

The Relationships Among Social Comparison, Body Image Dissatisfaction, and Self-Esteem in Young Adults

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the complex association between social comparison, body image, and self-esteem in the wider scope of psychological well being. In this research, social comparison is taken as an independent variable and body image and self-esteem are seen as dependent variables as one of the most important elements of self-concept and mental health. The theoretical basis of the research is the Social Comparison Theory by Leon Festinger who argues that people have an innate ability to compare themselves, based on comparing themselves with others. The psychology of comparison in the recent digitally driven and socially connected world has become a pressing issue due to the lives of the idealized image of beauty, success and lifestyle that people are constantly exposed to, and it is therefore important to delve into the psychological aspect of it. The research design used in studying this phenomenon is the mixed-methods research design to ensure a wide scope of the phenomenon is established. To measure the prevalence, orientation, and strengths of the social comparison tendencies and the connection between the tendencies and body image perceptions and the level of self-esteem, standardized surveys are used to gather quantitative data. To supplement this, the qualitative techniques are employed to get the personal experiences of the participants, their thoughts, and the subjective meanings related to their processes of comparison. The sample used is composed of individuals with diverse demographic backgrounds such as the variation in age, gender and cultural background making it possible to have a wider understanding of the role of social comparison among different populations. The findings suggest that social comparison and psychological outcomes were statistically significantly correlated. People who performed upward comparison more often (judged themselves in relation to people who appear to be more superior) were more likely to report negative body image perceptions and low self-esteem. These patterns of comparison are related to increased inadequacy, self-doubts, and external validation tendencies. The results also indicate that there is a relationship between demography and prevalence of the comparison behaviors as well as the effects of those behaviors. Further qualitative results indicate that internalization of beauty ideals to do with appearance, success, and social position are among the important psychological processes that lead to dissatisfaction. Simultaneously, some safety factors, including self-awareness, emotional

regulation, and high-level social support networks seem to mitigate the adverse impact of comparison. Finally, this research is useful in expanding the theoretical and practical knowledge by shedding light on how social comparison influences body image and self-esteem. The results can be used to present a good guidance on psychoeducational programs and counseling interventions that can be applicable in helping individuals develop healthier self-perceptions, enhance self-esteem, and develop psychological resilience in a society that is becoming more and more comparative. **Keywords:** Social Comparison, Body Image, Self-Esteem, Psychological Well-Being, Upward Comparison, Downward Comparison, Self-Concept, Societal Influences, Mixed-Methods Approach, Psychoeducational Strategies.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Study

Social comparison is a common psychological process through which individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their abilities, achievements, and appearance with others. In modern society, especially with the influence of social media and digital platforms, young adults are frequently exposed to idealized standards of beauty and success. These comparisons can strongly influence how individuals perceive their own bodies and overall self-worth.

Body image refers to an individual's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about their physical appearance. When individuals repeatedly compare themselves with unrealistic or idealized standards, they may develop body image dissatisfaction, meaning they feel unhappy or negative about their body. Such dissatisfaction can affect psychological well-being and may lead to lower confidence and negative self-perceptions.

Self-esteem represents an individual's overall evaluation of their own value and worth. Positive self-esteem is associated with confidence and emotional well-being, whereas low self-esteem is often linked with insecurity and psychological distress. Frequent social comparisons, particularly upward comparisons with people perceived as more attractive or successful, can reduce both body satisfaction and self-esteem. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the relationship between social comparison, body image dissatisfaction, and self-esteem among young adults, in order to understand how comparison behaviors may influence individuals' perceptions of their bodies and their overall sense of self-worth.

Background of the Study

In contemporary psychological research, the interrelationship between social comparison, body image, and self-esteem has emerged as one of the most compelling areas of inquiry within the broader domain of psychological well-being. Human beings are inherently social creatures whose perceptions of self are shaped, refined, and continually reconstructed through interactions with others. The evaluation of one's abilities, attributes, achievements, and physical appearance rarely occurs in isolation. Instead, individuals develop self-understanding through a dynamic and often automatic process of comparing themselves with those around them.

Social comparison operates as a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which individuals interpret their position within social hierarchies. Whether consciously or unconsciously, people compare their intelligence, success, attractiveness, relationships, possessions, and lifestyles against perceived standards

embodied by peers, celebrities, influencers, or culturally dominant figures. Although comparison can serve adaptive purposes such as motivation, self-improvement, and reality testing it can also generate dissatisfaction, insecurity, and diminished self-worth when perceived discrepancies are unfavorable.

Among the various domains in which comparison occurs, appearance-based social comparison has become especially salient. Physical appearance occupies a uniquely visible and socially evaluated dimension of identity. Unlike abilities or internal traits, appearance is immediately observable and frequently subjected to social judgment. As a result, comparison in this domain often carries heightened emotional intensity and psychological consequences.

The modern sociocultural environment has significantly amplified opportunities for social comparison. The rapid expansion of digital media, online communication, and social networking platforms has created an unprecedented landscape of constant exposure to idealized representations of others. Individuals now encounter carefully curated, filtered, and selectively edited portrayals of beauty, achievement, and lifestyle multiple times per day. This perpetual exposure fosters an environment in which comparison is not occasional but continuous.

Importantly, these comparisons are rarely neutral. Individuals tend to compare themselves upward toward those perceived as more attractive, more successful, or more socially admired. While upward comparison may sometimes inspire self-improvement, it frequently produces feelings of inadequacy when the perceived gap between the self and the comparison target appears unattainable.

Consequently, understanding how social comparison processes influence body image and self-esteem is not merely an academic endeavor; it is essential for addressing growing concerns related to mental health, identity development, and emotional well-being.

Conceptualizing Social Comparison

The theoretical foundation for understanding social comparison originates from Social Comparison Theory, first introduced by Leon Festinger in 1954. Leon Festinger proposed that people have a natural motivation to evaluate their own opinions and abilities. When clear or objective standards are not available, individuals tend to compare themselves with others to understand where they stand. Through this process of comparison, people obtain information about their level of competence, adequacy, and how socially acceptable their behaviors or beliefs are.

Festinger argued that comparison is most likely to occur in domains that are personally relevant and central to identity. Thus, individuals who place significant value on physical attractiveness are more prone to engage in appearance-based comparison. Similarly, those who prioritize academic achievement or professional success may compare themselves more frequently in performance-related domains.

Later theoretical developments expanded this idea by differentiating between upward and downward social comparisons. Upward comparison occurs when individuals compare themselves with others whom they consider to be better or more successful. In contrast, downward comparison takes place when people evaluate themselves against those they perceive as less capable or less fortunate. These two forms of comparison lead to different psychological effects. Downward comparison can sometimes increase self-esteem because individuals feel relatively better about themselves, whereas upward comparison often results in more critical self-evaluation and feelings of inadequacy.

In the context of appearance, upward comparison has been consistently associated with body dissatisfaction, negative affect, and reduced global self-esteem. This pattern becomes particularly concerning when individuals internalize unrealistic standards as benchmarks for self-worth.

