

Stress and Negative Information Sharing in Media Environments: An Empirical Analysis of Motivational Mediation and Emotional Regulation

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Abstract. This study investigates the relationship between stress and the tendency to share negative information on social media, focusing on the mediating role of motivation. While previous research has linked stress with various social behaviors, the mechanisms behind the preference for negative information remain under-explored. Data were obtained from a total of 268 respondents in China through a systematically designed questionnaire. The analysis reveals that individuals experiencing higher stress levels are more inclined to disseminate negative information online, and that motivation serves as a crucial mediating variable in this relationship. These outcomes contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional mechanisms shaping users' online communication patterns and offer meaningful implications for interpreting social media engagement dynamics.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research background

In today's digital environment, social media serves as a central channel for the swift circulation of both uplifting and harmful messages. Although these platforms have greatly enhanced human communication and social connection, they also provide fertile ground for the dissemination of negative or damaging information. Stress—defined as a psychological reaction to external pressures—plays an essential part in guiding individual behavior, including how people engage with online information. According to the Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), stress emerges when environmental demands exceed one's coping resources, resulting in emotional and behavioral changes [1]. Recent studies suggest that stress meaningfully shapes online engagement, particularly by increasing users' inclination to share negative content. Individuals under stress often seek emotional catharsis or social affirmation, which drives them to interact more frequently with pessimistic media materials. Furthermore, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) proposes that audiences actively select media to satisfy particular psychological needs such as emotional

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reassurance, entertainment, or social affiliation [2]. Under stressful conditions, people may gravitate toward negative narratives to fulfill these needs, though the psychological mechanisms underlying this phenomenon remain insufficiently explored.

1.2 Literature review

Most existing research on the link between stress and social media behavior has concentrated on how media exposure influences mental health, while comparatively little attention has been paid to the reverse relationship—how stress shapes media use, especially the sharing of negative information. Guntuku et al. (2019) discovered that people experiencing higher stress levels are more inclined to post about exhaustion and physical discomfort, whereas those with lower stress tend to share positive experiences [3]. Likewise, Denq et al. (2018) reported that stress contributes to increased social media activity, mainly driven by the need for social support [4]. Wolfers and Utz (2022) suggested that social media can function simultaneously as a stressor, a coping resource, or a coping mechanism, depending on what users consume and the situational context [5]. Chu and Jiang (2024) extended this line of inquiry by examining how the disclosure of distress on social platforms is influenced by life events and perceived risks [6]. Arrivillaga et al. (2022) emphasized the moderating role of emotional intelligence (EI) in the relationship between stress and problematic social media use (PSMU), demonstrating that stress significantly affects adolescents' online engagement patterns [7]. Similarly, Malaeb et al. (2021) identified stress as a mediating variable between problematic social media use and mental health outcomes [8]. Kross et al. (2021) synthesized prior evidence on the complex dynamics between social media use and well-being, noting that its impact can be either beneficial or harmful depending on users' motivations and patterns of participation [9]. Finally, Bekalu et al. (2019) observed that habitual social media use is associated with positive health outcomes, whereas emotional dependence on these platforms corresponds with adverse psychological effects—underscoring the critical role of emotional engagement in determining social media's overall impact on well-being [10].

1.3 Innovation

Although prior studies have largely examined how media exposure impacts individuals' mental health, the present research redirects attention toward how psychological stress shapes media-related behaviors—particularly the tendency to share negative information. By examining motivation factors such as emotional catharsis and the pursuit of social affirmation as mediating variables, this study provides a fresh perspective on the psychological mechanisms underlying user engagement on social media.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research approach and Model

This study adopts a quantitative research approach, employing structured questionnaires as the primary method for data collection. The research aims to explore the relationship between stress (as the independent variable), motivation (as the mediating variable), and negative information sharing tendency (as the dependent variable).

The theoretical foundation of this research is grounded in Stress and Coping Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory. The study hypothesizes that individuals experiencing higher levels of stress are more likely to share negative information due to motivations such as emotional release and validation seeking.

