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ENVY, SOCIAL COMPARISON, AND IMPOSTOR SYNDROME AMONG LINKEDIN USERS IN INDIA

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Abstract: LinkedIn changes the way young adults project career identities which may invoke social comparison, envy and impostor syndrome. The paper explored the relationship between social comparison, benign and malicious envy, and impostor syndrome on 104 Indian users (20–25) with variations in gender and time spent on the platform. The quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design was adopted where the data were analysed using Pearson correlation and t-tests in the purposive sampling. Findings indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between social comparison and both types of envy, as well as the impostor syndrome. Notably, time spent on LinkedIn did not have any significant association, and gender differences were only observed to be significant in malicious envy. Finally, the analysis indicates that psychological experiences on professional sites are based on evaluative reactions and not the frequency of use, which provides a clue about the emotional influence of online visibility on young Indians.
Keywords: LinkedIn; social comparison; benign envy; malicious envy; impostor syndrome

INTRODUCTION:

In the last twenty years, social media has now firmly integrated into daily life as a platform that started as a simple place of networking, but nowadays it has become an intricate platform where personal, academic and professional successes are consistently showcased and contrasted (Valkenburg et al., 2022; Statista, 2023). India, featuring a sizable youth demographics and growing digital base, has become one of the most dynamic online markets and users now utilizing social platforms as not only a source of digital connectivity but also professional presence and progress (Kemp, 2023). LinkedIn, out of these, has created a special purpose of social networking site that is distinctly professional, which is bridging the gap between higher education and the workforce and providing young adults with a platform to create, demonstrate and sustain personal career identity. Nevertheless, the very affordances that make visibility and opportunity achievable, networking, endorsements, and social capital may give rise to increased conditions of comparison, peer evaluation and psychological strain (Verduyn et al., 2020).

In addition to networking and recruitment, professional social media sites have become platforms of more and more impression management and symbolic self-presentation. The curated profile, endorsements, and achievement announcements are also actively promoted to make users create consistent stories of competence, growth, and ambition. These practices can make professional development less of a process and more of a performance that is judged publicly. Such focus on visibility and perceived competence may, in turn, increase self-monitoring tendencies especially in young adults who are in the process of forming career identities. With the emergence of professional milestones as discernible and comparable, a person might start to locate their personal advancement, not in absolute terms, but in comparative terms against digitally mediated criteria of achievement.

The design of LinkedIn teaches members to publicly show the successes of their careers: internships, job opportunities, promotions, or publications, which promotes success in the workplace but also sets the situation of constant comparison. Although social media has traditionally been linked to emotional effects, including envy, low self-esteem, and anxiety (Appel et al., 2016; Kross et al., 2020), majority of them are a result of lifestyle-focused platforms such as Instagram or Facebook. Little is known about how these psychological mechanisms can manifest themselves in career-oriented contexts, particularly in collectivist cultures such as India, where education and professional accomplishments are not just an individual achievement, but also a status symbol of the family and social position (Panda & Das, 2025). Therefore, the interaction of social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome on LinkedIn is socially significant but underexplored.

According to Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) people compare themselves with others in terms of abilities and achievements. On social networking platforms, such comparison often takes an upward form against people perceived as more successful or capable which can have dual outcomes. Research results indicate upward comparisons may encourage personal growth in case success seems achievable (Latif et al., 2020) and unattainable comparisons may trigger frustration and low self-worth (Appel et al., 2016). The online spaces amplify them by exposing itself algorithmically to filtered success, which results in ongoing self-assessment (Ellison et al., 2011; Rawat et al., 2023).

One of the major emotions that emanates out of such comparison is envy. There are two types of envy differentiated by the Dual Envy Framework (Van de Ven et al., 2009; Crusius & Lange, 2014). Benign envy contributes to self-improvement while malicious envy leads to resentment or withdrawal respectively. Research indicates that benign envy has a positive effect on performance motivation (Miaei, 2024), and malicious envy is associated with negative effects and burnout (Wu et al., 2018; Wallace et al., 2017). Both types of envy may co-exist on LinkedIn, where success is visible and satisfaction can be measured by likes, endorsements, or comments, benign envy motivates professional activity and malicious envy destroys satisfaction (Merckx, 2024; Risdarmawan, 2023).

