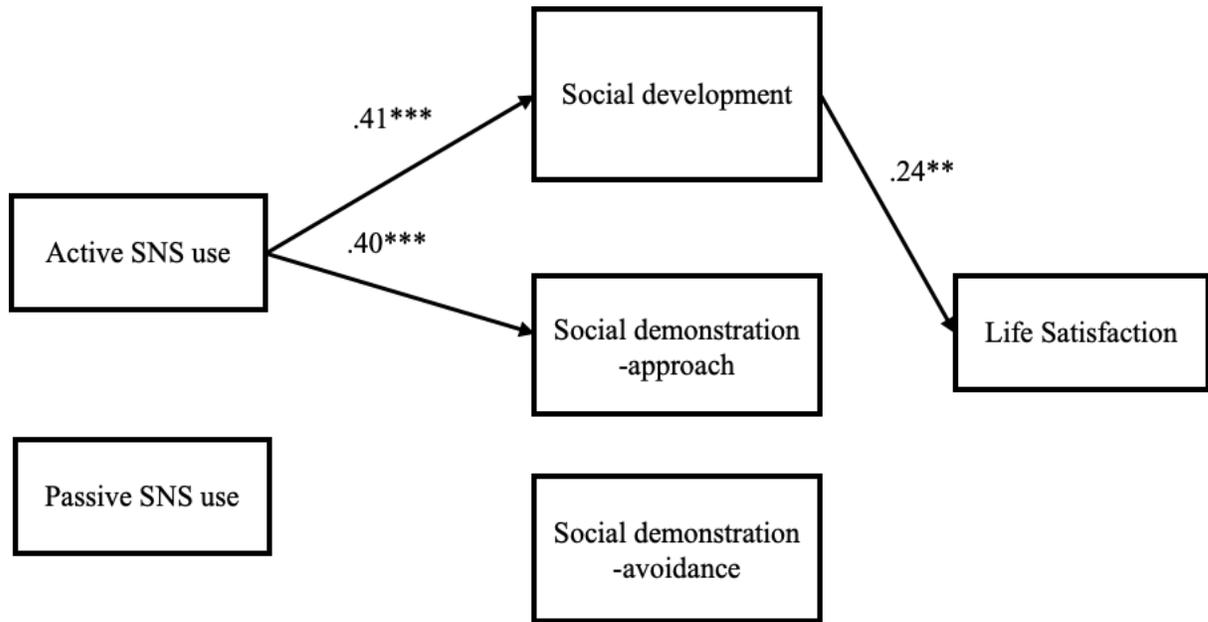
Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS OF SNS USE, SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION OF MALES/FEMALES

	AT	PS	SDE	SDAP	SDAV	LS
Mean	2.45/2.94	3.26/3.09	3.55/3.53	2.87/2.70	3.20/2.99	3.15/2.99
SD	1.00/1.04	0.61/0.60	0.73/0.72	0.83/0.80	0.76/0.77	0.72/0.76
AT	1					
PS	-.41***/-.67***	1				
SDE	.43***/.41***	-.22**/-.32***	1			
SDAP	.37***/.26***	-.10/-.25***	.36***/.43***	1		
SDAV	.08/.07	.08/-.03	.10/.19**	.38***/.33***	1	
LS	.16*/.15*	.01/-.15*	.28***/.29***	.20**/.15*	.07/-.13*	1

