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# Digital Validation: How Likes and Comments Affect Self-Esteem of Young Users

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### Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media has had a tremendous impact on how young people communicate and express themselves. It has also affected their views of self-worth. Digital validation is a term used to describe the validation or approval that people get from their social media interactions like likes, comments, shares, and followers. Social media sites like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat offer young people a sense of popularity and social validation that can impact their views of self-worth. This research paper focuses on the relationship between digital validation and the self-esteem of young social media users. Self-esteem is the view that people have of their self-worth and can be impacted by what they get from others. When people get positive validation like likes and positive comments from others on social media, they can get confidence and motivation to do more and a sense of belonging. However, when they get less or negative validation, they can get a sense of insecurity and self-doubt. The study will also explore the impact of social comparison on social media on the youth. Most people, especially the youth, tend to compare their appearance, lifestyle, and popularity with other users online. This has, in turn, forced them to present an image of perfection to the public. They do this by altering their online content to gain more traction and approval. Through secondary research, this paper seeks to identify the positive and negative impacts of digital validation on the youth. The study has concluded that, although social media presents an opportunity for self-expression, it has a negative impact on the self-esteem of the youth. Thus, it is essential for the youth to develop good social media habits while maintaining self-esteem that is not based on digital validation.

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### Introduction

In the last ten years, tremendous growth in technology and internet usage has changed the way people interact and express themselves through communication. Social media sites are an integral part of modern life, especially among young people. Social media sites such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat help users share their images, videos, views, and experiences with a larger internet community. Such sites also offer users likes, comments, sharing, and followers, which are key drivers of popularity and social acceptability. As a consequence, social media sites have brought into existence a new concept known as digital validation, where people seek to be validated socially.

Digital validation is the feeling of approval or recognition that people get based on the responses to the information they put

online. To most people, especially the younger generation, this has become a significant source of validation. The level of likes, comments, and sharing of the information that an individual posts may at times determine how the person feels about himself or herself, as well as how he or she thinks other people view them. At this point, the interaction via social media transcends just communication, becoming instrumental in the formation of the image of a person.

It is also worth noting that young people are some of the most active users of social media sites. They spend a considerable amount of time accessing various forms of content, interacting with their peers, and sharing their personal lives through social media sites. During their adolescent and young adult years, people are in a critical period of self-formation and self-discovery. During this period, people are

significantly influenced by opinions and views from others in forming their own views of themselves. As such, social media with its feedback mechanism is significantly influential in shaping self-esteem in people.

Self-esteem is defined as the general view that people have of their worth as individuals. Self-esteem can be considered as the judgment that people make about their ability to perform or their self-worth. In the traditional social setting, self-esteem is affected by family relationships, friendship associations, academic performance, and social interactions. In the digital setting, another factor that affects self-esteem is online feedback. This is because social media posts often get likes and comments that can be considered as measures of acceptance or popularity. When individuals get positive feedback on their posts, they may develop a sense of self-worth or self-esteem. When the posts get little or no attention or when the comments are negative, individuals may develop a sense of rejection or dissatisfaction with their self-worth.

One of the major factors that contribute to the impact of digital validation on young people is the concept of social comparison that occurs through social media. Social media provides a platform where a person can be exposed to the posts of their friends, social influencers, or even celebrities. Most social media posts contain images or stories of the achievements of other people, their beautiful looks, their interesting lifestyle, or their positive experiences. When a young person scrolls through their social media accounts, they can easily compare their own life with the life of another person who seems to be perfect.

Another key feature of digital validation is how social media sites provide a highly visible system of engagement measurement. For example, the number of likes, comments, and followers is shown publicly, enabling users to easily compare their popularity with others'. Such a highly visible system of engagement measurement could motivate users to control their presence on social media in order to receive more engagement. For example, many young people may spend their time adjusting their images, using attractive captions, and following trends in order to attract more engagement and approval from their audience. Some people may even delete their posts if they do not receive enough likes, indicating how highly social media engagement could impact their self-esteem.

