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Social Media Validation and Self-Esteem

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Abstract: ***Social media platforms have become an important part of daily life and provide users with constant feedback through likes, comments, and shares. Such visible forms of approval can influencehowindividualsevaluatethemselves, particularlyduringadolescencewhenpeopleare more sensitive to social judgment. While previous research has explored the relationship between social media use and well-being, fewer studies have compared how online feedback affects adolescents and adults differently.***

This study explores how feedback valence, social comparison, and perceived authenticity of onlineinteractionsinfluencestateself-esteeminthesetwogroups.Threestudieswereconducted to examine how receiving fewer positive reactions than others on social media affects users' feelings about themselves.

The findings suggest that when adolescents perceive that others receive more positive feedback online, their self-esteem may decrease. Even without direct negative comments, the ability to constantly compare social approval can shape how young users view their social status. These resultsindicatethatsocialmediaenvironmentsthatencouragecomparisonmayincreasetherisk of emotional difficulties among vulnerable adolescents.

KEYWORDS: Adolescence, social media, social validation, evaluative feedback, depression, stress coping, digitalidentity regulation, self-conceptdevelopment,feedbackprocessing,emotionalreactivity, authenticity in self-presentation, adolescent vulnerability

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of social media platforms has changed the way people interact, communicate, andpresentthemselvesonline.Socialnetworkingsitesallowuserstosharephotos,thoughts,and experiences while receiving immediate feedback in the form of likes, comments, and shares.

Thesevisiblesignsofapprovalcaninfluencehowindividualsthinkaboutthemselvesandmay play a role in shaping their self-esteem.

Researchers have increasingly studied the relationship between social media use and psychological well-being. However, the impact of social media may not be the same for everyone. Adolescents, for example, are in a stage of life where peer approval and social acceptanceareespeciallyimportantfordevelopingidentityandself-confidence.Becauseofthis, they may be more sensitive to online feedback compared to adults.

Social media platforms also make it easy for users to compare themselves with others. The numberoflikes,comments, orreactionsonpostscanactasvisibleindicatorsofpopularityor social approval. These comparisons may influence how individuals evaluate their own social status and self-worth. Since adolescents and adults differ in emotional and cognitive development, their reactions to such comparisons may also be different.

Despitegrowinginterestinthistopic,severalgapsremainincurrentresearch.Manystudieshave examined the link between social media use and self-esteem, but fewer have explored how developmental differences and the specific features of social media platforms work together to shape this relationship. In addition, social media engagement is not only about receiving feedback. Users also actively manage how they present themselves online. For example, individuals may delete posts that receive fewer likes or share content they believe will attract more positive reactions. This shows that people both respond to feedback and try to influence it.

Another important aspect of online environments is the growing role they play in discussions aboutmentalhealth. Forinstance,theidentificationofAttention-Deficit/HyperactivityDisorder (ADHD) has traditionally relied on clinical diagnosis carried out by trained professionals.

However, many individuals today seek information, support, and validation about ADHD throughsocial mediaplatformssuchasInstagramandReddit.Theseonlinespacesallowpeople to share personal experiences and connect with others who report similar symptoms.

Asaresult,animportantquestionarisesregardinghowdifferentsourcesofvalidationinfluence individuals' self-perception. In particular, there is still limited understanding of whether validation from online communities has the same psychological impact as validation from a clinical professional.

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This difference may be especially important for individuals who self- identify with ADHD without receiving a formal diagnosis. Thepresentstudyaimstoexplorehowdifferentformsofvalidationinfluenceindividuals'self- perception and feelings of internalized stigma. It also examines whether a person's diagnostic status-whetherself-diagnosedorclinicallydiagnosed-affectshowthey interpretandrespondto these forms of validation.

In addition, the study considers the role of social comparison, which refers to the tendency of individualsto evaluatethemselvesinrelationtoothers.Onsocialmedia,thisprocesscanbecome stronger because feedback is constantly visible and easily measured through likes, comments, andreactions.Positivefeedbackcantriggerfeelingsofrewardandsatisfaction,asitisconnected with brain systems involved in motivation and emotional response.

According to the adolescent social-affective learning model, adolescence is a developmental stagewhere individualsareparticularlysensitivetosocialfeedbackandpeerstatus.Becauseof this heightened sensitivity, adolescents may be more strongly affected by online comparisons and validation than adults.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *ADHDandmedicalindustrialcomplex*

The pharmaceutical industry's substantial financial investment in ADHD research has created a complex relationship between commercial interests and scientific legitimacy. Such erosion of trust in medical authority creates conditions where individuals seek alternative validation for their symptoms through non-professional sources. This digital landscape has created a parallel diagnosticculturewhereindividualsvalidatetheirexperiencesthroughpeernetworksratherthan medical professionals.

