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Research Article

Social Comparison on Facebook, Rumination, and Coping Styles Among Young Adults with Symptoms of Depression during Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships among social comparison on Facebook, rumination, coping styles, and depressive symptoms among university students, with the aim of informing a targeted campus-based intervention. Using a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 336 respondents and analyzed through descriptive statistics, group difference testing, and Pearson correlation. Results revealed that a substantial proportion of students experienced moderate to severe depressive symptoms. Social comparison was positively and significantly associated with rumination, while rumination demonstrated significant relationships with problem-focused, emotion-focused, and avoidant coping styles. Level of depression emerged as a significant factor influencing social comparison, rumination, and coping patterns, suggesting that psychological condition plays a stronger role than demographic characteristics in shaping cognitive and behavioral responses. The findings indicate that repetitive negative thinking serves as a central mechanism linking social comparison and emotional distress. Grounded in these results, an innovative intervention framework titled CAMPUS CAREquest was developed to address the cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors identified in the study. The program integrates mindfulness-based cognitive awareness, digital comparison moderation, resilience-focused coping enhancement, and stigma-reduction strategies to promote a supportive campus climate. By targeting rumination and maladaptive comparison while strengthening adaptive coping and peer support systems, the intervention seeks to reduce depressive symptoms and foster long-term psychological resilience. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on social media use and student mental health and offers a data-driven, contextually grounded model for institutional mental health promotion in higher education settings.

Keywords: *Coping styles, Depressive symptoms, Rumination, Social comparison, University students' mental health*

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Introduction

The rapid growth of social media has changed how young adults communicate, build relationships, and evaluate themselves. During the COVID-19 pandemic, online platforms such as Facebook became one of the primary spaces for interaction, especially among university students who were isolated from their usual academic and social environments. While social media provided opportunities for connection during periods of lockdown and restricted mobility, it also exposed many young people to unhealthy comparison behaviors, excessive self-monitoring, and repetitive negative thinking. Recent studies suggest that these online experiences may contribute to emotional distress and depressive symptoms, particularly among young adults who are still undergoing identity formation and emotional adjustment (Hansen et al., 2025; Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025).

In the Philippine context, the mental health challenges experienced by university students during and after the pandemic present a growing concern. Unlike many Western settings where mental health services and psychological support systems are more accessible, students in provincial state universities often face limitations related to financial resources, internet stability, geographic isolation, and access to professional mental health care. These realities became more visible during the pandemic when students relied heavily on digital platforms not only for communication but also for academic participation and social belonging. In island provinces such as Romblon, where educational and psychosocial resources may be limited compared to urban institutions, students became increasingly dependent on online interactions while simultaneously experiencing academic uncertainty, social isolation, and emotional stress. Such conditions may intensify vulnerability to social comparison, rumination, and maladaptive coping behaviors.

Although previous international studies have explored the relationship between social media use and depression, much of the existing literature focuses on Western populations and highly urbanized settings. Many studies also examine social comparison, rumination, or coping as separate variables rather than understanding how these psychological processes

interact within the lived experiences of university students. As a result, there remains limited localized evidence explaining how Facebook social comparison, repetitive negative thinking, coping styles, and depressive symptoms are interconnected among Filipino university students, particularly those enrolled in state universities in geographically isolated areas. This gap is important because cultural expectations, family pressures, collectivist social norms, and unequal access to mental health support may shape how Filipino students experience and respond to psychological distress differently from students in Western contexts.

Research further suggests that social comparison on social media may negatively affect self-esteem, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being, especially when individuals repeatedly compare themselves with carefully curated online representations of others (Ahmad et al., 2024; Aubry et al., 2024). At the same time, rumination has consistently been identified as a cognitive vulnerability factor associated with depressive symptoms because it prolongs negative thoughts and emotional distress (Murray et al., 2024). Coping styles also play an important role in determining how students manage stress, whether through adaptive approaches such as problem-solving or through avoidant and emotion-focused responses that may worsen emotional difficulties (Duru et al., 2023). Despite these findings, there remains insufficient integrative research examining how these variables relate to one another within a university setting affected by pandemic-related disruptions and prolonged online engagement.