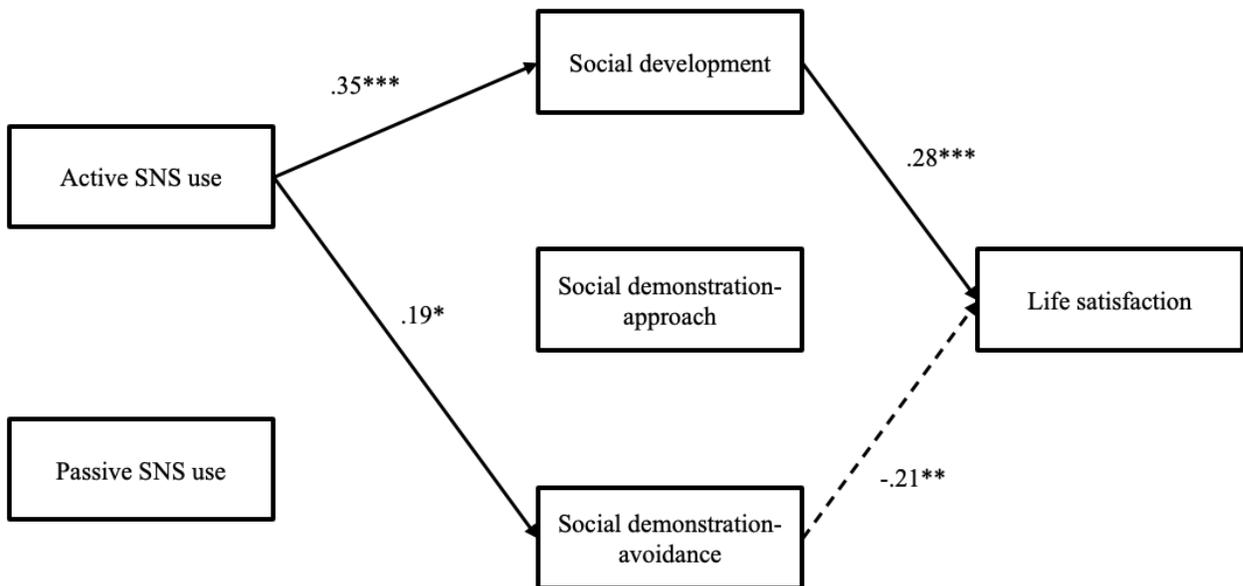
Note. The values are separated by gender (male/female). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

FIGURE 2
MALE MODEL OF SNS USE, SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION



Note. $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

FIGURE 3
FEMALE MODEL OF SNS USE, SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENT GOALS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION



Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the relationships between SNS use, social achievement goals, and life satisfaction in Korean college students. Specifically, the results of this study discovered the role of social achievement goals in the relationships between SNS use and life satisfaction. The findings suggest that SNS use can have a positive impact on life satisfaction when it promotes social development goals regardless of gender, but SNS use can have a negative or no effect on life satisfaction through social demonstration goals depending on gender. These results have implications for using SNS in educational settings, where educators can encourage students to use SNS to enhance their social skills and build meaningful relationships with others so that students can have more positive impacts from using SNS. Furthermore, this study suggests considering gender differences when exploring the impact of SNS use on social achievement goals and life satisfaction.

Social Development Goals in the Relationships between SNS Use and Life Satisfaction

Our study found that Korean college students' active SNS use can increase life satisfaction by endorsing social development goals. This positive impact was observed in all models, indicating that both male and female students who frequently post (or comment) on SNS may experience more life satisfaction when focusing on improving their social skills and building meaningful relationships. These findings are consistent with previous research that has found positive correlations between active SNS use and social development goals among college students in the United States (Brinkman et al., 2020). Also, our finding is aligned with the existing notion that endorsing social development goals is positively associated with life satisfaction among undergraduate students in China (Shim et al., 2017).

Considering that the social development goal is to qualitatively develop social relationships, social development goal endorsement would have played a positive role between SNS use and life satisfaction as follows. Firstly, social development goal endorsement may help to build an authentic connection with other users. Since pursuing social development goals involves building in-depth relationships (Ryan & Shim, 2006), students with social development goals are more likely to engage in meaningful interactions that build authentic connections with others on SNS. Also, openly expressing true feelings and thoughts on SNS to build genuine relationships with others may mitigate their distress (DeAndrea et al., 2012). Secondly, the postings and comments with the aim of building in-depth relationships may get positive feedback from others who appreciate their efforts to connect and engage authentically, resulting in life satisfaction. Because self-disclosure revealing true personal information, thoughts, and feelings on SNS, can elicit social support (Wohn et al., 2013). Finally, social development goals on SNS that focus on enhancing one's social competence rather than seeking external validation from others can lead to a sense of internal control. This sense of control can increase satisfaction (Ponto, 1999) as individuals feel more in charge of evaluating the quality of their relationships on SNS based on personal growth rather than popularity.

Social Demonstration Goals and Gender Differences

Social demonstration-approach goals and social demonstration-avoidance goals have different relationships with SNS use and life satisfaction depending on gender in the present study. This is not surprising as gender difference in popularity-related goals has been found in multiple studies (Kiefer et al., 2013; Swirsky et al., 2022).