Impostor syndrome is also a related construct, which is the internalized fear of being discovered as a fraud despite the signs of success (Clance and Imes, 1978). The Sociocognitive Model (Marder et al., 2023) focuses on the idea that the feeling of an impostor is supported in society by the visibility, comparison, and the perceived external judgment. This may be more acutely felt by people in collectivist societies such as India because their achievement comes with social pressures that increase the sense of self-doubt. There is an emerging body of evidence indicating that impostor feelings in the online setting are tightly connected with the fear of negative evaluation. Professional networking sites, in which users expect recruiters, peers, and prospective employers to judge them, have the potential to heighten impostor behaviors. Young adults at the beginning of their career path, where professional identities are yet to be formed, might find such exposure as a cause of enduring self-doubt despite objective competence. These results highlight the significance of studying impostor syndrome in professional social media environments, especially among groups of individuals that experience transitional career stages. Studies have shown that social comparison and envy are factors, which predict impostorism, especially among high-achiever young adults (Ramm, 2019; Johnson, 2022). Marderer et al. (2023) discovered that professional self-consciousness in LinkedIn enhances impostor thoughts, which indicates that self-criticism may escalate when exposed to the achievements of peers continuously.

These interrelationships are empirically supported: social comparison is positively correlated with both benign and malicious envy (Wu et al., 2018), and both types of envy, in turn, are positively correlated with impostor syndrome (Miaei, 2024; Chowdhary, 2025). Additionally, despite the fact that the LinkedIn usage facilitates the formation of professional identity, the research also provides the connection between frequent use and anxiety, stress, and feelings of inadequacy (Jones et al., 2016; Merckx, 2024). Although these patterns have been observed, very few studies have explored them in India, where young people are exposed to intense professional competition and where a successful academic performance is commonly associated with social status (Rawat et al., 2023). This way, the present research will aim at incorporating these constructs into the Indian cultural and digital-professional setting.

OBJECTIVES

To explore the association between social comparison and envy (benign and malicious) and impostor syndrome among LinkedIn users.

1. To explore gender-based differences in the experience of social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome among LinkedIn users.
2. To determine the association between LinkedIn usage, measured in terms of time spent on the platform, and the levels of social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome.

HYPOTHESES

H1a: Duration of LinkedIn usage has no meaningful statistical relationship with levels of social comparison.
H1b: Duration of LinkedIn usage has no meaningful statistical relationship with levels of benign envy.
H1c: Duration of LinkedIn usage has no meaningful statistical relationship with levels of malicious envy.
H1d: Duration of LinkedIn usage has no meaningful statistical relationship with levels of impostor syndrome.
H2a: Social comparison has no meaningful statistical relationship with benign envy.
H2b: Social comparison has no meaningful statistical relationship with malicious envy.
H2c: Social comparison has no meaningful statistical relationship with impostor syndrome.
H2d: Benign envy has no meaningful statistical relationship with impostor syndrome.
H2e: Malicious envy has no meaningful statistical relationship with impostor syndrome.
H3a: No notable gender based variations were expected in social comparison.
H3b: No notable gender based variations were expected in impostor syndrome.
H3c: No notable gender based variations were expected in envy (both benign and malicious).

The current study fills the existing knowledge gap in the conceptual and cultural insights on how LinkedIn activity influences psychological well-being. It broadens western-centric literature and offers an idea regarding the emotional toll of digital professionalization by exploring the interaction among social comparison, both forms of envy, and impostor syndrome in Indian context. The paper emphasizes that when professional visibility is a valuable quality in terms of employability, it can also lead to self-doubt and stress related to comparison among young adults in India. These results also have practical implications for mental health

practitioners, educators and career counselors on ways to promote healthier digital interactions and career resilience.

