

# The Mediating Role of Social Comparison in the Relationship Between Parental Social Media Use and Parenting Stress

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## Abstract:

This study examined the mediating effect of social comparison tendencies on the relationship between social media usage and parenting stress. Data were collected through an online questionnaire from 302 parents (59.27% mothers, 40.73% fathers).; average age 31-40 years old) to measure their intensity of social media use, social comparison tendencies and parenting stress levels. Reliability and validity analysis indicated that all scales had good reliability and validity (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.85$ ), and excellent structural validity (KMO=0.918). Relevant analysis shows that social media usage, social comparison tendency and parenting stress are significantly positively correlated in pairs ( $r=0.440-0.484$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). The mediating role of social comparison tendency was supported by bootstrap analysis, showing a significant indirect pathway (effect = 0.161, 95% CI [0.103, 0.225]) from social media use to parenting stress. This indirect effect accounted for 36.9% of the total effect, suggesting that social comparison is a substantial mechanism through which social media use amplifies parenting stress. Finally, this study discussed the theoretical significance and practical implications, put forward suggestions for standardizing parents' use of social media, and proposed further suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** Social media usage; parenting pressure; social comparison tendency; mediating effect

## 1. Introduction

With the wide use of social media, more and more parents will use social media to obtain parenting information and make comparisons. This kind of comparative behavior may intensify parents' social com-

parison tendencies, thereby increasing their parenting pressure. Existing research indicates that the use of social media is associated with negative emotions such as stress and anxiety to some extent. However, there is insufficient research on the influence of social comparison on parents' parenting stress.

Based on theory and previous data evidence, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- (1) The use of social media is positively correlated with parenting pressure;
- (2) The use of social media is positively correlated with SC tendencies;
- (3) Social comparison tendency are positively correlated with parenting pressure;
- (4) Social comparison tends to play a mediating role between social media usage and parenting pressure;

This study aims to explore the relationships among three variables: social media usage, social comparison tendencies, and parenting pressure.

### 1.1 Social Media Use (SMU) and Parenting Stress

Parenting stress is conceptualized as a specific form of stress that parents experience when fulfilling their parenting roles due to the perception that parenting demands exceed their available resources [3]. Current research indicates that parents' investment in SM is an important prerequisite for their parenting pressure. Wen Changying's research indicates that from the perspective of media availability, the connectivity and search ability of SM expose parents to a vast and continuous stream of parenting information, which can easily lead to „information overload“ and „parenting burnout“, thereby directly triggering related parenting pressure [4]. Bartholomew's longitudinal study also confirmed this [5]. The „social search“ behavior of new parents on „Facebook“ was significantly associated with subsequent higher levels of parenting stress. These studies all indicate a direct link between SMU and parenting stress.

### 1.2 SMU and SC Tendency

Leon Festinger first proposed the theory of SC in 1954. He believed that SC is a method by which individuals, in order to reduce their sense of uncertainty, assess their own abilities and viewpoints by comparing themselves with others when there are no specific and objective evaluation criteria. The digital nature of SC also makes it a powerful engine for SC. Xu Aiyu's research on the SM platform Douyin found that the personalized recommendation mechanism of algorithms forms an „information cocoon“, causing parents to repeatedly be exposed to homogeneous and standardized parenting content, which creates favorable conditions for continuous SC [6]. Huang Xiaomin's research also further revealed that there is a large amount of beautified „showing off children“ content on SM, which is essentially a „media display“ driven by commercial logic, setting unrealistic benchmarks for „perfect parenting“

for parents and easily intensifying their tendency to make SC. [7]

### 1.3 SC Tendency and Parenting Stress

Under the concept of SC, individuals tend to compare themselves with others, and this process of comparison is an important source of negative emotions and a sense of stress. In the field of parenting, when parents come into contact with other parenting styles and upbringing behaviors through SM, they will unconsciously activate the SC mechanism. This comparison mechanism makes it easy for parents to perceive the gap between their real self and the ideal standard, and then they will doubt themselves. Such emotions are the core components of parenting pressure. Niu Gengfeng demonstrated in his research on the relationship between social networking site usage and happiness that SC is a key mechanism in the relationship between media usage and individual psychological states [8]. Chae's research also further focused on the parent group, clarifying that SC is a mediating variable for the increased stress of parents caused by the use of SM [9]. These studies all collectively point out that SC tendency, as a psychological trait, varies in response to the same stress in the same SM environment: that is, parents with a higher SC tendency are more likely to make comparisons when browsing SM, thereby generating a higher level of parenting stress.

