Article

Social comparison and Personal Relative Deprivation among young female Social Media users: A survey

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Abstract

Social media, particularly social networking sites, provide expansive windows opened to see through the life of its users. Exposure to others' lives on social networking sites may consider increased feelings of personal relative deprivation, as the feeling of being deprived arises from comparing oneself to others. Researchers have found that women have the tendency to make upward social comparisons with others, which ultimately results in increased negative feelings about themselves. If there is a desire for online social comparison among young women, can it lead to compulsive checking of social networking sites? Till date, there is little work done in India that looks into the effects of social comparison among women through social media platforms and feelings of relative deprivation thereafter. This paper attempts to examine how the social comparison on online platforms leads to a sense of relative deprivation among young women social media users in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords

Social Media, Youth culture, Sociological study, Women, Jammu and Kashmir.

Introduction

Due to advances in technology in the 21st century, the whole world is experiencing a never-before way of interpersonal communication and social connection. There is an unparalleled way of connectivity and sociality, which is possible only because of the social media platforms.

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Social media (SM) has become an indispensable component of the present society. It has profoundly altered the way we conduct our lives and build relationships (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002). One can easily observe the level of penetration of social media platforms into people's lives. Social media does not discriminate on any level. If you know how to deal with your smartphone using the internet, you are good to dive into the never-ending ocean of new experiences. However, every phenomenon has a binary effect. Social media, particularly social networking sites like Instagram and Facebook, provides expansive windows opened to see through the life of its users. Social media users can look into the life of their friends, relatives, colleagues, and neighbours, which for many leads to own life dissatisfaction because of the social comparison they make. The present paper attempts to examine the relative deprivation induced by the over-exposure to others' lives on social media, exclusively among women social media users between 15-25 years of age.

Social Media: A Social Comparison Platform
According to Dollarhide (2021), "Social media is a computer-based technology that eases sharing ideas, thoughts, and information by building virtual networks and communities". More than 3.8 billion people use social media (Kemp, 2020). The worldwide usage of social media by Internet users on an average is 145 minutes (Tankovska, 2021). It is a new, popular method of communication. It emerged as a new method of interaction with family and friends. Many use social media mainly to stay connected with their friends and extended family members. Because of the impeccable features of social media, family members who live far from their homes because of jobs or studies can connect to their families online. Earlier, this was a very expensive practice.

SM typically gives prominence to personalised profiles and user-generated content such as photos, videos, and blogs. SM users share their thoughts, feelings, insights and emotions on SM platforms. Most of the content shared on social networking sites (SNSs) is the personal information of its users. What is going on in their lives, which tourist destination they hit on during holidays, what personal or professional achievements they got; people share such information on SNSs to show to their SM friends. Amazingly, these pieces of information are never negative; they always share their best experiences as nobody wants to share their 'bad hair' days online. People generally portray themselves positively on social networking sites.

Social media, mainly social networking sites, are more like 'Social Comparison Platforms'. Social comparison is natural in human beings. However, various SM platforms have taken this tendency of social comparison among humans to a whole new level in the last several years. SM platforms make their users see who is doing what they are not. It often becomes stressful, making them wonder if they are doing enough, enjoying life enough. Many SM users compare their regular lives with others' curated best memories.

SNSs users often feel that they are being pushed or compelled to feel deprived, but they cannot control themselves. Dr Nancy Mramor (2018), a Pennsylvanian psychoanalyst and media specialist said, "Social media has become a way to put these false images right in your field of vision whether you opt for them or not. You can turn off a movie, close a magazine or consciously step back from a billboard, but not so with social media. If young women want to know what someone is doing today, or stay connected to their friends, they have to turn it on". When SM users visit SNSs such as Facebook, Instagram they do not have in mind to indulge in comparison. Still, it just happens while seeing others' posts, status updates, stories, and timelines. This unintentional comparison process occurs and leaves many SM users feeling deprived, though most do not do anything; they just feel bad for themselves. Yet, many take it seriously and change their social behaviour accordingly.

SNSs provide frequent exposure to others' lives, making their users indulge in comparison with their online friends. Research has revealed that SNSs can degrade one's well-being because of envy arising from discouraging social comparison (Verduyn et al., 2021; Krasnova et al., 2011). Facebook use, in particular, heralds upward social comparison, which negatively impacts "individuals' self-esteem and well-being" across time. In contrast, "Instagram use has a direct negative effect on psychological well-being" (Schmuck et al., 2019).

