

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL VALIDATION ON SELF-ESTEEM AMONG
YOUNG GIRLS IN KARACHIMahwish Qutub^{*1}, Professor Dr. Erum Hafeez²^{*1}PhD Scholar, Visiting Lecturer, Iqra University, Pakistan²Dean, Faculty of Media Sciences, Iqra University, Pakistan¹mahwish.qutub@iqra.edu.pk, ²erum.hafeez@iqra.edu.pk,²<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6954-3092>DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22094535>**Keywords**

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Abstract

Social media has increasingly been a way for youth to communicate and gain social acceptance. The ability to like and comment on things gives people digital validation that's easy to see and can impact their self-worth. This particular research paper examined the effect of digital validation on the self-esteem of young females aged 18 to 25 years old and the contribution of Baseline self-esteem to self-esteem levels. A quantitative research design with a cross-sectional technique was used. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 354 young women who use social media. Established scales were used to measure self-esteem, Baseline self-esteem, and digital validation. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, hierarchical multiple regression & Pearson correlation were used to analyse the data. Results showed that digital validation negatively and significantly predicts self-esteem, meaning that the more someone uses likes and comments to validate themselves, the less positive their self-esteem is. Baseline self-esteem was also revealed to be a significant negative predictor of self-esteem. In addition, negative correlation analysis revealed that there was a significant correlation between self-esteem and digital validation and Baseline self-esteem.

1. INTRODUCTION**1.1 Social Media and Digital Interaction**

With the swift development of social media, the way people communicate, interact, and form relationships in today's society has changed. The use of apps like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook has been instrumental in the communication, self-expression, entertainment, and social networking aspects of young girls and young adults. Social media is unlike traditional methods of communication, where communication is one-sided and limited to the point of contact; in social media, there is constant communication and instant connection, allowing the user to be in constant contact with his peers regardless of where he is. Social media is no longer merely a

communication medium but a social world where individuals experiment with new identities, form relationships, and gain social acceptance. Recent research emphasizes the role of social media as a crucial context where adolescent identity development takes place and how it shapes identity exploration, the formation of self-concept, and self-presentation behaviors (Avci et al., 2025).

Social media is also pervasive and has changed how social approval is expressed and received. Social networking is becoming a primary source for young girls to communicate with others but also a means of determining social status and popularity. Peer interaction is constant, and social media users are exposed to opportunities for social comparison and peer evaluation,

which could impact their and others' perceptions. Some research indicates that online interactions and digital experiences significantly influence young girls' psychological growth and health (Masri-zada et al., 2025).

1.2 Digital Validation in Social Media Environments

The numbers of likes, comments, shares, views, and followers are some of the most distinguishing aspects of social media platforms. These metrics offer instant and clear evidence of how well people are reading online material. Social media platforms represent a space where users can directly see and compare popularity and acceptance measures—unlike traditional interpersonal interactions, where it may be challenging to quantify. Therefore, social acceptance is more quantifiable in virtual spaces. This feedback has given rise to the concept of digital validation. Digital validation refers to the acceptance, recognition, and approval that people receive through digital interactions and engagement metrics. Likes and comments serve as a measure of social support, popularity, and peer acceptance and enable users to gauge their own social value. Positive feedback can help build self-confidence and a sense of belonging, while negative feedback or low engagement can foster feelings of disappointment and self-doubt. Recently, studies have shown that online feedback systems have a profound impact on shaping the emotional experiences and self-evaluations of young girls, with digital validation becoming a key factor in comprehending psychological well-being in the digital sphere (Chen, 2025).

Digital validation has been integrated into daily social interactions as social media has continued to be the primary means of young girls' communication. Youth consumers often monitor engagement levels and how they are doing compared to others. This phenomenon can lead to validation-seeking behaviors, in which people rely more and more heavily on others' opinions and approval to determine their self-worth. Therefore, comprehending the significance of digital validation has emerged as a key research focus in social media and psychological fields (Mustafa et al., 2024).

1.3 Self-Esteem Among Young Girls

Self-esteem is a basic psychological construct that includes the general self-evaluation of self-worth, self-competence, and self-acceptance. It is crucial for emotional health, social adaptation, and psychological resilience. High self-esteem tends to accompany high levels of confidence and emotional stability, while low self-esteem can lead to anxiety, depression, and susceptibility to social pressures. The importance of self-esteem during the adolescent years and early adulthood is especially noteworthy, as teenagers go through significant physical, emotional, and social changes that impact their self-perceptions and the development of their identity (Masri-zada et al., 2025).

Females may be particularly vulnerable to the ups and downs in self-confidence due to the fact that they are frequently faced with more challenges and pressure concerning appearance, popularity, and peer approval. The pressures are exacerbated by social media, which can show people idealized images, beauty standards, and evaluations, all measured by engagement metrics. Highly visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok promote a comparison based on appearance, and young females are often more susceptible to issues around body image and social acceptance. Social comparison and self-presentation within social media could have significant impacts on self-esteem and psychological health among young girls, according to the research results (Mustafa et al., 2024).

Also, teenagers often utilize social networks as a way to express themselves and receive approval from their peers. Since self-esteem is a significant factor in this stage of development, feedback from digital interactions could be significant for self-worth and self-perception. Therefore, it is timely and relevant to explore the interconnection between digital validation and self-esteem in young girls.