This study suggests that stress influences motivation, which in turn affects the tendency to share negative information. The study tests the following hypotheses:

H1: Stress is positively correlated with negative information sharing tendency.

H2: There are significant differences in negative information sharing tendency across different topics.

H3: Motivation mediates the relationship between stress and negative information sharing tendency.

2.2 Data sources and sample description

Data for this study were collected through the Credamo platform in Mainland China. A total of 280 responses were received, and after excluding 12 invalid responses, the final sample consisted of 268 valid responses.

2.3 Questionnaire design and variable measurement

The questionnaire used in this study consists of five distinct sections, each designed to measure specific constructs relevant to the research objectives:

2.3.1 Section A: demographic information

This section gathers basic demographic data from the participants, including gender, age, education level, occupation, residence, and social media usage time. These variables are considered control variables for the subsequent analyses, allowing for segmentation of the sample based on key demographic factors.

2.3.2 Section B: stress scale

A simplified version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4), a validated four-item measure, was employed to evaluate participants' subjective levels of stress. Each statement was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"), where higher scores reflected greater perceived stress. The PSS-4 has been extensively used across diverse populations and is widely acknowledged for its strong reliability and construct validity in assessing perceived stress.

2.3.3 Section C: information sharing task (core dependent variable)

In this section, participants were given six thematic categories: Fandom, Fertility and Population, Workplace and Employment, Brand and Consumption, Artificial Intelligence, and Emotional Expression. For each theme, respondents selected one of two statements—one reflecting a positive tone and the other a negative one—based on which they would be more inclined to share on social media. In this section, "A" represents positive content while "B" represents the opposite. All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= "Strongly favor A", 2= "Somewhat favor A", 3= "Neutral", 4= "Somewhat favor B", 5= "Strongly favor B"). The mean of score derived from these responses represents each participant's overall tendency to disseminate negative information online.

2.3.4 Section D: motivation scale

This section assesses participants' motivations for sharing content on social media. It includes two items: D1, which measures validation-seeking motivation, and D2, which measures emotional release motivation. Both items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree", 7 = "Strongly Agree").

2.4 Data processing method

Data collected from the survey were analyzed using IBM SPSS 27.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of the sample characteristics. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the scales. Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between stress and negative information sharing tendency. Repeated measures ANOVA was employed to examine differences in negative information sharing across various themes. Additionally, PROCESS Model 5 by Hayes was used to test the mediating role of motivation in the relationship between stress and negative information sharing, with bootstrap sampling (5000 samples) to validate the mediation effect.

3 Data processing and reliability analysis

3.1 Data validity and case processing

Before performing the main analysis, the data were screened for any missing values and inconsistencies. As shown in Table 1, the Case Processing Summary revealed that all 268 responses were valid, with no missing or inconsistent data. This confirms that the data meet the necessary requirements for further analysis.

Table 1. Case processing summary: reports data validity and completeness before analysis.

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	268	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	0.0
	Total	268	100.0
Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure ^a			

3.2 Reliability statistics

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha, a commonly applied measure for examining the coherence of items within a scale. A higher alpha value indicates stronger correlations among the items, reflecting better consistency. According to the results generated from IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0 (Table 2), the overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the entire questionnaire was 0.834, demonstrating good internal reliability. In line with the generally accepted standards in social science research, an alpha value above 0.70 is regarded as satisfactory. Therefore, the findings confirm that the instrument possesses adequate reliability for subsequent statistical analyses.

