



Media Exposure and Adolescent Self-Esteem in Western Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between media exposure and adolescent self-esteem in Western Kenya, a region characterised by high levels of media access among adolescents and growing concerns about their psychosocial well-being. This study employed a descriptive survey and correlational research design targeting adolescent students in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties. A stratified random sample of 417 Form 2 and Form 3 secondary school students (aged 15–16 years) and 48 class teachers was selected from national, extra-county, county, and sub-county schools in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties. Data collection involved structured questionnaires, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and focus group discussions. For quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics, Spearman's rho correlation, and ordinal regression were applied, while qualitative data from the discussions helped explain adolescents' lived experiences and views on media influence on self-esteem. Findings revealed predominantly weak and statistically nonsignificant relationships between media exposure (radio, television, and social media) and self-esteem. The results indicated a small but meaningful positive association between mobile phone use and the variable of interest ($\rho = 0.101$, $p < 0.05$). However, regression analysis indicated that media exposure was not a significant predictor of self-esteem, explaining only 1.5 per cent of the variance. Qualitative findings suggested that excessive media use may negatively influence self-esteem through social comparison and reduced confidence. The study concludes that media exposure has minimal predictive influence on adolescent self-esteem. It recommends guided media use, enhanced digital literacy, and strengthened school-based psychosocial support systems. The findings contribute to informed policy and practice in adolescent mental health and education.

Key terms: Body image, digital consumption, psychological wellbeing, social comparison, youth.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing integration of digital media into adolescents' daily lives has raised concerns about its potential effects on psychological well-being, particularly self-esteem. Despite widespread digital consumption and rising screen time among youth (Singh & Mahur, 2026), there remains limited empirical clarity on how media exposure influences adolescents' self-perception within the Kenyan context. Existing Kenyan studies have largely focused on the influence of media on children's social behaviour, language use, and academic development (Ng'ethe, 2014; Rono, 2014; Ocharo & Karani, 2015), with comparatively little attention given to its relationship with adolescents' self-esteem. Furthermore, evidence from Western Kenya remains scarce, despite Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties experiencing rapid growth in access to digital and traditional media technologies among adolescents (Kemp, 2022). This study, therefore, sought to address this empirical and contextual gap by examining the relationship between media exposure and self-esteem among secondary school students in these counties.

Concerns regarding student psychosocial wellbeing, including school unrest and behavioural challenges, have been documented in national education reports (Ministry of Education, 2019; UNESCO, 2017), and this is particularly relevant in Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties, where access to mobile technologies and media platforms has increased significantly, as reflected in regional household media access and education statistics (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Youth, in this study, refers to adolescents undergoing a critical developmental stage characterised by identity formation and heightened sensitivity to peer influence (Debbarma & Umadevi, 2021). During this period, individuals actively construct their self-concept, often through social comparison processes. Social comparison involves evaluating oneself against others, a process increasingly shaped by media environments that frequently portray idealised standards of success, attractiveness, and body image (Rollero, 2015; Xiao, 2022). These portrayals can influence adolescents' perceptions of their own body image and self-worth, potentially affecting overall psychological well-being.

This study is anchored on Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), which posits that individuals evaluate their abilities, appearance, and self-worth by comparing themselves with others. In the context of media exposure, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to upward social comparisons when they encounter idealised representations of beauty, success, and lifestyle on digital and traditional media platforms, and these comparisons may influence self-perception and contribute to variations in self-esteem among adolescents.

Digital consumption encompasses the use of media technologies such as television, radio, mobile phones, and social networking platforms, which are now central to adolescents' routines (Kim et al., 2023). While such media can facilitate learning and social interaction, excessive or unregulated screen time has been associated with negative developmental outcomes. Empirical evidence remains mixed, as some studies highlight the benefits of prosocial and educational content (Al-Kamel, 2019; Yau et al., 2020), while others link media exposure, particularly celebrity-focused content, to reduced self-esteem through intensified peer comparison (Umar & Idris, 2018).

Given these dynamics, understanding how media exposure interacts with key psychosocial factors such as peer influence, social comparison, and body image is critical for assessing its impact on adolescents' self-esteem. However, existing studies have largely been conducted in non-African contexts and tend to emphasise general associations between media exposure and adolescent self-esteem, with limited focus on how specific psychosocial mechanisms interact within rural and urban adolescent populations in Western Kenya. In addition, few studies have empirically examined these relationships within school-going adolescents in this region using context-specific data, thereby creating a need for localised evidence.

Although adolescents widely use digital media, there is still limited empirical evidence clarifying how media exposure affects self-esteem in Kenya, especially in Western Kenya, where access to digital platforms has grown rapidly. Existing studies present mixed findings, with some highlighting positive developmental

outcomes of media use while others report negative associations, such as reduced self-esteem linked to social comparison and idealised media portrayals. This inconsistency, along with limited context-specific evidence, highlights the need for further research; therefore, this study seeks to clarify the relationship between media exposure and adolescent self-esteem in Western Kenya.

