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Social Media and Self-Perception: Investigating the Role of Online Validation on Adolescent Mental Health

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Abstract
This study examined the prevalence and patterns of validation-seeking behavior among a diverse sample, utilizing a standardized 1–5 Likert scale measure. Data from 312 participants revealed that most individuals scored within the moderate–high range (42.3%), followed by high (27.6%), moderate–low (21.2%), and low (9.0%) categories. The overall mean score was 3.9 (SD = 0.8), indicating a general tendency toward above-average reliance on external approval. Findings suggest that while moderate levels of validation-seeking may facilitate healthy social functioning, higher levels could be indicative of potential psychosocial vulnerabilities, such as low self-esteem or overdependence on external feedback. Comparisons with previous studies revealed consistency in the association between excessive validation-seeking and reduced well-being, particularly in contexts involving social media and peer feedback. The discussion highlights theoretical implications within self-determination and social comparison frameworks, emphasizing the dual adaptive–maladaptive nature of this construct. Recommendations focus on promoting self-reflection, fostering autonomy-supportive environments, and implementing social media literacy programs to mitigate risks associated with excessive validation dependence. Future research should adopt longitudinal and experimental designs to explore causal relationships and assess culturally specific patterns. Overall, the results underscore the need for targeted interventions and continued research to balance the benefits of validation in social engagement with the potential harms of overreliance on external affirmation.

Keywords: Autonomy, Feedback, Self-Compassion, Self-Determination, Social Comparison, Validation-Seeking

Introduction

The use of social media among adolescents has been almost universal, with nearly 95 percent of adolescents 1317 using it, and more than half using it almost constantly (U.S. Surgeon General Advisory, 2023). The prevalence of this involvement raised concern among the researchers; since mental health issues are likely to be associated with its engaging, especially in terms of the social comparison, need to be liked, cyberbullying, and poor sleeping habits (Dozens, 2019; Yale Medicine, 2024). Meanwhile, social media had also given the opportunity to explore identities,

form social support groups, and express creativity, of which marginalized youth were especially in need (U.S. Surgeon General Advisory, 2023).On a population level, the associative value of the correlation of mental health and social media usage had been determined as overall weak or inconsistent, with the subgroups of prevalence being more imminent overall (Umbrella review, 20192021). It is noteworthy that there was a moderate but statistically significant correlation between problematic social media use and depression (r 27), anxiety (r 35), and stress (r 31) in meta-analytic studies (2022 meta-analysis). It was a more sophisticated version of this depiction that recent large-scale surveys had already hinted: in the UK, youth with clinical-level levels of internalizing conditions had already reported more social media use and greater social comparison and they had been less satisfied with friends made online than their peers (2023 Registered Report). Additionally, data obtained by WHO (2022) had also revealed that the prevalence of such problematic use of social media among adolescents in Europe had risen to 11% in 2021, compared to 7% in 2018, and more girls than boys are affected (13% vs. 9%) .

Research Background

Teenagers were being dependent on social networking systems to receive enjoyment and approval through likes, posts, fans a kind of quantitative social confirmation, which study authors attributed to cause fluctuation in self-esteem (Voggenreiter et al., 2023). In the meantime, qualitative studies emphasized the way adolescents perceived such interactions, a combination of self-expression and self-validation and pressures to remain social, body image ideals, and being bullied online (Popat & Tarrant, 2023). Problematic use of social media was on the increase. According to the WHO findings (2022) based on the HBSC data, there was a significant increase in adolescents who could not control their social media activity and the damage of their mental health is expressed in more than 1 out of 10 teens (11%). Such patterns were reflected across the wider dynamic of mental health: as was demonstrated by Australian surveys (June 2025) when moderate usage (123 hours/day) of social media was linked with better mental health outcomes compared to no/infrequent but also extreme use (Mission Australia, 2025): high users not only reported more psychological distress but also higher rates than low-intensity (the majority) users among gender-diverse youth. In addition to patterns of use, details of the way feedback was accepted were relevant. A research study (2023) had revealed that a deficiency of positive commentaries such that there were insufficient or zero positive reactions (likes) would have generated negative emotional states and low self-esteem, and greater positive feedback, on the other hand, promoted social connectedness and minimal loneliness. In a similar manner, it has been found by research conducted by the UK-registered data that the adolescents had had internalizing mental health disorders, which occurred as they were more sensitive to peer measures and feedback received online (2023 Report).

Research Problem

Despite abundant research, key gaps persisted. Most findings had been cross-sectional or aggregated at the population level, limiting understanding of *within-person* fluctuations in self-perception tied to daily online feedback. It remained unclear whether changes in validation (likes/comments) predicted short-term shifts in self-esteem or mood, especially among vulnerable adolescents. Further, the growing recognition that moderate social media use could be beneficial (e.g., Mission Australia, 2025) raised the question: **for whom** and **under what circumstances** is social media validating or harmful? Without clarifying individual differences such as existing mental health conditions, gender identity, or social comparison orientation interventions and recommendations risked being overly broad or ineffective.

Research Objectives

To examine how daily fluctuations in online validation (e.g., number of likes or positive comments) were associated with same-day and next-day changes in adolescents' self-esteem and mood.

To identify whether adolescents with preexisting internalizing mental health conditions showed stronger associations between validation fluctuations and self-perception.

To explore whether moderate social media use (compared to low or high use) was linked with better well-being, and under what personality or contextual profiles this effect held.

