

The Role of Social Media (Facebook) on the Self-Concept of Young Adults at the University of Buea, South West Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Social media use, and Facebook involvement in particular, has become embedded in the daily routines of young adults, with measurable implications for their psychological well-being and self-perception. This study examined the role of social media (Facebook) on the self-concept of young adults at the University of Buea, South West Region of Cameroon, operationalising self-concept through three sub-constructs: self-esteem, self-image, and the ideal self. Facebook engagement was framed in terms of motivation, uses and gratifications, and social comparison. The study was grounded in three theoretical lenses, namely symbolic interactionism, social comparison theory, and self-objectification theory. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted. A structured, closed-ended questionnaire was administered to 450 active Facebook users drawn through random sampling from three faculties of the University of Buea. Data were captured in EpiData version 3.1 and analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, the chi-square test, and the non-parametric Spearman rho correlation, with significance set at the 0.05 level. Descriptive results showed that Facebook involvement affected self-esteem (83.2%), self-image (79.0%), and the ideal self (77.2%) of respondents. Inferential results confirmed a statistically significant negative relationship between Facebook use and each dimension of the self-concept: self-esteem ($\rho = -.211$, $p = .001$), self-image ($\rho = -.237$, $p < .001$), and ideal self ($\rho = -.245$, $p < .001$), with an overall self-concept effect of $\rho = -.250$ ($p < .001$). Female respondents, younger users (18 to 25 years), and those whose principal motivation was posting and commenting on pictures were consistently more affected. The study recommends targeted sensitisation on the content shared on Facebook, a stronger and exemplary presence of conventional media on social platforms, the introduction of social media as a formal course in universities, and balanced regulation of social media use.

How to cite this paper: Michael Kengnjoh "The Role of Social Media (Facebook) on the Self-Concept of Young Adults at the University of Buea, South West Region of Cameroon"

Published in
International
Journal of Trend in
Scientific Research
and Development
(ijtsrd), ISSN:
2456-6470,
Volume-10 | Issue-

4, August 2026, pp.66-79, URL:
www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd141906.pdf



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KEYWORDS: social media, Facebook, self-concept, self-esteem, self-image, ideal self, social comparison, young adults, Cameroon.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the world has witnessed a rapid emergence and proliferation of social networking sites, which have become woven into the fabric of daily life, particularly among young adults. Social networking sites have given individuals the opportunity to share information that is often personal and to receive feedback on the content they share. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have reshaped social communication in the recent past. As at 2014, Facebook alone recorded more than one billion daily active users worldwide (Smith, 2014).

Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

Facebook was launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, initially as a website restricted to Harvard University students who wished to stay connected with their classmates. By 2006 the platform had opened to anyone above the age of thirteen who held a valid e-

mail address, and additional features such as the News Feed, the like button, and cover photos were progressively introduced. In Buea municipality, social networking has become the most popular online activity among young adults and other age groups, rising steadily as access to smartphones and the internet expands. This exposure brings details of other people's lives into constant view, prompting comparison, self-evaluation, and the presentation of models for imitation.

The desire for validation from others is a common phenomenon that shapes the volume of pictures and information shared daily. On Facebook, validation is made easier through external criteria such as likes and comments from people the user may not even know. The difficulty is that these signals are not easily tested against objective reality. Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, and Tong (2008) found that a Facebook user's perceived credibility and physical attractiveness are influenced by the physical attractiveness of the user's friends, rendering the platform a new arena for social comparison. Lee (2014) reported that social comparison frequency is significantly explained by self-uncertainty, such that a person who is less certain about herself compares more frequently with others on Facebook. Steers, Wickham, and Acitelli (2014) further found that the relationship between time spent on Facebook and depressive symptoms was mediated by upward, non-directional, and downward Facebook social comparisons.

Social networking sites allow users to construct electronic profiles, provide details about their lives, post pictures, maintain relationships, meet new people, observe others' lives, fulfil belongingness needs, and express their beliefs and emotions (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Given the relevance of these sites to a wide range of social functions, people also use them, consciously or unconsciously, as a basis for social comparison, self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954), and self-enhancement (Wills, 1981). Because such platforms offer abundant opportunities for social comparison, it is important to understand the role they play in defining the self-concept of individual users. This study therefore focuses on how motivation for use, uses and gratifications, and social comparison on Facebook affect the self-concept of young adults, indicated by self-esteem, self-image, and the ideal self.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Advertisers and content creators construct a fanciful world that appears to impose unrealistic standards on young adults, and these standards are amplified by

social media. The technology underpinning social media is centred on user-generated content, online collaboration, information sharing, and collective intelligence (Davidson & Yoran, 2007), allowing anyone on Facebook to create and disseminate information without restriction. The platforms idealise success, beauty, fame, and glory, and present ideals that are frequently non-existent. Photoshopped and retouched images are presented as authentic, generating in some viewers a desire to attain the form, shape, and complexion portrayed.