METHODS

Research Design

The current paper utilized a cross-sectional, correlational research design based on self-report questionnaires with quantitative analysis. This design was selected to check the relationship between social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome among LinkedIn users and to check for the gender differences in these experiences. Its cross-sectional aspect allowed for the data collection to be done at a single phase, and correlational design allowed the analysis of relationships between the variables of interest. The design was appropriate to check how LinkedIn usage relates to psychological constructs such as social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome within a professional networking site.

Sampling

The study population was the active LinkedIn users aged 20–25 years, and represented university students, recent graduates, and young professionals who actively engage in using the platform both academically and professionally. The final sample size was 104 participants, which was adequate to use correlational statistics and group comparisons. Participants were recruited through LinkedIn and WhatsApp networks via the purposive sampling method. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were strictly followed. Participants were required to be Indian nationals between 20 to 25 years old with an active LinkedIn profile. Individuals who failed to fulfill these requirements, were inactive, or had diagnosed psychological and medical conditions were eliminated. Gender representation was made equal to check gender differences in experiences.

Tools

Three standardized scales were used:

1. **Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999):** This scale measures individuals' tendency to compare themselves with others in terms of abilities and opinions. It is a 11-item questionnaire, which is assessed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree). Two items, i.e. 5 and 1 are reverse coded. Higher scores reflect greater social comparison orientation. The scale has high internal consistency (Cronbach .78–.85) and a high validity across international samples (Schneider & Schupp, 2011).

Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (BeMaS; Lange & Crusius, 2015):

The BeMaS differentiates between two types of envy, benign envy (that is characterized by admiration and self-improvement drive) and malicious envy (that is characterized by hostility and resentment). It has 10 items (five of them per subscale), with a 6-point Likert ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher average scores denote increased strength of each of the envy type. The reliability coefficients reported are .79–.90 in benign envy and .83–.91in malicious envy (Kwiatkowska et al., 2020), which were proved in factor analyses and predictive correlations with achievement motivation and antagonism.

2. **Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985):** This 20-item scale measures the impostor feelings such as self-doubt, fear of failure and discounting success. Each item is evaluated using a 5-point scale ranging from 1(not at all true) to 5 (very true). The overall score ranges between 20 to 100 where higher scores indicated more impostor qualities. A score of 41- 60 indicates that there is high frequency of impostor feelings, whereas a higher score of 61 and above is an indication of severe impostor syndrome. The CIPS has demonstrated good internal consistency (α = .85–.92) and strong construct validity (Chrisman et al., 1995).

A brief demographic section was also included to collect data on age, gender, occupation, and weekly time spent on LinkedIn.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using an online form circulated via LinkedIn and WhatsApp. The form included an informed consent statement, demographic questions, and the three standardized scales. Participants were briefed on the study's aim, confidentiality procedures and assured that the participation was entirely voluntary. The mean time to complete the questionnaire was 12–15 minutes. Responses that were either incomplete or ineligible responses were discarded, resulting in a final sample of 104 respondents. Online data collection was done in accordance with ethical guidelines; process ensured voluntary, anonymous, and unpaid participation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics software (Version 29.0). Raw scores were coded numerically following the standard scoring procedures of each instrument. Demographic variables and psychological measures were measured through descriptive analyses including means, standard deviations and

frequency distributions. Pearson's correlation was applied to assess the associations among LinkedIn usage, social comparison, both types of envy and impostor syndrome. Independent-sample-t-tests were conducted to evaluate gender-based variations across variables. All parametric assumptions were tested and met before analysis. Significance was also established at $p < .05$ and effect size (Cohen's d, r) was also reported where applicable which shows the strengths of associations between variables and group differences.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The present study determines the association between LinkedIn usage, social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome, and the gender differences across these psychological constructs. Data analysis was done using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29. To summarize demographics, LinkedIn usage and psychological variables, the descriptive and distribution statistics were computed, and the Pearson correlations and independent sample t-tests evaluated the relationships and gender variations, respectively.