Although digital validation might have some positive impacts on the individual, such as increased confidence and the strengthening of social ties, it might also have some drawbacks for the young individual. Excessive dependence on the approval of others through social media might cause emotional dependency among the individual, whereby the individual might start to measure their self-worth by the amount of attention they are able to receive through the same platform.

Research into the psychological effects of the feedback system of social media suggests that the reward system of the brain gets activated. Getting likes or comments on social media platforms like Instagram or TikTok triggers the release of dopamine, a chemical that induces a sense of pleasure. As a result, the users feel happy with the experience and try to post content to feel the same sense of pleasure again. Eventually, the need for validation from social media becomes a crucial factor for the users.

This rising phenomenon of digital validation has caught the attention of many researchers, academicians, and mental health practitioners. Though social media platforms offer opportunities for the development of creativity,

communication, and self-expression among the younger generation, it is also important to analyze the effects of the need for approval from the platforms on their self-esteem.

Therefore, the purpose of this research paper is to examine the association between digital validation and the self-esteem of young social media users. It is also important to examine the positive and negative impacts of seeking validation through social media sites. By studying the existing literature, the research aims to gain a better idea of the impact of digital validation on the life of a young person in the digital age.

The research paper aims to prove the significance of creating healthy social media practices among the younger population. It is essential to raise awareness among the public regarding the psychological effects of social media sites. This would allow the users to use the sites in a responsible manner.



**Fig 1:** The Affect of Social Media

### Literature Review

The increasing popularity of social media has raised considerable research interest, especially concerning the psychological impact of social media on young minds. Scholars have examined the impact of online interactions, feedback, and validation on the self-esteem and psychological well-being of young minds. This section aims to present a summary of the existing research studies concerning social media validation and its impact on young minds' self-esteem.

A research carried out by Dr. M. Mano (2025) titled "Assessing the Psychological Impact of Social Media on Youth Self-Esteem: The Role of Virtual Validation" tried to investigate the impact of virtual validation on the self-esteem of the younger generation. The research included the self-esteem levels of the youth between the ages of 15-24 years who were residents of the city of Vellore in the state of Tamil Nadu. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data for the research. Additionally, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to determine the self-esteem levels of the respondents. Out of the total of 100 respondents, the research showed that 28% of the respondents had low self-esteem levels. Conversely, the research showed that only 12% of the respondents had high self-esteem levels. Moreover, the research showed a moderate negative correlation between self-esteem levels and virtual validation.

The study concluded that while positive feedback on social media can reinforce confidence and peer connection, overreliance on digital validation may lead to anxiety, disappointment, and fragile self-esteem.

In a similar vein, a study carried out by Radhika Dhingra and Babita Parashar (2022) investigated the concept of validation on social media and its association with self-esteem among adolescents. The study highlighted that adolescents are growing up in a technologically advanced world where social networking sites are playing a vital role in influencing social

interactions and their identity formation. According to these researchers, adolescence is a critical period in life marked by profound physical, emotional, and psychological transformations during which the quest for approval and acceptance becomes a critical factor. Social media sites are giving opportunities to express oneself through sharing images, stories, and opinions. However, it is also a reality that adolescents are seeking approval in terms of likes, comments, and followers, which may significantly influence their self-esteem and social identity formation. As highlighted in this study, it is a fundamental human need to seek approval and acceptability from others in society, and social media sites are giving this quest a new dimension by making it quantitatively measurable in terms of likes and followers.

Another relevant study conducted by Yu-Hsing Chen in 2025 examined the impact of social media feedback loops on the self-esteem of adolescents and adults. The researcher highlighted that adolescence is a critical period of development that renders individuals more susceptible to social evaluation as a result of associated neurological and psychological changes. Social media offers feedback to users that is constant and quantifiable, which may heighten social comparison among users. The researcher noted that adolescents are more susceptible to the psychological effects of digital feedback compared to adults because they are more likely to define their self-worth based on peer opinions and social acceptance. The researcher highlighted the significance of understanding the impact of social media feedback mechanisms on emotional well-being during different stages of development.

