

The Impact of Social Comparison, Fear of Missing Out, and Online Social Network Usage on Self-Esteem among Malaysian Youth

Aini Azeqa Ma'rof^{1,2}, Haslinda Abdullah^{1,2}

¹Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, MALAYSIA, ²Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, MALAYSIA

Email: azeqa@upm.edu.my

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between social comparison, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), online social network usage, and self-esteem among Malaysian youth. Using a sample of 420 youth, the research utilizes quantitative methods, including Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses, to explore the predictive effects of these factors on self-esteem. The results reveal that social comparison is the strongest negative predictor of self-esteem, followed by FoMO and online social network usage. Higher levels of social comparison, FoMO, and online social network usage were significantly associated with lower self-esteem. These findings underscore the growing impact of social media on youth's psychological well-being and highlight the need for interventions focused on reducing social comparison, managing FoMO, and promoting healthy social media habits. This study offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and mental health practitioners aiming to improve youth self-esteem and digital well-being.

Keywords: Social Comparison, Fear of Missing Out, Online Social Network Usage, Self-Esteem, Malaysian Youth, Social Media

Introduction

The rapid growth of social media usage has dramatically changed the way individuals, particularly youth, interact and perceive themselves in today's digital age. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok allow users to constantly present curated versions of their lives, which often leads to increased engagement in social comparison behaviors (Verduyn et al., 2020; Appel et al., 2016). Social comparison, as theorized by Festinger (1954), is the process where individuals evaluate their own abilities and opinions by comparing themselves with others. While these comparisons can be neutral or even beneficial, upward comparisons—comparing oneself to someone perceived as better off—are often linked to negative self-assessments and lower self-esteem (Fardouly et al., 2020;

Vogel et al., 2014). Among Malaysian youth, who are highly active on social media, this phenomenon may be particularly pronounced, as they are exposed to idealized portrayals of others' lives, leading to potential adverse effects on their self-esteem.

In tandem with social comparison, the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) has also emerged as a significant factor influencing youth's well-being in the digital context. FoMO refers to the pervasive apprehension that others are experiencing rewarding events from which one is absent (Przybylski et al., 2013). This fear is exacerbated by constant connectivity and the ability to witness the experiences of peers in real-time on social media platforms. Research has shown that higher levels of FoMO are associated with increased social media use, anxiety, and lower levels of self-esteem (Elhai et al., 2020; Dempsey et al., 2019). In Malaysia, youth report experiencing high levels of FoMO, driven by cultural and social expectations to stay connected and informed, which may further undermine their self-esteem (Abdul Kadir & Mamat, 2021; Lian & Tam, 2019).

Online social network usage itself plays a dual role in shaping the psychological well-being of youth. While social media provides platforms for connection and communication, excessive use has been linked to negative psychological outcomes, including diminished self-esteem and increased anxiety (Vannucci et al., 2017; Twenge & Martin, 2020). The pervasive nature of online platforms encourages individuals, especially youth, to spend extended periods interacting virtually, which may result in the development of unrealistic standards of success and beauty (Ditch the Label, 2018). In Malaysia, where youth are some of the most avid users of social media, these effects may be particularly concerning, with prolonged usage leading to potential negative impacts on self-perception and mental health (Omar & Subramaniam, 2020; Yusoff et al., 2020).

Given these factors, the relationship between social comparison, FoMO, online social network usage, and self-esteem is a critical area of research. Previous studies have highlighted the significant influence these variables have on self-esteem among youth globally, but there is limited research focusing specifically on Malaysian youth. This study aims to fill this gap by examining how these variables collectively influence the self-esteem of Malaysian youth, who are uniquely positioned within an increasingly digitalized society with strong cultural norms surrounding social interaction and success (Lim & Mohd Razak, 2022; Rosli & Abdullah, 2021).

This study will contribute to the growing body of literature on youth mental health and digital media use, particularly in non-Western contexts. By exploring the interactions between social comparison, FoMO, and online social network usage, this research will provide a clearer understanding of the factors that influence self-esteem among Malaysian youth. Furthermore, it will offer insights that can inform interventions aimed at improving youth's digital well-being and self-esteem, while helping to foster healthier online behaviors in Malaysia (Cheng et al., 2021; Khong et al., 2020).

