

Social Comparison on Social Media and Psychological Well-being among College Students

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Abstract: *This study aimed to examine the relationship between the ideal life portrayed on social media and students' peace of mind. The study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The sample consisted of 392 college selected using a quota sampling technique. Data were collected using the Ideal Life on Social Media Scale and the Peace of Mind Scale and were analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. The results revealed a statistically significant but very weak positive relationship between social comparison on social media and students' peace of mind ($p = 0.044$; $r = 0.102$). The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.010$) indicates that the two variables shared only approximately 1.04% of their variance, suggesting that social comparison on social media has a very limited association with students' peace of mind and that the latter is likely related to many other factors. The positive direction of the correlation suggests that exposure to idealized social media content does not necessarily correspond to lower peace of mind and may be perceived as a source of inspiration or motivation when interpreted adaptively. However, this interpretation should be treated cautiously because the small effect size does not support a strong practical relationship.*

Keywords: College Student, Ideal Life on Social Media, Psychological Well-Being.

Abstrakt: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan antara perbandingan sosial di media sosial dan ketenangan jiwa mahasiswa. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional. Sampel penelitian berjumlah 392 mahasiswa menggunakan teknik *quota sampling*. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan skala perbandingan sosial di media sosial dan skala ketenangan jiwa, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan korelasi *Pearson Product Moment*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya hubungan positif yang signifikan, tetapi sangat lemah, antara perbandingan sosial di media sosial dan ketenangan jiwa mahasiswa dengan nilai $p=0,044$ dan $r=0,102$. Nilai koefisien determinasi sebesar $r^2=0,010$ menunjukkan bahwa kedua variabel hanya memiliki varians bersama sekitar 1,04%. Temuan tersebut menegaskan bahwa perbandingan sosial di media sosial memiliki keterkaitan yang sangat terbatas dengan ketenangan jiwa, sedangkan sebagian besar variasi ketenangan jiwa kemungkinan berkaitan dengan faktor-faktor lain yang tidak diteliti. Arah hubungan positif menunjukkan bahwa perbandingan sosial tidak selalu berkaitan dengan penurunan ketenangan jiwa, tetapi interpretasi tersebut perlu dilakukan secara hati-hati karena ukuran hubungannya sangat kecil.

Kata Kunci: Mahasiswa, Kebahagiaan, Kehidupan Ideal Sosial Media

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Introduction

Social media has become a space for communication and the formation of social perceptions that is deeply embedded in students' lives. In addition to being used to obtain information and interact, social media allows individuals to observe and evaluate the attitudes, behaviors, and lives of others (Aditia, 2021; Firdaus, 2024). The intensity of students' engagement with social media is also linked to changes in their interaction patterns and psychological well-being (Nasrullah, 2017). Various platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp, provide a space for users to showcase carefully curated achievements, appearances, happiness, and lifestyles (Sitanggang et al., 2024). These representations often do not depict users' lives in their entirety but showcase the aspects considered most appealing and ideal (Firdaus, 2024).

Exposure to representations of an ideal life can encourage students to engage in social comparison with other users. This phenomenon can be explained by Social Comparison Theory, developed by Festinger, which posits that individuals have an urge to evaluate their own abilities, opinions, and qualities by comparing themselves to others (Myers & Twenge, 2019). Such comparisons can take the form of downward social comparison when individuals compare themselves to those they perceive as being below them or upward social comparison when individuals compare themselves to those they perceive as more successful (Ye & Gao, 2025). In the context of social media, upward comparisons are more likely to occur because posts typically showcase success, happiness, appearance, and positive achievements. Constant comparison can lead to dissatisfaction, envy, frustration, and negative self-evaluation, although under certain conditions it can also foster motivation for growth (Fakhri, 2017; McComb et al., 2023).

Social comparison on social media may be linked to psychological well-being because this process influences how students perceive and evaluate themselves. Psychological well-being in this study is examined through the concept of psychological well-being, which refers to a state in which individuals are able to accept themselves, have a sense of purpose in life, build positive relationships, manage their environment, and develop their potential to the fullest (Zhang et al., 2023). This concept not only indicates the absence of psychological distress but also an individual's ability to lead an adaptive and meaningful life. Psychological well-being scales have been widely used to assess an individual's psychological well-being through the dimensions of self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth (Kharisma et al., 2024; Mulyadi et al., 2024; Savitri, 2019). Thus, social comparison that results in negative self-evaluation is theoretically associated with low psychological well-being among college students.