Whereas such images were once set by celebrities far removed from ordinary communities, they are now produced by classmates, neighbours, and friends within the same environment. The posting of curated pictures that display glorious moments while concealing struggle and ordinary effort can cause distress and a distorted self-concept in some young adults. The pursuit of validation and comparison can lead young people to feel unaccepted when their circumstances do not allow them to present images as attractive and flashy as those of their peers. This is most dangerous when young adults live away from the protective care of parents, or in situations of neglectful or absent parenting. Carefully edited images can act as a smokescreen of perfection, behind which the individual suffers emotionally; young adults with idealised online selves may feel frustrated upon realising the gap between who they pretend to be online and who they really are. It is therefore necessary to understand the relationship between social media and the self-concept of young adults, since self-perception is one of the most fundamental issues human beings face, and one that the advent of social media has profoundly affected.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate the impact of social media (Facebook) on the self-concept of young adults. Specifically, the study sought to assess the influence of Facebook on the self-esteem of young adults, to investigate the impact of Facebook on the self-image of young adults, and to examine the role of Facebook on the ideal self of young adults.

1.3. Research Questions

The general question asked whether social media (Facebook) has an influence on the self-concept of young adults in Buea municipality. The specific questions were: (a) To what extent does Facebook influence the self-esteem of young adults? (b) What role does Facebook play on the self-image of young adults? (c) To what extent does Facebook influence the ideal self of young adults?

1.4. Hypotheses

H_{a1}: There is a significant relationship between social media (Facebook) and the self-esteem of young adults. **H_{a2}:** There is a significant relationship between social media (Facebook) and the self-image of young adults. **H_{a3}:** There is a significant relationship between social media (Facebook) and the ideal self of young adults. Each alternative hypothesis was tested against a corresponding null hypothesis of no significant relationship.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The findings are intended to benefit several audiences. Young adults stand to gain a critical awareness that media images, including heavily edited Facebook pictures, should not dictate who they believe they ought to be, which may reduce depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties, and stress, and redirect time and resources away from harmful appearance-related practices. Parents and guardians may better recognise distress in their children and know when to seek professional support. The wider society may develop a healthier appreciation of differences in body type, complexion, and individuality. Educators may become more conscious of how they communicate with students, and conventional media practitioners and journalism institutions may see the value of a responsible social media presence and of incorporating social media into their curricula. The study also contributes to the academic literature on the role of Facebook in shaping the self-concept, particularly within an African and Cameroonian context that remains underexplored.

2. Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is delimited along five dimensions. Conceptually, the study is concerned with Facebook's impact on the self-concept of young adults, where Facebook is examined through motivation, usage, and social comparison (shared information, likes and dislikes, and public comments), and where self-concept is examined through self-image, self-esteem, and the ideal self. Geographically, the study is confined to Buea municipality, and specifically the University of Buea, in Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon. Theoretically, the study is anchored in symbolic interactionism, social comparison theory, and self-objectification theory. Methodologically, the study adopts a quantitative approach using a cross-sectional survey design. Contextually, the population of interest is young adults who are active users of Facebook within the selected university setting.

3. Review of Major Concepts

3.1. Facebook and Its Use Among Young Adults

Launched in 2004 as a social networking website exclusively for Harvard students, Facebook has grown into one of the most widely used social media sites in the world, with an estimated user population of 2.45 billion people. Users interact by updating their status, writing on other members' walls, sending direct messages, joining interest groups, liking or disliking pages, importing contacts, and uploading photos and videos. According to June 2016 statistics, some 2,100,000 subscribers, representing about 8.6 per cent of the Cameroonian population, were actively using Facebook in Cameroon, a figure likely to have multiplied with the rapid penetration of mobile telephony and internet access (Ngange & Tchewo, 2017). Within Buea, where the number of secondary, high school, and tertiary institutions is constantly rising, university students are especially active on the platform.

Three factors structure Facebook use among young adults: motivation for use, the actual use and gratification derived, and the social comparison that occurs during use. Motivation refers to the dynamic force that pushes individuals toward engagement, and Facebook offers numerous features, including profile creation, photo sharing, tagging, status updates, group creation, and games, that serve a variety of purposes. The uses and gratifications perspective, the most widely applied approach in social media research, focuses on motives and on the social, psychological, cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural antecedents and outcomes of media use (Papacharissi, 2008). Needs and gratifications are commonly categorised as cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension-release needs.