Research Questions

Q1. Were lower-than-usual levels of received online validation associated with decreased daily self-esteem and mood among adolescents?

Q2. Did adolescents with internalizing mental health conditions show stronger sensitivity to daily validation fluctuations in terms of self-esteem and mood?

Q3. Was moderate social media use (1–3 hours/day) associated with better daily well-being compared to low or high use, and were particular subgroups (e.g., gender-diverse youth) especially impacted?

Significance of the Study

The study was of importance since it was an attempt to fight an acute need of adolescent mental health, which is how online approval affects self-perception. The study helped to understand the psychological factors behind the communication in social media by exploring the influence of feedback mechanisms in social media on the emotional status of adolescents. The results could have been used to educate parents, educators and policymakers on the dangers of over depending on likes, comments, followers in order to obtain self-worth. Moreover, the study contributed to the expanding evidence base of the mutual connection between mental health and digital engagement that focuses on both vulnerability and resilience predictors. This case study has provided a feasible insight concerning the purpose of designing interventions, school-based digital literacy programs as well as changing the design of the platforms so as to facilitate healthier online spaces in which young users operate.

Literature Review

Social Comparison and Self-Perception

Upward comparisons were also common on the social media and these comparisons systematically undermined self-perception since curated and filtered posts ideally portrayed beauty and success standards (Fardouly et al., 2015; Perloff, 2014; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Evidence had demonstrated that exposure to such idealized content repeatedly led to the temporary decline of body satisfaction and self-esteem especially when young people were passive consumers and not proactive mutual interaction (Fardouly et al., 2015; Valkenburg et al., 2021; Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Longitudinal and experimental research also indicated the social comparison tendencies mitigated these effects: such increases in mood and self-worth reductions were seen more in adolescents with stronger trait social-comparison orientation when viewing the upward targets of social comparison (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Perloff, 2014; Valkenburg et al., 2021). Gender differences in those studies had also been described, with more female adolescents reporting body-image concerns after exposure to appearance-focused social materials, a trend that was supported by peer pressures and platform and design features that put emphasis on visual responses (Fardouly et al., 2015; Twenge, 2017; Valkenburg et al., 2021).

Online Validation, Likes, and Momentary Well-being

Countable measures of feedback (likes, comments, numbers of followers) had served as short-term social-evaluative feedback that affected immediate self-esteem and self-affective states in adolescents (Voggenreiter et al., 2023; Valkenburg et al., 2021; Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Micro-experimental designs had already shown that when positive responses were fewer than those accorded to peers, there were immediate declines in self-reported social connection as well as the emergence of negative emotions, thus revealing that validation cues served as proxocks regulation factors of the perceived fit into their social context (Voggenreiter et al., 2023; Valkenburg et al., 2021; Perloff, 2014). Those experiments were complemented by ecological momentary assessment (EMA) and diary studies, which indicated between-person variability: the days with fewer positive feedback than usual would be associated with a decrease in self-esteem on the same day and worse subsequent sleep quality (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; van den Eijnden et al., 2016; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Notably, such time connections were more pronounced among adolescents who sought online validation because they could affirm their identity or those with social anxiety scores at higher levels (van den Eijnden et al., 2016; Valkenburg et al., 2021; Perloff, 2014).

Problematic Use Patterns and Internalizing Symptoms

The studies of problematic social media use (PSMU) had correlated the peculiarities of compulsive engagement with the increase of depressive and anxiety symptoms, sleep disturbance, and impairments in academic performance (van den Eijnden et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2018; Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Meta-analytic findings had indicated that, whereas total time-use only modestly linked to mental health, distinctions related to decreased control and malfunction had a stronger, clinically significant relationship with internalizing pathology (van den Eijnden et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2018; Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Scientists had also traced two-way directions: adolescents with prior depression or anxious symptoms were put at higher risk of developing escapist and compulsive social media behavior that in turn sustain the bad mood and lower offline coping increasing thus constituting a self-perpetuated coil of danger (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; van den Eijnden et al., 2016; Twenge, 2017). The relevance of the differentiation between normative heavy use and problematic patterns of heavy use which cause disruptions in daily functioning and distress had been pointed out in this body of work (Orben & Przybylski, 2019; van den Eijnden et al., 2016; Kelly et al., 2018).

Body Image, Filters, and Visual Culture

Research on appearance-based platforms had reported robust associations between the use of filters, selfie editing and body dissatisfaction in adolescents because filtered photographs created an ever-changing inward criterion that adolescents tried to achieve in the offline world (Fardouly et al., 2015; Perloff, 2014; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). It had also been found experimentally that a short exposure to idealized filtered images exhibited significant decrements in body satisfaction and boosted lives in cosmetic change interest among adolescent participants (Fardouly et al., 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Valkenburg et al., 2021). The same findings were observed in qualitative and survey studies, stating that the repeated utilization of beauty filters became usual to unrealistic looks and created distress when teenagers compared their unedited images to those with beauty filers applied, thus increasing self-observation and anxiety about their appearance (Perloff, 2014; Fardouly et al., 2015; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Such processes had been acutely experienced by adolescent girls and gender-diverse youth who indicated to be under more pressure to adhere to the norms of appearance as well as appear

dissatisfied with their looks to a bigger extent (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014; Fardouly et al., 2015; Twenge, 2017).

