



The Moderating Role of Self-Esteem in The Relationship of Social Media Usage and Life Satisfaction Among Public University Undergraduates in Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. A total of 103 students from three public universities including Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sarawak, and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Bintulu participated in the study. Three validated instruments were used which included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire, and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Results from multiple regression analysis showed that self-esteem did not significantly moderate the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. However, problematic social media usage was found to significantly and negatively predict life satisfaction. Interestingly, self-esteem was also a significant negative predictor of life satisfaction, suggesting a complex relationship possibly influenced by cultural and gender expectations in collectivist societies. This research highlights the importance of considering cultural and gender contexts when assessing the impact of self-esteem on well-being. Limitations include a small sample size limited to three universities in Sarawak, reduced generalisability, and low variability in self-esteem scores among participants. Additionally, cultural influences unique to East Malaysia may have shaped how participants viewed self-worth and life satisfaction. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples and consider other moderating variables such as emotional regulation or social support.

Keywords: self-esteem, problematic social media use, life satisfaction, moderating effect, collectivist culture

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka peranan pengantara harga diri (self-esteem) dalam hubungan antara penggunaan media sosial dan kepuasan hidup dalam kalangan pelajar prasiswazah universiti awam di Sarawak. Seramai 103 pelajar dari tiga universiti awam iaitu Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sarawak, dan Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Kampus Bintulu telah menyertai kajian ini. Tiga instrumen yang telah disahkan digunakan, iaitu *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*, *the Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire*, dan *Satisfaction with Life Scale*. Hasil analisis regresi berganda menunjukkan bahawa harga diri tidak memainkan peranan sebagai pengantara yang signifikan dalam hubungan antara penggunaan media sosial dan kepuasan hidup. Walau bagaimanapun, penggunaan media sosial yang bermasalah didapati memberi kesan negatif yang signifikan terhadap kepuasan hidup. Menariknya, harga diri juga merupakan peramal negatif yang signifikan terhadap kepuasan hidup, menunjukkan hubungan yang kompleks yang mungkin dipengaruhi oleh jangkaan budaya dan jantina dalam masyarakat kolektivis. Kajian ini menekankan kepentingan mempertimbangkan konteks budaya dan jantina apabila menilai kesan harga diri terhadap kesejahteraan. Keterbatasan kajian termasuk saiz sampel yang kecil yang terhad kepada tiga universiti di Sarawak, penggeneralisasian yang terhad, dan variasi skor harga diri yang rendah dalam kalangan peserta. Selain itu, pengaruh budaya yang unik di Malaysia Timur mungkin telah membentuk cara peserta menilai harga diri dan kepuasan hidup mereka. Kajian masa hadapan disarankan melibatkan sampel yang lebih besar dan pelbagai serta mempertimbangkan pemboleh ubah pengantara lain seperti pengawalan emosi atau sokongan sosial.

Kata kunci: harga diri, penggunaan media sosial bermasalah, kepuasan hidup, kesan pengantara, budaya kolektivis

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Social media usage has emerged as a significant concern among university students, particularly in Sarawak, where the use of social media platforms has become increasingly prevalent in day to day life of the society. This phenomenon has raised issues related to life satisfaction, as these platforms also frequently emphasise idealised unrealistic standards of one's way of living, often leading individuals to experience dissatisfaction with themselves and their lives. The constant exposure to unattainable standards on social media can negatively influence self-perception or self-esteem, creating a risk of social comparison and contributing to reduced life satisfaction, which are commonly experienced by young adults like university students, who are prone to being influenced to be socially accepted by their peers. Thus, by exploring the moderating function of self-esteem, this study aims to clarify how variations in self-esteem may buffer or intensify the impact of social media usage on life satisfaction. This understanding is essential for developing targeted interventions in psychological and counselling services that support mental well-being and promote healthier social media usage patterns among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

1.1 Background of Study

According to Global Web Index, 62.3% of the world's population uses social media and it is apparent in current society that social media usage is also rapidly increasing in Sarawak, especially among young adults and university students, on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, that are commonly used for gaining and sharing information, self-expression, and staying connected. These usage of social media do bring a positive affect to individuals' life as they can use this to interact with each other and gain inspiration or motivation from others in making a decision of their daily living. However, the constant accessibility of these platforms raises concerns and has been linked to reduced life satisfaction and negative self-comparisons (Çiftci & Yıldız, 2023). This comparison stems from the exposure and idealisation of the content being produced and uploaded onto the platforms which can distort how individuals perceive and put a value onto themselves and their way of living. Thus, the ways individuals or specifically,

young adults among public university students, use social media can influence their outlook in life, depending on their engagement with it.

Additionally, the emphasis on unrealistic standards of ways of living on these platforms can lead users, particularly impressionable young adults, to feel dissatisfied with their self-image or achievements, which can further impact their satisfaction in life (Andrade et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of examining the navigation of university students on social media and the psychological effects of such behaviour to them. However, only few have discussed about how individuals with varying levels of self-esteem may experience these effects differently, as self-esteem can influence how individuals react to and internalise these ideals. The emphasis on the moderating effect of self-esteem to these variables of social media usage and life satisfaction has to be examined. Thus to fill this gap, this study aims to examine how different levels of self-esteem affect a university student's pattern of social media usage and their life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. Understanding this relationship allows counseling students and professional counselors to develop effective strategies for addressing self-esteem issues, which are increasingly prevalent among university students. By guiding students toward healthier social media engagement, counselors can help prevent its negative impact on overall life satisfaction. Additionally, this knowledge enhances counselors' skills in mitigating social media addiction, a potential consequence of excessive and uncontrolled usage, thereby promoting better mental well-being among university students.

1.2 Problem Statement

In today's digital era, students are increasingly required to develop technological fluency and other essential twenty-first-century skills (Kolhar et al., 2021). Social media provide a platform for students to explore their identities, enhance their learning experiences, and stay connected with educational communities beyond traditional classroom settings (Yu et al., 2010). Through social media, students can access up-to-date information, engage in collaborative learning, and exchange knowledge with diverse individuals, which can positively influence their academic performance (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Next, social media has also been widely studied in different areas, including politics, relationships, activism, identity, and youth culture. Many researchers have focused on how social media shapes the way people interact, build

identities, follow social norms, and present themselves to others (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2022b). These studies highlight that social media is not just a communication tool but also a platform where people create and express their identities, interact with society, and participate in cultural movements. Hence, while the usage of social media has greatly benefited the society in providing information from all over the world and helping individuals stay connected across distances, excessive or unhealthy use can lead to feelings of addiction which is a problematic behaviour. Thus, developing problematic social media usage is a huge concern that needs to be addressed, especially in the psychology and counselling field, as this could lead to decreased life satisfaction and feelings of unfulfillment (Andrade et al., 2023). This is particularly concerning for young adults, especially university students, aged 18 to 29, who are among the highest users of social media, according to Global Social Media Statistics 2024 by Meltwater (DataReportal, 2024), and may be especially susceptible to its influence without proper self-regulation. One prominent source of unhealthy influence on these platforms is the idealised standards that define success and social desirability. University students, seeking a sense of belonging among their peers, are often drawn to these standards, which may drive self-comparison and reinforce harmful usage patterns (Mayukh & Manaf, 2022).

However, self-esteem significantly influences how individuals interact on social media, particularly in their pursuit of social acceptance. Individuals with high self-esteem use social media for connection and self-expression, while those with low self-esteem are more likely to seek validation through self-comparison and reliance on social media (Ballara, 2023). The continuous pursuit of likes and positive feedback may result in emotional distress when validation is not received, further reinforcing low self-esteem. This reliance on external approval can contribute to negative self-perceptions and reduced life satisfaction. Therefore, self-esteem serves as a key factor in determining whether social media usage remains balanced or becomes problematic, emphasizing the need for interventions that encourage healthier and more mindful engagement among university students by the psychology and counselling services offered in public universities in Sarawak, which are lacking in interventions of these issues.

Despite these concerns, there is a gap in the research examining how self-esteem specifically moderates the development of social media dependency and its impact on life satisfaction. Much of the existing research focuses on how social media use affects self-esteem,

rather than how varying levels of self-esteem might influence or moderate an individual's social media usage and its effect on life satisfaction. Thus, this research intends to fill the gap of empirical evidence on the moderating role or effect of self-esteem has to the relationship. This gap also extends to intervention development, as there is limited guidance for addressing social media usage stemming from self-esteem issues, particularly in a way that supports life satisfaction. Additionally, there is a lack of targeted research on social media usage and life satisfaction among students in Sarawak's public universities. This absence of focused research and support in public university counseling services' in Sarawak limits the development of effective mental health interventions tailored to students' needs that comprises of cultural contexts in Sarawak.

Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among Sarawak's public university students. By examining self-esteem as a key factor, this research seeks to inform more effective, tailored support services to address social media usage and promote life satisfaction within this population.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To identify the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship of social media usage and life satisfaction in public university undergraduates in Sarawak.
2. To determine the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.
3. To determine the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Is there any effect of self-esteem as a moderator in the relationship of social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak?
2. Is there any relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak?
3. Is there any relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is a significant effect of self-esteem as a moderator in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

H₀₂: Social media usage is a significant predictor of life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

H₀₃: Self-esteem is a significant predictor of life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

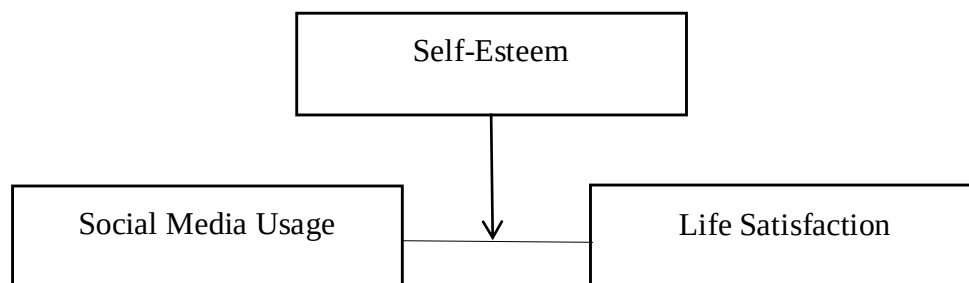


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework for this study, focusing on the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. The line connecting social media usage and life satisfaction represents the relationship being studied. The downward arrow from self-esteem shows that self-

esteem might intensify or buffer the relationship between the other two variables, acting as a moderator.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

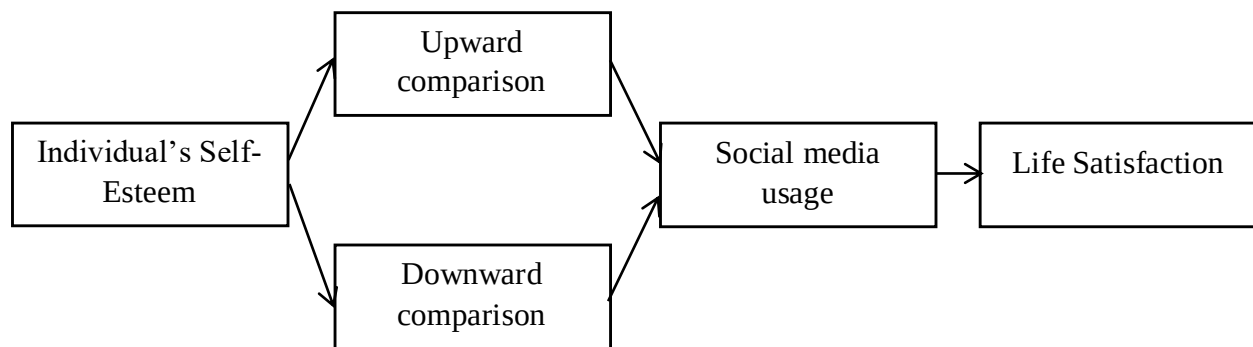


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in Figure 2 for this study is based on Social Comparison Theory, introduced by Leon Festinger in 1954. The theory notes that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their abilities, opinions, and attributes to others. This comparison process helps individuals gain self-insight and evaluate their social standing (Sisler, 2021). However, its impact can vary depending on the nature of the comparison and the individual's self-esteem. Social comparison can occur in two main forms: upward and downward comparison. Upward comparison involves comparing oneself to others perceived as better, which may inspire improvement but can also lead to feelings of inadequacy and reduced self-esteem. Downward comparison, on the other hand, involves comparing oneself to others perceived as worse, which can boost self-esteem but may lead to complacency (Festinger, 1954). In the context of this study, social media provides a constant platform for social comparison, where individuals are exposed to curated and often idealised content. This exposure can significantly influence self-esteem and life satisfaction.

This theoretical framework highlights how an individual's self-esteem influences the type of social comparison they engage in, whether upward or downward, to evaluate themselves. This process impacts the way they use social media, potentially leading to problematic usage patterns. These patterns, in turn, affect their life satisfaction. By integrating these elements, the framework

explains how self-esteem acts as a moderating factor in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. This model provides a clearer understanding of the role self-esteem plays in shaping the effects of social media on overall well-being.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Self-Esteem

Conceptual Definition

Self-esteem is the assessment of an individual's views and attitudes towards his or her skills and beliefs, as well as an overall judgement of one's own worth. It represents a continuum, with individuals ranging from low to high self-esteem (Jordan et al., 2020). Furthermore, as mentioned by Öztekin and Çengel (2020), an individual who value themselves negatively will struggle with their negative emotion and tends to be self-contradictory by venting to low-level activities that can be carried out immediately.

Operational Definition

Self-esteem is defined as an individual's overall sense of self-worth, including aspects such as self-focus in personal and achievement goals. This construct is commonly measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965, which assesses dimensions of self-competence, a sense of personal ability and effectiveness, and self-liking, feelings of self-acceptance and self-respect, through a questionnaire-based evaluation (Hosogi et al., 2012).

1.8.2 Social Media Usage

Conceptual Definition

It is conceptually defined as the engagement with interactive platforms like social media that enable users to create, share, and participate in social networking within virtual networks and online communities. The activities that individuals engage in through these platforms can influence others' thoughts and decisions, positively or negatively, depending on the nature and frequency of their usage patterns (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2022a).

Operational Definition

Social media usage is measured using the Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire (PSNUQ), developed by González-Nuevo, Cuesta, Postigo, Menéndez-Aller, and Muñiz (2021). This instrument provides a comprehensive assessment of problematic social media use by evaluating its consequences and the tendency for interpersonal social comparisons (González-Nuevo et al., 2021) among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

1.8.3 Life Satisfaction

Conceptual Definition

Life satisfaction is a cognitive and global evaluation of an individual's full quality of life (Malvaso & Kang, 2022). It also means satisfaction with or acceptance of one's life circumstances, as well as the fulfilment of one's overall desires and requirements (Sousa & Lyubomirsky, 2001).

Operational Definitions

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin in 1985 is used to measure public university undergraduates in Sarawak's life satisfaction to assess their global cognitive judgements of satisfaction in their life based on their own standards. It captures a broad and reflective judgement that allows one to weigh different aspects of life (Diener et al., 1985).

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study aims to enhance understanding of the current state of mental health services in Sarawak's public universities by examining how self-esteem can influence the patterns of social media usage and its impact on life satisfaction. The findings are intended to support psychology and counseling services in public universities by highlighting the role of self-esteem in either buffering or intensifying social media usage. Insights from this study may guide the development of targeted interventions to address self-esteem issues among university students, with the goal of reducing excessive and problematic social media use and preventing its negative effects on life satisfaction.

1.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study seeks to examine the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. The specific objectives are to explore the relationships among the variables of the study, thus, contributing to the development of interventions aimed at enhancing self-esteem and promoting well-balanced social media usage among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. These efforts are intended to improve life satisfaction and support the overall well-being of this population.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the past literature and studies that have been found and are related to the three variables of the present research, which are self-esteem as the moderating role, social media usage, and life satisfaction. The literature review of this study is collected from various sources.

2.1 Self-Esteem and Social Media Usage

Numerous studies have demonstrated that social media usage can negatively impact self-esteem and life satisfaction. Research has consistently shown a negative relationship between self-esteem and social media use. For instance, Malo-Cerrato et al. (2018) found that adolescents with low self-esteem tend to engage in higher levels of social media use. This behavior is often driven by their desire for acceptance, belonging, or validation from peers or strangers through social media platforms. Such engagement can negatively affect their well-being as they become increasingly focused on idealised and often unrealistic content portrayed on social media, and lastly making efforts to follow such standards or idealisations. Studies focusing on young adults, particularly university students, have also demonstrated this phenomenon. Research indicates that individuals like young adults construct self-identities that contribute to shaping their social identities, often influenced by their desire for acceptance and favorable perception by others, which Trang and Selassie (2020) suggest that individuals frequently consume or display content highlighting their achievements as a means of compensating for personal insecurities, or low level of self-esteem. This behaviour serves to reduce potential declines in self-esteem by seeking external validation and approval, thereby temporarily enhancing their self-esteem, but not permanently increasing it positively as it is only a way to get validated by others, not themselves.

Griffiths (2001), as cited in Aydm and San (2011), reported a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and social media usage. The study highlighted that individuals with low self-esteem often perceive the Internet or social media as a coping mechanism or a way to compensate for personal shortcomings. Through social media, users with low self-esteem can adopt different personas or engage in social interactions that allow them to feel better about

themselves. This reliance on social media as an alternative form of social connection reflects its potential appeal for individuals seeking validation or escape from real-life insecurities. These findings also indicated that problematic social media usage can lead to Internet addiction, particularly among adolescents, where low self-esteem plays a critical role. The negative correlation between self-esteem and Internet addiction suggests that frequent and potentially harmful use of social media may further negatively impact self-esteem.