To sum up, although the existing literature has respectively explored the relationships between SMU and parenting stress, SMU and SC, and SC and parenting stress, no research has integrated these three aspects, especially lacking the core mediating variable of SC tendency to empirically test its mechanism of role in the process of SMU influencing parenting stress.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1 Research Subjects

This study collected 302 valid questionnaires. The sample demographics were as follows: 59.27% of parents were mothers and 40.73% were fathers; gender distribution shows 54.31% males and 45.69% females; age distribution is predominantly 31-35 years old (30.80%); child age distribution shows 61.59% aged 0-6 years; educational background shows 44.37% parents have bachelor's degrees.

### 2.2 Research Tools

This study uses the questionnaire method to measure three variables:

SMU: a total of 6 items, Cronbach’s  $\alpha=0.893$ ;  
 SC tendency: a total of 8 items, Cronbach’s  $\alpha=0.876$ ;  
 Parenting stress: a total of 8 items, Cronbach’s  $\alpha=0.895$   
 The overall reliability of the questionnaire was Cronbach’s  $\alpha=0.915$ , indicating good validity (KMO=0.918, Bartlett test  $p < 0.001$ ). The chi-square value of the Bartlett test was 3188.792 (Sig.=0.000 <0.01), indicating excellent validity of the questionnaire as a whole.

**2.3 Variable Description**

In this study, SMU serves as the independent variable (X), representing social media use. The intermediate variable (M) is social comparison tendency (SC tendency), which

acts as a mediator in the model. The dependent variable (Y) is parenting stress, reflecting the outcome influenced by both SMU and SC tendency.

**2.4 Data Analysis Methods**

Use SPSS for frequency analysis, reliability and validity test, correlation analysis, linear regression analysis, Bootstrap mediation test, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation model (SEM)

**3. Research Findings**

**3.1 Frequency Analysis**

**Table 1. Frequency Analysis (n=302)**

Name	Option	Frequency	Percentage %
Your relationship with your child	father	123	40.728
	mother	179	59.272
	gather	302	100
sex	man	164	54.305
	woman	138	45.695
	gather	302	100
Your age	25 years and under	35	11.589
	26-30 years	49	16.225
	31-35 years	93	30.795
	36-40 years	84	27.815
	41 years and older	41	13.576
	gather	302	100
Age of child	0-3 years	94	31.126
	4-6 years (kindergarten)	92	30.464
	7-12 years (primary school)	65	21.523
	13-18 years (secondary school)	40	13.245
	18+	11	3.642
	gather	302	100
Your educational background	High school and below	34	11.258
	unior college	80	26.49
	undergraduate course	134	44.371
	Master’s degree or above	54	17.881
	gather	302	100

A total of 302 questionnaires were collected in this study, and all the questionnaires were strictly screened, and the final effective sample size was 302 (n=302). The demographic characteristics of this sample are as follows:  
 Relationship with children: 123 fathers (40.73%) and 179

mothers (59.27%).  
 Result: The sample was dominated by mothers, which is consistent with the phenomenon that mothers are more involved in their children’s education.  
 Age distribution: 93 people aged 31-35 (30.80%), 84 peo-

ple aged 36-40 (27.81%).

**Conclusion: The sample is mainly composed of parents born in the 1980s and 1990s, who are the main force of SM and parenting.**

Education: 134 people have bachelor's degree (44.37%), 54 people have master's degree or above (17.88%).

**Conclusion: The relatively high educational background of the sample may be due to the fact that the high educated group is more inclined to participate in online academic surveys.**

Children's age: 94 people (31.13%) aged 0-3 years, 92 people (30.46%) aged 4-6 years (See Table 1).