In addition to that, another study was conducted by Murat Sezgin and Sakir Guler (2020) to investigate the relationship between digital feedback and self-esteem among digital natives. In their study, which was conducted among high school students in Isparta, Turkey, involving a total sample of 310 participants, the researcher used Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Digital Feedback Form (DFF), and Personal Information Form (PIF). The findings of the study indicated that self-esteem among adolescents was significantly affected by different forms of digital feedback that they receive from their friends through social media tools like friend requests, messages, comments, and retweets or reposts. The researcher argued that social media provides interactive communication tools that can produce different forms of feedback that can influence how people view their social importance or their popularity among their friends. The findings indicated that self-esteem among adolescents depends on the amount of feedback that they receive from their friends on social media tools. Furthermore, another study carried out by Naomi Coulthard and Jane Ogden (2018) in an experiment aimed to explore the psychological effects of posting selfies and receiving likes on social media sites. For this purpose, 59 participants were selected, ranging in age from 16 to 25 years. The participants were randomly assigned to different groups and were subjected to a seven-day experiment. Three different groups were formed: those who do not post selfies, those who post selfies without receiving feedback in the form of likes, and those who post selfies and receive feedback in the form of likes. The study revealed that posting selfies without receiving any feedback does not significantly impact self-esteem and mood states; however, those participants who do not post selfies show more improvement in appearance satisfaction. Posting selfies with feedback in the form of likes temporarily improves facial appearance satisfaction during the experiment; however, this effect goes back to normal after a

while. It was concluded that the psychological effects of social media feedback may differ in different contexts and when measuring different aspects of psychological well-being.

In conclusion, it is clear from the existing body of literature that social media interactions and feedback mechanisms are instrumental in influencing the self-esteem of young social media users. While positive feedback through social media may boost the self-esteem of young users, it is also clear from existing literature that overdependence on social media may have a negative impact on their self-esteem. Collectively, existing studies highlight the significance of understanding the complex relationship between social media interactions and young users' self-esteem. Following this line of inquiry, this research aims to further explore the impact of likes, comments, and feedback mechanisms on young social media users' self-esteem in the modern digital world.

### Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design in investigating the effect of digital validation, such as receiving likes and comments, on the self-esteem of young individuals. In collecting data for this study, the researcher employed the online survey questionnaire method, which is helpful in collecting data regarding the social media practices of the respondents, their emotional responses towards the digital validation they receive, and their perception of the effect of digital validation on their self-confidence and self-worth. A series of multiple-choice questions were included in the questionnaire that allowed the respondents to choose the answers based on their experiences and opinions. Questions regarding the age group of the respondents, gender, occupation, hours spent on social media, favorite social media, and perception of receiving likes and comments on the posts they uploaded online, as well as the practice of comparing themselves with other people online, deleting the posts that received fewer likes and comments, and changing the posts in order to receive more likes and comments, were included in the questionnaire. The survey was circulated online and was easily accessible to the participants with the help of digital media such as messaging apps and social media sites. The total number of participants who voluntarily filled out the questionnaire was 32. The participants belonged to different ages, but the main focus was on young social media users. The participants were anonymous, and their responses were kept confidential and used only for academic purposes. Once the data was collected from the participants, the responses were compiled and analyzed with the help of basic quantitative analysis techniques such as frequency distribution and percentage analysis. The responses were analyzed to understand the pattern of interaction with social media and the emotional response to digital validation. The responses were analyzed to understand the relationship between the number of likes and comments received and the happiness and confidence experienced by the participants or the feeling of disappointment and comparison with others. The results obtained from this analysis were further used to understand the impact of digital validation on the self-esteem of young social media users.

### Findings

Based on the results that have been obtained from the survey, it can be concluded that social media has a great impact on the emotions and self-esteem of the young generation. Based on the demographic profile of the participants of the survey, it

can be concluded that the majority of the participants of the survey are the young generation between the ages of 18-25 years old, who comprise 78.1% of the total participants of the survey. The next segment includes the participants between the ages of 26-35 years old, who comprise 9.4% of the total participants of the survey. The next segments include the participants between the ages of 36-50 years old and the participants who are above the age of 51 years old, who comprise 6% of the total participants of the survey.