Body Image as a Multidimensional Construct

Body image is more complex than simply feeling satisfied or dissatisfied with one's physical appearance. It is considered a multidimensional concept that includes perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. The perceptual aspect relates to how individuals perceive or view their own bodies, which may not always match their actual physical appearance. The cognitive aspect involves the beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts individuals hold about their bodies. The emotional aspect includes feelings connected to body perception, such as pride, embarrassment, anxiety, or dissatisfaction. Lastly, the behavioral aspect refers to actions influenced by body perception, such as frequently checking one's appearance, avoiding social interactions, engaging in dieting practices, or exercising excessively.

Disturbances in body image are not trivial concerns. Research consistently links negative body image with eating pathology, depressive symptoms, social anxiety, and reduced life satisfaction. Importantly, body dissatisfaction does not exist in isolation; it often interacts reciprocally with self-esteem. When individuals perceive their bodies as failing to meet societal standards, their overall sense of worth may deteriorate.

The rise of digital image editing, filters, and curated social media profiles has intensified the internalization of narrow beauty ideals. Unlike traditional media figures, peers and influencers appear relatable and attainable. This perceived attainability strengthens the psychological impact of upward comparison, as individuals believe the ideal should be achievable for them as well.

Self-Esteem and Psychological Well-Being

Self-esteem refers to the overall evaluation individuals hold about their worth as a person. It is both affective and cognitive, encompassing feelings of value, competence, and self-respect. High self-esteem is associated with resilience, optimism, adaptive coping strategies, and positive interpersonal relationships. Conversely, low self-esteem is linked to vulnerability to anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and maladaptive behaviors.

From a theoretical standpoint, self-esteem can be viewed as a psychological indicator of an individual's sense of social belonging and acceptance. When people feel appreciated, valued, and accepted by others, their level of self-esteem tends to increase. In contrast, when individuals experience feelings of rejection, exclusion, or personal inadequacy, their self-esteem is likely to decrease.

Appearance-based comparison plays a significant role in this process. In societies where physical attractiveness is heavily emphasized, body image becomes a central determinant of perceived social value. Repeated unfavorable comparisons can gradually erode global self-esteem, reinforcing a cycle of self-doubt and validation-seeking behavior.

The Digital Context and Intensification of Comparison

The digital revolution has transformed the mechanisms through which social comparison operates. Social networking platforms provide endless streams of images and updates that highlight achievements, relationships, vacations, fitness transformations, and curated moments of success. Rarely do these portrayals include ordinary struggles, insecurities, or failures.

Digital algorithms often increase individuals' exposure to content that matches their preferences and online behavior, which can lead to a greater amount of appearance-related material in their feeds. Continuous exposure to such content encourages the internalization of societal beauty and lifestyle standards, which in turn increases the likelihood of engaging in upward social comparisons.

Adolescents and young adults tend to be especially sensitive to these influences because they are in a developmental period where peer opinions and identity formation are highly significant. At this stage of life, individuals are actively shaping their sense of self, making them more responsive to external approval, feedback, and social validation.

Psychological Consequences of Persistent Comparison

Chronic engagement in upward appearance-based comparison may lead to:

- Persistent body dissatisfaction
- Lowered global self-esteem
- Increased symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Disordered eating behaviors
- Social withdrawal
- Heightened self-objectification
- Reduced academic and occupational functioning
- Compulsive social media use

These consequences highlight the need for comprehensive investigation into how comparison processes operate and how protective factors may buffer negative effects.

Rationale for the Present Study

Despite extensive research, there remains a need to integrate theoretical perspectives with contemporary digital realities. Much early work on social comparison predates social media culture. The current sociotechnical environment demands renewed investigation into how constant exposure to curated content shapes psychological well-being.

This study seeks to bridge theoretical frameworks with modern lived experience by examining the mechanisms through which social comparison influences body image and self-esteem. By integrating quantitative measurement with qualitative insight, the research aims to provide a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding.

Research Significance

This study is important for both theoretical and practical reasons. From a theoretical perspective, it enhances the understanding of social comparison as a flexible and context-dependent cognitive process that influences how individuals evaluate themselves. From a practical standpoint, the findings can contribute to the development of psychoeducational programs, counseling approaches, media literacy initiatives, and strategies that help individuals build resilience and develop a more positive and healthy self-perception.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the intricate relationship between social comparison, body image, and self-esteem requires a strong and multidimensional theoretical foundation. These constructs do not function independently; rather, they are embedded within broader cognitive, sociocultural, and motivational processes. Several psychological theories provide explanatory frameworks for understanding how individuals evaluate themselves, internalize societal standards, and construct their sense of self-worth. The following section presents the major theoretical perspectives that guide the present study.

Theories of Social Comparison

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954)

Leon Festinger developed the Social Comparison Theory, which forms a central foundation for understanding how individuals evaluate themselves. According to this theory, people have a natural tendency to assess their own opinions and abilities. When clear or objective standards are not available, they rely on comparisons with others to judge their own capabilities and viewpoints. This tendency to

compare is considered an essential aspect of human thinking rather than a voluntary behavior.

According to Festinger, comparison occurs primarily in domains that are personally relevant and psychologically significant. Individuals are more likely to compare themselves in areas that are central to their identity, such as intelligence, social status, career success, or physical attractiveness. In contemporary society, where physical appearance is heavily emphasized, appearance-based comparison becomes particularly salient.

Festinger also introduced the principle of similarity, suggesting that individuals prefer to compare themselves with others who are perceived as similar in age, gender, background, or social status. This perceived similarity enhances the credibility and relevance of the comparison outcome. In the context of body image, young adults are more likely to compare themselves with peers or influencers who appear relatable rather than distant celebrities.

The theory implies that when individuals perceive a significant discrepancy between themselves and the comparison target, emotional consequences arise. These consequences may include motivation for self-improvement or, alternatively, dissatisfaction and reduced self-esteem.

Upward and Downward Social Comparison Theory (Wills, 1981)

Thomas A. Wills further developed the ideas of Leon Festinger by distinguishing between different types of comparison, particularly upward and downward comparisons within Social Comparison Theory. Upward comparison takes place when individuals compare themselves with others whom they perceive as more successful or capable. If the person being compared to seems within reach, this type of comparison can inspire motivation and encourage personal growth. However, when the difference between oneself and the comparison target appears too large or unattainable, upward comparison may lead to reduced self-esteem and negative emotional reactions.

Downward comparison involves evaluating oneself against those perceived as worse off. This process may temporarily enhance self-esteem by reinforcing a sense of relative superiority.

However, its effects are typically short-lived and externally dependent.

In the domain of body image, upward comparisons to idealized bodies are significantly more common than downward comparisons. Repeated exposure to highly curated and edited images increases the likelihood that individuals will evaluate themselves unfavorably, contributing to chronic dissatisfaction and lower global self-esteem.

Self-Evaluation Maintenance Theory (Tesser, 1988)

Self-Evaluation Maintenance Theory proposes that individuals are motivated to maintain or enhance their self-esteem when confronted with comparison information. According to this theory, comparison becomes particularly threatening when it involves someone close (e.g., a friend or peer) outperforming the individual in a domain central to their identity.

When individuals feel threatened by comparison, they may use certain psychological strategies to protect their self-esteem. These strategies can include creating emotional distance from the person being compared with, reducing the importance of the area in which the comparison occurs, or focusing on other personal strengths where they feel more confident.

