

The Relationship Between Social Comparison, Problematic Internet Use and Social Anxiety in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the relationship between social comparison, problematic internet use and social anxiety in adolescents. Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood, so that it makes a difference or change in the demands of the characteristics of development and growth. The research method used was quantitative correlation with a sample of 217 high school adolescents in Asemrowo District, Surabaya. Data collection instruments used three scales, namely the social anxiety scale, social comparison scale, and problematic internet use scale measured using a Likert scale. The results of the analysis show that social comparison and problematic internet use have a simultaneous relationship with social anxiety in adolescents. Teenagers with social comparison will compare themselves with others, supported by problematic internet use carried out in each teenager, so that social anxiety will increase. The next result shows that social comparison has a positive relationship with social anxiety in adolescents. This means that adolescents who compare themselves with others can increase anxiety and fear when in a social environment. The results of the third hypothesis show that problematic internet use has a positive relationship with social anxiety in adolescents. This means that teenagers who use the internet not according to their needs can increase their anxiety and fear

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood, so this makes a difference or change in the demands of developmental and growth characteristics (Arini, 2021). The different demands of development and growth characteristics cause adolescents to enter the stage of searching for self-identity through their interactions with the environment (Fatmawaty, 2017).

The process of interacting with the social environment is a form of searching for self-identity and self-existence, so adolescents who experience failure can cause self-isolation (Palupi et al., 2023). Adolescents who fail in the search for identity then isolate themselves from their environment can give rise to negative reactions such as negative

emotions, anxiety, nervousness, fear, and discomfort if they are in a social environment because of their inability to establish social relationships properly (Bahri & Kholidin, 2024).

Adolescents who isolate themselves from their social environment can lose the ability to develop interpersonal skills that are important for their identity (Hendrawan et al., 2024). This condition according to Watson & Friend, (1969) also has an impact on the emergence of social anxiety, which is an experience or feeling due to discomfort, fear, anxiety when in a social situation.

Social Anxiety is an anxiety disorder that can be characterized by excessive fear of social situations where individuals will feel evaluated or judged negatively by others (La Greca & Lopez, 1998). A person who experiences social anxiety often has a strong desire to make a good impression, but they feel unable to do so so they choose to avoid social situations or if forced to face these situations then they will feel anxious (Purdon et al., 2001).

Adolescents who experience social anxiety are often inhibited in social skills, have a negative view of themselves, or experience a decline in their academic grades (Srisayekti et al., 2022). This is due to the strong desire in adolescents to be able to make a good impression even though they are not sure of their abilities (Purdon et al., 2001). If social anxiety is experienced by adolescents for a long period of time, it can trigger symptoms of mental disorders such as stress or depression which can worsen the quality of life of adolescents (Leigh & Clark, 2018).

In fact, in Indonesia, social anxiety disorder is the highest mental health disorder (Ministry of Health, 2024) with the most subjects being adolescents. Social anxiety disorder is one of the most common anxiety disorders with the highest value of (12%) when compared to generalized anxiety disorder (6%), panic disorder (5%), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Srisayekti et al., 2022).

A study conducted by Jefferies & Ungar (2020) informed that the participation of seven countries including Indonesia with a total of 6,825 adolescent subjects experienced social anxiety. The highest social anxiety was in America with 57.6% and the lowest was in Indonesia with 22.9%. Bafadal (2021) in his study also said that 15.8% of Indonesian adolescents tend to experience social anxiety. In fact, it turns out that the results of a survey by the National Institute for Health Excellence and Care show that the level of social anxiety in adolescents is the highest at 3.7% (Globarius, 2022).

The picture of social anxiety that is still widely experienced by adolescents was also obtained from the researcher's interviews with ten adolescents studying at Senior High School and Vocational High School in the Surabaya area. These simple interviews yielded information that social anxiety arises when adolescents have to face situations of interaction with newly known people in a new environment. The teenage respondents mentioned that they tend to feel anxious, nervous, have heart palpitations, and have negative thoughts about other people's acceptance of them. Not only that, the anxiety experienced by interview respondents arises when they have to talk to their friends for fear of being ridiculed, criticized, and laughed at when their speech is not fluent.