Table 2. Reliability statistics: displays cronbach's alpha value assessing internal consistency of the questionnaire.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.834	12

3.3 Reliability adjustment

The reliability analysis indicated that items D3 and D4 within the Communication Motivation Scale (Section D) showed relatively weak correlations with the remaining items. After their removal, the Cronbach's Alpha value increased, suggesting an improvement in the internal consistency of the scale. Consequently, the present study excluded items D3 and D4 from Section D, retaining only D1 (Identity Seeking) and D2 (Emotional Catharsis) to compute the total score for communication motivation. This adjustment follows common reliability optimization procedures in empirical research and contributes to strengthening the consistency and robustness of the subsequent analyses.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

As shown in Table 3, the majority of respondents in this study are young adults, with 65.3% of the sample aged between 16-30 years, followed by 30.2% in the 31-45 age group. Only 3.7% of the participants are aged between 46-60, and a very small proportion (0.4%) falls in the 61-75 age range. This indicates a predominance of younger individuals in the sample.

Table 3. Age distribution of participants.

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16-30	175	65.3	65.5	65.5
	31-45	81	30.2	30.3	95.9
	46-60	10	3.7	3.7	99.6
	61-75	1	0.4	0.4	100.0
	Total	267	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.4		
Total		268	100.0		

In terms of gender distribution (Table 4), the sample is predominantly female, with 67.2% of the participants identifying as women, while 32.8% of the respondents are male. This reflects a higher engagement of female participants in the survey.

Regarding social media usage, Table 5 shows that 47.4% of participants report using social media for more than 3 hours per day, followed by 31.0% who spend 2-3 hours daily. A smaller group, 19.4%, use social media for 1-2 hours, and only 2.2% spend 0.5-1 hour on social platforms. This suggests that a significant portion of the sample is highly engaged with social media, with over 78% using it for 2 or more hours each day.

Table 4. Gender distribution of participants.

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	88	32.8	32.8	32.8
	Female	180	67.2	67.2	100.0
	Total	268	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Daily social media usage time: illustrates participants' average time spent on social media per day.

Daily social media usage time					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0.5-1h	6	2.2	2.2	2.2
	1-2h	52	19.4	19.4	21.6
	2-3h	83	31.0	31.0	52.6
	More than 3h	127	47.4	47.4	100.0
	Total	268	100.0	100.0	

4.2 Correlation and regression analysis of stress and negative communication tendencies

To examine the predictive effect of stress on negative information preference, a linear regression analysis was conducted. The independent variable was the stress total score (Stress_total), and the dependent variable was negative information preference (NegScore).

4.2.1 Model summary

Model Summary (Table 6) indicates a moderate positive correlation between stress and negative information preference ($R = 0.297$). The model explains 8.8% of the variance in negative preference ($R^2 = 0.088$), meaning that stress accounts for 8.8% of the variability in negative information selection. The adjusted R^2 is 0.085, suggesting that the predictive power of stress on negative preference remains stable. The standard error of the estimate is 5.85655, indicating that the model's prediction error is relatively small and the fit is stable.

Table 6. Model summary: summarizes the regression model explaining the effect of stress on negative information preference.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.297 ^a	0.088	0.085	5.85655
Predictors: (Constant), Stress_total ^a				

4.2.2 ANOVA (analysis of variance)

The ANOVA (Table 7) results show that the overall regression model is significant, with $F(1, 266) = 25.753$ and $p < 0.001$, indicating that stress significantly predicts negative information preference and the model explains a substantial portion of the variance.

Table 7. ANOVA: tests the overall significance of the regression model.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	883.304	1	883.304	25.753	0.000 ^b
	Residual	9123.573	266	34.299		
	Total	10006.877	267			
Dependent Variable: NegScore ^a						
Predictors: (Constant), Stress_total ^b						

4.2.3 Coefficients

The Coefficients table (Table 8) shows that stress significantly predicts negative information preference. The unstandardized coefficient $B = 0.444$ indicates that for every 1-point increase in stress, the negative preference score increases by 0.444 points. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.297) shows that stress has a moderate effect on negative information preference. The t-value is 5.075, and the p-value is less than 0.001, further confirming the significant predictive effect of stress on negative information preference.

Table 8. Coefficients table: presents regression coefficients showing the predictive strength of stress on negativity preference.

