

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USE, SELF-ESTEEM, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: *The use of social media has become an important part of daily life, influencing the way individuals communicate, relate to others, and evaluate themselves. In this context, this study aims to analyze the relationships between social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, as well as the role of social media use as a mediator in the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being. At the same time, the study aims to identify differences in social media use based on the purpose of use and to highlight the implications of these relationships for human resource management. The research was conducted on a sample of 182 respondents using an online questionnaire, and data analysis was performed in JASP, utilizing descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlations, the Kruskal-Wallis test, and mediation analysis. The results show that social media use is positively associated with social comparison and negatively associated with self-esteem and psychological well-being. Furthermore, self-esteem is positively associated with psychological well-being, representing the primary factor associated with it. At the same time, significant differences in social media use were identified based on the purpose of use, with the highest level recorded for entertainment purposes. Moreover, social media use partially mediates the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being. In conclusion, the effects of social media on psychological well-being are complex and depend on usage patterns and individual user characteristics; the results underscore the importance of promoting a balanced approach to social media use and an organizational climate geared toward supporting employee well-being.*

Keywords: social media use, self-esteem, psychological well-being, social comparison, human resource management.

JEL Classification: M12, D91, I31, O33, Z13.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the use of social media has expanded significantly, generating growing interest in its effects on individuals' psychological functioning. Social media is an essential component of daily life, influencing how people communicate, maintain social relationships, and relate to others (Huang, 2017; Leong et al., 2019). At the same time, they can be viewed as a "digital mirror" in which individuals construct and validate their identity within a context of continuous social evaluation (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). In this context, the analysis of the relationships between social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being becomes relevant from both theoretical and practical perspectives, including for the field of human resource management, as such processes influence employees' behavior and well-being (Fuciu, Sims and Tîmbalari, 2025). The literature highlights contradictory findings regarding the effects of social media use on well-being. On the one hand, numerous studies show that intensive or passive use of these platforms is associated with lower levels of well-being, due to social comparison and exposure to idealized content (Kross et al., 2013; Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas, 2018; Hunt et al., 2018). On the other hand, other research highlights positive effects, emphasizing the role of social media in maintaining relationships and developing social connections (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Chan, 2015). Therefore, the impact of social media on well-being is not uniform but depends on how and for what purpose they are used. In this context, it becomes relevant to investigate differences based on the purpose of use, as well as to analyze the relationships between social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Although the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being has been extensively studied, the results remain contradictory (Kross et al., 2013; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). Most studies analyze these variables separately or treat self-

esteem as a mediator, with limited research investigating social media use in this role. In the absence of integrated approaches within a national context, the contribution of this research lies in analyzing social media use as a mediator between self-esteem and psychological well-being.

The aim of the research is to analyze the relationships between social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, as well as the role of social media use as a mediating variable in the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being. At the same time, the study aims to identify differences in social media use based on the purpose of use and to highlight the implications of these relationships for the field of human resource management. The research is quantitative in nature, based on data collected via a questionnaire. Data analysis was performed using the *JASP v.0.97.0* program (JASP Team, 2026), employing *Spearman's* correlation analysis, the *Kruskal-Wallis* test, and mediation analysis to investigate the relationships among the variables under study. The paper is organized into six main sections, beginning with an introduction that presents the topic and purpose of the study. The second chapter reviews existing theories and establishes research questions and hypotheses, followed by a presentation of the methodology and the instruments used. The results obtained from the statistical analyses are presented in chapter four, and their interpretation in comparison with other studies takes place in the discussion. Finally, the paper offers a summary of the conclusions, highlighting the practical importance of the results, the limitations of the research, and recommendations for future studies.

