

Social Media Use Integration, Comparative Self-Evaluation, and Social Loneliness Among Teenagers in Kuwait

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Abstract: *This study examined relationships among social media use integration, comparative self-evaluation, and social loneliness among teenagers aged 13–19 years living in Kuwait. A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was used. A convenience sample of 120 participants completed an online questionnaire containing the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS), Social Comparison Scale (SCS), and five-item social-loneliness subscale of the De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale. Analyses included descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson and Spearman correlations, and unadjusted simple linear regression. Greater social media use integration was associated with more favorable comparative self-evaluation ($r = .382, p < .001$) and greater social loneliness ($r = .208, p = .023$). Comparative self-evaluation was not significantly associated with social loneliness ($r = .034, p = .713$). Spearman correlations supported the same significance pattern. Social media use integration explained 14.6% of variation in comparative self-evaluation and 4.3% in social loneliness. The findings indicate that favorable self-evaluation and perceived social disconnection can coexist with greater social media integration. Convenience sampling, self-report, unadjusted analyses, and the cross-sectional design limit generalizability and causal interpretation. Teenagers' relational experiences online warrant attention alongside use duration.*

Keywords: social media use integration; comparative self-evaluation; social loneliness; teenagers; Kuwait

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period when identity, peer evaluation, and belonging become increasingly important. Social media provides opportunities for communication, self-expression, and support, while also exposing teenagers to idealized images, popularity indicators, and peers' social activities. Its relationship with wellbeing is therefore not uniformly beneficial or harmful.

Social media use integration concerns how strongly social media is embedded in social life, routines, and psychological experience, rather than time online alone [1,2]. Teenagers with similar use duration may differ substantially in reciprocal communication, passive observation, self-presentation, and exposure to comparison-related content. Social Comparison Theory explains evaluation of personal qualities relative to others [3], while the need-to-belong perspective emphasizes meaningful interpersonal attachments [4].

This study distinguishes three constructs: social media use integration; comparative self-evaluation, meaning the favorability of perceived qualities and social standing relative to others; and social loneliness, meaning perceived inadequacy in companionship, peer connection, or wider social belonging. Examining these constructs together may clarify teenagers' digital and relational experiences in Kuwait without reducing them to screen time.

2. Literature Survey

Kuwait-specific research establishes the relevance of digital engagement but generally measures platform use, addiction-like use, distress, educational outcomes, or social isolation rather than the three focal constructs together. Aljazzaf

reported that Kuwaiti teenagers commonly used social media for communication and entertainment, with concerns about sleep [5]. Alduaij and Al-Amari examined perceived health, educational, and relationship consequences of internet addiction among high-school students [6]. Adolescent self-esteem research further highlights the importance of coping and personal self-evaluation in this context [7].

Studies of older or mixed-age populations provide contextual rather than direct teenage evidence. Al-Kandari and Al-Sejari linked social isolation, social support, and smartphone addiction [8]. Al-Menayes examined social-media-addiction dimensions among university students and their relationship with academic performance [9]. Conversely, Alenezi and Brinthaup described perceived benefits for peer interaction, engagement, and collaborative learning [10]. These findings reinforce the importance of purpose and relational context but cannot be generalized directly to all teenagers.

International research also suggests heterogeneous and potentially reciprocal relationships. Lawrence and colleagues reported reciprocal associations involving screen-media use, loneliness, and friendship quality [11]. Burnell and colleagues examined links between adolescents' social-media comparisons and momentary self-evaluations [12]. Damra and colleagues described social-media coping in relation to adolescent stress and loneliness [13], while Kim and Lee examined media literacy as a moderator of the use–loneliness relationship [14]. Differences in populations, measures, and designs limit direct comparison with Kuwait.

The present study uses the SCS to measure favorable or unfavorable self-evaluation relative to others, not online-comparison frequency or upward versus downward comparison [15]. Social loneliness is measured separately, with attention to the reliability of the designated subscale in

adolescents [16]. The literature reviewed in the dissertation did not jointly assess SMUIS-defined integration, SCS-defined comparative self-evaluation, and De Jong Gierveld social loneliness in a Kuwait teenage sample.

3. Problem Definition and Objectives

The study examined whether social media use integration was associated with comparative self-evaluation and social loneliness, and whether comparative self-evaluation was associated with social loneliness among teenagers aged 13–19 years residing in Kuwait.