Social anxiety can arise because adolescents tend to compare themselves with others as a way to assess and form personal identity so they tend to rely more on others as a reference in evaluating themselves (Aar et al., 2018). Adolescents also often compare themselves with friends who are considered superior or public figures, which can have a major impact on their psychological condition (Midgley et al., 2021). Although it is natural to occur as a basic human urge to evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with other individuals (Meier & Johnson, 2022).

According to Festinger (1954), every individual wants a proper assessment in evaluating their skills, characteristics, or abilities. When individuals evaluate themselves directly, they will look for ways to do it correctly, such as making comparisons between themselves and other individuals. Social comparison behavior which is a behavior used to obtain information about oneself by comparing it with others (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999).

Based on simple interviews conducted by previous researchers, it is known that adolescents tend to compare themselves with friends or public figures such as comparing physical conditions, achievements, knowledge, abilities or skills, traits, clothing styles, fun, ways of interacting, and popularity. However, social comparison can also trigger social anxiety, because if adolescents make excessive social comparisons, a negative mindset will emerge and a tendency to do so continuously in various aspects, thus creating pressure to judge themselves only based on unrealistic standards (Hadad et al., 2021). This is because it can trigger a lack of self-confidence that will make him anxious, uncomfortable, or withdraw from his environment (Luthar et al., 2020).

Social anxiety is also prone to occur along with the rise of continuous internet use, because internet development can bring positive or negative benefits (Debbarma & Umadevi, 2018). Adolescents who lack support from their social environment tend to turn to using the internet as a means of meeting unmet social and emotional needs (Jiang & Ngien, 2020). Not only that, adolescents tend to think that using the internet is a safer way because they can control everything involved in the social environment so that they are less likely to be evaluated by others (Yen et al., 2011). When a person with social anxiety finds comfort in interacting online, it tends to develop dependence on the internet as the main means of socializing. This can develop into problematic internet use, where internet use becomes excessive and difficult to control (Aboujaude, 2010).

Caplan (2010) explains that problematic internet use is a pattern of internet use that can involve maladaptive cognitions and behaviors such as excessive internet use resulting in negative consequences such as imbalances regarding academic, professional, and social performance. Problematic Internet Use refers to excessive or unhealthy patterns of internet use that can interfere with daily life. It includes the inability to control time and often leads to negative consequences in various aspects of life, such as social relationships, academic performance, and mental health (Bernal-Ruiz et al., 2017). The more one relies on the internet for social interaction, the less opportunity there is to develop and practice social skills in real-life situations, which can exacerbate existing social anxiety (Diomidous et al., 2016).

METHOD

In this study, researchers collected data using an incidental sampling approach. The population used in this study were adolescents aged 16 years to 18 years who attended high schools in Surabaya with a total of 501 students. Determination of the number of samples in the population is calculated using the Krejcie table with a p value of 0.05%, which obtained a population (N) of 501, so that the required number of samples (S) is 217. Based on the background of this study, it is known that there are three hypotheses, it is:

1. Social comparison and problematic internet use are positive predictors of social anxiety in adolescents.
2. Social comparison is a positive predictor of social anxiety in adolescents. The assumption is that the higher the social comparison, the higher the social anxiety in adolescents.
3. Problematic internet use is a positive predictor of social anxiety in adolescents. It is assumed that the higher the problematic internet use, the more social anxiety increases in adolescents.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

FINDING

Research data collection was carried out for 7 days starting on the first day of distributing questionnaires on November 30, 2024 until December 05, 2024. The research was conducted by distributing online questionnaires by researchers directly at high schools in Asemrowo District.

This research is a correlational quantitative study whose data is analyzed using Multiple Regression Analysis techniques. The Multiple Regression Analysis technique in this study produces several outputs, namely: Simultaneous Regression, Partial Regression, Regression Line Equation and Effective Contribution.