**Conclusion: The sample focused on preschool children's parents, which is**

**one of the periods when parents' anxiety is strongest.**

### 3.2 Credibility and Validity Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted for the key variables. For SM usage, the overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.893. The CITC values for all measurement items were greater than 0.4, and the  $\alpha$  value after deleting any item was lower than the overall coefficient. For SC tendency, the scale exhibited a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.867. Similarly, all items had CITC values above 0.4, and the deletion of any item would not lead to an increase in the overall  $\alpha$  coefficient. These results jointly attest to the robust reliability and high internal consistency of the measurement scales employed in the study.

Reliability analysis for the educational pressure scale yielded a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.895. The validity of all measurement items was supported by two key findings: firstly, all CITC values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.4; secondly, the  $\alpha$  coefficient would not increase upon the deletion of any individual item. These results collectively confirm the high internal consistency and satisfactory reliability of the scale (See Table 2).

**Table 2. Reliability Statistics**

Dimension name	Cronbach Alpha	number of terms
SMU	0.893	6
Social and economic preferences	0.867	8
Educational pressure	0.895	6

**Table 3. Overall Reliability Analysis**

Cronbach Alpha	sample capacity	number of terms
0.915	302	20

The overall questionnaire demonstrated excellent reliability, as indicated by a standardized Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of 0.915 (See Table 3).

**Table 4. Analysis of Validity**

KMO and Bartlett test		
KMO sampling appropriateness measure		0.918
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approximate chi-square	3188.792
	Degrees of freedom	190.000
	conspicuousness	<0.001

The validity of the questionnaire was assessed using the KMO measure and Bartlett's test. The results, showing a KMO value of 0.918 and a significant Bartlett's test ( $\chi^2 = 3188.792, p < 0.001$ ), affirmed the excellent suitability of

the data for factor analysis (See Table 4).

### 3.3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

**Table 5. Description of statistical results (n=302)**

variable name	least value	crest value	mean	standard deviations	skewness	kurtosis
SMU	1.333	5.000	3.341	0.932	-0.144	-0.973
SC preference	1.500	4.875	3.446	0.816	0.015	-1.179
Educational stress	1.333	5.000	3.374	0.926	-0.094	-1.075

The skewness was approximately equal to 0, indicating that the distribution shape is symmetric and close to normal distribution.

that the distribution pattern is similar to the normal distribution in steepness. The absolute value is less than 3 is usually acceptable (See Table 5).

The peak degree is approximately equal to 0, indicating

**Table 6. Pearson Correlation Analysis**

	average value	standard deviations		SMU	Social and economic preferences	Educational stress
SMU	3.341	0.932	Pearson correlation	1		
			Sig. (double-tailed)			
Social and economic preferences	3.446	0.816	Pearson correlation	0.454***	1	
			Sig. (double-tailed)	<0.001		
Educational pressure	3.374	0.926	Pearson correlation	0.440***	0.484***	1
			Sig. (double-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001	
*** The correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (double tail).						

The mean value of the three variables ranged from 3.34 to 3.45, and the standard deviation ranged from 0.82 to 0.93, showing a close normal distribution. Pearson correlation analysis showed that:

Social interaction tended to show a significant positive correlation with parenting stress ( $r=0.484, P < 0.001$ )

There was a significant positive correlation between SMU and SC tendency ( $r=0.454, P < 0.001$ );

All the coefficients ranged from 0.44 to 0.48, were positive, and the P values were all  $< 0.001$ , indicating that there was a significant moderate positive correlation between the three variables (See Table 6).

There was a significant positive correlation between SMU and parenting stress ( $r=0.440, P < 0.001$ )

### 3.4 Linear Regression Analysis

**Table 7. Linear Regression Analysis Results n=302**

	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardization factor	t	p	VIF	R square	Adjusting R squared	F
	B	standard error	Beta						
constant	2.120	0.156		13.585	0.000		0.206	0.203	F(1,302)=77.776,p=0.000
SMU	0.397	0.045	0.454	8.819	0.000	1.000			

A Dependent variable: SC tendency

tendency ( $\beta = 0.397, t=8.819, P < 0.001$ ), explaining 20.3% of the variance (See Table 7).

