

# Impact of Social Comparison on Romantic Relationship among Young Adults

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**Abstract:** *The motive of this study is to find how the Social Comparison tendency relates and influences the Romantic relationship among young adults. This research focused on finding whether higher Social Comparison tendencies are related to the lower Romantic Relationship satisfaction in this particular group. Data were collected from 300 young adults who are all currently involved in Romantic relationships and completed two standardized tools: one measuring Social Comparison and another measuring Romantic relationship satisfaction level. The Social comparison level appeared moderate, with mean score of 33.03 and standard deviation of 6.756, this indicates significant variation among participants. Romantic relationship level averaged 22.79 with a standard deviation of 5.001. This study was examined in Pearson's correlation method suggested a substantial negative relationship between social comparison orientation and romantic relationship satisfaction, resulting that individuals who frequently compare themselves with others tend to report lower levels of satisfaction in their romantic relationships. These findings highlight that excessive engagement in social comparison may create unrealistic expectations, feelings of inadequacy, and relationship dissatisfaction among young adults.*

**Keywords:** Social Comparison, Romantic relationship, Young adults, Social Comparison tendencies, Relationship satisfaction, Unrealistic expectations, Feelings of inadequacy.

## 1. Introduction

Social Comparison Theory first was elaborated systematically by Festinger (1954), who wrote his theory Social Comparison that states that people are naturally motivated to compare their opinions and capabilities. Where there are no objective standards, people use comparison with one another to come up with the correct self-evaluations. Festinger determined that social comparison has a self-evaluative role that helps them to minimize the uncertainty and physical consistency of their minds. Wood (1989) has also added that social comparison is not only evaluative but also has self-enhancement and self-improvement purposes. Self-enhancement comparisons make people sustain optimistic self-regard, and self-improvement comparisons encourage self-development. Processes of social comparison are especially acute in the young adulthood because of the identity formation and the increased sensitivity to peer posts. Identically, Social comparison is not an innate maladaptive act. It may also encourage learning, resilience, and self-development when it is guided by the realistic standards and adaptive motives. the constant use of comparison as a means of self-esteem can also result in psychological ill-ness and interpersonal performance, particularly within intimate relationships.

Major factors of psychosocial development in the time of young adulthood is Romantic Relationship. Romantic Relationship are described as sources of emotional support and identity affirmation mostly due to the level of emotional intimacy, affection, commitment, and interdependence. Romantic Relationship are becoming more influenced by outside factors in the modern society that include peer norms, media depictions and the process of social comparison. The beauty of being exposed to depictions of Romantic Relationship can cause unrealistic expectations and consequent dissatisfaction and relational insecurity. Romantic

Relationship claim to have lower relationship satisfaction and higher relational distress. Romantic Relationship in the collectivistic cultures are commonly linked to social approval and self-worth. This can make young adults consider their success in relationships in relation to social norms, which exposes them to more distress of comparison. Consequently, Romantic Relationship can turn into an area where social comparison processes can have a strong psychological effect.

The main motive of this study is to find how social comparison with others affects their romantic relationship in young adults. However, it is important to understand what is it and how it works.

## 2. Review of literature

Chowdhary, N. (2025) examined the relationship between social media use, social comparison, and mood among young Indian adults in the study titled Social Media Use, Social Comparison, and Mood among Young Indian Adults. Grounded in Social Comparison Theory, the study aimed to assess how patterns of social media engagement influence comparison tendencies and emotional well-being. A quantitative research design was employed using standardized self-report measures, Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), the Iowa–Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM), and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-SF). The sample consisted of approximately 185 young Indian adults aged 18–30 years from urban educational institutions. Correlation and regression analyses revealed that higher levels of social media use were significantly associated with increased upward social comparison and negative mood states, while moderate use showed more stable emotional outcomes. The study concluded that excessive social media exposure may

negatively affect mood through maladaptive social comparison processes.

Celly, K., and Singh, A. K. (2025) examined the relationships among social comparison, tolerance of ambiguity, and quiet ego among young adults with the objective of understanding how adaptive self-orientation and cognitive flexibility influence social evaluative tendencies. The study aimed to assess the extent to which tolerance of ambiguity and quiet ego are associated with upward and downward social comparison processes. Adopting a quantitative correlational research design, data were collected from 140 young adults aged 18–30 years using standardized self-report measures, including the Social Comparison Scale, Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale, and Quiet Ego Scale. Statistical analyses such as Pearson correlation and regression analysis were employed to test the relationships among variables. Findings revealed that higher tolerance of ambiguity and a stronger quiet ego orientation were significantly associated with lower maladaptive social comparison tendencies. The study concluded that cultivating psychological flexibility and a balanced self-concept can reduce unhealthy comparison and promote emotional well-being among young adults.