Women and Social Comparison

Researchers found out that women tend to make upward social comparisons with others, which ultimately results in increased negative feelings about themselves. Most women assess themselves against some 'societal ideal' (Jones, 2001). Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have made the comparison more common since these online platforms make it easier to compare oneself to the 'ideal'. This ideal could be anything we attach to the highest standard, collectively in the given society. Everyone desires to have an 'ideal life'. Almost everyone tries to display their ideal life through their posts, mainly

through photos and videos on social media platforms. A number of women have reported making upward comparisons positively in an attempt to motivate themselves. However, most of the time, when women are feeling low, they indulge more in social comparison, thus evoking negative implications.

Women's social media accessibility and use in India

India is a traditionally patriarchal society. Being a male-dominated society, the social position of women in India remained low for centuries. This low status of women was mainly the result of illiteracy, caste restrictions, economic reliance, religious prohibitions, absence of female leadership, and unsympathetic stance of men. However, from the early 1950s onwards, both structural as well as cultural changes resulted in the emancipation of women in India and provided Indian women equal opportunity in education, employment and political participation (Ahuja, 2010). But for Srinivas (1977), only a tiny minority of women have benefitted from the changes that have occurred. This inequality still manifests itself in contemporary Indian society. In India, women lag behind men in all fields of life and, till date, remain under-represented. This lag can be easily visible in the use of digital media. Only modern urban educated women are enjoying access to digital media, yet not all. The majority of rural women still do not have access to smartphones and the internet. They are mainly involved in home chores and agricultural activities, not much educated, financially dependent on male family members, having no exposure to the digital world. Women's least or no access to phones and the internet is also because of cultural and social norms.

There is a huge gender divide in India in the context of digital world accessibility. According to Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) Association's 2020 mobile gender gap report, "only 21 per cent of women in India are mobile internet users". The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India (2020), through the National Sample Survey's 75th Round conducted from July 2017 to June 2018, revealed that only 8.5 per cent of females in rural India could use the Internet, while 30.1 per cent of urban females can use the Internet. As far as subscription of the two most popular SNSs (Facebook and Instagram) in India is concerned, as per *statista.com*: India ranks first in Facebook subscribers, the majority of which are men, i.e., 74.2 per cent and only 25.8 per cent are women. 9.6 per cent of women Facebook subscribers in India are between 25-34 years of age. As far as Instagram users' number in India is concerned, as of April 2021, there is a male

majority on this platform with 73.5 per cent and only 26.5 per cent of women users, which includes 10.6 per cent of women between the age of 18 and 24.

Research gap

The majority of the academic research works focused on women's online self-presentation, body image, and stereotypical presence. There has been minimal consideration to examining social media platforms' effects on women. Unfortunately, no studies in India addressed the subject explicitly. Thus, in order to fill the gap, the present research has been carried to examine the effects of social media platforms, particularly Social Networking Sites (SNSs), on young women. Moreover, till date, there is very little work done in India that looks into the effects of social comparison among women through social media platforms and feelings of relative deprivation thereafter. The present work was mainly drafted to address this issue.

Literature Review

Social Comparison: Festinger (1954) asserted that people indulge in social comparisons as they have a drive for self-assessment. Social comparison is a process by which individuals assess their life situations, and on comparing themselves to others, they try to increase their self-understanding. People make use of social comparison in a direct and simple way. "If they are in a better situation than similar others (downward comparisons), they feel satisfied". Furthermore, "if they are in a worse situation than similar others (upward comparisons), they feel dissatisfied" (White et al., 2006).

In social networking sites, the apparent self-presentation of comparison targets (other SNSs users) pushes people for upward social comparison, and SNSs provide easy access to the personal information of those targets (Fan et al., 2019; Vogel et al., 2014; Wood, 1989; Wills, 1981). Most studies have shown that people on social media platforms try to show positive aspects of their lives only to get positive impressions on others (Brandenberg et al., 2019; Park & Baek, 2018; Jang et al., 2016). Increased social comparison on SM platforms raises jealousy and envy, escalates social tension, and makes its users sulk about various interpersonal issues (Wang et al., 2018). Passive use of social networking sites, those who directly or indirectly indulge in the consumption of others' glorified online content such as social networking sites' profiles, photos, videos, status updates and online stories, is connected to social comparison orientation that shortens subjective well-being and social capital (Lee,

2020). Schulze and Krätschmer-Hahn (2014) claim that "the feeling of relative deprivation will arise from the comparison of oneself to others".