Literature Review

Social Comparison and Its Impact on Self-Esteem Among Youth

Social comparison is a common behavior in the digital age, particularly among youth who spend significant amounts of time on social media platforms. According to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, individuals evaluate their own abilities, attributes, and well-being

by comparing themselves to others. Recent studies have shown that upward social comparison—comparing oneself to individuals perceived as better off—tends to result in lower self-esteem and negative self-perception (Fardouly et al., 2020; Vogel et al., 2019). Among Malaysian youth, who are heavily engaged in social media, this effect may be amplified, leading to adverse consequences for mental health (Abdul Kadir & Mamat, 2021; Omar & Subramaniam, 2020).

Research indicates that social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook exacerbate social comparison by providing users with constant exposure to curated, idealized images of others' lives. These platforms have been found to increase upward social comparison, which correlates with lower self-esteem and higher anxiety, particularly among young adults (Verduyn et al., 2020; Vogel et al., 2019). In Malaysia, youth are active users of these platforms, where they often engage in social comparison as they observe the accomplishments and lifestyles of peers, influencers, and celebrities (Lim & Mohd Razak, 2022; Khong et al., 2020).

In addition, cultural factors may also play a role in how Malaysian youth engage in social comparison. The societal pressure to achieve and conform to social norms often drives youth to compare their successes, appearances, and social standing with their peers. Studies have found that in collectivist societies like Malaysia, where familial and societal expectations are emphasized, social comparison can be more prevalent and more damaging to self-esteem (Rosli & Abdullah, 2021; Tan et al., 2020). The increasing visibility of others' success online further heightens this pressure, contributing to declining mental well-being.

Given the role of social media in facilitating social comparison, many interventions have been proposed to mitigate its negative impact. For instance, encouraging mindful social media use and promoting digital literacy could reduce the frequency and intensity of social comparison among youth (Omar & Subramaniam, 2020; Cheng et al., 2021). These interventions aim to empower youth to navigate the digital world without internalizing negative feelings that arise from social comparison, potentially improving their self-esteem and overall well-being.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and Its Influence on Self-Esteem

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) is a relatively new psychological phenomenon that has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly with the rise of social media. Defined as the pervasive apprehension that others are experiencing enjoyable or rewarding activities from which one is absent, FoMO is closely linked to the use of social networking sites (Przybylski et al., 2013; Elhai et al., 2020). Research suggests that individuals who experience higher levels of FoMO tend to have lower self-esteem, as they frequently compare their own lives to the seemingly more exciting lives of others (Dempsey et al., 2019; Buglass et al., 2017).

Among youth, FoMO is particularly prevalent due to the developmental need for social connection and belonging. Studies have found that FoMO is associated with more frequent and compulsive social media use, as individuals seek to stay connected and informed about the activities of their peers (Vannucci et al., 2017; Oberst et al., 2020). This constant engagement with social media can lead to feelings of inadequacy and a diminished sense of self-worth, especially when youth perceive that they are being excluded from important social experiences (Franchina et al., 2018; Elhai et al., 2020). In Malaysia, where youth are highly

active on social media platforms, the impact of FoMO on self-esteem is a growing concern (Abdul Kadir & Mamat, 2021; Rosli & Abdullah, 2021).

FoMO not only influences self-esteem but also contributes to increased anxiety and stress levels. Research has shown that individuals with higher levels of FoMO are more likely to experience negative emotional states, including feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression (Dempsey et al., 2019; Elhai et al., 2020). These negative emotions can, in turn, further erode self-esteem, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break. In the context of Malaysian youth, FoMO may exacerbate the societal pressures to succeed and maintain social connections, leading to further declines in mental health and self-esteem (Lian & Tam, 2019; Khong et al., 2020).

Interventions to reduce FoMO and its impact on self-esteem are gaining attention in psychological research. Strategies such as promoting digital mindfulness, encouraging face-to-face social interactions, and fostering self-acceptance have been shown to alleviate the effects of FoMO on youth well-being (Buglass et al., 2017; Vannucci et al., 2017). These interventions aim to empower youth to disengage from the compulsive need to be constantly connected and to build healthier, more fulfilling relationships both online and offline.