Hazare et al. (2025) a qualitative study on forgiveness, conflict resolution, and relationship satisfaction in Romantic Relationship. The purpose was to explore how conditional and unconditional forgiveness influences conflict styles and satisfaction among partners, and to understand the underlying dynamics of forgiveness in the fabric of romantic bonds. Using thematic analysis of lived experiences shared by participants and reflexive diaries, the study examined how forgiveness contributes to emotional restoration and maintaining relational bonds while considering personality traits, attachment repertoires, and extraneous variables such as culture and socio-economic conditions. Findings highlighted that forgiveness plays a vital role in promoting emotional restoration and effective conflict resolution, which in turn enhances relationship satisfaction, emphasizing the nuanced mechanisms through which forgiveness supports healthy Romantic Relationship.

Hitanshi (2025) examined perceived stress, frustration tolerance, and relationship quality in both marital and Romantic Relationship in a comparative study. The purpose was to understand how perceived stress and frustration tolerance relate to the quality of relationships and compare these dynamics between married individuals and those in romantic (dating) relationships. Using an online survey, standardized tools, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Frustration Discomfort Scale (FDS), and the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) were administered to participants from both groups. Findings showed that married individuals reported higher perceived stress and frustration discomfort, along with lower relationship quality, compared to those in Romantic Relationship; perceived stress was negatively correlated with relationship quality, especially for married participants, while frustration tolerance showed weaker predictive strength. The study underscores that stress is a significant predictor of relationship quality, highlighting the importance of stress management for healthier intimate relationships.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Objectives

- To access the level of social comparison among young adults using Iowa - Netherlands Comparison Oriented Measure (INCOM).
- To find the level of Romantic relationship among young adults using Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS).
- To investigate the impact of social comparison on the romantic relationship among young adults.

#### 3.2 Hypothesis

**H0:** There is no significant relationship between Social comparison and Romantic relationship among young adults.

#### 3.3 Research design

It is a quantitative research study which is based on the measurement quantity or amount. The correlation research design is used for this study. The Pearson's correlational is used to find the relationship between social comparison and romantic relationship among young adults, because correlation is the statistical measure that indicates the extent to which two or more variables fluctuate in relation to each other.

### 4. Sample and Sampling Technique

The population selected for this research is young adults (18 to 25 years) and the sample size for this research study is 300 individuals. This research is done by using probability sampling method. The sampling technique used in this study is "simple random sampling method" because sample size is large and the simple random sample has high external validity. SIMPLE RANDOM SAMPLING: Simple random sampling is a straightforward method used to select a sample from a larger population. In this method, each individual or item in the population has an equal chance of being selected as part of the sample.

#### 4.1 Inclusion criteria

- Respondents comprises of both Genders.
- Respondents within the age of 18-25 years are included.
- Volunteering for the study and giving consent.

#### 4.2 Exclusion criteria

- Individuals who cannot read or write English are excluded.
- Respondents who are below 18 and above 25 years are excluded.
- Individuals with known cognitive impairments are excluded.

#### 4.3. Tool description

##### 1) IOWA - Netherlands Comparison Oriented Measure (INCOM)

This scale was proposed by Frederick X. Gibbons and Bram P. Bunk (1999). This is 11 items questionnaire designed to

compare one’s own opinions, abilities, outcomes to those of others. This is a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale has reverse score items (item 5 and 7). The total score is calculated by summing all the items, score ranging from 11 to 55. This scale has 5 level of interpretation, 11 to 19 = very low social comparison orientation, 20 to 27 = low social comparison orientation, 28 to 35 = moderate social comparison orientation, 36 to 43 = high social comparison orientation, 44 to 55 = very high social comparison orientation. this scale has the reliability value of 0.78 to 0.85.

**2) Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)**

This scale was proposed by Susan S. Hendrick (1988). This scale is 7 item questionnaire designed to measure overall satisfaction in romantic relationship. This is a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale has reverse score items (item 4 and 7). The total score is calculated by summing all the items, the score ranging from 7 to 35. This scale has 5 level of interpretation ranging: 7 to 14= very low relationship status, 15 to 19 = low relationship satisfaction, 20 to 24= moderate / average satisfaction, 25 to 29= high relationship satisfaction, 30 to 35= very high relationship satisfaction.