In the context of body image research, this perspective helps explain why comparisons with peers often trigger stronger emotional responses than comparisons with distant celebrities, since peers are perceived as more similar and personally relevant.

Relative Deprivation Theory (Stouffer, 1949)

Relative Deprivation Theory suggests that individuals evaluate their well-being not in absolute terms but relative to others. Feelings of dissatisfaction arise when individuals perceive that they have less than what comparable others possess.

Applied to body image, individuals may feel deprived when they perceive their bodies as falling short of societal ideals. This perceived discrepancy fosters frustration, envy, and emotional distress. The theory highlights the subjective nature of dissatisfaction, emphasizing that distress emerges not from objective inadequacy but from comparative perception.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

Social Identity Theory emphasizes the role of group membership in shaping self-concept and self-esteem. Individuals derive part of their identity and self-worth from belonging to social groups. Positive evaluation of one's in-group enhances self-esteem, whereas negative comparisons with out-groups may undermine it.

In relation to body image, cultural or peer group norms influence standards of attractiveness. If an individual perceives themselves as failing to meet group standards, self-esteem may decline. Conversely, alignment with group norms may strengthen confidence and belongingness.

Theories of Body Image

Self-Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997)

Self-Objectification Theory posits that societal emphasis on physical appearance leads individuals particularly women to internalize an external observer's perspective of their bodies. Instead of experiencing their bodies as instruments of action and capability, individuals begin to view them as objects to be evaluated.

This internalized objectification results in chronic body surveillance, body shame, and anxiety. Continuous monitoring increases sensitivity to perceived flaws, intensifying vulnerability to social comparison. Over time, this pattern contributes to body dissatisfaction and diminished psychological well-being.

Sociocultural Theory (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999)

Sociocultural Theory highlights the influence of media, cultural norms, and societal standards on body image development. It argues that repeated exposure to idealized body representations promotes internalization of unrealistic standards.

Internalization is a critical mediator. Individuals who strongly internalize societal ideals are more likely to engage in upward comparison and experience dissatisfaction when they fail to meet those standards. This theory directly connects cultural messaging with personal self-evaluation processes.

Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson, Heinberg, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999)

The Tripartite Influence Model suggests that body image is mainly shaped by three important sociocultural influences: media, peers, and family. These influences affect individuals through two key psychological processes: social comparison and the internalization of appearance ideals. This framework is especially relevant to the current study because it highlights social comparison as an important mechanism through which sociocultural pressures can lead to body dissatisfaction and reduced self-esteem.

Dual Pathway Model (Stice, 2001)

The Dual Pathway Model explains the development of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating through two mechanisms:

1. Pressure to achieve thinness or muscularity
2. Negative emotional states resulting from perceived discrepancy

Both pathways are intensified by comparison processes. When individuals perceive a gap between their

bodies and societal ideals, negative emotions may drive maladaptive behaviors such as extreme dieting or compulsive exercise.

Cognitive-Behavioral Model of Body Image (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002)

This model emphasizes cognitive distortions and maladaptive beliefs about appearance. Individuals who engage in dichotomous thinking (“I am either attractive or unattractive”) or catastrophizing (“If I gain weight, no one will like me”) are more vulnerable to negative comparison outcomes.

Repeated upward comparisons reinforce dysfunctional beliefs, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of dissatisfaction and reduced self-esteem.

Theories of Self-Esteem

Sociometer Theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000)

Sociometer Theory conceptualizes self-esteem as an internal monitor of social acceptance. When individuals perceive inclusion and approval, self-esteem increases. When they perceive rejection or inadequacy, it decreases.

Appearance-based comparison can signal perceived social exclusion, particularly in cultures that emphasize attractiveness as a determinant of value. Thus, repeated unfavorable comparison may lower self-esteem by signaling potential social rejection.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

Self-Determination Theory proposes that psychological well-being depends on the fulfillment of three needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When self-esteem is contingent upon appearance-based validation, it becomes fragile and externally regulated rather than internally grounded.

Healthy self-esteem develops when individuals derive worth from intrinsic values rather than external comparisons.

Self-Concept Theory (Rosenberg, 1965)

Rosenberg conceptualized self-esteem as a global evaluation of self-worth. According to this theory, individuals integrate evaluations from various domains—including physical appearance into an overall self-concept.

Persistent dissatisfaction in one central domain, such as body image, can significantly influence global self-esteem.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957)

Cognitive Dissonance Theory suggests that psychological discomfort arises when beliefs and behaviors are inconsistent. For example, valuing body positivity while simultaneously engaging in harsh self-comparison creates internal tension.

To reduce dissonance, individuals may alter attitudes, behaviors, or self-perceptions. Unresolved dissonance may negatively impact self-esteem.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

Collectively, these theories illustrate that social comparison functions as a central psychological mechanism influencing body image and self-esteem. Sociocultural pressures create standards, comparison processes activate self-evaluation, cognitive distortions reinforce dissatisfaction, and self-esteem reflects the outcome of these evaluations.

The integration of these theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how and why social comparison influences body image perceptions and overall self-worth in contemporary society.

Hypothesis:

H1: There will be a significant positive correlation between engaging in social comparison and experiencing negative body image among young adults.

H2: Higher levels of engagement in social comparison will be associated with lower levels of self-esteem among young adults

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Fardouly et al. (2015) Phillipa Fardouly and her colleagues carried out an experimental study to investigate the short-term psychological impact of Facebook use on the body image of young women. In the study, participants were randomly placed into three groups where they were asked to browse either Facebook, a fashion-related website, or a neutral control website. The researchers assessed factors such as appearance-based social comparison, body dissatisfaction, and mood both before and after the browsing activity.

The results indicated that participants who used Facebook showed noticeably higher levels of appearance comparison and greater dissatisfaction with their bodies compared to those who viewed the neutral website. The researchers concluded that using Facebook tends to promote upward social comparison, which can negatively affect body image and temporarily reduce self-esteem. They further noted that visually oriented social media platforms frequently expose users to idealized images, creating continuous opportunities for comparison and increasing the risk of body dissatisfaction.

Tiggemann and Zaccardo (2015) Marika Tiggemann and Zali Y. Zaccardo examined the psychological impact of “fitspiration” images that are frequently shared on Instagram. In their experimental study, female participants were shown either fitspiration images or neutral travel-related images. After viewing the images, measures of body satisfaction, mood, and appearance-based social comparison were assessed. The findings indicated that participants who were exposed to fitspiration images experienced higher levels of body dissatisfaction and reported more negative mood states than those who viewed the neutral images. The study suggested that comparing oneself with highly toned and idealized bodies often leads to negative self-evaluations. The researchers also noted that even content intended to encourage health and fitness may unintentionally promote harmful comparison processes and lower self-esteem.

Meier and Gray (2015) Meier and Gray conducted a survey-based study among adolescent girls to explore the relationship between Facebook photo activity and body image concerns. They assessed frequency of photo sharing, photo viewing, appearance comparison tendencies, body satisfaction, and self-esteem. The results demonstrated that greater engagement in photo-related activities was strongly associated with increased appearance comparison. This comparison, in turn, predicted lower body satisfaction and reduced self-esteem. The study concluded that visual interaction on social media strengthens comparison processes, which significantly impact adolescents' psychological well-being.