B. *Self-verificationtheory*

Self-Verification Theory posits a fundamental motivation to maintain a stable and consistent self-concept,adrivethatservesbothepistemicneedsforpredictabilityandpragmaticgoalsforsmoothersocialinteractions.Forindividualswithacli nicalADHDdiagnosis,medicalvalidation can strengthen self-image by reframing distressing experiences as manifestations of a neurobiologicalconditionratherthanpersonalfailure,thuspromotingacoherentandstableself- concept. In contrast, self-diagnosed individuals frequently contend with stigma tied to perceived illegitimacy. The absence of professional validation can foster persistent self-doubt, imposter syndrome, and anxiety over the credibility of their condition.

C. *Pathwaystoverification:Socialmediavalidation*

The fundamental drive to maintain a coherent self-concept, as posited by Self-Verification. The first, social validation, is defined as confirmation sought from or provided by interpersonal sources, such as family, friends, and partners, that affirms an individual's ADHD-related experiences. Self-image refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of themselves, encompassingbeliefsaboutpersonalworth,competence,andidentity.Finally,thepsychological impact of validation seeking is likely contingent upon an individual's diagnostic status.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A. *Patternsofsocialmedia usage*

Theresultsofthestudyshowedthatmostparticipantsinthe1825agegroupusesocialmediafrequentlythroughouttheday.Amajorityofrespond entsreportedspending2–4hoursdailyon social networking platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. Study concludes that socialmediavalidationhasanoticeableinfluenceonself-esteemamongyoungusers.Frequent use of social media platforms and the desire for online approval through likes, comments, and followers can affect how individuals perceive their self-worth.

B. *RelationshipbetweenValidationandself-esteem*

The results of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between social media validation and self-esteem. Social media validation refers to the approval or recognition users receiveintheformoflikes, comments,shares ,andfollowers onplatformssuchasInstagramand Facebook. Many participants reported feeling happy, appreciated, and valued when their content receivedmorelikesorpositivecomments.Someparticipantsalsoreportedcomparingtheirposts with others, which sometimes negatively affected their self-esteem.

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C. Negativeeffects

The study found that excessive dependence on social media validation can have several negative effectsonself-esteem.Manyuserstendtomeasuretheirself-worthbasedonthenumberoflikes, comments,andfollowerstheyreceiveonplatformssuchasInstagramandFacebook.Whenposts receive fewer reactions than expected, individuals may experience feelings of disappointment, insecurity, and self-doubt. This comparison can create feelings of inadequacy and lower self- confidence, especially when others appear to receive more attention or appreciation online.

D. Differencesamong users

Thestudyfoundthattheimpactofsocialmediavalidationonselfesteemvariesamongdifferentusers.Someindividualsaremoreinfluencedbylikes,comments,andfollowers,whileothersare less affected by online feedback. Users who spend more time on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook tend to place greater importance on online validation. These variations in usage influence how strongly social media validation affects their self-esteem.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

A. ComparisonwithpreviousStudies

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research on the relationship betweensocialmediavalidationandself-esteem.Earlierstudieshaveshownthatonlinefeedback such as likes, comments, and shares can influence how individuals perceive their self-worth.
Similartopastresearch,theresultsofthisstudyindicatethatpositivefeedbackonplatformslike Instagram can increase confidence, while limited engagement may lead to feelings of disappointment or reduced self-esteem. This comparison supports the idea that social media validation plays a significant role in shaping individuals' emotional responses and self- perception.

B. PsychologicalImplications

The study highlights several psychological implications related to social media validation. Continuous exposure to online feedback can influence individuals' emotions, mood, and self- confidence. Positive reactions may temporarily boost self-esteem, whereas negative or limited responsesmayleadtofeelingsofinsecurityorself-doubt.Overtime,excessiverelianceonsocial media validation may affect an individual's emotional stability and mental well-being.

C. Socialsupport

Social media platforms can also act as a source of social support for users. Positive comments, encouragement, and interactions from friends or followers can help individuals feel valued and connected. Platforms such as Facebook and Instagram allow users to share experiences and receivesupportfromtheironlinecommunities.Thissenseofbelongingcancontributepositively to an individual's emotional well-being when used in a balanced manner.

D. PromotingReallifeself-worth

The findings emphasize the importance of promoting real-life self-worth that is not solely dependentonsocialmediavalidation.Individualsshouldbeencouragedtofocusonpersonal achievements, skills, and meaningful offline relationships to build stronger self-esteem.
Developingself-confidencethroughreal-lifeexperiencescanhelpreducedependenceononline approval and support healthier psychological development.

V. METHODOLOGY

A. ResearchDesign

Thepresentstudyusedacross-sectionalresearchdesigntoexaminetherelationshipbetween social media validation and self-esteem among young individuals. The research focused on understanding how online feedback such as likes, comments, and followers on social media platforms influences an individual's perception of self-worth and confidence.