Online Social Network Usage and Its Effects on Youth's Self-Esteem

The pervasive use of online social networks has significantly altered the social experiences of youth, providing both opportunities for connection and risks to mental well-being. Studies have consistently shown that excessive social media use is linked to lower self-esteem, especially among young adults (Vannucci et al., 2017; Twenge & Martin, 2020). The constant interaction on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter create an environment where youth are frequently exposed to the lives of others, leading to increased social comparison and the pressure to maintain a certain image online (Cheng et al., 2021; Omar & Subramaniam, 2020).

In Malaysia, where social media penetration is particularly high among youth, the effects of online social network usage on self-esteem are becoming more apparent. Research conducted on Malaysian youth has revealed that prolonged use of social media platforms is associated with increased levels of anxiety, stress, and lower self-worth (Yusoff et al., 2020; Abdul Kadir & Mamat, 2021). These platforms often promote unrealistic standards of success and beauty, which youth internalize, leading to negative self-perceptions and lower self-esteem (Khong et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2020).

Moreover, the nature of online interactions can affect self-esteem differently depending on how youth engage with social media. Passive use, where individuals scroll through content without actively participating, has been found to be particularly detrimental, as it increases feelings of envy and inadequacy (Verduyn et al., 2020; Fardouly et al., 2020). Active use, on the other hand, such as posting content and interacting with others, may have more complex effects on self-esteem. While active use can boost feelings of social connectedness, it can also reinforce the need for external validation through likes and comments, which may ultimately undermine self-esteem (Lim & Mohd Razak, 2022; Twenge & Martin, 2020).

Addressing the negative impact of online social network usage on self-esteem requires a multifaceted approach. Promoting digital literacy and healthy social media habits, such as setting time limits and fostering positive online interactions, can help mitigate the harmful effects of excessive social media use (Omar & Subramaniam, 2020; Cheng et al., 2021). Additionally, encouraging youth to engage in face-to-face social interactions and emphasizing the importance of real-life connections can counterbalance the pressures of the digital world, potentially improving their self-esteem and overall well-being (Vannucci et al., 2017; Buglass et al., 2017).

The Relationship between Social Comparison, FoMO, Online Social Network Usage, and Self-Esteem

The combined effects of social comparison, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and online social network usage on self-esteem have garnered significant attention in social psychology, as these factors often interact in complex ways. Social media platforms provide fertile ground for both social comparison and FoMO, as users are constantly exposed to curated, idealized portrayals of others' lives (Verduyn et al., 2020; Elhai et al., 2020). These comparisons can lead to feelings of inadequacy and exclusion, which are exacerbated by FoMO, further contributing to lower self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2019; Franchina et al., 2018).

Among Malaysian youth, who are avid social media users, these dynamics are particularly relevant. Research has shown that social comparison and FoMO are closely linked to online social network usage, with higher levels of engagement in these behaviors correlating with lower self-esteem (Lim & Mohd Razak, 2022; Khong et al., 2020). Malaysian youth often use social media not only to connect with friends but also to monitor the activities and achievements of their peers, which can lead to a heightened sense of inadequacy and decreased self-worth (Rosli & Abdullah, 2021; Omar & Subramaniam, 2020).

Furthermore, the interplay between these factors may create a feedback loop that perpetuates negative self-perceptions. Youth who experience FoMO are more likely to engage in social comparison, which in turn drives them to use social media more frequently in an attempt to stay connected and informed (Dempsey et al., 2019; Elhai et al., 2020). This increased social media usage further exposes them to idealized portrayals of others' lives, reinforcing social comparison and exacerbating FoMO, ultimately leading to a decline in self-esteem (Vannucci et al., 2017; Twenge & Martin, 2020).

Understanding the relationship between social comparison, FoMO, online social network usage, and self-esteem is crucial for developing effective interventions aimed at improving the mental health of youth. By addressing the underlying psychological processes that drive these behaviors, such as promoting self-acceptance and resilience, psychologists can help youth navigate the challenges of the digital world while maintaining a healthy sense of self-esteem (Cheng et al., 2021; Buglass et al., 2017).