2. Literature review

In the literature, social networks are defined as online platforms that allow users to interact, share information, and form social connections (Schivinski et al., 2020; Ostic et al., 2021). Their use is not uniform, with users exhibiting diverse behaviors, ranging from self-presentation and content consumption to relationship maintenance (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012). The main motivations include the needs for belonging and positive self-affirmation, as well as entertainment or information (Nadkarni and Hofmann, 2012; Whiting and Williams, 2013; Jinghang, 2022). Although these platforms primarily serve to strengthen existing relationships, the intensity of use varies significantly depending on the predominant purpose (Kuss and Griffiths, 2011). Similarly, research conducted in Romania suggests that different modes of use can be associated with both social benefits and negative experiences, highlighting the importance of the purpose of use (Ștefăniță et al., 2018). Given these aspects, it can be assumed that the level of social media use differs depending on the predominant purpose of use, which leads to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H1: *There are significant differences in the level of social media use depending on the purpose of use (entertainment, social interaction, instrumental purpose).*

A central phenomenon in understanding the psychological effects of social media use is social comparison, defined as the tendency of individuals to evaluate themselves in relation to others (Festinger, 1954). The literature shows that social media offer numerous opportunities for comparison, as users are frequently exposed to information about other people's lives and activities, often presented in a selective and idealized manner, which may lead them to compare their own experiences and achievements with those of others, generating negative emotions and less favorable self-evaluations (Vogel et al., 2014; Alfasi, 2019). At the same time, social media use has a dual impact: it facilitates communication and social connections, but, when used intensively, it is associated with a decline in psychological well-being, especially when linked to comparison processes (Verduyn et al., 2017; Ostic et al., 2021). Furthermore, research indicates that passive use stimulates social comparison and envy, negatively affecting well-being (Verduyn et al., 2015; Derbaix et al., 2025). Furthermore, frequent exposure to upward social comparisons is associated with lower levels of self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014). Thus, social comparison emerges as a relevant factor in the relationship between social media use, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Given these considerations, it is warranted to investigate the

relationships between social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, which leads to the formulation of the following research question:

Research Question: *How are social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being related?*

Self-esteem reflects one's assessment of one's own worth and has a direct effect on well-being. As early as Rosenberg's (1965) classic studies, it was demonstrated that high self-esteem is associated with increased life satisfaction and reduced vulnerability to despair. Recently, the meta-analysis conducted by Sowislo and Orth (2013) reconfirmed this role as a "protective shield," showing that self-confident individuals are more resilient and have a much lower risk of developing depression or anxiety. Thus, self-esteem remains a primary predictor of well-being. The way we perceive ourselves also dictates how we interact with technology. Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths (2017) showed that there is an inverse relationship between self-esteem and time spent on social media. Their research suggests that people with lower self-esteem use these platforms more intensively, often seeking validation or a way to improve their image in the eyes of others. In contrast, those with solid self-esteem are less dependent on the online environment, leading to reduced use of these networks. This trend is also confirmed by another relevant research, such as that conducted by Mehdizadeh (2010) and, more recently, Berhan and Cansu (2024). Although excessive use can be harmful, social networks also offer valuable opportunities for connection. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) introduced the concept of "social capital" in the online environment, demonstrating that using these platforms helps maintain relationships with friends and create a sense of belonging. These positive interactions and the social support received online contribute, to a certain extent, to increased well-being and overall satisfaction. There is thus a dual mechanism: high self-esteem directly improves well-being but reduces time spent online (Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths, 2017). Through this reduction in usage, however, we also lose the small benefits of social interaction and social capital that these platforms offer (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). Thus, social media use acts as a mediator that "regulates" the link between our internal resources (self-esteem) and the final outcome (psychological well-being). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: *Social media use plays a mediating role in the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being.*

To illustrate the theoretical relationships between the analyzed variables and to highlight the formulated hypotheses, the conceptual model presented in Figure 1 was constructed.

