



When Comparison Doesn't Hurt: Social Comparison Orientation and Life Satisfaction Among Pakistani University Students

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Abstract

This study examined how social comparison orientation relates to life satisfaction in a digital era where people are constantly exposed to others' lives and achievements through social media. Using a quantitative design, data were collected from 308 respondents through an online survey built around the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). Contrary to the original prediction of a negative association, social comparison orientation was significantly and positively related to life satisfaction, $r = .40$, $p < .001$, and it emerged as a meaningful predictor in regression, explaining 16% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R^2 = .16$). The findings suggest that social comparison, when engaged in constructively, can act as a motivational process that supports well-being rather than eroding it. By showing how context-specific the effects of comparison can be in digital settings, the study adds a useful counterpoint to the prevailing view and offers practical pointers for healthier social media engagement and more positive comparison habits.

Keywords: Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) Scale, Youth, Social Media, Pakistan

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Introduction

Digital technology has emerged so fast shifting the perspective of the way people interact and communicate, as well as social realities. In the last ten years, social networks, like Instagram, Facebook, and Tik Tok, have become a part and parcel of human existence, particularly in young adulthood. Such sites enable the users to post their personal experiences, accomplishments, and lifestyle highlights to many people. Although these online environments have the potential of connectivity and self-disclosure, they also establish a platform where people are exposed in many ways to the lives, achievements, and Internet social standing of others. Such daily exposure to the edited online content of people tends to make people embrace social comparison (Margolis et al., 2019). Social media sites have an overall biased and idealistic view of life, and what people are likely to post positive experiences in their professional lives, vacation, sights, and other personal accomplishments. Consequently, they can make judgements on the comparison of their own conditions with the one of apparently more successful or satisfying lives of a person. Comparisons may be conscious or unconscious and may affect the ratings of self-worth and satisfaction along the way individuals rate their lives.

With the advent of digital technology, cases of social comparison have been rising. Persistent exposure to idealized depictions might result in unrealistic expectations and standards that impact negatively on the psychological well-being of people. Studies indicate that consistent upward social comparisons against one with people who are thought to be better off may elicit inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and instrumental unhappiness. Considering such dynamics, it becomes necessary to study the effect of social comparison behaviours on the ways in which people view their lives (Gerber et al., 2018). The knowledge of the connection between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction may be beneficial in the field of the psychological implications of digital media use and contribute to the broader discourse on subjective well-being in today's digital environment.

Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory attests to the fact that people gauge their own capacity, opinions and personal traits by comparing themselves to others. This theory is the view that individuals are predisposed to evaluate their performance and place in a social environment. If objective criteria or quantifiable metrics of assessment do not exist, people increasingly use comparisons of other personalities to make judgments on themselves (Suls & Wills, 2024). In the process, a person forms a sense of ideas concerning their skills, performances and personal values. The social comparison mainly takes place to achieve various psychological reasons. Self-evaluation is one of the reasons, and people compare themselves with other people to comprehend their abilities, attitude, or the level of performance. The other drive is the self-improvement where individuals compare themselves to those who are evaluated to be superior as a way of getting an inspiration or seeking a means of developing their capabilities and accomplishments. The third motivational factor is self-enhancement, which implies that one should compare themselves to other people who are considered less successful or less competent to retain or increase the positive self-conceptions.

Although the social comparison is a normal psychological phenomenon, people respond differently to the levels of social comparison. Such a tendency is called social comparison orientation, which describes the extent to which people have tendency to constantly compare themselves with others in daily contexts (Midgley et al., 2021). Certain people constantly practice comparison, and others do it not as frequently. Social Comparison Theory has become more pertinent in the realm of the contemporary digital setting. The social

media gives one continuous access to the lives, success, and living standards of others, therefore, making the risks of comparison more and beginning to affect how people view their own health and satisfaction with their lives.

Upward and Downward Social Comparison

Social comparison may be divided into two: upward social comparison and downward social comparison, both of which determine the way people present their self and their life situation. Such and such comparisons are significant in developing the perceptions, emotion, and psychological well-being of the people.

An upward social comparison takes place when people judge themselves against people who appear to be more successful, attractive, or well-off in some areas of life (Pera, 2018). Such a comparison is especially popular in the environment of social media networks, where customers are regularly subjected to images and articles that showcase the success, affluent spending, physical well-being, and personal success. Since social media contents are usually well-chosen and repeatedly depicted in favourable conceits, they tend to project idealistic ways of life. Due to this, people will realize that others live better lives than them. The frequent upward comparisons may have several adverse psychological outcomes, such as dissatisfaction, envy, and the worsening to the overall dissatisfaction with life. People can develop feelings of inadequacy or their concept of not conforming to the societal expectations.