This study, therefore, examines the relationship between media exposure and adolescent self-esteem in Western Kenya, specifically investigating the extent of media use and its association with self-esteem among adolescents.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution of empirical evidence on the relationship between media exposure and adolescent self-esteem in Western Kenya, thereby addressing the limited context-specific literature in the region. The findings will assist educators and school administrators in designing targeted psychosocial support programmes that address the influence of media on adolescents' self-perception. It may also inform parents and guardians on appropriate media monitoring practices to support healthy digital engagement among adolescents. In addition, the results will guide policymakers and stakeholders in developing youth-focused media literacy and mental health interventions aimed at promoting positive self-esteem in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Self-esteem is defined as a person's general assessment of their own worth and is commonly considered a key aspect of psychological well-being during adolescence. During adolescence, self-esteem becomes particularly salient due to ongoing identity formation and increased sensitivity to external feedback, especially from peers. In this developmental stage, adolescents are more likely to evaluate themselves through social comparison processes, using perceived attributes, behaviours, and achievements of others as reference points for self-assessment (Rollero, 2015).

Within contemporary digital environments, these psychological processes are increasingly mediated by social networking platforms, which intensify

opportunities for comparison and external validation. Unlike traditional face-to-face interactions, social media platforms provide continuous exposure to curated and idealised representations of body image, success, and lifestyle. As a result, adolescents are frequently confronted with selectively constructed identities that may serve as unrealistic benchmarks for self-evaluation, thereby shaping self-perception in both positive and negative directions (Xiao, 2022).

Social networking sites further amplify these dynamics through interactive features such as profiles, images, likes, comments, and sharing functions, which institutionalise peer feedback and social validation. These mechanisms create an environment in which adolescents are not only passive consumers of content but also active participants in cycles of evaluation and comparison. Consequently, social acceptance and perceived popularity become quantifiable and visible, increasing sensitivity to peer approval and rejection (Elgersma, 2019).

However, the impact of these platforms on self-esteem is not uniform. While constant exposure to idealised content may heighten social comparison upward and contribute to diminished self-worth, the same platforms can also facilitate self-expression and identity exploration. In this regard, social media may function both as a space for reinforcement of social pressures and as a potential resource for self-presentation and social connection, depending on patterns of use and interpretation. Kite and Kite (2020) emphasise that perceived discrepancies between online ideals and personal reality are particularly influential in shaping adolescents' self-evaluative outcomes, underscoring the role of subjective interpretation in the relationship between media exposure and self-esteem.

Taken together, these conceptual perspectives suggest that adolescent self-esteem is shaped by an interaction between developmental vulnerability, social comparison tendencies, and the structural features of digital media environments.

Empirical Review

Empirical research on media exposure and adolescent self-esteem has increasingly focused on the psychological implications of the use of social

networking sites. Across studies, findings remain mixed, but can broadly be grouped into three patterns: negative associations driven by social comparison, context-dependent or neutral effects, and potential positive outcomes linked to self-presentation and identity construction.

At the global level, a substantial body of research highlights the negative psychological consequences of media-driven social comparison. Exposure to idealised and selectively curated online content has consistently been associated with lower self-esteem, largely through upward comparison processes. Tiggemann and Polivy (2010) demonstrate that appearance-based comparisons are strongly linked to reduced self-esteem, particularly among female adolescents, with body image emerging as a key mediating factor. Similarly, Berry et al. (2018) report that comparison-oriented and emotionally expressive social media engagement is associated with diminished self-evaluative outcomes. Racine et al. (2011) also identify a negative relationship between media use and self-esteem among preadolescent girls, while Richards et al. (2015) observe broader adverse mental health outcomes linked to social media engagement, including reduced self-worth. Rounsefell et al. (2019) further reinforce this pattern by showing that exposure to idealised online representations contributes to body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem. Collectively, these studies suggest that digital environments intensify upward social comparison, often resulting in negative self-perception.

However, global evidence also indicates that the relationship between social media use and self-esteem is not uniformly negative. Gonzales and Hancock (2011) argue that selective self-presentation can enhance self-esteem by enabling individuals to construct favourable self-images, suggesting that digital platforms may function as tools for identity management and self-enhancement. Sobol and Darke (2014) similarly propose that upward social comparison may, under certain conditions, foster motivation for self-improvement and more positive self-evaluation. These findings highlight that psychological outcomes depend not only on exposure but also on patterns of engagement and interpretation of online content.

Within Sub-Saharan Africa, emerging empirical evidence suggests that digital media effects are shaped by rapid technological adoption and strong peer-network influence. Studies in the region indicate that social media platforms are increasingly embedded in adolescents' everyday communication, making peer interaction and social evaluation central to identity formation processes (Ngonso et al., 2024). Evidence from East African contexts further shows that adolescents' online behaviours are strongly influenced by peer networks, where homophily and social reinforcement shape patterns of engagement and self-perception (Naluvubi & Christopher, 2025; Ngaramtoni & Olemong'i, 2025). These dynamics suggest that social networking sites in Sub-Saharan Africa function not only as communication tools but also as environments for identity negotiation, validation, and comparison. Studies further indicate that adolescents' engagement with online platforms is heavily influenced by peer relationships, where feedback mechanisms such as likes, comments, and visibility reinforce social approval processes (Gbaranor et al., 2026). As a result, self-esteem is closely linked to perceived social acceptance within peer networks, reinforcing the importance of social comparison and peer validation in shaping self-evaluative outcomes.