However, when they were asked to point out the social media site that they used the most compared to others, it was observed that the maximum votes were in favor of the social media site Instagram, as 78.1% of the votes were in favor of Instagram. This indicates that Instagram is extremely popular among the younger generation of the population. Hence, it can be concluded that it is a source of digital validation for the younger generation of the population.

It was observed that social media sites like Snapchat, among others, received a total of 9.4% votes. Facebook received the lowest votes.

This survey has been conducted to know the extent to which the emotions that they develop after seeing the likes and comments of the people on their social media posts affect their mood. Most of the participants of the survey claimed that the emotions that they develop after seeing the likes and comments of the people on the social media posts that they shared affect the emotions that they feel. However, out of the participants of the survey, it was observed that 46.9% claimed that they 'sometimes' feel disappointed or upset if the post that they shared does not receive any or few likes or comments. This indicates that the majority of the population, i.e., almost 18.8%, claimed that they 'always' feel disappointed or upset if the post that they shared does not receive any or few likes or comments, or at least depended largely on the feedback obtained from the likes or comments on the social media platform. On the other hand, it was observed that 18.8% claimed that they 'rarely' feel disappointed or upset, while 15.6% claimed that they 'never' feel disappointed or upset.

In conclusion, it can be seen from the above findings that the impact of the digital validation on the feelings and self-perceptions of the young social media users is considerable. Though it cannot be said that all the people are influenced by the social media validation, it can be seen from the above findings that all the participants confessed that their feelings and self-perceptions could be influenced to a certain extent by the social media validation. This clearly proves the point that the social media validation could influence the self-esteem of the social media users to a certain extent.