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	9.316	1.136		8.201	0.000
	Stress_total	0.444	0.088	0.297	5.075	0.000
Dependent Variable: NegScore ^a						

4.2.4 Scatter plot of regression analysis

Figure 1 illustrates the linear relationship between stress level (Stress_total) and negative information preference (NegScore). Each dot represents a participant's pair of scores. The horizontal axis indicates stress level, while the vertical axis shows the tendency to select negative information across six content modules. The fitted regression line demonstrates an upward trend, described by the equation:

$$\text{NegScore} = 9.32 + 0.44 \times \text{Stress_total} \quad (1)$$

The intercept (9.32) represents the predicted negative preference score when stress is zero, whereas the slope (0.44) indicates that for each one-point increase in stress, the negative preference score increases by 0.44 points on average. This positive slope confirms that

individuals with higher stress levels tend to exhibit stronger preferences for negative information.

The scatter plot displays a generally upward distribution of data points, suggesting a significant positive linear correlation between stress and negative preference. However, the relatively wide dispersion of data points implies that other psychological or contextual factors may also play a role. The model's coefficient of determination ($R^2=0.088$) indicates that stress explains approximately 8.8% of the variance in negative preference. Despite the modest explanatory power, the regression model is statistically significant ($F(1,266) = 25.753, p < 0.001$).

No pronounced nonlinear pattern or clustering of residuals is observed, confirming that the assumption of linearity holds. The overall fit is acceptable, and the results visually and statistically support the conclusion that stress significantly and positively predicts the tendency to select negative information.

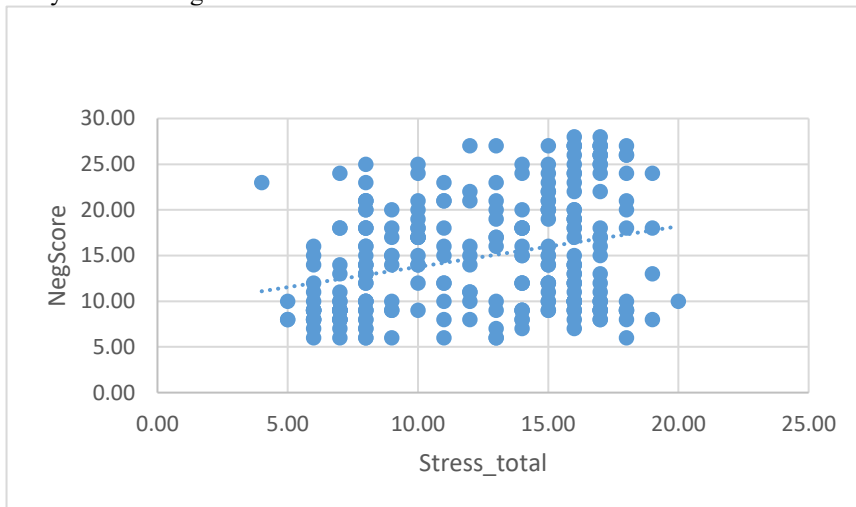


Figure 1. Scatter Plot of Regression Analysis: Visualizes the positive relationship between stress and negative information preference.

4.3 Analysis of negative preference differences across different themes

4.3.1 Research methods overview

In this study, Repeated Measures ANOVA was employed to examine whether there are significant differences in the tendency to choose negative information across six different themes. The themes and their representative number can be found in Table 9.

Table 9. Thematic categories of negative information preference: lists and codes the six research themes.

Representative Number	Themes
1	Idol/Fandom
2	Fertility/Population
3	Employment/Workplace
4	AI/Technology
5	Brand/Corporate
6	Personal/Emotional Expression

Since participants rated their preference for negative information across all six themes, Repeated Measures ANOVA was appropriate because it allows for the analysis of differences within the same participants across multiple conditions. This method helps assess whether the mean scores of negative information preference differ significantly between themes, accounting for the within-subjects design.