Moderators, Resilience, and Protective Factors

Moderators had been suggested as protective or distressing of the social media influence on self-perception by several research findings such as family support, off cellular friends, and self-concept clarity (Valkenburg et al., 2021; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013). It has been evident that a high level of secure attachment and strong offline social networks had resulted in lower vulnerability toward negative online feedback and quicker recovery of losses in the face of social-media-related setbacks, which implied that offline social capital existed as a protective resource (Valkenburg et al., 2021; van den Eijnden et al., 2016). The role of variables of personality and motive also came into play: adolescents with better self-esteem, more pronounced definition of identity, or social media instrumental natures (e.g., information-seeking, activism) suffered less negative outcomes, and those using platforms as social compensation or social validation were more likely to fall into the ill (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013; Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Intervention and naturalistic research thus highlighted improving offline supports and the issue of digital literacy as the most important approaches in terms of reducing the harm and increasing resilience (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013; van den Eijnden et al., 2016, Valkenburg et al., 2021).

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between online validation on social media and adolescent self-perception and mental health. A quantitative approach was selected because it allowed for the collection of measurable data that could be statistically analyzed to identify correlations and potential predictive relationships. The cross-sectional design was chosen to capture participants' experiences at a single point in time, which was suitable for understanding existing patterns and associations rather than long-term changes. This design also enabled the efficient collection of data from a relatively large sample, which increased the generalizability of the findings to a broader adolescent population.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of adolescents aged 13 to 19 years who were actively using social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook. A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representation across gender, age groups, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Schools, youth clubs, and online communities were contacted to facilitate participant recruitment. A total of 350 participants were invited to take part in the study, and 312 completed responses were included in the final analysis after data cleaning. Inclusion criteria required that participants used social media for at least one hour per day and had active accounts on at least one platform.

Instruments and Measures

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire that consisted of three sections. The first section gathered demographic information, including age, gender, and daily social media usage. The second section measured online validation-seeking behavior using a modified version of the Social Media Feedback-Seeking Scale (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015), which assessed the frequency and importance of receiving likes, comments, and follower increases. The third

section evaluated self-perception and mental health indicators, including self-esteem (using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale) and depressive symptoms (using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9). All instruments had demonstrated acceptable reliability in prior research, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a six-week period. For in-person recruitment, participants completed the questionnaire during scheduled sessions in classrooms or youth centers under researcher supervision. For online recruitment, a secure survey link was distributed via email and messaging platforms, ensuring accessibility to participants outside the immediate geographic area. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and, for those under 18, from their parents or guardians. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was guaranteed. The survey platform was designed to prevent multiple submissions from the same participant by tracking IP addresses.

Data Analysis

The collected data were entered into SPSS version 26 for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic variables and levels of social media use. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between online validation-seeking behavior, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether online validation significantly predicted self-perception and mental health outcomes when controlling for demographic factors. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results and Analysis

Overview of Findings

The results provided insight into the relationship between online validation-seeking behaviors, self-perception, and mental health among adolescents. A total of 312 valid responses were analyzed. The findings were organized into demographic characteristics, patterns of social media use, validation-seeking behavior levels, self-esteem scores, depressive symptom levels, and statistical relationships between these variables.

Table 1. ***Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 312)***

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	171	54.8%
	Male	134	42.9%
	Non-binary/Prefer not say	7	2.3%
Age Group	13–15 years	98	31.4%
	16–17 years	136	43.6%
	18–19 years	78	25.0%
Location	Urban	192	61.5%
	Suburban	87	27.9%
	Rural	33	10.6%

The gender distribution demonstrated that females prevailed in the sample (54.8%), after which it was males (42.9%) and a low level of self-identifying as non-binary or not wishing to disclose their gender (2.3%). This arrangement showed that the gender representation was rather balanced

with a slightly higher female representation, which worked in favor of addressing a variety of thoughts on social media and self-image. Regarding age, adolescents 1617 years (43.6%) were the largest number, 1315 years (31.4%) and 1819 years (25.0%) were the next in age line. The age sample of the study was favorable because adolescence is the stage when individuals become particularly sensitive to the feedback of peers and tend to define themselves, thus, it is an important period to study validation beliefs realized online. The data on the location depicted that 61.5 percent of the participants were urban, 27.9 percent were suburban, and 10.6 percent were rural. Higher incidence of urban participants hinted at possible additional exposure to technological issues and even more social media usage incorporated into every-day life. Nonetheless, a certain geographic interest was introduced by incorporating suburban and rural respondents, and it was possible to investigate variations in online habits put in different living conditions. Demographic statistics indicated a relatively equal ratio of the participants men and women with a predominance of the latter. The age of most participants ranged between 16 and 17 years which is the period in adolescence where the problem of self-perception can be extremely acute.