Empirical work has consistently identified distinct motives for Facebook use. Flaherty, Pearce, and Rubin (1998) found that entertainment, passing time, and information seeking, needs traditionally met by older media, are also met through computer-mediated platforms. Tanta, Mihovilovic, and Sablic (2014) reported that adolescents use Facebook mainly to socialise and to obtain information about social events, thereby gratifying needs for integration, social interaction, and understanding of their social environment. Sheldon (2008) constructed a Facebook Motives scale identifying relationship maintenance, passing time, virtual community, entertainment, companionship, and coolness, while Joinson (2008) identified seven uses and gratifications, including social connection, shared identities, content, social investigation, social network surfing, and status updating.

Social comparison, traditionally an offline and face-to-face process, is now mediated by social networking sites that allow individuals to broadcast their social lives. Because creating and maintaining social ties is a primary motive of Facebook use, users engage in social surveillance behaviours such as browsing and checking up on acquaintances, and these behaviours create opportunities for comparison. Likes and dislikes consequently play a significant role in affirming or disapproving a user's pictures, statements, and appearance, and may substitute for the physical connections individuals share, thereby affecting the self-concept positively or negatively. Research also indicates that self-esteem level is related to online behaviour: individuals with lower self-esteem tend to spend more time on Facebook, log on more frequently, and accumulate more friends as a means of social compensation (Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013; Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010), whereas individuals with higher self-esteem tend to use Facebook to enhance existing relationships and pass time (Barker, 2009).

Personality traits further shape Facebook behaviour. Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012) found that Facebook use is motivated by the need to belong and the need for self-presentation, the latter being influenced by traits such as neuroticism, narcissism, shyness, and self-worth. Studies grounded in the Five Factor Model report that highly neurotic individuals post more photos and disclose more basic information (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010), that individuals high in narcissism post more self-promotional content and check the platform more frequently (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Mehdizadeh, 2010), and that openness to experience is associated with broader and more expressive use of the platform's features (Ross et al., 2009).

3.2. Self-Concept

Self-concept can be defined as the totality of a complex, organised, and dynamic system of learned attitudes, beliefs, and evaluative judgements that people hold about themselves (Wehrle & Fasbender, 2018). It is the perception one holds about oneself, an answer to the enduring question of who one is. Over recent decades the conceptualisation of self-concept has shifted from a unitary and stable entity to a multidimensional, multifaceted, and dynamic structure that guides how people process self-relevant information across all areas of life (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012). Self-concepts both develop through unique personal experiences and are shaped by existing social expectations and power structures, mediating the link between social context and individual behaviour (Markus & Wurf, 1987).

Differences in self-concept may be intra-individual, arising from the context-specific and malleable nature of the self and from the varied roles people occupy (Stryker & Burke, 2000), or inter-individual, arising from differences in life experience, knowledge, interests, exposure to external forces, and cultural influence (Elliott, 2001). The self-concept also has a developmental component, becoming more defined and stable with age (Coleman, 1996), even as accumulated experience continues to reshape it across the lifespan. For the purposes of this study, the self-concept is examined through three interrelated sub-constructs: self-esteem, self-image, and the ideal self.

3.2.1. Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is an individual's subjective evaluation of their own worth, encompassing beliefs such as being loved or worthy, together with emotional states such as pride, triumph, despair, and shame (Hewitt, 2009). Smith and Mackie (2007) distinguish the self-concept, which is what we think about the self, from self-esteem, which is how positively or negatively we evaluate it. Self-esteem is typically conceived as a continuous dimension ranging from high to low and is regarded as a relatively stable trait, though short-term state variations exist. William James (1890) proposed that people develop high self-regard when they consistently meet personally important goals, while Maslow (1943) treated self-esteem as a fundamental need without which fulfilment cannot be attained. Rogers (1959) located self-worth in the congruence between the current self and the ideal self, arguing that unrealistic ideals conveyed by others undermine self-worth. Individuals with high self-esteem are characterised by secure values, trust in their judgement, present-focused living, and resistance to manipulation, whereas those with low self-esteem display heavy self-criticism, hypersensitivity to criticism, chronic indecision, perfectionism, and a generally negative outlook (Bonet, 1997).