Distribution Statistics

TABLE – 1 Frequency and Percentage Distributions for LinkedIn Usage, Age, and Gender

Distribution Statistics		
Variables	N	%
LinkedIn Usage		
Less than 10 minutes	38	36.5
10-30 minutes	29	27.9
30-60 minutes	17	16.3
60-120 minutes	11	10.6
120-180 minutes	5	4.8
180 + minutes	4	3.8
Total	104	100.0

(Table 1 continues)

(Table 1 continues)

Variables	N	%
Age		
21	13	12.5
22	32	30.8
23	23	22.1
24	13	12.5
25	15	14.4
Total	104	100.0
Gender		
Male	52	50.0
Female	52	50.0
Total	104	100.0

Table 1 indicates frequency, percentage, and cumulative percentage for LinkedIn Usage, Age, and Gender. Mentioned below is the interpretation of the table.

LinkedIn Usage

Frequency analysis revealed that most participants (36.5%) spent less than 10 minutes per day on LinkedIn, and only 3.8% spent over 180 minutes per day. These findings suggest that overall usage was low among respondents.

Age

Frequency analysis showed that most participants were 22 years old (30.8%), then 23 years old (22.1%), followed by 25 years old (14.4%), 21 years old (12.5%), and 24 years old (12.5%), with the smallest group being 20 years old (7.7%). The sample was composed of relatively even distribution of ages.

Gender

Out of the 104 participants, 52 (50%) were male and 52 (50%) were female making the sample balanced in terms of gender.

TABLE – 2 Descriptive Statistics for Demographics, LinkedIn Usage, and Psychological Variables

Descriptive Statistics									
Study Variables	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
LinkedIn Usage	104	1	6	2.31	1.38	1.00	0.23	0.28	0.46
Age	104	20	25	22.63	1.44	0.09	0.23	-0.71	0.46
Social Comparison	104	15	55	34.90	7.99	0.25	0.23	-0.09	0.46
Benign envy	104	5	30	18.41	5.45	-0.27	0.23	-0.33	0.46
Malicious envy	104	5	26	11.38	5.59	0.69	0.23	-0.41	0.46
Impostor Syndrome	104	20	100	65.58	15.01	-0.11	0.23	0.88	0.46

Table 2 indicates Mean, Std. Deviation, Skewness, Std. Error of Skewness, Kurtosis, and Std. Error of Kurtosis for the Study Variables. Mentioned below is the interpretation of the table.

LinkedIn Usage

LinkedIn usage-time was measured using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = <10 minutes, 6 = >180 minutes). The mean score was 2.31 (*SD* = 1.39, range = 1-6), meaning that most participants used LinkedIn for 10-60 minutes per day. The distribution was positively skewed (skew = 1.01, SE = 0.24), and had fairly normal kurtosis (0.28, SE = 0.47).

Age

Participants were of ages between 20 and 25 years (*M* = 22.63, *SD* = 1.44; N = 104). The age distribution was fairly normal, having skewness = 0.09 (SE = 0.24) and kurtosis = - 0.72 (SE = 0.47).

Social Comparison

The descriptive analysis of social comparison (INCOM) showed that scores ranged from 15 to 55 (*M* = 34.90, *SD* = 7.99). This indicates that the respondents reported moderate to high levels of comparison. The distribution was approximately normal as shown by skewness = 0.25 (SE =.24) and kurtosis = -0.10 (SE = 0.47). Overall, these findings show that the variables satisfy the requirement of normality and are suitable for further parametric tests.

Benign Envy

Benign envy scores ranged between 1 and 6 (*M* = 3.68, *SD* = 1.09). The distribution was approximately normal. It showed a slightly negative skewness (-0.27, SE = 0.24) and mildly negative kurtosis (-0.34, SE = 0.47). Overall, the level of benign envy was moderate among the respondents and indicated enough variation and acceptable distribution to conduct a parametric test.

Malicious Envy

Scores of malicious envies were found between 1 and 5.2 (*M* = 2.28, *SD* = 1.12). This implies comparatively low levels of malicious envy. It showed a slightly negative skewness (-0.70, SE = 0.24) and mildly negative kurtosis (-0.42, SE = .047). These findings indicate that malicious envy existed, but it was lower than benign envy and also the distribution was adequate to carry out additional analyses.