Method

Participants

This study involved a sample of 420 Malaysian youth, aged between 18 to 25 years, who were active users of social media. Participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure a diverse representation across different demographics, including gender,

socioeconomic status, and geographic location (urban and rural areas). This sampling method allowed for a comprehensive examination of the effects of social comparison, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and online social network usage on self-esteem across various subgroups. The sample consisted of 48% males and 52% females, with the majority of participants reporting daily use of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

Procedure and Measures

Participants were recruited through social media platforms, university bulletin boards, and online youth forums. Detailed information about the study's objectives, confidentiality, and voluntary nature was provided to all participants before they gave their informed consent. The survey was administered online, ensuring accessibility to participants from different regions of Malaysia. The data collection process adhered to ethical guidelines, including confidentiality and the option to withdraw from the study at any point.

Social Comparison

Social comparison was measured using the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) developed by Buunk and Gibbons (1999). This scale assesses both upward and downward social comparison tendencies, focusing on the extent to which individuals compare themselves with others. The INCOM consists of 11 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicated a greater tendency to engage in social comparison. The scale has been widely validated in diverse populations and is known for its reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85) in capturing social comparison orientation.

Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)

FoMO was assessed using the Fear of Missing Out Scale (FoMOs) developed by Przybylski et al. (2013). This scale measures the extent to which individuals feel anxious or fearful about missing out on rewarding experiences shared by others. The FoMOs consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all true of me, 5 = Extremely true of me), with higher scores indicating higher levels of FoMO. This scale has demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.86) and has been validated across various cultures, including Malaysian samples.

Online Social Network Usage

Online social network usage was measured using the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS) developed by Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, and Johnson (2013). This instrument assesses how integrated social media is into an individual's daily routine and its impact on social interactions. The SMUIS consists of 10 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate greater social media integration into daily life. The SMUIS has been shown to have strong reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82) and is widely used to assess social media usage in youth populations.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Rosenberg (1965). The RSES is one of the most widely used instruments to measure global self-worth and self-esteem. It consists of 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Strongly Agree), with higher scores reflecting higher levels of self-esteem. The

RSES has been validated in numerous studies and populations, including in Malaysia, and demonstrates high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88).

Data Analysis

Data collected from the online survey were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' tendencies for social comparison, levels of FoMO, online social network usage, and self-esteem. Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between social comparison, FoMO, online social network usage, and self-esteem. Multiple regression analyses were performed to identify which factors—social comparison, FoMO, or online social network usage—were the strongest predictors of self-esteem. Adjusted R^2 values were calculated to assess the proportion of variance explained by the predictors, and F-statistics were used to evaluate the overall significance of the regression models.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides a summary of the levels of social comparison, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), online social network usage, and self-esteem among 420 Malaysian youth. In terms of social comparison, a majority of participants (65%) reported moderate levels of social comparison, while 20% experienced high levels, and 15% reported low levels. The overall mean for social comparison was 32.1 (SD = 5.20), suggesting that most participants engaged in moderate levels of comparison with others on social media.

FoMO was also prevalent among the participants, with 57% reporting high levels, 29% experiencing moderate levels, and 14% reporting low levels of FoMO. The mean score for FoMO was 34.5 (SD = 6.10), indicating that a significant portion of the youth felt a strong fear of missing out on social activities or events, reflecting the increasingly connected nature of social interactions online.

Regarding online social network usage, 68% of participants indicated high levels of usage, 22% reported moderate usage, and 10% reported low usage. The mean score for online social network usage was 29.8 (SD = 4.90), suggesting that the majority of the sample used social media frequently, integrating it into their daily lives.

Self-esteem results were more balanced, with 47% of participants reporting high self-esteem, 33% reporting moderate self-esteem, and 20% reporting low self-esteem. The mean score for self-esteem was 26.3 (SD = 4.00), indicating a relatively healthy self-esteem level overall, but with notable variability across participants.