B. Sampling Method

The study used a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, to select participants. In this method, respondents were chosen based on their availability and willingnesstoparticipate.

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Thisapproachwas considered suitablebecauseitistime-efficientand practical for academic research. Participants belonged to the 18–25 age group, as individuals in this age range are highly active on social media and more likely to seek validation online.

C. DataCollectionMethods

Thestudyusedtheprimarydatacollectionmethod.Datawascollecteddirectlyfromparticipants through a structured questionnaire containing questions related to social media usage, online validation (likes, comments, shares), and self-esteem levels. The questionnaire was distributed online through platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp to gather responses efficiently.

D. DataAnalysisTechniques

The collected data was analyzed using statistical techniques to understand the relationship between social media validation and self-esteem. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize theresponses,andfurther analysiswas conducted toidentifypatternsandrelationshipsbetween variables. The results were interpreted using charts, percentages, and statistical methods.

E. EthicalConsiderations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research to protect the rights and well-being of the participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participationwasvoluntary. Theywereallowedto withdrawfromthestudyatanytime,andtheir responses were kept confidential and anonymous.

F. PrivacyProtection

Privacy protection was ensured during the research process. No personal information of participantswas collectedorshared.Allresponseswerekeptanonymousandconfidential,and the data was used only for academic research purposes related to the study.

G. Consentof Participants

Participantswereinformedaboutthepurposeoftheresearchbeforefillingoutthequestionnaire, and their consent was obtained. Only individuals who actively use social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook were included in the study, as the research focused on the impact of social media validation on self-esteem.

VI. FUTURE SCOPE

A. Interpretationoffindings

Future studies can further explore how social media validation influences self-esteem among differentagegroupsandculturalbackgrounds.Adeeperanalysismayhelpinunderstandingthe psychological factors that shape individuals' responses to online feedback.

B. PositiveandNegativeImpactsofsocialmediavalidation

Furtherresearchcanexaminebothpositiveandnegativeimpactsofsocialmediavalidation in detail. While positive feedback may enhance confidence and motivation, excessive dependence on online approval may lead to reduced self-esteem and emotional stress.

C. Validationaddiction

Future research may focus on the concept of validation addiction, where individuals become overlydependentonlikes, comments, andonlinereactionsforself-worth.Studiescanexplore the causes, consequences, and possible strategies to manage this behavior.

D. Digitalawareness

Thereisaneedtopromotedigitalawarenessregardingthepsychologicaleffectsofsocialmedia usage. Future initiatives may focus on educating individuals about responsible and mindful use of social media platforms and their impact on mental well-being.

E. RoleofEducationand Parents

Educational institutions and parents can play an important role in guiding young individuals abouthealthysocialmediahabits. Futureprogramsmayincludedigitalliteracyandawareness activities to help students develop self-esteem that is not dependent on online validation.

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F. Healthysocialmedia Usage

Future studies can explore methods to promote balanced and healthy social media usage. Encouraginglimitedscreentime,positiveonlineinteractions,andofflineengagementmayhelp reduce the negative effects of social media validation.

G. Community Building

Socialmediaplatformscanalsobeusedtocreatesupportiveandpositiveonlinecommunities. Future research may examine how these platforms can promote meaningful connections, peer support, and positive communication among users.

H. Suggestionsforfutureresearch

Futureresearchcanincludelargerandmorediversesamplestoprovideabroaderunderstanding of the relationship between social media validation and self-esteem. Longitudinal studies may also help in examining the long-term effects of social media validation on individuals' psychological well-being.

VII. SOCIAL MEDIA VALIDATION

A. Likes

Likesareoneofthemostcommonformsofsocialmediavalidation.Theyrepresentquickapprovalfrom others and often influence how users perceive the popularity of their posts. Receiving a large number of likes on platforms such as Instagram can make individuals feel appreciated and confident, while fewer likes may sometimes lead to feelings of disappointment or reduced self-esteem.

B. Comments

Commentsprovidemoredirectanddetailedfeedbackcomparedtolikes.Positivecommentsfromfriends or followers can encourage users and strengthen their sense of social acceptance. However, negative or criticalcommentsmayaffectanindividual'semotionsandself-confidence,influencingtheiroverallself- esteem.

C. *Followers*

Thenumberoffollowersonsocialmediaisoftenseenasameasureofpopularityandsocialinfluence. Manyusersassociateahigherfollowercountwithgreaterrecognitionandvalidation.Platformssuchas Instagram and Facebook allow individuals to build networks where followers act as an audience that interacts with their content. This can influence how users evaluate their social image and self-worth.