Downward social comparison is having self-comparisons with people who are seen to be unsuccessful or less fortunate. Such comparison may be a self-defence psychological mechanism, which allows people to preserve or raise self-esteem. When people realize that other people can encounter even more problems or be in a more disadvantaged position, they might come up feeling even stronger about their situation. Downward comparison may therefore be an emotional alleviating process that supports positive self-concepts. Both types of comparisons are widespread, but usually, they have various psychological consequences. Upward comparisons can be shown to reduce well-being and downward comparisons can transiently sustain the self-esteem and emotional stability.

Social Comparison, Ego and Self-Esteem

Social comparison is one of the factors that influence the way people see themselves and test their personal skills, success, and social status. In cases where people often compare themselves with others, they may end up in comparisons that may affect their self-worth and competence. Specifically, a habitual interaction when performing upward social comparison in relation to other people who are perceived as more successful or well to do, could pose the threat of disturbing the ego and personal identity of a particular person. Comparisons of this kind can make people imagine that someone is underperforming or they are not living to some standards set by society or individual (Caliskan et al., 2024). Continuous comparison, which is always an upward one, may harm the level of self-esteem in an individual. Self-esteem is the general assessment people make towards themselves about their worthiness and abilities. As people always consider themselves lesser than others are, they can lose their confidence and self-esteem. Reduced self-esteem has been highly linked with poor psychological effects such as less happiness, more stress and less satisfaction with life.

Self-esteem is also an elaborate aspect in this respect as another facet of how social comparison orientation relates to life satisfaction. The people, who often indulge in social comparison process, may have an opportunity to lose self-esteem, which consequently can result in a decline in life satisfaction levels (Schmuck et al., 2019). Thus, by knowing the mediating effect of self-esteem, it can be concluded as to how comparison behaviour affects the general psychological well-being.

Measurement of Key Constructs

Psychological researches require the application of standardized measurement tools in assessing major constructs and help in maintaining uniformity in data gathering. In the current research, the social comparison orientation and life satisfaction are assessed according to the well-developed psychological scales which have been broadly implemented in past studies. The Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM), created by Gibbons and Buunk (1999) is used to measure social comparison orientation. INCOM scale has 11 questions aimed to determine the level of tendency of people to compare their skills, views, and results with other people. The scale defines personal differences in terms of comparison behavior and can also make a researcher know the frequency of people in their day-to-day lives to involve the process of social comparison.

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) is used to measure life satisfaction; this scale was introduced by Diener et al. (1985). The SWLS is made of five questions which measure the overall appraisal of a person on their life and their degree of subjective well-being. The scale does not deal with transitory moods, but places emphasis on overall satisfaction with life. Standardized psychological scales increase the validity and reliability of research findings. These instruments have been tested and proven valid in various research studies, demonstrating that they are capable of effectively measuring the intended constructs and producing results that are coherent across diverse populations and research environments.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. To investigate how the individual tendency to compare oneself with others impacts subjective well-being.
2. To determine the extent to which social comparison orientation predicts life satisfaction.

Research Hypothesis and Future-Research Propositions

H₁: Social comparison orientation is significantly and negatively related to life satisfaction.

Beyond H₁, three further relationships were considered at the design stage but could not be tested with the data ultimately collected. They are presented here as directions for future research rather than as tested hypotheses:

- (a) Upward versus downward comparison. Upward comparison (with others perceived as “better off”) may predict lower life satisfaction. The INCOM assesses general social comparison orientation and does not separate upward from downward comparison, so this proposition could not be tested in the present study; testing it would require an instrument that distinguishes the two directions.
- (b) Self-esteem as a mediator. Self-esteem may mediate the relationship between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction. A self-esteem measure was not included in the final survey instrument, so this pathway was not tested.
- (c) Social media usage as a moderator. The strength of the association between comparison orientation and life satisfaction may vary with the frequency of social media use. Usage groups were not analysed in the final dataset, so this moderation was not tested.

Literature Review

The study contains the critical review of the available literature relevant to the current research the goal of which is to provide the theoretical and empirical basis to discuss the relationship between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction in the digital era. It consolidates important ideas and precedent studies that connect to Social Comparison Theory, with emphasis on evaluating oneself in a comparison with others. The study also discusses the

phenomenon of social comparison orientation and its measurement and the very idea of life satisfaction as one of the main elements of the subjective well-being. Mediating role of self-esteem is considered in order to cognize about the psychological processes of such relations (Meier & Johnson, 2022). The role of social media is also discussed, as it increases the opportunities for making comparisons in modern contexts. This review provides context for the research problem and justification for the need for the current study. The next section describes the theoretical framework on which this study is based.