4.3.2 Main effect significance

To examine whether the preference for negative information differed significantly across the six themes, Multivariate Tests were performed. The results of the multivariate test are shown in Table 10.

The Pillai's Trace value of 0.285, Wilks' Lambda of 0.715, and $F(5, 263) = 20.984$, with a p-value less than 0.001, indicate that the main effect of theme on negativity preference is statistically significant. This means that the six themes differ significantly in terms of their negative information preference, thus supporting our hypothesis that different themes will exhibit varying levels of negativity preference.

Table 10. Multivariate tests of theme effects: displays multivariate test results showing significant differences among themes.

Multivariate Tests						
	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's trace	0.285	20.984 ^a	5.000	263.000	0.000	0.285
Wilks' lambda	0.715	20.984 ^a	5.000	263.000	0.000	0.285
Hotelling's trace	0.399	20.984 ^a	5.000	263.000	0.000	0.285
Roy's largest root	0.399	20.984 ^a	5.000	263.000	0.000	0.285
Each F tests the multivariate effect of Theme. These tests are based on the linearly independent pairwise comparisons among the estimated marginal means.						
Exact statistic ^a						

4.3.3 Comparison of means across themes

Table 11 presents the descriptive statistics for each theme, including the mean, standard error, and 95% confidence intervals for negative information preference across the six themes.

Theme 5 (Brand/Corporate) emerged with the highest mean ($M = 2.877$), signifying that participants tend to prefer negative information most strongly when the topic involves brands, corporate scandals, or public relations crises. This could reflect a heightened public interest in corporate misdeeds and the impact of such events on public perception.

On the other hand, Theme 1 (Idol/Fandom) recorded the lowest mean ($M = 2.063$), suggesting that negative information related to idols or fandoms is less favored. This may be attributed to the strong emotional connection fans have with idols, which drives them to avoid consuming or spreading negative content about them.

Theme 3 (Employment/Workplace) and Theme 2 (Fertility/Population) displayed moderate mean scores ($M = 2.724$ and $M = 2.381$, respectively). These topics evoke some negative preferences, but not to the extent seen in corporate scandals. Issues like workplace

dynamics or fertility concerns seem to strike a balance, drawing interest but not as strongly as issues related to corporate mismanagement.

With a mean score of $M = 2.493$, Theme 4 (AI/Technology) falls between the extremes, showing a relatively moderate preference for negative information. This reflects a growing concern and curiosity around technology, but it doesn't reach the level of intensity seen in more socially impactful topics like corporate scandals.

Theme 6 (Personal/Emotional Expression), with a mean of $M = 2.250$, shows a mid-range preference for negative content. This suggests that personal and emotional topics resonate with participants, yet they don't carry the same societal significance as corporate or employment-related issues, which might trigger stronger negative reactions.

Table 11. Descriptive statistics of negativity preference by theme: provides mean and confidence intervals for negativity preference across themes.

Estimates				
Measure:				
Theme	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2.063	0.083	1.901	2.226
2	2.381	0.083	2.218	2.543
3	2.724	0.089	2.549	2.899
4	2.493	0.076	2.343	2.642
5	2.877	0.095	2.691	3.063
6	2.250	0.076	2.101	2.399

4.3.4 Post-hoc comparisons (bonferroni adjustment)

To determine which themes showed significant differences in negativity preference, Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons were performed. Bonferroni adjustment helps control for the increased risk of Type I errors when performing multiple comparisons.

As shown in Table 12, theme 5 (Brand/Corporate) exhibits the highest negativity preference compared to all other themes. This suggests that public controversies, corporate scandals, and brand-related crises elicit stronger negative emotional responses from individuals. Theme 1 (Idol/Fandom) has the lowest negativity preference, which may be attributed to the emotional attachment that individuals have to idols and the filtering mechanisms within fandom communities. Theme 3 (Employment/Workplace) shows a stronger preference for negative information compared to Theme 6 (Personal/Emotional Expression), indicating that participants are more likely to engage with negative information when the topic involves employment and work-related concerns.

