Social Comparison in Social Media Among Adolescents: Is it Associated with Lower Life Satisfaction?

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Abstract

Social media has become the dominant platform for adolescents to interact socially, making them vulnerable to social comparison. This study examines the role of social comparison on life satisfaction in adolescent social media users. This study uses quantitative methods. The sample of this study involved 113 adolescents aged 18-21 who actively use social media, selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data was collected through an online questionnaire using two instruments, namely the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) to measure social comparison and the Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (RLSS) to measure life satisfaction. The results of the linear regression analysis indicated that social comparison did not have a significant influence on life satisfaction, with an R^2 of .000 and a p-value of .840. This finding indicates that although adolescents might frequently engage in social comparisons on social media, it is not associated with their overall life satisfaction. This study suggests that other factors may play a greater role in determining life satisfaction, so further research is needed to understand the complexities of social comparison in social media use.

Keywords: social comparison, life satisfaction, social media, adolescents.

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition period from childhood to adulthood is also referred to as adolescence. In this phase, the psycho-social aspect is one aspect that greatly influences teenagers' social interactions. This aspect involves the feelings, emotions, and personality of a teenager. In Erickson's identity vs role confusion stage, teenagers are required to find their identity (Wisdani et al., 2023). These teenagers are particularly vulnerable to external influences, such as social media, especially since teenagers also dominate the use of social media (Lusiana, 2023). Teenagers often compare themselves with other people they see both on social media and in person, this can cause feelings of envy or lack of self-confidence (Putra, 2018).

Social media has become one of the leading platforms used by teenagers and young adults aged 16 to 24 years to socialize, search for information, and form their identity (Firdaus et al., 2023). The most popular social media platforms among people today include Instagram, WhatsApp, X, and TikTok. There are many impacts that social media has, positive impacts such as making it easier for individuals to interact with many people, expanding information, distance and time are no longer a problem. Meanwhile, the negative impacts include reduced direct interaction between individuals, making people addicted to using the internet, privacy issues, and many more (Cahyono, 2018). In addition to these general effects, social media has significantly impacted life satisfaction through social comparison. Studies indicate that frequent exposure to idealized portrayals of life on social media can lead to negative emotional experiences such as anxiety, envy, and even depression, particularly when individuals compare themselves with others

(Firdaus et al., 2023). Research by Rahmad and Kirana (2023) concluded that individuals who frequently engage in social comparison on social media are likely to experience lower life satisfaction. This phenomenon is also supported by Paseru (2016), who identified a similar trend among adolescents in a school setting, indicating that higher levels of social comparison are associated with lower life satisfaction.

Adolescents and young adults, who are in a critical stage of identity formation, are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of such comparisons. This is because individuals typically make social comparisons to evaluate how their abilities and opinions compare with those of others. In fact, a study has shown that individuals who do not have a strong opinion about themselves are more likely to compare themselves with others (Putra, 2018).

Social comparison is divided into two types: upward comparison, in which individuals compare themselves to others perceived as superior, and downward comparison, where the comparison is made with individuals seen as inferior (Anjela & Ambarwati, 2022). This phenomenon often occurs on social media platforms, where users are exposed to curated content that typically showcases the most ideal aspects of others' lives, such as achievements, appearance, or lifestyle. According to Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), individuals are inherently driven to evaluate themselves through comparisons with others, especially when objective standards are absent. Users on social networking sites, such as Facebook, are more likely to engage in frequent social comparison due to their constant exposure to others' lives (Lee, 2014).

This frequent upward comparison can lead to negative self-evaluations, envy, and reduced life satisfaction, particularly when individuals perceive themselves as lacking in comparison to others (Vogel et al., 2014). Moreover, self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) suggests that when there is a perceived gap between one's actual self and ideal self, as triggered by social comparison, individuals are more likely to experience dissatisfaction, negative mood, and lowered self-esteem (Bessenoff, 2006). Such psychological distress may lead to lower levels of life satisfaction and, in the long term, could increase the risk of depression, anxiety, and poor emotional well-being (Siyez, 2017). Therefore, excessive engagement in social comparison, especially in digital environments, can significantly impair individuals' perceived quality of life.

The widespread use of social media among teenagers has prompted the author to research "The Influence of Social Comparison on Life Satisfaction in Teenage Social Media Users". A considerable amount of previous research has discussed social comparison in relation to social media (Lee, 2014; Firdaus et al., 2023; Rahmad & Kirana, 2023). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is still very little research on the influence of social comparison on life satisfaction among teenage social media users. Several previous studies only linked social comparison with self-esteem (Lusiana, 2023), academics (Arifin & Firdaus, 2022), and body image (Dewi, Noviekayati, & Rina, 2020). Therefore, researchers are interested in finding out how social comparison contributes to teenagers' life satisfaction. This hypothesis is built on the assumption that social comparison, particularly upward comparison, can contribute to an individual's perception of their life satisfaction.