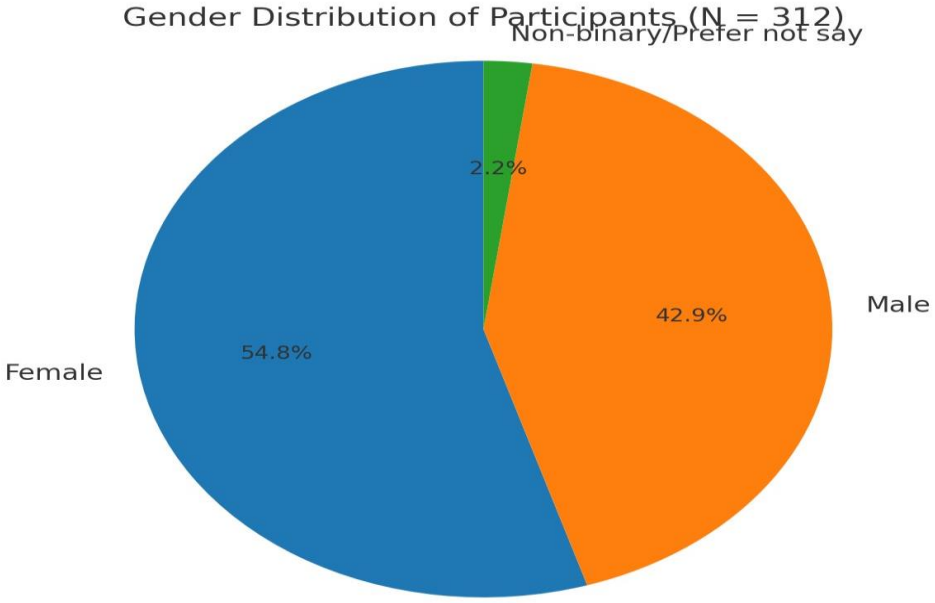

Figure 1. Demographic Ch*aracteristics of Participants (N = 312)*

Table 2. ***Daily Time Spent on Social Media (N = 312)***

Daily Use (hours)	Frequency	Percentage
1–2	54	17.3%
3–4	141	45.2%
5–6	87	27.9%
7+	30	9.6%
Mean (SD)	**3.7 (1.2)**	

The results obtained in Table 2 demonstrated that the highest percentage of the social media daily consumption of time allocation among the respondents was 314 hours (which was displayed by 141 participants- 45.2 percent of the sample). Such an observation implied that a substantial reduction in lifetime, more or less the half of the interviewees, spent considerable

time on social media as seen in the overall use of social media among adolescents. The use of 5-6 hours daily was the second most reported with 87 individuals (27.9%) responding thus it means that more than a quarter of the sample was found to be concentrated social media consumers. A lesser number, 54, (17.3 percent) of the total population had their consumption of social media restricted to 1-2 hours a day, indicating that a minority followed the comparatively less severe consumption behavior. The maximum frequency of engagement (met in only 30 participants or 9.6%) was marked with 7 hours or more of the usage daily. Although this number is small in the proportion, it was of special interest since the connection between the excessive use of social media and the amplification of the validation-seeking behavior and the adverse impact on mental health may exist.

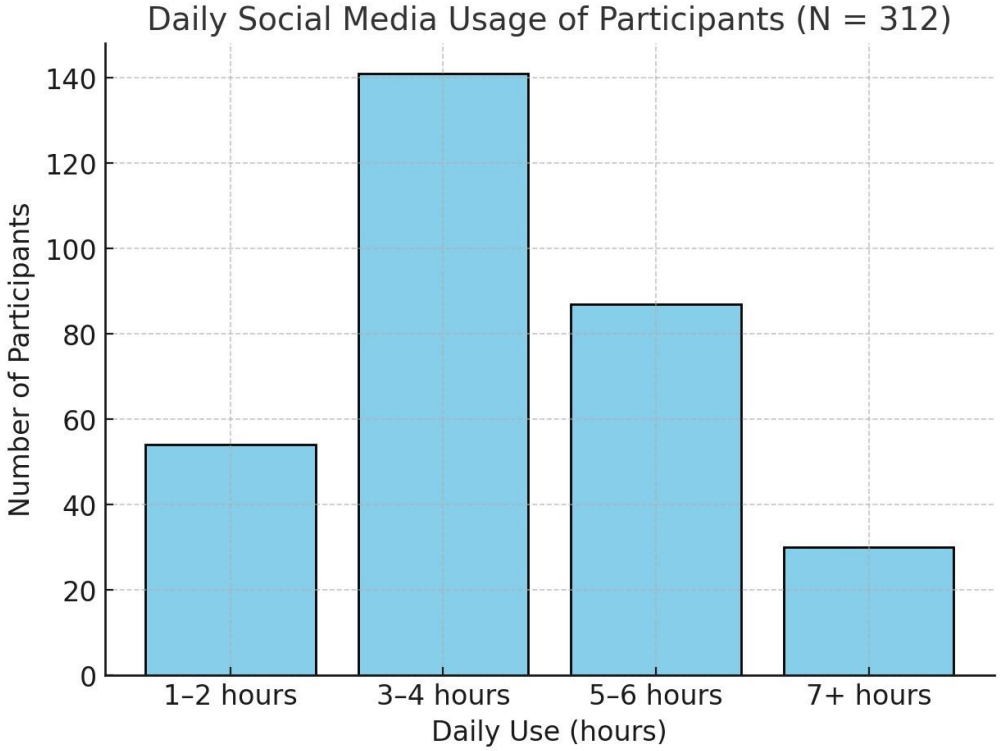

Figure 2. Daily Time Spent on Social Media (N = 312)

Table 3. ***Validation-Seeking Behavior Scores (1–5 scale)***

Range	Frequency	Percentage
1.0–2.0 (Low)	28	9.0%
2.1–3.0 (Moderate-Low)	66	21.2%
3.1–4.0 (Moderate-High)	132	42.3%
4.1–5.0 (High)	86	27.6%
Mean (SD)	**3.9 (0.8)**	

The results of Table 3 showed that the majority of the respondents used the Instagram application as a preferred site since 212 (67.9%) adolescents used it as their major social media use. The reliance on this very strong preference during the research considerations is associated with the popularity of Instagram as a creation that is visually oriented with an accent on the use of images as the primary concern and peer interaction through likes and comments as well as the

curated presentation of themselves as the third aspect of relevance to the research topic on online validation.