1.4 Digital Validation and Self-Esteem

Researchers have been focusing increasingly on the connection between social media use and self-esteem in the last few years. As indicated in the existing literature, there are both positive and negative effects associated with social media on psychological wellness. Positive online

interactions, supportive comments, and social connectedness can enhance a sense of belongingness and make a positive impact on self-esteem. Meanwhile, overdependence on external validation can foster validation-seeking behavior and social comparison, which can negatively impact self-worth (Chen, 2025).

Digital validation is one of the most critical means by which social media can impact self-esteem. Likes and comments provide you instant feedback on your popularity and acceptance. Young girls often interpret these signs as indicators of their attractiveness, social desirability, and personal worth. Thus, getting more positive engagements can help boost one's self-esteem, while fewer likes or comments than anticipated can lead to feelings of inadequacy and rejection. Recent research (Chen, 2025) has demonstrated that social media feedback systems profoundly impact young girls' emotions and self-perceptions.

Furthermore, opportunities for constant social comparison are provided by social media platforms. Carefully selected content is regularly fed to the user, which often presents idealistic lives, accomplishments, and looks. Exposure to such things can lead to upward social comparison, that is, comparing oneself to one's more successful or more attractive peers. Studies show that the social comparison processes are closely linked to the self-esteem outcomes and can have positive and negative psychological experiences depending on the individual (Mustafa et al., 2024). Hence, both digital validation and social comparison are significant mechanisms that can account for the effects of social media on self-esteem.

1.5 Problem Statement and Research Gap

As more and more young girls and young adults are using social media, there has been a greater and greater concern over the psychological effects of social media. While social media offers the chance to communicate, express oneself, and socially interact, it also continually invites social assessment via interactions like likes, comments, shares, and follower numbers. There is a significant correlation between social media usage, social comparison, and self-esteem, as high social media engagement is often associated

with low self-esteem among teenagers (Mustafa et al., 2024).

Despite the proliferation of evidence around the relationship between social media and psychological well-being, research predominantly treats social media as an overarching construct, with little research examining its specific mechanisms, which are likely to impact self-esteem. Although online feedback processes and social media feedback loops could impact young girls' psychological well-being and self-evaluations, they have been under-explored in recent research (Chen, 2025). Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond overall indicators of social media use to focus on particular types of feedback, like likes and comments, on social media.

The other significant limitations are that many of the current studies looked at young girls in general without any particular focus on young girls and that young girls are apparently more susceptible to appearance-related comparison and peer evaluation. Young girls are more likely to experience digital validation and online feedback, which can have detrimental effects on self-esteem, as they are typically facing higher pressure in relation to appearance, popularity, and social acceptance (Masri-Zada et al., 2025).

In addition, previous research on social media experiences and self-esteem is inconclusive. Some research has shown a detrimental impact of social media engagement on self-esteem, while other studies have shown mixed or context-based results. The inconsistencies suggest that certain social media processes, such as digital validation through likes and comments, might be a better fit in explaining the impact of online interactions on self-esteem. Hence, the effect of digital validation on the self-esteem of young girls aged between 18 and 25 years is still largely unknown.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to investigate the effect of digital validation, specifically how likes and comments affect the self-esteem of young girls aged 18 to 25. The study will specifically examine digital validation (using social media) rather than social media use in general to gain more insight into the impact of digital validation

on self-worth, social acceptance, and psychological well-being.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media Usage among Young Girls

Social media has become a way of life for young girls, helping them communicate, enjoy and entertain themselves, express themselves, and develop their identities. Recently, girls have been found to be more active than boys when it comes to social network use, and they are more likely to use visually oriented social networks for interpersonal communication and self-presentation (Sala et al., 2024).

2.1.1 Growth of Social Media Use among Young girls

With the proliferation of mobile phones and the internet, social media has become a big part of teens' lives. Recent research suggests that young girls spend hours each day using social media, and this consumption increases during early and middle teenage (Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025). Social media has become more than just a communication tool—it has become a main place to maintain friendships and engage in social activities.

The use of digital technologies in daily life has changed how young girls interact with their peers and how they seek social support. Therefore, online interactions today become an important factor in the development of psychosocial growth and welfare (Sala et al., 2024).

2.1.2 Popular Social Media Platforms and Usage Patterns

Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are all popular visual and interactive platforms, with Instagram and TikTok being especially appealing to younger girls due to their focus on sharing pictures and short videos, as well as real-time interaction. Users can produce content, connect with other users, and receive instant feedback in the form of likes, comments, and shares.

The new social networks focus on visual content and the indicators of user interaction so that social approval becomes very visible and measurable. It can foster regular monitoring of peers' interactions and processes of social comparison (Steinsbekk et al., 2021).

2.1.3 Social Media as a Tool for Identity Formation

Teenage is the time of life when one is exploring and developing one's identity and sense of self. Young girls can try out how to present themselves, communicate their values, and receive feedback from friends on social media. Social media has been found to have a significant effect on identity formation as young people actively engage with social media to explore various components of their identity and evaluate themselves against others (Avci et al., 2025).