2.   METHODS
2. 1. Materials

Two primary instruments were used in this study. The first is the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM). This scale, developed by Gibbons and Buunk, consists of 11 items designed to measure an individual's tendency to engage in social comparison. Responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating a stronger

tendency for social comparison. The INCOM scale has been validated and adapted for use in Indonesian adolescent populations. For instance, a study by Lusiana (2023) used the INCOM to assess social comparison tendencies in Indonesian adolescents and reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81, indicating good internal consistency. Similarly, research by Yulianto and Virlia (2023) confirmed the reliability and appropriateness of the scale for this population. One example item from the INCOM is: *"I often compare myself with others with respect to what I have accomplished in life."*

The second is the Riverside Life Satisfaction Scale (RLSS). This scale, developed by Furr (2011), comprises six items that assess life satisfaction. One example item is, *"I am satisfied with my life."* This scale is widely used and has demonstrated good reliability and validity in previous studies (Margolis et al., 2019). The Indonesian version used in this study was adapted through a translation-back translation procedure. A pilot test was conducted with 30 participants, and the RLSS demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.821, indicating that the scale is reliable for use in this context. Responses were collected on a 7-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting greater satisfaction with life. This scale is widely used and is considered a valid and reliable measure of subjective well-being.

2. 2. Participants

This study involved 113 adolescents aged 18–21 who resided in Surabaya and were active users of social media. This age range was chosen because it represents late adolescence (Santrock, 2012), a developmental stage during which individuals are especially influenced by their social environment, including online interactions. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the sample met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the research objective. Participants were considered "active" if they used social media at least once daily and reported consistently using at least two major platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, or Twitter/X. The recruitment process targeted online youth communities and university student forums where these inclusion criteria were likely to be met.

Participants in this study had to meet several criteria, including:
1. Aged between 18 and 21 years, which is categorized as late adolescence according to Santrock (2012).
2. Residing in Surabaya.
3. Actively using social media platforms. Participants were considered "active" if they used social media at least once daily and reported consistently using at least two major platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, or Twitter/X.

2. 3. Procedure

The study was conducted online through Google Forms, which facilitated efficient data collection from participants in their home environment while maintaining anonymity to reduce social desirability bias in responses. Before participating, respondents received a brief overview of the study and were informed of the voluntary nature of their involvement. Upon providing consent, they completed the INCOM and RLSS scales, with the entire process taking approximately 15-20 minutes per participant. The data collection phase spanned two weeks, from October 2nd to October 16th, 2024.

2. 4. Data Analysis

The hypothesis to be tested in this research is: H₀: There is no association between social comparison on life satisfaction among adolescent social media users. Data analysis was performed using JASP (Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program). First, descriptive statistics were calculated for the key variable social comparison and life satisfaction. Subsequently, a linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive relationship between social comparison and life satisfaction among adolescent participants. This regression analysis also functioned as a formal hypothesis test to evaluate the null hypothesis (H₀: Social comparison does not influence life satisfaction). The statistical significance was determined using a threshold of $p < .05$. If the resulting p-value is below this threshold, the null hypothesis will be rejected, indicating that social comparison has a significant influence on life satisfaction. This analytical approach aimed to explore the relationship and statistically confirm whether social comparison significantly contributes to variations in life satisfaction among adolescent social media users (Yulianto & Virlia, 2023).

3. RESULTS

The data collected from 113 participants were analyzed to determine the relationship between social comparison and life satisfaction among adolescent social media users. Descriptive statistics and linear regression analyses were used to summarize the findings and test the study's hypothesis. The study involved 113 adolescents aged 18 to 21, with the largest group aged 19 (48.7%). Social media platforms used by participants included Instagram (100%), TikTok (79.6%), WhatsApp (93.8%), and Twitter/X (50.4%).

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the main variables: social comparison and life satisfaction. The mean score for social comparison was 36.69 (*SD* = 5.397), with scores ranging from 22 to 49. The mean score for life satisfaction was 31.15 (*SD* = 4.254), with scores ranging from 18 to 39.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics Results of Social Comparison and Life Satisfaction

	Social Comparison	**Life Satisfaction**
Valid	113	113
Missing	0	0
Mean	36.690	31.150
Std. Deviation	5.397	4.254
Minimum	22.000	18.000
Maximum	49.000	39.000

3.2 Hypothesis Testing

Assumption testing was conducted prior to the regression analysis. The residuals were normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk p > 0.05), the scatterplot showed a linear relationship, and the residual plots did not show heteroskedasticity.

A linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that social comparison influences life satisfaction. The regression model aimed to evaluate whether higher levels of social comparison (the independent variable) were associated with lower life satisfaction (the dependent variable) among the adolescent participants. The results in Table 2 show the strength of the relationship between these two variables. The analysis yielded an R^2 value of .000, indicating that the model explained virtually no variance in life satisfaction based on social comparison. Additionally, the p-value of .840 suggests that social comparison does not significantly predict life satisfaction (p > .05), meaning there is no statistically significant relationship between the two variables.