These findings emphasize the need for further research into understanding how self-esteem influences the way individuals engage with social media and thus, find ways that can help identify those at risk of problematic usage. Interventions aimed at improving self-esteem may not only reduce reliance on social media as a coping strategy but also mitigate its potential negative effects on life satisfaction. This connection underscores the importance of addressing self-esteem as a key variable in studies on social media usage and its broader impact on mental health.

2.2 Self-Esteem and Life Satisfaction

Self-esteem plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's happiness and overall life satisfaction. A research by Radhika (2024) highlights that adolescents with higher self-esteem are more inclined to report a general sense of satisfaction in life. This positive association can be attributed to the role of self-esteem in promoting emotional well-being and resilience. High self-esteem provides individuals with a more favorable self-concept, enabling them to cope effectively with challenges and maintain a balanced perspective on life. In contrast, those with lower self-esteem may struggle with negative self-perceptions, which can hinder their emotional resilience and lead to dissatisfaction in various areas of life. This can further be explained by a research done by Suldo and Huebner (2006) which stated that adolescents with higher levels of life satisfaction also demonstrated greater social and emotional efficacy compared to their peers with lower levels of life satisfaction. By linking these two studies, this suggests that individuals with elevated self-esteem are more likely to engage positively in social interactions, exhibit stronger interpersonal skills, and regulate their emotions effectively. These findings highlight the role of self-esteem as a driver of constructive social behaviour and emotional well-being.

Research by Moksnes et al. (2022) and Kaushik and Nc (2021) consistently revealed a strong positive correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction among adolescents and young

adults of university students. Individuals with higher self-esteem tend to report greater life satisfaction, as self-esteem is recognized as a fundamental component of overall well-being and mental health. It serves as a foundation for various positive outcomes, including enhanced happiness, emotional stability, and life satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of self-esteem in shaping an individual's perception of life satisfaction. Building on this, the present study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by investigating how self-esteem interacts with social media usage to influence life satisfaction among university students. While previous studies have firmly established the link between self-esteem and life satisfaction, there is a need to explore the moderating role of self-esteem in the context of social media. Given the increasing influence of social media on students' social life, understanding its relevance and relationship with self-esteem could provide deeper insights into how social media usage could impact well-being and life satisfaction. This study aims to fill this gap by examining whether self-esteem buffers or increases the effects of social media usage on life satisfaction, thereby extending the application of prior findings to the present day.

2.3 Social Media Usage and Life Satisfaction

The reviewed literature indicates that social media usage can play a constructive role in enhancing life satisfaction. For instance, Choi (2024) argued that social media use is positively linked to increased social support, which contributes to a higher level of social capital, ultimately leading to greater life satisfaction. The findings suggest that social media platforms serve as tools for fostering social relationships and strengthening connections, which are crucial for fulfilling individuals' social needs and sense of belonging. However, social media use's potential to increase life satisfaction depends on how the individuals use these platforms. With a controlled and meaningful usage of connection and beneficial interaction, it would foster sense of community and connectivity.

However, when usage becomes excessive and leads to negative self-comparison, it can affect one's self-esteem and decrease life satisfaction. Kabasakal (2015) demonstrated that problematic social media usage, particularly when excessive, significantly reduces the social benefits derived from these platforms and decreases overall life satisfaction. This finding emphasises that while social media can provide platforms and ways for social connection, its

overuse may impair the supposed positive outcomes, highlighting the need to manage usage levels effectively. Similarly, Weiser (2001) also acknowledged that problematic internet use, including social media, is a factor that diminishes life satisfaction. This perspective demonstrated how critical social media usage is for emotional and psychological well-being, including life satisfaction of an individual. Furthermore, Meier and Johnson (2022) also explored the role of self-comparison and envy in social media interactions, which are common contributors to decreased well-being. The curated and idealised nature of content on social media often leads users to compare their lives unfavorably with others, resulting in feelings of inadequacy, envy, and lower self-esteem. These emotions can lead to a greater decrease in life satisfaction, as individuals feel disconnected or less successful in comparison to their perceived peers. Consequently, this could lead to a lower self-esteem in an individual, especially towards young adults who are vulnerable to social comparison and influence.

While much research has examined the direct effects of social media usage and self-esteem on life satisfaction, few have focused on self-esteem as a moderating factor in this relationship. By addressing this gap, the study aims to highlight the importance of self-esteem in shaping how social media usage impacts life satisfaction. For instance, individuals with low self-esteem may use social media differently compared to those with high self-esteem, potentially leading to different outcomes in their life satisfaction.

2.4 Self-Esteem as Moderator

Self-esteem has been shown to have a negative relationship with social media usage and is closely linked to life satisfaction. Individuals with high self-esteem generally report higher levels of life satisfaction, while those with low self-esteem tend to experience lower satisfaction which was discussed above in the previous literature. Moreover, self-esteem influences an individual's ability to cope with challenges and negative experiences in life (Moksnes & Espnes, 2013). People with high self-esteem are better equipped to manage adverse situations compared to those with lower self-esteem, which may help them lessen the negative effects of social media use. Therefore, self-esteem may act as a moderating factor in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction.

Findings from Scapim (2022), who studied the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction with 88 participants, revealed no moderating effect. Instead, self-esteem was found to significantly predict life satisfaction, while social media usage showed no direct significant impact on life satisfaction. Scapim theorised that the type of content consumed and problematic social media usage might further clarify its effect on life satisfaction, but these variables were not included in the study. Thus, this study aims to address this gap in the literature by incorporating a more detailed measure of problematic social media usage, including dimensions such as addictive consequences and social comparison, to better understand its impact on life satisfaction, and lastly, find the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship of social media usage and life satisfaction.

2.5 Conclusion

Thus, this literature review discusses each variable in this research by drawing on insights from previous studies. This study seeks to provide insight into how different levels of self-esteem among young adults influence the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. Understanding the impact of self-esteem on social media behavior helps explain how it connects to an individual's satisfaction with life. This understanding could guide the development of targeted interventions to promote healthy self-esteem and balanced social media usage. Such interventions could help users maintain a more positive outlook on life while avoiding the negative consequences of excessive or problematic social media use. This research hopes to contribute to the counselling field by offering practical insights into improving psychological well-being among social media users in terms of their social media usage and life satisfaction, moderated by self-esteem, in the population of public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research design and instruments used in this study, explaining their relevance and application in addressing the research objectives. Additionally, it describes the procedures undertaken during the research process and highlights the ethical considerations adhered to in ensuring the integrity and credibility of the study.

3.1 Research Design

The research design of this study follows a correlational research design, which examines the associations between variables without any manipulation or control by the researcher. Data collection will be conducted through an online questionnaire distributed to public university undergraduates in Sarawak. The questionnaire will include demographic questions to gather information like participants' age, ethnicity, university, and year of study. Additionally, it will incorporate three standardised instruments to measure levels of self-esteem, social media usage, and life satisfaction. The estimated time to complete the questionnaire is approximately 5 minutes.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population for this study consists of undergraduate students enrolled in public universities across Sarawak, Malaysia, such as Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sarawak, and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Bintulu Sarawak. This includes students pursuing degree programs across various fields of study, spanning all academic years, from first-year students to those in their fourth year. The sampling strategy ensures representation across different public universities in Sarawak and academic years to capture varied perspectives and behaviors related to self-esteem, social media usage, and life satisfaction. By targeting a diverse student population, the study aims to provide insights applicable to the broader context of public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

Convenience sampling, a nonprobability sampling method, was used to select participants based on practical criteria such as accessibility, availability at a specific time, and willingness to

participate (Etikan et al., 2016). The sample size represents a quantitative dataset, consisting of continuous numerical values that reflect the number of students participating in the study. With multiple regression being the main analysis that will be conducted in this study, the sample size which is determined through Cohen's table, is 85 with alpha-level of .05 and power analysis of .80 to detect medium effect size (Cohen, 1992).

3.3 Instruments

The instruments utilised in this study include a demographic questionnaire, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), the Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire (PSNUQ), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS).

3.3.1 Demographic Questionnaire

Respondents were required to provide their demographic information, including their age, gender, ethnicity, university, and year of study.

3.3.2 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Self-esteem is measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which comprises 10 items rated on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). As self-esteem is not a singular concept, it is divided into two equal facets or areas, each measured by 5 items, which are self-competence and self-liking (Sinclair et al., 2010). The total score is calculated by summing the responses to all 10 items, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem and lower scores indicating lower self-esteem. Schmitt and Allik (2005) reported that the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale demonstrated strong predictive validity, internal consistency, and test-retest reliability. The test-retest correlations ranged from 0.85 to 0.88, indicating excellent stability over time. Additionally, the scale showed a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.81, reflecting strong internal consistency.

3.3.3 Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire (PSNUQ)

Social media usage is assessed using the Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire (PSNUQ), which consists of 18 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). These items are divided into two subscales, which are addictive consequences and negative social comparison. The PSNUQ has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with a correlation of .59 between the two subscales. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for the subscales are .94 for addictive consequences and .91 for negative social comparison, indicating high reliability. Additionally, the convergent validity of the scales showed values above .50, further supporting the instrument's validity (González-Nuevo et al., 2021). A higher score in the questionnaire demonstrates higher problematic social network use.