Theoretical Framework: Social Comparison Theory

The Theory of Social Comparison proposed by Festinger (1954) helps to obtain the theoretic building blocks of the attitudes toward personal capabilities, views, and perceptions of the intrinsic self-value. This theory dictates that people are endowed with something of a self-assessment drive that causes them to assess themselves in comparison to others, especially in cases where there is no objective standard. By making these comparisons, people are trying to minimize uncertainty and have a more certain idea of their social status. There are two main forms of comparison identified in the theory. Upward comparison is a comparison of a person with others who seem to have better qualities in some aspects, which can often result in feelings of inadequacy, envy, and poorer well-being. By contrast, downward comparison, which involves comparing oneself to those considered to be less well-off, may lead to positive effects on self-esteem and offer psychological relief.

With the advent of the virtual world, particularly the proliferation of social internet platforms, there are vast possibilities when it comes to engaging in social comparison. Users are constantly subjected to filtered and romanticized versions of the aspects of the lives of other people, which enhances the occurrence and strength of upward comparisons (Malvaso & Kang, 2022). Such change is likely to render social comparison much pervasive and psychologically dominant compared to conventional settings. In this respect, this theory forms the immediate basis of the current research, in which social comparison orientation can have a detrimental effect on life satisfaction, especially in the digitally mediated space (Powdthavee, 2024).

Social Comparison Orientation (INCOM)

The social comparison orientation (SCO) is the degree of desire that people have towards comparing themselves with others in real life. Although social comparison is a universal process of cognition, various people vary comprehensively on how often and how strongly they make these comparisons. There are people with the high propensity to compare their skills, views, and performance with those of others, and there are people with the lower propensity to such evaluative action (Liu et al., 2021). To quantify these differences of individuals, Gibbons and Buunk (1999) constructed the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) which is a very common and well-established scale comprising of 11 items. This tool is used to measure the extent to which people engage in social comparison across different contexts. High-social comparison orientation people are more vulnerable to social information and tend to draw comparisons to others especially on the areas concerning success, appearance and social status. Conversely, people who have low SCO would be more inclined to use inner criteria to assess themselves.

Empirical evidence suggests that this has much more negative emotional consequences and indicators of envy, dissatisfaction, and anxiety are typical of high SCO (Eitan & Gazit, 2023). Such emotional outcomes especially manifest in social media settings where one has a lot of comparison opportunity. Thus, it can be suggested that people with high SCO are more

susceptible to lower life satisfaction, and it is important to study this construct as applied to well-being.

Life Satisfaction and Subjective Well-Being

A life satisfaction is one of the key aspects of subjective well-being and can be defined as a general mental assessment of the quality of life of a person regarding self-established standards. The concept of life satisfaction, unlike emotional well-being, is more stable and conscientious about one's life situation, given that it concerns the momentary feelings (Murari et al., 2024). In the measurement of this construct, Diener et al (1985) invented the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), which is a well-validated five-item scale that was used to examine the global life judgments of individuals.

The factors that contribute to life satisfaction include a variety of psychological and environmental factors, with the social comparison and social media exposure to these factors having received considerable attention in the last few years. People constantly compare their lives with others and these comparisons are exaggerated in the online world. Social media sites offer one constant access to filtered and idealized images of the work done and lifestyle of others that can shape the view of reality. Strong empirical evidence has uniformly shown that the greater the degree of social comparison, and especially upward social comparison, the lesser the level of life satisfaction (Rüther et al., 2023). These results provide an idea that after multiple observation of positive imagery of the others, dissatisfaction and negative self-perceptions might occur. Thus, it is imperative to study the connection between social comparison and life satisfaction, which will also be discussed in the next section.

Relationship Between Social Comparison and Life Satisfaction

There is a substantial amount of literature indicating a considerable connection between social comparison and life satisfaction in that, the propensity of people to engage in social comparisons with others can directly impact their general well-being. Specifically, the constant social comparison has been linked to lower frameworks of life satisfaction since people have been observed to assess their conditions in relation to presumed criteria others have established. This correlation is particularly strong in the framework of upward comparison, in which people compare themselves to those that they see as more successful, attractive, or accomplished (Singh & Tripathi, 2024). On the negative side, upward social comparison has largely an adverse psychological effect of inadequacy, envy and low self-worth that all result in a lower life satisfaction. With the advent of social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, this has only been further augmented by giving individuals 24/7 access to highly filtered and untouchable versions of other people's lives. Empirical research has indicated that dependent on higher use of social media is greater upward comparison and, therefore, lower satisfaction in life.