Young girls may be especially at risk from the influence of social media because they are more likely to participate in a variety of activities online that are related to appearance and to communicate with others. Idealized content and images created by peers can lead to greater appearance comparisons and heightened body image and social acceptance concerns (Taylor & Armes, 2024).

2.2 Digital Validation: Concept and Dimensions

Digital validation has become a key feature of social media contexts. Users can obtain real-time information about their social acceptance, popularity, and online presence through visible engagement metrics. These digital signals affect people's self-perception and their perception of their relationships with others.

2.2.1 Definition of Digital Validation

Digital validation is the process of gaining, granting, and understanding social acceptance from social interactions and social interaction metrics online, such as likes, comments, content sharing, views, and followers (Mark et al., 2023). Digital validation is immediate, measurable, and transparent—whereas traditional interpersonal validation is not.

The feedback systems on social media have become institutionalized, allowing users to gauge their social standing by counting the number of points of social approval they have. Young girls may perceive these signals as indicators of their worth and acceptance in society (Sala et al., 2024).

2.2.2 Forms of Digital Validation (Likes, Comments, Followers, Shares)

Digital validation can include both quantitative and qualitative feedback. While quantitative validation is measured by numbers including likes, followers, views, and shares, qualitative validation involves supportive comments, direct messages, and other instances of positive interpersonal communication.

Visible engagement metrics enable users to compare their popularity and influence with peers. Therefore, greater engagement is related to a greater sense of social status and social belongingness (Lee et al., 2020).

2.2.3 Positive and Negative Digital Feedback

There are positive and negative psychological impacts that can result from digital feedback. Giving positive feedback, whether by verbal or non-verbal means, such as encouraging comments and high engagement levels, can reinforce a sense of connectedness, social support, and self-confidence.

On the other hand, if someone receives negative comments or criticism on the internet, is cyberbullied, or is not as popular as the others, such experiences can lead to feelings of rejection, loneliness, and inadequacy. The findings of the research indicate that online engagement is associated with emotional distress and lower perceptions of social acceptance, especially among young girls who are less engaged. The results of the research suggest that young girls with lower levels of online engagement experience emotional distress and lower perceptions of social acceptance (Lee et al. 2020).

2.2.4 The Psychology of Online Validation-Seeking

Basic human needs for belonging, approval, and connection to social groups drive the pursuit of digital validation. Social media sites use feedback systems that act as social reinforcers, which encourage users to actively look for repeated feedback through online interactions. While positive emotions can boost self-worth in the short term, overreliance on external validation could lead to validation-seeking behaviors and emotional dependence on social media interactions. The more important young

girls consider their likes and comments, the more likely they are to experience self-esteem fluctuations depending on online feedback (Sala et al., 2024).

Digital validation could be a major factor in self-concept for young girls who tend to be more influenced by peers' assessment and appearance issues.

2.4 Self-Esteem among Young Girls

Self-esteem is how a person sees him/herself, how well he or she likes himself or herself, and how well he or she respects him/herself. It mirrors people's positive or negative self-perceptions and self-competence. Self-esteem is particularly significant during Youth when young people are going through physical, emotional, and social changes and discovering their identities and roles in society (Avci et al., 2025).

Self-esteem comprises self-confidence, social acceptance, body satisfaction and perceived competence. Appearance-related self-esteem and social self-esteem are particularly significant for young girls, as these two factors may determine their self-perceptions. They have been shown to impact self-esteem and body esteem, and online comparison is now relevant to young people's self-evaluation, especially on Instagram (Taylor & Armes, 2024).

Gender differences further justify the focus on young girls. Appearance-based comparisons, idealised images and feedback from people can be more common for girls on visual social media. As a result, they could be more susceptible to changes in their self-esteem when digital feedback is positive, negative, or lacking completely (Taylor & Armes, 2024).

2.5 Social Media and Self-Esteem: Existing Evidence

The association of social media use and self-esteem has been a subject of considerable research. While there is evidence that social media can positively impact the well-being of young girls, there is also evidence that it can negatively influence their well-being, depending on how it is used, the type of content viewed, and how the young girls interpret their interactions on social media (Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025).

The good news is that social media offers teens a way to foster friendships, to express themselves and to get emotional support from friends. Supportive comments, online communities, and positive interactions might foster a sense of belongingness and social connectedness, positively impacting self-esteem (Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025).

Social media can also have a negative impact on self-esteem, however. Using visual platforms, users are exposed to idealised images, lifestyles and appearance standards which lead to upward social comparison. Social comparison on Instagram has been linked to body-esteem and self-esteem shifts; thus, idealised online content can impact self-evaluation (Taylor & Armes, 2024).

However, empirical results have been inconsistent as the effects of social media are subject to individual differences and use habits. Thus, overall social media consumption may not be a complete explanation for self-esteem. The platform mechanisms like likes and comments can offer a more detailed explanation of how online experiences impact the self-esteem of young girls (Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025).

2.6 Impact of Digital Validation on Self-Esteem

Digital validation means social validation through likes, comments, shares, views and followers. These types of feedback are quick, obvious and quantifiable and therefore are strong predictors of online acceptance. More than just that, online feedback can impact users' emotional experiences, social connectedness, and self-esteem (Voggenreiter et al., 2024).