A number of studies have examined the relationship between social media activity and psychological well-being. Arenz et al. (2023), through a study on social comparison on social media and mental health, showed that exposure to others' lives may be associated with feelings of inferiority, anxiety, and self-dissatisfaction. Lee (2022) found that a social comparison orientation on social networking sites is negatively associated with psychological well-being, with perceived social support and self-esteem serving as mediating mechanisms that help explain this relationship. Meanwhile, Fusvinda & Kurniawan (2025) found a relationship between online self-presentation and psychological well-being among Generation Z users with secondary Instagram accounts. These three studies indicate that the way individuals evaluate and present themselves on social media is related to their psychological state.

Other this researchs have primarily focused on the intensity of social media use as the main variable. Gea et al. (2025) found a significant association between Instagram use and college students' mental health, particularly regarding mood swings and difficulty regulating emotions. Aziz (2020) also found a significant association between the intensity of social media use and levels of depression among college students. These results indicate that the more intensively students use social media, the greater the likelihood of certain psychological issues arising. However, Zhang et al. (2023) explain that social

media use is not always directly linked to lower psychological well-being, as its impact can be influenced by how individuals interpret their social media experiences.

Based on six key this research that serve as the empirical foundation namely, Arenz et al. (2023), Lee (2022), Fusvinda and Kurniawan (2025), Gea et al. (2025), Al Aziz (2020), and Zhang et al. (2023) there are two main research trends. Studies examining mental health and psychological well-being generally use the intensity of social media use or online self-presentation as predictors, whereas studies on social comparison more often link it to depression, self-esteem, anxiety, or psychological well-being in general. In the referenced studies, no research has been found that specifically operationalizes social comparison on social media as a predictor variable and students' peace of mind as a criterion variable. Furthermore, the context of students at Islamic universities has not received special attention, even though the personal, social, and religious values that develop in that environment can shape how students evaluate themselves and interpret social media content. It is this conceptual and contextual gap that forms the basis for this study of students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra.

This research aims to examine the relationship between social comparison on social media and the peace of mind of students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. Social comparison on social media is understood as the tendency of students to evaluate their own circumstances by comparing them to the achievements, happiness, appearance, and lives of other users as portrayed on social media. Psychological well-being is understood as a state of psychological well-being reflected in self-acceptance, life goals, positive relationships, independence, environmental mastery, and personal growth. Based on Social Comparison Theory and previous research findings, the hypothesis of this study is that there is a significant relationship between social comparison on social media and students' psychological well-being.

Method

This research employs a quantitative approach with a correlational design (Creswell, 2018). This design was used to examine the relationship between social comparison on social media as the independent variable (X) and students' psychological well-being as the dependent variable (Y) without applying any treatment to the respondents. The hypothesis tested is that social comparison on social media is negatively correlated with students' psychological well-being. The more students tend to compare themselves with other users on social media, the lower their psychological well-being.

The research participants were currently enrolled students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. The sample consisted of 392 students, determined using the Slovin formula and selected through quota sampling. Respondents came from eight faculties, with a quota of 49 students per faculty. This technique was used to ensure that all faculties were represented in the sample, even though the selection of respondents within each quota was not random.

The research instruments consisted of the Social Comparison Scale on Social Media and the Psychological Well-Being Scale. The Social Comparison Scale on Social Media was developed by the researcher based on Festinger's social comparison theory, adapted to the context of social media use, and initially comprised 20 items. The Psychological Well-Being Scale was developed by the researcher based on Ryff's dimensions of psychological well-being, which include six dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal growth, and initially consisted of 30 items. Both scales use a Likert scale with four or five response options indicating the respondent's level of agreement with each statement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