Relative Deprivation: Mussweiler and Strack (2012) assert that "Almost all our achievements are relative, in that their merit depends on the achievements of others". Social comparisons between people are at the centre of relative deprivation. According to Crosby (1982), relative deprivation is "wanting what one does not have, and feeling that one deserves whatever it is one wants but does not have".

The concept of relative deprivation, formed by Stouffer et al. (1949) and extended by Merton and Kitt (1950), suggests that "people experience feelings of deprivation mainly when they compare their own situations unfavourably with those of other individuals or groups" (Abercrombie et al., 2000). Tropp and Wright (1999) defined relative deprivation as "one's sense of deprivation in comparisons with other individuals or social groups".

According to De Carufel (1986), relative deprivation comprises two related elements in its expansion: "first, people are aware of differences between themselves and others through a social comparison process" – the social comparison process makes a person aware of differences between themselves and others; and "second, people perform justice evaluations in order to judge whether the perceived differential is justified" – to consider if the observable differential is justified, a person carries out justice evaluations.

Runciman (1966) broadened the concept of relative deprivation by distinguishing between individual and group relative deprivation. He believes that people may compare themselves to others and feel personally deprived. He defined personal relative deprivation (PRD) as the "result of a comparison between the self and a more fortunate member of the in-group or the out-group".

PRD refers to "the feeling of dissatisfaction and resentment resulting from the belief that one is deprived of desired and deserved outcomes compared with what others have" (Kim et al., 2016; Callan et al., 2015). It is the belief that one's situation is worse than others. It reflects interpersonal comparisons that one makes with "similar others" such as friends and colleagues (Wood, 1989). PRD is "an important predictor of social outcomes, behaviours, and attitudes" (Smith & Pettigrew, 2015). When people feel that similar others have more than what they have, it leads to feelings of discontent and unjust.

Methodology of the Study

The study primarily focused on the young female social media users of Facebook and Instagram as these are among the most popular social networking sites worldwide. With 2.80 billion monthly active users, Facebook is the largest social networking service as of December 2020 (Facebook Investor Relations, 2021). As presented by the website *statista.com*, Instagram, with 1,158 million active users as of January 2021, is the fifth most prominent social networking service (Tankovska, 2021).

It has been found from various studies that youngsters tend to use social media platforms more than adults. They could be seen connected to their electronic devices mainly to reach out to others using social media. Keeping this in mind, the target population for the study was narrowed down to young female social media users between the age group of 15-25 years of Jammu Division.

Jammu is one of the two administrative divisions within the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the northernmost part of India. The launch of 4G services and flooding of 'cheaper' smart mobile phones in the market has been the main contributor behind the rising number of Internet subscribers in J&K. It has been observed that the main motive to have an internet connection is to make use of social networking sites. It ultimately led to an increase in the number of subscribers of social networking sites (mainly Facebook and Instagram) in J&K. The population under study was further narrowed down to users of Facebook and Instagram as both the platforms are very popular among the young generation of Jammu division.

An online survey was conducted using a questionnaire to reach out to social media users in the Jammu division. A total number of 129 accurately filled responses was collected. Participants comprised of 110 students, 13 government employees, 4 private employees and 2 home-makers.

Research questions

R1: Is there any relation between Online Social Comparison (OSC) and Online Personal Relative Deprivation (OPRD)?

R2: Does online social comparison among young female social media users predict online personal relative deprivation?

Research Instrument

Primary data collection was done using a questionnaire. To measure online personal relative deprivation (OPRD), a self-administered scale (OPRD scale) with 10 items (5-point Likert scale with 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree') was used. To test the internal consistency and

reliability of the OPRD scale, Cronbach's alpha test was conducted. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was 0.941, indicating excellent reliability and internal consistency. The item-total correlations for the OPRD scale were all above 0.50.