3.3.4 Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS)

Life satisfaction is measured using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS) which consist of 5 items, rated using the 7-point Likert Scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A high score of this scale depicts a high level of satisfaction with their life, and a low score depicts a lower satisfaction in life. According to Diener et al. (1985), a high test-retest reliability was determined through two-months analysis which resulted in a result of .82. Meanwhile, according to Jang et al. (2017), the scales' Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was .86, which depicted consistent internal consistency.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire using Google Forms consisting of informed consent, demographic questionnaires and the three instruments are distributed to undergraduates of UNIMAS, UiTM Cawangan Sarawak, and UPM Bintulu Sarawak through online platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, and X, or formerly known as Twitter. Next, the respondents are asked to complete the questionnaires in a few minutes and reminded of the confidentiality of the responses submitted by them. At the end, the results of the questionnaires are collected and recorded for the purposes of descriptive and inferential analysis for the study.

3.5 Methods of Analysing Data

3.5.1 Data Analysis

Data collected from the questionnaire for the purpose of this study will be recorded analysed using the Statistical Package of the Social Science (SPSS) version 27.0.

3.5.2 Descriptive Analysis

Before conducting a thorough analysis, a descriptive analysis must be done first. It is a step in research to summarise the collected and recorded data in a systematically organised manner to describe the relationship between the variables being researched in the sample. This analysis includes the types of variables, measures of frequency, variation, and central tendency. With these methods, the hundreds or thousands of data will be organized or condensed into a summary that is easier to be comprehended to assess the sample or population being involved in the research (Kaur et al., 2018).

3.5.3 Inferential Analysis

After a descriptive analysis, an inferential analysis will be conducted. This analysis is whereby the results from the previous analysis of the sample will be drawn back to make a generalisation of facts to the population of where the samples was from. This method will help to make inferences that are specific for the purpose of the research and relationship that the research is trying to determine with the variables being researched on. Through this method, a conclusion that go beyond the data being used itself can be made (Garg & Goyal, 2019). Next, the moderating effect of the variable in this study which is self-esteem was tested using multiple regression analysis, which allows for examining the combined effects of multiple independent variables on a single dependent variable. In addition, simple linear regression was used to assess the predictive relationship between two variables.

3.5.4 Variables

In this research, the variable of self-esteem is the moderator variable and the variable of social media usage is the independent variable. Meanwhile, the dependent variable in this research is life satisfaction.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In conducting correlational design or quantitative research, several ethical guidelines must be followed. First, the results and reports should be prepared honestly and transparently, ensuring no bias, fabrication, or manipulation interferes with the accuracy of the analysis and findings. Researchers must carefully review and evaluate the questionnaire before distribution and ensure the reports are written professionally to avoid providing misinformation to participants or compromising the study's results. Additionally, intellectual property must be respected by properly citing previous research or authorship in APA style, thereby acknowledging their contributions and avoiding plagiarism. Adhering to these ethical principles is crucial to maintaining the originality, honesty, and accuracy of the research findings.

3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research design for this study is quantitative method which will involve a distribution of online survey to undergraduates of Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sarawak, and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Bintulu Sarawak, the three public universities in Sarawak, which consist of individuals from various ages, genders, ethnicity, and year of study. The instruments used in this research to study on the variables of the study are Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire (PSNUQ), and Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS). The data collected will be recorded to be analysed through both descriptive and inferential analysis. While conducting the research, it is important for the researcher to adhere to the ethical guidelines to ensure accuracy, honesty, and transparency of the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the data analysis and research findings based on the collected responses for the study of the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship of social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. It includes the results of the reliability analysis to assess the internal consistency of the research instruments, followed by descriptive analysis to summarise the demographic profile and main variables of the study. Inferential statistical analyses were then conducted, including multiple regression, to test the study's hypotheses and examine the relationships among the variables.

4.1 Demographic Background

The questionnaire was distributed through online platforms targeting undergraduate students from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sarawak, and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Bintulu Sarawak. A total of 103 responses were collected from participants across the three universities.

Demographic Variables		<i>n</i>	Percentage (%)
Gender			
	Male	39	37.9
	Female	64	62.1
	Total	103	100
Age			
	19 – 21	24	23.3
	22 – 24	62	60.2
	25 – 27	17	16.5
	28 - 30	0	0
	Total	103	100
Ethnicity			

	Malay	41	39.8
	Chinese	11	10.7
	Indian	3	2.9
	Bumiputera Sarawak	30	29.1
	Bumiputera Sabah	18	17.5
	Total	103	100
University			
	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)	50	48.5
	Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Cawangan Sarawak	33	32.0
	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Bintulu Sarawak	20	19.4
	Total	103	100
Year of Study			
	Year 1	14	13.6
	Year 2	32	31.1
	Year 3	49	47.6
	Year 4	8	7.8
	Year 5	0	0
	Total	103	100

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

According to Table 1, a total of 103 respondents participated in the study, consisting of 64 females (62.1%) and 39 males (37.9%). In terms of age, the majority of respondents were between 22 and 24 years old, accounting for 62 participants (60.2%). This was followed by 24 respondents (23.3%) aged 19 to 21 years, and 17 respondents (16.5%) aged 25 to 27 years. Notably, there were no participants in the 28 to 30 years' age group, making it the least represented category. In terms of ethnicity, the majority of respondents were Malay, with 41 participants (39.8%), followed by

30 Bumiputera Sarawak respondents (29.1%). There were 18 Bumiputera Sabah respondents (17.5%), while 11 participants (10.7%) were Chinese, and 3 participants (2.9%) were Indian, making them the least represented ethnic group in this study. Next, the majority of respondents were from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), with 50 participants (48.5%). This was followed by 33 participants (32.0%) from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sarawak, and 20 participants (19.4%) from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Bintulu Sarawak, making UPM the least represented university in the study. Lastly, for year of study, the majority of respondents were in Year 3, with 49 participants (47.6%). This was followed by 32 respondents (31.1%) in Year 2, and 14 respondents (13.6%) in Year 1. Only 8 participants (7.8%) were in Year 4, while no respondents were in Year 5, making it the least represented group in this category.

4.1.1 Gender

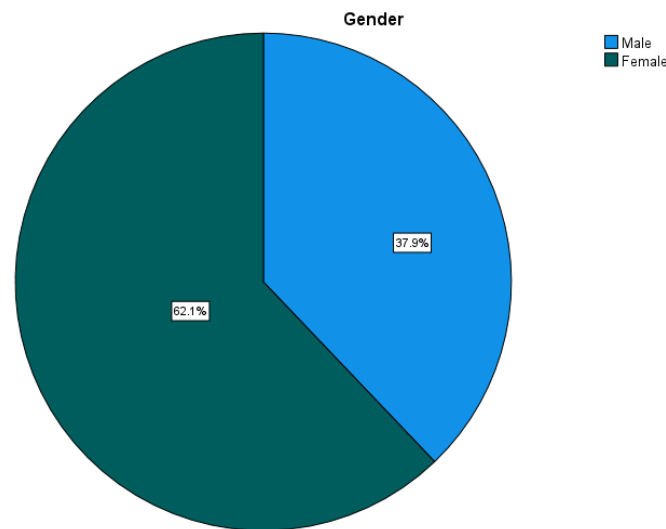


Figure 3: The Percentage of Gender

According to the data that was collected shown in Figure 3, the gender distribution reveals that female respondents made up the majority, with 62.1% (64 participants), while male respondents accounted for 37.9% (39 participants). This indicates a higher participation rate among females in the study.

4.1.2 Age

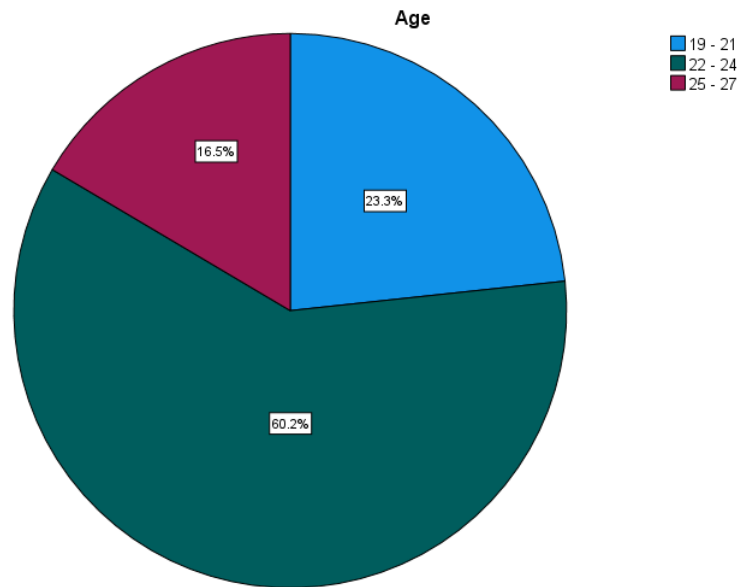


Figure 4: The Percentage of Age

The age demographic of the respondents as represented in Figure 4 showed some variation, with the majority 60.2% (62 participants) concentrated in the 22–24 age group. This was followed by 23.3% (24 participants) aged 19–21, and 16.5% (17 participants) aged 25–27. Notably, there were no respondents (0%) in the 28–30 age group, making it the least represented category and was therefore not included in the pie chart. This indicates that most participants were in their early twenties, which is typical for undergraduate students.