Table 1: Results of Simultaneous Regression Analysis

F	p	Keterangan
23,010	0,000	Signifikan ($p < 0,05$)

Based on table 1, it is known that simultaneous regression analysis is intended to test the first research hypothesis, namely social comparison and problematic internet use as predictors of social anxiety in adolescents. The results of simultaneous regression analysis showed the coefficient of $F = 23.010$ at $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$) so it is significant. These results illustrate that there is a significant correlation between social comparison and problematic internet use with social anxiety. Based on these results, the first hypothesis of this study is accepted.

Partial regression analysis is intended to test the second research hypothesis, namely social comparison as a predictor of social anxiety in adolescents and the third hypothesis, namely problematic internet use as a predictor of social anxiety in adolescents.

The results of partial regression analysis showed the coefficient $t = 3.944$ at $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$) for the correlation of social anxiety variables with social comparison. These results indicate that there is a significant correlation between social anxiety and social

comparison. Based on these results, the second research hypothesis in this study is accepted.

The results of partial regression analysis also show the coefficient value of $t = 4.228$ at $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$) for the correlation of social anxiety variables with problematic internet use. These results indicate that there is a significant correlation between social anxiety and problematic internet use. Based on these results, the third research hypothesis in this study is accepted. A summary of all partial regression analysis results can be seen in table 2.

Table 2: Results of Partial Regression Analysis

Variabel	t	p	Keterangan
<i>Social Anxiety – Social Comparison</i>	3,944	0,000	Signifikan ($p < 0,05$)
<i>Social Anxiety – Problematic Internet Use</i>	4,228	0,000	Signifikan ($p < 0,05$)

The regression line equation produced in this study means:

- Without social comparison and problematic internet use, social anxiety has a score of 52.752.
- Every addition of 1 social comparison score, it will increase the social anxiety score by 0.101.
- Every additional 1 score of problematic internet use will increase the social anxiety score by 0.315.

Multiple regression analysis produces 2 types of effective contributions, namely the effective contribution of the two independent variables together to the dependent variable and the effective contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable. The results of correlation and regression analysis are contained in table 3 below:

Table 3: Components of Effective Contribution of Each Independent Variable to the Dependent Variable

Variabel	Koefisien β	Cross Product	Regresi (Sum of Squares)	SE Total (R^2)
<i>Social comparison – Social Anxiety</i>	0,101	6074,516	1298,385	0,177
<i>Problematic Internet Use – Social Anxiety</i>	0,315	2172,157		

Based on table 3, it can be seen that the effective contribution value of the two independent variables, namely social comparison and problematic internet use on social anxiety is $R^2 = 0.177$ or only about 17.7% (very small). The effective contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable can be calculated using the formula:

$$SE_{xi} = \left(\frac{b_{xi} \cdot \text{Cross Product} \cdot R^2}{\text{Regression}} \right) \times 100\%$$

The effective contribution of social comparison variables to social anxiety variables is:

$$SE_{x1} = \left(\frac{0,101 \cdot 6074,516 \cdot 0,177}{1298,385} \right) \times 100\%$$

$$SE_{x1} = 8,37\%$$

The effective contribution of problematic internet use variables to social anxiety variables is :

$$SE_{x_2} = \left(\frac{0,315 \cdot 2172,157 \cdot 0,177}{1298,385} \right) \times 100\%$$

$$SE_{x_2} = 9,32\%$$

The total effective contribution (SE) can be calculated as follows:

$$SE_{(Total)} = SE (X_1) + SE (X_2)$$

$$SE_{(Total)} = 8,37\% + 9,32\%$$

$$SE_{(Total)} = 17,7\%$$

Based on the calculation using this formula, it can be seen that the effective contribution of the independent variable social comparison to the dependent variable social anxiety is 8.36%, while the effective contribution of the independent variable problematic internet use to the dependent variable social anxiety is 9.32%. The total effective contribution of the two variables X social comparison and problematic internet use to social anxiety is 17.7%.