This analysis demonstrates that the preference for negative information varies significantly across different social topics. Specifically, Brand/Corporate topics evoke the highest levels of negative information preference, while Idol/Fandom topics evoke the least.

Table 12. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons (bonferroni adjustment): identifies specific differences between thematic pairs in negativity preference.

Pairwise Comparisons						
Measure:						
(I) Theme		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	-0.317*	0.082	0.002	-0.559	-0.075
	3	-0.660*	0.085	0.000	-0.911	-0.409
	4	-0.429*	0.092	0.000	-0.700	-0.158
	5	-0.813*	0.093	0.000	-1.089	-0.538
	6	-0.187	0.085	0.426	-0.437	0.064
2	1	0.317*	0.082	0.002	0.075	0.559
	3	-0.343*	0.071	0.000	-0.553	-0.133
	4	-0.112	0.093	1.000	-0.389	0.165
	5	-0.496*	0.089	0.000	-0.759	-0.233
	6	0.131	0.082	1.000	-0.113	0.374
3	1	0.660*	0.085	0.000	0.409	0.911
	2	0.343*	0.071	0.000	0.133	0.553
	4	0.231	0.088	0.137	-0.030	0.492
	5	-0.153	0.083	0.995	-0.399	0.093
	6	0.474*	0.082	0.000	0.230	0.718
4	1	0.429*	0.092	0.000	0.158	0.700
	2	0.112	0.093	1.000	-0.165	0.389
	3	-0.231	0.088	0.137	-0.492	0.030
	5	-0.384*	0.093	0.001	-0.659	-0.110
	6	0.243	0.091	0.120	-0.026	0.511
5	1	0.813*	0.093	0.000	0.538	1.089
	2	0.496*	0.089	0.000	0.233	0.759
	3	0.153	0.083	0.995	-0.093	0.399
	4	0.384*	0.093	0.001	0.110	0.659
	6	0.627*	0.089	0.000	0.364	0.890
6	1	0.187	0.085	0.426	-0.064	0.437
	2	-0.131	0.082	1.000	-0.374	0.113
	3	-0.474*	0.082	0.000	-0.718	-0.230
	4	-0.243	0.091	0.120	-0.511	0.026
	5	-0.627*	0.089	0.000	-0.890	-0.364
Based on estimated marginal means						
The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level*						
Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni ^b						

4.4 Analysis of the mediating role of motivation

4.4.1 Model overview

This study used PROCESS Model 5 to examine whether stress (Stress_total) influences negativity preference (Negscore) through the mediator of motivation (Motivation). A sample of 268 participants was used, and 5000 bootstrap samples were applied to estimate confidence intervals for the indirect effect. Stress-total, Negscore, and Motivation respectively calculate the mean scores of the corresponding scales. Here, mediator motivation represents emotional release and validation.

4.4.2 The effect of stress on motivation

From Table 13, we can see that stress (Stress_total) explains 7.03% of the variance in motivation (Motivation). The model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that stress has a significant effect on motivation.

Table 13. Model summary for motivation prediction: shows how stress predicts motivation.

Statistic	Value
R ²	0.0703
F-value	20.1229
p-value	0

4.4.3 Regression coefficients for motivation (path a)

From Table 14, we can see that stress (Stress_total) significantly predicts motivation (Motivation). The coefficient is 0.1721, meaning that for every 1-point increase in stress, motivation increases by 0.1721 points. The effect is significant ($p < 0.001$).

Table 14. Regression coefficients for motivation: displays coefficients showing the strength of stress's effect on motivation.

Path	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval (LLCI, ULCI)
Constant	6.6417	0.4978	13.3414	0	[5.6615, 7.6218]
Stress (X)	0.1721	0.0384	4.4859	0	[0.0966, 0.2477]

4.4.4 Model summary for negativity preference (path b and c')

From Table 15, we can see that stress (Stress_total) and motivation (Motivation) together explain 17.91% of the variance in negativity preference (Negscore). The model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Table 15. Model summary for negativity preference: reports the combined explanatory power of stress and motivation on negative preference.