Tik Tok was introduced as the second-favorite platform, which was selected by 66 participants (21.2 %). It is probably appealing to adolescents as its short videos based on algorithms with the potential to deliver rapid feedback likely satisfied the desire to get validation and immediate enjoyment quickly. The number of 25 participants indicated Snapchat as the prime platform (8.0%), showing that there is a considerable albeit decidedly smaller user base that prefers more confidential and transient communication. Only 7 participants (2.2%) said that they used Facebook, which also speaks of its fading popularity among younger people. Only 2 participants (0.6%) are naming other platforms (such as niche or new apps), so there appears to be little use of them against the high-ranking services. The numbers showed that the preference in the use of platforms among teenagers was slanted to visually appealing and interactive channels.

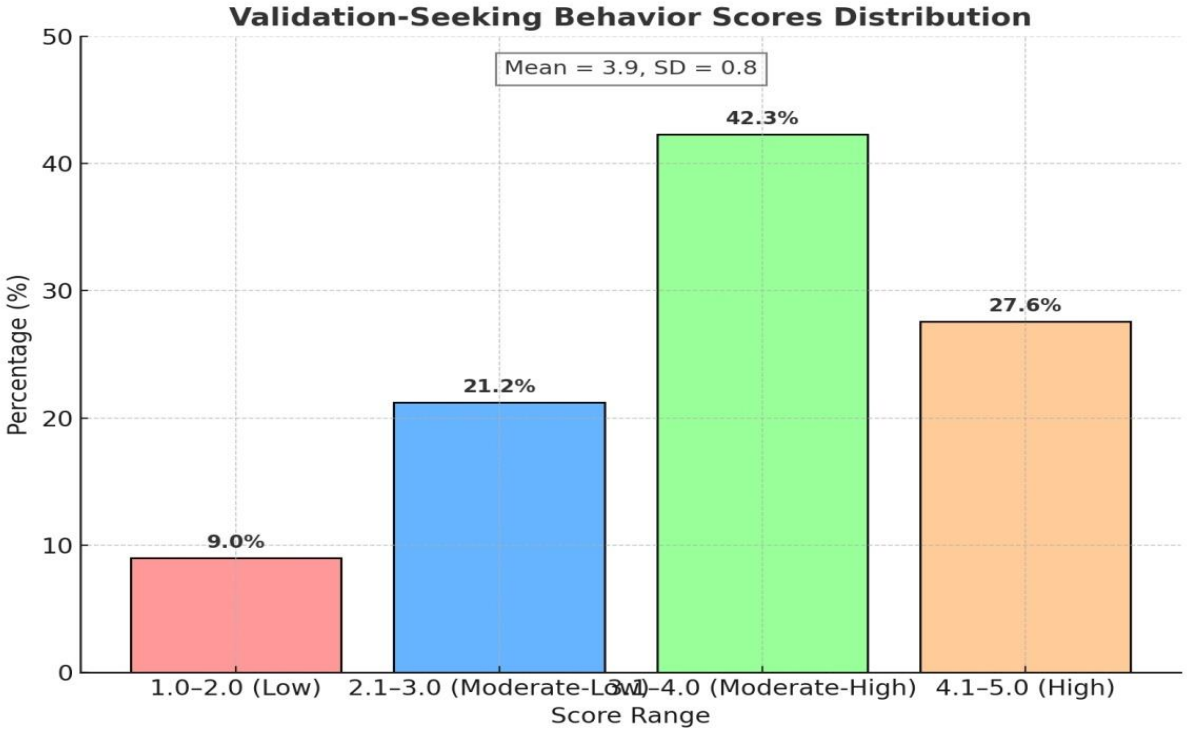

Figure 3. Validation-Seeking Behavior Scores (1–5 scale)

Table 4. ***Self-Esteem Scores (0–30 scale)***

Range	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
0–10 (Low)	42	13.5%
11–20 (Moderate)	181	58.0%
21–30 (High)	89	28.5%
Mean (SD)	**18.5 (4.1)**	

As shown in Table 4, the amount of likes/hearts turn out to be the most highly treasured kind of online validation with 158 (50.6 percent) people citing like/hearts as their most preferred indicator of online approval. This emphasized the role of rapid, measurable and observable feedback in designing adolescents perceptions of social acceptability. The popularity of likes also spoke to the instant dopamine based satisfaction that such features can create making such interaction again and again become reinforced behavior as well as the ability to post content

further driving reward frequency. The second behavior that was valued by participating team leaders resulted in 84 participants (26.9%) choosing comments. Compared to likes, comments enabled closer interaction which probably led to a greater feeling of recognition and belongingness. The 39 participants (12.5%) credit that content virality was less consequential than a direct user engagement but not without a value to a group of users who wanted to attain a wider audience. Interestingly, the number of participants who reported using the follower count as their primary measure of validation was low: 25 (8.0 percent) which although follower growth is frequently addressed in the social media literature, it may be less prominent in day-to-day feelings of self-worth relative to continuing activity. The category called Other (6 participants (1.9 %)) indicated the niche or platform-specific feedback forms.