The procedure for developing the instrument includes the following stages: 1). Theoretical review, which involves examining the concepts and dimensions of each variable (Festinger's social comparison theory and Ryff's dimensions of psychological well-being) as the basis for formulating operational definitions. 2). Blueprint development, which involves breaking down each dimension into the indicators to be measured, then determining the proportion of items per indicator. 3). Item development, which

involves drafting statements based on the established indicators, consisting of favorable and unfavorable items. 4). Content validity testing (expert judgment), which involves seeking evaluations from expert faculty members or advisors to assess the alignment of items with indicators and the clarity of language. 5). Readability test: testing the items on a small number of respondents to ensure the statements are easy to understand. 6). Scale pilot test: distributing the scale to a pilot sample to obtain preliminary data. 7). Item analysis, which involves calculating the discriminant power and validity of items through item-total correlations, followed by the elimination of items that do not meet the criteria. 8). Reliability testing, which involves calculating reliability coefficients (e.g., Cronbach's Alpha) to ensure the scale's internal consistency.

The instrument was pilot-tested on 50 students at Ar-Raniry State Islamic University in Banda Aceh. The results of the item analysis showed that 18 of the 20 items on the Social Comparison Scale on Social Media met the validity criteria, with a range of Corrected Item-Total Correlations of [minimum–maximum]. On the Psychological Well-Being Scale, 26 out of 30 items met the validity criteria, with a range of Corrected Item-Total Correlations of [minimum–maximum]. The six items that did not meet the criteria consisting of two items in variable X and four items in variable Y were eliminated prior to the main data collection.

Reliability test results showed that the Social Comparison on Social Media Scale, consisting of 18 items, obtained a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.848. The Psychological Well-Being Scale, consisting of 26 items, obtained a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.896. These values indicate that both instruments have good internal consistency and are suitable for use in research.

Data were collected by distributing questionnaires to respondents who met the research criteria. Before completing the instrument, respondents were informed about the research objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and data confidentiality. The data were then analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. A normality test was conducted using the Monte Carlo approach at a significance level of 0.05, while the relationship between the two variables was tested using Pearson Product-Moment correlation. The direction and strength of the correlation were interpreted based on the correlation coefficient value, and statistical significance was determined at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Results

The research results are presented through instrument quality testing, descriptive analysis, tests of differences based on respondent characteristics, normality tests, and correlation tests between social comparison on social media and students' psychological well-being.

1. Instrument Quality Testing

Before being used in the main study, the research instrument was first pilot-tested on 50 students at Ar-Raniry State Islamic University in Banda Aceh. Instrument quality testing was conducted through validity and reliability tests to ensure that the instrument was suitable for use in the study.

a. Validity Test

Validity testing was conducted to determine whether all questionnaire items were capable of accurately measuring the variables. An item was deemed valid if the calculated r value was greater than the table r value; the table r value for content validity testing was 0.273. Based on the validity test results, it was found that the "Ideal Social Media Life" instrument had 18 valid items out of the 20 tested, while the other 2 items were deemed invalid. Meanwhile, the "Peace of Mind" instrument had 26 valid items out of the 30 tested, and 4 items were deemed invalid. An item is considered valid if it has a significance level of less than 0.05 and a calculated r value greater than the table r value of 0.273. Therefore, a total of 44 items that met the validity criteria were used in the study, while the 6 items that did not meet the criteria were eliminated from the research instruments.

b. Reliability Test

A reliability test was conducted to determine the consistency of the instrument using Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum threshold of > 0.60 . The results of the reliability test showed that the Cronbach's Alpha value for the "Ideal Social Media Life" variable was 0.848 and for the "Peace of Mind" variable was 0.896. Since both Cronbach's Alpha values were above the minimum threshold of 0.60, the research instrument was deemed reliable. These results indicate that the items on both scales exhibit good internal consistency in measuring the constructs under study, making them suitable for use in subsequent research phases.

2. Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to characterize the data for each research variable. The descriptive statistics presented include the number of respondents (N), minimum score, maximum score, mean, and standard deviation. The presentation of descriptive statistics aims to provide information regarding the distribution and trends of the data obtained from the research respondents.

a. Descriptive Analysis of Variables X and Y

Descriptive analysis is used to describe the characteristics of the data for each research variable. The descriptive statistics presented include the number of respondents (N), the minimum score, the maximum score, the mean, and the standard deviation. The presentation of descriptive statistics aims to provide information regarding the distribution and trends of the data obtained from the study respondents.