H1: Greater social media use integration is associated with more favorable comparative self-evaluation.

H2: Greater social media use integration is associated with greater social loneliness.

H3: Comparative self-evaluation is associated with social loneliness, with no prespecified direction.

These hypotheses concern statistical associations, not causation, mediation, or temporal order.

4. Methodology

4.1 Design, Setting, and Participants

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational survey was conducted in Kuwait between 12 August and 2 September 2026. Convenience sampling through social-media platforms and personal or community contacts yielded 120 complete, eligible questionnaires. Recruitment was not school- or institution-based. Sample size reflected feasibility; no formal a priori sample-size calculation was performed.

Eligible participants were aged 13–19 years, resided in Kuwait, used social media, understood English, and provided consent. Participants aged 13–17 years additionally provided assent and confirmed parental or guardian consent. Ineligible, nonconsenting, or unusably incomplete responses were excluded. All submitted records included complete responses for the three focal scale scores; no imputation was required.

4.2 Measures

The questionnaire included demographic characteristics, reported social-media use, and three multi-item measures.

Social media use integration: The 10-item SMUIS was administered using responses from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Item 8 was reverse-scored, and items were summed to give a total of 10–50. Higher scores indicate greater integration into social life and routines. The total score, rather than separate subscales, was analyzed [1,2].

Comparative self-evaluation: The 11-item SCS uses bipolar semantic-differential items, including inferior–superior and outsider–insider. Items were scored 1–10 and summed without reverse scoring, producing totals of 11–110. Higher scores indicate more favorable self-evaluation relative to others. The scale does not directly assess social-media comparison frequency, direction, or context [15].

Social loneliness: Five designated social-loneliness items (1, 4, 7, 8, and 11) from the 11-item De Jong Gierveld scale were used. Responses were yes, more or less, and no. For these positively worded items, yes was scored 0 and the other responses 1. The summed score ranged from 0 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater social loneliness. Overall and emotional loneliness were not primary outcomes [16].

4.3 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Participants completed a Google Forms questionnaire taking approximately 10–15 minutes. An information sheet described the purpose, procedures, potentially sensitive questions, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants could skip questions or stop before submission without penalty. Those aged 18–19 years consented independently; younger participants confirmed guardian consent and provided assent. Consent status was self-reported and not independently verified.

No names, telephone numbers, email addresses, or student identification numbers were collected. Responses were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Data were treated as confidential rather than fully anonymous. No diagnostic assessment, intervention, or follow-up contact was conducted.

4.4 Statistical Analysis

Data were screened for eligibility, duplicate submissions, missing or out-of-range values, and scoring errors. Analyses used IBM SPSS Statistics Version 30. Descriptive statistics summarized participants and scores, and Cronbach's alpha assessed internal consistency. Pearson correlations tested the three hypotheses. Spearman correlations provided sensitivity analyses because social loneliness was bounded and non-normally distributed. Two unadjusted simple linear regressions used SMUIS as the sole predictor of SCS and social-loneliness scores. Tests were two-tailed with $p < .05$. Daily use duration and checking frequency were descriptive variables, not covariates in the reported models.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Participant Characteristics

The sample's mean age was 16.88 years ($SD = 1.84$; median = 17; range = 13–19). Of the participants, 78 (65.0%) were female, 81 (67.5%) attended private schools, and 118 (98.3%) lived with a parent. Instagram was the most frequently recorded platform (50.0%). Daily use of 3–4 hours (40.0%) and checking 6–10 times per day (41.7%) were the most common categories. Although the questionnaire allowed multiple platform selections, reported platform categories totaled one response per participant; these findings should not be interpreted as a complete platform inventory.

5.2 Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Reliability and descriptive statistics

Measure	Items / possible score	n	Cronbach's α	M	SD	Median	Observed range
Social-media use integration (SMUIS)	10; 10–50	120	.887	33.52	8.53	33.00	11–50
Comparative self-evaluation (SCS total)	11; 11–110	120	.913	67.39	17.76	66.00	20–110
Social loneliness (De Jong Gierveld social subscale)	5; 0–5	120	.711	3.16	1.61	3.00	0–5

The measures showed high internal consistency for SMUIS and SCS and acceptable internal consistency for social loneliness. The means describe this sample and are not clinical classifications.