Impostor Syndrome

CIPS scores were between 20 and 100 (*M* = 65.58, *SD* = 15.01). This indicates frequent impostor feelings in the sample. The curve was approximately normal, with near-zero skewness (-0.12, SE = 0.24), and mild positive kurtosis (0.89, SE =.47). These findings indicate that the scores had enough distribution around the range making the data appropriate to run parametric analyses.

TABLE – 3

Independent samples t-test comparing males and females on LinkedIn Usage, Social Comparison, Benign Envy, Malicious Envy, and Impostor Syndrome

	Male		Female					
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Social Comparison	35.27	7.00	34.54	8.93	0.46	96.50	.643	0.09
LinkedIn Usage	2.44	1.39	2.17	1.38	0.99	102	.325	0.19
Benign Envy	3.76	1.03	3.60	1.16	0.74	102	.464	0.14
Malicious Envy	2.59	1.16	1.96	1.00	3.00**	99.79	.003	0.59
Impostor Syndrome	63.48	16.01	67.67	13.78	−1.43	99.79	.156	−0.28

Table 3 indicates gender variances across the psychological variables of interest. Mentioned below is the interpretation of the table.

LinkedIn Usage (Time Spent)
The assumption of equality of variance was met according to the Levene's test, $F(1,102) = 0.13$, $p = .721$. The t-test results showed no significant difference in LinkedIn usage for male ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.39$) and female ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 1.38$) participants, $t(102) = 0.99$, $p = .325$. The effect size of Cohen's $d = 0.19$ indicated a small effect with only trivial difference based on gender.

Social Comparison
The assumption of equal variances was violated according to the Levene's test, $F(1,102) = 3.996$, $p = .048$; thus, equal variances could not be assumed. The t-test results indicated that males ($M = 35.27$, $SD = 7.00$) and females ($M = 34.54$, $SD = 8.93$) did not differ in social comparison scores, $t(96.50) = 0.46$, $p = .643$. The effect size (Cohen $d = 0.09$) was negligible.

Benign Envy
Levene's test showed equal variances, $F(1,102) = 2.77$, $p = .099$. The t-test findings revealed that there is no significant difference in males ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.03$) and females ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(102) = 0.74$, $p = .464$. The effect size was small (Cohen's $d = 0.14$).

Malicious Envy
Levene's test showed equal variances, $F(1,102) = 3.54$, $p = .063$. The t-test findings revealed that males ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.16$) are the ones to endorse more malicious envy compared to females ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(99.79) = 3.00$, $p = .003$. The effect size was medium (Cohen's $d = 0.59$), and therefore statistically significant and practically important.

Impostor Syndrome
The assumption of equality of variance was met according to the Levene's test, $F(1,102) = 0.03$, $p = .857$. The t-test results did not indicate a significant difference between male ($M = 63.48$, $SD = 16.01$) and female ($M = 67.67$, $SD = 13.78$), $t(99.79) = -1.43$, $p = .156$. The Cohen's d effect size was small (Cohen's $d = -0.28$), and while females have a slightly higher value for impostor syndrome, it was statistically not significant.

TABLE – 4 Correlations among LinkedIn Usage, Social Comparison, Benign Envy, Malicious Envy, and Impostor Syndrome

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. LinkedIn Usage	—				
2. Social Comparison	.09	—			
3. Benign Envy	−.06	.41**	—		
4. Malicious Envy	.08	.22*	.30**	—	
5. Impostor Syndrome	.06	.41**	.38**	.26**	—

Note. Significance level *p<0.05. **p<0.01

The correlation matrix (Table 4) provides information about the associations among the variables of interest. Mentioned below is the interpretation of the matrix.

LinkedIn Usage

The findings indicated that there were no significant relationships between LinkedIn usage and social comparison ($r = .09$, $p = .348$), benign envy ($r = -.06$, $p = .532$), malicious envy ($r = .08$, $p = .419$), or impostor syndrome ($r = .06$, $p = .552$).

Social Comparison

Social comparison showed a significant positive relationship with benign envy ($r = .41$, $p < .001$), malicious envy ($r = .22$, $p = .027$), and impostor syndrome ($r = .41$, $p < .001$).