Likes are one of the most obvious ways to validate something online. Many likes can mean that a young woman is popular, attractive and accepted by their peers. Conversely, disengagement can result in frustration or a feeling of failure. Lack of feedback online can lead to negative emotions and reduce self-confidence, as indicated by research (Voggenreiter et al., 2024).

Comments are important as they provide qualitative feedback. Positive comments can boost confidence and sense of belonging; negative comments or no response at all can lead to a sense of rejection. The comments often include direct peer evaluations and can

therefore have a significant impact on young girls' perception of social value (Voggenreiter et al., 2024).

When validation is too digital, validation-seeking behaviour can result. If teens rely on the number of likes and comments to gauge their self-worth, their self-esteem can rise and fall based on the feedback they receive online. This phenomenon is why digital validation plays a crucial role in grasping the impact of social media on young girls' self-esteem (Voggenreiter et al., 2024).

2.7 Theoretical Underpinning

This study is based on social comparison theory and looking-glass self theory. These theories discuss how people appraise themselves by comparing themselves to others and receiving feedback from others. The visible signs of engagement in the social media environment amplify comparisons and peer feedback (Taylor & Armes, 2024).

2.7.1 Social Comparison Theory

Social comparison theory suggests that people make comparisons between their skills, attitudes, and personal qualities and the abilities, opinions, and personal characteristics of others. Social media enhances this process as users are constantly seeing what others look like, how they live, their popularity and level of engagement. The theory was found to be significant in the digital realm, as Instagram-based comparison has been proven to affect body esteem and self-esteem (Taylor & Armes, 2024).

2.7.2 Looking-Glass Self Theory

According to the looking-glass self theory, people's self-concept is based on their perception of how they think others perceive them. Likes and comments are like visible representations of others' assessments on social media. However, positive feedback can enhance the sense of worth, and limited or negative feedback can trigger feelings of inadequacy and rejection (Voggenreiter et al., 2024).

2.7.3 Theoretical Justification

These theories can be understood collectively as an explanation of how digital validation could

impact self-esteem. Social Comparison Theory and Looking-Glass Self Theory account for how girls compare their online activity to that of others and how others' feedback impacts self-perception. With social media always offering a chance for comparison and evaluation, these theories also align with the proposed relationship between digital validation and self-esteem (Taylor & Armes, 2024; Voggenreiter et al., 2024).

2.8 Research Gap

There has been a large amount of research on social media and self-esteem, but most of that has been on social media use generally and not on specific processes like likes and comments. Current research suggests that the impact of social media is differentiated based on patterns of use and experiences online, and so it is crucial to consider more specific features of the internet (Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025).

Another gap exists in that many studies do not separately target young girls, treating young girls as a single group. The experiences of girls need to be looked at separately, as they are more likely to be the target of appearance-based social comparison and peer evaluation on visual platforms (Taylor & Armes, 2024).

Lastly, there has been little research investigating digital validation as a stand-alone factor, especially in early adulthood (18-25 years) among young females. This study fills this gap by analysing the effects of likes and comments on self-esteem among young girls (Voggenreiter et al., 2024).

2.9 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

2.9.1 Conceptual Framework

From the literature reviewed, the following research hypotheses will be framed: Digital validation has a significant impact on the self-esteem of the young girls. Likes and comments are physical cues of peer acceptance and approval. Based on social comparison theory and looking-glass self theory, digital validation is put forward as the independent variable, with self-esteem as the dependent variable (Taylor & Armes, 2024; Voggenreiter et al., 2024).

What you see online (Likes and Comments) = Self-Esteem

2.9.2 Hypotheses Development

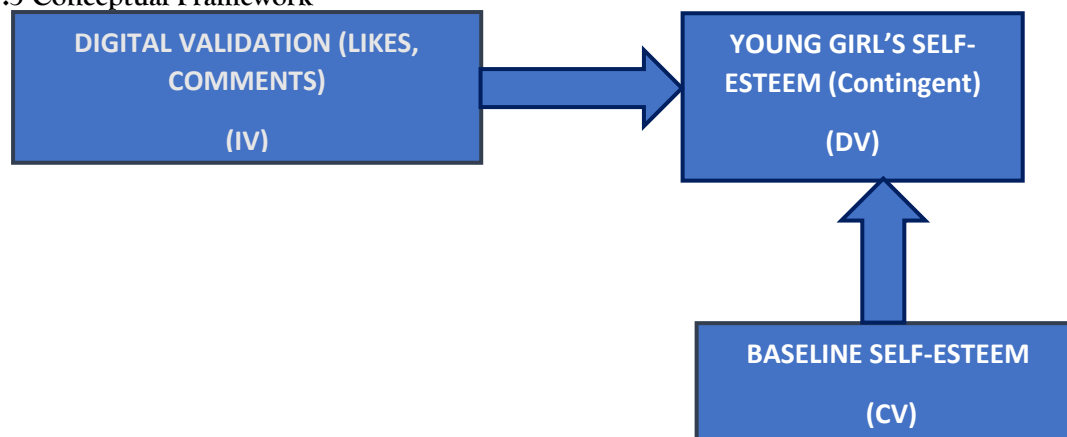
Digital validation is a significant source of social approval in the digital world. Social media users are provided with instant feedback on their popularity, attractiveness and acceptance through likes/comments. Given that online feedback can impact emotional responses, connectedness and self-esteem, the following hypothesis is posited (Voggenreiter et al., 2024):

H1: There is a significant relationship between digital validation (likes and comments) and self-esteem (Contingent) among young girls.