Within the Kenyan context, empirical studies reflect similar but context-specific dynamics shaped by rapid digital expansion and diverse media access. Muigai (2020) finds that social media interaction among secondary school students in Nairobi influences self-esteem through self-presentation and peer feedback mechanisms, indicating that digital platforms simultaneously enable identity construction and social comparison. Nyagah et al. (2015) report that social networking site use among adolescents in Embu County is associated with both positive and negative self-esteem outcomes, depending on usage patterns and interpretation of online interactions. Kwara et al. (2021) further highlight the role of social networking in shaping adolescents' self-concept, reinforcing the psychological influence of online peer engagement. Together, these studies suggest that in the Kenyan context, self-esteem outcomes are shaped by how adolescents engage with social media rather than exposure alone.

Overall, the empirical literature demonstrates that the relationship between media exposure and adolescent self-esteem is complex, multidimensional, and context-dependent. While a dominant body of evidence supports the association between social comparison processes in digital environments and lower self-esteem, other studies highlight conditional or positive effects depending on engagement patterns and interpretive frameworks. Across contexts, peer influence and social comparison consistently emerge as central mechanisms shaping adolescent self-evaluative outcomes.

Despite growing research in this area, studies focusing specifically on self-esteem within African and Kenyan adolescent populations remain limited. In particular, there is still insufficient empirical clarity on how social comparison and peer influence interact within digital environments to shape self-esteem in specific Kenyan contexts, thereby necessitating further context-specific investigation.

Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on media exposure and adolescent self-esteem, the evidence remains theoretically and empirically fragmented. Existing studies consistently demonstrate that social comparison processes in both traditional and digital media environments can influence self-esteem; however, they differ in the direction and magnitude of these effects. While some research emphasises predominantly negative outcomes linked to idealised content exposure, other studies highlight conditional or even positive effects depending on usage patterns, self-presentation strategies, and contextual factors. This inconsistency suggests that the relationship is not fully understood as a uniform effect, but rather as a context-sensitive process shaped by developmental and environmental conditions.

Furthermore, much of the existing empirical work has been conducted in Western and other non-African contexts, limiting its applicability to settings with different media ecologies, socio-cultural norms, and patterns of digital access. In particular, the Kenyan context presents a distinctive environment characterised by rapid expansion of mobile connectivity, high exposure to both traditional and digital media, and varying levels of parental and

institutional regulation. Nonetheless, few studies have comprehensively examined how contextual factors work together with social comparison processes to influence self-esteem among adolescents.

Within Kenya, available research has largely focused on behavioural outcomes, academic performance, or general psychosocial effects of media exposure, with limited emphasis on self-esteem as a primary construct of interest. Although studies such as Nyagah et al. (2015) provide preliminary insights into the relationship between social networking site use and self-esteem, they do not fully unpack the mechanisms, such as peer influence and social comparison, that may explain these effects in a structured way.

Accordingly, there remains a clear empirical gap in understanding how media exposure influences adolescent self-esteem within the Kenyan context, particularly in relation to the mediating roles of social comparison and peer influence. This study addresses this gap by providing context-specific evidence from Western Kenya, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and locally grounded understanding of adolescent psychosocial development in digital media environments.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a pragmatic research paradigm and employed a mixed-methods convergent parallel design as the overall methodological framework. In this design, quantitative and qualitative data were gathered simultaneously, analysed independently, and later combined during interpretation to yield a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

The quantitative component adopted a descriptive survey design to determine the levels of media exposure and self-esteem among adolescents, while a correlational approach was used to examine the statistical relationship between these variables. The qualitative component complemented this by exploring adolescents' lived experiences of media exposure, particularly how social comparison and peer influence shape their self-esteem.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings strengthened the study by allowing statistical

relationships to be explained through contextual narratives. While the quantitative data established whether and to what extent media exposure is associated with self-esteem, the qualitative data provided deeper insight into how and why these effects occur. The integration of findings improved the validity of the results and produced a richer explanation of adolescent media experiences than could be achieved through either approach independently (Cherryholmes, 1992; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Dawadi et al., 2021; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

The study population comprised in-school adolescents aged 15–16 years in Form 2 and Form 3, and their class teachers, drawn from Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya Counties in Western Kenya. This gave a total population of 190,555 learners and 2034 teachers. Teachers were included in the qualitative component because they interact closely with adolescents and can provide informed observations on students' media use, behaviour, and self-esteem-related tendencies within the school environment. Their views complemented students' quantitative data by offering contextual explanations, thereby enhancing interpretation through triangulation.

The sample for the quantitative component comprised 387 students selected using stratified random sampling. The sample size was established using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table for finite populations, applying a 95 per cent confidence level and a 5 per cent margin of error. The learners' population was first stratified based on the three counties under study, namely Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya. Each county formed a primary stratum to ensure geographical representation. Within each county stratum, students were further stratified according to school category, specifically national schools, extra-county schools, county schools, and sub-county schools. This resulted in twelve (12) sub-strata across the three counties. From each sub-stratum, students were selected using simple random sampling. The number of students selected from each sub-stratum was determined proportionately based on the size of that sub-stratum within the total student population in the study area, ensuring proportional representation across counties and school categories.

For the qualitative component, a sample of 48 teachers was selected using simple random sampling from the target schools. The sample size was not determined using statistical formulas but was guided by the requirements of qualitative inquiry, where emphasis is placed on depth of information and thematic adequacy rather than statistical representativeness. A similar stratified approach to that of the learners was applied to teachers. Teachers were first grouped by county (Kakamega, Kisii, and Siaya), and then further stratified according to school category, resulting in twelve sub-strata. From each sub-stratum, four teachers were selected using simple random sampling to constitute the final teacher sample. This approach ensured representation of both geographical and institutional diversity within the study population.