Benign Envy

Benign envy was significantly and positively correlated with social comparison ($r = .41$, $p < .001$), malicious envy ($r = .30$, $p = .003$), and impostor syndrome ($r = .38$, $p < .001$).

Malicious Envy

Malicious envy showed significant positive association with social comparison ($r = .22$, $p = .027$), benign envy ($r = .30$, $p = .003$), and impostor syndrome ($r = .26$, $p = .008$).

Impostor syndrome

Impostor syndrome depicted significant positive correlation with social comparison ($r = .41$, $p < .001$), benign envy ($r = .38$, $p < .001$), and malicious envy ($r = .26$, $p = .008$).

Overall, there was no strong correlation between LinkedIn use and any psychological variable, indicating that LinkedIn time had no direct impact on comparison, envy, or impostor syndrome. Nevertheless, the social comparison, benign envy, malicious envy, and impostor syndrome, were all significantly inter-related with the correlation varying between weak-to-moderate.

DISCUSSION

The current study examined the associations between social comparison, benign and malicious envy, impostor syndrome, and LinkedIn usage. It also focused on determining gender differences across these constructs. The findings of the present research provide valuable insights about the interaction of LinkedIn as a platform with these psychological constructs in young Indian adults.

Our findings did not reveal any significant associations between time spent on LinkedIn and any of the psychological variables of interest. This was consistent with the first set of our hypotheses, failing to reject which contrasts with the previous literature that proposed platform usage and psychological impact follow a dose-response relationship (Jones et al. 2016). However, it was also noted in the same research that the impact may depend more on how the users tend to engage with the LinkedIn design features like endorsements and visibility metrics aligning with other literature supporting the role of platform affordances over just usage time system of measurement (Wu et al., 2018; Muqaddimah & Setiyawan, 2022). The findings of the present study build upon this insight and suggest that raw usage time is not what drives these psychological outcomes in the Indian context.

Rejecting the second set of the hypotheses, the results of our study found significant associations among social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome. Social comparison was positively correlated with benign envy, malicious envy, and impostor syndrome. This aligns with the past studies which highlight how upward social comparison provokes benign and malicious envy both (Latif et al., 2020) and that professional comparisons on LinkedIn often translate into impostor feelings unless buffered by healthy offline social support (Fuji, 2021). It also supports results of Suryanto et al. (2023). They emphasised that upward social comparisons are strong predictors of envy. Lawesson (2025) also qualitatively associated social comparison with competitiveness, inadequacy and self-doubt. Our study findings affirm that LinkedIn fosters a space where social comparison is prominent and is associated with envy and impostor syndrome. Interestingly, correlations were moderate with benign envy and impostor syndrome and weak with malicious envy. This suggests that social comparisons on LinkedIn may often lead to more constructive than destructive forms of envy. It also coincides with the argument of Klein (2024) that LinkedIn is professional-focused, and which may at times promote more motivation-oriented results. The key implication of the findings is the difference between exposure and interpretation in the field of professional networking. Even though the time spent on LinkedIn did not correlate with the psychological outcome, the ample correlation between social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome indicates that psychological factors influencing the overall level of evaluation are imperative factors compared to the platform use itself. This is in line with the new concept of digital psychology that favors subjective meaning-making over quantitative usage indicators. People might vary significantly in their ways of perceiving the success of peers, internalizing professional norms and attributing personal success, which results in varying psychological experience despite a comparable level of platform exposure.

Both benign and malicious forms of envy were also found to be significantly associated and also positively correlated with impostor syndrome. This finding is consistent with the results of Wu et al. (2018) that distinguished between adaptive and maladaptive forms of envy. It is also similar to the study conducted by Miaei (2024), who noted that benign envy might actually facilitate positive results, but malicious envy might actually lead to unproductive behaviors. This also strengthens the relation that when individuals observe peers' achievements and get motivated for self-improvement, they may also simultaneously internalise the feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy. On the other hand, malicious envy, although weaker in strength, still contributes to impostor syndrome.