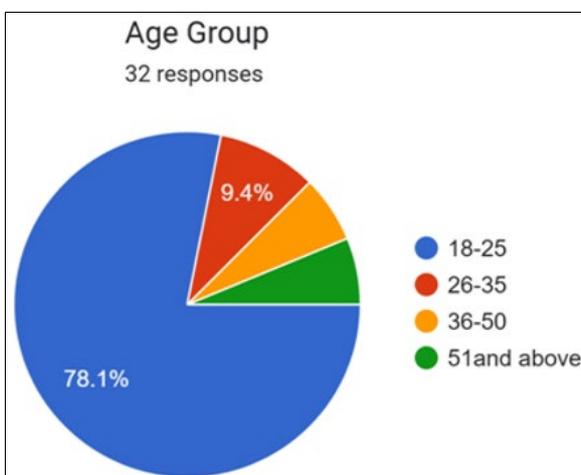


Fig 2: Analysis 4

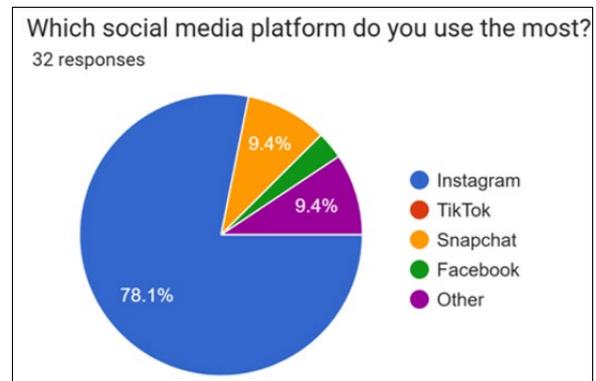


Fig 3: Analysis 1

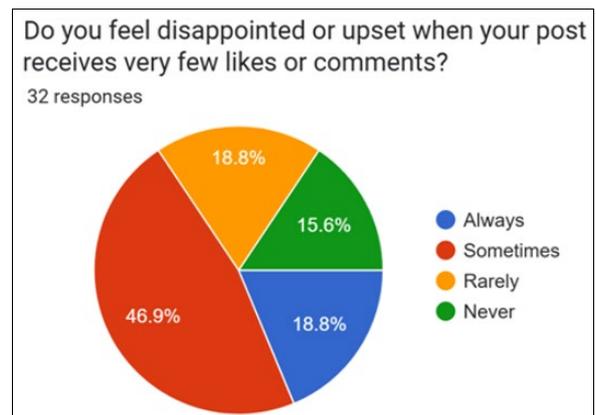


Fig 4: Analysis 2

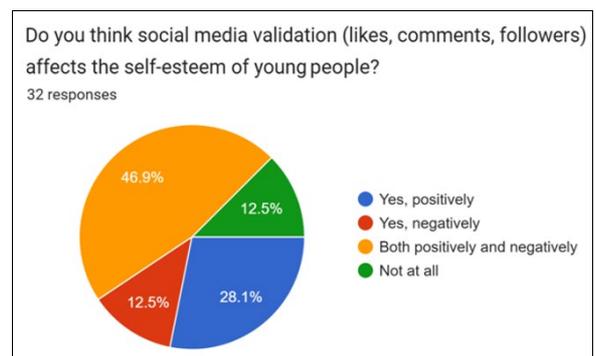


Fig 5: Analysis 3

**Learnings**

According to the study, social media engagement like likes and comments has a major impact on the self-esteem of young people. Some people get a sense of approval when their posts get more likes and comments on social media. This has a major impact on their self-esteem because they feel valued and accepted when their posts get more likes and comments. Some people may feel dissatisfied with their posts when they get fewer likes and comments.

According to the study, Instagram is one of the most used social media platforms among young people. This means that Instagram has become a focal point for young people when it comes to digital validation. This is because Instagram is based on visuals and public engagement like likes and comments. This has made some people feel pressured to post more to get more likes and comments from others. This is because they feel that their posts should be valued by others.

Another important thing that can be learned from the above research is that it is not necessary that all the users of social media behave in the same manner towards the digital validation that is being provided to them. For example, it has been confessed by the users that their mood level is being

affected according to the number of likes and comments that they receive from the users of social media. It has also been confessed by the users that they are not affected by the comments that they receive from the users of social media.

It is also clear from the above research that the users of social media among the younger generation are in the habit of checking their posts to get to know how the users of social media are responding to their posts. It is an indication that the feedback that they receive from social media is considered to be an important factor that determines their popularity in the virtual world.

In general terms, it is very much evident from the above study that the impact of the digital validation may be positive or negative on the self-esteem of the user. It may be positive in the sense that the user is developing self-confidence to express themselves as they are getting positive feedback from the people surrounding them. It may be negative in the sense that the user is facing emotional pressure as they are over dependent on the people surrounding them.

### Conclusion

The study has concluded that the validation received in the form of likes, comments, and shares plays an important role in the self-esteem of young social media users. It has been found that young people consider it very important that their posts receive a high level of engagement. It has been observed that posts that receive high numbers of likes and positive comments create feelings of happiness, social acceptance, and self-confidence among young people. It has been found that such validation makes young people feel appreciated and recognized by their social groups, which in turn enhances their self-esteem. They feel motivated to post more of the same type of content. Contrary to that, posts that receive low numbers of likes or negative comments create feelings of disappointment, insecurity, and self-doubt. It has been found that young people delete their posts if they do not receive enough engagement. They feel embarrassed or believe that the post is not good enough.

Another significant aspect identified by the research is that social comparison is an essential aspect in building self-esteem. The majority of young social media users often compare the number of likes and comments they are receiving with their friends and social media influencers. The comparison may force them to present an ideal image online. The ideal image may result in increased pressure and decreased self-confidence. The research revealed that even though social media validation offers a sense of belonging and encouragement to the young social media users, over-reliance on social media validation may result in decreased self-esteem. Therefore, it is crucial to develop an effective relationship with social media among young social media users. It is significant to develop digital literacy and awareness about the psychological impact of social media engagement among young social media users. The development of healthy social media engagement and avoidance of excessive checking of likes and other social media validation may help develop and enhance the self-esteem among young social media users.

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