Table 1: OPRD scale statistics

Scale Statistics			
Mean	Variance	Standard Deviation	Number of Items
29.84	85.700	9.257	10

Data Analysis

The present study tried to find the motivation among young female SM users for joining Social Networking Sites (SNSs). It was seen that 49.6 per cent of participants (N=64) joined SNSs to stay connected with their relevant others (family, friends, colleagues). 17 per cent participants (N=22) wanted to experience such a new thing like SNS, so out of curiosity, they joined SNSs. 16.3 per cent of participants (N=21) said that everyone was on SNSs, so they just followed the trend. 10.9 per cent of participants (N=14) said that their relevant others encouraged them to join SNSs. And 6.2 per cent of participants (N=8) joined SNSs to make new contacts. The majority of the participants (N=123, 95.3 %) used their smartphones to visit social networking sites. 79.8 per cent of participants (N=103) liked Instagram, whereas 24 participants (18.6 %) liked Facebook. Only 2 participants liked none of the above SNSs, though they used them. The average time spent by the participants on Instagram in a day is 1 hour, 45 minutes and 78 seconds. In contrast, the average time spent on Facebook by the participants is 52 minutes and 57 seconds. The majority of the participants (N=103, 79.8 %) kept their SNSs profiles private, while 20.2 per cent of the participants kept their SNSs profiles public. It shows that majority of the young women are concerned about their safety online.

Correlation between OSC and OPRD

Being an exploratory and qualitative study, the present paper included two main categorical variables: The first one, Online Social Comparison (OSC) as an independent variable, and the second one, Online Personal Relative Deprivation (OPRD) as a dependent variable.

OSC is a process through which social media users evaluate or judge their abilities or opinions by comparing themselves to the 'others' online. With the help of the questionnaire, participants were asked whether they compare themselves with their SNS friends on seeing their posts and

photos. 45 per cent of participants (N=58) agreed that they often compare themselves with their SNS friends on seeing the content they upload about their lives, such as posts and photos.

OPRD is one's sense of deprivation compared to the 'others' on social media platforms such as social networking sites. SNSs users may compare themselves to other SNSs users and feel personally deprived. OPRD scale included items such as "I feel sad when I see my social media friends have everything that I do not have"; "It makes me feel isolated/depressed while going through the timelines and posts of my social media friends"; "My social media friends have a better life than me"; "I often desire similar joyous life like some of my social media friends". The level of online personal relative deprivation among the 129 respondents was ascertained using the OPRD scale. 11 per cent of participants (N=14) showed very high OPRD, 22 per cent of participants (N=28) showed high OPRD, 25 per cent of participants (N=32) showed moderately high OPRD, 36 per cent of participants (N=47) showed low OPRD, and 6 per cent of participants (N=8) showed very low OPRD. Thus, it can be said that 57.36 per cent of participants (N=74) do feel online personal relative deprivation with varying degrees.

Thus, in order to answer the R1, Spearman's correlation (rho) was run using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine the relationship between OSC and OPRD. It was found that there was a strong, positive and high correlation between OSC and OPRD which was, as per L. Cohen (1992), statistically significant (Spearman's rho = 0 .710, $p < 0.001$).

Does OSC cause OPRD?
To find the answer to the R2, a simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether online social comparison (OSC) could predict online personal relative deprivation (OPRD) among female social media users (15-25 years).

A scatterplot revealed a positive and linear relationship between OSC and OPRD. It was found after the analysis of standard residuals that data did not include any outliers (Standard Residual Minimum = -3.223 and Standard Residual Maximum = 2.648). A Durbin-Watson test (d = 1.791) confirmed that data is free from residual errors. The data showed homoscedasticity and normality of residuals.

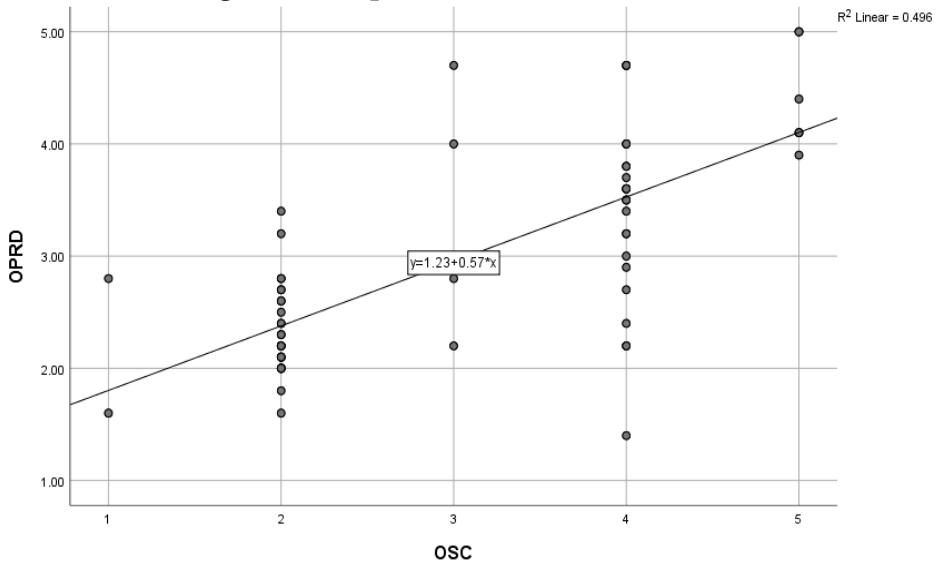**Fig. 1: Scatterplot for OSC and OPRD**

Table 2: ANOVA for OPRD (dependent variable)