Guided by these concerns, the present study examined the relationships among social comparison on Facebook, rumination, coping styles, and depressive symptoms among university students. Specifically, the study sought to describe the respondents' demographic profile and level of depressive symptoms, determine the extent of rumination and coping styles, examine differences in the variables when grouped according to profile characteristics, and identify the relationships among social comparison, rumination, coping styles, and depressive symptoms. The study also aimed to develop an evidence-based intervention plan

that may help strengthen coping behaviors, reduce emotional vulnerability, and promote a more supportive and mentally healthy university environment.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study. The framework illustrates the interrelated relationships among social comparison on Facebook, rumination, coping styles, and depressive symptoms within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic environment. Rather than positioning coping styles as

mediating or moderating mechanisms, the framework treats these variables as interconnected psychological factors that collectively influence emotional well-being among university students. The model reflects the complex relationship between online engagement, cognitive processing, coping behavior, and depressive symptoms, providing the basis for correlational analysis and the development of a contextually grounded intervention program for higher education institutions.

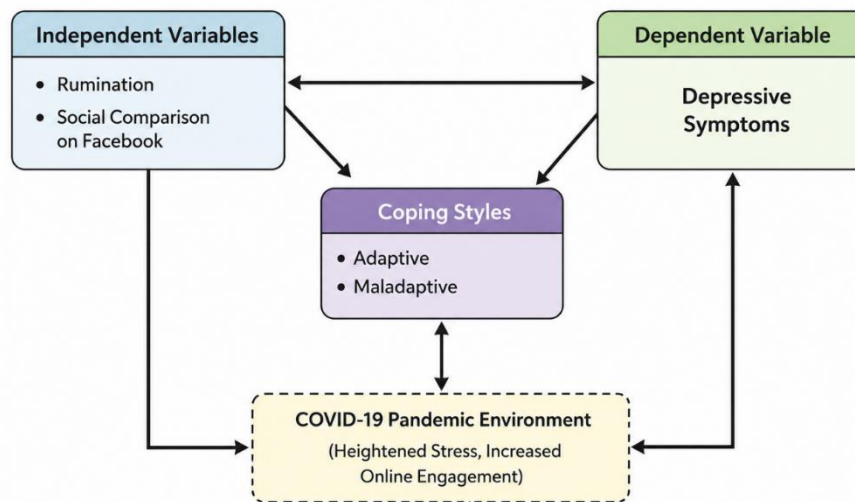


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Literature

Social Comparison on Social Media and Depressive Symptoms

A growing body of literature highlights social comparison on social media as a significant predictor of depressive symptoms among young people. Ahmad et al. (2024) describe social media platforms as environments that intensify comparison processes, where users are frequently exposed to carefully curated and idealized representations of others' lives. Similarly, Aubry et al. (2024) found that upward social comparison during Instagram use creates a "vicious circle," where individuals with depressive symptoms are more likely to engage in comparison, which in turn further heightens their distress. Le Blanc-Brillon et al. (2025) and Taylor and Armes (2024) also report that frequent comparison on social networking sites is associated with lower self-esteem and poorer mental health outcomes. These findings suggest that social comparison is not merely a

passive cognitive process but a mechanism that may actively shape emotional well-being.

Broader syntheses reinforce these conclusions. Agyapong-Opoku et al. (2025) emphasize that social media's impact on youth mental health is complex but consistently linked to increased vulnerability to anxiety and depression when comparison becomes frequent and internalized. Tian et al. (2025) further demonstrate that upward social comparison predicts appearance anxiety, particularly when individuals are highly sensitive to external validation. From a motivational perspective, West et al. (2024) explain that when social media engagement undermines basic psychological needs such as competence and relatedness, it may contribute to emotional distress. Together, these studies establish social comparison as a critical online stressor and provide a strong foundation for examining how Facebook-based comparison may relate to depressive symptoms among young adults.

Rumination as a Cognitive Vulnerability Factor

Rumination has been consistently identified as a central cognitive process in the development and maintenance of depressive symptoms. Kresinszky et al. (2026) explain that rumination involves repetitive and passive focus on distress and its possible causes, which prolongs negative mood states over time. Murray et al. (2024) further demonstrate that rumination is linked to neural mechanisms associated with negative self-referential processing in adolescents with depression. In digital contexts, Chen et al. (2025) found that social media rumination predicts internalizing symptoms, with self-esteem playing a mediating role. These findings suggest that rumination may transform everyday online experiences into prolonged psychological distress by reinforcing negative self-evaluations.

Additional research shows that rumination not only contributes to depressive symptoms but also interacts with social communication patterns. Barreira et al. (2025) found that individuals high in trait rumination are more likely to engage in co-rumination through instant messaging, which may intensify depressive symptomatology. Importantly, Li and Tang (2024) highlight that interventions targeting rumination, such as rumination-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, significantly reduce depressive symptoms, underscoring its central role in emotional regulation. These studies collectively indicate that rumination is a powerful cognitive vulnerability factor. Within the present study, rumination may magnify the emotional impact of social comparison on Facebook, increasing the likelihood of depressive symptoms among young adults.