The causative agent is worthy of explication in response to exposure to idealized images and highlight reel, which provide unrealistic ideals of achievement and fulfilment. They are also something people can internalize and think badly of themselves and dislike their own lives. Nevertheless, according to several studies there were mixed results, which implied that effects of social comparison could differ according to individual differences and context only. Although there are these differences, the general evidence supports examining a negative association between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction (H_1); the more specific possibility that upward comparison predicts lower life satisfaction is taken up later as a future-research proposition. The next section discusses this mediation of self-esteem in this relation.

Mediating Role of Self-Esteem and Social Media Usage

Self esteem describes how one values himself/herself regarding its worth and value, the extent to which one harbours healthy/unhealthy feelings towards himself/herself. It is extremely important in determining psychological state and has been substantially acknowledged as primary life satisfaction predictor. The processes of social comparison i.e. upward comparisons may have a significant impact on self-esteem in that it motivates the person to compare themselves with those they think are better than them. Comparisons of these sorts tend to lead to negative self-image hence reduce self-esteem.

Self esteem may be viewed as an intermediary role as relied on the pathway involving the role of social comparison orientation in effecting a life satisfaction as mediated through self-esteem. People who take part in comparison so often tend to develop lower self-worth, which further adds up to decreased level of life satisfaction. This points out the significance of the consideration of self-esteem as the psychological process that can be related to the comparison behavior and the well-being consequences (Sepas et al., 2024). It is heightened by the frequency of which social media is used. More access to social media sites comes with more comparative opportunities which intensifies the adverse effects of social media. People spending more time on social media are prone to engage more in upward comparisons and this evidence is consistent with the possibility, examined here only as a future-research proposition, that the frequency of social media use is associated with comparison orientation. Although there are existing studies, the gap in investigating this mediating relationship in the cultural conditions exists, which explains why the present study is justified.

Research Gap

Although there are increased amounts of literature regarding the topic of social comparison and life satisfaction, there are still some gaps that are noteworthy. First, most of the available research papers have been done in the Western setting with minimal research undertaken on developing economies like Pakistan, especially among the young adults who are extremely active on social media. Second, although the direct association between social comparison and well-being has already been studied, limited studies have examined this relationship in detail by investigating how self-esteem plays a mediating role in the relationship (Liu et al., 2024). The interactive impact of social media use and comparison orientation has also been underexamined. The given research addressed these gaps by offering context-specific empirical evidence.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The given research takes the form of a quantitative research design to explore the correlation between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction during the epoch of the digital age. Quantitative research is commonly applied to psychological and social science research due to its ability to gather numerical information and analyze the relationship between the variables by the means of statistical analysis. The method is especially suitable in the present study because it focuses on testing definite hypotheses and the ability to measure psychological constructs using standardized scales (Espejo et al., 2022). The research has a cross-sectional survey design, with the data gathered at one time on the participants. Cross-sectional studies are normally employed in studying patterns, relationships, and associations among variables in a certain population. The cross-sectional design is suitable in the current study since the researcher aimed to test the relationship between tendencies to make comparisons with others and the levels of life satisfaction reported by individuals within the same period. An online

survey is also useful in terms of gathering data concerning a relatively large proportion of the users of the social media.

The present study requires a quantitative approach because it allows constructs to be measured and tested objectively and statistically. Psychological constructs such as social comparison orientation and life satisfaction can be measured using validated measurement scales. By converting participants' responses into numerical data, the researcher was able to use statistical methods to analyze the associations between the variables and determine whether the proposed hypotheses were supported by the data. Social comparison orientation was treated as the independent variable in this study because it represents the factor expected to influence the psychological outcome of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The dependent variable was the level of life satisfaction, which reflects individuals' general sense of how good or bad they feel about the quality of their lives.

The research used statistical tests to address the hypotheses presented. Correlation analysis and regression analysis were carried out to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction. These analytic procedures enabled the researcher to examine the theoretical relationships put forward in the study.