DISCUSSION

Interaction with the social environment is one of the ways adolescents seek self-identity. However, when adolescents fail to build these interactions, it can result in self-isolation. Adolescents who withdraw from the social environment risk losing the ability to develop interpersonal skills. According to La Greca & Lopez (1998), this condition can trigger social anxiety which is characterized by excessive fear of social situations, especially the feeling of being judged or evaluated negatively by others. One of the features of social anxiety mentioned is the fear of negative evaluation, which makes individuals feel anxious about criticism or feeling noticed and judged poorly in social interactions. For example, adolescents may feel that they do not belong in certain social settings due to their perceived inadequacy, which in turn increases their level of social anxiety.

In addition, La Greca & Lopez (1998) explain that social anxiety is also characterized by avoidance behavior and social pressure. This is indicated by the tendency to feel uncomfortable in new situations, avoid engaging in unfamiliar interactions, and feel anxious when meeting new people or being in unfamiliar environments. Even in familiar social situations, individuals with high social anxiety still feel uncomfortable and tend to avoid. As a result, adolescents with high levels of social anxiety tend to withdraw, both in familiar and new environments.

Social anxiety in adolescents is strongly influenced by their self-assessment. At the identity development stage, adolescents tend to compare themselves with others due to a lack of self-confidence. This comparison, which can happen consciously or unconsciously, will affect adolescents' behavior in social situations. Gibbons & Buunk (1999) stated that social comparison is a factor that predicts social anxiety. One aspect is the comparison of one's abilities with others, such as skills, competence, or popularity. In addition, there is another aspect in the form of confidence in one's abilities without the need to compare with other individuals.

The development of the digital age has made teenagers live in an environment that is connected online through the internet. Before this era, social comparisons only happened within the school or community. However, with the advent of the internet, the scope of comparison expands, allowing teens to compare themselves with peers, celebrities or influencers from different parts of the world. These comparisons can be upward (comparing oneself to superior individuals) or downward (comparing oneself to individuals who are considered disadvantaged). Adolescents with social anxiety often compare themselves to others, and when the results are not as expected, they tend to feel anxious and start avoiding social interactions to avoid feeling uncomfortable due to the standards they set themselves.

The second hypothesis of the study is accepted, which reads that social comparison is a predictor of social anxiety in adolescents. The assumption shows that the higher the social comparison owned by adolescents, the more social anxiety experienced by adolescents will increase. This is in accordance with the explanation of Aslam, et al (2024) that the high level of social anxiety in reality is strongly influenced by the behavior of those who compare themselves with others such as comparing popularity, competence, skills of others, and physical appearance. This means that someone who compares themselves with others can cause significant social anxiety because at this time this behavior can be supported by the existence of social media so that adolescents can access social comparisons with an unprecedented range (Akbar & Hakim, 2024).

Social comparison is proven to be one of the factors that can increase social anxiety (Alaska dkk., 2024; Xu & Li, 2024; Goodman dkk., 2021; Jiang & Ngien, 2020; Mitchell & Schmidt, 2014). This can happen because individuals will assess the feasibility in themselves such as how good they are at doing things, especially in everyday life where social comparisons are used to compare themselves to positive aspects that are beneficial and negative aspects that are not beneficial to individuals. Someone who experiences social anxiety will compare themselves with negative aspects so that it can increase feelings and views on a low or bad self, which can affect social life because they are afraid if they are evaluated by others according to the views that have been formed from comparing them to others (Fakhri (2017).

Individuals with social anxiety tend to have an unstable self-view that can make them more vulnerable to social comparisons where they will feel unworthy or less valuable because they see others who have better competence, skills, and popularity, are more successful, or more attractive so that they can worry about how they will be judged in social situations (Goodman et al., 2021).

Social comparison can be a major trigger of social anxiety, especially in the current era of social media which can facilitate constant exposure to idealized images and achievements of others. Social media often showcases people's lives, such as success, luxurious lifestyles, or perfect physical appearance, creating pressure to live up to standards similar to these people. Therefore, this pressure can lead to feelings of not being good enough, envy, and dissatisfaction with oneself (Alaska et al., 2024). When individuals constantly compare themselves to others who appear more successful, social anxiety levels

tend to increase, mainly due to the fear of negative judgment or the fear of being left behind in social settings.