D-W: 2.182

SMU has a significant positive predictive effect on SC

**Table 8. Linear regression analysis results. (n=302)**

	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardization factor	t	p	VIF	R square	Adjusting R squared	F
	B	standard error	Beta						
constant	1.913	0.178		10.719	0.000		0.194	0.191	F(1,302)=72.165,p=0.000
SMU	0.437	0.051	0.440	8.495	0.000	1.000			

a Dependent variable: parenting stress

D-W: 2.273

SMU has a significant positive predictive effect on parent-

ing stress ( $\beta = 0.437$ ,  $t=8.495$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), explaining 19.1% of the variance (See Table 8).

**Table 9. Linear regression analysis results (n=302)**

	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardization factor	t	p	VIF	R square	Adjusting R squared	F
	B	standard error	Beta						
constant	1.479	0.203		7.284	0.000		0.235	0.232	F(1,302)=92.003, p=0.000
Social and economic preferences	0.550	0.057	0.484	9.592	0.000	1.000			

a Dependent variable: parenting stress

D-W: 2.115

SC tendency shows a significant positive predictive effect

on parenting stress ( $\beta = 0.550$ ,  $t=9.592$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), explaining 23.2% of the variation (See Table 9). Results of regression analysis are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10. Regression Model Analysis**

types of models	regression equation	adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F checkout	conclusion
X→M	Y=2.120+0.397X	0.203	F(1,302)=77.776,p<0.001	notable
X→Y	Y=1.913+0.437X	0.191	F(1,302)=72.165,P<0.001	notable
X→M→Y	Y=1.479+0.550X	0.232	F(2,302)=62.841,p<0.001	notable

### 3.5 Mediation Analysis

**Table 11. Mediation Analysis n=302**

	Category [X=>Y]: parenting stress				Two types [X=>of] regression social comparison tendency				Three types of [X=>M=>stress]			
	B	standard error	t	p	B	standard error	t	p	B	standard error	t	p
constant	1.913	0.178	10.719	0.000	2.120	0.156	13.585	0.000	1.050	0.212	4.947	<0.001
SMU	0.437	0.051	8.495	0.000	0.397	0.045	8.819	0.000	0.276	0.054	5.100	<0.001
Social and economic preferences									0.407	0.062	6.583	<0.001
R2	0.194				0.206				0.296			

Adjust R2	0.191	0.203	0.291
F	F (1,302)=72.165,p<0.001	F (1,302)=77.776,p<0.001	F (2,302)=62.841,p<0.001
DW	2.273	2.182	2.146

**Table 12. Summary of Test Results of Mediator Effect (p <0.05 \*\* p <0.01 \*\*\* p <0.001)**

Item	Path	$\beta$	Bootstrap 95% CI	P
Total Effect(C)	X→Y	0.437	--	p<0.001
Direct Effect(c')	X→Y(with M controlled)	0.276	--	p<0.001
Indirect Effect(a*b)	X→M→Y	0.161	[0.103,0.225]	Significant

Note: C represents the total effect, a\*b is the product of a and b, i.e., the mediating effect (indirect effect), and c' represents the direct effect.

Based on the coefficients of the three regression models (X→Y, X→M, M→Y), the Bootstrap method (2000 times sampling) was used for verification, and the results showed that:

Total effect (C): The coefficient from model 1 (X→Y) is 0.437.

Direct effect (c'): The coefficient value of X in model 3 (X+M→Y) is 0.276, which is significant.

Indirect effect (a\*b): a (from model 2X→M with coefficient 0.397) \* b (from model 3M→Y with coefficient 0.407) (See Table 11).

Bootstrap 95% CI: The a\*b value calculated by 2000 sam-

pling is ranked to determine the 2.5th and 97.5th percentile, and the CI [0.103,0.225] is obtained, which does not include 0, indicating that the mediating effect is significant (See Table 12 ).