Coping Styles and Resilience as Protective or Risk Factors

Coping strategies play a crucial role in determining whether stress leads to psychological adjustment or emotional distress. Waterhouse and Samra (2025) found that university students employ a range of coping mechanisms, but adaptive strategies such as problem-solving and help-seeking are associated with better mental health outcomes, whereas avoidance is linked to higher stress and depressive

symptoms. Similarly, Varela et al. (2022) demonstrated that avoidant coping intensified depressive symptoms among adolescents experiencing cyberbullying, while active coping promoted healthier adjustment. Duru et al. (2023) also reported that maladaptive coping during the COVID-19 pandemic predicted higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. These findings suggest that coping style significantly shapes psychological responses to both offline and online stressors.

Beyond individual coping behaviors, resilience and environmental resources further influence mental health outcomes. Rizzi et al. (2023) emphasize that resilience is strengthened by social support and stable environmental conditions, which function as protective factors against depression. Roy et al. (2025), guided by the socio-ecological model, highlight that coping and support systems operate across multiple levels, including interpersonal and institutional contexts. Farhang et al. (2024) similarly show that perceived social support reduces depressive symptoms during crisis situations. Plöhl et al. (2026) add that adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategies, such as reappraisal, reduce anxiety, while maladaptive strategies heighten distress. Taken together, these studies reinforce the importance of coping and resilience in shaping emotional outcomes. In relation to the present research, coping strategies may either buffer or intensify the effects of social comparison and rumination on depressive symptoms, particularly during the heightened stress conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationships among social comparison on Facebook, rumination, coping styles, and depressive symptoms among young adults. A cross-sectional design is appropriate when variables are measured at a single point in time without manipulation, particularly in observational psychological research (Pérez-Guerrero, 2024). Descriptive-correlational designs allow researchers to determine both the levels of constructs and the strength

and direction of relationships among them, making this approach suitable for studies investigating associations between cognitive, behavioral, and emotional variables.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 336 college students enrolled in a state university in Romblon, Philippines, who voluntarily participated in the survey. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed due to accessibility and the limitations brought about by the post-pandemic academic setting. This sampling approach is commonly utilized in cross-sectional observational studies where the primary objective is to examine relationships among psychological variables rather than to establish population-wide generalizations (Pérez-Guerrero, 2024). Participants were recruited through online distribution of survey forms across different academic programs and year levels.

Instruments

Data were collected using standardized self-report questionnaires composed of Likert-type items. The survey instrument consisted of four sections corresponding to the major variables of the study. Social comparison on Facebook was measured using an adapted Social Comparison Scale focused on Facebook-related comparison behaviors. The instrument assessed the extent to which respondents compare their achievements, experiences, appearance, and personal situations with others on social media. Rumination was assessed using the Ruminative Responses Scale (RRS), which measures repetitive negative thinking and the tendency to dwell on distress, personal shortcomings, and emotional difficulties. Coping styles were measured using the Brief-COPE Inventory developed by Carver. The instrument evaluates coping responses under three dimensions: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidant coping. Depressive symptoms were measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), a widely used screening instrument that assesses the severity of depressive symptoms experienced within the previous two weeks.

All instruments utilized in the study were adapted from established psychological

measures previously validated in related literature. Composite scores were computed for each construct prior to inferential analysis and were treated as continuous variables appropriate for parametric statistical procedures.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through an online survey platform during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided voluntary informed consent prior to participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. The cross-sectional online survey approach ensured efficient data collection while maintaining methodological consistency with observational research standards (Pérez-Guerrero, 2024).

Statistical Treatment of Data

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were computed to summarize demographic characteristics and to determine the levels of depressive symptoms, social comparison, rumination, and coping styles. These measures provided an overview of central tendency and variability within the sample (Pérez-Guerrero, 2024).

To examine differences in the study variables across demographic groups, independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. These parametric tests are appropriate for comparing group means when composite scores derived from Likert-type items are treated as continuous variables in sufficiently large samples (Huh, 2025).