Perloff (2016) Perloff conducted a comprehensive review examining how social media contributes to body image disturbances through social comparison mechanisms. The review synthesized experimental and correlational research and argued that social media differs from traditional media because it allows peer-based comparison rather than celebrity-only comparison. The findings across studies indicated that curated and edited images intensify upward comparisons, leading to dissatisfaction and lower self-worth. Perloff emphasized that adolescents are particularly vulnerable due to identity formation processes during this developmental stage.

de Vries et al. (2016) de Vries and colleagues conducted a longitudinal study among adolescents to

examine the direction of influence between social networking site use and self-esteem. Data were collected at multiple time points. The findings indicated that adolescents who frequently engaged in appearance comparison experienced a gradual decline in global self-esteem over time. The study highlighted that the effect was stronger among girls compared to boys. It concluded that repeated exposure to idealized peer images contributes to persistent self-evaluation and negative body image.

Holland and Tiggemann (2016) Grace Holland and Marika Tiggemann conducted a meta-analysis that reviewed numerous studies examining the relationship between social networking platforms and concerns related to body image. Their findings revealed a clear positive association between the use of social media and increased body dissatisfaction.

A key outcome of their analysis was that social comparison frequently functioned as a mediating factor. In other words, the negative effects were not caused directly by social media use itself, but rather by the tendency of individuals to compare their appearance with others while using these platforms. The study reinforced the theoretical view that social comparison plays a crucial role in shaping body image perceptions and influencing levels of self-esteem.

Vogel et al. (2016) Vogel and colleagues conducted experimental research to assess how upward and downward comparison on social networking sites affects self-esteem. Participants viewed profiles that were either superior (upward comparison) or inferior (downward comparison). Results showed that exposure to upward comparison profiles significantly reduced participants' self-esteem and self-evaluations. The study demonstrated that online environments amplify comparison opportunities and can negatively influence psychological well-being, especially among individuals with high comparison orientation.

Ferguson et al. (2017) Christopher J. Ferguson and his colleagues explored factors that may influence how social comparison affects body image, particularly focusing on variables such as existing self-esteem levels and emotional vulnerability. Using a survey-based approach with adolescent participants, the researchers observed that individuals who already had lower levels of self-esteem were more likely to develop negative body image perceptions after engaging in social comparison.

The findings suggested that personal characteristics and vulnerability factors play an important role in determining how strongly comparison processes impact psychological outcomes.

Butkowski et al. (2017) Butkowski and colleagues focused specifically on Instagram use and body dissatisfaction. Through quantitative surveys, they found that browsing appearance-focused content significantly increased upward comparison. Participants reported feeling inferior after comparing themselves to influencers and peers. The study concluded that image-centric platforms create unrealistic standards, negatively influencing body image and self-esteem.

Lee and Lee (2017) Lee and Lee investigated the role of social comparison orientation (SCO), which refers to an individual's tendency to compare themselves with others. Their findings showed that individuals high in SCO were more negatively affected by social media exposure. Specifically, high comparison orientation predicted greater body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem following upward comparison.

Stapleton et al. (2017) Stapleton and colleagues studied young women's Instagram use and its psychological consequences. They found that frequent Instagram engagement predicted higher body surveillance, meaning individuals constantly monitored their physical appearance. This increased monitoring led to greater dissatisfaction and lower self-worth.

Sherlock and Wagstaff (2018) This study examined the amount of time individuals spent on Instagram and how it influenced their self-esteem. The findings showed that spending more time on the platform was

linked to a greater tendency to engage in upward social comparison. As a result, participants reported lower levels of self-esteem along with increased dissatisfaction with their bodies, which refers to an individual's tendency to compare themselves with others. Their findings showed that individuals high in SCO were more negatively affected by social media exposure. Specifically, high comparison orientation predicted greater body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem following upward comparison.

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Rodgers et al. (2018) Rachel F. Rodgers and her colleagues investigated the relationship between media exposure and body dissatisfaction. Their study found that social comparison played a significant mediating role between exposure to idealized images and the development of negative perceptions about one's body. In other words, individuals who frequently compared themselves with these idealized images were more likely to experience body dissatisfaction.

Cohen et al. (2018) Cohen and colleagues experimentally exposed participants to idealized images. Results demonstrated that participants experienced reduced body appreciation and lower self-esteem after upward comparison, confirming the harmful impact of idealized portrayals.

Brown and Tiggemann (2018) Brown and Tiggemann examined the impact of celebrity and peer comparison on Instagram and their influence on body image and self-esteem. Using a survey method with young female Instagram users, they measured social comparison behaviors, body dissatisfaction, and global self-esteem. The findings revealed that both celebrity and peer comparisons significantly predicted body dissatisfaction. However, peer comparison had a stronger negative effect on self-esteem because peers are perceived as more relatable and similar. The study concluded that comparison with seemingly "ordinary" individuals can be more psychologically damaging than comparison with distant celebrities, as it creates pressure to achieve similar appearance standards.

Marengo et al. (2018) Marengo and colleagues investigated the role of social comparison orientation (SCO) in predicting body dissatisfaction among adolescents. Through a cross-sectional survey design, they assessed Instagram usage, comparison tendencies, and body image concerns. The results showed that adolescents high in comparison orientation were more vulnerable to body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem. The study emphasized that personality factors, particularly the tendency to compare oneself with others, play a significant role in explaining why some individuals are more negatively affected by social media exposure.

Hogue and Mills (2019) Hogue and Mills explored whether appearance-based social comparison mediates the relationship between social networking site use and body dissatisfaction. Using validated scales among young adult women, they found that social media use predicted body dissatisfaction primarily through comparison behaviors. When comparison was controlled, the direct effect of social media reduced significantly. The study highlighted that it is not mere usage but the comparison process that leads to negative self-evaluation and reduced self-esteem.

Fardouly and Vartanian (2019) Fardouly and Vartanian examined gender differences in appearance

comparison on social media. Their research showed that women were more likely to engage in upward comparison related to thinness ideals, while men were more likely to compare muscularity. Both types of upward comparison resulted in body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. The study concluded that although comparison processes operate similarly across genders, the specific body ideals differ.

Verduyn et al. (2020) Verdun and colleagues conducted a longitudinal study distinguishing between passive and active social media use. They found that passive browsing (scrolling without interaction) increased upward comparison and envy, which over time reduced self-esteem and body satisfaction. Active engagement did not show the same negative effect. The study suggested that the manner of social media use influences psychological outcomes, with passive comparison being particularly harmful.

Saiphoo and Vahedi (2020) Anastasia N. Saiphoo and Zahra Vahedi conducted a meta-analysis to explore the relationship between the use of social networking sites, body dissatisfaction, and self-esteem. After reviewing findings from several studies, they observed a consistent moderate association between social media use and negative body image.

Their analysis highlighted social comparison as a major mediating mechanism in this relationship. The results suggested that comparison-based processes play a significant role in explaining why increased social media use is often linked to declines in self-esteem across different groups of individuals.

Chae (2020) Chae investigated the relationship between Instagram use, appearance comparison, body shame, and self-esteem. Using survey methods among young women, the findings revealed that upward comparison significantly predicted body shame, which in turn lowered self-esteem. The study emphasized that emotional responses such as shame play a critical role in the negative psychological outcomes of social comparison.