Participants and Sampling Design

Target Population

The intended population of the current research was people who were avid users of social media. Social media has emerged as a vital element of the communication and social interaction process with each day, especially commonly among the young adults in the digital era. On Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, and Twitter, users can see the lifestyle, success, and experience of others at any given time (Emerson et al., 2017). This exposure enhances the chances of social comparison behaviours therefore social media users are the right population to study the relationship between the social comparison orientation and the level of life satisfaction. The most active group of social media users is the young adults and the university students and this is the main focus of the study. It has been demonstrated that young adults find themselves spending a significant amount of time on social networking sites and they are more also prone to online comparison behaviours. In this way, the choice of the population enabled the research to address its relevant topic of peer exposure to digital environments by investigating the impact of such environments on life satisfaction as a psychological outcome.

Sampling Method

The research utilized a non-probability convenience sampling method to sample the participants. The convenience sampling method includes the choice of participants that are accessible and ready to take part in the study (Field, 2024). This approach is typical when the studies are based on a survey, and the data is being collected through the internet. The latter research can be conducted by convenience sampling due to several reasons. To begin with, it enables the researcher to effectively collect data of a great number of respondents under a confined period of time. Second, as the research was based on an online survey, it is convenient to use the participants who are easily accessible in social networks and university community. In psychological studies, convenience sampling is common when the main focus is to find out the relationship between variables as opposed to making generalizations about a particular population.

Sample Size

The researchers sought to gather responses from at least 300 persons. The sample size is significant in a quantitative study since it improves the statistical power and reliability of the

outcomes (Buunk et al., 2019). Statistical analyses are able to discriminate relationships between variables more precisely with more participants, and additionally eliminate chances of random errors. A sample of 300 participants was considered adequate to apply statistical methods such as correlation and regression analysis, which were used to test the hypotheses formulated in the research.

Inclusion Criteria

Specific inclusion criteria have been set on the participants to make sure that the collected data are relevant to the research objectives. The sample should be composed of individuals who are frequent social media users because the research is aimed at analyzing the process of comparison that takes place in the online realities. Second, the subjects should have reached 18 years of age and above, meaning that all respondents have reached adulthood and were able to provide informed consent. Pro-voluntary participation is also a strength of the study, as this segment of the participant willingly and clearly agrees to fill out the questionnaire (Black & Babin, 2019). The criteria are useful in ensuring that the sample is suitable in analyzing the relationship between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction.

Data Collection Platform

The data for this study were gathered using an online questionnaire by use of Google Forms. The popularity of online surveys in modern research is due to the possibility to contact a big population of the participants and survey them in a rather short amount of time. The questionnaire link was disseminated via distribution channels, such as social media platforms, email correspondence, and student networks (Denis, 2021). By doing so, the researcher gained access to a varied sample of study participants who consistently use online platforms. Conducting an online survey provided convenience to participants, as they could complete the questionnaire at their own time and pace, which likely increased the response rate.

Measurement Instruments and Data Collection Procedure

Social Comparison Orientation

In this case, social comparison orientation was measured using the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM), developed by Gibbons and Buunk (1999). INCOM scale has been extensively applied in the field of psychology to measure the degree at which individuals are prone to comparing their opinions, skills, and accomplishments with those of other individuals. The scale has 11 items designed to measure individual variations in social comparison propensity. Respondents' replies indicated the frequency of the instances in which they compared themselves with others in normal life. An increase in the score on the scale denotes the greater the social comparison orientation. INCOM scale has proven to be highly reliable and valid in the past and was a suitable instrument to understand comparison behaviors in relation to the current study.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction was measured using the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) provided by Diener et al. (1985). SWLS is a popular tool which is utilized to assess the overall judgment of the individuals regarding their life and subjective well-being. It has five items which deal with the level of satisfaction that people have with their entire life. Participants responded to the statements indicating their level of agreement with their overall conditions and accomplishments in life. SWLS focuses on individuals' global satisfaction with life rather than momentary moods. Because of its high psychometric qualities and wide application in study of life satisfaction, the SWLS is deemed to be a valid and reliable instrument in measurement of satisfaction of life among various groups of people.

Note on Self-Esteem as a Proposed Mediator

Self-esteem was originally proposed as a mediating variable in the conceptual model for this study (see the Research Hypothesis and Future-Research Propositions section). However, a self-esteem scale was not included in the final survey instrument administered to participants, and self-esteem data were therefore not collected or analyzed in the present study. This represents a deviation from the original research design and is addressed further in the Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research sections.

Demographic Information

Along with the main measurement scales, the questionnaire included a section to gather demographic information from the respondents. This was intended to give context to the study and to allow the researcher to examine possible trends across different participant subgroups. Participants were asked to share information about their age and gender, along with information about their social media use (Arbale & Mutisya, 2024). Respondents indicated the social media platform they used most often and how frequently they used social media. This is significant because populations with greater exposure to social media may differ in how social comparison behaviors are adopted.