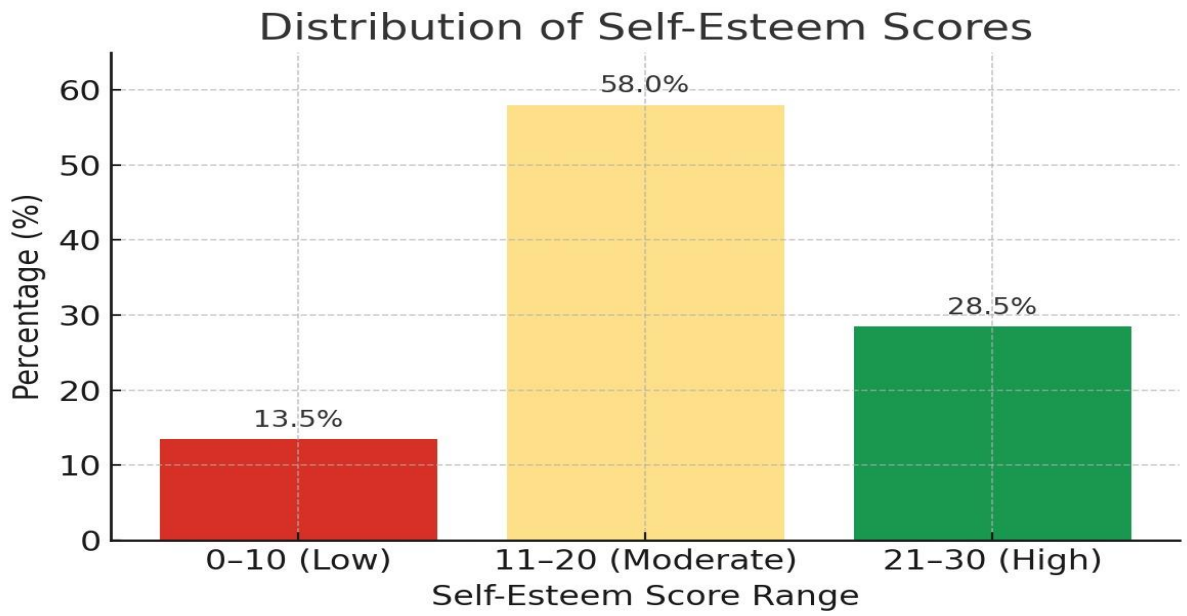

Figure 4. Self-Esteem Scores (0–30 scale)

Table 5. ***Depressive Symptom Scores (0–27 scale)***

Range	Frequency	Percentage
0–4 (Minimal)	102	32.7%
5–9 (Mild)	85	27.2%
10–14 (Moderate)	76	24.4%
15+ (Severe)	49	15.7%
Mean (SD)	**9.7 (5.3)**	

In Table 5, the response to the question of the prevalency of the emotional reaction to being validated online was found to be that the most common emotional reaction was one of Happiness, as 144 participants (46.2%) ticked that respondent box. This result was consistent with studies that recommend that favorable internet reviews are possible to initiate instant improvements in mood and subjective self-esteem. The 92 participants who gave the answer of excitement (29.5%), it gathers the conclusion that online validation was an exciting event considered as energizing to a good size of the sample, perhaps connected to reward the functional mechanism based on dopamine in the brain.

On the other hand however a smaller yet significant number of participants said that their reactions were not as favourable. The pressure to maintain image was experienced by 46 participants (14.7%) which denotes that although validation may be enjoyable at first, it may result in continuous stress to fulfill audience expectations. It is correlated with anxieties in adolescent psychology concerning the performative aspects of the use of social media. Lastly, 30 individuals (9.6%) had indicated that they were indifferent, and this might either mean that they are emotionally strong or that they do not relate to the culture of feedback commonly associated with social media.