Walker et al. (2021) Walker and colleagues examined influencer comparison and its effects on young adults. The results showed that frequent comparison with influencers significantly increased body dissatisfaction and reduced self-esteem. Participants often perceived influencer lifestyles as attainable, which intensified feelings of inadequacy when they could not match those standards.

Ryding and Kuss (2021) Ryding and Kuss studied problematic social media use and its relationship with body image disturbance. Their findings indicated that addictive patterns of social media use increased exposure to idealized images and strengthened comparison behaviors. This cycle contributed to lower self-esteem and greater body dissatisfaction.

Dane and Bhatia (2022) Dane and Bhatia investigated how social comparison acts as a mediating factor between social media addiction and psychological outcomes. Using quantitative research methods, their findings showed that individuals who frequently engaged in comparison were more likely to experience lower self-esteem when they used social media excessively. The study emphasized that addressing comparison-related behaviors could be an important focus in psychological interventions aimed at improving well-being.

Jarman et al. (2022) Jarman and colleagues differentiated between upward and downward comparison. Their findings showed that upward comparison strongly predicted body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem, while downward comparison provided only slight temporary improvements in self-perception. The study concluded that upward comparison has a more lasting psychological impact.

Lup et al. (2022) Lup and colleagues examined exposure to idealized Instagram models and self-esteem outcomes. They found that frequent exposure increased comparison behaviors and reduced self-esteem, particularly among individuals with high comparison orientation. The study emphasized that vulnerability factors intensify the harmful effects of comparison.

Kim and Chock (2023) Jihyun Kim and Tina M. Chock examined how social comparison orientation influences the relationship between social media exposure and body image. Their findings showed that individuals who have a stronger tendency to compare themselves with others experienced higher levels of body dissatisfaction after viewing idealized images. The study highlighted that individual differences play an important role in shaping psychological responses to social media content.

Vandenbosch et al. (2023) Vandenbosch and colleagues examined the internalization of beauty ideals as a mediator. Their findings indicated that individuals who strongly internalized societal appearance standards were more negatively affected by upward comparison. This internalization strengthened the link between comparison and reduced self-esteem.

Griffiths et al. (2024) Griffiths and colleagues conducted large-scale survey research including both men and women. The study found that appearance-based social comparison significantly predicted body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem across genders. The researchers highlighted that body image concerns are increasingly prevalent among men as well, particularly regarding muscularity and physical fitness standards.

Fulya Akbuga (2025) Fulya Akbuga carried out a quantitative study to explore the direct impact of social comparison on body image and self-esteem among young adults. By using standardized psychological assessment scales, the findings indicated that engaging in upward social comparison was a significant predictor of increased body dissatisfaction and lower overall self-esteem.

The study also revealed that the internalization of societal beauty ideals played a mediating role in this relationship. Based on these findings, the researcher suggested that intervention programs should focus on minimizing unhealthy comparison behaviors in order to enhance psychological well-being.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Aim:

Social Comparisons and its effects on body image and self-esteem.

Objectives:

To understand the role of social comparison processes in shaping individuals' perceptions of their own bodies and self-esteem.

To investigate the impact of upward and downward social comparisons on body image and self-esteem.

To explore how exposure to idealized media images influences social comparisons and subsequent body image and self-esteem outcomes.

To identify potential moderators and mediators of the relationship between social comparison and body image/self-esteem, such as gender, age, and cultural factors.

To develop strategies and interventions aimed at promoting positive body image and self-esteem by mitigating the negative effects of social comparison processes.

Hypothesis:

H1: There will be a significant positive correlation between engaging in social comparison and experiencing negative body image among young adults.

H2: Higher levels of engagement in social comparison will be associated with lower levels of self-esteem among young adults.

Sample Size

The sample consisted of 100 adult participants who met the inclusion criteria and completed all study measures. Participants were required to be at least 18 years of age, able to read English and have felt body

image issues , low self esteem or social comparisons when in social gathering

Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational research design to examine Social comparisons and its relationships between body image and self esteem among adults. All variables were measured once, using self-report scales administered through an online questionnaire, without any experimental manipulation.

Sampling Technique

A purposive convenience sampling strategy was used. The Google Form link was circulated via online platforms (social media and messaging applications. Eligible individuals who chose to participate completed the questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously. Participants were free to share the link further, introducing a snowball element, which is common in studies of technology use and digital behaviour.

3.7 Measures

All measures were administered online through a structured Google Form titled “*the relationship Among social comparisons, body image dissatisfaction, and self esteem in Young adults*”

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	84	42.8	42.0	42.0
	2	112	57.1	58.0	100.0
	Total	196	98.5	100	
Missing	System	0	0		

Inclusion Criteria

The following criteria were used to select participants for the study:

- Age Range (18–30 years):** Participants were required to fall within the age range of 18 to 30 years. This age group was selected as it represents young adulthood, a developmental stage characterized by identity formation, heightened social comparison, and increased body image concerns.
- Gender:** Both males and females were included in order to examine potential gender differences in social comparison, body image, and self-esteem.
- Informed Consent:** Participants were required to provide informed consent after being informed about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study.
- Physical Health:** Only individuals who were generally physically healthy were included to avoid confounding influences of medical conditions that could significantly affect body image or self-esteem.
- No History of Eating Disorders:** Individuals with a prior history of diagnosed eating disorders were excluded, as such conditions could substantially influence body image perceptions and self-esteem, thereby confounding the results.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded based on the following criteria:

- Age Outside the Specified Range:** Individuals below 18 years or above 30 years were excluded to maintain developmental consistency within the sample.
- Language Proficiency:** Participants lacking sufficient proficiency in the language of assessment were excluded to ensure accurate comprehension and responses.
- Severe Mental Health Conditions:** Individuals experiencing severe mental health issues (e.g., severe

depression, psychosis) that could impair comprehension or participation were excluded.

4. **Severe Physical Disabilities or Disfigurement:** Participants with significant physical conditions that might substantially alter body image experiences were excluded to focus on typical body image perceptions within the general young adult population.

Description of Tools

1. Social Comparison Scale (Allan & Gilbert, 1995)

The Social Comparison Scale was developed by Allan and Gilbert (1995) to assess individuals' perceptions of their social rank and relative standing in comparison to others. The scale consists of 11 bipolar semantic differential items rated on a 10-point scale.

Participants are asked to compare themselves globally to others using contrasting constructs such as:

Incompetent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 More Competent

The items assess perceived social rank, attractiveness, and social fit. Lower scores indicate feelings of inferiority and low perceived social status. The scale demonstrates strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .88 to .96 in clinical samples and .90 to .91 in student populations.

2. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a widely used 10-item self-report measure designed to assess global self-esteem. It evaluates overall feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance.

Factor analysis supports a largely unidimensional structure of the scale. Research using item response theory indicates that the items vary in discrimination strength, meaning they contribute differently to the measurement of self-esteem. The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties and is extensively validated across diverse populations.

Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-esteem, while lower scores reflect reduced self-worth and self-acceptance.

3. Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ)

The Body Shape Questionnaire (Cooper et al., 1986) is a self-report instrument designed to measure concerns about body shape and preoccupation with weight and physical appearance. Originally developed to assess body image disturbances associated with eating disorders, the BSQ evaluates dissatisfaction, fear of weight gain, and feelings of unattractiveness. It has demonstrated strong validity and reliability and is widely used in research examining body dissatisfaction.