Data collection involved administering structured questionnaires to students and conducting focus group discussions with teachers. Media exposure, the independent variable, was measured in terms of frequency, duration, content, and context of use, while self-esteem, the dependent variable, was assessed using an adapted Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale measuring self-worth, self-acceptance, and self-respect (Rosenberg, 1965; DeFreese & Nissley, 2020).

SPSS version 26 was utilised to process and analyse the quantitative data. The data were summarised using descriptive statistics, relationships between variables were examined through Spearman's rho correlation, and ordinal regression was conducted to evaluate the predictive effect of media exposure on self-esteem. Qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and thematically analysed, with findings integrated during interpretation. Ethical approval was obtained from MMUST-IERC and NACOSTI, with informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity strictly upheld in accordance with the Kenya Data Protection Act of 2019.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 417 questionnaires were distributed to students, and 387 were returned, giving a response rate of 93 per cent. The student respondents were drawn from Kakamega (36%), Kisii (36%), and Siaya

(28%) counties in Western Kenya. Slightly more than half were in Form 2 (51%), while 49 per cent were in Form 3. The gender distribution was nearly equal, with 51% female and 49 per cent male respondents. Most students (82%) lived with both biological parents, while 16% were from single-parent households and 2% were orphans. A small proportion reported that their parents had no formal education (fathers 5%, mothers 7%). The teacher respondents (n = 48) were evenly distributed by gender and class level taught (Form 2 and Form 3). The average age of teachers was 35 years, with a mean teaching experience of 10.4 years.

The high response rate (93%) enhances the reliability and representativeness of the findings, reducing the likelihood of non-response bias. The relatively balanced distribution of respondents across counties, gender, and class levels strengthens the comparability of results across groups. The dominance of students living with both biological parents suggests relatively stable home environments for most participants, which may be relevant when interpreting psychosocial

outcomes such as self-esteem, as family structure can act as a moderating contextual factor.

The presence of a small proportion of parents with no formal education indicates variation in socio-economic background, which may indirectly influence adolescents' media access and usage patterns. The teacher profile, characterised by moderate teaching experience, suggests that responses were informed by adequate classroom exposure to adolescent behaviour and media-related influences. Overall, the demographic distribution provides a suitable foundation for examining media exposure and self-esteem among adolescents in the study area.

Self-Comparison with Media Characters

Guided by Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), the study examined the frequency with which adolescents compare themselves with media characters as a potential mechanism linking media exposure to self-esteem. Respondents rated their frequency of self-comparison on a 3-point Likert scale (never to always), with results presented in Figure 1.

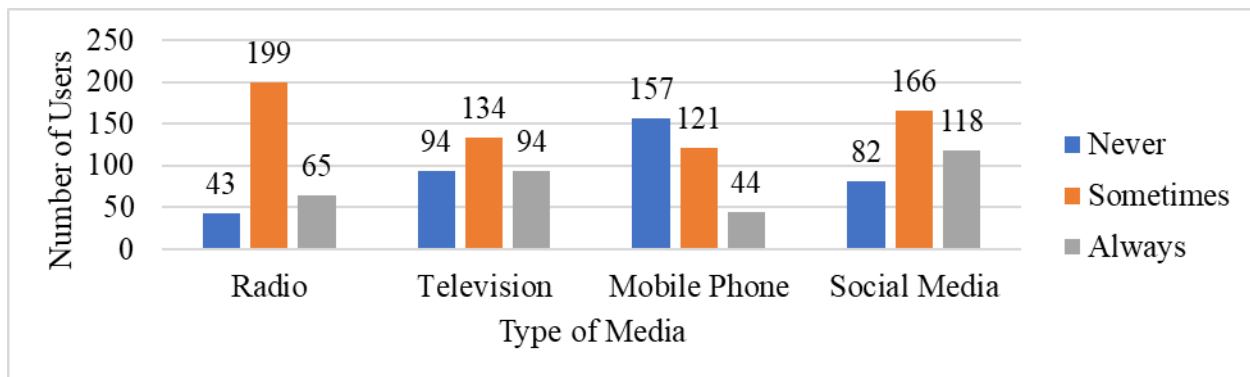


Figure 1: Respondents Who Compared Themselves with Media Characters

Figure 1 shows that 24 per cent of respondents (N = 321) reported that they “always” compare themselves with media characters. Among this subgroup, comparisons were most frequently made with social media figures (36.8%), followed by television content (29.3%), radio-based content (20.2%), and mobile phone-based content (13.7%).

Teachers further reported observable behavioural indicators of self-comparison, including learners adopting names of social media influencers, television celebrities, and fictional characters. In some cases,

these identities were used as nicknames in peer interactions or online-style usernames, and occasionally appeared in informal classroom discussions and written work.

The study indicates that a large proportion of adolescents frequently compare themselves to media personalities, especially those portrayed on social media and television. This suggests that media exposure functions as a key reference framework for adolescent self-evaluation.

The observed adoption of media-derived identities reflects strong identification with media personalities, reinforcing the role of parasocial and comparison processes in shaping adolescent self-concept. These behaviours are consistent with Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), particularly upward comparison dynamics, where individuals evaluate themselves against idealised figures.

