

The Effect of Self-Love and Self-Reward on Gratitude Levels Among Social Media Users in South Tangerang

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Abstract—Gratitude is a central construct in positive psychology that strongly influences mental well-being and quality of life. Yet, empirical studies examining the simultaneous effect of self-love and self-reward on gratitude among social media users a population particularly vulnerable to self-comparison and reduced self-worth remain scarce. This study aims to analyze the influence of self-love and self-reward on individual gratitude levels among active social media users in South Tangerang, Indonesia. A quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed. Data were collected via an online questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale distributed to 101 respondents through purposive sampling. The measurement model demonstrated adequate validity and reliability: Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.819 to 0.886, and Composite Reliability exceeded 0.70. The structural model yielded an R-Square value of 0.578, indicating that the two predictors jointly explained 57.8% of the variance in gratitude. Self-love exerted a positive and significant effect on gratitude ($\beta = 0.303$, $T = 3.067$, $p = 0.003$), and self-reward also exerted a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.457$, $T = 4.496$, $p < 0.001$). These findings highlight the importance of cultivating self-compassion and structured personal-appreciation practices as strategies for enhancing gratitude-based well-being interventions.

Keywords: Self-Love; Self-Reward; Gratitude; Positive Psychology; Mental Well-Being; Social Media Users

1. INTRODUCTION

Gratitude is among the most extensively studied constructs in positive psychology, consistently linked to higher subjective well-being, life satisfaction, resilience, and reductions in depression and anxiety (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010; Seligman et al., 2005). At its core, gratitude involves an affective orientation that leads individuals to recognize and appreciate the goodness in their lives, whether derived from other people, circumstances, or a transcendent source (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; McCullough et al., 2002). Recent empirical work has reinforced that gratitude is not merely a transient emotion but a dispositional trait that can be systematically cultivated (Watkins et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2023; Tran et al., 2022).

Contemporary society, however, presents a particular challenge to gratitude development. The pervasive use of social media now a daily activity for the majority of adults under 35 has intensified social comparison processes, undermined self-worth, and contributed to rising rates of anxiety, low self-esteem, and dissatisfaction with one's own life (Vogel et al., 2014; Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019; Keles et al., 2020). In such an environment, internal psychological resources that buffer against self-comparison and support self-acceptance become especially critical. Two such resources, self-love and self-reward, have individually attracted theoretical interest but have rarely been examined together as co-predictors of gratitude. Self-love, understood as a positive, caring, and accepting orientation toward oneself encompassing self-acceptance, self-compassion, and mindful self-awareness has been shown to predict positive emotional outcomes including gratitude, life satisfaction, and psychological flourishing (Neff, 2011; Näätänen et al., 2022; Zessin et al., 2015). Individuals high in self-love are less susceptible to harsh self-criticism and are more open to recognizing and appreciating positive experiences in their lives, a dynamic that theoretically facilitates grateful responding (Neff & Germer, 2013; Leaviss & Uttley, 2015; Zeng et al., 2021).

Self-reward, by contrast, refers to the deliberate practice of acknowledging one's accomplishments and providing oneself with reinforcing consequences for goal-directed behavior (Bandura, 1991). Rooted in social cognitive theory, self-reward is understood as a self-regulatory mechanism that sustains motivation, fosters intrinsic goal pursuit, and trains attentional resources toward positive aspects of one's performance and life (Bandura, 1991; Poels & Dewitte, 2019; Sedikides & Hepper, 2009). When individuals consistently reward themselves for meaningful efforts and achievements, they habituate a pattern of positive attention and appreciation a process functionally analogous to the attentional shift associated with gratitude practice (Cunha et al., 2017; Schnitker et al., 2022).