3.2.2. Self-Image

Self-image is the mental picture, often resistant to change, that captures both objectively observable details such as height, weight, and hair colour, and items learned about oneself through personal experience or by internalising the judgements of others. Social and cognitive psychologists refer to it as the self-schema, which stores information and shapes how people think and remember, as in self-referential encoding (Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977; Schacter, Gilbert, & Wegner, 2011). A prominent facet of self-image is body image, a multifaceted construct comprising perception, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to one's body (Cash & Pruzinsky, 1990). Body image is not fixed but constitutes a dynamic relationship between the

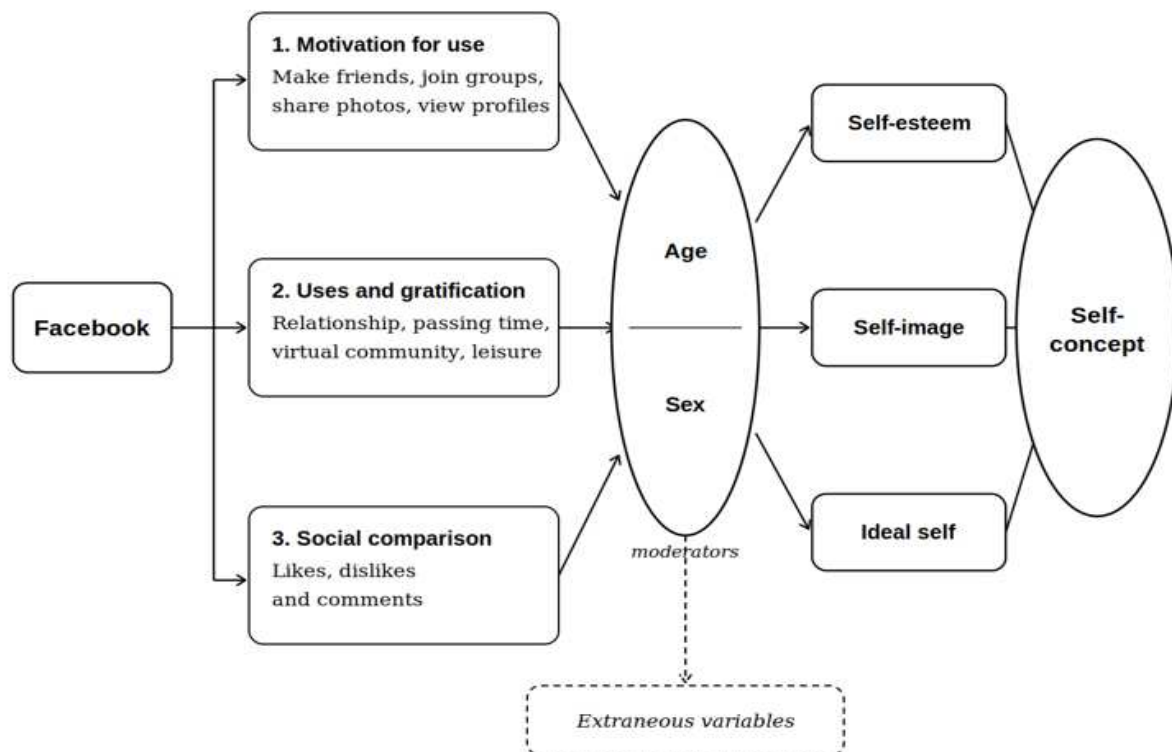
individual, the body, and the social environment. Cafri, Yamamiya, Brannick, and Thompson (2005) found that internalising the thin ideal and engaging in heightened social comparison increase the risk of negative body image, while Grogan (1999) noted that family, peers, teachers, and society shape body image across the lifespan.

Self-image may be healthy, based on positive feedback from self and others, or poor, often resulting from accumulated criticism or from societal beauty values such as the slimness ideal. Body dissatisfaction has risen sharply, with about half of girls and undergraduate women reporting dissatisfaction with their bodies (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008), a pattern that emerges early and is strongly correlated with media exposure to the thin ideal (Levine & Murnen, 2009). Research specific to social media reports that internet exposure, and particularly time spent on Facebook, is directly related to body image concern and the drive for thinness, with Facebook users scoring significantly higher than non-users (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013), and that photo-related activity in particular is associated with thin-ideal

internalisation and self-objectification (Meier & Gray, 2014).

3.2.3. The Ideal Self

For the humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers, personality comprises the real self, which is who a person actually is, and the ideal self, which is the person one wishes to become. The ideal self is constructed from life experience, the demands of society, and admiration of role models; when the real self is far from this idealised image, the individual may feel dissatisfied and consider himself a failure. Within positive psychology, the ideal self is not a defensive function but the core mechanism of self-regulation and intrinsic motivation, manifest as a personal vision of what one hopes to accomplish (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006). Discrepancy or congruence between the real self and the ideal self produces distinct emotional and behavioural consequences (Boldero & Francis, 1999). Total congruence is rare, and Argyle (2008) identified four factors that shape the self-concept: the reactions of significant others, comparison with others, social roles, and identification with other people.



Conceptual framework of facebook and self concept. Source: Researcher's conception 2021.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in three complementary theories: symbolic interactionism, social comparison theory, and self-objectification theory. Together they account for how meaning is socially constructed through interaction, how individuals evaluate themselves relative to others, and how exposure to idealised images leads individuals to treat themselves as objects to be appraised.