Effect proportion:(a\*b)/c=0.161/0.437≈0.369, that is, the mediating effect accounts for 36.9% of the total effect, indicating that both direct effect (C') and indirect effect (a\*b) are significant and consistent in symbol, so SC tendency plays a partial mediating role between SMU and parenting pressure (See Table 12).

## 4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

### 4.1 Measurement model fitting results

**Table 15. Measurement Model Fitting Results**

$\chi^2/df$	2.612 (3)
RMSEA	0.073 (0.08)
CFI	0.913 (0.9)
TLI	0.901 (0.9)
GFI	0.841
AGFI	0.800

The model fitting index basically meets the standard and the model is acceptable (See Table 15).

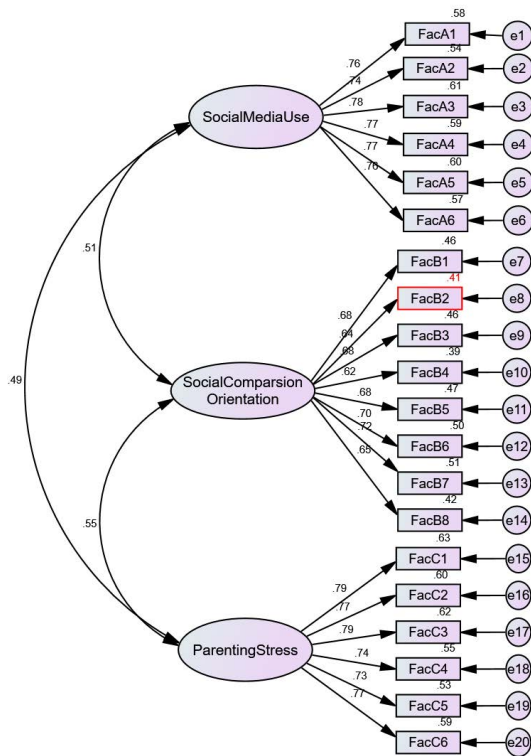
**Table 16. Summary of CFA Analysis**

Factor	number of terms
SMU	6
Social and economic preferences	8
Educational pressure	6
gather	20
Analyzing sample size	302

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the proposed model comprising 3 factors and 20 items. The

analysis utilized an effective sample of 302 respondents, which satisfies the recommended sample size requirement

of being at least 10 times the number of observed variables (See Table 16).



**Fig 1. Structural model of social media use, social comparison orientation, and parenting stress**

The measurement model exhibited robust item-factor relationships, as evidenced by standardized factor loadings all greater than 0.6 and statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  (See Figure 1).

#### 4.2 Aggregation Validity and Differentiation Validity

**Table 17. Results of Model AVE and CR Indicators for Discriminant Validity: Correlation with AVE Root Value**

Factor	AVE	CR	1	2	3
SMU	0.581	0.893	0.763		
Social and economic preferences	0.451	0.868	0.513	0.671	
Educational stress	0.587	0.895	0.494	0.548	0.766

In terms of SM usage, the square root of AVE is 0.763, which is greater than the maximum absolute value of the inter-factor correlation coefficient of 0.513, indicating that it has good discriminative validity (See Table 17).

According to the social tendency, the square root of AVE is 0.671, which is greater than the maximum absolute value of the inter-factor correlation coefficient of 0.548, indicating that it has good discriminative validity.

In terms of parenting stress, the square root value of AVE was 0.766, which was greater than the maximum absolute

value of inter-factor correlation coefficient of 0.548, indicating that it had good discriminative validity.

All values were greater than the corresponding correlation coefficient, and the discrimination validity is good.

Combined reliability (CR): The CR value is greater than 0.86,

SC tendency AVE is slightly lower than 0.5, and the aggregation validity is generally low, but it is still acceptable because the CR is very high and the load standard is met (See Table 18).

