



Impact of Social Comparison on Self-Efficacy & Emotional Regulation among Peers

Aarushi Verma, Amity University of Psychology & Allied Sciences, Noida, Uttar Pradesh

aaruverma1025@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between social comparison, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation. Social comparison, a cognitive process involves individuals assessing their abilities, attributes, and emotions relative to those of others. This research aims to study how social comparison influences both self-efficacy beliefs and emotional regulation strategies. The data was collected through quantitative surveys. It is important to note that Convenience Sampling was used, as a result of which we sampled a group of various young adults using tools such as Social Comparison Scale, General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale – 16 item version (DERS-16). Quantitative data analysis utilizes statistical tools like the correlation analysis and regression modelling to look for the relations between the social comparison, self-efficacy, and emotional regulation. The study demonstrates that social comparison can significantly influence the self-efficacy beliefs of individuals, while also

influencing perceived competence and self-co ownership in various domains. In addition, the research further discusses the complex links between social comparison and emotional regulation demonstrating the use of problematic or adaptive strategies of emotion regulation. However, the immediate reactions to upward social comparison may cause individuals to want to better their skills and get social support, while downward social comparison might just alleviate distress and hinder development. The relevance of these discoveries is emphasized and the key directions for this process are discussed, including supporting healthy comparison and constructing adaptive self-efficacy beliefs and emotion regulation strategies.

Keywords: *Social comparison, self-efficacy, emotional regulation*

INTRODUCTION

Social comparison

Social comparison is a ubiquitous phenomenon ingrained in the fabric of human interaction, influencing our perceptions, emotions, and behaviours in myriad ways. From comparing ourselves to our peers in terms of achievements or appearance to evaluating our lifestyles against societal standards, the impulse to gauge our standing relative to others is inherent. This innate tendency to engage in social comparison serves as a fundamental mechanism through which individuals navigate their social environments, shaping their self-concept, aspirations, and interpersonal dynamics.

Theory of social comparison (Festinger, 1950) explores how people evaluate themselves by comparing to others. This happens both consciously and subconsciously, affecting our decisions, self-esteem, and relationships. By studying social comparison, psychologists aim to

better understand human behaviour and thinking in various social situations. Research has identified two main types of social comparison: upward comparison and downward comparison (Collins, 1996). Upward comparison involves comparing oneself to others perceived as superior, which may lead to feelings of inadequacy or motivation for improvement (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Conversely, downward comparison involves comparing oneself to those perceived as inferior, potentially boosting self-esteem (Wills, 1981).

In the age of social media, where curated images of success and happiness are often portrayed, social comparison has become even more prevalent, impacting individuals' well-being and mental health. Peers serve as critical reference points for self-evaluation and identity formation, making social comparison within peer groups particularly salient. Research suggests that exposure to idealized representations of peers on social media can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and negatively impact self-esteem, particularly among adolescents.

Additionally, the dynamics of peer comparison are shaped by factors such as social norms, group cohesion, and individual differences in self-esteem and social comparison orientation.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully perform specific tasks or achieve particular goals. It involves confidence in one's ability to mobilize the necessary resources, skills, and efforts to overcome challenges and attain desired outcomes. Self-efficacy, a cornerstone concept in social cognitive theory proposed by Albert Bandura (1997), represents more than just confidence in one's abilities.

Bandura emphasized that self-efficacy beliefs are task-specific and context-dependent, meaning that individuals may feel highly efficacious in certain situations but less in others. One of the key components of self-efficacy is mastery of experiences, which involves successful performance and accomplishments in specific tasks or situations.

These experiences serve as the most influential source of self-efficacy beliefs, as individuals gain confidence and competence through firsthand mastery of challenges. However, failure or setbacks can also shape self-efficacy beliefs, depending on how individuals interpret and respond to these experiences. In addition to mastery experiences, social modelling plays a significant role in shaping self-efficacy beliefs. Observing others who are successful in similar tasks can instil confidence and provide valuable insights into effective strategies and techniques.