ANOVA[a]					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	54.379	1	54.379	124.845	.000[b]
Residual	55.317	127	.436		
Total	109.696	128			

a. Dependent Variable: OPRD
b. Predictors: (Constant), OSC

The online social comparison (OSC) statistically significantly predicted online personal relative deprivation (OPRD), $F(1,127) = 124.845$, $p < 0.001$, accounting for 49.6 % of the variability in OPRD with adjusted $R2 = .492$, this is moderately strong relationship (Cohen, 1988). The regression for predicting online personal relative deprivation (OPRD) from the online social comparison (OSC) was OPRD y = 1.23+0.57x (OSC).

Findings
With the help of the conclusions of the present study, the subsequent interpretation is made regarding SNS usage by young women in the Jammu division and its effect on them:
1. The majority were motivated to join SNSs mainly to stay associated with their friends, family and colleagues.

2. They mainly use their smart mobile phones to visit social media platforms.
3. They liked Instagram more than Facebook, making Instagram most popular among young women in the Jammu division.
4. They prefer to keep their SNSs profiles private. It shows that majority of the young women in the Jammu division are more concerned for their privacy and safety online.
5. 45 per cent of young women participants evaluate or judge their abilities or opinions by comparing themselves to the 'others' online. It shows that they are, directly or indirectly, indulged in online social comparison.
6. From the data collected using the OPRD scale, it was found that 57.36 per cent of participants (N=74) do feel online personal relative deprivation with varying degrees. It proves that one's sense of deprivation compared with the 'others' on social media platforms such as social networking sites leads to online personal relative deprivation.
7. The findings (Spearman's rho = 0.710, p < 0.001) prove that there is a strong, positive and high correlation between Online Social Comparison (OSC) and Online Personal Relative Deprivation (OPRD). Thus, it proved that young women SNSs users compare themselves to other SNSs users and feel personally deprived.
8. The online social comparison (OSC) statistically significantly predicted online personal relative deprivation (OPRD), accounting for 49.6 % of the variability in OPRD with adjusted R^2 = .492. It is a moderately strong relationship (Cohen, 1988). And, keeping it in mind, it is safe to say that OSC may predict OPRD. Thus, social comparison with social media friends online leads to personal relative deprivation in young women.

Conclusion

Following Kingsley Davis' idea of Human Society (1949), not just the nature of society is complex, but human nature as such is extremely complicated. When human nature is characterised as selfish, it is also defined as virtuous. In the attribute of complexity, humans compare each other, which has evolved from a stage of physical and personal appearance to the stage of how you want to appear. There is a comparison at more expansive universal levels during the age of online media.

Social media platforms have become platforms of social comparison for humans, particularly women in this case who identify themselves as

deprived of all 'societal ideals'. The desirability factor of looking good and seeming real in the virtual world has set the trend of presenting better and more competent, situates the competition of positive and negative appearances of life. Even if people do not put their negative on the virtual platforms, their positive manifestations also connote the contradictory. The traits of differences remain distinct and continue to propel the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, the beautiful and the ugly and so on. And, humans tend to catch these distinctions in their characterisations of superiority and inferiority, resulting in the conception of a sense of inequality. Deprivation is the outcome of this conception, highlighting the peculiar features of belonging to the online world. We may consider that the specialities of the online (virtual) world are extensions of the material world only. Still, there is a significant difference in compulsive checking comprising the availability of the internet and social media profiles. The deprivation is either in relation or in comparison to the online content shared on social networking sites by others. The study's findings present a strong, positive relationship between "online social comparison" and "online personal relative deprivation" among the female youth. Thus, based on the study's findings, it can be said that many young women social media users often match themselves with their SNSs' friends. This comparison ultimately leads to heightened perceptions of relative deprivation at the personal level, which eventually affects their social behaviour.

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