Table 1 Results of Descriptive Analysis

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
The Ideal Life on Social Media	392	29	90	61,37	14,106
psychological well-being	392	69	130	104,60	12,263
Valid N (listwise)	392				

Based on the results of a descriptive analysis of 392 respondents, the "Ideal Social Media Life" variable had a minimum score of 29 and a maximum score of 90, with a mean of 61.37 and a standard deviation of 14.106. These results indicate that the level of ideal social media life perceived by the respondents falls into the moderate category. Meanwhile, the "Peace of Mind (psychological well-being)" variable had a minimum score of 69 and a maximum score of 130, with a mean of 104.60 and a standard deviation of 12.263. These results indicate that students' levels of peace of mind tend to fall within the moderate to high category.

b. Descriptive Analysis of Variables X and Y by Gender

A descriptive analysis of variables X and Y by gender provides a brief overview of students' Ideal Social Media Life and Mental Peace as seen through the lens of their gender. For the "Ideal Social Media Life" variable, female students had a mean score of 61.77, slightly higher than that of male students, who had a mean of 60.22. Overall, the total average score was 61.37. Descriptively, female students achieved an average social comparison score on social media of 61.77, while male students achieved an average of 60.22. This difference in average scores was then tested using an independent-samples t-test to determine whether the difference between the groups was statistically significant.

Next, regarding the Mental Well-being variable, male students had an average score of 104.76, while female students scored 104.55. Overall, the average mental well-being score for students was 104.60. Descriptively, male students achieved an average psychological well-being score of 104.76, while female students achieved an average of 104.55. This difference in means is very small; however, any

conclusion regarding the presence or absence of a difference must be based on the results of the independent-samples t-test.

Based on the statistical test results, no significant differences were found in social comparisons on social media or in psychological well-being based on gender. Thus, the differences in averages observed descriptively do not indicate statistically significant differences.

c. Descriptive Analysis of Variables X and Y by Age

In the descriptive analysis of variables X and Y by age, we can see an overview of students' "Ideal Social Media Life" and "Peace of Mind" when grouped by age (ranging from 18 to 25 years old): First, regarding the "Ideal Social Media Life" variable, a unique trend is evident. As students get older, the mean score tends to increase. The youngest students (18 years old) have the lowest mean score of 54.50. This figure continues to rise at age 19 (57.76), age 20 (59.00), 21 years old (61.32), and reaches its peak among the oldest student groups: 24 years old (69.33) and 25 years old (81.00 although the 25-year-old group is represented by only one respondent). Overall, the total average score for this variable is 61.37. Descriptively, the average social comparison score on social media tends to increase across several age groups. However, this pattern cannot yet be interpreted as a significant difference or a consistent trend because the number of respondents in each age group is uneven, particularly the 25-year-old group, which consists of only one respondent.

Second, regarding the "Peace of Mind" variable, the average scores of students across all age groups tended to be stable and similar, ranging from 102 to 108. The highest average score was among 18-year-old students at 108.83, while the lowest average score was among 23-year-old students at 102.62. Overall, the average total score for students' mental well-being was 104.60. Descriptively, the average psychological well-being scores for the 18-25 age group ranged from 102.62 to 108.83. Although the differences in average scores across groups appear relatively small, it is not yet possible to conclude whether or not there are age-based differences without conducting inferential tests.

The descriptive data indicate variations in the mean scores for social comparison and psychological well-being across each age group. However, these data cannot be used to state that age influences both variables because inferential testing has not been conducted and there is an imbalance in the number of respondents across groups.

d. Descriptive Analysis Based on Student Semester

In the descriptive analysis based on semester, data was collected based on their semester (from semester 2 to semester 10): First, for the Ideal Social Media Life variable, the average (mean) scores of students across semesters showed considerable variation but remained close together. The lowest average score was found in fourth-semester students, at 58.30. This score then increased in semester 6 (62.08) and reached its highest in eighth-semester students, at 62.35, before decreasing slightly in semester 10 to 61.33. Overall, the total average score for this variable was 61.37. Descriptively, the lowest average social comparison score on social media was found in fourth-semester students, at 58.30, and the highest in eighth-semester students, at 62.35. These differences in averages were tested using a one-way ANOVA to determine whether there were significant differences between semesters.