To assess the relationships among social comparison, rumination, coping styles, and depressive symptoms, Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was computed. Pearson correlation is suitable for determining the strength and direction of linear associations between continuous composite variables when statistical assumptions are reasonably satisfied (Huh, 2025). Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Result and Discussion

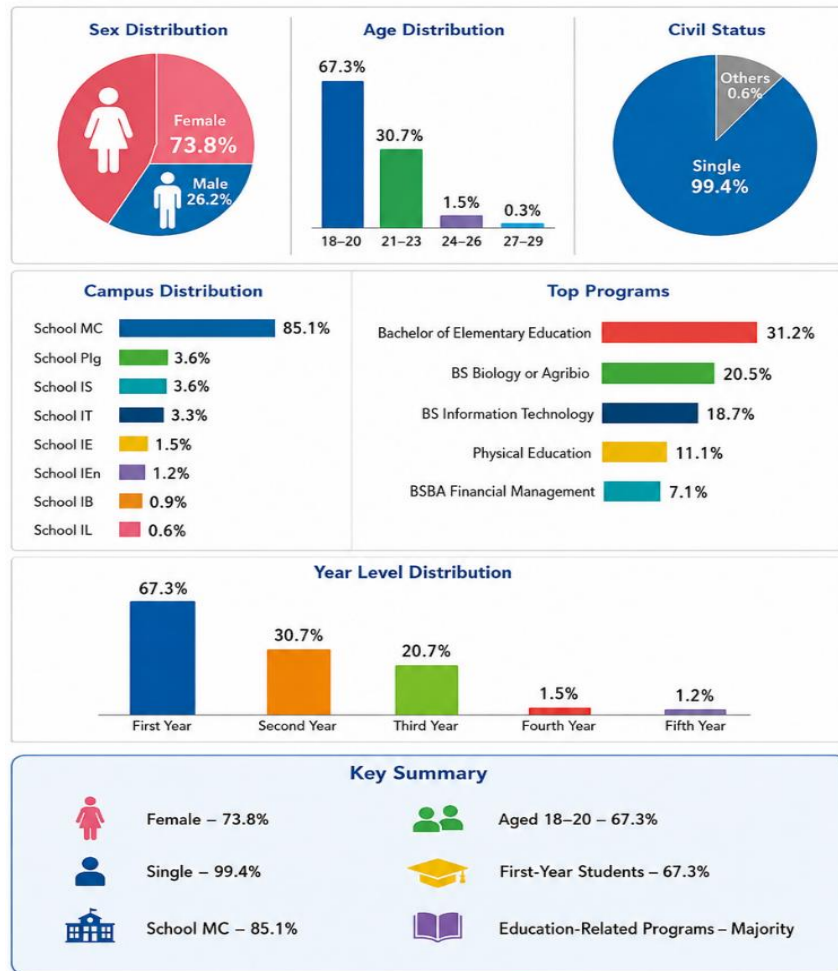


Figure 2. Profile Distribution of the Respondents

Figure 2 presents the demographic profile of the 336 respondents and provides important context for interpreting the study findings. The majority of participants were female (73.8%), aged 18–20 years old (67.3%), single (99.4%), and first-year college students (67.3%). Most respondents also came from School MC (85.1%) and were enrolled in education-related programs. These findings suggest that the sample is largely composed of emerging adults who are undergoing significant academic, social, and personal transitions.

This developmental stage is often associated with identity formation, emotional adjustment, and increased reliance on peer interaction and digital engagement. According to Keum et al. (2022), emerging adulthood is a sensitive period in which social media use may

either strengthen social connectedness or contribute to emotional distress depending on patterns of engagement. The predominance of young and digitally active students in the present study therefore provides a relevant context for examining social comparison, rumination, coping behaviors, and depressive symptoms.

The demographic composition of the respondents also supports the methodological approach used in the study. Beam (2023) noted that online survey platforms are effective in reaching college-aged populations who are highly engaged in digital communication environments. Overall, the profile distribution shown in Figure 2 establishes the developmental and contextual relevance of the study variables within the university setting.

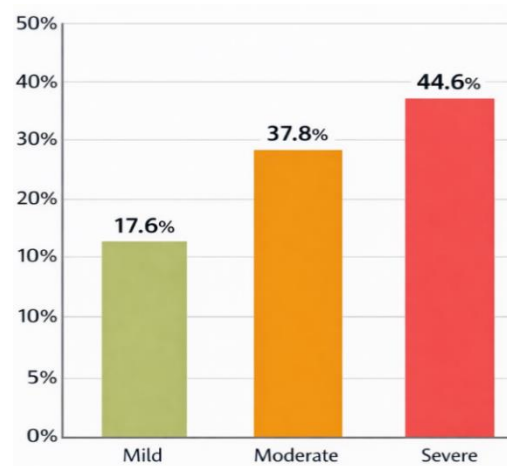


Figure 3. Respondents Level of Depressive Symptoms

The distribution of depressive symptoms presented in Figure 3 indicates that 44.6% of respondents fall within the severe category and 37.8% within the moderate category, while only 17.6% report mild symptoms. This means that more than four out of five participants experience moderate to severe depressive symptoms, suggesting a heightened level of psychological distress within the sample. These findings corroborate Khan et al. (2021), who reported a high pooled prevalence of depressive symptoms among university students, underscoring the vulnerability of tertiary-level populations. Similarly, Puyat et al. (2021) documented substantial levels of depressive symptoms among Filipino young adults, reinforcing the presence of a significant mental health burden within comparable demographic contexts.