D. Sharesandreactions

Sharesandreactionsalsoserveasimportantindicatorsofvalidation.Whenusersshareсomeone'scontent or react to it with emojis or other reactions, it increases the visibility and reach of the post. This type of engagement can make individuals feel that their content is valued and meaningful, which may positively influence their confidence and self-esteem.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Thestudyshowsthatsocialmediavalidationplaysanimportantroleininfluencingself-esteem among young users. The findings on patterns of social media usage indicate that many individuals frequently check likes, comments, and reactions on their posts, showing the importance of online feedback. The research also reveals a relationship between validation and self-esteem, where positive feedback can increase confidence, while low engagement may reduce self-worth. At the same time, excessive dependence on online approval can lead to negativeeffectssuchassocialcomparisonandemotionalpressure.Thestudyfurtherhighlights differencesamongusers,assomeindividualsaremoreaffectedbysocialmediavalidationthan others depending on their confidence and level of social media use. Overall, the research concludes that while social media can support interaction and expression, over-reliance on validation may negatively affect self-esteem, making balanced use of social media important.

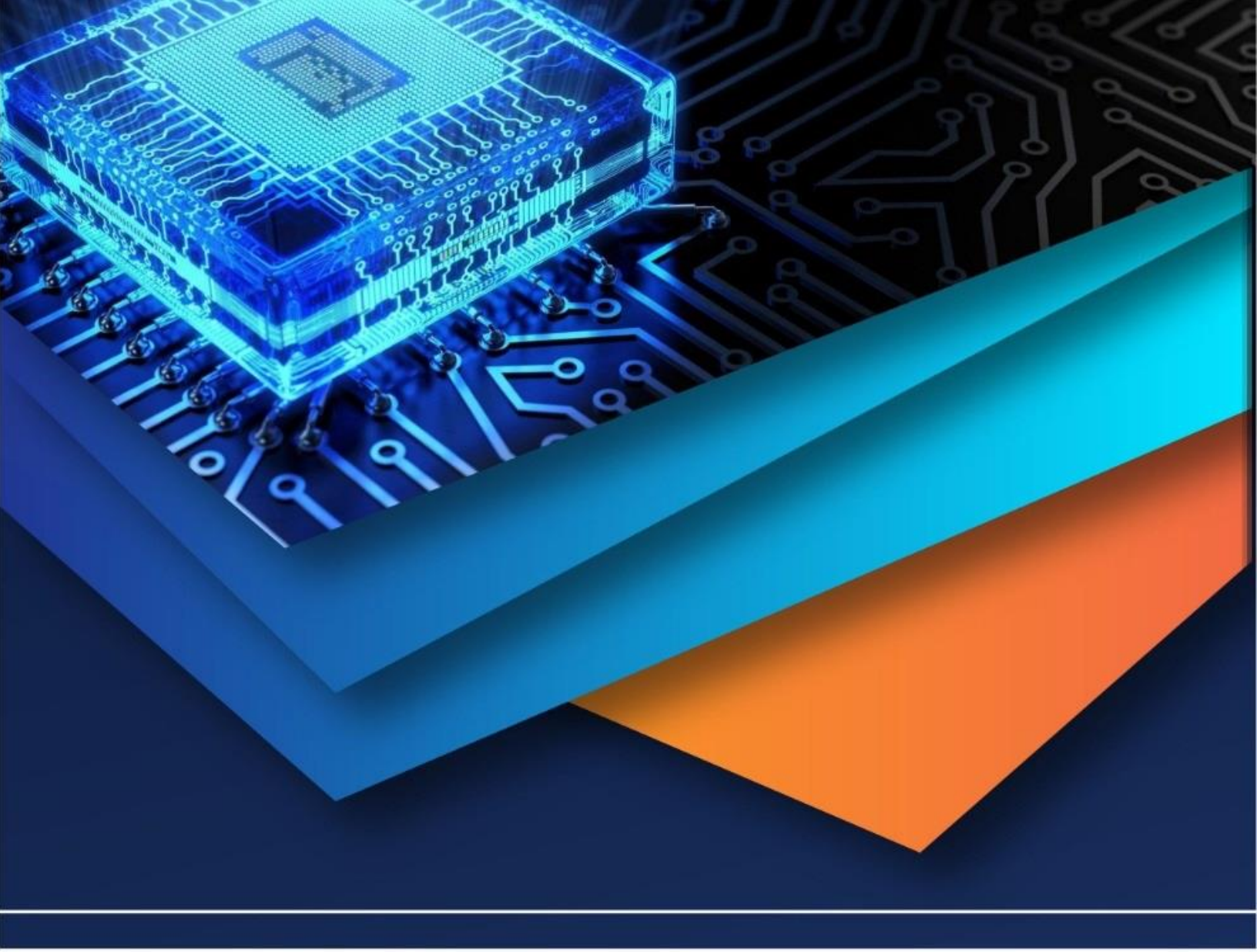
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