Then, in the Mental Peace variable, the average student score in each semester tends to be very stable and is in the range of 103 to 106. The highest average score was found in semester 2 students at 106.19, followed by semester 10 students at 106.00. Meanwhile, the lowest average score was in semester 4 students at 103.57. Overall, the average total score of students' mental peace was 104.60. Descriptively, the average psychological well-being of students in each semester ranged from 103.57 to 106.19. Although the average variation appears small, conclusions regarding differences between semesters must be based on the results of a one-way ANOVA. Hasil pengujian menunjukkan bahwa tidak terdapat perbedaan yang signifikan pada perbandingan sosial di media sosial maupun kesejahteraan

psikologis berdasarkan semester. Dengan demikian, variasi nilai rata-rata yang terlihat secara deskriptif belum menunjukkan perbedaan yang bermakna secara statistik.

3. Classical Assumption Tests

Classical assumption tests are a series of tests conducted to ensure that the research data meet the necessary statistical assumptions before further analysis is performed.

a. Normality Test

Table 2 Results of the Normality Test Using Monte Carlo

		Unstandardized Residual
N		392
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	,0000000
	Std. Deviation	12,19992233
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	,058
	Positive	,043
	Negative	-,058
Test Statistic		,058
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		,003 ^c
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)	Sig.	,146 ^d
	95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound ,139
		Upper Bound ,152

Monte Carlo is a simulation method that focuses on repeated random sampling to obtain better statistical estimates. Therefore, in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test for this study, the Monte Carlo approach was used as the basis for determining the normality of the data (Fathiyaturrahmi et al., 2025). The test results showed a Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.146, which is greater than 0.05; thus, the data were deemed to be normally distributed.

4. Hypothesis Testing

a. Correlation Test

A correlation test was conducted to test the research hypothesis, namely to determine whether there is a relationship between the Ideal Social Media Life (X) and Students' Peace of Mind (Y).

Table 3 Results of the Correlation Test

		X	Y
X	Pearson Correlation	1	,102*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,044
	N	392	392
Y	Pearson Correlation	,102*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,044	
	N	392	392

Based on Table 1.3 above, the results of the correlation test between the Ideal Social Media Life (X) and Peace of Mind (Y) show a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.044. The results of the Pearson Product-

Moment correlation analysis indicate a statistically significant positive relationship between social comparison on social media and students' psychological well-being, $r = 0.102$, $p = 0.044$. However, the strength of this relationship is classified as very weak. A correlation coefficient of $r = 0.102$ indicates a positive relationship with very weak strength. This means that an increase in social comparison scores on social media is only very weakly associated with an increase in psychological well-being scores. The coefficient of determination, $r^2 = 0.010$, indicates that the two variables share only about 1.04% of their variance. Therefore, this relationship has very limited practical significance and cannot be used to conclude that social comparison is a major factor related to students' psychological well-being.

Discussion

The moderate level of social comparison among college students indicates that they do not entirely avoid the process of self-evaluation through social media, but neither do they rely on it as the sole basis for assessing their personal lives. This situation may arise because students are exposed to a wide variety of content regarding academic achievements, social relationships, lifestyles, and personal successes, which naturally provide benchmarks for comparison (Andrade et al., 2023; Le Blanc-Brillon et al., 2025). However, students' ability to recognize that social media posts are curated representations can limit the intensity of maladaptive social comparison (Auliannisa & Hatta, 2021; Nugraha et al., 2023). In other words, students are frequently exposed to various representations of seemingly perfect lives on social media, such as academic achievements, happiness, friendships, lifestyles, and personal success. Exposure to such content leads students to form a specific image of how a good, happy, and successful life should be lived (Christanti et al., 2024; Sahoo et al., 2024).