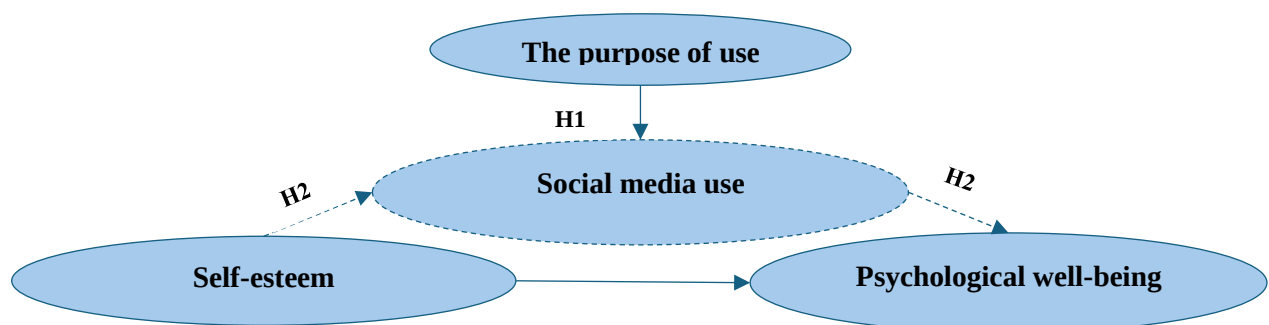


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of the relationships between the studied variables

Source: Author's design using Microsoft Word v. 2602

In the field of human resource management, the use of social media in the workplace is viewed as both an opportunity and a risk. Some studies show that the use of social media can facilitate communication, information sharing, creativity, and employee engagement (Zhao et al., 2021; Zhang, Wang and Chen, 2023). In contrast, other research highlights that excessive use of these platforms during work hours can reduce employee productivity, concentration, and well-

being (Wushe and Shenje, 2019; Alzaabi and Alsehhhi, 2023). Thus, the literature suggests that the effects of social media in organizations depend on how and for what purpose they are used.

3. Methodology

The main objective of the research is to analyze the relationships between social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, as well as the mediating role of social media use in the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being. At the same time, the study aims to investigate differences in social media use based on the purpose of use and to highlight the implications of these phenomena for human resource management. The research is quantitative in nature and was conducted based on an analysis of national and international literature, which formed the basis for formulating the objectives, hypotheses, and research question. Data was collected via an online questionnaire and statistically analyzed to test the hypotheses and identify relationships between variables. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire, designed in accordance with the study's objectives and hypotheses and administered online via *Google Forms*. The questionnaire was distributed between March 12 and 21, 2026, via *WhatsApp*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *email*. The target population consisted of social media users in Romania, and the inclusion criteria were consent to participate and the use of social media. A total of 183 responses were obtained, one of which was excluded because the respondent did not consent to participate and did not use social media; the final sample consisted of 182 respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions, organized into three sections. The first section served as a filter, verifying consent to participate and social media usage. The second section included demographic questions regarding gender, age, education level, occupation, the purpose of social media use, and the most frequently used platforms. The third section comprised four psychological scales translated and adapted into Romanian. Higher scores indicate higher levels of the variables analyzed, and negatively worded items from the *INCOM* and *Rosenberg* scales were recoded. Although the *Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale* was originally developed to assess problematic social media use, it was used in this study to capture the level of engagement in social media use and the frequency of behaviors associated with such use. According to the scale's authors, the instrument assesses dimensions such as preoccupation with use, tolerance, difficulty in reducing use, or impact on daily activities (Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths, 2017). The psychological scales used are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Psychological scales used in the study

Variable	Instrument (Author)	Number of Items	Response scale (Likert)
Social media use	Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (Andreassen et al., 2012)	6	5 - point scale (1 = very little, 5 = very much)
Social comparison	Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM) (Gibbons and Buunk, 1999)	11	5 - point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)
Self-esteem	<i>Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale</i> (Rosenberg, 1965)	10	5 - point scale (0 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree)
Psychological well-being	<i>WHO-5 Well-Being Index</i> (Bech, 2004) ,	5	6 - point scale (0 = never, 5 = always)