This is consistent with previous research indicating that exposure to idealised media representations is associated with increased self-comparison tendencies and may negatively influence self-perception, particularly among adolescents (Eyal & Te'eni-Harari, 2013; Mills et al., 2017). Similarly, media exposure has been linked to distorted body image and reduced self-evaluative outcomes in adolescents (Kwon, 2020).

Although this section does not directly measure self-esteem outcomes, the high prevalence of self-comparison provides a plausible behavioural pathway through which media exposure may influence adolescent self-esteem, aligning with the broader objective of the study. The findings also suggest that digital and visual media platforms are more strongly associated with comparison behaviour than traditional media forms.

Self-Perceived Inferiority in Comparison to Media Characters

Guided by Rodgers and Rousseau (2022), the study assessed adolescents' perceptions of inferiority relative to media characters as an indicator of self-evaluation. Frequency of perceived inferiority was measured on a 3-point Likert scale, with results presented in Figure 2.

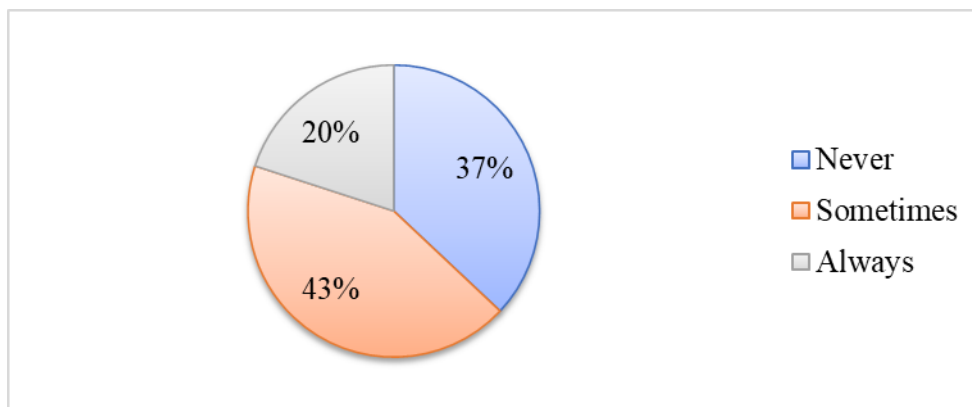


Figure 2: Self-Perceived Inferiority Compared to Media Characters

Figure 2 indicates that 37 per cent of respondents reported never feeling inferior to media characters, while 43 per cent experienced such feelings occasionally, and 20 per cent reported them consistently. Overall, 63 per cent of respondents indicated at least some level of perceived inferiority in relation to media characters, suggesting that upward social comparison is a common experience among the majority of adolescents. The distribution also reflects variation in intensity, with a smaller proportion exhibiting persistent feelings of inferiority, indicating more sustained exposure to or impact of comparative media evaluations.

These findings suggest that self-perceived inferiority is a relatively common outcome of adolescents' engagement with media content, with most respondents reporting at least occasional experiences of feeling inferior to media characters. This pattern implies that upward social comparison is not an isolated occurrence but a recurrent feature of media interaction among adolescents.

The results align with prior evidence indicating that upward social comparison is frequently associated with feelings of inadequacy during media use in adolescent populations (Radovic et al., 2017). The present study extends this understanding by demonstrating that such comparative processes are

not limited to social media platforms but also extend to legacy media, including radio and television, as well as mobile phone-based content.

These findings are particularly significant given that media characters often represent idealised identities, lifestyles, and physical appearances (Bozsik et al., 2018). Continuous exposure to such portrayals may therefore reinforce unrealistic standards against which adolescents evaluate themselves, potentially contributing to self-criticism and reduced self-worth.

In the context of the present study, these patterns provide further evidence of how media exposure may indirectly influence adolescent self-esteem through processes of perceived inferiority and social comparison.

Self-Perceived Superiority to Media Characters

Respondents reported the frequency with which they felt superior to media characters across various platforms, and the results are summarised in Figure 3.

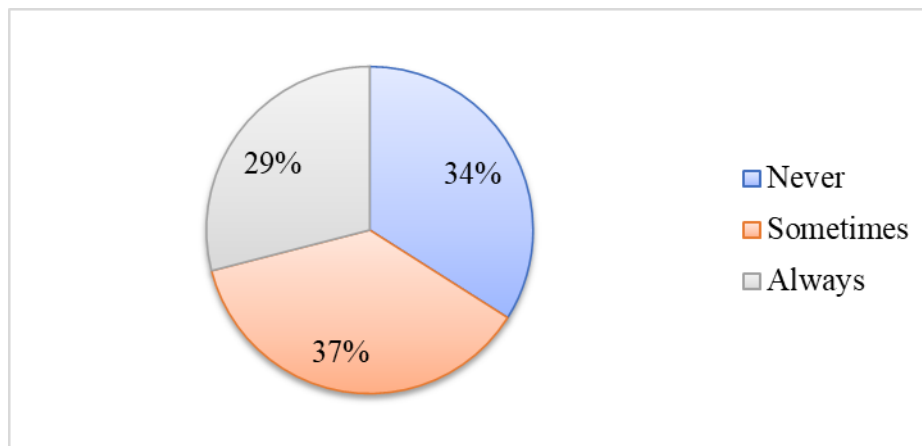


Figure 3: Self-Perceived Superiority Compared to Media Characters

Figure 3 shows that 34 per cent of respondents reported never feeling superior to media characters, 37 per cent occasionally experienced such feelings, and 29 per cent reported feeling superior consistently. Overall, 71 per cent of respondents did not regularly experience superiority in relation to media characters, indicating that downward social comparison is not a dominant evaluative pattern among most adolescents in the sample.