Social comparison can make individuals experience anxiety when in a social environment which can occur due to the tendency of individuals to evaluate as a whole and compare based on the information they receive from others. Social comparison can be done by comparing upwards (e.g., comparing with others who are considered better in certain aspects) or downward social comparison (e.g., comparing oneself with others who are considered inferior) (Jiang & Ngien, 2020). A person who engages in social comparison may raise greater concerns about how they will be evaluated by others because they will try to make their behavior conform to certain standards or norms. This is because when they engage in social comparison, they may be more likely to focus on their weaknesses and shortcomings, which can reinforce negative views and increase anxiety in social situations. For example, if someone with social anxiety sees others who appear more confident in social interactions then they will feel embarrassed or depressed which can exacerbate social anxiety (Mitchell & Schmidt, 2014).

Excessive social comparison can lead to problematic internet use. Adolescents with social anxiety tend to use the internet as an escape from social interactions that they find daunting. The internet provides an anonymous platform that allows them to avoid the anxiety that comes with face-to-face encounters. However, this deprives teens of the opportunity to build social skills and neglects their real social life.

Overuse of the internet also affects adolescents' social anxiety levels. According to Caplan (2010), one of the factors that influence social anxiety is problematic internet use. One of its characteristics is the preference for interacting online because it is considered more effective and increases confidence than face-to-face interaction. As a result, adolescents who are comfortable interacting online will begin to avoid social situations in the real world.

Caplan (2010) also added that other characteristics of problematic internet use include mood regulation, where the internet is used to change moods to be more positive; difficulty controlling internet use (deficient self-regulation), such as the tendency to be constantly online and difficulty managing time; and negative outcomes, such as reduced ability to interact directly with others and use of the internet that is not as needed. These conditions can exacerbate social anxiety, especially as social media is often a space where individuals compare themselves to others, which in turn triggers compulsive and uncontrolled internet use.

In addition to social comparison, the results of this thesis research also prove that problematic internet use can also predict social anxiety as also proven in the research of Arinda, et al (2024); Ding, et al (2023); Hadad, et al (2021); Debbarma & Umadevi (2018); Bernal-Ruiz, et al (2017); Casale & Fioravanti (2015). The assumption shows that the higher the problematic internet use, the more social anxiety will increase in adolescents. This is in accordance with research conducted by Arinda, et al (2024) which shows a significant positive relationship between problematic internet use and social anxiety. This can occur because individuals who use the internet excessively can reduce opportunities for direct

interaction, thus inhibiting development in social skills which makes adolescents feel insecure and anxious when dealing with real social situations.

Excessive internet use can also reinforce or bring up negative mindsets related to fear or anxiety related to the social environment because individuals who use the internet excessively tend to be more comfortable interacting online than face-to-face. This makes individuals isolate themselves from the social environment which can increase the fear of negative judgment from others (Casale & Fioravanti, 2015). Individuals who feel anxious when interacting directly with others often use the internet as an escape or a way to avoid face-to-face meetings. However, this will make them more dependent on internet use, reducing their opportunities to practice or develop face-to-face interaction skills which can increase stress, depression and anxiety (Bernal-Ruiz, et al., 2017).

Individuals who experience social anxiety often feel anxious or fearful in social situations so they tend to avoid interacting directly. Therefore, they will turn to using the internet as a form of communication. However, if individuals rely too much on using the internet then they will miss out on the opportunity to practice in order to improve social skills in person which is very important to help overcome their social anxiety. Although the internet can improve the mood of the day, if used excessively, it can make them feel more lonely and isolated (Ding et al., 2023).

Evidence that social comparison and problematic internet use together affect social anxiety in adolescents is also illustrated in the results of this thesis research which accepts the third research hypothesis, namely social comparison and problematic internet use as predictors of social anxiety in adolescents. The acceptance of this research hypothesis means that adolescents who tend to compare themselves with others and use the internet excessively can increase social anxiety. This can be characterized by feelings of fear of negative judgment or fear of being left behind in the social environment and losing opportunities to improve social skills which can make feelings of loneliness and isolation. Although social comparison and problematic internet use in these studies are reduced to play a role in increasing social anxiety, but based on the effective contribution of each variable in this study, it is illustrated that problematic internet use has a greater effective contribution (8.7%) to social anxiety than social comparison to social anxiety (9.32%) and in total the effective contribution of the two variables to social anxiety is 17.7%.