Source: Author, based on a review of specialized literature

After collection, the data were processed in *Microsoft Excel v.2602* and exported to the *JASP v.0.97.0* program (JASP Team, 2026) for statistical analysis. In the first stage, the reliability of the instruments was assessed using *Cronbach's Alpha*, followed by a descriptive analysis of the data to characterize the sample and determine the appropriate statistical tests. Due to the identified deviations from normality and the ordinal nature of the responses obtained via Likert scales,

nonparametric tests were used, as they are considered appropriate in situations where the assumptions of parametric tests are not met (Field, 2018). Relationships between variables were analyzed using *Spearman's* correlation, differences between groups using the *Kruskal-Wallis* test, and the role of social media use in the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being using mediation analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Sample characteristics

The research sample consisted of 182 respondents, the majority of whom were female (63.2%), compared to 36.8% male. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65 years ($M = 25.95$; $SD = 8.64$), with a median of 23 years, indicating a predominantly young sample. In terms of educational attainment, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (45.1%) or a high school diploma (36.3%), with lower percentages for post-secondary education (6.6%), master's degrees (7.7%), and doctorates (4.4%). Nearly half of the respondents are employed (48.9%), and 39% are students, with the remainder being self-employed (5.5%), unemployed (2.2%), or in other situations (4.4%). The most widely used platforms are Instagram (85.2%) and TikTok (74.7%), followed by Facebook (47.8%), indicating a preference for visual and interactive platforms. Other platforms mentioned were *Snapchat* (19.8%), *LinkedIn* (12.6%), *X/Twitter* (11.5%), and *Reddit* (1.6%). Regarding the purpose of use, most respondents use social media for entertainment (51.6%) and social interaction with friends and family (32.4%), while staying informed (9.9%), personal or professional promotion (3.8%), and educational activities (2.2%) are mentioned less frequently. Overall, the sample is characterized by predominantly young respondents with a relatively high level of education and recreational use of social media.

4.2. Analysis of instrument reliability

In this section, the reliability of the instruments used in the research was assessed by calculating *Cronbach's Alpha*, along with 95% confidence intervals. The results obtained for each scale are presented in Table 2, which includes the α values, the number of items, and the confidence interval limits.

Table 2

Reliability coefficients of the scales used

Variable/Scale	Number of items	Cronbach's α	Confidence Interval (95%)	
			Lower	Upper
Use of social media	6	0.841	0.798	0.884
Social comparison	10	0.839	0.804	0.874
Self-esteem	9	0.802	0.757	0.846
Psychological well-being	5	0.922	0.899	0.945

Source: Author, based on results obtained using JASP v.0.97.0 (JASP Team, 2026)

According to Table 2, all scales used demonstrate good to very good levels of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.802 to 0.922, indicating that the items of each instrument consistently measure the same psychological dimension. To increase reliability, item 11 (of the social comparison scale) and item 7 (of the self-esteem scale) were removed, which led to an improvement in the α coefficient values. According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), values close to or above 0.80 indicate an adequate level of internal consistency in basic research (Isaksson, Beer and Bianchi, 2026).

4.3. Descriptive analysis of the variables

To provide an overview of the variables investigated, a descriptive analysis of the data was conducted, the results of which are presented in Table 3. According to Table 3, all mean values are below 3, indicating moderate levels of the analyzed variables. The highest mean values are recorded for social comparison ($M = 2.834$) and psychological well-being ($M = 2.793$), while

social media use ($M = 2.212$) and self-esteem ($M = 2.045$) show lower values. Regarding the normality of the distribution, only psychological well-being has a distribution close to normal, as the *Shapiro-Wilk* test value is above the 0.05 threshold ($p = 0.057$). In contrast, social media use ($p < 0.001$), social comparison ($p = 0.007$), and self-esteem ($p < 0.001$) did not pass the *Shapiro-Wilk* test, as the values are below the 0.05 threshold. Given the relatively small sample size ($N = 182$) and deviations from normality, nonparametric tests – specifically *Spearman's* correlation coefficient and the *Kruskal-Wallis* test – were used to analyze correlations and differences between groups, due to their methodological consistency and robustness.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics

Indicators	Social media use	Social comparison	Self-esteem	Psychological well-being
Number of respondents	182	182	182	182
Average	2.212	2,834	2,045	2,793
Standard Deviation	0.886	0.787	0.559	1.111
Skewness	0.782	0.436	-0.208	-0.093
Standard error of skewness	0.180	0.180	0.180	0.180
Kurtosis	0.259	-0.098	-0.588	-0.207
Standard error of kurtosis	0.358	0.358	0.358	0.358
Shapiro-Wilk	0.942	0.979	0.967	0.985
Statistical significance (p) Shapiro-Wilk	< 0.001	0.007	< 0.001	0.057
Minimum	1.000	1.300	0.222	0.000
Max	5,000	5,000	3,000	5,000

Source: Author, based on results obtained using JASP v.0.97.0 (JASP Team, 2026)

4.4. Analysis of relationships between variables

To examine the relationships between the studied variables, a nonparametric *Spearman* correlation analysis was performed, with the results presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Correlation between variables – Spearman correlation coefficients

Variables		Social media use	Social comparison	Self-esteem	Psychological well-being
Social media use	Coefficient ρ (p)	-	-	-	-
Social comparison	Coefficient ρ (p)	0.479 (< 0.001)	-	-	-
Self-esteem	Coefficient ρ (p)	-0.413 (< 0.001)	-0.370 (< 0.001)	-	-
Psychological well-being	Coefficient ρ (p)	-0.169 (0.023)	-0.094 (0.204)	0.567 (< 0.001)	-

Source: Author, based on results obtained using JASP v.0.97.0 (JASP Team, 2026)

According to Table 4, *Spearman's* correlation analysis highlights several significant relationships among the variables investigated. Social media use is positively and moderately correlated with social comparison ($\rho = 0.479$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals who use social media more frequently tend to compare themselves more with others. Furthermore, social media use is negatively correlated with self-esteem ($\rho = -0.413$, $p < 0.001$) and psychological well-being ($\rho = -0.169$, $p = 0.023$), indicating that higher levels of use are associated with lower self-esteem and a slight decrease in well-being. Social comparison is negatively correlated with self-esteem ($\rho = -0.370$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals who tend to compare themselves more frequently with others generally have lower self-esteem. The strongest relationship identified is that between self-esteem and psychological well-being ($\rho = 0.567$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to report higher levels of psychological well-being as

well. In contrast, the relationship between social comparison and psychological well-being is not statistically significant ($\rho = -0.094$, $p = 0.204$); therefore, in this sample, the tendency to compare oneself does not directly influence the level of psychological well-being. Overall, the results suggest that self-esteem plays a central role in the relationship among the analyzed variables, being associated with both social media use and psychological well-being. In the context of the analyzed sample, characterized predominantly by young people and individuals active on social media, these results indicate that the impact of social media use on well-being is not direct, but is rather influenced by psychological factors such as self-esteem.

4.5. Analysis of differences between groups

To test **hypothesis H1**, regarding the existence of significant differences in the level of social media use depending on the purpose of use, the nonparametric *Kruskal-Wallis* test was applied. Categories with low response frequency (information/news, educational activities, personal or professional promotion) were combined into a single category, termed instrumental use, with the results presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Kruskal-Wallis test on social media use by purpose

Descriptive Statistics			
Purpose of social media use	Number of participants	Median	IQR
Entertainment	94	2.250	1.167
Social interaction	59	1.833	1.167
Instrumental	29	1.667	0.667
Kruskal-Wallis test			
Variable	H-statistic	df	Statistical significance (p)
Purpose of using social media	13.000	2	0.001
Post-hoc comparisons (Dunn's test, with Bonferroni correction)			
Comparison	Bonferroni-adjusted p		
Entertainment - Social interaction	0.011		
Entertainment - Instrumental	0.006		
Social interaction - Instrumental	1.000		

Source: Author, based on results obtained using JASP v.0.97.0 (JASP Team, 2026)