The findings of this study support Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which explains that individuals tend to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to others. Social media facilitates social comparison because users more often showcase aspects of their lives that are perceived as successful, attractive, and happy rather than experiences of failure or difficulty (Ahmad et al., 2024; Tria Adelia & Icha Delia, 2025). Nevertheless, college students do not always accept these representations as a complete picture of life. The ability to recognize that social media content is the result of curation and self-presentation can help students maintain a psychological distance from the displayed standards of living, thereby preventing social comparison from always leading to negative self-evaluation (A. M. Putri & Barseli, 2025; Septian, 2025). The results of this study are consistent with the research by Christanti et al. (2024), which shows that college students in Indonesia frequently engage in social comparison when using social media. These findings are also consistent with the research by Nugraha et al. (2023), which explains that social comparison is an almost inevitable activity when college students use Instagram. Research by Mardatillah & Aulia (2026) also indicates that the frequency of social media use can increase an individual's tendency to engage in social comparison. However, this study differs from several others that found higher levels of social comparison. These differences are likely influenced by respondent characteristics, the type of social media platform used, and variations in the social and cultural contexts where the research was conducted (Christanti et al., 2024).

Theoretically, the "ideal life" portrayed on social media can be understood as a constructed reality shaped through processes of self-selection and self-presentation on social media. Students who constantly view posts about others' academic achievements, romantic relationships, lifestyles, or career successes may develop certain standards regarding what is considered an ideal life (N. M. I. D. Putri, 2026; Swari & Tobing, 2024). However, these standards do not necessarily reflect actual living conditions, as social media tends to highlight the positive aspects and conceal the various difficulties individuals face. Therefore, perceptions of the "ideal life" on social media should be understood as a digitally constructed social representation rather than as a fully objective reality (Chou & Edge, 2012; Merunková & Šlerka, 2019; Septian, 2025).

The interpretation of these research findings must be approached with caution because the data were collected via self-report instruments, which may introduce perceptual bias and social desirability bias. Furthermore, this study did not thoroughly measure the types of social media most frequently used, the frequency of daily access, or students' motivations for using social media. These factors may influence how students construct their perceptions of an ideal life on social media (Godard & Holtzman, 2024; Maharani & Kartasasmita, 2025). The results of this study only describe the circumstances of students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra at the time of data collection. Therefore, the findings cannot be directly generalized to all students in Indonesia without considering differences in cultural, social, and religious characteristics, as well as patterns of social media use at each university (Ang, 2026; Valkenburg et al., 2022). The findings of this study highlight the importance of improving digital literacy among college students. Students need to understand that most content on social media is the result of identity construction that does not always fully reflect real-life conditions. The ability to think critically about various representations of life on social media is expected to help students develop a more realistic perception and reduce the tendency toward maladaptive self-evaluation (Boyle et al., 2022; Nugraha et al., 2023).

The relatively good level of students' psychological well-being indicates that most respondents possess psychological resources that can help them cope with academic, social, and digital demands. Within the framework of psychological well-being, these conditions may be related to self-acceptance, having a sense of purpose in life, the ability to build positive relationships, and adaptive management of one's environment (Charry et al., 2020; Kharisma et al., 2024). These resources likely make students less prone to experiencing a decline in psychological well-being simply from seeing the achievements or successes of other users on social media. These findings support the concept of psychological well-being, which states that psychological well-being is not only characterized by the absence of mental disorders but is also demonstrated through an individual's ability to accept themselves, have a purpose in life, form positive relationships with others, and develop their potential to the fullest. Students with good psychological well-being tend to be able to maintain inner peace when facing various life challenges (Humaidah & Nihayah, 2024; Kharisma et al., 2024).

The results of this study align with research by Afrikana & Virgonita (2024), which indicates that psychological well-being among active Instagram users is influenced by how individuals engage in social comparison (Afrikana & Virgonita, 2024). These findings also align with the study by Ulfa & Farida (2023), which showed that fear of missing out can predict the psychological well-being of college students who use Instagram. Furthermore, a study by Rahma (2024) found that social comparison and self-esteem jointly influence the psychological well-being of Instagram users. However, the results of this study may differ from those of other studies due to differences in respondent characteristics, social environments, and the protective factors possessed by each student. This positive relationship may also be linked to students' ability to regulate their emotions through reappraisal strategies. Through these strategies, students can reframe their interpretation of others' success posts shifting their perception from a source of threat to a source of learning or motivation. The awareness that social media tends to showcase the best moments rather than the full spectrum of life experiences can help students maintain a realistic self-evaluation (Goel, 2021; McComb et al., 2023). However, since emotional regulation was not measured in this study, its contribution to the relationship between the two variables requires further testing. This strategy involves assigning a new, more realistic meaning to content that triggers feelings of discomfort. Instead of feeling down when seeing posts of harmonious family portraits or perfect career successes, students can shift their perspective by realizing that what is displayed on social media is merely a curated "highlight reel" of the best moments, not a reflection of the full reality of life (Goel, 2021).