4.1.3 Ethnicity

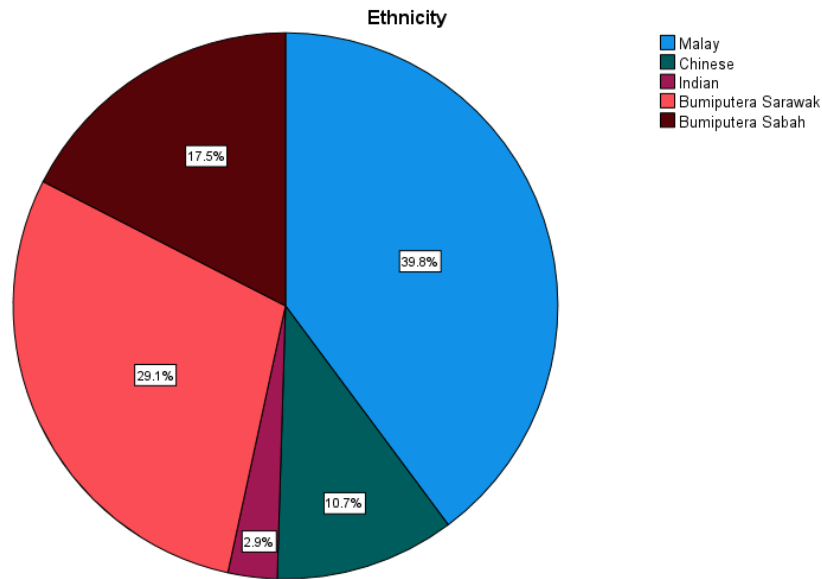


Figure 5: The Percentage of Ethnicity

In terms of ethnicity, as represented in Figure 5, Malay respondents formed the largest group, accounting for 39.8% (41 participants), followed by Bumiputera Sarawak at 29.1% (30 participants). Bumiputera Sabah made up 17.5% (18 participants), while Chinese and Indian respondents represented 10.7% (11 participants) and 2.9% (3 participants) respectively, with Indians being the least represented in the study. This result reflects the ethnic composition commonly found among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

4.1.4 University

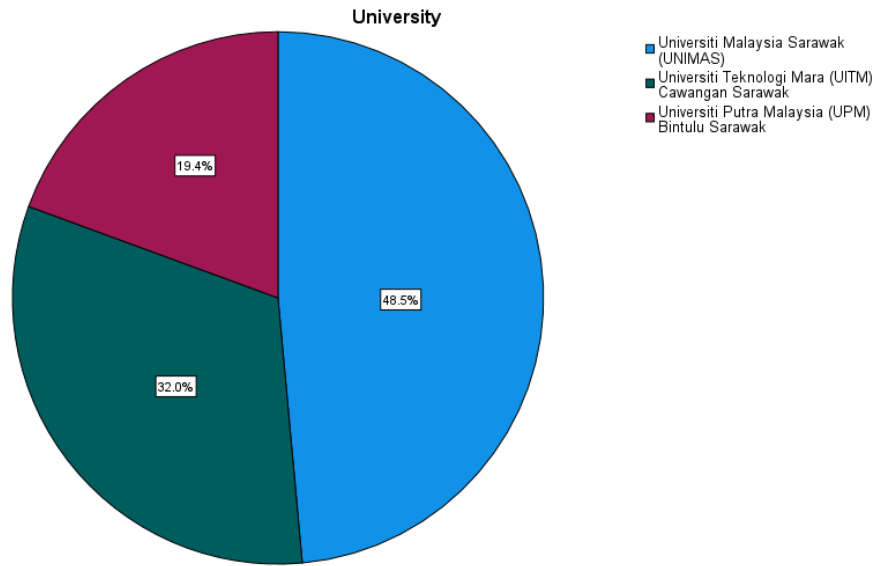


Figure 6: The Percentage of University

According to Figure 6, the university distribution shows that most respondents were from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), making up 48.5% (50 participants). This was followed by 32.0% (33 participants) from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Sarawak, while the least number of respondents came from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Bintulu Sarawak, with 19.4% (20 participants). The higher number from UNIMAS could be due to the researcher's easier reach to students from their own university.

4.1.5 Year of Study

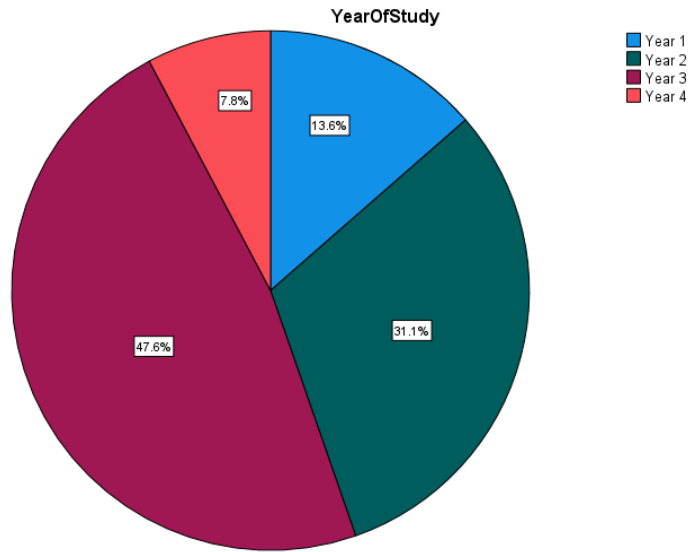


Figure 7: The Percentage of Year of Study

The data in Figure 7 indicates that third-year students formed the largest group of respondents with 44 participants (42.7%), followed by second-year students (32.0%, 33 participants) and final-year students (17.5%, 18 participants). First-year students were the least represented, with only 8 participants (7.8%), while no responses were recorded from fifth-year students, indicating no representation from that group and in the pie chart. This trend may suggest that students in their middle years are more active in academic participation.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Although the instruments used in this study has been proven reliable in previous researches, a reliability analysis was still conducted to ensure its consistency within the current sample and context. Different populations and cultural settings can influence how respondents interpret and answer items (Fayyaz et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important to verify that the instrument remains internally consistent and reliable when applied to undergraduates in Sarawak, making the results of this study more valid and trustworthy.

4.2.1 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's	
Alpha	N of Items
.901	10

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of RSES

The Cronbach's alpha value for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale in this study was $\alpha = .901$, indicating a very high level of internal consistency among the items. This means that the statements within the scale reliably measure the same underlying construct, which is self-esteem. A value above .9 is generally considered excellent, suggesting that the scale is highly reliable for use with the current sample of respondents, which in this case is among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

4.2.2 Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire (PSNUQ)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's	
Alpha	N of Items
.923	18

Table 3: Reliability Analysis of PSNUQ

The Cronbach's alpha (α) value for the Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire (PSNUQ) in this study was $\alpha = .923$, reflecting excellent internal consistency. This high reliability score indicates that the items within the PSNUQ are strongly correlated and effectively measure the construct of problematic social media use. Such a result suggests that the questionnaire is a dependable tool for assessing social media-related issues among the current sample and is suitable for continued use in similar research contexts.

4.2.3 Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's	
Alpha	N of Items
.861	5

Table 4: Reliability Analysis of SLS

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS) showed a Cronbach's alpha (α) of .861, indicating that the scale has good internal consistency. This means the items are closely related and reliably assess the overall construct of life satisfaction. With α exceeding .8, the scale can be considered dependable for measuring life satisfaction within this group of respondents.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Self_Esteem	103	13	35	22.64	5.691
Social_Media_Usage	103	26	79	55.62	13.494
Life_Satisfaction	103	11	29	20.60	4.305
Valid N (listwise)	103				

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Based on the descriptive statistics shown in Table 5, the majority of respondents reported moderate levels across all three variables measured in this study. The mean score for self-esteem was 22.64 out of a possible 40, indicating that most participants had a moderate level of self-esteem. For social media usage, the mean score was 55.62 out of a maximum of 90, which suggests a moderate level of engagement with social media platforms among the respondents. Meanwhile, the life satisfaction mean score was 20.60 out of 35, also reflecting a moderate level of satisfaction with life. These average scores suggest that the sample predominantly consists of individuals with neither extremely high nor low levels in these psychological aspects, which may have influenced the statistical findings, particularly in detecting interaction effects.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

To test the study's hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether self-esteem moderates the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among undergraduates in public universities across Sarawak. This analysis aims to determine both the individual and interactive effects of the variables involved.