The elevated levels observed are also supported by psychological and neurocognitive literature. Murray et al. (2024) explain that rumination and negative self-referential processing are central mechanisms that sustain depressive symptomatology among adolescents and young adults. Complementing this, Li and Tang (2024) demonstrate that interventions targeting rumination significantly reduce depressive symptoms, implying that maladaptive cognitive processes may contribute to the severity levels identified in the present study. Furthermore, Rizzi et al. (2023) emphasize the role of environmental stressors and limited protective factors in exacerbating psychological distress, suggesting that academic pressures and

contextual challenges may intensify symptom severity.

While the findings are generally consistent with existing literature highlighting the vulnerability of university students to depression, the proportion of respondents experiencing moderate to severe depressive symptoms in the present study appears considerably high even when compared with broader pandemic-era estimates. The clustering of severe depressive symptoms may reflect the combined pressures experienced by students during a critical developmental transition while simultaneously navigating prolonged pandemic-related disruptions.

Most respondents in the study were first-year college students aged 18–20 years old, a developmental stage commonly associated with identity formation, emotional adjustment, academic transition, and heightened sensitivity to peer evaluation. Within the context of a provincial state university in an island province such as Romblon, these developmental pressures may have been intensified by strict localized lockdowns, limited mobility, unstable internet connectivity, reduced face-to-face social interaction, and restricted access to mental health resources. Unlike students in highly urbanized settings who may have broader institutional and psychological support systems, students in rural or semi-urban Philippine provinces often experienced prolonged isolation and increased dependence on social media for academic communication and social connection.

These contextual realities may help explain the unusually high concentration of depressive symptoms observed in the study. The findings therefore suggest that depressive distress among students during the pandemic was not

simply an individual psychological concern but was also shaped by broader educational, social, and environmental conditions affecting young adults in geographically isolated university settings.

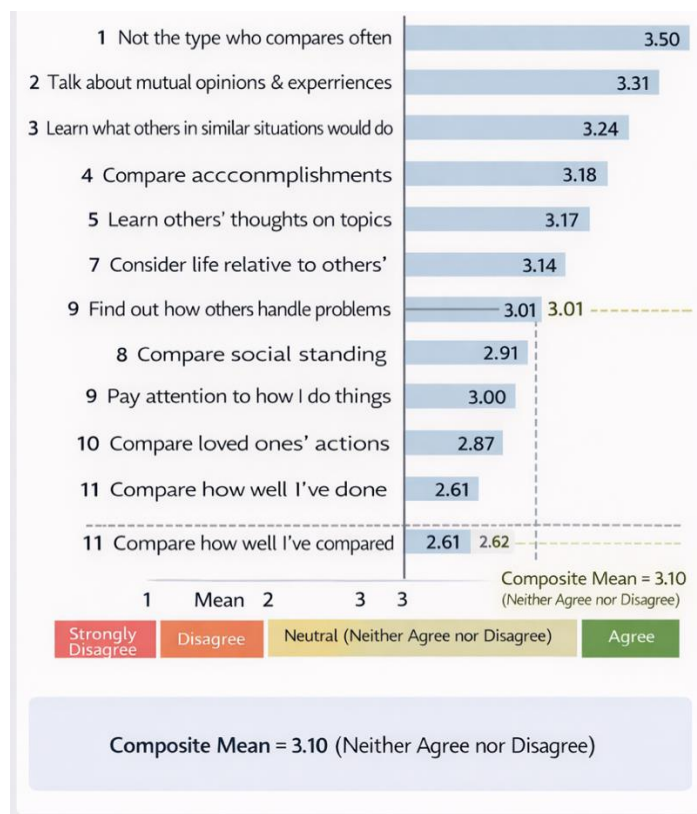


Figure 4. Extent of Social Comparison on Facebook (n = 336)

Figure 4 shows a composite mean of 3.10, interpreted as “Neither Agree nor Disagree,” indicating that respondents generally report moderate or ambivalent levels of social comparison on Facebook. The highest-rated item suggests that many participants do not strongly perceive themselves as frequent comparers, yet most indicators fall near the neutral midpoint, reflecting occasional or situational comparison behaviors.