Higher scores indicate greater body shape concerns and dissatisfaction.

Procedure

The present study employed a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between social comparison, body image, and self-esteem among young adults. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire created through Google Forms. The online mode of data collection was selected due to its accessibility, efficiency, and ability to reach a broader and diverse sample within the target age group. It also ensured convenience for participants, allowing them to complete the questionnaire at their own pace and preferred time.

Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaire was carefully designed and reviewed to ensure clarity, relevance, and ease of understanding. The survey consisted of four main sections:

1. **Demographic Information** – This section gathered basic background details such as age and gender. These variables were included to understand the sample characteristics and to examine potential differences in social comparison, body image, and self-esteem across demographic groups.
2. **Social Comparison Scale** – This standardized measure assessed the extent to which individuals

engage in social comparison, particularly in evaluating themselves in relation to others. The scale included items that measured tendencies toward upward and downward comparison.

3. **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** – This widely validated instrument was used to measure global self-esteem. It assessed participants' overall sense of self-worth and self-acceptance through a series of positively and negatively worded statements.
4. **Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ)** – This scale was administered to assess body image concerns, specifically focusing on body dissatisfaction, preoccupation with weight and shape, and emotional distress related to physical appearance.

The final set of questionnaire items was organized into a single survey using Google Forms, and a shareable survey link was created for distribution. This link was circulated through different social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Instagram, as well as other online networking channels in order to reach young adults within the targeted age group. Along with the link, a short explanation of the study was provided so that potential participants could understand the purpose and nature of the research.

Prior to starting the questionnaire, participants were shown an informed consent statement. This section clearly described the objectives of the study, emphasized that participation was voluntary, mentioned the approximate duration required to complete the survey, and explained the participant's right to discontinue participation at any time without facing any negative consequences. Only after confirming their consent were participants allowed to continue to the questionnaire.

Detailed instructions were provided at the beginning of each section of the survey. Participants were asked to read each statement carefully and provide responses based on their own experiences and feelings. They were encouraged to answer honestly and thoughtfully so that the data collected would accurately reflect their perspectives. The total time required to complete the survey was estimated to be around 10–15 minutes.

Throughout the research process, ethical standards were carefully followed. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by avoiding the collection of identifying information such as names, phone numbers, email addresses, or IP details. All responses were automatically saved in a secure database that was accessible only to the researcher. Additionally, the collected data were stored in password-protected files to safeguard them from unauthorized access.

To reduce potential response bias, participants were assured that there were no correct or incorrect answers and that their responses would be used strictly for academic purposes. They were also informed that the findings would be reported in aggregated form, meaning that individual responses would remain unidentifiable in any reports or publications.

After receiving an adequate number of responses, the collected data were carefully reviewed to ensure completeness and consistency. Any responses that were incomplete or showed inconsistencies were removed from the dataset to maintain the quality of the data. The remaining valid responses were then organized and prepared for statistical analysis to examine the relationships among social comparison, body image, and self-esteem.

Overall, the procedure was structured to maintain ethical responsibility, ensure methodological accuracy, promote participant comfort, and collect dependable data, thereby enhancing the credibility and validity of the research findings.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics. The following statistical techniques were applied for data analysis:

- Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize and describe the characteristics of the data.
- Correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships among social comparison, body image, and self-esteem.
- Correlation analysis was specifically used to test the hypotheses of the study and to identify the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables.

CHAPTER 4 RESULT

This section outlines the findings derived from the analysis of responses obtained from 195 participants. Descriptive statistical methods were used to summarize the data, including measures such as the mean and standard deviation, in order to identify general patterns within the sample. In addition, correlation analysis was carried out to explore the relationships between social comparison, body image, and self-esteem. The results offer important insights into the patterns, relationships, and overall distribution of scores across the variables examined in the study.

Table-2.1 Descriptive Statistics

N- 195	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
SC	12	111	73.96	20.169
SE	16	37	27.55	3.287
BI	34	190	88.64	43.970

The table summarizes the descriptive statistical characteristics of three variables Social Comparison (SC), Self-Esteem (SE), and Body Image (BI) based on responses obtained from 195 participants. For Social Comparison (SC), the scores range from a minimum value of 12 to a maximum value of 111, indicating a wide variation in responses among the participants. The mean score of 73.96 represents the average level of social comparison within the sample. The relatively high standard deviation ($SD = 20.169$) indicates substantial variability in participants' tendencies to engage in social comparison. This suggests that while some individuals reported relatively low levels of comparison, others demonstrated much higher levels, resulting in a broad distribution of scores.

In comparison, Self-Esteem (SE) displays a more limited range, with scores ranging from 16 to 37. The mean score of 27.55 reflects the average level of self-esteem among the participants. The smaller standard deviation ($SD = 3.287$) indicates that the scores are more concentrated around the mean, suggesting that participants generally showed similar levels of self-esteem with less variability across the sample.

Body Image (BI) demonstrates the widest range, with scores extending from 34 to 190. The mean score of 88.64 indicates the average body image perception within the group. Notably, the standard deviation is quite high ($SD = 43.970$), reflecting substantial variability in body image concerns among participants. This suggests that experiences related to body image differ considerably within the sample, with some individuals reporting minimal concerns and others indicating significantly higher levels of dissatisfaction. Overall, the descriptive statistics reveal that while self-esteem appears relatively stable across participants, social comparison and body image show greater variability, indicating diverse experiences within the sample.

Table 2.2 Correlation Table

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

N-195	Social Comparison
Body Image	-0.220**
Self Esteem	-0.242**

The table displays **Pearson’s correlation coefficients** analyzing the relationships among Social Comparison (SC), Body Image (BI), and Self-Esteem (SE). The results reveal a statistically significant negative relationship between Social Comparison and Body Image ($r = -0.220, p < .01$), as well as between Social Comparison and Self-Esteem ($r = -0.242, p < .01$). Since both correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed), the likelihood that these associations occurred by chance is minimal, indicating that the findings are statistically dependable. The negative correlation between Social Comparison and Body Image suggests that individuals who engage more frequently in social comparison tend to have less positive perceptions of their bodies. In other words, frequent comparison with others is linked with higher levels of body dissatisfaction. Similarly, the negative association between Social Comparison and Self-Esteem indicates that individuals who often compare themselves with others are more likely to report lower levels of self-esteem and reduced feelings of self-worth.

Based on these results, **Hypothesis 1**, which proposed a significant relationship between Social Comparison and Body Image, is supported. Likewise, **Hypothesis 2**, which proposed a significant relationship between Social Comparison and Self-Esteem, is also supported. These outcomes demonstrate that higher engagement in social comparison is associated with less favorable psychological outcomes. The findings also emphasize the complex relationship between social comparison processes and self-evaluative constructs. When individuals repeatedly assess themselves in relation to others—especially through upward comparisons—it may lead to feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and reduced confidence. Over time, such experiences may create a cycle where negative self-perceptions further encourage comparison behaviors.

From a broader perspective, these results carry both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to the understanding of social comparison as an important factor influencing body image dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of developing psychological interventions and awareness programs aimed at reducing unhealthy comparison habits, encouraging self-acceptance, and strengthening personal self-worth. Promoting internal standards of self-evaluation rather than constant reliance on external comparisons may support better psychological well-being.