Verbal persuasion and social feedback can influence self-efficacy beliefs. Encouragement, support, and constructive feedback from others can bolster individuals' confidence in their abilities, whereas criticism or negative feedback may undermine self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000). High levels of self-efficacy are associated with a greater willingness to set ambitious goals and pursue them with tenacity, even in the face of obstacles or setbacks.

Low self-efficacy can contribute to feelings of helplessness and resignation in the face of adversity. Individuals may perceive obstacles as insurmountable barriers and believe that their efforts will not lead to positive outcomes. This sense of learned helplessness can lead to diminished motivation, decreased persistence, and increased susceptibility to stress and depression (Seligman, 1975). Individuals with low self-efficacy may avoid challenges or opportunities for growth due to fear of failure or feelings of incompetence. They may also engage in self-defeating behaviours such as procrastination or self-handicapping as a way to protect their self-esteem in the face of potential failure.

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation refers to the processes through which individuals manage and modulate their emotional experiences, expressions, and responses. It involves the ability to recognize, understand, and effectively regulate one's own emotions in various situations, as well as to navigate interpersonal interactions with others. Emotional regulation encompasses a range of strategies and skills, including cognitive reappraisal, attentional deployment, expressive suppression, and situational selection.

Effective emotional regulation is essential for psychological well-being and adaptive functioning. It allows individuals to cope with stress, regulate mood fluctuations, and maintain interpersonal relationships. Research has shown that individuals who possess strong emotional regulation skills tend to experience lower levels of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues (Aldao et al., 2010). Moreover, emotional regulation plays a critical role in social and academic success, as it influences communication, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities.

The development of emotional regulation begins in infancy and continues throughout childhood and adolescence, guided by a combination of biological maturation, socialization experiences, and cognitive growth. During infancy, caregivers play a critical role in assisting infants in regulating their emotions through responsive caregiving, soothing techniques, and emotional mirroring (Cole et al., 2004). Through interactions with caregivers, infants learn to recognize and label basic emotions, such as joy, sadness, and distress, laying the foundation for later emotional regulation skills.

As children grow older, they become increasingly capable of using more sophisticated strategies to regulate their emotions. Around toddlerhood, children begin to develop rudimentary

self-regulation skills, such as shifting attention away from distressing stimuli or seeking comfort from caregivers (Eisenberg et al., 2009). During middle childhood and adolescence, emotional regulation becomes more complex and context-dependent. Children learn to regulate their emotions in a variety of social and academic settings, navigating peer interactions, school demands, and family relationships (Eisenberg et al., 2009). With increased cognitive development, adolescents become better at understanding and interpreting their own emotions, as well as those of others, which facilitates more sophisticated emotion regulation strategies.

However, the development of emotional regulation is not always linear or uniform. Individual differences in temperament, neurobiological factors, and environmental influences can shape the trajectory of emotional regulation development (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Children who experience supportive, nurturing environments tend to develop more adaptive emotional regulation skills, whereas those who face adversity or neglect may struggle with emotion dysregulation.

Impact of Social Comparison on Self-Efficacy & Emotional Regulation

This study explores the impact of social comparison on self-efficacy and emotional regulation by delving into the intricate interplay between individuals' perceptions of themselves in relation to others and their abilities to regulate their emotions effectively. Social comparison can profoundly influence individuals' self-efficacy beliefs as well as their emotional regulation strategies. Understanding the impact of social comparison on self-efficacy and emotional regulation is essential for elucidating the mechanisms underlying individuals' psychological functioning and well-being.

Social comparison may lead to either positive or negative outcomes depending on various factors such as the direction and valence of the comparison, individual differences, and situational context. This study helps to gain insights into the mechanisms underlying individuals' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to social comparison processes.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

To study the impact of social comparison on self-efficacy and emotional regulation among young adults.

Objectives

- To study the relationship between social comparison and self-efficacy among young adults.
- To study the relationship between social comparison and emotional regulation among young adults.

Hypothesis

- There would be significant impact of social comparison on self-efficacy among young adults.
- There would be significant impact of social comparison on emotional regulation among young adults.