Previous self-perceptions and self-worth could also impact self-esteem. But digital validation can still help with self-esteem by offering another measure for social acceptance and approval. Considering that feedback received from social media is significant for identity development and self-evaluation, the following hypothesis can be proposed (Avci et al., 2025; Voggenreiter et al., 2024):

H2: The relationship between digital validation and self-esteem (contingent) remains significant after controlling for baseline self-esteem among young girls aged 18–25 years.

2.9.3 Conceptual Framework



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

To address the objectives of the study, data were gathered in numerical form from young female social media users and examined using statistical procedures. This approach was selected because it facilitates the systematic evaluation of relationships among research constructs. The investigation was conducted within a single data-collection period, allowing participants' experiences and viewpoints regarding online feedback and self-worth to be captured as they existed at that moment. The design was considered suitable for obtaining an overall picture of the phenomenon under investigation without requiring repeated observations over time.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The targeted group of the study was women aged 18-25 years using social media. Young adults were chosen because they are likely to be heavy users of social networking sites and often receive feedback in the form of likes and comments. Convenience sampling was done in which participants who fulfilled study criteria and were willing to participate were included as members of the sample. Answers were gathered electronically, using online methods. Of the 359 questionnaires that were sent back, 354 were complete and used for data analysis.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

Data for this study were collected through an online survey designed to measure the main constructs including, Digital validation, contingent self-esteem, and Baseline self-esteem.

Baseline self-esteem, included as a control variable and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1965) was used to measure the Baseline self-esteem, which has been extensively applied in psychological and social science research. The questionnaire consisted of items related to self-esteem, Baseline self-esteem, and digital validation. Contingent self-esteem, the dependent variable of the study, was measured using the contingencies of self-worth scale (CSWS) which assesses the extent to which an individual's self-worth is influenced by acceptance, recognition, and approval from others. The digital validation was assessed through items examining participants' perceptions regarding the importance of receiving online feedback, including likes and comments on social networking platforms. Responses were recorded using a Five-point Likert-type response format, ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

After the questionnaires were collected, the responses were organized and prepared for statistical examination using SPSS software. The analysis began with summary measures to provide an overview of respondent characteristics and the distribution of the collected data. The dependability of the measurement instruments was then evaluated by examining internal consistency coefficients. Relationships among the constructs were explored through correlation analysis to identify both the direction and strength of the associations. To further investigate the explanatory role of digital validation, a

hierarchical regression model was estimated. Baseline self-esteem was entered in the initial stage of the model, followed by digital validation in the subsequent stage. This procedure made it possible to assess the additional contribution of digital validation in explaining variations in self-esteem beyond the influence of Baseline self-esteem. The selected analytical techniques were considered appropriate for addressing the objectives and testing the proposed hypotheses of the study.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The empirical results obtained from the data collected are provided in Chapter 4. A total of 354 participants responded to a study of what digital validation means for self-esteem in young women. Various statistical techniques were performed to accomplish the study objectives. A set of summary statistics was first generated to give a general overview of the data and to explore the distribution patterns. Next, the consistency of the measurement scales was determined to see whether the instruments yielded reliable data. Correlations between the constructs were then

calculated. The stepwise regression was used to determine if digital validation will help to explain variance in self-esteem beyond the influence of Baseline self-esteem. The results from these analyses are summarized below.

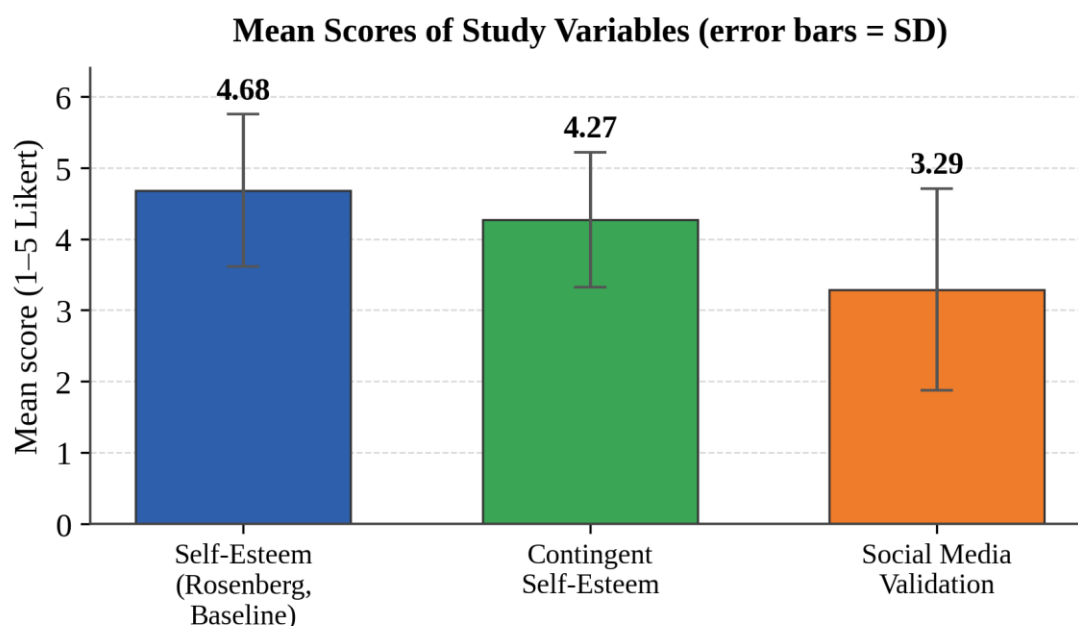
4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Normality Assessment