**4.4. Statistical analysis**

Data analysis will employ IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26.0. The descriptive statistics that will be involved and applied to socio-demographic variables and scale scores will comprise mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage. Pearson’s correlation analysis will also be applied to investigate relationships between Social comparison and Romantic relationship.

**5. Result**

This section discusses the results and interpretation of the analysis done to understand the relationship between Social comparison and Romantic relationship.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics showing the mean and standard deviation between Social comparison and Romantic relationship among young adults.

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Social comparison	33.03	6.759	300
Romantic relationship	22.79	5.001	300

The descriptive table shows the mean and standard deviation for the variables, IV: Social comparison has a sample N=300, mean=33.03 and standard deviation=6.759. DV: Romantic relationship has a sample N=300, mean=22.70 and standard deviation=5.001.

**Table 2:** Correlational analysis showing the relationship between Social comparison and Romantic relationship among young adults.

Variables	Pearson’s correlation	r value	Decision
Social comparison Romantic Relationship	1	-0.211**	Rejecting (H0)

Above table evaluates the value of Pearson’s correlation among the two variables. This appears to be correlation of 1 and significance of -0.211\*\* (p>0.01). There it shows significance at 0.01 level and a negative correlation between the social comparison and romantic relationship among young adults. It implies that the higher the social comparison and lower the romantic relationship among young adults. Since it indicates that there is a correlation between social comparison and romantic relationship, the null hypothesis (H0: There is no significant relationship between social comparison and romantic relationship among young adults) is rejected.

**6. Discussion**

The motive of this study is to examine the relationship between social comparison and romantic relationship among young adults. This study was conducted with sample of 300 young adults and the data were collected using standardized self-report measures, measures social comparison and romantic relationship variables. The findings exposed a significant negative correlation (-0.211\*\*, p>0.01) between two variables. The present finding revealed that individual who compare themselves more with others socially have tend to have less satisfaction in their romantic relationship. One possible explanation is that constant comparison with others, specifically idealized portrayals of relationships (e.g., on social media), may lead individuals to develop unrealistic expectations about their own partners and relationships. This, in turn, can foster dissatisfaction, insecurity, and conflict within the relationship. Heightened social comparison may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and reduced self-esteem, which negatively affect communication and emotional intimacy between partners.

Moreover, the results highlight that increased social comparison acts as a detrimental factor in romantic relationships, potentially undermining relationship stability and satisfaction. Reducing the tendency to compare and fostering self-acceptance may therefore be important for maintaining healthier and more fulfilling romantic relationships among young adults.

**7. Summary**

The study found a significant negative relationship between social comparison and romantic relationship among young adults. The data were collected from 300 young adults through standardized questionnaires: Iowa - Netherlands Comparison Oriented Measure (INCOM) and Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). The descriptive statistics value shows moderate level of social comparison (M=33.03, SD=6.759) and romantic relationship (M=22.79, SD=5.001). Pearson’s analysis indicates negative correlation (r= -0.211\*\*, p>0.01). Higher levels of social comparison are associated with lower romantic relationship satisfaction, trust, and overall well-being. Individuals who frequently compare their relationships with others may develop unrealistic expectations and feelings of inadequacy, which can harm relationship stability and emotional connection.

## 8. Conclusion

The research result shows the reliable correlations between the two variables and scores obtained from using the Iowa - Netherlands Comparison Oriented Measure (INCOM) and Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), indicates a negative correlation between two variables social comparison and romantic relationship. therefore, the adults who are having higher social comparison tend to have lower romantic relationship.

## 9. Limitations

- The participants were selected from a specific location or region, which may limit the applicability of the findings in other cultural or geographical contexts.
- The sample consisted of 300 young adults, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to middle adulthood or older adults to a larger population.
- Factors such as personality traits, attachment styles, or social media usage were not controlled and may have affected the results.
- Response bias may influenced because participants may have responded in a way they perceived as socially acceptable, especially given the sensitive nature of romantic relationships.

## 10. Recommendations

- Can use longitudinal designs for future research should track participants over time to better understand causal relationships between social comparison and relationship outcomes.
- Future studies should involve participants from different age groups, backgrounds, and cultures to improve generalizability.
- Future studies can examine factors and includes the variables like self-esteem, attachment style, or social media exposure as mediators or moderators.

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