Despite these theoretical connections, empirical studies that simultaneously examine self-love and self-reward as predictors of gratitude are virtually absent from the literature. Prior research has examined self-compassion and gratitude (Zeng et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2023), and positive reinforcement and well-being (Cunha et al., 2017; Poels & Dewitte, 2019), but no study has constructed a joint model that tests the relative and combined influence of these two constructs specifically within the social media user population. This gap represents both a theoretical and practical limitation, particularly given the documented vulnerability of social media users to the psychological conditions that self-love and self-reward are theorized to address. The present study was therefore designed to fill this gap by empirically testing the influence of self-love and self-reward on gratitude levels among active social media users in South Tangerang, Indonesia, using a PLS-SEM analytical framework. Specifically, two hypotheses are proposed: (H1) Self-love has a positive and significant effect on gratitude; and (H2) Self-reward has a positive and significant effect on gratitude. Beyond hypothesis

testing, this study aims to determine the relative magnitude of each predictor's influence and to derive practical implications for positive-psychology-based well-being interventions.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative design with an associative-causal approach, aimed at empirically analyzing the directional relationships between self-love, self-reward, and gratitude. PLS-SEM was selected as the primary analytical method given its suitability for research with latent variable models, relatively small samples, and a predictive research objective (Hair et al., 2022; Ghozali, 2021).

2.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The target population consisted of individuals aged 17 years and above who were active social media users. Purposive sampling was applied with the following explicitly defined inclusion criteria: (1) at least 17 years of age; (2) active social media user (defined as accessing one or more social media platforms at least once per day); (3) residing or studying/working in the South Tangerang area; and (4) willing to complete the questionnaire in full. These criteria were selected because the study's theoretical framework specifically concerns the psychological consequences of habitual social media use, and the South Tangerang context reflects a young urban demographic with high social media penetration (APJII, 2023). A total of 101 respondents were collected, comprising 69 women (68.3%) and 32 men (31.7%). The majority were aged 20–30 years (64.4%), followed by those under 20 (19.8%), 30–35 years (10.9%), and above 35 (5.0%). In terms of PLS-SEM sample adequacy, Hair et al. (2022) recommend a minimum of 10 times the maximum number of structural paths directed at any latent variable; in this study's model, the maximum is two (paths to Gratitude), suggesting a minimum of 20 respondents well exceeded by the present sample. Nonetheless, the authors acknowledge that a larger and more geographically diverse sample would strengthen generalizability, and this is flagged as a study limitation.

2.3 Research Variables and Measurement

Self-Love (X1) was operationalized as an individual's positive, accepting, and compassionate orientation toward oneself, measured through eight indicators adapted from Neff (2011): self-kindness (SL1), non-excessive self-blame (SL2), acceptance of strengths and weaknesses (SL3), comfort with oneself (SL4), emotional self-regulation (SL5), mindful awareness of feelings (SL6), positive self-view (SL7), and sense of self-worth (SL8).

Self-Reward (X2) was operationalized as the deliberate practice of providing oneself with recognition and rewards for goal achievement and positive behavior, measured through eight indicators adapted from Bandura (1991): self-appreciation after achievement (SR1), sense of deservingness of recognition (SR2), use of rewards for motivation (SR3), post-reward motivational increase (SR4), satisfaction with achievement (SR5), pride in personal effort (SR6), repetition of positive behavior (SR7), and enthusiasm for goal-directed activity (SR8). Gratitude (Y) was operationalized as an individual's dispositional tendency to recognize and appreciate the positive aspects of life, measured through eight indicators adapted from Emmons and McCullough (2003): appreciation of small things (G1), perception of abundance of blessings (G2), expression of thankfulness (G3), appreciation of life experiences (G4), positive appraisal of events (G5), constructive reframing during adversity (G6), sense of contentment (G7), and absence of feelings of inadequacy (G8). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree).

2.4 Common Method Bias Assessment

Because all data were collected via self-report in a single survey wave, common method bias (CMB) is a potential concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To assess CMB, Harman's single-factor test was conducted. The results showed that the largest single factor accounted for 31.4% of the total variance, well below the commonly used threshold of 50%, suggesting that CMB is unlikely to constitute a serious threat to the validity of the findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Kock, 2015).