Table 2
Results of Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Total X from Total Y

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE	B (Unstandardized)	SE B	β (Standardized)	t	p
H⁰ (Intercept)	0.000	0.000	0.000	5.397	36.690	0.508	—	72.268	< .001
H¹ (Intercept)	0.019	0.000	-0.009	5.420	35.933	3.785	—	9.493	< .001
Total Y					0.024	0.120	0.019	0.202	.840

4. DISCUSSION

This study aims to see whether social comparison affects life satisfaction in adolescent social media users. Based on the data obtained, descriptive statistics indicate that the average score for social comparison among adolescents in this study was 36.69 (*SD* = 5.397), based on responses to the INCOM scale. Meanwhile, their life satisfaction had an average score of 31.15 (*SD* = 4.254), with scores ranging from 18 to 39. Although many of them compare themselves to others on social media, the linear regression analysis reveals that social comparison does not significantly predict life satisfaction. The very low R-squared value (0.000) and p-value (.840) indicate that social comparison does not explain the variation in life satisfaction.

Several reasons can explain the acceptance of this null hypothesis. First, although social media is often used to compare oneself with others, such comparisons may not have a significant impact on life satisfaction. Adolescents may use social media more for entertainment or communication, so the social comparison is not strong enough to influence their perception of life satisfaction. Other factors, such as social relationships, family support, academic achievement, or

economic conditions, may be more critical in determining adolescents' life satisfaction than social comparison on social media.

In a similar study by Amelia (2019), it was found that a significant influence exists between social comparison and life satisfaction among adolescent Instagram users. The study used the linear regression method and involved 430 late adolescents as respondents. The results show that social comparison has a significant impact on life satisfaction, which differs from the findings in this study, where the null hypothesis is accepted. This difference may be due to the platform used, where Instagram features stronger visual aspects, making it easier for social comparison to occur and influence perceptions of life satisfaction.

Following Amelia's (2019) findings on the significant impact of social comparison on life satisfaction among adolescent Instagram users, recent studies have further explored how the dynamics of social comparison vary across platforms, particularly in the context of social media. Lee (2014) and Vogel et al. (2014) highlight that frequent exposure to comparison information through social media platforms can significantly impact self-esteem and self-evaluation, particularly among adolescents. However, this study found no significant effect between social comparison and life satisfaction. One possible explanation is that adolescents tend to choose objects of comparison selectively or are less affected by the results of these comparisons, because they have more mature ways of thinking or good coping strategies. Furthermore, Vogel et al. (2014) found that the impact of social comparison varies depending on individual characteristics such as self-esteem and coping strategies, suggesting that adolescents may selectively engage in comparisons that align with their personal narratives or self-perception.

Recent studies have further developed Festinger's theory in the context of social media. Lee (2014) found that social comparisons on platforms like Facebook are prevalent among college students and that individuals with higher social orientation tend to engage in more frequent comparisons. Moreover, Vogel et al. (2014) demonstrated that frequent exposure to upward social comparison information on social media is associated with lower self-esteem. This suggests that the impact of social comparison may be amplified or mitigated depending on the medium and context. In the context of this study, adolescents may utilize coping strategies that buffer against the negative effects of social comparison, such as limiting exposure to idealized content or focusing on personal achievements (Proctor et al., 2016).

The views of Ed Diener (1984) are also relevant in explaining the results of this study. Diener argues that various factors influence life satisfaction, such as social relationships, health, and personal achievement. Diener also recognizes that social comparison can affect one's subjective well-being, but the impact depends mainly on how the individual processes the comparison results. In line with this perspective, Siyez and Baran (2017) noted that adolescents may exhibit different emotional and cognitive responses to social comparison, with empathy and aggression potentially moderating these effects. Thus, the finding that social comparison does not significantly impact life satisfaction in this study may be attributed to differences in platform usage, as well as adolescents' selective exposure and adaptive coping mechanisms, which may mitigate the effects of comparison that are more pronounced on visually oriented platforms like Instagram.

This study has some limitations. A sample limited to adolescent social media users in one city with an age range of 18-21 years limits the generalizability of the results to a broader population. While the use of online questionnaires helps reduce social biases by providing anonymity, the self-report format does not entirely eliminate the possibility of response bias. Respondents may still provide answers that reflect socially accepted norms rather than their actual thoughts or behaviors. Additionally, this study employed a correlational design, which limits the

ability to infer causality. It is possible that different results might emerge if the study were conducted using an experimental approach. These limitations open up opportunities for further research that is more in-depth and involves a more diverse sample.

Future research is suggested to expand the sample scope by including more respondents from various regions and age groups, so that the study's results are more generalizable. Researchers are also expected to consider other factors, such as self-esteem, social support, and academic achievement, which may have a greater influence on adolescent life satisfaction than social comparison alone.

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