

## **SOCIAL MEDIA-BASED SELF-CRITICISM AMONG BHUTANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THAILAND AND BHUTAN: A TRIANGULATION STUDY**

**Dr. Vincent Isilen Gattud, Sangay Om, Sonam Lhamo, Samdrup Pem,  
Gyan Bdr Ghalley, Sonam Dorji, Tandin Dorji**

College of Nursing, Christian University of Thailand  
E-mail: vincentgattud@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Self-criticism focuses on what traits others may have that is missing in oneself. Bhutan's cultural gender differences and gross national happiness measure uniquely define their population. This mixed-method study describes the social media-based self-criticism among Bhutanese university students and considered significant differences according to gender, and, country of study. A total of 352 students responded. Descriptive statistics, t-test, and thematic analysis were done. There is a moderate level of social media-based self-criticism among Bhutanese university students in Thailand and Bhutan. There are also significant differences in terms of gender and country of study. Written narratives were coded into positive and negative comparatives versus neutral comparative, which also served as a guide in formulating the interview questions for 6 key informants, recruited from the respondents. Digital freedom and self-enhancement surfaced as the themes of the study. The study concludes the Bhutanese university students are responsive to the increasing influence of social media. Gender and studying in a country with more access to social media determine their propensity towards social media-based self-criticism. Social media-based self-criticism after graduation, gender differences, and inclusion of more variables are recommended for further studies.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Self-criticism, Bhutanese University Students

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

People make all kinds of judgments about themselves through social comparison, or analyzing the self in relation to others (Cherry, 2019). Self criticism can be the process of focusing on what traits others may have that is missing in oneself. Despite its varied conceptualizations a number of studies see it as a negative personality trait and even an element in certain psychological disorders (Zuroff, et.al, 2016; Werner, et. al, 2019). Social media has increased opportunities for people to engage in body comparisons with peers and celebrities (Puglia, 2017). People tend post their best looks on their social media feeds (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). As a result, these social media posts have the possibility to negatively affect how the viewer sees oneself (Fardouly, 2016).

Social media posts can be filled with images projecting certain body types and looks. Self criticism can easily be triggered by certain images that an individual is particularly sensitive to or aspire to be. The aspirational images is now perceived as a determinant to emotional wellbeing and self worth (Vitelli, 2013; Martin, 2010). Young adults were observed to be more vulnerable when it comes to body criticism (Lipowska et al, 2019). Images and social media images were found to determine weight loss behaviors (Izydorczyk and Warchulska, 2018). Thai women were found to be dissatisfied with them because of what they think they should look like (Nantaraj, Mansuwan, 2017). It was not just women who have experience

body image related self criticism based on social media. More men now see themselves differently after seeing what they think their body mass should be (Aziz 2016). These studies clearly show that university age students are prone to self criticism.

The Bhutanese, who originated the concept of gross national happiness as a measure, is now dealing with easy information access and super connectivity that social media use offers. With the outward mobility of their students to countries with more liberal use of social media, how this generation integrate the expanding social media influence in their lives must be described. Thailand, one of the Bhutanese students country of destination ranked among the top 10 of the world's social media users (Nguansuk, 2018).

Gender differences in basic education Bhutan has been documented (Choden, 2012), though in terms of tertiary education there have been noted increases in certain fields of study (Sedenet al., 2016). These are why the study took into consideration the following variables to describe self criticisms among the Bhutanese university students with regards to their social media use. As the future of their country, there are substantial implications in how the evolving digital environment and porous borders eventually shapes how the said university students perceive themselves and their own standard happiness.

### **1.1 Aims of the Study**

The study determined the social media-based self-criticism among Bhutanese university students. Specifically, it described the:

1. The level of the social media-based self-criticism among Bhutanese university students in Thailand and Bhutan.
2. The significant differences social media-based self-criticism among Bhutanese university students in Thailand and Bhutan according to gender, and, country of study.
3. The social media-based self-criticism among Bhutanese university students.

### **1.2 Hypotheses**

The research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.01 level of significance

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference on social media body image self-criticism among Bhutanese university students according to gender and country of study.

Alternate Hypothesis: There is a significant difference on social media body image self-criticism among Bhutanese university students according to gender and country of study.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The sequential concurrent embedded research design utilizing qualitative data within quantitative was utilized to provide a better understanding of research (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

From the 322 Bhutanese university undergraduate students in Thailand enrolled in the 2019 academic year. A sample size of 176, determined through Yamane method was obtained through snowball technique. For purposes of comparison, the same number of Bhutanese university undergraduates in Bhutan participated in this study yielding a total sample of 352.