The central tendency, variability, and distributional characteristics of the study variables were examined with descriptive statistics. The mean score, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis of the self-esteem, Baseline self-esteem, and social media validation scales are presented in Table 1. The mean score of self-esteem was 4.68 (SD = 1.07) which is moderately high self-esteem of the respondents. The mean score for Baseline self-esteem was 4.27 (SD = 0.95) indicating that the respondents moderately used others' assessment and achievements to determine their self-esteem. The social media validation scale had a mean of 3.29 (SD = 1.42), suggesting a moderate tendency of the respondents to seek social media validation through likes, comments etc.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 354)

Variable	N	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-Esteem (Rosenberg,Baseline)	354	4.68	1.07	-0.28	-0.32
Contingent Self-Esteem	354	4.27	0.95	-0.12	0.07
Social Media Validation	354	3.29	1.42	0.50	-0.33

Figure 1 Mean Scores of Self-Esteem, Contingent Self-Esteem, and Social Media Validation (N = 354)



Skewness was between -0.28 and 0.50, and kurtosis was between -0.33 and 0.07. All values were within the acceptable range of ± 2.0 ; thus, the data were considered approximately normally distributed. Thus, the assumptions for parametric statistical analyses were met.

4.3 Reliability Analysis

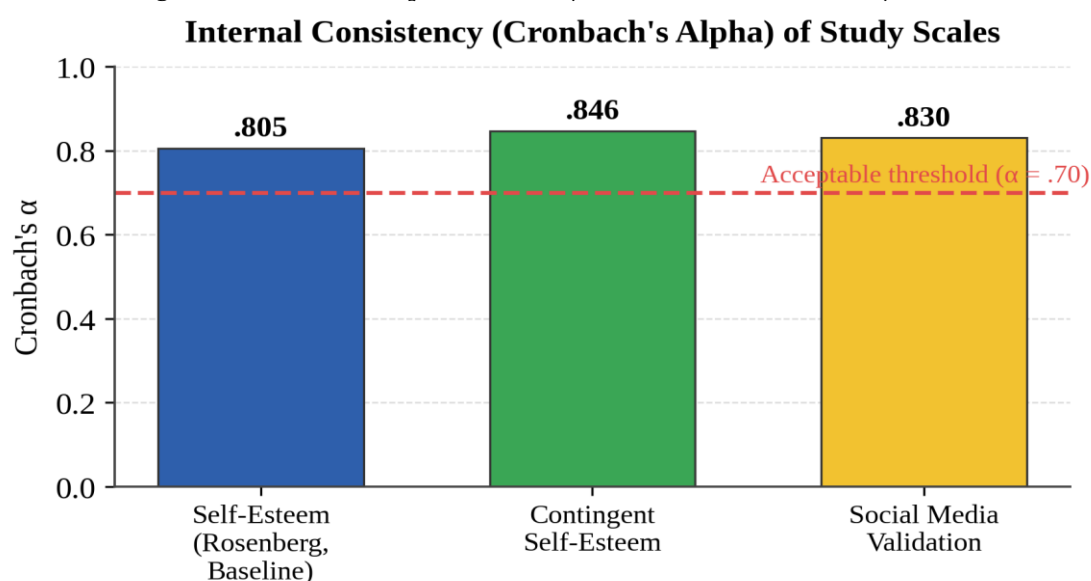
Internal consistency of the scales used in the study was measured by Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient of each of the variables in the study is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for Study Scales

Scale	Items	N	α	Interpretation
Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, Base Line)	10	351	.805	Good
Contingent Self-Esteem Scale	15	354	.846	Good
Social Media Validation Scale	5	353	.830	Good

Figure 2 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for the Study Scales



Results showed that the internal consistency scores of all scales were satisfactory. The Cronbach's alpha values for the Self-Esteem (contingent) Scale was .805 and the Baseline Self-Esteem Scale was .846. In the same way, the Social Media Validation Scale had an alpha coefficient of .830. All the alpha values were above the recommended .70; thus, the scales proved reliable and appropriate for further analysis. The findings of this research showed

that the measurement instruments used in the research consistently described the constructs being studied.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among Rosenberg Self-Esteem, Contingent Self-Esteem, and Social Media Validation.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