4.1. Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, holds that the self is a social product that is nonetheless purposive and creative. The theory views society as the product of the

everyday interactions among individuals and provides a framework for understanding how people create symbolic worlds that in turn shape their behaviour (West & Turner, 2017). Charon (2004) outlines five central ideas: the human being is fundamentally social and is driven by the search for interaction; the human being is a thinking being whose action involves continuous internal as well as interpersonal interaction; humans do not sense their environment directly but define the situations they are in; the cause of human action lies in the present situation, present thinking, and present definition; and human beings are active rather than passive in relation to their environment. Students at the University of Buea exist within precisely such a social environment, interacting intrapersonally and interpersonally through Facebook and other platforms, and being affected by these interactions. Symbolic interactionism therefore illuminates the processes through which young adults are shaped by their mediated interactions.

4.2. Social Comparison Theory

Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory proposes that individuals possess a drive to evaluate their opinions and abilities, and that they satisfy this drive by comparing themselves with others. Comparison may be downward, against those considered inferior, which tends to elevate self-regard (Gibbons, 1986), or upward, against those considered superior, which may have the opposite effect (Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). Upward comparison is particularly relevant to body image: women frequently compare themselves with ultrathin models and celebrities whose body types are unrealistic, leading to negative emotional and behavioural consequences, including body dissatisfaction, depression, and disordered eating (Heinberg & Thompson, 1992; Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Comparable pressures exist for men through the association of muscularity with masculinity (Mishkind, Rodin, & Silberstein, 1986). Because Facebook displays a continuous stream of curated images, it constitutes a powerful and accessible arena for upward social comparison among young adults.

4.3. Self-Objectification Theory

Self-objectification theory, originally articulated by Fredrickson and Roberts and synthesised from earlier scholarship on the sexual objectification of women, explains the pervasive tendency to equate women with their bodies and the negative consequences this carries for body image. To objectify is to treat as an object something that is not an object, to be used, controlled, and evaluated through its physical properties (Calogero, 2012). On Facebook, self-objectification is exemplified by uploading photos, adopting an external observer's view of one's own body, and having that view affirmed or rejected through likes and comments (Meier & Gray, 2014). Related practices such as fat talk, comments about one's own weight or eating, and old talk, negative statements about ageing, intensify self-objectification and are associated with body dissatisfaction, depression, and disordered eating (Arroyo, Segrin, & Harwood, 2014). The likes and dislikes that young adults receive thus function as instruments of objectification that shape how they view themselves across social media platforms.

5. Empirical Research

A growing body of empirical research has examined the relationship between Facebook use and aspects of the self. Mitsoula et al. (2020), studying children aged 10 to 13 in Patras, Greece, found that Facebook usage was significantly associated with personality traits including neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, and was negatively related to school performance as assessed by teachers, while children who perceived themselves as good pupils tended not to hold Facebook accounts. The study found no significant association between Facebook usage and self-reported happiness or life satisfaction.

Gallinari (2017), drawing on social comparison theory, investigated whether the number of likes received on social media affects self-perception among 124 women aged 18 to 25. Using a manipulated Instagram post and the State Self-Esteem Scale, the study found that comparing likes on Instagram did not significantly affect self-esteem, although a small positive correlation emerged between a participant's own number of likes and her appearance self-esteem. Mendoza (2017), in a quasi-experimental study of 329 students at Saint Louis University in Baguio City, Philippines, found that relationship maintenance was the most salient motive of Facebook use, that intensity of use correlated with upward, non-directional, and downward social comparison and with positive and negative affect, but that self-esteem did not mediate the relationship between the variables.

Faryal (2016), drawing on Goffman's theory of self-presentation, surveyed 50 students at Bahaiddin Zakariya University and found a significant relationship between self-presentation and the idealised version of the self, with self-presentation also correlated with narcissism and judgement anxiety, and males more involved in self-presentation than females. Gutierrez (2015) reported that Facebook usage was negatively related to self-esteem and that single individuals invested more time on Facebook than those in relationships.

Despite this expanding literature, important gaps remain. Much prior research has examined the internet or media in general rather than a single platform, and few studies have treated the self-concept holistically by combining self-esteem, self-image, and the ideal self within one design. Existing work has rarely focused on young adults in an African or Cameroonian setting, and the question of which gender is more vulnerable to the effects of Facebook use has not been adequately resolved. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the totality of the self-concept in relation to Facebook use among young adults at the University of Buea, attending to gender, age, and motivation for use.

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. A survey is regarded as an efficient method for eliciting public opinion on an issue, and it allowed the researcher to capture the views of a large number of young adults regarding the role of Facebook on their self-concept. Structured questionnaires were used to gather data from respondents drawn from the University of Buea.