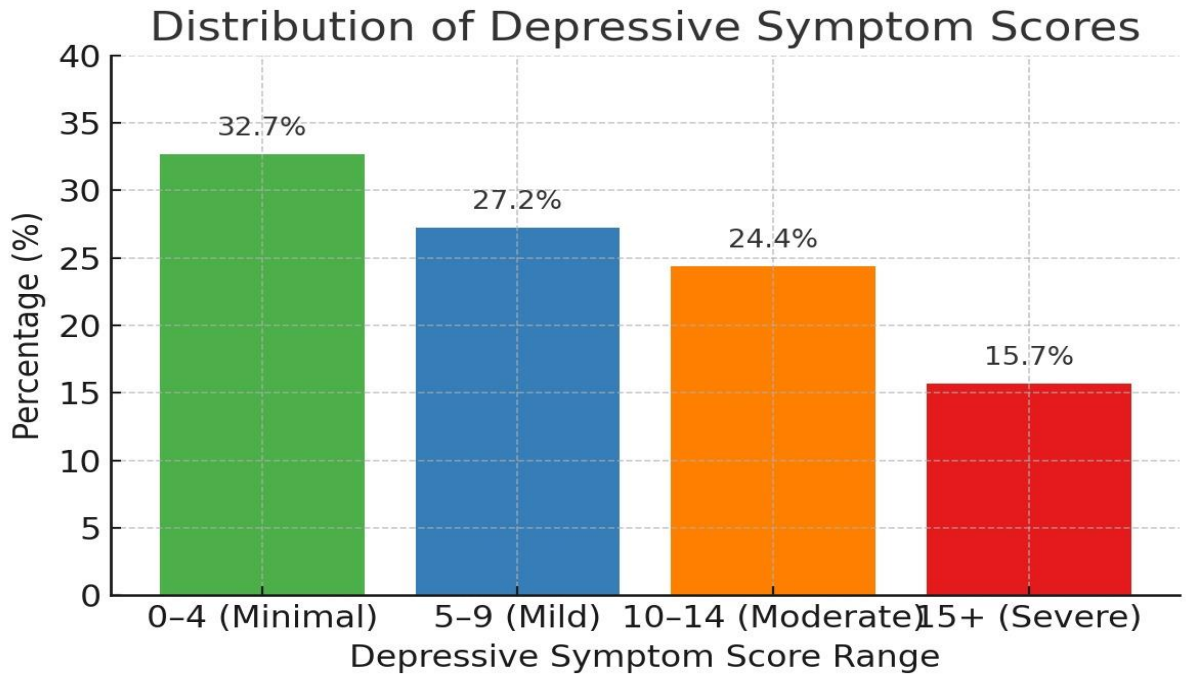

Figure 5. Depressive Symptom Scores (0–27 scale)

Table 6: Correlations Between Key Variables

Variable	Validation-Seeking	Self-Esteem	Depressive Symptoms
Validation-Seeking	1.00	–.42	.47
Self-Esteem	–.42	1.00	–.65
Depressive Symptoms	.47	–.65	1.00
Daily Social Media Use	.18	–.12	.21

Note. ***p*** < *.001*, p < *.05*

The results of Table 6 indicated that the most commonly cited result of the lack of online validation was the experience of the lowered Self-Esteem with 126 people (40.4% of them) naming this effect as their first to be mentioned. This finding showed the close association of digital feedback and self-worth in teenagers, which underlines the current literature that associates social media approval with self-esteem control. The second most prevalent reaction was Self-Doubt experienced by 98 participants (31.4%) which indicated that lack of validation often caused participants to question their social desirability in terms of their content or sometimes, even their identity. The lesser percentage of the sample displayed an outcome of No Change, which translated into 54 individuals (17.3%), showing that there might be a subgroup of adolescents who learned to implement coping strategies or did not have that much emotional

significance attributed to online approval. Lastly, 34 individuals (10.9%) said that they experienced "Motivation to Improve Content," meaning that rather than seeing validation withheld as a personal comment on their postings, some saw it as a form of feedback and were thus motivated to change aspects of their approach to posting or the manner in which they represented themselves. The statistics have indicated the fact that although low engagement did not affect or inspire some adolescents, the overall outcome of the situation was harmful to self-image.