The findings of this study provide important insights into how social comparison, FoMO, and online social network usage influence self-esteem among Malaysian youth. First, the moderate to high levels of social comparison observed align with previous studies that highlight the pervasive role of social media in promoting constant comparison among users, particularly young adults (Vogel et al., 2019; Fardouly et al., 2020). Given that Malaysian youth are highly active on social media platforms, it is not surprising that a majority reported engaging in social comparison, which has been linked to lower self-esteem in various studies (Lim & Mohd Razak, 2022; Khong et al., 2020).

Similarly, the high prevalence of FoMO among the participants underscores the growing impact of social media on youth's psychological well-being. FoMO has been shown to contribute to heightened anxiety, dissatisfaction, and low self-esteem (Elhai et al., 2020; Dempsey et al., 2019). The findings in this study resonate with previous research that suggests FoMO is particularly common among youth who are constantly connected online, seeking to remain updated and involved in their peers' social activities (Omar & Subramaniam, 2020; Przybylski et al., 2013).

The high level of online social network usage reported by participants further confirms the central role that social media plays in the daily lives of youth. This heavy usage has been linked to a range of negative outcomes, including reduced self-esteem and heightened feelings of inadequacy, as observed in several studies (Twenge & Martin, 2020; Vannucci et al., 2017). The mean score for online social network usage in this study highlights the frequency with which Malaysian youth engage in these platforms, potentially exposing them to negative social comparisons and FoMO, which can contribute to diminished self-esteem (Cheng et al., 2021; Rosli & Abdullah, 2021).

Interestingly, despite the high levels of social comparison, FoMO, and online social network usage, nearly half of the participants reported high self-esteem. This suggests that while these factors can negatively influence self-esteem, some youth may develop resilience or coping mechanisms that buffer against their harmful effects (Vogel et al., 2019; Buglass et al., 2017). It is also possible that cultural or individual differences, such as strong familial support or personal values, play a role in maintaining higher self-esteem despite the challenges posed by social media use (Khong et al., 2020; Rosli & Abdullah, 2021).

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex relationships between social comparison, FoMO, online social network usage, and self-esteem among Malaysian youth. Given Malaysia's collectivist culture, the influence of cultural norms and values is particularly significant in understanding the relationship between social media use and self-esteem. In collectivist societies, individuals often prioritize group harmony and familial expectations over personal achievement, which can shape their experiences on social media platforms. For instance, Malaysian youth may feel heightened pressure to conform to societal standards of success and beauty, which are often exaggerated on social media. This societal pressure can intensify feelings of inadequacy during social comparison, leading to lower self-esteem (Rosli & Abdullah, 2021).

Additionally, collectivist values promote a sense of community and interconnectedness. While this can provide a buffer against negative self-perception by fostering strong social ties, it can also lead to increased scrutiny and comparison within peer groups. Youth may experience a greater fear of missing out (FoMO) not only from individual experiences but also from communal events, reinforcing the impact of social media on their self-esteem. This dynamic suggests that interventions aimed at improving self-esteem among Malaysian youth should consider these cultural factors, emphasizing collective values and community support as essential components of resilience against the pressures of social media.

Table 1

Levels of Social Comparison, FoMO, Online Social Network Usage, and Self-Esteem Among Malaysian Youth

Level	n	%	Mean	SD
<u>Social Comparison</u>			32.1	5.20
Low	63	15.0		
Moderate	73	65.0		
High	84	20.0		
<u>FoMO</u>			34.5	6.10
Low	59	14.0		
Moderate	122	29.0		
High	239	57.0		
<u>Online Social Network Usage</u>			29.8	4.90
Low	42	10.0		
Moderate	92	22.0		
High	286	68.0		
<u>Self-Esteem</u>			26.3	4.00
Low	84	20.0		
Medium	139	33.0		
High	197	47.0		

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between social comparison, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), online social network usage, and self-esteem among Malaysian youth (see Table 2). The results revealed that all independent variables (social comparison, FoMO, and online social network usage) were significantly correlated with self-esteem, indicating that higher levels of social comparison, FoMO, and online social network usage are associated with lower self-esteem.