These findings suggest that downward social comparison processes, reflected in feelings of superiority over media characters, are relatively limited among adolescents. The majority of respondents do not consistently engage in self-evaluations that place them above media figures, indicating that such comparisons are largely situational rather than stable cognitive patterns.

In relation to Social Comparison Theory, the results imply that upward comparison processes (previously observed in earlier sections) are more prominent than

downward comparison in shaping adolescents' media-related self-evaluations. While media characters may serve as reference points for evaluation processes (de Vries et al., 2018), the present findings suggest that adolescents are more likely to engage in evaluative processes that position them below rather than above media representations.

Overall, the limited prevalence of sustained superiority perceptions indicates that downward comparison plays a weaker role in adolescents' self-evaluation within media contexts. This imbalance between upward and downward comparison tendencies is important for understanding how media exposure may contribute to self-esteem outcomes, particularly where upward comparison is more dominant.

Experience of Negative Comments from the Media

Exposure to negative feedback from media sources over the past six months was assessed across four attributes: physical appearance, gender, family, and school (Figure 4)

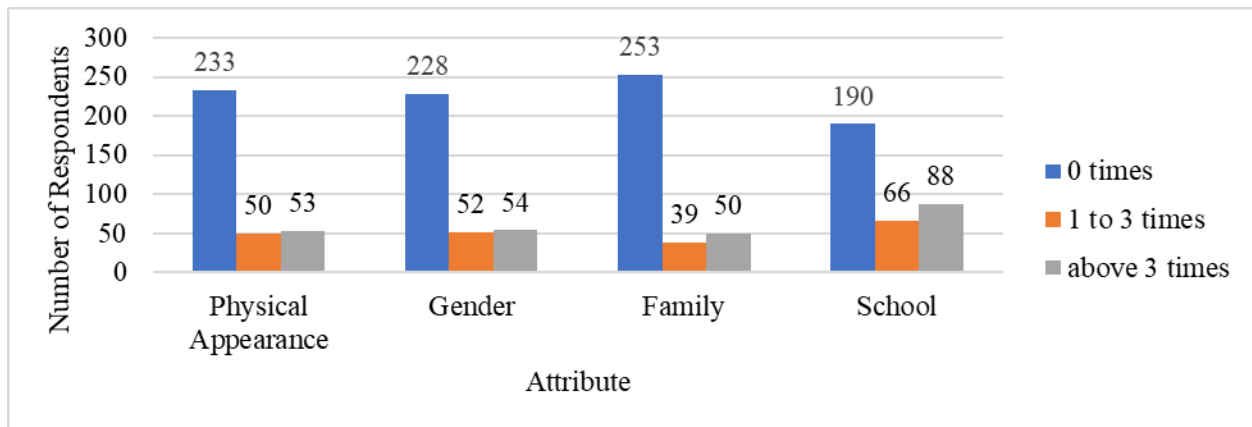


Figure 4: Respondents who Encountered Negative Comments from the Media

Figure 4 shows that most respondents did not report experiencing negative comments across the assessed domains: physical appearance (66%), gender (68%), family (74%), and school (55%). However, a notable proportion reported experiencing negative commentary, particularly in relation to school (45%), followed by gender (32%), physical appearance (31%), and family (26%).

The findings suggest that while most adolescents are not frequently exposed to negative media commentary, a substantial minority experience such interactions, particularly in relation to school-related issues. The relatively higher prevalence of school-related negative comments may be explained by the visibility of school as a shared social identity marker, which increases the likelihood of institutional features such as infrastructure, uniforms, teachers, and transport being discussed and evaluated on social media. Such evaluative exposure may contribute to adolescents' self-esteem by shaping how they perceive and internalize judgments about their school environment, thereby influencing broader self-evaluations of social standing and self-worth.

These results are consistent with evidence that adolescents are exposed to negative online interactions, which can contribute to psychological distress (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2021; Keles et al., 2020). Within the framework of Social Comparison Theory, exposure to negative commentary may reinforce adverse self-evaluations, especially when adolescents internalise critical standards communicated through both media and peer-related contexts.

Overall, the presence of negative media-related feedback, even among a minority, highlights a potential risk factor in adolescents' psychosocial environment. Such experiences may contribute to negative self-perception and, over time, influence self-esteem, particularly when combined with frequent comparison processes identified in earlier findings.

Self Esteem

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was used to measure self-esteem, which was then classified into low, average, and high levels, as presented in Figure 5.