Statistic	Value
R ²	0.1791
F-value	28.9148
p-value	0

4.4.5 Regression coefficients for negativity preference (paths b and c')

From Table 16, Motivation (Motivation) significantly predicts negativity preference (Negscore). For each 1-point increase in motivation, negativity preference increases by 0.7204 points ($p < 0.001$). Stress (Stress_{total}) also significantly influences negativity preference (Negscore). The coefficient for this direct effect is 0.3203, and it is significant ($p < 0.001$).

Table 16. Regression coefficients for negativity preference: indicates direct and mediating effects of stress and motivation.

Path	Coefficient t (B)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval (LLCI, ULCI)
Constant	4.5314	1.3952	3.2478	0.0013	[1.7843, 7.2785]
Stress (X)	0.3203	0.0863	3.7107	0.0003	[0.1504, 0.4903]
Motivation (M)	0.7204	0.133	5.4161	0	[0.4585, 0.9823]

4.4.6 Indirect effect (mediating effect)

From Table 17, the indirect effect of stress on negativity preference through motivation is 0.1240, and the 95% bootstrap confidence interval is [0.0541, 0.2080], which does not contain zero. This confirms that the indirect effect is statistically significant.

Table 17. Indirect (mediating) effect of motivation: shows the indirect effect of stress on negative preference via motivation.

Effect Type	Coefficient (Effect)	Bootstrap SE (BootSE)	Bootstrap LLCI (Lower CI)	Bootstrap ULCI (Upper CI)
Indirect Effect	0.124	0.0392	0.0541	0.208

4.4.7 Total effect

From Table 18, the total effect of stress on negativity preference is 0.4443, which means that stress significantly influences negativity preference, combining both the direct and indirect effects. This effect is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), and the 95% confidence interval [0.2719, 0.6167] confirms that the effect is robust.

Table 18. Total effect of stress on negativity preference: presents the overall effect combining both direct and indirect influences.

Effect Type	Coefficient (Effect)	Standard Error (SE)	t-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval (LLCI, ULCI)
Total Effect	0.4443	0.0876	5.0747	0	[0.2719, 0.6167]

5 Conclusion

The study revealed a clear positive correlation between stress and the tendency to share negative information on social media. Participants experiencing higher levels of stress were notably more inclined to engage in spreading negative content. This finding provides strong support for Hypothesis 1, which posited that stress has a direct influence on negative information sharing behavior. Additionally, the analysis showed that the preference for sharing negative content varied significantly depending on the topic at hand. For instance,

corporate scandals and public relations crises sparked a much stronger inclination to share negative information, whereas subjects like fandoms and emotional expression elicited comparatively lower levels of negative sharing. The observed variation across different topics further supports Hypothesis 2, indicating that the type and nature of the content significantly influence the degree of negative information sharing. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of motivation as a mediating variable linking stress to negative sharing behavior. In particular, motivations such as emotional catharsis and the pursuit of validation appear to prompt stressed individuals to disseminate negative material online, offering a clearer explanation of the psychological mechanisms behind this tendency. These results provide strong empirical backing for Hypothesis 3, highlighting motivation as a key determinant of whether individuals experiencing stress are likely to engage in the sharing of negative information on social media.

While this study provides insights into the role of stress and motivation in online behavior, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the study relied on a cross-sectional design, meaning that causality cannot be definitively established. Future studies using longitudinal data could provide more robust evidence of the causal relationship between stress and negative information sharing. Second, this study focused on Chinese social media users, and thus the findings may not fully generalize to other cultures or contexts. Further research should consider cross-cultural comparisons to explore whether the observed effects hold true in different cultural settings. Lastly, the study only examined two types of motivations (emotional release and validation seeking), and future research could explore a wider range of motivations, including social support or self-affirmation, to better understand the complexity of online behavior.

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