Overall, the results indicate that social comparison plays a significant role in influencing body image perceptions and levels of self-esteem, underscoring its relevance in understanding the psychological well-being of young adults.

Independent Samples t-Test Table Table2.3

Variable Gender 1 Mean Gender 2 Mean t value p value Interpretation

Social Comparison	76.63	70.82	1.10	0.275	Not Significant
Self-Esteem	27.70	27.31	0.45	0.651	Not Significant
Body Image	82.67	93.74	-1.04	0.301	Not Significant

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Objective of the Study Was

The main aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between social comparison, body image, and self-esteem among young adults. The research focused on understanding how individuals' tendencies to compare themselves with others may affect the way they perceive their physical appearance and their overall sense of self-worth. In contemporary society, social comparison has become increasingly prominent, particularly due to the widespread use of social media platforms where individuals are frequently exposed to idealized portrayals of beauty, success, and lifestyle. Such exposure often encourages people to evaluate themselves in relation to others, which may influence their psychological well-being and self-perception.

Another objective of the study was to determine whether frequent involvement in social comparison behaviors is associated with negative perceptions of body image and lower levels of self-esteem among young adults. Body image is considered a complex psychological concept that includes individuals' thoughts, emotions, and attitudes about their physical appearance. Similarly, self-esteem reflects an individual's overall evaluation of their personal value and self-worth. The study therefore aimed to explore whether individuals who often compare themselves with others are more likely to experience body dissatisfaction and reduced confidence.

Additionally, the study aimed to generate empirical evidence regarding the psychological effects of social comparison within the context of modern socio-cultural environments. Young adulthood is an important developmental phase marked by identity development, increased social interactions, and heightened awareness of peer evaluation. Because of these characteristics, understanding the influence of social comparison during this stage becomes especially important. By examining these variables together, the research sought to contribute to existing psychological knowledge and offer deeper insight into how comparison processes may affect emotional well-being and self-perception among young adults.

Furthermore, the study also attempted to explore whether significant gender differences exist in social comparison, body image, and self-esteem among participants. This objective was included to assess whether males and females experience these psychological processes in different ways or whether similar patterns are observed across genders. Through this examination, the study aimed to enhance the understanding of social comparison dynamics and their impact on psychological outcomes.

The Hypotheses of the Study Were

Based on relevant theoretical frameworks and findings from previous studies, a set of hypotheses was developed for the present research. The first hypothesis suggested that a significant relationship would exist between social comparison and body image among young adults. More specifically, it was expected that individuals who engage in higher levels of social comparison would be more likely to experience negative perceptions of their body image. When people frequently compare their physical appearance with others—especially with those they view as more attractive or successful—they may begin to feel dissatisfied with their own appearance.

The second hypothesis proposed a significant association between social comparison and self-esteem. It

was anticipated that individuals who often participate in comparison behaviors would demonstrate lower levels of self-esteem. This assumption is based on the idea that repeatedly comparing oneself with others can draw attention to perceived personal weaknesses, which may gradually reduce confidence and overall self-worth.

The third hypothesis stated that body image would be positively related to self-esteem. This means that individuals who hold more positive perceptions of their physical appearance were expected to report higher levels of self-esteem. On the other hand, those who feel dissatisfied with their bodies were expected to show comparatively lower levels of self-esteem. This hypothesis highlights the strong psychological connection between how individuals perceive their bodies and how they evaluate themselves overall.

Finally, an additional hypothesis was developed to explore possible gender differences in the variables being studied. It was proposed that male and female participants might differ significantly in their levels of social comparison, body image perceptions, and self-esteem. This hypothesis was included to examine whether gender influences comparison behaviors and self-evaluative processes among young adults.

The Findings Suggested That

The results of the present study offered important insights into the associations between social comparison, body image, and self-esteem among young adults. The correlation analysis showed a statistically significant negative relationship between social comparison and body image. This suggests that individuals who frequently compare themselves with others are more likely to experience dissatisfaction with their physical appearance. When people repeatedly evaluate themselves against others particularly those they perceive as more attractive or successful they may develop less favorable perceptions of their own bodies.

The analysis also revealed a significant negative association between social comparison and self-esteem. This indicates that individuals who engage more often in comparison behaviors tend to report lower levels of self-esteem. Constantly evaluating oneself against others may draw attention to perceived personal shortcomings, which can negatively influence a person's self-concept and overall sense of worth. These findings highlight the potential psychological consequences of excessive comparison in contemporary social environments.

Furthermore, the study found that body image and self-esteem are closely connected. Participants who reported more positive attitudes toward their physical appearance also tended to show higher levels of self-esteem. In contrast, individuals who expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies were more likely to report lower feelings of self-worth. This result underscores the significant role that body image plays in influencing an individual's overall psychological well-being and self-evaluation.

The descriptive statistics also suggested that social comparison behaviors were relatively common among the participants, indicating that such tendencies are prevalent among young adults. This pattern may reflect the broader socio-cultural context in which individuals are frequently exposed to social expectations and peer evaluations, particularly through digital media and online platforms.

In addition, the results of the independent samples t-test indicated that there were no statistically significant gender differences in social comparison, body image, or self-esteem among the participants. Although slight variations in average scores were observed between male and female participants, these differences did not reach statistical significance. This finding implies that the psychological mechanisms related to social comparison and its influence on body image and self-esteem may function in similar ways for both genders within the present sample.

Overall, the findings emphasize the important role of social comparison in shaping individuals'

perceptions of their bodies and their general sense of self-worth. The results are consistent with existing psychological theories and previous research suggesting that frequent engagement in comparison processes can lead to negative self-evaluations and decreased psychological well-being.

Therefore, the study highlights the need to encourage healthier self-perceptions and to reduce the influence of unrealistic social standards in order to support the mental well-being of young adults.

Although the study offers important insights, it is necessary to recognize certain limitations in order to interpret the findings more accurately:

1. Cross-Sectional Research Design

The cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Although significant negative correlations were observed, it cannot be definitively established whether social comparison results in poorer body image and lower self-esteem, or whether individuals who already have low self-esteem are more likely to engage in frequent comparison behaviors. It is also possible that the relationship between these variables is reciprocal, meaning that each factor may influence the other over time.

2. Restricted Age Range

The sample consisted of individuals aged 18–30 years. Although this developmental stage is particularly relevant for identity formation, peer evaluation sensitivity, and heightened appearance concerns, the findings cannot be generalized to adolescents, middle-aged adults, or elderly populations. Adolescents, for instance, may demonstrate stronger emotional reactivity to comparison, while older adults may show more stabilized self-concepts.

3. Sampling Technique and Representativeness

The study utilized online convenience sampling. While practical and efficient, this method may limit representativeness across socioeconomic, educational, and cultural backgrounds.

Individuals with access to digital platforms and interest in psychological surveys may differ systematically from the general population.

4. Self-Report Measures

The use of self-report questionnaires may introduce certain biases, including social desirability bias, response distortion, recall bias, and differences in how participants interpret the questionnaire items. Participants might intentionally or unintentionally present themselves in a more favorable manner, particularly when responding to questions related to self-esteem.