**Table 18. Model fitting index**

Common indicators	$\chi^2$	df	$\frac{\chi^2}{df}$	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	GFI	AGFI
criteria for judgment	-	-	<3	<0.08	<0.05	>0.9	>0.8	>0.9	>0.8	>0.8	>0.8
Value	436.196	167	2.612	0.073	0.069	0.913	0.867	0.913	0.901	0.841	0.8

## 5. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis

### 5.1 Path Coefficient Results

**Table 19. Path Coefficient Results**

way		Nonstandard path coefficient	S.E.	C.R.	P	Standard path coefficient	
Social and economic preferences	<--	SMU	0.469	0.065	7.170	0.000***	0.513
Educational pressure	<--	SMU	0.306	0.072	4.230	0.000***	0.289
Educational stress	<--	Social and economic preferences	0.462	0.085	5.453	0.000***	0.400

\*p<0.05 \*\*p<0.01 \*\*\*p<0.001

According to the fitting index of the table, the model fitting index basically meets the standard, so the path analysis and hypothesis test between variables can be carried out.

The standardized path coefficient of SMU on SC tendency is 0.513 (C.R.=7.170,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), indicating that SMU has a significant positive influence on SC tendency.

The standardized path coefficient of SMU on parenting stress was 0.289 (C.R.=4.230,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), indicating that

SMU has a significant positive influence on parenting stress.

The standardized path coefficient of SC tendency on upbringing pressure was 0.400 (C.R.=5.453,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), indicating that SC tendency has a significant positive influence on upbringing pressure, indicating that frequent comparison will make parents have a stronger sense of anxiety and burden (See Table 19 & Figure 2).

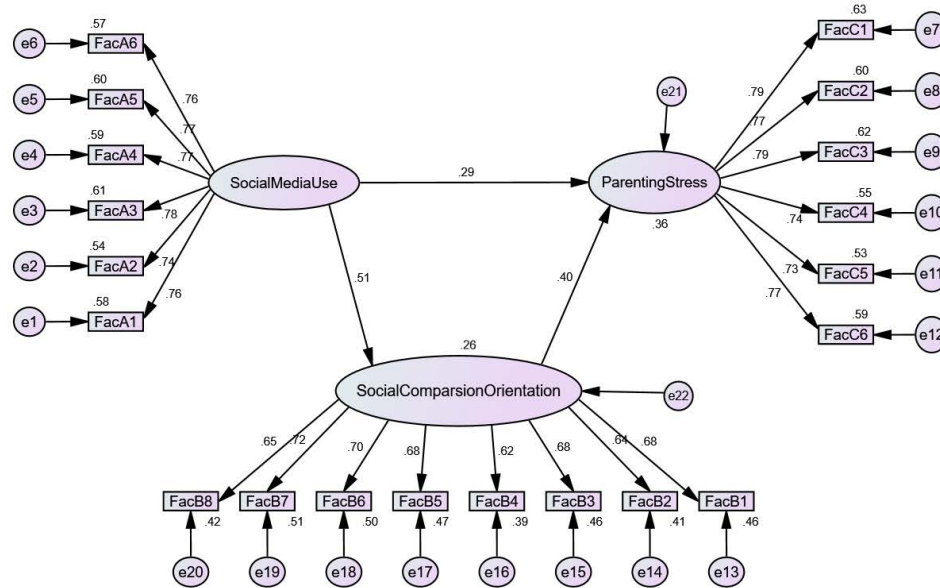


Fig. 2 Structural Equation Model

5.2 Indirect Effect Test

Table 20. Model Fitting Index

Common indicators	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	NFI	IFI	TLI	GFI	AGFI
riterion for judgment	-	-	<3	<0.08	<0.05	>0.9	>0.8	>0.9	>0.8	>0.8	>0.8
price	436.196	167	2.612	0.073	0.069	0.913	0.867	0.913	0.901	0.841	0.8

Model fitting index: compare the difference between the theoretical model and the actual situation.  
 $\chi^2/df$ : <3 good, <5 acceptable. 2.612 good  
 RMSEA: <0.05 Excellent, <0.08 Good. 0.073 Good  
 CFI, TLI, IFI:0.9 good. CFI=0.913, TLI=0.901, good.  
 GFI, AGFI:0.8 is acceptable. The values are 0.841 and 0.8 respectively, which are within the acceptable range (See

Table 20).  
 SEM path coefficient: with the same significance as the standardized coefficient (Beta) in regression analysis, it represents the interaction effect between variables. All paths are significant, which verifies hypotheses H3, H4, H5 and H6.