In relation to the third set of hypotheses, our data did not find any significant gender differences across LinkedIn usage, social comparison, benign envy, and impostor syndrome. Interestingly however, a notable exception was malicious envy. Males in the study reported higher levels of malicious envy than females. This is in line with previous studies that indicated that men tend to be more likely to be characterized by malicious envy and schadenfreude (Malika, 2025), and they also evidently exhibit social comparisons in more antagonistic way (Samra et al., 2022).

It is also essential to note the lack of gender differences in our study since earlier literature suggests that females are more vulnerable to impostor feelings due to structural hierarchies (Myers, 2021; Morris et al., 2022). It is possible that in the Indian context, males and females both experience similar pressures relating to self-presentation and thus they may experience similar impostor feelings.

Altogether, our findings extend impostor theory (Clance, 1985) and social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) into the digital-professional context. The cultural norms could be used to present these results in a more subtle manner in the Indian collectivist setting. While time spent on LinkedIn itself did not predict the psychological outcomes, the roles of comparison and envy did. This implies that it is possible that exposure is not the only factor, but also the ways in which people define success, peer achievement, and online interaction with others are critical. The fact that men showed a stronger tendency toward malicious envy may also reflect that social expectations with special emphasis on competitiveness and professional rivalry might still be deeply rooted in our society.

While the associations found in our study relating to social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome were strong, the cross-sectional design limits the causal inferences. Moreover, the use of self-report measures can give rise to possible bias such as social desirability and also misinterpret self-perception.

The present study still makes meaningful contributions to literature, in spite of these limitations, by extending previous findings on social media psychology into a professional networking context. What we found through our study is that it’s not simply the hours spent on LinkedIn but the way people make sense of social comparison, envy, and feelings of being an impostor, as well as the quality of engagement on the platform that may impact these outcomes. The gender differences in envy point to the value of thinking about these processes within a cultural frame, rather than in isolation. For future research, it may be more useful to follow longitudinal and mixed methods approach. Following participants over time to see how these patterns develop, and to combine quantitative data with qualitative accounts to get at the richer, everyday realities behind these psychological experiences in digital-professional spaces may aid in gaining better insights.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that time spent on LinkedIn did not have any significant relationship with social comparison, envy, or impostor syndrome, suggesting that LinkedIn usage-time may not be an adequate predictor of these psychological constructs. A positive association was found among social comparison, both malicious and benign envy and impostor tendencies. Malicious envy was found more in males, and no gender differences were noted in impostor feelings. These points towards evaluative and emotional processes possibly being more likely to influence psychological experiences on professional-networking platforms rather than just the raw exposure. Overall, the research applied social comparison and impostor theories to the digital-professional environment and provided culturally specific findings from young Indian adults. Nevertheless, the study had several limitations. The findings cannot be generalised to older or mid-career professionals who might have different LinkedIn and work-related demands due to the small sample size (N=104) which was confined to young Indian adults. Biases due to social desirability effect or inaccurate self-perception may have been introduced due to data collection through self-report questionnaires. Although the use of a cross-sectional design helps us compare different groups, it prevents drawing causal inferences about the directionality between social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome. The measurement of LinkedIn usage solely by time without accounting for the difference in quality of engagement with the professional sites potentially misses out on the smaller psychological effects. Future research should thus focus on improving external validity by including mid and late-career professionals from various cultural contexts. The directionality in relationships can be better explored by using longitudinal and quasi-experimental designs. Adopting nuanced measures of platform usage that help distinguish between the quality of engagement with the professional sites can be more beneficial. Gender differences in envy, social comparison, and impostor feelings can be better explored by using qualitative methods and open-ended interviews. The future work should

also explore interventions like digital-literacy training, mentoring, and psychological counselling to support the development of healthier professional identities on online platforms, since social comparison, envy, and impostor syndrome are all interrelated.

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APPENDIX A

The Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (INCOM; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999)

Instructions:

Most people compare themselves from time to time with others. For example, they may compare the way they feel, their opinions, their abilities, and/or their situation with those of other people. There is nothing particularly "good" or "bad" about this type of comparison, and some people do it more than others. We would like to find out how often you compare yourself with other people. To do that, please indicate how much you agree with each statement below.