4.4.1 Hypothesis 1 Testing

H₀₁: There is a significant effect of self-esteem as a moderator in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

		Coefficients ^a			t	Sig.
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	20.602	.230		89.731	.000
	Centered_SMU	-.107	.026	-.336	-4.199	.000
	Centered_SE	-.427	.061	-.564	-7.049	.000
2	(Constant)	20.674	.297		69.632	.000
	Centered_SMU	-.112	.028	-.350	-3.981	.000
	Centered_SE	-.417	.066	-.551	-6.281	.000
	Interaction	-.001	.003	-.023	-.383	.703

a. Dependent Variable: Life_Satisfaction

Table 6: Multiple Regression Results for Moderation Role of Self-Esteem

It was hypothesised that there is a significant effect of self-esteem as a moderator in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. However, as presented in Table 6, the interaction term between centered social media usage and centered self-esteem (Centered_SMU × Centered_SE) was not statistically significant ($\beta = -0.023$, $p = .703$). The beta coefficient indicates a very weak negative relationship between the interaction and life satisfaction. However, this effect is minimal and not meaningful due to its lack of statistical significance. The p-value of .703 is greater than the conventional threshold of $p = .005$, indicating that the result is not statistically significant. This

means there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis or in other words, there is not enough evidence to support a significant moderating effect of self-esteem on the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. Therefore, the interaction between social media usage and self-esteem does not significantly predict life satisfaction. These findings suggest that self-esteem does not play a moderating role in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. Thus, H_{01} is rejected.

4.4.2 Hypothesis 2 Testing

H₀₂: Social media usage is a significant predictor of life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

Model		Coefficients ^a			t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	34.001	1.191		28.548	.000
	Social_Media_Usage	-.241	.021	-.755	-11.574	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Life_Satisfaction						

Table 7: Simple Linear Regression Results for the Effect of Social Media Usage on Life Satisfaction

It was hypothesised that social media usage is a significant predictor of life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. Based on the results presented in Table 7, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether social media usage significantly predicts life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. The analysis showed a statistically significant result, with a p-value of .000, which is less than the significance level of $p = .05$. This indicates that social media usage is a significant predictor of life satisfaction. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = -0.241$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in social media usage, life satisfaction decreases by 0.241 units, meanwhile the standardized beta value ($\beta = -0.755$) shows a strong negative relationship between the two variables. In addition, the t-value of -11.574 suggests that this negative association is meaningful and not due to chance.

Therefore, H₀₂ is accepted, as the findings confirm that social media usage significantly predicts life satisfaction among undergraduates. The negative direction of the relationship suggests that higher use of social media is associated with lower levels of life satisfaction.

4.4.3 Hypothesis 3 Testing

H₀₃: Self-esteem is a significant predictor of life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.

		Coefficients^a			t	Sig.
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	34.539	1.021		33.825	.000
	Self_Esteem	-.616	.044	-.814	-14.070	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Life_Satisfaction						

Table 8: Simple Linear Regression Results for the Effect of Self-Esteem on Life Satisfaction

It was hypothesised that self-esteem is a significant predictor of life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. Based on the results showed in Table 8, the analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship, with a p-value of .000, which is less than the standard significance level of .05. This means that self-esteem is a significant predictor of life satisfaction. The unstandardized coefficient (B = -0.616) indicates that for every one-unit increase in self-esteem, life satisfaction decreases by 0.616 units. Then, the standardized beta coefficient (β = -0.814) reflects a strong negative relationship between the two variables which differs from past studies' findings. The large negative t-value (-14.070) further confirms the strength and significance of this relationship. Therefore, H₀₃ is accepted, as the findings show that self-esteem significantly predicts life satisfaction. However, the negative direction of the relationship is unusual, as self-esteem typically has a positive link with life satisfaction. This result may suggest possible issues such as context-specific factors influencing the outcome.

4.5 Summary Testing

Hypothesis	Tests	Result	Outcome
There is a significant effect of self-esteem as a moderator in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.	Multiple Regression	$\beta = -0.023$, $p = .703$	Rejected
Social media usage is a significant predictor of life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.	Simple Linear Regression	$p = .000$, $\beta = -0.755$	Accepted
Self-esteem is a significant predictor of life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak.	Simple Linear Regression	$p = .000$, $\beta = -0.814$	Accepted

Table 9: Summary of Results

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the study on the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among 103 undergraduate students from public universities in Sarawak, namely UNIMAS, UiTM Cawangan Sarawak, and UPM Bintulu Sarawak. The sample was predominantly female, with most participants aged between 22 and 24 years. The results showed that both social media usage and self-esteem were significant predictors of life satisfaction. However, contrary to the initial hypothesis, self-esteem did not significantly moderate the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. Notably, a negative relationship was found between self-esteem and life satisfaction, which may reflect varying perceptions or experiences of these constructs among the respondents. These

findings highlight the complexity of these variables within this specific context. Overall, these findings provide important insights and form the basis for further discussion in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the findings obtained from the study, focusing on the moderating role of self-esteem between the relationship of social media usage and life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. It begins by summarising the main results and addressing each research hypothesis. The findings are then interpreted and compared with previous studies and relevant literature to understand their theoretical and practical significance. This chapter also outlines the implications of the results, particularly in the context of counselling practice. Following that, the limitations of the study are discussed, and several recommendations are proposed to improve future research. Finally, the chapter highlights possible directions for further studies and concludes the overall discussion.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine whether self-esteem plays a moderating role in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction among undergraduate students from public universities in Sarawak. A total of three hypotheses were tested. The results showed that self-esteem did not significantly moderate the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 1. On the other hand, Hypothesis 2, which examined social media usage as a predictor of life satisfaction was supported. Hypothesis 3 was also accepted which showed that self-esteem significantly predicted life satisfaction. Notably, while social media usage showed a negative relationship with life satisfaction, self-esteem also showed a significant negative relationship, which differs from most previous findings. These results are further discussed in the following sections with reference to existing literature and possible explanations.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

5.2.1 Discussion on Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis aimed to examine whether self-esteem moderates the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. However, the multiple regression analysis, as presented in Table 6, showed that the interaction term between social media usage and self-esteem was not statistically significant. This indicates that self-esteem did not influence the strength or direction of the relationship, and thus, did not serve as a moderator. One possible explanation for this finding is the limited variability in self-esteem scores among the participants. Aguinis et al. (2005) noted that moderation effects are more difficult to detect when the distribution of scores is narrow, which may have impacted the results of this study. As shown in the descriptive analysis in Table 5, most participants reported moderate levels of self-esteem, with a mean score of 22.64. This clustering of scores around the mean indicates low variability, which reduces the statistical power needed to detect interaction effects. As a result, even if self-esteem does moderate the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction, the effect may not have been observable within this sample due to the limited range of self-esteem levels.

This finding also aligns with findings from a study by Scapim (2022), which similarly found no moderating effect of self-esteem. However, it is important to note that Scapim's study measured social media use solely based on time spent online. In contrast, the present study used a more comprehensive approach by applying the Problematic Social Network Usage Questionnaire, which evaluates emotional and behavioral concerns, such as feelings of inferiority, fear of judgment, social comparison, and compulsive usage. Despite this deeper assessment, the moderating role of self-esteem was still not supported. This suggests that even when focusing on problematic patterns of use rather than just time spent online, self-esteem may still not significantly change how social media usage relates to life satisfaction.

Another possible explanation for the lack of a moderating effect of self-esteem in this study is the natural instability of self-esteem during young adulthood, which includes individuals aged 18 to 25, which is the age range of most respondents. According to Reitz (2022), self-esteem in this stage of life is still developing and can fluctuate due to ongoing life changes, or in other words, their self-esteem is unstable. Research by Reitz et al. (2020) also shows that self-esteem may decrease during their years at university as students adjust to new environments, form new

relationships, and face academic and social challenges. These experiences can cause shifts in how individuals view themselves, making self-esteem less stable and less able to act as a consistent buffer in difficult situations. Because of this, self-esteem may not be strong or consistent enough to change the impact that social media usage has on life satisfaction. This helps explain why Hypothesis 1 was not supported in this study in which self-esteem did not significantly moderate the relationship. In other words, whether a student had higher or lower self-esteem, it did not make a noticeable difference in how social media usage affected their overall life satisfaction.

5.2.2 Discussion on Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis aimed to examine whether social media usage significantly predicts life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. Based on the results of the regression analysis, social media usage was found to be a significant negative predictor of life satisfaction ($\beta = -0.755$, $p < .001$). This finding indicates that the more students engaged in problematic social media use, the lower their reported life satisfaction levels. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is accepted, indicating that social media usage significantly predicts life satisfaction among university students. Specifically, the findings show a negative relationship, suggesting that higher levels of problematic social media use are associated with lower life satisfaction. This result is consistent with previous studies that have reported similar outcomes which has been stated in the literature review. For instance, Kabasakal (2015) found that excessive social media engagement negatively affected students' psychological well-being. Similarly, Weiser (2001) and Meier and Johnson (2022) highlighted how problematic patterns of use particularly social comparison and feelings of envy can lead to reduced overall life satisfaction. These consistent findings support the notion that, while social media can offer certain benefits, its excessive or problematic use may harm users' well-being, particularly among young adults navigating the demands of university life.