For the male model, active SNS use seems to lead male college students to pursue more popularity (i.e., social demonstration-approach goals). In contrast, passive SNS use did not affect male college students' social achievement goals. This finding supports the notion that males' active SNS use is positively associated with popularity pursuit (Swirski, Rosie, & Xie, 2022) and that active SNS use has positive relationships with social demonstration-approach goals in general (Brinkman et al., 2020). One possible explanation for this positive relationship between active SNS use and social demonstration-approach goals regarding male college students is that male students' active SNS use may be driven by a need to stay connected with others called FoMO. FoMO is characterized by a desire to stay connected with what others are doing and is found to be linked to greater use of social media platforms in general (Scott & Woods, 2018)

or Facebook specifically (Dempsey et al., 2019; Przybylski et al., 2013). As multiple studies have reported that males tend to have higher FoMO compared to females (Al-Busaidi et al., 2022; Przybylski et al., 2013), the purpose of posting and commenting on social media of male students can be related to ensuring that they are connected with others pursuing social demonstration-approach goals. However, more research is needed on the factors affecting male students' SNS use and the differences in pursuing social achievement goals.

On the other hand, female students' active SNS use made them concerned about showing unpopularity (social demonstration-avoidance goal) and that social demonstration-avoidance goal endorsement decreased their life satisfaction. This result counters our expectation based on the prior findings that active SNS use is a positive predictor of popularity pursuit with or without considering gender (Brinkman et al., 2020; Swirski, Rosie, & Xie, 2022). The unexpected finding of the present study of the positive relationship between active SNS use and social demonstration-avoidance goal can be explained by female users' expectations of social media posts. Because women's language on social media is warmer and more benevolent than men's (Kim & Choi, 2011; Tifferet, 2020), female students can expect as supportive feedback on their posts as they do on others. Therefore, a lack of comments or 'likes' could be interpreted as not getting the support most people deserve from a female user's point of view. It can indicate unpopularity that female students worry about after posting on social media. Girls want immediate feedback on their social media posts, and the immediacy of feedback affects their emotional state (Jong & Drummond, 2016). Also, posting on social media can make female students anxious, as female SNS users are more aware of security threats than male users (Tifferet, 2019) and are often judged by explicit images seen on social media (Davidson & Rivka, 2016).

Nevertheless, the results of this study are inconsistent with Swirski and colleagues' (2022) existing notion that women's online self-expression (i.e., active SNS use) and online lurking and monitoring (i.e., passive SNS) are positively related to their pursuit of popularity (i.e., social demonstration-approach goals). The discrepancy seems to be caused by applying a more detailed social goal framework that distinguishes popularity-related goals into thriving for gaining popularity (i.e., social demonstration-approach goals) and avoiding showing unpopularity (i.e., social demonstration-avoidance goals). The results of the present study imply that the effect of SNS use on life satisfaction differs according to gender through different social demonstration goals. Thus, it is suggested that gender and social orientations should be differentiated in detail when conducting research related to students' SNS use.

Limitations and Future Studies

Although our study provides some insight into the relationships among SNS use, social achievement goals, and life satisfaction of young adults, some limitations of this study should be pointed out. First, the current study focused on students' life satisfaction in general. Since the impacts of SNS use can be more outcome-specific, future studies are recommended to observe further defined psychological outcomes, including various emotions (e.g., inferiority or envy) or cognitive self-evaluations (e.g., self-image or self-efficacy). Second, we did not distinguish the types of SNS platforms in the study. However, there is a possibility that different types of SNS (e.g., video-based, image-based, text-based, or hybrid SNS) can make different impacts on users' social achievement goals or life satisfaction. Third, we measured social achievement goals based on respondents' in-person relationships due to the lack of available measurements for online social achievement goals. As some studies indicated that an SNS user's social relationships could be different from their in-person relationships, future studies on social goals in an online context are recommended to consider using a social goal measurement specified for online relationships.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the relationships among SNS use, social achievement goals, and life satisfaction in Korean college students. The results suggest that SNS use can positively impact life satisfaction when it promotes social development goals. This finding has important implications for educators who encourage students to use SNS to enhance their social skills and build meaningful

relationships with others. Additionally, the study suggests considering gender differences when exploring the impact of SNS use and life satisfaction, as males and females may have different impacts from SNS use through different social demonstration goals.

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