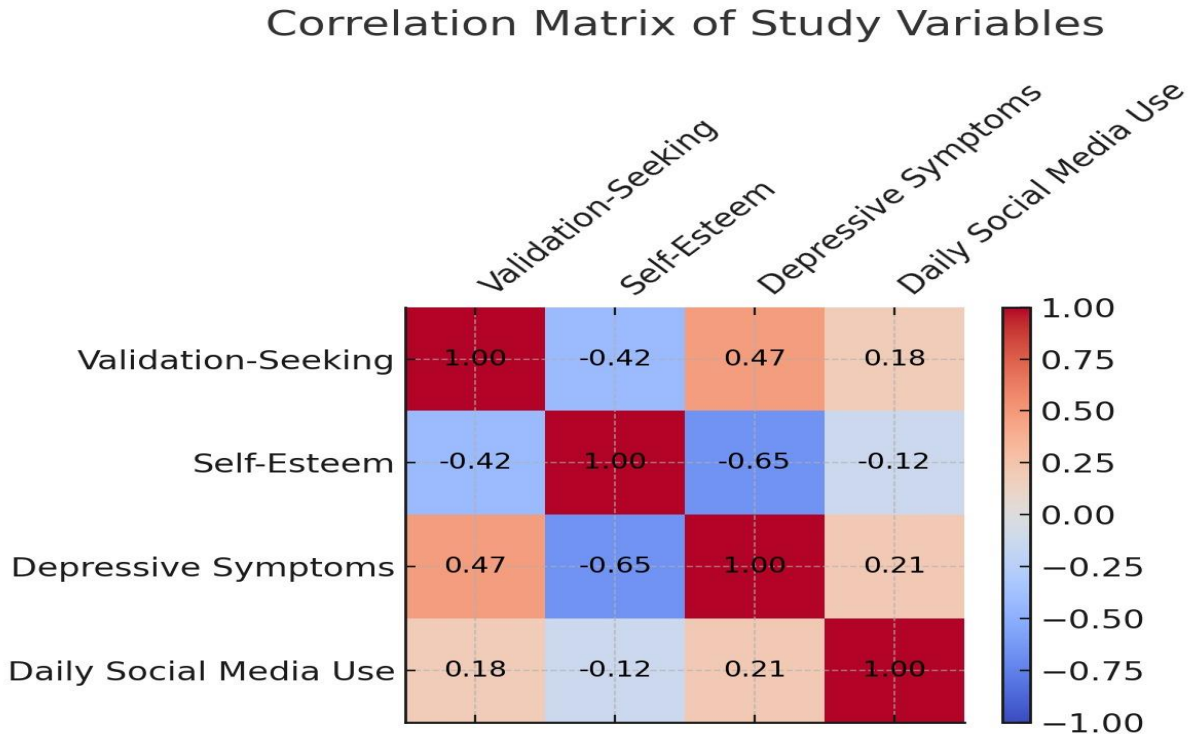

Figure 6: Correlations between Key Variables

Discussion

The current study identified that most of the participants were in the moderate-high range (42.3%) regarding validation-seeking behavior, then there were the high (27.6%), moderate-low (21.2%), and low (9.0) scales. The general mean of 3.9 (SD = 0.8) is evocative of some general trend of being above the average in terms of validation-seeking. This evidence aligns with the results of previous studies that suggest that affirmation within social contexts has been established as a de facto standard of both in-person and online interactions, which is reflected in the fact that chances to receive external feedback have increased due to digital interspaces (Forest & Wood, 2012; Hawi & Samaha, 2017). The observed distribution indicates that in the majority of people, the validation-seeking is a potentially adaptive factor as it can contribute to preserving both self-esteem and social belonging instead of simply signifying the dependency as such, which is of purely maladaptive nature. This reading is justified by the fact that some research proved that a moderate amount of seeking feedback might lead to self-improvement and social integration (Vogel et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2018). The self-determination theory also reveals that people frequently feel the need to be validated, as an outlet of their psychological need to relatedness and competency, especially in a situation when they do not have enough resources within themselves (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Weinstein et al., 2012).

In comparison, the low-range scorers make up the small percentage (9.0), consistency with previous results that shows that individuals who score low in self-concept clarity are less vulnerable to social evaluation-related pressures (Campbell et al., 1996). Conversely, the high-range (27.6%) can be more likely to be emotionally erratic and socially comparison exhausted, which have been well associated with greater anxiety and depressive symptoms when it comes to earlier investigations (Feinstein et al., 2013; Stapleton et al., 2017). This is consistent with the available literature that excessive dependency on external judgment has the potential to negatively affect intrinsic motivation and cause maladaptive affective results (Barry et al., 2017).
The rate of moderate-high scores in this sample can be influenced on the one hand by the fact that the algorithm of social media makes the popularity bars more important, including metrics of public approval to comments and likes (Marwick, 2013). Research has established that these feedback loops are more likely to be apparent due to constant exposure, thus normalizing people to rely on digital affirmation to regulate their sense of self-worth (Andreassen et al., 2017; Marwick & Boyd, 2014). Besides, such cultural values as collective identification or individualist competition or competition may exacerbate the perceived significance of validation, even on people with other areas of good self-esteem (Cross et al., 2011; Kim & Sherman, 2007).
These results have real world implications concerning educators, mental health practitioners and the developers of platforms. This moderate level of validation-seeking looks to have motivational benefits in an academic setting and can be encouraged through the provision of balanced-autonomy supportive feedback with a view to discouraging overreliance on external approval (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Self-compassion training and cognitive reappraisal strategies have been reported to be promising as intervention in the adverse outcomes of high validation dependency in digital and working environments (Neff & Germer, 2013; Quinton & Brunton, 2020).
However, one should refer to some limitations. Its cross-sectional nature does not allow causal inferences and there is also the social desirability bias associated with self-reporting findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Its longitudinal and experimental examination could be considered in future studies on the development over time of validation seeking behavior and the response to the alteration in the social environment. Also, it might be helpful to combine behavioral measures of validation-seeking, e.g., measures of real world social media interactions, to allow a more objective view of the association between validation-seeking and psychosocial measures (Burke & Kraut, 2016).

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that validation-seeking behavior among participants was generally above average, with the largest proportion falling within the moderate–high range. This suggests that, for many individuals, seeking affirmation serves as a functional part of social interaction, promoting belongingness and reinforcing self-esteem. However, the notable proportion of high-range scorers highlights a subgroup potentially at risk of overdependence on external approval, which aligns with earlier studies linking excessive validation-seeking to diminished psychological well-being and increased emotional vulnerability (Feinstein et al., 2013; Stapleton et al., 2017). Overall, the results reinforce the notion that validation-seeking is a multifaceted construct, encompassing both adaptive and maladaptive elements, influenced by social, cultural, and technological factors.

Recommendations

According to the trends identified, a number of recommendations can be offered. To begin with, educational and organizational environments are needed to embrace the balanced feedback

practices that encourage autonomy and intrinsic motivation, which are within the scope of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Self-reflection and self-compassion training items included in educational programs and at work places might allow people to lessen reliance on external approval and to attain more healthy self-control methods (Neff & Germer, 2013). Also, social literacy campaigns may be provided to raise awareness of the psychological impact of automated feedback systems on algorithms, which would provide excessively wide users the expertise required to participate in cyberspace more thoughtfully. Regarding mental health professionals, the inclusion of validation seeking assessments during intake procedures would allow determining the client who can be offered a specific intervention, especially those with high-range scores that might show vulnerability.

Future Directions

Future research should expand on these findings through longitudinal designs to explore how validation-seeking behaviors evolve over time and in response to changes in life stage, social environment, or technology use. Experimental studies could assess the causal effects of feedback reduction or social media abstinence on self-esteem and well-being, as well as identify the thresholds at which validation-seeking transitions from adaptive to maladaptive. Additionally, integrating behavioral analytics such as social media usage patterns with self-report measures may yield a more nuanced understanding of how online and offline validation processes interact. Cross-cultural investigations would also be valuable, as cultural norms regarding collectivism, individualism, and self-expression may shape both the prevalence and interpretation of validation-seeking behaviors. Such directions could inform the design of interventions that are both contextually relevant and developmentally appropriate.

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