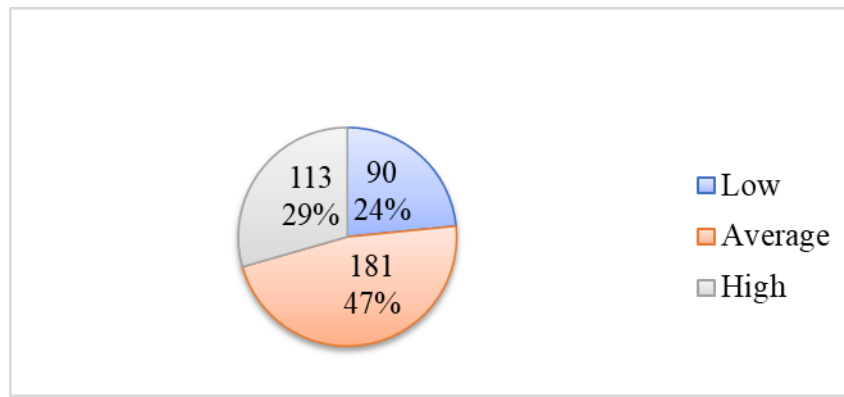


Figure 5: Distribution of Self-Esteem Levels among Respondents

Figure 5 shows that 24 per cent of respondents reported low self-esteem, 29 per cent had average self-esteem, and 47 per cent exhibited high self-esteem. Overall, 76 per cent of respondents fell within the average to high self-esteem categories, indicating generally positive self-evaluations among the majority of adolescents in the study. However, 24 per cent of respondents recorded low self-esteem, reflecting a substantial minority with reduced self-worth.

The findings suggest that most adolescents in the study population report relatively positive self-evaluations, with the majority falling within the average to high self-esteem range. This indicates a generally favourable psychological profile among respondents despite varying levels of media exposure and comparison experiences documented in earlier sections. However, the presence of a sizeable minority with low self-esteem is important, as it signals persistent vulnerability within a segment of the

adolescent population. This group may be more sensitive to environmental and psychosocial influences, including media exposure, social comparison, and peer-related evaluation processes highlighted earlier in the study.

Overall, while the distribution suggests that self-esteem is not predominantly low among respondents, the findings still point to meaningful variation that warrants attention, particularly in relation to factors that may contribute to reduced self-worth among adolescents.

Correlation Analysis

A Spearman’s rho correlation analysis, conducted in SPSS, was used to examine the relationship between adolescents’ exposure to media platforms (radio, television, mobile phones, and social media) and self-esteem. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Relationship Between Exposure to Radio, Television, Mobile Phone, Social Media and Self-Esteem

	1	2	3	4	5
Radio (1)	1.000				
Television (2)	.147**	1.000			
Mobile phone (3)	.132**	.452**	1.000		
Social media (4)	.112*	.307**	.615**	1.000	
Self-esteem (5)	-.066	-.035	.101*	-.064	1.000
	.195	.495	.049	.214	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 1 shows generally weak associations between media exposure and self-esteem across all media types. Radio access was weakly and negatively correlated with self-esteem ($\rho = -0.066$, $p = 0.195$), while television access also showed a weak negative correlation ($\rho = -0.035$, $p = 0.495$). Neither relationship was statistically significant at the 0.05 level; hence, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Mobile phone access showed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship with self-esteem ($\rho = 0.101$, $p = 0.049$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis for this variable. In contrast, social media exposure showed a weak negative correlation with self-esteem ($\rho = -0.064$, $p = 0.214$) that was not statistically significant; thus, the null hypothesis was retained.

The findings indicate that media exposure, in general, has weak and largely non-significant associations with adolescent self-esteem. The non-significant relationships for radio, television, and social media suggest that exposure alone may not be sufficient to influence self-esteem outcomes, supporting the argument that media effects are often context-dependent rather than uniform.

The weak positive association between mobile phone access and self-esteem may reflect beneficial uses such as communication, social connection, and support networks, which can enhance perceived self-

worth. However, the effect size remains very small, indicating limited practical influence.

The non-significant relationship between social media exposure and self-esteem contrasts with theoretical expectations and prior empirical findings that associate social media use with social comparison processes and reduced self-esteem (Ozimek & Bierhoff, 2020; Buglass et al., 2017). Similarly, screen-based media effects are often described as weak and contingent on usage patterns and content type (Ahmed, 2022; Stiglic & Viner, 2019). These inconsistencies suggest that access to media alone is not a strong determinant of self-esteem; instead, how adolescents engage with media is likely more influential.

Overall, the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between media exposure and self-esteem is largely not supported, except for a minimal association observed in mobile phone access.

Regression Analysis

The study employed ordinal regression analysis to assess the association between exposure to various media platforms, such as radio, television, mobile phones, and social media (independent variables), and self-esteem (dependent variable). It aimed to establish the extent to which each media type predicts changes in self-esteem and their relative influence within the model. The findings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.124 ^a	.015	.005	.723

Predictors: (Constant), social media use (hours/day), radio use (hours/day), television use (hours/day), and mobile phone use (hours/day).

The ordinal regression results indicate a weak overall association between media exposure and self-esteem, with a model fit value of $R = 0.124$, suggesting a minimal combined influence of radio, television, mobile phones, and social media on self-esteem. The model accounts for only 1.5% of the variation in self-esteem ($R^2 = 0.015$), with a slightly lower adjusted R^2 of 0.005, indicating very limited explanatory power even after adjusting for the number of predictors. This indicates that the variables in the model account for

only a small share of the variation in self-esteem, with most differences likely influenced by other unmeasured factors.

The standard error of the estimate (0.723) further indicates a moderate level of prediction error, implying limited precision in the model's estimates. Overall, while the model demonstrates a statistically estimated relationship, its practical predictive capacity is weak.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) results is presented | in Table 3.

Table 3: ANOVA for Regression Model Predicting Self-Esteem

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	3.099	4	.775	1.481	.207 ^a
Residual	198.273	379	.523		
Total	201.372	383			

Note. Dependent variable: self-esteem. Predictors: social media use, radio use, television use, and mobile phone use (measured in time per day).