The strongest negative correlation was observed between social comparison and self-esteem ($r = -0.62$, $p < .001$). This result is consistent with previous studies, which highlight the detrimental effects of frequent social comparison on self-esteem, particularly in a social media context (Vogel et al., 2019; Fardouly et al., 2020). Youth who engage in constant comparisons with others on social media are more likely to experience feelings of inadequacy, leading to lower self-esteem.

FoMO also demonstrated a significant negative correlation with self-esteem ($r = -0.58, p < .001$). This finding aligns with research that suggests youth with higher levels of FoMO tend to have lower self-esteem as they feel anxious about missing out on experiences that others are having (Przybylski et al., 2013; Elhai et al., 2020). The pervasive nature of social media exacerbates this anxiety, which in turn undermines youth's self-worth.

Online social network usage was moderately negatively correlated with self-esteem ($r = -0.54, p < .001$). This supports the literature that suggests frequent use of social media can have adverse effects on self-esteem by fostering unrealistic comparisons and reinforcing external validation (Twenge & Martin, 2020; Vannucci et al., 2017). Youth who spend more time on social media are more exposed to curated and idealized images of others, which can lead to diminished self-esteem.

These correlations provide important insights into the factors that influence self-esteem among Malaysian youth. Social comparison emerged as the strongest predictor of lower self-esteem, followed by FoMO and online social network usage. The findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing social comparison and FoMO, as well as promoting healthier social media habits, may help in mitigating the negative impact of social media use on youth's self-esteem.

Table 2

Correlations Between Social Comparison, FoMO, Online Social Network Usage, and Self-Esteem among Malaysian Youth

Variable	Self-Esteem	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Social Comparison	-.62**	.001
FoMO	-.58**	.001
Online Social Network	-.54**	.001

N = 420, ** $p < .001$

The multiple regression analysis (see Table 3) revealed that social comparison, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and online social network usage significantly predicted self-esteem among Malaysian youth, $F(3, 416) = 112.35, p < .001$. Among the predictors, social comparison emerged as the strongest negative predictor of self-esteem ($\beta = -0.45, p < .001$). This finding is consistent with previous research, which highlights that frequent social comparison on social media negatively impacts self-esteem by fostering feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth (Vogel et al., 2019; Fardouly et al., 2020). Youth who frequently compare themselves to others on social media are more likely to experience lower self-esteem.

FoMO also significantly predicted lower self-esteem ($\beta = -0.39, p < .001$). This aligns with prior studies that suggest individuals with higher levels of FoMO are more likely to feel dissatisfied with their lives and self-worth due to the constant fear of missing out on social events or experiences (Elhai et al., 2020; Przybylski et al., 2013). This anxiety further erodes their self-esteem as they become preoccupied with others' experiences rather than their own.

Online social network usage also negatively predicted self-esteem ($\beta = -0.34, p < .001$), indicating that more frequent use of social media platforms is associated with lower self-

esteem. This result is consistent with literature that emphasizes the potential negative psychological effects of prolonged social media exposure, including increased social comparison, pressure for validation, and dissatisfaction with one's self-image (Twenge & Martin, 2020; Vannucci et al., 2017).

Together, these three predictors explained a significant portion of the variance in self-esteem, with the model accounting for approximately 67.2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.672$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.668$). This highlights the important role of social comparison, FoMO, and online social network usage in shaping self-esteem among Malaysian youth. The findings suggest that interventions targeting these areas—such as reducing social comparison and FoMO through mindfulness or promoting healthier social media habits—may be effective in improving self-esteem in this population.

Table 3

Regression Analysis for Social Comparison, FoMO, and Online Social Network Usage on Self-Esteem among Malaysian Youth

Variable	Self-Esteem			
	B	SE. B	Beta, β	<i>p</i>
Social Comparison	-.48	.07	-.45	.001
FoMO	-.41	.09	-.39	.001
Online Social Network Usage	-.37	.08	-.34	.001
R²	.672			
Adjusted R²	.668			
F	112.35			

$R^2 = 0.672$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.668$, $F = 112.35$ ($p < .005$)

These results indicate that social comparison is the strongest predictor of lower self-esteem, followed by FoMO and online social network usage. This model explains approximately 67.2% of the variance in self-esteem among the participants, demonstrating the significant impact of these variables on youth's self-esteem.