Data Collection Procedure

This study used an online questionnaire to collect data, which participants completed on a voluntary basis (Pallant, 2020). The questionnaire was distributed in an online format, allowing respondents to access and complete it at their own schedule. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose and objectives of the study before completing the questionnaire. Data collection involved anonymous responses, and no personally identifying information was requested from participants, in order to address ethical concerns.

Data Analysis Plan

The same statistics were used to analyze the collected data and test the hypotheses. First, the researcher summarized the characteristics of the participants and the general pattern of responses using descriptive statistics. Correlation analysis was then performed to examine the relationship between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction. Regression analysis was used to test whether social comparison orientation significantly predicted life satisfaction. Together, these analyses provided a comprehensive picture of how the key variables in the study relate to one another.

Results and Discussion

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 summarises the demographic profile of the sample ($N = 308$). Respondents were approximately balanced by gender (51.6% male, 47.7% female) and predominantly young: 63.3% were aged 18–22 years and 79.9% were 27 years or younger. Most participants had completed a Bachelor's degree (45.8%), with a further 43.5% holding a Master's degree or higher. The majority lived in urban areas (71.8%), and daily smartphone use was concentrated in the 1–6 hour range (73.7%).

Table 1: *Sample Demographic Characteristics ($N = 308$)*

Variable	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	159	51.6
	Female	147	47.7
	Prefer not to say	2	0.6
Age (years)	18–22	195	63.3
	23–27	51	16.6



Education	28-32	8	2.6
	33-37	10	3.2
	38-42	23	7.5
	43+	21	6.8
	Intermediate	33	10.7
	Bachelor	141	45.8
	Master	66	21.4
	MPhil	53	17.2
	PhD	15	4.9
Residence	Rural	30	9.7
	Semi-urban	57	18.5
	Urban	221	71.8
Daily smartphone use	Less than 1 hour	17	5.5
	1-3 hours	108	35.1
	4-6 hours	119	38.6
	7-9 hours	45	14.6
	More than 9 hours	19	6.2

Note. $N = 308$. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Reliability

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha computed across the items within each scale. In their original validation studies, the INCOM demonstrated good internal consistency, with alpha values ranging from .78 to .85 across multiple samples (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), and the SWLS demonstrated high internal consistency, with an alpha of .87 (Diener et al., 1985). In the present sample, item-level analysis indicated acceptable reliability for both measures: the 11-item INCOM yielded $\alpha = .81$ and the 5-item SWLS yielded $\alpha = .70$, both meeting or approaching the conventional .70 threshold for acceptable measurement (Kline, 2023). These coefficients support the internal consistency of the two scales in this sample.

Descriptives

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Social Comparison Orientation and Life Satisfaction

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Social Comparison Orientation (INCOM)	34.89	8.52	11	55
Satisfaction with Life (SWLS)	21.08	6.41	5	35

Note. $N = 308$.

The descriptive statistics provide an overview of the central tendency and variability of the study variables. For social comparison orientation (incom_total), the mean score is 34.88 with a standard deviation of 8.52, indicating a moderate level of comparison tendency among respondents with some variability in responses. The scores range from 11 to 55, showing a wide spread of participant experiences. For life satisfaction (swls_total), the mean is 21.08 with a standard deviation of 6.41, suggesting an average level of life satisfaction with moderate dispersion. The minimum and maximum values (5 to 35) reflect variability in perceived well-being. Overall, both variables show reasonable distribution across the sample of 308 respondents, supporting further statistical analysis.

Correlations

Table 3: *Pearson Correlation between Social Comparison Orientation and Life Satisfaction*

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Social Comparison Orientation	34.89	8.52	—	
2. Life Satisfaction	21.08	6.41	.40***	—

Note. $N = 308$. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

The correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social comparison orientation (incom_total) and life satisfaction (swls_total). The results reveal a moderate positive correlation ($r = .40$) between the two variables, which is statistically significant ($p < .001$). This indicates that there is a meaningful relationship between social comparison tendencies and life satisfaction among the respondents. Specifically, as social comparison orientation increases, life satisfaction also tends to increase. The strength of the correlation suggests a moderate association, implying that while the variables are related, other factors may also influence life satisfaction. The significance level confirms that the relationship is not due to chance. This finding contradicts the proposed hypothesis (H_1), which expected a negative relationship, and therefore, H_1 is not supported in this study.