Variables

Social Comparison (Predictor)

Self-efficacy and Emotional Regulation (Criterion)

Sample

A total of 122 individual data has been collected through snow-ball sampling and were asked for consent beforehand. Those agreed participated in the research and confidentiality was maintained. The data was analysed using SPSS.

Tools

- **Social Comparision Scale:** The social comparision scale developed by Allan & Gilbert (1995) consists of 11 items addressing various comparison dimensions on bipolar 10-point scales (e.g., 1 = inferior to 10 = superior, 1 = unlikeable to 10 = likeable). Participants rank themselves “in relation to others” and scores are summed to yield an overall score between 11 and 110.
- **General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE):** The general self - efficacy scale (GSE) was developed by Schwarzer & Jerusalem. The scale is available in 33 languages. The scale is usually self-administered consisting of 10 items. It requires 4 minutes on average. Responses are made on a 4-point scale. Sum up the responses to all 10 items to yield the final composite score with a range from 10 to 40.
- **The Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale – 16 item version:** The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale – 16 item version (DERS-16) is a self-report measure. Based upon the original 36 item version DERS, the DERS-16 uses a clinically-useful

conceptualization of emotion regulation that was developed by Bjureberg et al., (2016). Each item rated for frequency on a five-point likert scale. The overall score is calculated. Total scores on the DERS-16 can range from 16 to 80, with higher scores reflecting greater levels of emotion dysregulation.

RESULT

Table 1

Correlation between social comparision & self-efficacy among young adults

Correlations

		SelfefficacyScoreT	SOCIALCOMPARISIONT
Pearson Correlation	SelfefficacyScoreT	1.000	-.220
	SOCIALCOMPARISIONT	-.220	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	SelfefficacyScoreT	.	.007
	SOCIALCOMPARISIONT	.007	.
N	SelfefficacyScoreT	122	122
	SOCIALCOMPARISIONT	122	122

Table 2

Regression model

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.220 ^a	.049	.041	6.0384	.049	6.121	1	120	.015

a. Predictors: (Constant), SOCIALCOMPARISIONT

Table 3*Correlation between social comparision & emotional regulation among young adults***Correlations**

		EmTotal	sct
Pearson Correlation	EmTotal	1.000	.505
	sct	.505	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	EmTotal	.	.000
	sct	.000	.
N	EmTotal	122	122
	sct	122	122

Table 4**Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.505 ^a	.255	.248	14.17893006	.255	40.987	1	120	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), sct

DISCUSSION

This study explores the impact of social comparison on self-efficacy and emotional regulation, which delves into the intricate interplay between individuals' perceptions of themselves in relation to others and their abilities to regulate their emotions effectively.

The tools used for study were Social Comparison Scale (Allan & Gilber, 1995), General Self - Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem) and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale – 16 item version (DERS-16) (Bjureberg et al., 2016), a self-report.

The regression analysis indicates that there is a significant impact of social comparison on self-efficacy. Approximately 4.9% of the variability in self-efficacy can be explained by social comparison. People experiencing more social comparison show less self-efficacy. This negative relationship suggests that as the frequency or intensity of social comparison increases, an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations decreases. A study conducted provides evidence that individuals with a higher social comparison orientation tend to have lower self-efficacy. (Vogel et al., 2014; Singh & Bhardwaj, 2021; Chaudhary & Sharma, 2018; Zhand & Lee, 2019)

The Pearson correlation coefficient between Self-efficacy Score and Social Comparison was found to be 0.220. This indicates a weak negative correlation between self-efficacy score and social comparison. The negative sign suggests that as one variable increases, the other tends to decrease. This correlation table confirms the findings from the regression analysis, indicating a statistically significant negative correlation between self-efficacy score and social comparison.

The regression model as a whole is statistically significant, as indicated by the F-statistic of 6.121 and the associated p-value of 0.015. Here, R Square is 0.049, meaning that 4.9% of the variance in the outcome variable is explained by social comparison. This suggests that the predictor variable, social comparison, significantly contributes to the prediction of Self-efficacy Score. Social Comparison as a predictor significantly explains variance in Self-efficacy Score.