Response categories:
A = Strongly disagree
B = Disagree
C = Neutral
D = Agree
E = Strongly agree

Items:
1. I often compare how my loved ones (boy or girlfriend, family members, etc.) are doing with how others are doing.
2. I always pay a lot of attention to how I do things compared with how others do things.
3. If I want to find out how well I have done something, I compare what I have done with how others have done.
4. I often compare how I am doing socially (e.g., social skills, popularity) with other people.
5. I am not the type of person who compares often with others. *(reverse coded)*
6. I often compare my accomplishments with those of others.
7. I often like to talk with others about mutual opinions and experiences.
8. I often try to find out what others think who face similar problems as I face.
9. I always like to know what others in a similar situation would do.
10. If I want to learn more about something, I try to find out what others think about it.
11. I never consider my situation in life in comparison with that of other people. *(reverse coded)*

Reverse-coded items: 5 and 11

APPENDIX B

Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale (CIPS; Clance, 1985)

Instructions:

For each statement below, please circle the number that best indicates how true the statement is of you. It is best to give the first response that enters your mind rather than thinking over each statement.

Response categories:
1 = Not at all true
2 = Rarely
3 = Sometimes
4 = Often
5 = Very true

Items:
1. I have often succeeded on a test or task even though I was afraid that I would not do well before I undertook the task.
2. I can give the impression that I'm more competent than I really am.
3. I avoid evaluations if possible and have a dread of others evaluating me.
4. When people praise me for something I've accomplished, I'm afraid I won't be able to live up to their expectations in the future.
5. I sometimes think I obtained my present position or success because I happened to be in the right place at the right time or knew the right people.

6. I'm afraid people important to me may find out that I'm not as capable as they think I am.
7. I tend to remember the incidents in which I have not done my best more than those times I have done my best.
8. I rarely do a project or task as well as I'd like to do it.
9. Sometimes I feel or believe that my success in my life or in my job has been the result of some kind of error.
10. It's hard for me to accept compliments or praise about my intelligence or accomplishments.
11. At times, I feel my success has been due to some kind of luck.
12. I'm disappointed at times in my present accomplishments and think I should have accomplished much more.
13. Sometimes I'm afraid others will discover how much knowledge or ability I really lack.
14. I'm often afraid that I may fail at a new assignment or undertaking even though I generally do well at what I attempt.
15. When I've succeeded at something and received recognition for my accomplishments, I have doubts that I can keep repeating that success.
16. If I receive a great deal of praise and recognition for something I've accomplished, I tend to discount the importance of what I've done.
17. I often compare my ability to those around me and think they may be more intelligent than I am.
18. I often worry about not succeeding with a project or examination, even though others around me have considerable confidence that I will do well.
19. If I'm going to receive a promotion or gain recognition of some kind, I hesitate to tell others until it is an accomplished fact.
20. I feel bad and discouraged if I'm not "the best" or at least "very special" in situations that involve achievement.

Reverse-coded items: None

APPENDIX C

Dispositional Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (BeMaS; Lange & Crusius, 2015)

Instructions:

Below you will find statements related to situations when you lack another person's superior quality, achievement, or possession and you either desire it or wish that the other lacks it. Please indicate for each statement how much you agree or disagree. There are no right or wrong answers.

Response categories:

1 = Strongly disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Somewhat disagree
4 = Somewhat agree
5 = Agree
6 = Strongly agree

Items:

1. When I envy others, I focus on how I can become equally successful in the future. *(benign)*
2. I wish that superior people lose their advantage. *(malicious)*
3. If I notice that another person is better than me, I try to improve myself. *(benign)*
4. Envying others motivates me to accomplish my goals. *(benign)*
5. If other people have something that I want for myself, I wish to take it away from them. *(malicious)*
6. I feel ill will towards people I envy. *(malicious)*
7. I strive to reach other people's superior achievements. *(benign)*
8. Envious feelings cause me to dislike the other person. *(malicious)*
9. If someone has superior qualities, achievements, or possessions, I try to attain them for myself. *(benign)*
10. Seeing other people's achievements makes me resent them. *(malicious)*

Reverse-coded items: None