Regression

Table 4: *Model Summary of Regression Analysis*

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE of estimate
.40	.16	.16	5.88

Note. Predictor: Social Comparison Orientation (INCOM).

Table 5: *ANOVA Results for Regression Model*

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Regression	2018.19	1	2018.19	58.31	< .001
Residual	10591.61	306	34.61		
Total	12609.81	307			

Note. Dependent variable: Life Satisfaction (SWLS).

Table 6: *Regression Coefficients for Predicting Life Satisfaction*

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	10.59	1.41	—	7.49	< .001	[7.81, 13.37]
Social Comparison Orientation	0.30	0.04	.40	7.64	< .001	[0.22, 0.38]

Note. Dependent variable: Life Satisfaction (SWLS). CI = confidence interval.

The regression analysis was conducted to examine whether social comparison orientation predicts life satisfaction. The model is statistically significant, as indicated by the ANOVA results ($F(1, 306) = 58.31, p < .001$), showing that the predictor meaningfully explains variation in life satisfaction. The model summary reveals an R^2 value of .16, indicating that approximately 16% of the variance in life satisfaction is explained by social comparison orientation. This suggests a moderate explanatory power, while also implying that other factors contribute to life satisfaction. The coefficients table shows that social comparison orientation has a positive and significant effect on life satisfaction ($\beta = .40, B = 0.30, t(306) = 7.64, p < .001$). This means that an increase in comparison orientation is associated with an increase in life satisfaction scores. The results indicate a significant predictive relationship; however, the positive direction contradicts the proposed hypothesis (H_1), and therefore, H_1 is not supported.

Discussion

The current research was focused on testing the connection between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction during the digital era and especially the role of the predisposition to compare with the others and its impact on the subjective well-being of people (Suls & Wills, 2024). The results clarify this relationship and give both theoretical and practical implications. Correlation analysis and regression analysis findings have shown that there exists a moderate positive correlation between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction ($r = .40, p < .001$), and the regression results further confirmed that social comparison orientation significantly predicts life satisfaction ($\beta = .40, p < .001$). These results indicate that people who engage more in social comparison are more likely to report greater levels of life satisfaction. This finding is opposite in direction to the first hypothesis (H_1), which proposed a negative relationship between these variables. The null hypothesis of no relationship is rejected; however, the direction of the relationship is opposite to that proposed by H_1 , and H_1 itself is therefore not supported.

The change of social comparison on the online platform is one potential reason behind this unexpected discovery (Lee, 2022). Although the conventional theories tend to relate social comparison specifically, in terms of upward comparison with negative emotional implications, recent theories indicate that comparison could also be a motivational and self-enhancing process. People can employ the power of comparison as a self-improvement, inspiration and goal-setting tool. Regarding the social media, when people can see what other people have, and the way they lead their life, it may push others to improve themselves, making their lives more meaningful and satisfactory. Perhaps, the respondents in the study involved in constructive or balanced comparison, and did not involve in upward or harmful comparison. Such comparison can be used to help people judge their progress and strengthen their personal success as well as keep the realistic point of view on their life situation. Social comparison need not always dissatisfy, but in effect could benefit the general well-being when well managed.

The descriptive statistics further support these findings, showing moderate levels of both social comparison orientation ($M = 34.88$) and life satisfaction ($M = 21.08$) among the participants. This indicates that the sample represents individuals with varying tendencies of comparison and well-being, allowing for meaningful analysis (Han, 2022). The relatively wide range of scores also suggests diversity in experiences, which strengthens the generalizability of the findings within the studied population. The regression model explained approximately 16% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R^2 = .16$), which means that although social comparison is a strong predictor, other psychological and contextual variables also contribute to life satisfaction. Despite the fact that the study is informative, there are some drawbacks that need to be mentioned. Self-reported data can lead to bias in the response, and the cross-sectional design does not allow us to determine causal relationships (Kjell & Diener, 2021). The borderline reliability of the life-satisfaction measure ($\alpha = .70$) suggests that future research could use longer or refined scales to further strengthen internal consistency. The results contradict the classical hypothesis that social comparison is destructive to well-being. Rather, they point to the complex and situational nature of social comparison in the digital era. The research adds to the existing body of literature by showing that social comparison may have a positive association with life satisfaction when people engage with it constructively (Rüther et al., 2023). To understand this relationship better, future studies should consider mediating and moderating factors such as self-esteem and social media usage habits.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined how individuals' tendency to compare themselves with others relates to their subjective well-being, with social comparison orientation as the independent variable and life satisfaction as the dependent variable. The following sections summarize the major findings in relation to existing literature, outline the theoretical and practical implications, and discuss the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

The descriptive statistics revealed moderate levels of both social comparison orientation ($M = 34.88$) and life satisfaction ($M = 21.08$) among the respondents, with considerable variability suggesting diverse experiences across individuals. Both scales showed acceptable internal consistency in this sample (INCOM $\alpha = .81$; SWLS $\alpha = .70$), consistent with the good reliability reported in their original validation studies (Diener et al., 1985; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). The correlation analysis demonstrated a significant positive relationship between social comparison orientation and life satisfaction ($r = .40, p < .001$), indicating that individuals with higher comparison tendencies tended to report higher levels of life satisfaction.