The analysis indicates that there is a significant impact of social comparison on emotional regulation. A positive correlation is observed between social comparison and emotional dysregulation, suggesting that individuals facing more social comparison tend to have more complex emotional dysregulation. A study conducted by Srivastava & Bhargava (2020), Jaiswal & Mishra (2018), and Lim et al.,(2015) provides evidence that individuals with a higher social comparison orientation tend to have complex emotional dysregulation.

The Pearson correlation coefficient between Emotional regulation Score and Social Comparison is 0.505. This indicates a positive correlation between emotional dysregulation score and social comparison. The positive sign suggests that as one variable increases, the other also increase. This correlation table confirms the findings from the regression analysis, indicating a statistically significant positive correlation between emotional dysregulation score and social comparison.

The findings also suggest that approximately 25.5% of the variance in the emotional regulation can be explained by variations in the predictor variable social comparison. The R Square value of 0.255 suggests that social comparison accounts for a significant portion of the

variability in the dependent variable that is emotional regulation, even though the relationship is not extremely strong.

CONCLUSION

This study explore the impact of social comparison on self-efficacy and emotional regulation which delves into the intricate interplay between individuals' perceptions of themselves in relation to others and their abilities to regulate their emotions effectively.

Based on the calculations by finding correlational of all the variables and regression analysis ,we found that there has been significant impact of social comparision on self-efficacy and emotional regulation. There has been negative correlation between social comparision and self-efficacy which suggests that people experiencing more social comparision shows less self-efficacy. A positive correlation is observed between social comparison and emotional dysregulation, suggesting that individuals facing more social comparison tend to have more complex emotional dysregulation.

REFERENCES

- Aldao, A., Gee, D. G., De Los Reyes, A., & Van Dyk, I. S. (2016). Emotion regulation as a transdiagnostic factor in the development of internalizing and externalizing psychopathology: Current and future directions. *Development and Psychopathology*, 28(4pt1), 927–946. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0954579416000638>
- Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived Self-Efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational Psychologist :/Educational Psychologist*, 28(2), 117–148. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2802_3
- Bjureberg, J., Ljótsson, B., Tull, M. T., Hedman, E., Sahlin, H., Lundh, L. G., Bjärehed, J., DiLillo, D., Messman-Moore, T. L., Gumpert, C. H., & Gratz, K. L. (2015). Development and validation of a brief version of the difficulties in emotion regulation scale: the DERS-16. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 38(2), 284–296. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-015-9514-x>
- Buunk, A. P., & Gibbons, F. X. (2007). Social comparison: The end of a theory and the emergence of a field. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 102(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2006.09.007>
- Collins, R. L. (1996). For better or worse: The impact of upward social comparison on self-evaluations. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119(1), 51–69. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.119.1.51>
- Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202>

- Gibbons, F. X., & Buunk, B. P. (1999). Individual differences in social comparison: Development of a scale of social comparison orientation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76(1), 129–142. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.1.129>
- Maddux, J. E. (1993). Social Cognitive Models of Health and Exercise Behavior: An Introduction and review of conceptual issues. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 5(2), 116–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413209308411310>
- Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized Self-Efficacy scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston, *Measures in Health Psychology: A User's Portfolio. Causal and Control Beliefs* (pp. 35–37). NFER-NELSON. https://www.religiousforums.com/data/attachment-files/2014/12/22334_285ebbd019ec89856493442b1b6f9154.pdf
- Seligman, M. E. P. (1975). *Helplessness: on depression, development, and death*. <http://cds.cern.ch/record/1012042/>
- Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & University of Toledo. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and Self-Esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm047>
- Wills, T. A. (1981). Downward comparison principles in social psychology. *Psychological Bulletin*, 90(2), 245–271. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.90.2.245>
- Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Self-Efficacy: an essential motive to learn. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 82–91. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1016>