6.2. Area of Study and Population

The study was conducted at the University of Buea in Buea municipality, a sub-divisional and regional headquarters in the South West Region of Cameroon, with an estimated population of about 200,000 inhabitants and a highly cosmopolitan composition owing to the presence of the university and numerous educational institutions. The target population comprised 19,557 students distributed across eight faculties and two schools, as reported by the university's information technology centre. From this population, three faculties with the largest enrolments, namely Education, Health Sciences, and Social and Management Sciences, were selected, giving an accessible population of 14,522 students.

Table 1. Accessible Population of the Study

No.	Faculty	Student enrolment
1	Faculty of Education	3,269
2	Faculty of Health Sciences	3,408
3	Faculty of Social and Management Sciences	7,845
	Total	14,522

Source: Information Technology Centre, University of Buea (2020).

6.3. Sample Size and Sampling

A sample of 450 active Facebook users was drawn from the accessible population using simple random sampling, so that every eligible student had an equal chance of selection. The sample size was estimated using the formula proposed by Amin (2005), with a Z value of 1.96, an absolute precision of 5 per cent, an expected population proportion of 50 per cent for optimal estimation, and a design effect of 1.2. The design effect of 1.2, rather than 1.0, was applied to increase the sample size and thereby strengthen the credibility of the findings, given the ready availability of students.

6.4. Instrument, Validity, and Reliability

The principal instrument was a structured questionnaire composed of closed-ended items to guide responses. Section A captured demographic information, while Section B contained items measuring the influence of Facebook on self-esteem, self-image, and the ideal self, each rated on a four-point Likert scale. Content validity was ensured by constructing items aligned with the study's objectives and variables, and face validity was secured through review and approval by the supervisor. A pilot study involving ten questionnaires administered to young adults in Mile 17, Bonduma, and Buea Town was conducted to assess clarity and to refine instructions and item wording. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. As shown in Table 2, the alpha coefficients for the three sub-scales ranged from .824 to .860, with an overall coefficient of .942, indicating high reliability.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis of the Instrument

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Variance	No. of items
Self-esteem	.841	.014	11
Self-image	.860	.003	11
Ideal self	.824	.004	11
Overall reliability	.942	.007	33

A coefficient above .70 is considered acceptable; all values exceeded this threshold.

6.5. Method of Data Analysis

Data were entered using EpiData version 3.1 (EpiData Association, Odense, Denmark, 2008), which provides built-in consistency and validation checks, and were then exported to SPSS version 25 for cleaning and analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and multiple-response sets, summarised the responses for each variable. Because the test of normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) indicated that the data deviated significantly from a normal distribution ($p < .001$ for all variables), the non-parametric Spearman rho correlation was used to test the hypotheses rather than the parametric Pearson correlation. The chi-square test was used to compare the influence of Facebook on the self-concept across gender, age range, and principal motivation for use. All inferential statistics were evaluated at the 95 per cent confidence level, with alpha set at .05. The decision rule was that a computed p-value below .05 led to rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

6.6. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality were respected throughout. Participation was voluntary, respondents were not required to disclose their names or any identifying information, and the purpose of the study was explained to each participant. Because data collection coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, the prescribed barrier measures were observed in order to protect respondents and field assistants.

7. Results

7.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Of the 450 university students who took part in the study, 193 (42.9%) were male and 257 (57.1%) were female. With respect to age, 261 (58.0%) were between 18 and 25 years and 189 (42.0%) were above 25 years. Regarding the principal motivation for using Facebook, 154 (34.2%) used it primarily for viewing profiles, 103 (22.9%) for meeting new friends, 98 (21.8%) for posting and commenting on pictures, and 95 (21.1%) for chatting with others.

Table 3. Demographic Distribution of Respondents (N = 450)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	193	42.9
Female	257	57.1
Age range		
18 to 25 years	261	58.0
Above 25 years	189	42.0
Principal motivation		
Chatting with others	95	21.1
Meeting new friends	103	22.9
Viewing profiles	154	34.2
Posting and commenting on pictures	98	21.8

7.2. Facebook and Self-Esteem

The aggregated multiple-response set indicated that 83.2% of respondents reported that their self-esteem was affected by Facebook involvement, while 16.8% reported no such effect. Majorities agreed that they feel socially desirable when posting photos with friends (89.3%), feel pressure to keep up with Facebook friends (87.6%), feel distressed when unable to access Facebook (83.6%), and post, like, and comment on pictures when sad (82.9%). Notably, 78.0% admitted to posting untrue information about themselves due to perceived pressure to maintain a certain appearance.

