

The Influence of Video-Based Social Media on Self-Directed Learning: A Self-Discrepancy Theory Perspective

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Research Overview

Social media has transitioned learning from physical classrooms to digital spaces. As influencers increasingly distribute educational content on video-based platforms, this study investigates how these videos affect viewers' self-directed learning (SDL) behaviors.

Purpose of Study

Grounded in self-discrepancy theory (SDT), this study investigates how the discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self (actual–ideal discrepancy, AID), evoked after viewing educational videos, influences individuals' SDL. Furthermore, this study explores the mediating role of inspiration (emotional responses) and the moderating effects of self-esteem. Differences between two educational videos (Study With Me, SWM video vs. The Ultimate Study Routine, USR video) are also examined.

Research Methods

This study proposed a research model with five hypotheses (see Figure 1), and developed two educational videos for our stimulus-based survey approach. Participants randomly chose one video, and completed a questionnaire after viewing it. A total of 439 valid responses were collected from an online survey, and the samples were balanced for SWM video (N1=220, high AID) and USR video (N2=219, low AID). Our data satisfied manipulation check and common method variances,

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and was validated with Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). A Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) was conducted to examine the differences across the two video types, and a moderated-mediation model was adopted for robustness check.

Results and Discussion

The PLS-SEM results indicated that AID positively influences SDL through the mediating effects of inspiration. When viewers perceive a concrete representation of their ideal self from the educational videos and recognize the discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self, they are inspired and in turn enhance learning motivation and regulate their learning behaviors autonomously. Inspiration was found to have a significant positive effect on SDL, highlighting the critical role of emotions in digital learning contexts. In addition, self-esteem has a direct positive effect on SDL; however, it does not significantly moderate the relationships between inspiration and SDL. These results were sustained for both SWM video and USR video.

The MGA analyses present consistent results. The measurement Invariance Assessment (MICOM) ensured MGA is suitable for this study, and MGA results revealed there is no significant differences between SWM video and USR video. It indicates once viewers perceive discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self, they will be inspired and engage in SDL, even the discrepancy is low.

Additionally, this study performed a moderated mediation analyses with Hayes' PROCESS to check whether the PLS-SEM results derived from nonparametric estimation are consistent with parametric OLS estimation. Our results show that a significant and positive relationship was found between AID and inspiration, between inspiration and SDL, and between self-esteem and SDL. The moderating effects of self-esteem were still not established. All the results of moderated mediation analyses were in line with PLS-SEM results.

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study extends prior research in several important ways. First, this study challenges the conventional view that social media primarily distracts users and undermines learning effectiveness, and demonstrates that even within fragmented and entertainment-driven contexts, users can experience meaningful psychological processes that foster self-directed learning. Social media as an important space for informal learning. Second, previous research has largely emphasized the negative emotional outcomes of actual-ideal discrepancies, this study presents that such discrepancies can generate constructive psychological

effects by eliciting inspiration, which in turn promotes learning motivation and self-regulatory behaviors. Third, this study clarifies the distinction between self-discrepancy theory and social comparison theory in the context of learning-oriented social media. Rather than merely engaging in comparisons with others, users internalize educreators as representations of their ideal selves and evaluate their actual selves against these internal models. This internalization process better reflects self-regulatory mechanisms proposed by self-discrepancy theory. Finally, the study highlights the generalizability of the model by demonstrating the robustness of the proposed model across SWM and USR videos. It suggests that the psychological mechanism—from discrepancy to inspiration to SDL—is stable across content formats.

Our findings offer important implications for different stakeholders. For educators, educational video can serve as an inspiring and relatable supplementary tool to support students' SDL beyond formal classroom settings. For educreators, integrating knowledge delivery with personal experiences and concrete learning demonstrations can enhance learning motivation and SDL. For learners, social media can be transformed from a purely entertainment medium into a meaningful space that supports self-reflection and autonomous learning.

Keywords: *educational videos, educreator, actual–ideal discrepancy, inspiration, self-esteem, moderated mediation analyses.*

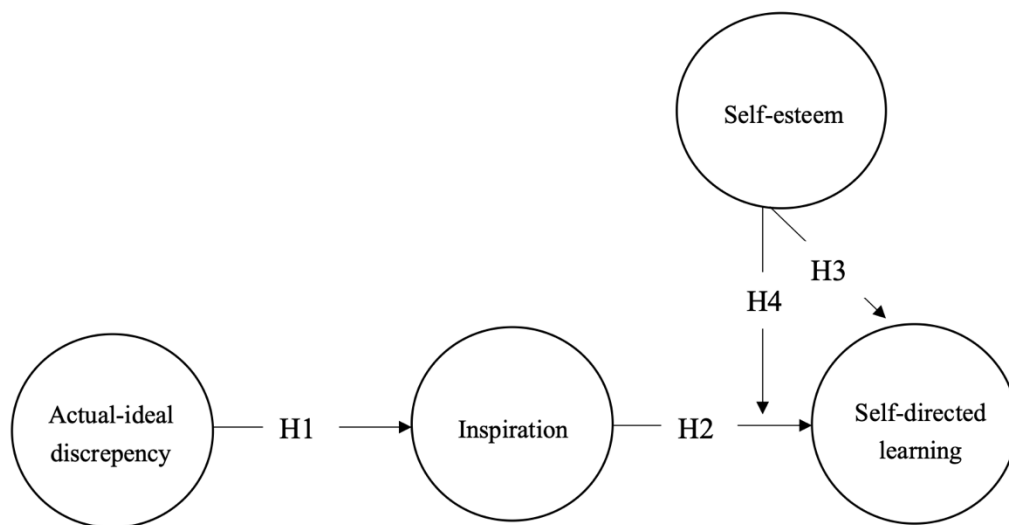


Figure 1. Research model of this study.