The results of this study must be interpreted with caution because mental well-being is influenced by various factors that were not fully measured in this study, such as religiosity, economic status, family support, academic pressure, self-esteem, and individual life experiences. Furthermore, the

use of self-report instruments may introduce perceptual biases and a tendency for respondents to provide answers perceived as positive. The results of this study describe the state of peace of mind among students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra at the time the study was conducted. Therefore, the results cannot be directly generalized to all Indonesian students due to differences in cultural characteristics, educational environments, and social conditions at each university.

In the context of Islamic Guidance and Counseling, these findings indicate that services for students should not be limited to restricting social media use, but should also help students develop a critical, realistic, and self-acceptance-oriented perspective. Counselors can develop information services, group guidance, and individual counseling that integrate digital literacy, emotional regulation, healthy self-evaluation, and a positive interpretation of others' achievements. This approach is important because social media is not always a source of psychological distress; its impact also depends on how students assess themselves and interpret the content they receive. However, these implications must be applied proportionally because the relationship between the two variables in the study was classified as very weak. Such programs can be directed toward improving emotional regulation skills, strengthening self-concept, developing social support, and enhancing digital literacy so that students can maintain their peace of mind even while living in a digital environment fraught with various demands and social comparisons (Verduyn et al., 2017).

The positive correlation indicates that an increase in social comparison scores on social media is associated with an increase in psychological well-being scores, albeit the relationship is very weak. This finding differs from initial predictions, which assumed that social comparison—particularly upward comparison—would be linked to a decline in psychological well-being. This divergence suggests that, for university students, social comparison is not necessarily perceived as a threat to self-esteem; under certain conditions, it can serve as a source of information, inspiration, or motivation for self-development. However, this explanation remains a theoretical interpretation, as the study did not directly measure motivation or inspiration. How individuals interpret the content they view is a crucial factor in determining its impact on their psychological state. One possible explanation for the positive relationship is the students' ability to critically evaluate social media content. Students who understand that posts are curated are less likely to view others' successes as entirely objective reflections of real life. Such digital literacy can help students distinguish personal reality from the idealized representations found on social media and reduce maladaptive self-evaluation (Nugraha et al., 2023). Nevertheless, as the role of digital literacy was not directly tested in this study, it should be regarded as a potential explanation rather than an empirical conclusion.

The results of this study indicate that the consequences of social comparison are determined not only by the direction of the comparison but also by how individuals interpret the comparison outcomes. Within Social Comparison Theory, upward comparison can indeed lead to dissatisfaction if individuals view others as setting an unattainable standard. Conversely, the same type of comparison can foster personal growth if individuals perceive the success of others as information regarding realistic and achievable goals. Thus, the observed positive correlation likely arises because some students interpret content showcasing success as a reference for self-improvement rather than as evidence of their own inferiority (Fakhri, 2017; Irmer & Schmiedek, 2023). In the context of social media, students are frequently exposed to posts displaying the success, happiness, and achievements of others. However, this study demonstrates that the process of social comparison does not inevitably result in diminished psychological well-being. When students are able to interpret such posts adaptively, social comparison can actually boost motivation for growth without compromising their peace of mind.

These research findings align with Ryff's concept of psychological well-being, which posits that individuals possessing self-acceptance, a clear sense of purpose, autonomy, and environmental mastery are better equipped to maintain their psychological well-being despite facing various environmental demands—including those of the digital landscape. Thus, a student's peace of mind is not solely

determined by exposure to idealized lives on social media; it is also shaped by their ability to manage emotions, accept themselves, and respond wisely to the information encountered on these platforms.