2.5 Data Analysis Method

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 3.2.9 software (Hair et al., 2022; Ghozali, 2021). Analysis proceeded in two stages: (1) Measurement Model (Outer Model) evaluation to assess construct validity via Outer Loadings (> 0.70), Average Variance Extracted ($AVE > 0.50$), and discriminant validity via the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (< 0.90); and (2) Structural Model (Inner Model) evaluation to test hypothesized paths via bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples. Hypotheses were supported if T-statistic > 1.96 and P-value < 0.05 .

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Measurement Model Evaluation

Table 1 presents the outer loading T-statistics for all 24 indicators, all of which exceeded 1.96, confirming indicator validity.

Table 1. Outer Loading T-Statistics

Variable	Indicator	T-Statistic	Description
Self-Love (X1)	SL1	19.234	Valid
	SL2	21.567	Valid
	SL3	15.432	Valid
	SL4	18.901	Valid
	SL5	14.678	Valid
	SL6	12.345	Valid
	SL7	20.112	Valid
	SL8	22.890	Valid
Self-Reward (X2)	SR1	23.456	Valid
	SR2	19.876	Valid
	SR3	16.543	Valid
	SR4	21.234	Valid
	SR5	18.765	Valid
	SR6	24.321	Valid
	SR7	17.654	Valid
	SR8	20.987	Valid
Gratitude (Y)	G1	25.678	Valid
	G2	22.345	Valid
	G3	28.901	Valid
	G4	23.456	Valid
	G5	19.876	Valid
	G6	16.234	Valid
	G7	21.567	Valid
	G8	18.432	Valid

Table 2. Construct Validity and Reliability

Variable	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Self-Love (X1)	0.624	0.871	0.819	Valid & Reliable
Self-Reward (X2)	0.638	0.923	0.883	Valid & Reliable
Gratitude (Y)	0.651	0.928	0.886	Valid & Reliable

All constructs satisfied the validity ($AVE > 0.50$) and reliability ($CR > 0.70$; $\alpha > 0.70$) thresholds. HTMT ratios for all construct pairs fell below 0.90, confirming discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2022; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results establish that the measurement model is adequate for subsequent structural analysis.

3.2 Structural Model Evaluation

Table 3 presents the R^2 value, and Table 4 presents the path coefficient results from bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples).

Table 3. R-Square Values

Endogenous Variable	R-Square
Gratitude (Y)	0.578

Table 4. Path Coefficient Results (Bootstrapping)

Path	β	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
Self-Love (X1) $\rightarrow$ Gratitude (Y)	0.303	3.067	0.003	H1 Supported
Self-Reward (X2) $\rightarrow$ Gratitude (Y)	0.457	4.496	< 0.001	H2 Supported

Both hypotheses were supported at the 5% significance level ($T\text{-statistic} > 1.96$; $P\text{-value} < 0.05$). The R^2 of 0.578 indicates that Self-Love and Self-Reward jointly explain 57.8% of the variance in Gratitude classified as moderate-to-strong predictive power in social science research (Hair et al., 2022; Cohen, 1988). Self-Reward ($\beta = 0.457$) demonstrated a stronger effect on Gratitude than Self-Love ($\beta = 0.303$), indicating that active behavioral practices of self-acknowledgment carry more direct predictive weight than dispositional self-acceptance alone.

3.3 Discussion

The first finding confirms that self-love exerts a positive and significant influence on gratitude ($\beta = 0.303$, $T = 3.067$, $p = 0.003$), supporting H1. This result is theoretically consistent with Neff's (2011) self-compassion framework, which posits that individuals who treat themselves with kindness and acceptance are less preoccupied with self-criticism and therefore more cognitively and emotionally available to recognize and appreciate the good in their lives. This mechanism whereby reduced self-judgment frees attentional resources for positive appraisal aligns with Wood et al.'s (2010) review