Table 4. Chi-Square Comparison of Facebook Influence on Self-Esteem by Demographics

Group	Affected (%)	Not affected (%)	Chi-square test
Gender			
Male	78.2	21.8	$\chi^2 = 6.32$, df = 1 p = .011
Female	87.0	13.0	
Age range			
18 to 25 years	86.5	13.5	$\chi^2 = 4.70$, df = 1 p = .029
Above 25 years	78.7	21.3	

Principal motivation			
Chatting with others	71.8	28.2	$\chi^2 = 12.03$
Meeting new friends	87.4	12.6	df = 3
Viewing profiles	84.6	15.4	p = .007
Posting/commenting on pictures	87.8	12.2	

As shown in Table 4, the self-esteem of female respondents (87.0%) was significantly more affected than that of males (78.2%), $p = .011$; younger respondents aged 18 to 25 (86.5%) were more affected than those above 25 (78.7%), $p = .029$; and those whose principal motivation was posting and commenting on pictures (87.8%) were the most affected, $p = .007$. The Spearman rho correlation confirmed a significant negative relationship between Facebook use and self-esteem ($\rho = -.211$, $p = .001$), with an explanatory power of 66.1%. The first null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

7.3. Facebook and Self-Image

The aggregated multiple-response set indicated that 79.0% of respondents reported that their self-image was affected by Facebook involvement, while 21.0% reported no effect. Majorities agreed that they feel part of the Facebook community (82.9%), feel satisfied with a picture only when it attains a desired number of likes (82.0%), feel dissatisfied when an uploaded picture does not attract the likes they want (79.8%), and feel jealous when a friend's picture attracts more likes (79.3%). Substantial proportions reported comparing their body with that of popular persons online (76.9%) and wishing to resemble fashion models and celebrities (72.0%).

Table 5. Chi-Square Comparison of Facebook Influence on Self-Image by Demographics

Group	Affected (%)	Not affected (%)	Chi-square test
Gender			
Male	74.4	25.6	$\chi^2 = 4.14$, df = 1
Female	82.5	17.5	p = .041
Age range			
18 to 25 years	81.8	18.2	$\chi^2 = 2.76$, df = 1
Above 25 years	75.1	24.9	p = .096
Principal motivation			
Chatting with others	66.4	33.6	$\chi^2 = 13.51$
Meeting new friends	78.3	21.7	df = 3
Viewing profiles	83.1	16.9	p = .003
Posting/commenting on pictures	85.6	14.4	

As shown in Table 5, female respondents (82.5%) were significantly more affected than males (74.4%), $p = .041$, and those motivated by posting and commenting on pictures (85.6%) were the most affected, $p = .003$, while the difference by age range did not reach significance ($p = .096$). The Spearman rho correlation confirmed a significant negative relationship between Facebook use and self-image ($\rho = -.237$, $p < .001$), with an explanatory power of 69.4%. The second null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

7.4. Facebook and the Ideal Self

The aggregated multiple-response set indicated that 77.2% of respondents reported that their ideal self was affected by Facebook involvement, while 22.8% reported no effect. Majorities reported spending considerable time and money on appearance to resemble those they follow (82.7%), believing they could look better after comparison with others online (79.8%), editing or photoshopping their pictures before posting (78.7%), and wishing to look like the models they follow (78.9%).

Table 6. Chi-Square Comparison of Facebook Influence on the Ideal Self by Demographics

Group	Affected (%)	Not affected (%)	Chi-square test
Gender			
Male	72.5	27.5	$\chi^2 = 3.60$, df = 1
Female	80.2	19.8	p = .057
Age range			
18 to 25 years	80.4	19.6	$\chi^2 = 10.49$, df = 1
Above 25 years	72.1	27.9	p = .001

Principal motivation			
Chatting with others	64.9	35.1	$\chi^2 = 10.19$
Meeting new friends	78.8	21.2	df = 3
Viewing profiles	78.6	21.4	p = .017
Posting/commenting on pictures	83.8	16.2	

As shown in Table 6, younger respondents (80.4%) were significantly more affected than older ones (72.1%), $p = .001$, and those motivated by posting and commenting on pictures (83.8%) were the most affected, $p = .017$, while the gender difference approached but did not reach conventional significance ($p = .057$). The Spearman rho correlation confirmed a significant negative relationship between Facebook use and the ideal self ($\rho = -.245$, $p < .001$), with an explanatory power of 62.2%. The third null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

7.5 Overall Effect on Self-Concept

Taken together, the analyses showed that Facebook has a significant and negative effect on the overall self-concept of young adults ($\rho = -.250$, $p < .001$). The three sub-constructs were strongly and positively inter-correlated, with self-esteem, self-image, and the ideal self correlating with the composite self-concept at .841, .896, and .921 respectively, indicating that a negative effect on one dimension is associated with negative effects on the others.