The researchers developed the Online-based Self Criticism Questionnaire, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.86. This was formulated based on questionnaires with the permission of the authors. The first part consists of the 14 item Likert-type scale questionnaire. The second part contains open ended questions designed to gather more data regarding the nature and the contents of self criticisms. The open ended questions were then categorized. This formed the basis for the questionnaire on the subsequent focus group

discussion of the key informants. The key informants were recruited from the group of respondents, which is crucial in validating the quantitative findings of the study.

### 3. RESULTS

The quantitative results on the levels of social-media based self criticism of the Bhutanese university students were initially presented followed by the uncovered themes obtained from the qualitative data of this study.

#### 3.1 Level of the social media-based self-criticism among Bhutanese university students.

The overall level of social media-based self-criticism among Bhutanese University students in Thailand and Bhutan has an interpretation of moderate self criticism (  $X = 2.85$ ,  $S.D=1.46$ ) as shown in table 1. The highest means are shown in item 14 (Feeling good when my photo receives many “likes” & “hearts”) with the mean and standard deviation of  $X=3.47$ ,  $S.D= 1.29$ , interpreted as having low self criticism. On the other hand, item 5 (When I follow/add a new person on social media, I compare my body to his/her body)  $X=2.45$ ,  $S.D=3.85$  had the lowest scores which is interpreted as high level of self criticism.

**Table 1: Level of the Social Media-based Self-criticism among Bhutanese University Students**

	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1. I feel dissatisfied about my body after seeing someone with thinner body or muscular body on social media.	2.99	1.25	Moderate
2. I feel pressure from social media to look thin/muscular.	2.72	1.29	
3. I feel pressure from the social media to change the way I look.	2.79	1.26	Moderate
4. When I post my pictures on social media, I am concerned about what other people think of my appearance.	3.00	1.24	Moderate
5. When I follow/add a new person on social media, I compare my body to his/her body	2.45	1.38	High
6. When I shop online, I compare my body with the models body.	2.63	1.40	Moderate
7. I compare how I look to others before posting a photo.	2.72	1.38	Moderate
8. Some of my posted photos make me feel I should exercise.	2.74	1.36	Moderate
9. I am afraid I look fatter in my photos than in real life.	2.55	1.25	Moderate
10. I worry how my clothes will make me look in my social posts.	2.95	1.29	Moderate
11. When friends post my photos, I check to see if I look fat.	2.81	1.44	Moderate
12. I edit my photos before posting.	2.98	1.33	Moderate
13. I check for negative or positive comments after posting my photo or tagged photos.	3.26	3.09	Moderate
14. I feel good when my photo receive many “likes”& “hearts”	3.47	1.29	Low
Mean total	2.85	1.46	Moderate

This research question was answered by computing the mean and the standard deviation of the sample.

### 3.2 Significant differences in the level of social media-based self-criticism among Bhutanese university students in Thailand and Bhutan according to gender and country of study

The study shows significant differences between females and males in the level of social media body image self-criticism among Bhutanese University students with regards to their gender and country of study at 0.01 level of significance. Bhutanese university students studying in Thailand respectively differ from their peers in Bhutan when it comes to the social media-based criticism of themselves. Further results show significant differences in the level of social media body image self-criticism between female and male Bhutanese University students living in Thailand. Thus, the study accepts the alternative hypotheses, there is a significant difference on social media body image self-criticism among Bhutanese university students according to gender and country of study as presented in Table 2 next page.

**Table 2: T-test Results of Social Media-based Self-criticisms among Bhutanese University Students**

University Students									
	$\bar{x}$	S.D	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence interval of Difference		T	Df	sig
Gender									
Male	2.68	1.13	.31	.115	.081	.53	2.672	333.749	.008*
Female	2.99	1.02							
Country									
Bhutan	2.42	.978							
Thailand	3.29	1.035	-.877	.107	-1.08	-.66	-8.166	348.910	.000*
Thailand									
Female	49.61	14.25	8.24	2.134	4.02	12.45	3.862	174	.000*
Male	41.37	13.51							
Bhutan									
Female	33.98	13.40							
Male	33.82	14.19	0.15	2.094	-3.98	4.28	0.73	174	.942

p-value < 0.01

### 3.3 The social media based self-criticisms of the Bhutanese university students

The narrative answers from the open ended questions sections were thematically analyzed before being presented in quantitative form representing the general nature of the social media based-self criticisms. The qualitative responses validate the quantitative significant differences. It can be observed that there is a far greater number of responses related to social media-based self criticisms of the Bhutanese university students in Thailand in comparing themselves and others, while less for those pursuing their education in Bhutan. Further analysis revealed that more female respondents provided negative perception of themselves and others. It has to be noted that the responses ranged from one word, phrases and some sentences as presented in table 3. Thus, the researchers gathered more qualitative data from key participants in a focus group discussion session.