Although the level appears moderate, research suggests that even subtle upward comparison can influence mental health. Tian et al. (2025) found that upward social comparison predicts appearance anxiety, while Taylor and

Armes (2024) linked social comparison with lower self-esteem. Similarly, Le Blanc-Brillon et al. (2025) reported associations between social media comparison and poorer mental health among young adults. From a Self-Determination Theory perspective, West et al. (2024) explain that comparison may undermine feelings of competence and relatedness, increasing psychological vulnerability.

Thus, while mentioned Figure reflects a neutral overall tendency, existing literature indicates that even moderate social comparison behaviors may still carry meaningful mental health implications.

Table 1. Respondents' Level of Agreement in Terms of Rumination (N = 336)

Indicators	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Interpretation
1. think about how alone you feel	2.5030	0.74111	12	<i>Often</i>
2. think "I won't be able to do my job if I don't snap out of this"	2.4970	0.73301	14	<i>Sometimes</i>
3. think about your feelings of fatigue and achiness	2.4256	0.76907	18	<i>Sometimes</i>
4. think about how hard it is to concentrate	2.6815	0.78593	4	<i>Often</i>
5. think "What am I doing to deserve this?"	2.7083	0.84185	3	<i>Often</i>
6. think about how passive and unmotivated you feel.	2.5000	0.75706	13	<i>Often</i>
7. analyze recent events to try to understand why you are depressed	2.5060	0.75308	11	<i>Often</i>
8. think about how you don't seem to feel anything anymore	2.4048	0.77835	19	<i>Sometimes</i>
9. think "Why can't I get going?"	2.4375	0.75446	17	<i>Sometimes</i>
10. think "Why do I always react this way?"	2.6012	0.79280	9	<i>Often</i>
11. go away by yourself and think about why you feel this way	2.5714	0.80351	10	<i>Often</i>
12. write down what you are thinking about and analyze it	2.1786	0.76351	22	<i>Sometimes</i>
13. think about a recent situation, wishing it had gone better	2.7470	0.82407	2	<i>Often</i>
14. think "I won't be able to concentrate if I keep feeling this way."	2.6458	0.76266	6	<i>Often</i>
15. think "Why do I have problems other people don't have?"	2.4613	0.86989	16	<i>Sometimes</i>
16. think "Why can't I handle things better?"	2.6518	0.84334	5	<i>Often</i>
17. think about how sad you feel.	2.6190	0.83082	8	<i>Often</i>
18. think about all your shortcomings, failings, faults, mistakes	2.7708	0.83818	1	<i>Often</i>
19. think about how you don't feel up to doing anything	2.4940	0.74511	15	<i>Sometimes</i>
20. analyze your personality to try to understand why you are depressed	2.4018	0.77027	20	<i>Sometimes</i>
21. go someplace alone to think about your feelings	2.6250	0.85823	7	<i>Often</i>
22. think about how angry you are with yourself	2.3780	0.84817	21	<i>Sometimes</i>
COMPOSITE MEAN	2.5368	0.52784		<i>Often</i>
OVERALL TOTAL	55.8095	11.61237		

Legend: 4.00-3.5 (Almost Always) 3.49-2.5 (Often), 2.49-1.5 (Sometimes) and 1.49-1.00 – (Almost Never)

Table 1 shows that the respondents generally engage in rumination at a level interpreted as "Often" (composite mean = 2.54). The highest-rated items reflect self-critical and backward-looking thoughts, such as dwelling on personal shortcomings, wishing situations had gone better, and questioning why they

experience certain difficulties. These responses suggest that many participants tend to mentally revisit negative experiences and focus on perceived faults. Although not extreme, this pattern indicates a steady presence of repetitive negative thinking, which can quietly sustain emotional distress over time. Some items

fall under “Sometimes,” particularly those related to emotional numbness or structured self-analysis, showing that rumination is present but not uniformly intense across all aspects.

This pattern is consistent with existing research showing that repetitive self-focused thinking is closely linked to depressive symptoms among young adults. Studies have explained that rumination strengthens negative self-evaluation and prolongs low mood rather

than resolving it. Other research has demonstrated that interventions targeting rumination can significantly reduce depressive symptoms, suggesting that these thought patterns are both influential and modifiable. Taken together, the findings imply that the respondents’ tendency to dwell on mistakes and perceived inadequacies may contribute to emotional vulnerability, especially within the pressures of university life.