Table 21. Effectiveness check

Parameter	Estimate	Lower	Upper	Standard Estimate	Standard Lower	Standard Upper	hypothesis
Educational pressure <-SC tendency <-SMU (indirect effect)	0.217	0.136	0.331	0.205	0.131	0.301	Part of the mediation
Educational stress-social media use (direct effect)	0.306	0.165	0.45	0.289	0.155	0.418	found

Note: Lower indicates the lower limit of the 95% CI, Upper indicates the upper limit of the 95% CI, and CI excluding 0 indicates that the effect is significant.

According to the above test results:

The standardized indirect effect coefficient of parenting stress  $\leftarrow$  SC tendency  $\leftarrow$  SMU was 0.205, and the CI of standardized indirect effect did not include 0, and the CI of standardized direct effect did not include 0, indicating that SC tendency partially mediates the relationship between SMU and parenting stress (See Table 21).

## 6. Results of Hypothesis Testing

This study postulated a series of hypotheses grounded in theoretical analysis, which were subsequently tested through empirical methods. The findings corroborated all proposed relationships. Specifically, significant positive correlations were identified among SM usage, SC tendency, and parenting stress. Further path analysis confirmed that SMU exerts a significant positive impact on both SC tendency and parenting stress, while SC tendency itself positively predicts parenting stress. Critically, the mediation analysis substantiated that SC tendency serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between SM usage and parenting stress. In conclusion, the empirical evidence fully supports all hypotheses, thereby validating the proposed theoretical model.

## 7. Conclusion

Through mediation effect testing and structural equation modeling analysis of data collected from 302 valid questionnaires, SMU not only directly increases parenting stress but also indirectly exacerbates stress perception by heightening SC tendencies. As SM becomes deeply embedded in daily life, its potential impact on educational information and parenting stress has emerged as a critical area of concern. This study not only provides an innovative theoretical perspective for understanding parental stress but also transforms the abstract concept of „comparison feelings“ into quantifiable variable relationships, offering precise targets for subsequent interventions.

The findings should draw attention from multiple stakeholders, starting with parents. They should recognize that their parenting stress partly stems from passive, unconscious SC behaviors. This study suggests that parents should cultivate healthy „digital literacy,“ consciously self-regulating their SMU to reduce related comparisons. Secondly, SM platform designers and policymakers are also key. The research calls for greater social responsibility from these platforms, such as optimizing content recommendation mechanisms to minimize the spread of anxiety-inducing comparative content. Additionally, platforms should explore creating dedicated spaces for „anti-comparison“ or „authentic parenting“ content to foster a more

supportive and healthy online parenting environment.

This study also has the following limitations. Firstly, although the sample size is adequate, the questionnaires were primarily distributed through online channels, constituting convenience sampling. The sample may predominantly represent parents who are more interested in parenting topics, have higher education levels, or are active in specific online communities, failing to fully capture the broader Chinese parent population. This could potentially limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could employ more randomized or geographically diverse sampling methods to validate the stability of the conclusions across different subgroups.

Second, a cross-sectional research design was employed, which involves collecting data on all variables within a short period. While this design effectively reveals correlations among variables, it struggles to establish definitive causal relationships. Future studies could adopt longitudinal tracking designs or experience sampling methods, measuring variables multiple times at various different time points to more robustly examine the causal direction and dynamic changes between variables.

Thirdly, the composite reliability (CR) of the social comparison tendency (SCT) construct is very high, and all item factor loadings meet the standards, indicating good internal consistency. Its average variance extracted (AVE) is slightly below the recommended value of 0.5. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), a high CR value can partially compensate for a slightly lower AVE. Nevertheless, this result still suggests room for further improvement in the convergent validity of the construct. Therefore, future research could consider revising or adding measurement items to optimize the measurement tool for this construct.

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