**Table 3 Frequencies According to the Qualitative Themes in the study**

<i>Bhutanese University Students</i> (n=322)		Bhutan (n=176)		Thailand (n=176)	
Codes		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Comparison of self and others		81	46.02	140	79.5
None comparative		95	53.9	36	20.4
		Female (n=122)		Male (n=54)	
	Thailand (n=176)	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Positive outlook		23	13.06	14	7.95
None comparative		28	15.91	18	10.22
Negative perception to self & others		70	39.78	16	9.09
No response		1	00.56	6	3.4
		Bhutan (n=176)		Female (n=120)	
				Male (n=56)	
Positive outlook		50	28.41	22	12.5
None comparative		35	29.17	19	10.80
Negative perception to self & others		35	29.17	15	8.52

The focus group discussion yielded a richer data from the key participants studying in Thailand, providing further insights on the significant differences that were revealed. Their responses generated two themes: digital freedom and self-enhancement. The informants reveal that they feel they have more time to access the internet and use social media while they are living in Thailand. There is comparison of internet speed, availability of time. It emerged that they have more time in the country where they are studying than when they are in their home country. They are in agreement that they feel there are more family rules and responsibilities, which could lessen their time to access social media. The female informants reveal they access social media to follow influencers and celebrities while their male counterparts claim they do not follow social media trends as much. Males further saying that much of their online activity are spent in online games. Under the second theme of self enhancement, key participants reveal that there are certain posts that annoy them, some that inspire and motivate them to be better, and others that seem to aim at show them what they do not have.

#### 4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

While the study did not factor in the personality types of the Bhutanese university students studying in and out of their country, their moderate level of self criticism reinforces it as concept of a negative personality trait (Zuroff, et.al, 2016). The study did reveal how much they also appreciate “likes” or “shares” over their social media post, which can be seen as a minor element in the self criticism. It is simply explained by the desire to be recognized by peers (Chua & Chang, 2015), which is typical among their age group. Further, social media platforms like Facebook have also become information dissemination and resource in their study activities (Saw, Abbott, Donaghey, McDonald, 2012). There is clearly a mix of social media use for self promotion and studies, which the study did not further delineate.

The findings in the significant differences of the country where the Bhutanese university students are studying can be explained over the social media use of international students in maintaining and establishing connections (Hall & Sivakumaran, 2014). It is inevitable that as they use it, they are exposed to posts that can possibly generate any form of self criticism, as validated by the qualitative aspect of this study. The qualitative aspect of the study supports that these students may negatively look at themselves in response to online images

(Izydorczyk and Warchulska,2018) in their verbalizations of comparing themselves over certain looks and body image. In general, the comparisons in the form of self criticism can be coupled with feelings of appreciation or envy, sometimes both. International students do not feel at ease discussing their distress via social media (Seo, Harn, Ebrahim, Aldana, 2016). Thus, explaining the relatively low narratives in the questionnaire and validated in the focus group discussion.

The gender differences found in this study validates previous studies that young women feel more critical of themselves after going online (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2014). As revealed during the qualitative aspect of the study, females claim to follow more celebrities and influencers in contrast to the males who do not. Certain individuals have been shown to negatively respond in some online platform situations (Jackson & Luchner,2017). Self criticism naturally have the tendency to occur among the female Bhutanese university students studying in Thailand considering that they utilize social media differently than their male counterparts. More so that social goals mediate between self-construals and social interaction (Chang,2016). The difference in the social media-use and content being accessed by the students play a part in how they see themselves with other people, the environment, and most especially themselves.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Bhutanese university students are responsive to the increasing influence of social media. However, their level of social media-based self criticisms is relatively moderate. Studying in a country with more access to internet and social media use determine their propensity towards social media-based self criticisms. Gender differences in the Bhutanese university students' social media based-criticisms arise from their access and content of social media use. Female and male students may have equal access to social media but differ in the social media content they access more frequently.

The study recommends university systems to provide stronger support systems and student development programs for Bhutanese university students and other similar international students to ensure self awareness and well being. For future researches, a follow up study should be done regarding the social media use as well as self criticism after the Bhutanese university students living in Thailand go back to their country. Further, qualitative studies can also better help surface gender differences in social media use and self criticism among this group. Quantitative or mixed method approach should also consider incorporating personality types and self construal as variables in further studies.

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