Although this study found that higher social media usage predicts lower life satisfaction, not all research agrees with this result. Some researchers, like Schemer et al. (2020), found that social media use can actually support life satisfaction by helping people build and maintain social relationships. For example, users may feel more connected to others when they can message friends instantly, share updates, or receive encouragement and support online. These social interactions can give people a sense of belonging and emotional support, which are important for

overall happiness and life satisfaction. This shows that in certain situations, social media might have a positive effect, especially when it is used to strengthen personal connections rather than compare oneself to others.

In contrast, other studies using long-term data have found mixed results. A research by Boer et al. (2021) noticed that when comparing different individuals, those who spend more time on social media tend to report lower life satisfaction than those who use it less. However, when looking at the same person over time, their life satisfaction does not necessarily change depending on how much they use social media at different points. This means that while there may be a general pattern showing that high usage is linked to lower satisfaction between different people, this pattern might not apply to every individual's personal experience. In other words, just because people who use social media more tend to be less satisfied, it does not mean that using it more will cause a person's own happiness to go down. These findings highlight the complexity of the relationship between social media use and life satisfaction. They suggest that the effect of social media may not be the same for everyone, and it may depend on individual factors such as how social media is used and what kind of experiences users have online. This helps explain why some studies find negative effects, while others find positive or no effects at all.

In this study, the Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire was used to assess how social media is used in harmful or addictive ways such as feeling anxious without access, comparing oneself negatively to others, or using it excessively despite consequences. This gives a deeper look at how social media affects well-being, beyond just how many hours a person spends online. In contrast, Scapim (2022) only measured screen time or the number of hours spent on social media. While this can show general usage levels, it does not reflect how or why someone uses it. For example, two people might spend the same amount of time online, but only one of them feels lonely or anxious because of what they see or how they interact on social platforms. This study's approach is therefore more meaningful because it looks at the quality and emotional impact of usage and not just the quantity.

5.2.3 Discussion on Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis proposed that self-esteem is a significant predictor of life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. Based on the results of the simple linear regression analysis, this hypothesis was accepted. The analysis showed a statistically significant result with a p-value of .000, indicating that self-esteem does predict life satisfaction. This result is in line with that presented by Diener and Diener (1995), who identified self-esteem as one of the strongest internal predictors of life satisfaction. Self-esteem reflects how individuals evaluate their own worth and abilities, which strongly influences how they perceive their overall quality of life. When individuals have higher self-esteem, they are more likely to view life events positively, cope better with stress, and maintain a more optimistic outlook, all of which contribute to higher life satisfaction. This strong predictive relationship suggests that self-esteem is not just associated with, but also plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's sense of well-being.

However, the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction in the present study was found to be negative, as indicated by the standardized Beta coefficient ($\beta = -.814$). This suggests that participants with higher self-esteem reported lower levels of life satisfaction, which is contrary to most previous research. For instance, studies by Moksnes et al. (2022) and Kaushik and Nc (2021) consistently reported a positive correlation between self-esteem and life satisfaction among adolescents and university students. Their findings suggest that individuals with higher self-esteem are generally more content with their lives, as self-esteem is considered a key contributor to emotional well-being, confidence, and psychological resilience. The current study's results therefore stand in contrast, raising questions about possible contextual, cultural, or developmental factors that may influence how self-esteem functions among this specific population. Despite the unexpected direction of the relationship, the result remains statistically significant, highlighting that self-esteem still plays a substantial role in predicting life satisfaction, though in a different pattern than previously documented.

A possible explanation for the unexpected negative relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction observed in this study may lie in the cultural context of Malaysia, particularly in Sarawak, where the majority of respondents were based. Malaysia is considered a collectivist society, where an individual's sense of self is often shaped by the expectations and values of the surrounding group such as family, community, or peers (Othman, 2019). In such contexts, self-

esteem may be heavily influenced by how well individuals meet social roles and obligations, rather than being grounded in personal achievement or internal validation (Albarracin et al., 2024). For university students of Sarawak, high self-esteem may be linked to perceived success in meeting these external standards. However, this can also result in increased pressure and emotional strain, particularly if they feel they are falling short of expectations related to academic performance or social behaviour (Gupta et al., 2024). As a result, individuals with higher self-esteem may simultaneously experience lower life satisfaction due to the burden of maintaining that image and the fear of failure. This contrasts with findings from studies conducted in more individualistic cultures, where self-esteem is more strongly associated with personal fulfilment and tends to predict higher life satisfaction. Thus, the sociocultural environment in Sarawak as well as unrealistic expectation to meet others' expectation may help explain why self-esteem, despite being a significant predictor, was negatively related to life satisfaction in this study.

The unexpected negative relationship found between self-esteem and life satisfaction in this study may be explained through cultural and gender-related perspectives. Similar findings were reported by Zawadzka et al. (2016), where self-esteem was not strongly linked with life satisfaction among Indian women, despite being from a collectivist culture. Their study highlighted that, unlike in Western societies, self-esteem for women in collectivist settings may come more from meeting external expectations rather than personal achievement. This external pressure may increase stress and reduce life satisfaction, even if individuals report high self-esteem. Additionally, the study pointed out that collective self-esteem did not significantly affect life satisfaction for Indian participants, especially women, suggesting that cultural and social roles may influence how self-esteem functions. This finding is also supported by Li and Hamamura (2010) which reported that in collectivist cultures, self-esteem is often linked to how well a person fits into their cultural and social environment. When individuals follow cultural norms such as being respectful, responsible, and putting others before themselves, they are more likely to feel accepted and valued by their community. This sense of acceptance can lead to greater life satisfaction. On the other hand, if someone has difficulty meeting these cultural expectations, their self-esteem may decrease even if they are successful in other areas of life. This suggests that in collectivist societies, life satisfaction is strongly influenced by how well a person's behaviour and values match the expectations of their culture. In the current study, the majority of participants were also female, which may have contributed to the unexpected negative relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction. This

supports the idea that in a collectivist context like Sarawak, high self-esteem may reflect pressure to meet social norms, especially for women, leading to lower life satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of considering cultural and gender differences when examining the role of self-esteem in well-being.

This surprising result suggests that the relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction is not always straightforward. It highlights that self-esteem may function differently across cultural or developmental contexts. In this case, self-esteem might not consistently lead to greater well-being, especially when influenced by external pressures or expectations. However, the result remains statistically significant, which indicates that self-esteem still plays a substantial role in predicting life satisfaction. Despite the unexpected negative direction, this significance shows that self-esteem is still an important psychological factor that influences how individuals evaluate their overall satisfaction with life, even if the effect may differ based on context.

5.3 Research Implications

This study highlights how problematic social media usage negatively affects life satisfaction among university students. In today's digital age, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter are integral to how young people interact, express themselves, and form their identities. However, when students excessively use social media or engage with it in emotionally harmful ways such as constantly comparing their lives to others or relying on likes and comments for self-worth, it can reduce their overall well-being. These findings suggest an urgent need for social education and digital literacy programs. For instance, secondary schools and universities can include modules on healthy social media habits and emotional resilience online. Counselling units in universities can run workshops or campaigns that help students recognize the signs of problematic usage and encourage reflection on how social media makes them feel. Posters, infographics, and peer-led sharing sessions could be used to increase awareness of digital boundaries and the importance of taking breaks from screens.

This research also fills a critical gap in local psychological data, as most previous studies have been conducted in Western contexts or urban areas of Peninsular Malaysia. By focusing on students from public universities in Sarawak such as UNIMAS, UiTM Sarawak, and UPM Bintulu, this study captures the lived experiences of a population that may face different cultural, social,

and infrastructural influences. For example, students from rural areas or indigenous communities may rely more on social media for connection, especially when living away from home, which may heighten emotional dependence on these platforms. Therefore, counselling services in East Malaysia should consider local cultural values, such as collectivism and community expectations, when designing mental health outreach or support groups. Interventions might include community-based peer support programs, online psychoeducational materials in local languages, or group counselling sessions that focus on identity, belonging, and digital self-image.

This study offers a new perspective on how self-esteem works differently depending on culture and gender, especially among university students in East Malaysia. The finding that higher self-esteem was linked to lower life satisfaction mainly in a group with more female respondents challenges the common belief that high self-esteem always leads to better well-being. In collectivist cultures, especially for young women, self-esteem may depend more on meeting family and social expectations rather than on personal confidence. This kind of self-esteem can be unstable and easily affected by pressure or failure. The study suggests that counselling support should go beyond simply trying to raise self-esteem. For some students, especially women, focusing only on self-esteem may not improve mental health if it is based on external approval. Instead, it may be more helpful to promote self-kindness, reduce pressure to meet expectations, and help students find a balance between cultural roles and personal identity. This is important in Sarawak, where students come from different cultural and rural backgrounds that may shape their view of self-worth and life satisfaction in unique ways.