Table 2. Respondents’ Coping Style (N = 336)

Indicators	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Problem Focused Coping	2.6057	0.64779	A medium amount
Emotion Focused Coping	2.5474	0.59356	A little bit
Avoidant Coping	2.1217	0.47261	A little bit

Table 2 presents the respondents’ coping styles, showing that problem-focused coping obtained the highest mean (M = 2.61), interpreted as a “medium amount,” followed by emotion-focused coping (M = 2.55) and avoidant coping (M = 2.12), both interpreted as “a little bit.” These results suggest that while students tend to use practical and solution-oriented strategies more than other approaches, their overall coping levels are moderate rather than strong. The relatively lower mean for avoidant coping indicates that respondents are less likely to disengage completely from stressors, yet the modest levels across all strategies imply that coping efforts may not be consistently effective or fully developed.

This pattern aligns with literature indicating that coping styles significantly influence psychological outcomes. West et al. (2024)

explain that adaptive coping, particularly strategies that support autonomy and competence, is associated with better mental health among young social media users. In contrast, reliance on emotion-focused or avoidant coping without constructive problem-solving may leave stress unresolved, potentially intensifying depressive symptoms. Ahmad et al. (2024) further highlight that social comparison and online engagement can exacerbate distress when individuals lack effective coping mechanisms. Taken together, the findings in Table 2 suggest that while respondents attempt to manage stress through problem-focused strategies, the moderate intensity of these coping behaviors may not be sufficient to buffer against emotional vulnerability, particularly in environments marked by academic

Table 3 Social Comparison on Facebook, Rumination and Coping Styles when grouped according to profile (N = 336, alpha = 0.05)

	Social Comparison			Ruminative Response			Problem Focused Coping			Emotion Focused Coping			Avoidant Coping		
	t/F-value	p-value	VI	t/F-value	p-value	VI	t/F-value	p-value	VI	t/F-value	p-value	VI	t/F-value	p-value	VI
Age	0.044	0.988	NS	1.547	0.202	NS	0.768	0.512	NS	0.321	0.810	NS	0.500	0.683	NS
Sex	2.060	0.040	S	-1.232	0.219	NS	-2.443	0.015	S	-2.280	0.023	S	-0.054	0.957	NS
Civil Status	1.256	0.210	NS	1.138	0.256	NS	-0.589	0.556	NS	-0.086	0.932	NS	-0.010	0.992	NS
Campus	0.455	0.667	NS	0.680	0.689	NS	1.986	0.056	NS	1.414	0.199	NS	1.131	0.343	NS
Program/Course	1.123	0.322	NS	1.417	0.108	NS	1.037	0.418	NS	0.980	0.487	NS	0.908	0.581	NS
Year Level	4.029	0.008	S	2.133	0.096	NS	0.321	0.810	NS	0.621	0.602	NS	0.270	0.847	NS
Level of Depression	0.291	0.748	S	34.390	0.000	S	2.153	0.118	NS	16.859	0.000	S	28.116	0.000	S

Table 3 shows that most demographic variables such as age, civil status, campus, and program did not produce significant differences in social comparison, rumination, or coping styles. This suggests that these psychological patterns are not strongly determined by basic background characteristics. However, sex yielded significant differences in selected variables, particularly in social comparison and emotion-focused coping. This finding is supported by Taylor and Armes (2024), who found that social comparison processes on Instagram vary in intensity and psychological impact depending on individual characteristics, including gender-related tendencies in self-evaluation and body-esteem. Similarly, West et al. (2024) explain that differences in emotional regulation and psychological need satisfaction may shape how individuals engage with social media and manage distress, which helps explain why coping responses may differ across sex groups.

More importantly, level of depression consistently showed significant differences across

social comparison, rumination, and all coping styles. This indicates that psychological condition is a stronger determinant than demographic profile. Tian et al. (2025) demonstrated that upward social comparison significantly predicts appearance anxiety and psychological distress, especially when mediated by maladaptive cognitive processes. In the same way, Murray et al. (2024) highlighted that rumination and negative self-referential processing are central mechanisms in depression, reinforcing why respondents with higher depressive levels in Table 3 also exhibit differences in rumination and coping patterns. Ahmad et al. (2024) further support this by emphasizing that social media comparison interacts with psychological vulnerability, intensifying depressive outcomes when coping resources are limited. Overall, the results confirm that emotional status, particularly depressive severity, plays a more decisive role than demographic factors in shaping social comparison behavior, rumination tendencies, and coping strategies.