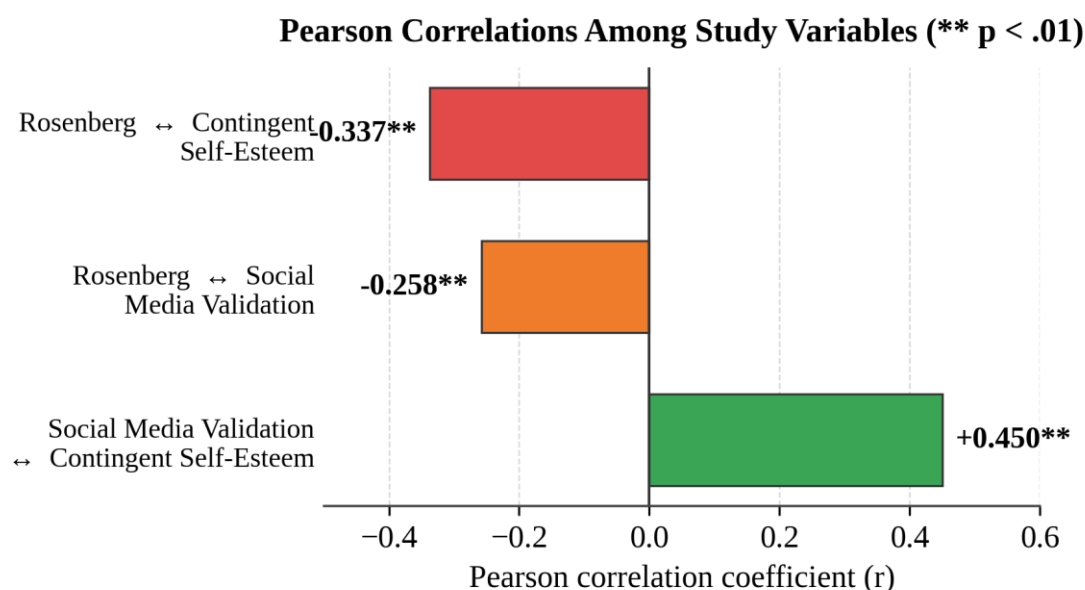
Variable	1	2	3
1. Rosenberg Self-Esteem (Baseline)	—		
2. Contingent Self-Esteem	-.337**	—	
3. Social Media Validation	-.258**	.450**	—

Note. N = 354. Values represent Pearson correlation coefficients (r). ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Note. N = 354. Values represent Pearson correlation coefficients. * $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Figure 3

Pearson Correlations Among Rosenberg Self-Esteem, Contingent Self-Esteem, and Social Media Validation



Results revealed a strong negative correlation between Rosenberg Self-Esteem and Contingent Self-Esteem $r(352) = -.337$, $p < .001$. This means that the more positive general self-perception a person had, the less they were likely to rely on external validation and approval of others for their self-esteem.

Additionally, there was a significant negative correlation between Rosenberg Self-Esteem and Social Media Validation, $r(352) = -.258$, $p < .001$. This indicates that negative general self-esteem participants were more likely to value likes, comments, and feedback provided by the social media.

Most important, Social Media Validation was significantly moderately positively related to Contingent Self-Esteem, $r(352) = .450$, $p < .001$. This finding shows that the greater the number of likes, comments and online feedback, the more likely young girls are to regard others' approval as a measure of their self-worth.

So, Hypothesis 1 was accepted. Digital validation was found to be significantly related to self-esteem as measured in this study by contingent self-esteem.

To analyze the data, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used.

A hierarchical multiple regressions were used to examine if the Social Media Validation scales significantly predicted Contingent Self-Esteem when controlling for Rosenberg Self-Esteem in a two-step analysis.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem was entered as the control variable in Step 1. Social Media Validation was added in Step 2 to determine if it would account for more variance in Contingent Self-Esteem than baseline self-esteem.

4.5 Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis

A two-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine whether Social Media Validation significantly predicted Contingent Self-Esteem after controlling for Rosenberg Self-Esteem.

In Step 1, Rosenberg Self-Esteem was entered as the control variable. In Step 2, Social Media Validation was added to examine whether it explained additional variation in Contingent Self-Esteem beyond baseline self-esteem.

Table 4

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Contingent Self-Esteem from Rosenberg Self-Esteem and Social Media Validation

Variable	B	SE B	β	t	p	R ²	ΔR^2
Step 1						.114	
Rosenberg Self-Esteem (Base line)	-.499	.074	-.337	-6.72	< .001		
Step 2						.255	.141**
Rosenberg Self-Esteem (Base line)	-.350	.071	-.237	-4.96	< .001		
Social Media Validation	.430	.053	.389	8.16	< .001		

Note. N = 354. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE B = standard error of B; β = standardized regression coefficient; R² = coefficient of determination; ΔR^2 = change in R². Step 1 entered Rosenberg Self-Esteem as the control variable. Step 2 added Social Media Validation as the predictor. * $p < .01$.