The finding of a very weak positive association supports the view that social media use does not have uniform psychological consequences for every individual. Zhang et al. (2023) demonstrate that the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being is influenced by the psychological processes accompanying the social media experience. Irmer & Schmiedek (2023) also explain that the impact of upward comparison depends on the evaluation individuals make after comparing themselves to others. Therefore, the results of this study can be interpreted as an indication that some students may engage in adaptive comparisons, while others experience negative consequences, resulting in a very weak aggregate relationship (Wen & Jin, 2025; Zhang et al., 2023). Furthermore, the study by Irmer and Schmiedek (2023) also indicates that the impact of social comparison on psychological well-being is influenced by the individual's self-evaluation process. If such comparisons are interpreted as motivation for growth, their impact can be positive. Conversely, if it is perceived as a threat to self-esteem, psychological well-being tends to decline (R. Collins, 1996; S. Collins et al., 2023).

A correlation coefficient of 0.102 and a shared variance of approximately 1.04% indicate that social comparison on social media has only a very limited association with students' psychological well-being. This weak relationship may stem from the fact that the consequences of social comparison are not uniform; some students might respond with dissatisfaction, while others view it as a source of motivation or information for self-development. Furthermore, psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct that can be linked to religiosity, social support, self-esteem, emotional regulation, academic pressure, personality, and family circumstances. Consequently, social comparison on social media cannot be regarded as a primary factor in explaining students' psychological well-being. There are various other factors that potentially exert a greater influence, such as religiosity, social support, self-esteem, emotional regulation, personality, academic pressure, and family conditions (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Eva et al., 2020; Yu, 2024). Therefore, the findings of this study must be interpreted with caution and cannot serve as a basis for concluding that the idealized lives portrayed on social media are the sole factor influencing students' peace of mind.

Conclusion

This research indicates a statistically significant but very weak positive relationship between social comparison on social media and the psychological well-being of students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.102$ with a p -value of 0.044. The coefficient of determination, $r^2 = 0.010$, indicates that the two variables share only about 1.04% of their variance. Thus, social comparison on social media has a very limited association with students' psychological well-being and cannot be considered a primary factor explaining their psychological condition. The positive direction of the relationship found differs from the initial hypothesis, which predicted a negative relationship between social comparison on social media and students' psychological well-being. Therefore, the hypothesis regarding a negative relationship is not supported by the research data. These findings suggest that social comparison on social media is not always associated with a decline in psychological well-being, although this study cannot yet determine the factors causing this positive relationship. The possibility that students interpret others' successes as a source of information, inspiration, or motivation should be understood as a theoretical interpretation, as digital literacy, emotional regulation, and the ways in which social media content is interpreted were not directly measured in this study. In practical terms, the research findings indicate that Islamic Guidance and Counseling services at universities should not merely focus on restricting social media use. Counseling services can be directed toward strengthening students' abilities to engage in healthy self-evaluation, accept themselves as they are, manage their emotions, and critically and realistically assess how life is portrayed on social media. However, these implications must be applied proportionally because the

relationship found is very weak. Interventions aimed at students' psychological well-being must still consider other factors, such as social support, religiosity, self-esteem, academic pressure, family circumstances, personality, and emotional regulation skills. This research has limitations because it used a correlational design and self-report instruments therefore, the results cannot be used to explain cause-and-effect relationships. The use of quota sampling and the fact that respondents were drawn exclusively from a single university also limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to use a more representative sampling technique, involve students from various universities, and examine mediator or moderator variables, such as digital literacy, emotional regulation, self-esteem, religiosity, and social comparison orientation. In practical terms, the research findings indicate that Islamic Guidance and Counseling services at universities should not merely focus on restricting social media use. Counseling services can be directed toward strengthening students' abilities to engage in healthy self-evaluation, accept themselves as they are, manage their emotions, and critically and realistically assess how life is portrayed on social media. However, these implications must be applied proportionally because the relationship found is very weak. Interventions aimed at students' psychological well-being must still consider other factors, such as social support, religiosity, self-esteem, academic pressure, family circumstances, personality, and emotional regulation skills. This research has limitations because it used a longitudinal design; a mixed-methods approach could also be used to understand how social comparison on social media relates to changes in students' psychological well-being over time

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