Table 4. Relationships among Social Comparison, Rumination and Coping Styles (N = 336, alpha = 0.05)

		Social Comparison TOTAL	Rumination TOTAL	PROBLEM FOCUSED COPING	EMOTION FOCUSED COPING	AVOIDANT COPING
Social Comparison TOTAL	Pearson Correlation		.145**	0.086	0.090	0.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.008	0.115	0.098	0.337
Rumination TOTAL	Pearson Correlation	.145**		.208**	.370**	.363**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.008		0.000	0.000	0.000

Legend: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 presents the relationships among social comparison, rumination, and coping styles. The results show that social comparison is significantly and positively correlated with rumination (r = .145, p = .008), although the strength of the relationship is small. This indicates that as respondents engage more in social comparison on Facebook, their tendency to ruminate also slightly increases. However, social

comparison does not show significant relationships with problem-focused, emotion-focused, or avoidant coping. This suggests that comparison behaviors are more directly linked to cognitive patterns such as repetitive thinking rather than to specific coping strategies. This finding aligns with Tian et al. (2025), who demonstrated that upward social comparison predicts psychological distress primarily

through maladaptive cognitive processes, including internalized self-evaluation and anxiety mechanisms.

Rumination, on the other hand, shows significant positive correlations with all three coping styles: problem-focused ($r = .208, p < .001$), emotion-focused ($r = .370, p < .001$), and avoidant coping ($r = .363, p < .001$), with moderate strength observed for emotion-focused and avoidant coping. This pattern suggests that individuals who ruminate more are also more likely to engage in multiple coping responses, particularly emotional and avoidant strategies. The stronger association with emotion-focused and avoidant coping reflects literature indicat-

ing that rumination often co-occurs with attempts to regulate distress internally rather than resolve stressors directly. Murray et al. (2024) emphasized that rumination is a core cognitive mechanism in depression, closely tied to negative self-referential processing. Similarly, Ahmad et al. (2024) found that social media comparison intensifies depressive symptoms when individuals rely on less adaptive coping responses. Together, the findings in Table 4 suggest that rumination functions as a central psychological link between social comparison and coping patterns, reinforcing its role as a key mechanism underlying emotional vulnerability among young adults.



Figure 5. Proposed Intervention Plan

The intervention plan was developed directly from the study's findings, which revealed high levels of depressive symptoms, a significant link between social comparison and rumination, and moderate but not consistently strong coping strategies among students. The results showed that rumination plays a central role in emotional vulnerability and that depressive severity significantly influences comparison behaviors and coping patterns. These findings indicate that students are not

only experiencing psychological distress but are also engaging in cognitive processes that may intensify it, particularly through repetitive negative thinking and social media comparison.

"CAMPUS CAREquest" responds to these results by targeting the core mechanisms identified in the study. MindBOOST addresses rumination through mindfulness and cognitive awareness training. COMPARISMART directly reduces harmful upward social comparison by

promoting healthier digital engagement. COPEcreative strengthens adaptive coping and resilience skills, while BEWELLcome fosters a stigma-free and supportive campus culture that encourages help-seeking. The plan is not generic; it is data-driven, focusing on the psychological pathways revealed in the correlations and group differences. By intervening at the levels of cognition, behavior, and environment, the program aims to reduce depressive symptoms, strengthen coping capacity, and build a campus climate where mental health is openly supported rather than silently endured.

Conclusions

This study examined the relationships among social comparison on Facebook, rumination, coping styles, and depressive symptoms among young adults. The findings revealed that a substantial proportion of respondents experienced moderate to severe depressive symptoms, highlighting notable psychological vulnerability within the university population. Social comparison showed a significant positive relationship with rumination, suggesting that comparison behaviors on social media are linked to repetitive negative thinking patterns. Rumination, in turn, demonstrated significant associations with all coping styles, indicating that students who engage in persistent self-focused thinking also attempt various coping responses, though not always effectively. Most importantly, level of depression significantly influenced social comparison, rumination, and coping patterns, underscoring psychological condition as a stronger determinant than demographic variables.

These findings emphasize that cognitive processes, particularly rumination, serve as a central mechanism in understanding depressive symptoms among young adults. While students reported moderate levels of coping, the intensity and consistency of these strategies may not be sufficient to buffer against emotional distress, especially in the context of social comparison and pandemic-related stressors. The results support the need for campus-based interventions that target maladaptive cognitive patterns, promote adaptive coping, and cultivate supportive, stigma-free environments.

For future research, longitudinal studies are recommended to determine causal relationships among social comparison, rumination, coping, and depression over time. Experimental or intervention-based research may also examine the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral and resilience-building programs in reducing depressive symptoms. Additionally, exploring other social media platforms, moderating variables such as self-esteem and perceived social support, and expanding the sample to diverse institutional contexts would strengthen generalizability and deepen understanding of psychological risk and protective factors among young adults.

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that no competing financial interests or personal relationships could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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