According to Table 5, the results of the *Kruskal-Wallis* test indicate the existence of statistically significant differences in social media use depending on the purpose of use ($H = 13.000$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.001$). Descriptive statistics based on the median and interquartile range (IQR) show that participants who use social media for entertainment had the highest median values for social media use ($Md = 2.250$; $IQR = 1.167$), followed by those who use social media for social interaction ($Md = 1.833$; $IQR = 1.167$). The lowest values were observed for instrumental use ($Md = 1.667$; $IQR = 0.667$). *Post-hoc* analysis using the *Dunn test* with *Bonferroni correction* revealed significant differences between entertainment-oriented and social interaction-oriented use ($p = 0.011$), as well as between entertainment-oriented and instrumental use ($p = 0.006$). In contrast, no significant differences were identified between social interaction and instrumental use ($p = 1.000$). The results suggest that participants who use social media for entertainment tend to exhibit higher levels of social media use compared to the other categories analyzed. Therefore, hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

For a more detailed understanding of the differences between usage categories, a descriptive analysis of the means for each distinct purpose category, without grouping them, was conducted and is presented in Figure 2. According to Figure 2, the highest average social media usage is recorded for entertainment ($M = 2.438$), followed by self-promotion ($M = 2.214$) and social interaction ($M = 2.020$). In contrast, usage for educational activities ($M = 1.833$) and information/news ($M = 1.741$) shows lower values.

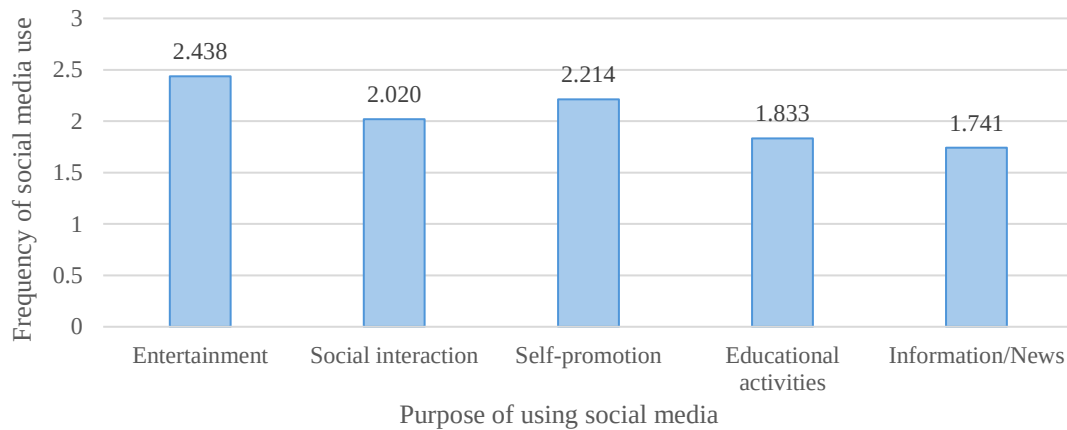


Fig. 2. Average social media usage by purpose

Source: Prepared by the author, based on results obtained using JASP v.0.97.0 (JASP Team, 2026) , in Microsoft Excel v.2602

The analysis highlights that the level of social media usage also varies within the instrumental usage category. Although this category was treated as a single unit in the statistical analysis, self-promotion ($M = 2.214$) registers values close to those of social interaction ($M = 2.020$), while educational activities ($M = 1.833$) and information/news ($M = 1.741$) show lower levels. Thus, grouping these subcategories into a single category may diminish the differences between them and obscure relevant variations. Therefore, it is recommended that these types of usage be analyzed separately in future research.

4.6. Mediation analysis

To investigate the relationships among the concepts analyzed, hypothesis H2 was formulated, positing that social media use mediates the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being. The overall results of the mediation analysis are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Mediation Analysis: Self-Esteem - Social Media Use - Psychological Well-being

		Coeff. β	Standard Error	Z- score	Statistical significance (p)	Confidence interval
Direct effect	Self-esteem - Psychological well-being	1.233	0.137	8.973	< 0.001	0.948; 1.502
Indirect effect	Self-esteem - Social media use - Psychological well-being	-0.104	0.050	-2.089	0.037	-0.246; -0.021
Total Effect	Self-esteem - Psychological well-being	1.129	0.121	9.309	< 0.001	0.875; 1.364