The regression analysis further confirmed that social comparison orientation is a significant predictor of life satisfaction ($\beta = .40, p < .001$), explaining approximately 16% of the variance ($R^2 = .16$). Although other factors clearly also influence life satisfaction, the direction of this relationship was unexpected: H₁, which predicted a negative relationship, was not supported, as the relationship was found to be positive rather than negative. These findings challenge conventional assumptions and highlight the ambiguous, context-dependent nature of social comparison in the digital era.

These results offer an interesting contrast with prior work on social comparison and well-being. Whereas social comparison theory and much of the existing literature emphasize its negative consequences, particularly on social media, the present findings suggest that social comparison orientation can be positively associated with life satisfaction. This may reflect a motivational function of comparison: individuals can use comparison information to set goals, gauge their own progress, and work toward self-improvement, through both upward comparison (which can raise aspiration) and downward comparison (which can foster contentment). The balance between these forms of comparison, along with individual differences such as self-esteem and coping style, likely shapes whether comparison has a positive or negative effect. These findings contribute to a more balanced view of social comparison as a process that can be either adaptive or maladaptive depending on context and individual disposition.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study are relevant to the current literature since they dispute the traditional belief that social comparison is mostly detrimental to the well-being. Rather the findings indicate that social comparison orientation does have potential positive relationship with life satisfaction and thus represents a further development in extending social comparison theory in the digital age. The given study notes the necessity to redefine the current theoretical frameworks and to take into consideration the duality in comparison processes, both positive and negative sides. It also highlights the need to view the consequences of social comparison in the contextual and psychological terms, which include motivation and perception.

In a practical sense, the findings are useful to different stakeholders. To the social media users, the research proposes that even the act of comparison is useful when taken positively. Comparison is the motivation that users can use instead of an emotion that will make them dissatisfied. To psychologists and mental health professionals, the findings imply

that interventions are required to encourage healthy comparative methods, as well as, to improve coping styles of individuals. Instructors are no exception as they can contribute to spreading awareness of the impact of social comparison among students and promoting critical thinking about the content found online. It highlights that in case social comparison is handled properly, it can also be of positive effect on individual well-being.

Limitations of the Study

Regardless of its input, this research has various limitations that ought to be noted. First, the study was cross-sectional, which restricts the possibilities to develop the causal relationships among variables. Although the results show the presence of significant association, one cannot say that social comparison orientation is a direct cause that triggers changes in life satisfaction. Second, self-reported measures were used to collect the data, and this could be vulnerable to response bias. The respondents might have given socially desirable answers and might not have represented their real attitudes and behaviors. Third, the sample was narrowed down to the population that might influence the extrapolations concerning other groups of people or cultural settings. Also, the research had restricted variables and it did not contribute to other significant variables like self-esteem, anxiety, or personality factors, which might determine the relationship between social comparison and life satisfaction.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research to come should consider the shortcomings of the present research to offer a deeper insight on the connection between the social comparison and life fulfilment. It is desirable that researchers add other variables like self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and emotional regulation to investigate possible mediating and moderating variables. The longitudinal studies are necessary to investigate the changes during the period and prove that the variables are causally correlated. To improve the generalizability of the findings, the sample size should be increased and people with different cultural backgrounds should have been included. It is also possible to look at different forms of social comparison in future research including upward and downward comparison more closely so that their unique implications on well-being can be understood.

Practical Recommendations

According to the results, it is advisable that people should take a moderated form in the processes of social comparison, especially when using social media. Comparison should be brought up as a way of self-improvement instead of negative feelings, which should be opposed to the user. Social media awareness campaigns can be created to inform people about the possible impact of social comparison and use digital media productively. There are cognitive restructuring and self-reflection techniques that should be employed by mental health professionals as a way of enabling them to deal with comparison behaviors in individuals. Educational institutions might also contribute to the same by incorporating digital literacy courses that will cater to the psychological effect of social media.

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