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Tests

Dimension	Spearman rho	p-value	Decision
Self-esteem	-.211	.001	Null rejected
Self-image	-.237	< .001	Null rejected
Ideal self	-.245	< .001	Null rejected
Overall self-concept	-.250	< .001	Null rejected

Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed). N = 450.

8. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Facebook exerts a significant and negative influence on each dimension of the self-concept among young adults at the University of Buea, and that the three dimensions move together. With respect to self-esteem, the high proportion of respondents who post curated content, conceal their true selves, and depend on the platform for a sense of worth indicates extensive self-comparison. This aligns with Mendoza (2017), who found relationship maintenance to be the most salient motive of Facebook use with consequences for self-esteem, and with Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012), who identified the need to belong and the need for self-presentation as drivers of use; both motives are visible in respondents who post untrue information and delete unflattering photos. The negative relationship is consistent with Festinger's (1954) account of upward social comparison, which tends to depress self-regard (Tesser et al., 1988). The finding that women and younger users are more affected echoes Cooley and Toray (2001) and Haman (2012), who observed that women compare themselves more intensively with idealised media figures.

With respect to self-image, the results corroborate Levine and Murnen (2009) and Tiggemann and Slater (2013), who linked media and Facebook exposure to body dissatisfaction and the drive for thinness, and Cafri et al. (2005), who connected heightened social

comparison to lower body image satisfaction. Respondents' dissatisfaction when their pictures attract few likes, their jealousy when friends attract more, and their felt pressure to lose weight all reflect a self-image constructed through external affirmation. The greater vulnerability of women is consistent with Grabe, Ward, and Hyde (2008), who reported widespread body dissatisfaction among young women exposed to media ideals, while the prominence of photo-centred motivation supports Meier and Gray (2014), who tied appearance-related Facebook activity to self-objectification.

With respect to the ideal self, the results align with Faryal (2016), who found a significant relationship between self-presentation and the idealised version of the self. The widespread editing of photos, preference for lighter-toned images, and aspiration to resemble followed models suggest a substantial discrepancy between the real self and the ideal self, which, in Rogers's framework, breeds dissatisfaction. The stronger effect among women is interpretable through self-objectification theory (Meier & Gray, 2014), which explains the tendency to equate women with their bodies and the attendant consequences for body image. Across all three dimensions, the likes and comments that constitute the currency of Facebook function simultaneously as instruments of social comparison and of objectification, shaping how young adults perceive and value themselves.

9. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the role of social media, specifically Facebook, on the self-concept of young adults at the University of Buea. The evidence is clear and consistent: Facebook involvement has a significant and negative effect on the self-concept, operating through its three interrelated components of self-esteem, self-image, and the ideal self. Because these components are strongly inter-correlated, a negative effect on one tends to produce negative effects on the others, so that incongruence between the real self, the self-image, and the ideal self can seriously distort how young adults perceive and value themselves. Female respondents, younger users aged 18 to 25, and those whose principal motivation is posting and commenting on pictures emerged as the most vulnerable groups. The findings affirm that the social comparison and self-objectification fostered by Facebook are not benign features of online life but forces that materially shape the psychological self-perception of young adults in this Cameroonian university context.

10. Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Young adults and the wider population should be sensitised on the kinds of images and information appropriate for sharing on Facebook and other platforms. Government, through the relevant ministry, and journalism institutions, as part of their social responsibility, can deliver such sensitisation through seminars and outreach.
2. Conventional media organs, including television, radio, and newspapers, should establish a strategic and exemplary presence on social media so as to set the standard for what is posted and how comments are handled, thereby modelling responsible use.
3. Universities and journalism institutions should introduce social media as a formal academic course, equipping professionals and students to maintain a credible online presence and reducing the impulse to fabricate or heavily edit images in pursuit of esteem.
4. Government should enact balanced regulation governing the use of social media, aimed not at curtailing legitimate press freedom but at discouraging nudity, hate speech, and vulgar content in public consumption.
5. Parents, counsellors, educators, and other helping professionals should help young people understand that much user-generated content is idealised and glamorised, so that they do not treat

online feedback as an accurate measure of their worth.

6. Young adults should be encouraged to seek the views of people who play a genuine and significant role in their lives, rather than relying on social media feedback to determine their place in the world.

10.1. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study examined Facebook alone and did not consider other platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube, which would have offered a more holistic appreciation of social media. It did not include parents or family members, whose perspectives would have enriched understanding of the wider impact of Facebook use. The scope was confined to the University of Buea, and data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevailing security situation, which made some respondents hesitant to participate. Future research should extend the study to other universities and regions of Cameroon and beyond, include adolescents and older adults to establish whether these effects extend across the lifespan, and adopt a mixed-methods design that complements quantitative findings with qualitative evidence.

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