5.3 Associations and Hypothesis Tests

Table 2: Bivariate associations

Association	n	Pearson's r	p value	Spearman's ρ (sensitivity)	p value
Social-media use integration $\times$ comparative self-evaluation	120	.382	< .001	.295	.001
Social-media use integration $\times$ social loneliness	120	.208	.023	.233	.011
Comparative self-evaluation $\times$ social loneliness	120	.034	.713	.009	.919

Greater social media use integration was associated with more favorable comparative self-evaluation and greater social loneliness, supporting H1 and H2 at the bivariate level. The former association was modest and the latter small. Comparative self-evaluation was not significantly associated with social loneliness; H3 was not supported.

Spearman analyses showed the same significance pattern. The nonsignificant finding does not demonstrate absence of an association in all teenage populations.

5.4 Unadjusted Regression

Table 3: Unadjusted linear regression results

Outcome	n	b for SMUIS (95% CI)	Standardized β	R ²	F(1, 118)	p value
Comparative self-evaluation	120	0.796 (0.445, 1.147)	.382	.146	20.20	< .001
Social loneliness	120	0.039 (0.006, 0.073)	.208	.043	5.32	.023

Each one-point increase in SMUIS corresponded to a 0.796-point higher SCS score and a 0.039-point higher social-loneliness score. A 10-point SMUIS difference therefore corresponded to estimated differences of 7.96 SCS points and 0.39 social-loneliness points. SMUIS explained 14.6% and 4.3% of variation in the respective outcomes. These are unadjusted cross-sectional associations, not independent or causal effects.

5.5 Interpretation and Implications

Teenagers with more integrated social-media use tended to evaluate themselves more favorably relative to others. Supportive feedback and reciprocal communication are possible explanations, but teenagers already feeling accepted or confident may also integrate social media more strongly into daily life. Neither pathway was tested directly.

The simultaneous small association with social loneliness indicates that favorable comparative self-evaluation and perceived disconnection can coexist. Lonelier teenagers may seek contact, reassurance, entertainment, or distraction online, while other factors may influence both constructs. The longitudinal literature supports caution about directionality [11]. The absence of an SCS–loneliness association further suggests that broad comparative self-evaluation should not be treated as equivalent to online-comparison processes [12,15].

Parents, educators, and counsellors should discuss the quality and context of online interactions alongside duration: reciprocal friendships, exclusion, online pressure, and connections with offline relationships. Media-literacy

education, supportive responses to cyberbullying, and accessible opportunities for offline connection are plausible priorities, not interventions proven effective by this study. Policy should support digital wellbeing and local research rather than derive numerical screen-time limits from these results.

5.6 Strengths and Limitations

Strengths include distinct multi-item measures, reported internal consistency, complete scale-level data, and a nonparametric sensitivity analysis. However, online convenience sampling and the predominance of female participants, private-school students, and teenagers living with a parent restrict generalizability. English-language eligibility also defines the accessible sample. Cross-sectional data cannot establish temporal order, and self-report may introduce recall or social-desirability bias. No covariate-adjusted models were reported, and sample size was not determined by a formal power calculation. The restricted, non-normal social-loneliness score requires particular caution in interpreting linear regression. The SCS measures general comparative self-evaluation, not comparison specific to social media.

6. Conclusion

Among participating teenagers in Kuwait, greater social media use integration was associated with more favorable comparative self-evaluation and slightly greater social loneliness. Comparative self-evaluation was not significantly associated with social loneliness. These findings suggest a complex relational pattern rather than a uniformly beneficial

or harmful role for social media. They apply to the participating sample and establish neither causation nor population prevalence. Attention to the meaning and context of teenagers' online experiences should complement, not replace, consideration of duration and checking frequency.

7. Future Scope

Larger, more representative longitudinal studies across genders, school sectors, governorates, and living arrangements should test temporal relationships and prespecified subgroup differences. Future work should directly measure active and passive use, comparison frequency and direction, feedback-seeking, fear of missing out, cybervictimization, sleep, media literacy, friendship quality, and offline support. Optional privacy-protective device records may supplement self-report but cannot replace assessment of relational experience. Preregistered scoring, covariates, analysis plans, reliability estimates, missing-data procedures, and confidence intervals would improve transparency. Local intervention studies are needed before concluding that media-literacy programmes or changes in use reduce loneliness.

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