Source: Author, based on results obtained using JASP v.0.97.0 (JASP Team, 2026)

According to Table 6, the direct effect of self-esteem on psychological well-being is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 1.233$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of self-esteem are associated with higher levels of psychological well-being. At the same time, the indirect effect of self-esteem on psychological well-being mediated by social media use, is negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.104$, $p = 0.037$), highlighting the existence of a mediating effect. The total effect of self-esteem on psychological well-being also remains positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 1.129$, $p < 0.001$). For a more detailed understanding of the mediating mechanism, the path coefficients of the model are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Path coefficients of the mediation model between self-esteem, social media use, and psychological well-being

	Coefficient (Estimate)	Standard Error	Z-score	Statistical significance (p)	Confidence Interval
Social media use - Psychological well-being	0.185	0.086	2.146	0.032	0.013; 0.357
Self-esteem - Psychological well-being	1.233	0.137	8.973	< 0.001	0.948; 1.502
Self-esteem - Social media use	-0.563	0.131	-4.311	< 0.001	-0.814; -0.302

Source: Author, based on results obtained using JASP v.0.97.0 (JASP Team, 2026)

According to Table 7, self-esteem negatively influences social media use ($\beta = -0.563$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that individuals with higher self-esteem tend to use social media less. At the same time, social media use has a positive and significant effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.185$, $p = 0.032$), indicating that higher usage is associated with a slightly higher level of psychological well-being. Thus, social media use mediates the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being, slightly diminishing the positive effect of self-esteem on well-being. Since both the direct and indirect effects are statistically significant, the results support the existence of competitive partial mediation. The mediation model was interpreted in accordance with the typology proposed by Zhao, Lynch and Chen (2010), which distinguishes types of mediation based on the statistical significance and direction of direct and indirect effects, such as complementary mediation and competitive mediation. Therefore, hypothesis H2 is confirmed.

5. Discussion

The results highlight the existence of significant relationships between social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Overall, respondents exhibit moderate levels of social media use and social comparison, a relatively high level of self-esteem, and a moderate level of psychological well-being. Self-esteem emerges as the most variable strongly associated with psychological well-being. These findings must also be interpreted considering the sample profile, which consists predominantly of young people, mostly female, with medium to high levels of education, and frequent users of platforms such as *Instagram* and *TikTok*. At the same time, nearly half of the respondents are employed, and a significant proportion are students, suggesting a sample that is active both professionally and educationally. Since most participants use social media primarily for entertainment, it is possible that these data reflect the characteristics of a generation deeply connected to the digital environment, for whom social media represents not only a source of interaction and social validation but also of social comparison.

Regarding the research question, the results show that social media use is positively associated with social comparison and negatively associated with self-esteem and psychological well-being. Thus, individuals who use social media more frequently tend to compare themselves more with others, have lower self-esteem, and report slightly lower levels of psychological well-being – a finding supported by studies conducted by Festinger (1954), Vogel et al. (2014), Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths (2017), Verduyn et al. (2017), Alfasi (2019), and Ostic et al. (2021). At the same time, self-esteem is positively associated with psychological well-being, suggesting that individuals with a more positive self-image tend to feel better psychologically. These conclusions are supported by studies conducted by Rosenberg (1965) and Sowislo and Orth (2013). Regarding Hypothesis H1, the analyses revealed significant differences in social media use depending on the purpose of use. Participants who use these platforms for entertainment show the highest levels of usage compared to those who use them for social interaction or instrumental