5. Lack of Control Over External Variables

6. The study did not directly assess or control for several important confounding variables, such as:

- Social media usage frequency and platform type
- Personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, perfectionism)
- Gender differences in appearance-based comparison
- Cultural beauty standards
- Peer and family influences

These unmeasured variables may interact with social comparison processes and influence outcomes.

7. Single-Time Measurement

Assessing variables at only one time point fails to capture situational fluctuations. Body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem levels may vary depending on life events, academic stress, relationship experiences, or exposure to triggering stimuli.

8. Lack of Qualitative Depth

Although the study quantified relationships effectively, it did not explore participants' subjective experiences. The emotional nuances, contextual triggers, and internal cognitive dialogues associated with comparison behaviors remain unexplored.

Recognizing these limitations provides a roadmap for methodological strengthening in future research.

Implications of the Study

The findings carry significant implications across theoretical, clinical, educational, and societal domains. The findings of the present study on the relationship between social comparison, body image dissatisfaction, and self-esteem among young adults have several important theoretical, practical, and social implications. Understanding how these psychological variables interact can help researchers, educators, mental health professionals, and society develop strategies to promote healthier self-perceptions and psychological well-being among young individuals.

1. Implications for Mental Health Awareness

The results of the study highlight the negative association between social comparison and both body image and self-esteem. This suggests that frequent comparison with others, especially regarding physical appearance, may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction among young adults. These findings emphasize the importance of increasing awareness about the psychological impact of excessive comparison. Mental health professionals, counselors, and educators can use these insights to educate young people about the potential risks of constantly evaluating themselves against others and encourage healthier patterns of self-evaluation.

2. Implications for Counseling and Psychological Interventions

The study provides useful insights for counselors and psychologists who work with young adults experiencing low self-esteem or body image concerns. Therapeutic approaches can incorporate strategies that help individuals recognize and challenge unhealthy comparison habits. Interventions may focus on developing self-acceptance, strengthening self-worth beyond physical appearance, and promoting positive self-perception. Techniques such as cognitive restructuring, self-compassion training, and confidence-building exercises may help reduce body dissatisfaction and improve overall self-esteem.

3. Implications for Educational Institutions

Educational institutions play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes and self-perceptions. The findings of this study suggest that schools and universities should incorporate programs that promote body positivity, self-acceptance, and emotional well-being. Workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns can help students understand how social comparison affects mental health. Educational programs that focus on self-esteem development and media literacy can encourage young adults to critically evaluate unrealistic beauty standards and reduce the pressure to conform to idealized images.

4. Implications for Social Media and Digital Literacy

In contemporary society, social media platforms often intensify social comparison by exposing individuals to highly curated and idealized images of others. The results of the study highlight the need for greater digital literacy among young adults. Teaching individuals to interpret online content critically and understand that many images are edited or selectively presented can reduce the negative effects of online comparisons. Encouraging mindful and balanced use of social media may also help protect individuals from developing unrealistic expectations about appearance and success.

5. Implications for Promoting Positive Body Image

The study underscores the importance of promoting a positive and realistic perception of body image. Community programs, public campaigns, and educational initiatives can emphasize body diversity and acceptance rather than idealized standards of beauty. When young adults learn to appreciate their bodies for functionality and individuality rather than appearance alone, they may develop healthier attitudes toward themselves and experience higher levels of self-esteem.

6. Implications for Future Research

The findings of the study also provide a foundation for future research in this area. Researchers may further explore how different factors such as gender, cultural background, personality traits, and social media usage influence the relationship between social comparison, body image dissatisfaction, and self-esteem. Longitudinal studies could also examine how these variables change over time and whether interventions designed to reduce social comparison can effectively improve body image and self-esteem among young adults.

7. Implications for Personal Development Among Young Adults

At an individual level, the results of the study encourage young adults to develop greater self-awareness regarding their comparison behaviors. By recognizing the impact of constant comparison on emotional well-being, individuals may learn to focus more on personal growth, strengths, and achievements rather than external validation. Encouraging self-acceptance and self-compassion can help young adults build a stronger sense of identity and maintain healthier self-esteem.

Overall Contribution of the Study

The present study offers an important contribution to understanding the psychological links between social comparison, body image, and self-esteem among young adults. In modern society, individuals are frequently exposed to social judgments and idealized standards of appearance through media and online networking platforms. Because of this constant exposure, examining the psychological effects of social comparison has become increasingly significant. This research adds to existing psychological literature by empirically exploring how regularly comparing oneself with others can affect individuals' perceptions of their physical appearance as well as their overall sense of personal value.

A key contribution of this study is the identification of a significant negative association between social comparison and both body image and self-esteem. The findings indicate that individuals who frequently compare themselves with others are more likely to experience dissatisfaction with their physical appearance and lower levels of self-esteem. These results support theoretical perspectives such as the Social Comparison Theory, which suggests that people naturally evaluate themselves by comparing their abilities and characteristics with those of others. By providing empirical evidence consistent with these theoretical ideas, the study strengthens the understanding of how comparison processes influence psychological outcomes among young adults.

Another important aspect of the research is its focus on young adults as the primary population of interest. Young adulthood represents a crucial stage of development characterized by identity formation, self-reflection, and heightened sensitivity to social feedback. During this period, individuals often develop lasting views about their abilities, appearance, and overall self-worth. By investigating the relationship between social comparison, body image, and self-esteem within this particular age group, the study sheds light on the psychological difficulties that young adults may encounter in an increasingly interconnected and socially driven environment.

The research also provides descriptive insights into the presence of social comparison behaviors within the sample population. The relatively high average scores related to social comparison suggest that such behaviors are fairly common among participants and may even be normalized within current social settings. Constant exposure to others' achievements, appearance standards, and lifestyle portrayals—especially through digital platforms can intensify individuals' tendency to evaluate themselves in relation to others. By documenting these patterns, the study emphasizes the growing impact of sociocultural influences on personal self-perception and mental well-being. In addition, the study contributes to existing

knowledge by exploring possible gender differences in social comparison, body image, and self-esteem through the use of an independent samples t-test. The findings indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between male and female participants across these variables. This result suggests that the psychological effects associated with social comparison may function similarly for both genders within the sample. Such findings challenge the common belief that concerns related to body image and comparison behaviors are limited to one gender, indicating instead that both males and females may experience comparable pressures related to appearance and self-evaluation.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the study also carries practical implications. By highlighting the negative effects of excessive social comparison on body image and self-esteem, the research underscores the importance of encouraging positive self-perceptions, emotional resilience, and critical awareness of unrealistic societal standards. The findings may assist educators, psychologists, counselors, and mental health professionals in better understanding the psychological processes underlying body dissatisfaction and reduced self-esteem among young adults. These insights can help in developing preventive programs, counseling approaches, and awareness initiatives aimed at strengthening healthy self-concepts and supporting psychological well-being.

Overall, the study enhances the understanding of how social comparison influences key aspects of self-perception among young adults. By combining theoretical frameworks, empirical evidence, and contemporary social influences, the research provides meaningful insights into the role of comparison processes in shaping body image and self-esteem. These findings contribute to the broader field of psychology while also emphasizing the need for continued research and intervention efforts to address the psychological challenges associated with social comparison in modern society.

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