The ANOVA (F-test) results indicate that the overall regression model is not statistically significant ($p = 0.207$), suggesting that exposure to radio, television, mobile phones, and social media is not a statistically significant predictor of self-esteem. This implies that

the combined effect of the media exposure variables does not significantly explain variation in self-esteem within the study sample. Table 4 presents the regression coefficients.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients for Predicting Self-Esteem

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β	T	p
(Constant)	2.175	.112		19.450	< .001
Radio	.004	.036	.005	.100	.921
Television	.024	.036	.039	.660	.509
Mobile Phone	-.080	.039	-.146	-2.032	.043
Social Media	.007	.034	.014	.203	.834

Note. Dependent variable: self-esteem.

The coefficients from the regression analysis reflect the direction and size of the relationship between self-esteem and exposure to different media platforms, including radio, television, mobile phones, and social media. The constant term ($\beta_0 = 2.175$) represents the predicted level of self-esteem when all predictor variables are held at zero.

The unstandardized coefficients show that access to radio ($\beta = 0.004$, $p > 0.05$), television ($\beta = 0.024$, $p > 0.05$), and social media ($\beta = 0.007$, $p > 0.05$) exhibit very small, positive, and statistically non-significant relationships with self-esteem. In contrast, mobile phone access ($\beta = -0.080$, $p < 0.05$) shows a statistically significant negative association with self-esteem, indicating that increased mobile phone exposure is associated with a slight decrease in self-esteem within the study sample.

The apparent difference between the correlation and regression results for mobile phone exposure is explained by the distinction between bivariate and multivariate analysis. The correlation coefficient ($\rho =$

.101, $p = .049$) indicates a weak positive association between mobile phone exposure and self-esteem when examined in isolation.

However, the regression coefficient ($\beta = -.146$, $p = .043$) reflects the unique effect of mobile phone exposure after controlling for radio, television, and social media exposure. Given the relatively strong intercorrelations among the independent variables, particularly between mobile phone and social media exposure ($\rho = .615$), the regression results suggest that the initial positive association is influenced by shared variance among media exposure variables. Once this shared variance is accounted for, the isolated effect of mobile phone exposure on self-esteem becomes slightly negative. This indicates that the initial positive association is influenced by the overlap between mobile phone use and other media activities, particularly social media use. Once this shared influence is removed, mobile phone exposure on its own is associated with a small reduction in self-esteem. Therefore, this suggests that mobile phone use does not operate independently in shaping self-

esteem but is closely intertwined with other forms of media exposure that collectively influence adolescents' self-perceptions.

Overall, the findings indicate that radio, television, and social media are not significant predictors of self-esteem, whereas mobile phone access is the only statistically significant predictor, though its effect size is small. The regression equation from the model is shown in Equation 1.

$$\text{Equation 1: } y = 2.175 + 0.004 x_1 + 0.024 x_2 + 0.080 x_3 + 0.007 x_4$$

Where:

y = self-esteem

x₁ = radio exposure

x₂ = television exposure

x₃ = mobile phone exposure

x₄ = social media exposure

The equation indicates that, holding other variables constant, a one-unit increase in radio exposure is associated with a 0.004 increase in self-esteem, television exposure with a 0.024 increase, and social media exposure with a 0.007 increase, while a one-unit increase in mobile phone exposure is associated with a 0.080 decrease in self-esteem.

Qualitative Findings (Teacher Perspectives)

Qualitative responses from teachers provided contextual insights into the influence of media use on students' self-esteem. Teachers observed that frequent media engagement was associated with diminished self-worth, often linked to exposure to idealised or inappropriate content that fosters social comparison. This was perceived to contribute to feelings of inadequacy, reduced confidence, and negative self-evaluation among some students. Additionally, patterns of excessive media use were associated with social withdrawal and weakened peer relationships, which may further undermine adolescents' sense of belonging and self-esteem. Teachers also noted that imitation of unrealistic or undesirable behaviours portrayed in the media could

negatively shape students' self-concept and identity development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concludes that media exposure has a generally weak association with adolescents' self-esteem. Correlation analysis revealed that exposure to radio, television, and social media was not significantly related to self-esteem, indicating that these forms of media do not independently influence adolescents' self-worth. Although mobile phone use showed a statistically significant relationship with self-esteem, the effect was weak, suggesting limited practical significance.

Further, regression analysis demonstrated that media exposure accounted for only a very small proportion of the variation in self-esteem, confirming that it is not a strong predictor of adolescents' psychological outcomes. These findings indicate that self-esteem among adolescents is more likely shaped by a combination of psychosocial and environmental factors rather than media exposure alone.

Overall, while media forms an integral part of adolescents' daily experiences, its direct influence on self-esteem is minimal and context-dependent. The findings highlight the need to consider qualitative aspects of media engagement, as well as broader developmental and social influences, in understanding adolescent psychological well-being.

Recommendations: The study recommends that schools strengthen digital literacy programmes to equip adolescents with critical media consumption skills and resilience against negative self-comparisons. In addition, school-based psychosocial support systems, including guidance and counselling services, should be enhanced to promote positive self-concept and emotional regulation. Training for teachers and counsellors is necessary to support early identification and intervention for self-esteem-related challenges. Furthermore, education stakeholders should integrate media awareness and mental health education into the curriculum to provide a structured response to the psychosocial effects of media exposure.

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