purposes. This result confirms Hypothesis H1 and suggests that the purpose of use influences the intensity with which social media is used. These results are consistent with the research conducted by Kuss and Griffiths (2011), Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012), Whiting and Williams (2013), and Ștefăniță et al. (2018). Regarding Hypothesis H2, the results confirm that social media use mediates the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being, consistent with the findings of Pertiwi, Suminar and Ardi (2022). The data point to an interesting mechanism: individuals with high self-esteem tend to use these platforms less, but the mediation model suggests that this reduced usage partially diminishes the benefits that self-esteem has on well-being. More specifically, although the correlational analysis indicates a general negative association between social media use and well-being, the mediation model shows that, under certain conditions, the digital environment can function as a source of social capital, in line with the theory of Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007). Nevertheless, self-esteem remains the primary predictor of psychological well-being, having the strongest direct effect. The fact that both the direct and indirect effects are statistically significant supports the existence of partial mediation, thus confirming Hypothesis H2. These conclusions are fully consistent with the research by Mehdizadeh (2010) and Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths (2017) on the compensatory use of social networks, as well as with the recent studies by Berhan and Cansu (2024), which highlight the complexity of the relationship between personality traits and digital behavior.

From a human resources management perspective, the results suggest that social media should not be viewed solely as a negative factor or a source of distraction. Although excessive use is associated with lower levels of self-esteem and psychological well-being, the mediation model shows that moderate use of social media can also have positive effects by facilitating social interactions and a sense of belonging. Therefore, organizations should not adopt restrictive policies regarding social media use in the workplace but rather promote a balance between professional work and social media use, as self-esteem remains the dominant predictor of well-being, and employees with a strong self-image tend toward moderate digital consumption. Given that a large proportion of respondents are employees or students about to enter the labor market, these findings are relevant for employers in their interactions with younger generations, who are deeply connected to the digital environment. Organizations can support employee well-being through flexible policies, regular breaks, social activities, and educational programs on the healthy use of social media. Managers should encourage positive *feedback*, recognition of achievements, and the development of an organizational climate based on support and a sense of belonging. These findings are consistent with studies showing that social media can have both beneficial effects on communication and collaboration and negative effects on productivity when used excessively (Wushe and Shenje, 2019; Zhao et al., 2021; Alzaabi and Alshehhi, 2023; Zhang, Wang and Chen, 2023).

6. Conclusions

The aim of the study was to analyze the relationships between social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being, as well as the mediating role of social media use in the relationship between self-esteem and psychological well-being. Additionally, the study aimed to identify differences in social media use based on the purpose of use. The research was conducted on a sample of 182 respondents using an online questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, *Spearman's* correlations, the *Kruskal-Wallis* test, and mediation analysis were used for data analysis.

The study has several limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. The data collection period was relatively short, a single data collection tool was used, and the sample size is small. Additionally, the participants are predominantly young, mostly female, and have medium to high levels of education, which limits the generalizability of the conclusions. Furthermore, the data were obtained through self-reporting, which may influence the accuracy of the responses. The cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for the establishment of clear

causal relationships between variables. Social media use was analyzed at a general level, without distinguishing between platforms or between active and passive use, and some usage categories had few respondents and were grouped together. Finally, the study did not include other variables relevant to psychological well-being, such as anxiety, depression, stress, social support, or job satisfaction. Building on this research and considering the limitations presented, future studies can explore the relationships between social media use, social comparison, self-esteem, and psychological well-being in greater depth. Such studies could employ larger and more diverse samples, as well as longitudinal designs, to capture how these relationships evolve over time. It would also be useful to analyze the differences between active and passive social media use, the platforms used, and their effects on psychological well-being. At the same time, future research could include additional variables, such as anxiety, stress, social support, or perceived loneliness, and could analyze differences across age groups, among users of different platforms, and the impact of social media use on job satisfaction and workplace performance. Future research could also examine generational differences in social media use and their effects on self-esteem, social comparison, and psychological well-being. For example, Generation Z, which has grown up in a highly digitalized environment, may develop different patterns of social media use and perceive online interactions differently compared to previous generations. Investigating such differences could contribute to a deeper understanding of how generational characteristics influence the relationships among the variables analyzed in the present study.

In conclusion, the research highlights that the effects of social media on psychological well-being are complex and depend on both usage patterns and users' individual characteristics, with self-esteem serving as the central factor influencing both social media use and levels of psychological well-being. From a human resource management perspective, these results underscore the importance of promoting a balance in social media use and an organizational climate based on support, positive *feedback*, and concern for employees' well-being.

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