In general, this study's findings demonstrate the complex and context-dependent nature of self-esteem and social media effects on life satisfaction. It shows that predictors of mental health cannot be viewed in isolation. For example, while many studies assume that higher self-esteem always leads to better outcomes, this study found a negative relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction, possibly due to external pressure or cultural expectations. This signals to researchers and practitioners that mental health outcomes are shaped by multiple interrelated factors such as age, social context, and cultural background. Practically, this implies that interventions must be individualized and culturally informed, rather than one-size-fits-all.

5.4 Implications to Educators and Academic Advisors

The findings of this study suggest that educators and academic advisors play an important role in supporting students' well-being beyond the classroom. Since problematic social media use and fluctuating self-esteem were found to impact life satisfaction, educators should be aware that students' academic struggles may also be linked to emotional or psychological stressors. Academic advisors can incorporate brief check-ins about students' digital habits or emotional health during advisory sessions. Lecturers and tutors may also integrate reflective activities in coursework, such as journal writing or guided discussions, to help students better understand how online experiences affect their self-worth and motivation. Additionally, training workshops for academic staff on student mental health literacy especially in relation to social media, self-esteem, and stress can enhance their ability to identify students in need of support early and refer them to the appropriate services. By fostering a more holistic and empathetic academic environment, educators and advisors can contribute significantly to improving students' life satisfaction and academic performance.

5.5 Implications to Counsellors

The findings of this study provide important insights for the counselling and psychology field, particularly in culturally diverse settings like Malaysia. The negative relationship between self-esteem and life satisfaction challenges the common belief that high self-esteem always leads to better mental health. In collectivist cultures, self-esteem may depend more on meeting family or social expectations, which can lead to added stress. This highlights the need for counsellors to consider cultural values when working with clients and to adopt culturally sensitive approaches. For counselling students and educators, the study encourages a deeper understanding of how self-esteem works in different contexts. Educators can integrate these findings into training to help future counsellors explore how cultural and social pressures influence self-worth and emotional well-being. The study also points to the need for greater focus on social media's psychological effects. Counselling students should be equipped to recognise signs of problematic use such as social comparison, low self-worth, or emotional dependence in their future clients. This can be taught through practical activities like case discussions or role-plays. Practising counsellors can apply these findings by running psychoeducation programs or workshops on healthy social media

habits, self-awareness, and emotional regulation. Such efforts can improve student mental health and help build resilience among university populations.

5.7 Limitations of Findings

One major limitation of this study is its cross-sectional design. This means that data was collected at only one point in time. As a result, it is not possible to determine cause-and-effect relationships between social media usage, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. For example, while the findings show that higher social media usage is related to lower life satisfaction, we cannot confirm whether social media use causes lower life satisfaction or if students who are less satisfied with life tend to use social media more.

Another limitation is the use of self-report questionnaires. Participants were asked to evaluate themselves on sensitive topics such as self-esteem and life satisfaction. This may lead to social desirability bias, where individuals give answers that they think are more acceptable or positive rather than what they truly feel. There is also a risk of inaccurate reporting, especially if participants misunderstood the questions or responded quickly without careful thought.

The sample size and location of the study also limit the generalisability of the results. This study only involved 103 students from three public universities in Sarawak. While this provides insight into the experiences of students in East Malaysia, the findings may not reflect the views and experiences of students in other states or private institutions across the country.

In addition, there was limited variability in self-esteem scores, with most participants reporting moderate levels of self-esteem. This makes it harder to observe the full impact of self-esteem, especially its role as a moderator in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. A wider range of scores might have given a better understanding of how self-esteem influences these variables.

Lastly, cultural and contextual factors may also influence the results. The study was conducted in Sarawak, where social and cultural norms may be different from other parts of Malaysia or other countries. For example, students may place more importance on family or community expectations, which could affect how they experience self-esteem and life satisfaction. Because of this, the findings might not apply to students from more urban or individualistic backgrounds.

5.8 Future Research Direction

Firstly, future studies are encouraged to use a larger and more diverse sample size to improve the generalisability of the results. This can include students from private universities, different age groups, or even working adults to compare how social media usage and self-esteem relate to life satisfaction across various populations.

Secondly, researchers should consider using a longitudinal research design to better understand how the relationship between social media usage, self-esteem, and life satisfaction changes over time. This would help clarify whether problematic social media use leads to lower life satisfaction or if individuals with lower life satisfaction are more likely to use social media problematically.

Thirdly, it is recommended to explore other moderating variables that may better explain the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. Since self-esteem did not act as a significant moderator in this study, future research could test other possible moderators such as social comparison tendency, emotional regulation, resilience, or perceived social support. These factors might help explain why some individuals are more affected by social media usage than others.

In addition, while this study used the Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire to measure unhealthy patterns of social media use, future researchers could use or develop more specific tools to measure different types of problematic behaviours on social media. For example, researchers might examine specific behaviours such as doomscrolling, fear of missing out (FOMO), or passive social media consumption (e.g., scrolling without interacting), to see which aspects of usage have the strongest impact on well-being.

Finally, future studies could also include qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to explore the personal experiences of university students regarding social media, self-esteem, and their satisfaction with life. This could provide a deeper understanding of the context and meaning behind the statistical patterns found. By addressing these recommendations, future research can continue to build a clearer picture of how social media affects young people's mental well-being and how counsellors, educators, and policymakers can better support them.

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the discussion of findings based on the data analysis from the previous chapter. It included the interpretation or discussion of results for all research hypotheses, comparison with past studies, and explanations for unexpected outcomes. The chapter also highlighted the implications of the findings for society, the counselling field, educators, and future research, followed by a discussion on the study's limitations and suggested directions for future studies. Overall, the study successfully achieved its objectives by examining the role of self-esteem and social media usage in predicting life satisfaction among public university undergraduates in Sarawak. While some hypotheses were supported, one was rejected, showing that the relationship between these variables can be complex and influenced by cultural and developmental factors.

In conclusion, this study provides useful insight into the moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between social media usage and life satisfaction. Although the moderating effect was not found to be significant, the findings highlight the importance of understanding how social media and self-esteem can shape students' well-being. The results contribute to local research and offer practical knowledge that can be used to support student mental health, especially in a digital age where social media plays a central role in daily life.

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APPENDIXES

SECTION A: Demographic Information

Gender		Male
		Female

Age		19 - 21
		22 – 24
		25 - 27
		28 - 30

Ethnicity		Malay
		Chinese
		Indian
		Bumiputera Sarawak
		Bumiputera Sabah

University		Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)
		Universiti Teknologi Mara (UITM) Cawangan Sarawak
		Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Bintulu Sarawak

Year of Study		Year 1
		Year 2
		Year 3
		Year 4
		Year 5

SECTION B: Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLS)

Instructions: Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

1. ____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. ____ The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. ____ I am satisfied with my life.
4. ____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. ____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Scoring:

Though scoring should be kept continuous (sum up scores on each item), here are some cut-offs to be used as benchmarks.

- ☐ 31 - 35 Extremely satisfied
- ☐ 26 - 30 Satisfied
- ☐ 21 - 25 Slightly satisfied
- ☐ 20 Neutral
- ☐ 15 - 19 Slightly dissatisfied
- ☐ 10 - 14 Dissatisfied
- ☐ 5 - 9 Extremely dissatisfied

SECTION C: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Please record the appropriate answer for each item, depending on whether you Strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with it.

1 = Strongly agree

2 = Agree

3 = Disagree

4 = Strongly disagree

_____ 1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

_____ 2. At times I think I am no good at all.

_____ 3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

_____ 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

_____ 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

_____ 6. I certainly feel useless at times.

_____ 7. I feel that I'm a person of worth.

_____ 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

_____ 9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.

_____ 10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

SECTION D: Problematic Social Network Use Questionnaire

Please record the appropriate answer for each item.

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

1. When I see content from influencers or celebrities, I feel inferior
2. When I see content from my friends or people I know, I feel inferior
3. When I'm not on social networks, I feel an impulse to go online that is hard to resist
4. When I publish my content, I worry that it will be made fun of
5. When I see what celebrities or influencers publish, I feel bad about myself
6. When I see what my contacts publish, I feel that they have a better life than me
7. I spend too much time using social networks
8. I don't get enough sleep because of using social networks
9. I have tried to spend less time on social networks, but I have not been successful
10. Most of my friends and people I know on social networks are happier than I am
11. I compare myself with other people who I think are better than me on social networks
12. I worry that my posts will not have enough positive interactions
13. I worry a lot about what people might think of my content
14. I feel lonely when I see what my contacts post on social networks
15. My academic or work performance has declined because of using social networks
16. People close to me have complained because I use social networks too much
17. I feel that if I am not connected to social networks, I am missing out on something
18. Using social networks, I lose track of time and ignore important tasks I have outstanding