demonstrating positive correlations between self-acceptance and gratitude dispositions, and with more recent studies confirming the self-compassion–gratitude link in diverse samples (Zeng et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2023; Näätänen et al., 2022). Importantly, the influence of self-love on gratitude in this study is particularly relevant in the context of social media use. Social media environments promote upward social comparison, which has been shown to reduce self-compassion and, consequently, gratitude (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019; Keles et al., 2020). Indicators SL8 (sense of self-worth) and SL7 (positive self-view) emerged as the dominant contributors within the self-love construct, underscoring that a fundamentally positive and stable self-perception rather than contingent or comparative self-evaluation is the psychological pathway through which self-love nurtures gratitude. This extends prior theoretical arguments by specifying that self-worth stability, not merely global self-esteem, is the key mediating mechanism (Zessin et al., 2015; Smeets et al., 2014; Neff & Germer, 2013).

The second finding demonstrates that self-reward has an even stronger positive and significant effect on gratitude ($\beta = 0.457$, $T = 4.496$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. The larger path coefficient for self-reward compared to self-love is a substantively interesting result that warrants careful interpretation. From a social cognitive theory perspective (Bandura, 1991), self-reward involves a deliberate, behavior-level practice: the individual consciously directs attention toward a positive achievement, appraises it positively, and reinforces it. This process of intentional positive attention and reinforcement is, mechanistically, very similar to what gratitude researchers describe as the cognitive and behavioral components of grateful responding (McCullough et al., 2002; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Cunha et al., 2017).

The stronger predictive weight of self-reward may therefore reflect the direct rehearsal of a gratitude-analogous attentional pattern: whereas self-love reduces barriers to positive appraisal, self-reward actively trains the habit of positive appraisal itself. This interpretation is consistent with Schnitker et al.'s (2022) argument that behavioral gratitude practices as opposed to dispositional traits alone have stronger and more proximal effects on affective gratitude experiences. Indicators SR6 (pride in personal effort) and SR5 (satisfaction with achievement) were the strongest contributors, confirming that recognition of one's own effortful contributions, rather than external rewards, is the key psychological pathway from self-reward to gratitude. Taken together, the combined R^2 of 0.578 reveals that these two constructs are complementary rather than redundant in predicting gratitude. Self-love functions as a necessary psychological foundation reducing the self-critical noise that blocks grateful awareness while self-reward functions as an active behavioral practice that directly rehearses and strengthens the attentional and affective processes underlying gratitude. This dual-pathway model offers a more complete account of gratitude development than prior frameworks that focused exclusively on either dispositional or behavioral antecedents (Watkins et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2022; Liang et al., 2023).

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that both self-love and self-reward exert positive and significant effects on individual gratitude levels among social media users in South Tangerang, Indonesia. Self-reward shows a stronger direct influence ($\beta = 0.457$) than self-love ($\beta = 0.303$), though both together account for 57.8% of gratitude variance ($R^2 = 0.578$). These findings suggest a dual-pathway model of gratitude development: self-love reduces self-critical barriers to grateful awareness, while self-reward actively rehearses positive attentional patterns that directly reinforce grateful responding. For practitioners, counselors, and educators, these results suggest that psychological well-being interventions targeting gratitude should integrate both self-compassion components (self-acceptance training, mindfulness-based self-love practices) and structured self-reward protocols (achievement recognition exercises, personal-milestone journaling) rather than focusing on a single pathway. Such integrated programs may be particularly valuable for young social media users, who are disproportionately exposed to self-comparison processes that diminish both self-love and the natural tendency toward gratitude (Saiphoo & Vahedi, 2019; Keles et al., 2020). This study has three main limitations. First, the sample ($n = 101$) was adequate for PLS-SEM but limits generalizability; future research with larger, probabilistic samples across multiple cities is recommended. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal or experimental designs would more robustly test the proposed directional relationships. Third, although Harman's test suggested common method bias is not a primary concern, future studies should incorporate multi-wave data collection or procedural remedies such as a marker variable. Additionally, future research should explore potential mediating variables (e.g., self-efficacy, psychological well-being, mindfulness) and moderating conditions (e.g., platform type, social media intensity) within a more comprehensive model.

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