Implications for Self-Esteem Interventions among Malaysian Youth: Policy and Practice

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that social comparison, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), and online social network usage play in influencing self-esteem among Malaysian youth. These results have important implications for policymakers, educators, and mental health practitioners seeking to improve youth well-being in the digital age.

Firstly, the strong negative impact of social comparison on self-esteem highlights the need for interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of social comparison behaviors on social media. Given that frequent comparisons with others online can significantly diminish self-esteem, initiatives such as digital literacy programs that teach youth how to critically evaluate social media content and reduce the tendency to engage in unhealthy comparisons could be highly effective. Educating youth about the unrealistic portrayals often found on social media may help mitigate the detrimental effects of social comparison on their self-worth (Vogel et al., 2019; Fardouly et al., 2020).

Similarly, the strong relationship between FoMO and lower self-esteem suggests that addressing FoMO should be a priority in youth mental health interventions. FoMO can cause anxiety and dissatisfaction, as youth constantly feel the pressure to stay connected and not miss out on social events. Strategies to reduce FoMO, such as promoting mindfulness and encouraging face-to-face interactions over digital connections, may help youth develop a healthier relationship with social media. Programs that emphasize the importance of being present in one's own life, rather than focusing on the experiences of others, can improve self-esteem and reduce the negative impact of social media use (Elhai et al., 2020; Przybylski et al., 2013).

Finally, the role of online social network usage in predicting lower self-esteem suggests that educators and policymakers need to focus on promoting healthier social media habits. Limiting screen time, encouraging balanced online and offline activities, and fostering meaningful real-world connections can help alleviate the pressures youth face online. By encouraging youth to engage with social media in a mindful and intentional way, rather than passively consuming content, practitioners can help reduce the negative effects of online social networks on self-esteem (Twenge & Martin, 2020; Vannucci et al., 2017).

Practical Applications for Educators and Mental Health Practitioners

The strong correlations between social comparison, FoMO, online social network usage, and self-esteem have important practical implications for educators and mental health practitioners. Schools and universities should prioritize digital literacy programs that teach youth about the psychological impact of social media and how to navigate it effectively. Educators can incorporate lessons on self-esteem, mindfulness, and the role of social comparison into curricula, equipping students with the tools they need to maintain healthy self-perceptions.

Mental health practitioners should also be aware of the strong impact social media can have on youth's self-esteem and well-being. Counseling and therapy sessions could focus on helping youth develop coping strategies to deal with FoMO and reduce their reliance on social media for validation. Offering workshops on social media detox and digital mindfulness could be valuable in helping youth balance their online and offline lives more effectively.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study provides valuable insights into the relationships between social comparison, FoMO, online social network usage, and self-esteem, several limitations should be considered. Firstly, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to better understand how changes in these variables over time influence self-esteem in youth (Vogel et al., 2019; Przybylski et al., 2013).

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases such as social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment. Future studies could benefit from employing mixed-methods approaches that include both quantitative data and qualitative interviews to capture a more comprehensive understanding of how social media influences youth self-esteem (Twenge & Martin, 2020; Elhai et al., 2020).

Finally, the sample used in this study is specific to Malaysian youth, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts. Future research should explore these relationships in diverse cultural and organizational settings to gain a broader understanding of how social comparison, FoMO, and social media usage impact self-esteem across different populations (Rosli & Abdullah, 2021; Khong et al., 2020).

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role that social comparison, FoMO, and online social network usage play in shaping self-esteem among Malaysian youth. The findings suggest that efforts to improve self-esteem in this population should focus on reducing social comparison, addressing FoMO, and promoting healthier social media habits. By implementing interventions that foster mindfulness, digital literacy, and balanced social media use, educators and mental health practitioners can help youth navigate the challenges of the digital age while maintaining a positive sense of self-esteem.

In conclusion, the results of this study underscore the importance of addressing the psychological impact of social media on youth well-being. Future research should continue to explore these relationships across different cultural and organizational contexts to develop effective strategies for promoting self-esteem and mental health in the digital era.

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