The results of the calculation of the effective contribution of problematic internet use which is greater to social anxiety than social comparison to social anxiety, means that adolescents who experience social anxiety tend to be caused by the unwillingness to do activities directly so that they divert it to internet use. Not only that, problematic internet use can include various negative aspects such as excessive self-evaluation, difficulty in controlling internet use, obsessively using internet media to improve mood.

The total effective contribution of social comparison and problematic internet use in increasing social anxiety by 17.7% also illustrates that there are 82.3% other factors that influence social anxiety in adolescents besides the two predictors that will be examined in this thesis. These factors include public self-consciousness, need for approval, inaccurately perceived social difficulties, accurately perceived social difficulties, low

physical attractiveness, excessively high standards for self-evaluation, loneliness, and self-esteem (Leary et al., 2015).

Public self-consciousness is a person's tendency to pay attention to how they look and act in front of others, so if someone has a high level of public self-consciousness, they often feel worried if they are perceived negatively by others. Not only that, low physical attractiveness is also another factor because of the self-perception that they are less physically attractive when compared to others. Another factor that can support social anxiety is self-esteem or a person's assessment of their own self-worth, so someone who has low self-esteem can cause feelings of worthlessness or inadequacy.

On the other hand, excessively high standards for self-evaluation can also cause a person to experience anxiety or feelings of inadequacy due to unrealistic expectations or standards that tend to be too high. This is supported by the need for approval factor, which is a desire or need to be accepted and liked by others so that someone will change their behavior to please others and gain acceptance from the social environment so that individuals who fail to meet the needs of acceptance from the social environment tend to feel anxious or worried if they are not accepted by their environment.

Social anxiety can occur due to the factor of inaccurately perceived social difficulties which is a form of error in interpreting social interactions such as believing that they have problems or rejection when in a social environment that does not actually exist. Also, accurately perceived social difficulties are difficulties in starting conversations or maintaining relationships. Someone who experiences social anxiety then tends to cause feelings of loneliness or loneliness due to a lack of interacting with others, or a lack of emotional connection.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine the relationship between social comparison, problematic internet use and social anxiety in adolescents. Adolescence is a transitional period so that it makes a difference or change in the guidance of the characteristics of development and growth so that it provides new tasks for adolescents to be able to behave or act when facing changes. The main task is the search for self-identity which is used to form an existence in itself, so that adolescents who experience failure in the search for identity can isolate themselves.

The growing digital era makes teenagers grow up in an environment that is very connected online due to the use of the internet. Adolescents who are in a period of identity formation naturally tend to compare themselves with others regarding abilities, skills, or characteristics. Not only that, when social comparison occurs excessively, it can encourage problematic internet use because adolescents may feel compelled to constantly check their internet activities. This can lead to compulsive and uncontrolled internet use.

In this study, three main variables will be analyzed, namely: social comparison, which is used to measure the level of adolescents' tendency to compare themselves with others so that it can affect adolescents' feelings, attitudes, or behavior in the social environment; problematic internet use, which is used to measure the level of problematic

internet use that causes maladaptive behavior that interferes with daily life activities; social anxiety, which is used to measure the level of anxiety or fear experienced by adolescents when in social situations or when interacting with others.

This study found that the combination of social comparison and problematic internet use can affect social anxiety in adolescents. This can occur because the two variables reinforce each other in the onset of social anxiety. When adolescents constantly compare themselves with others directly or through the internet, it can make adolescents feel not good enough or not worthy, thus reducing their self-confidence. The facilities provided on the internet make adolescents have ideal social standards that are difficult to achieve, so that adolescents who feel unworthy of these standards can bring up anxiety in social situations for fear of not being accepted by their friends and prefer to interact online which will increase adolescents' neglect of interacting directly, thus reducing opportunities to develop social skills.

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