

The Digital Mirror of Self-Worth: Examining Social Media-Induced Life Dissatisfaction Among Emerging Adults

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Abstract: *Social media has become an integral part of the daily lives of emerging adults, providing opportunities for communication, self-expression, connection, and exposure to diverse lifestyles. At the same time, constant exposure to carefully presented images, achievements, and experiences of others may encourage individuals to evaluate their own lives against what they see online. Such comparisons can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and changes in how individuals perceive their own worth. The present study explored the relationship between social comparison-induced life dissatisfaction, social media-contingent self-esteem, and global self-esteem among emerging adults in India. A correlational research design was employed with 100 participants between 18 and 29 years of age who were recruited through an online questionnaire. Data were collected using the Social Comparison-Induced Life Dissatisfaction Scale (SCILD), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), and Social Media-Contingent Self-Esteem (SMCSE) subscale. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analyses were conducted using SPSS. The findings demonstrated a significant moderate negative association between social comparison-induced life dissatisfaction and global self-esteem ($r = -0.409, p < .05$), indicating that greater dissatisfaction following upward social comparison was associated with lower self-esteem. However, social media-contingent self-esteem did not show a significant direct association with global self-esteem ($r = 0.058, p > .05$). When both variables were entered into the regression model, they collectively accounted for 22.8% of the variance in global self-esteem. Social comparison-induced life dissatisfaction emerged as the stronger negative predictor, whereas social media-contingent self-esteem demonstrated a significant positive predictive relationship within the combined model. These findings suggest that the emotional impact of comparing one's life with others online may be more influential in shaping self-esteem than simply relying on social media for validation. The study highlights how idealized online portrayals may influence emerging adults' perceptions of their own lives, achievements, and personal worth. It emphasizes the importance of encouraging healthier social media engagement, increasing awareness of unrealistic comparison standards, and fostering a sense of self-worth that is grounded in personal qualities and experiences rather than external digital standards.*

Keywords: Social Media, Life Dissatisfaction, Global Self-Esteem, Social Comparison, Emerging Adults