Figure 4 Variance in Contingent Self-Esteem Explained Across the Two Regression Steps (R²)

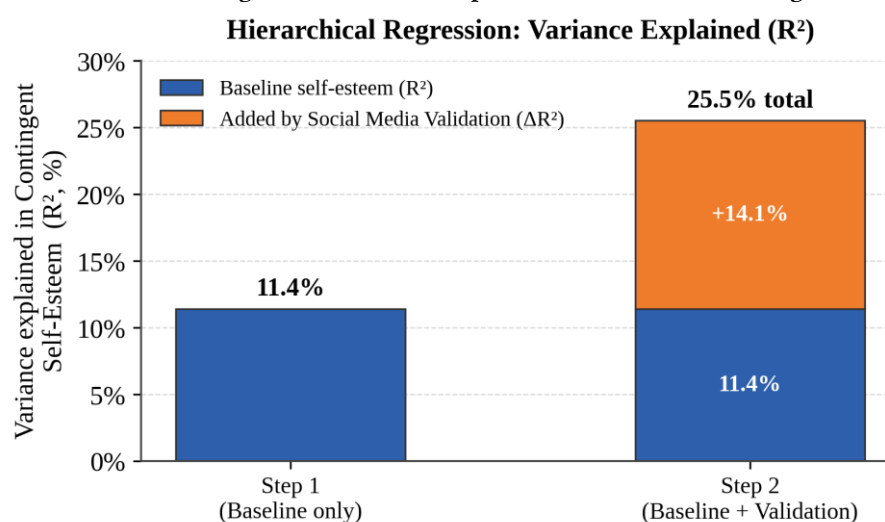
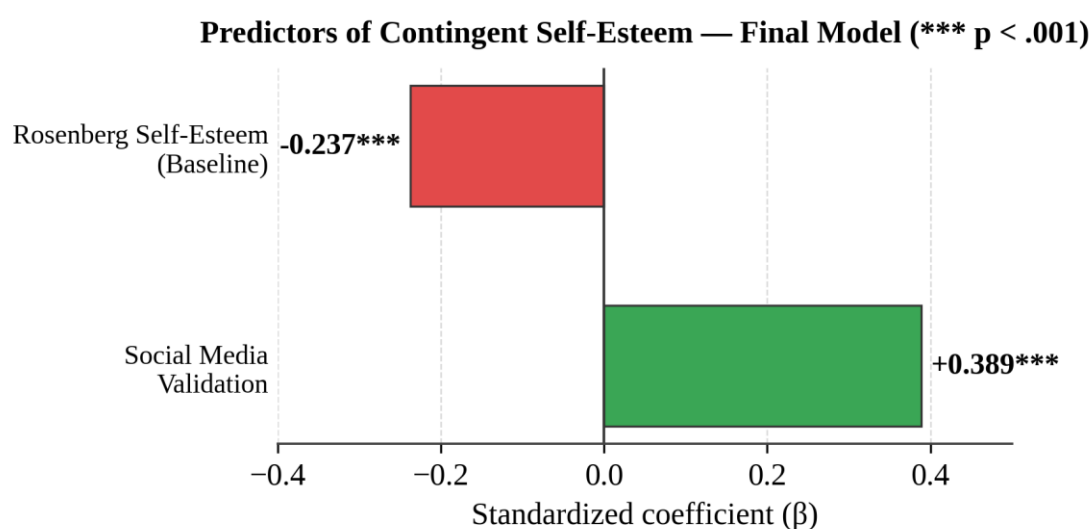


Figure 5 Standardized Regression Coefficients (β) Predicting Contingent Self-Esteem in the Final Model



Rosenberg Self-Esteem in Step 1 was a significant predictor of Contingent Self-Esteem ($\beta = -.337$, $p < .001$). The model explained 11.4% of the variance in Contingent Self-Esteem, $R^2 = .114$, $F(1, 352) = 45.11$, $p < .001$. The model was expanded to include Social Media Validation in Step 2. Social Media Validation was added to the model and the additional variance accounted for was significant, $\Delta R^2 = .141$, $F(1, 351) = 66.59$, $p < .001$. The final model explained 25.5% of the total variance in Contingent Self-Esteem, $R^2 = .255$.

Even after controlling for Rosenberg Self-Esteem, Social Media Validation was a significant positive predictor of Contingent Self-Esteem, $\beta = .389$, $p < .001$. This resulted in a positive correlation between increased reliance on likes, comments and online validation, and the more likely a young girl was to look to others' opinions for her self-worth.

Hence Hypothesis 2 was accepted. The relationship between digital validation and contingent self-esteem remained significant when statistically controlling for baseline Rosenberg Self-Esteem.

4.6 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Relationship	Result
H1	Digital Validation $\rightarrow$ Self-Esteem (Contingent)	Supported
H2	Digital Validation $\rightarrow$ Self-Esteem (after controlling for Baseline Self-Esteem)	Supported

The results indicated that there was a significant relationship between Social Media Validation and Contingent Self-Esteem of youth female between 18-25 years old. The more important it was for participants to have likes, comments, and feedback online, the more they relied on others' approval to assess their self-worth. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis also showed that Social Media Validation was a significant predictor of Contingent Self-Esteem even after controlling for Rosenberg Self-Esteem. The incorporation of digital validation provided significant explanatory power to the model and was able to raise the explained variance from 11.4% to 25.5%. In general, both the hypotheses were accepted. The results indicate that digital validation is significantly related to external validation of self-esteem in young girls, confirming the hypothesis.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study focused on the correlation between digital validation and contingent self-esteem of young women aged 18-25 years. Digital validation was assessed with the participants' dependence on likes, comments, and other feedback they received from social media. Contingencies of self-esteem were defined as how much participants relied on approval, acceptance, and recognition of others in the

construction of self-esteem. General self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem) was added as a control variable to address the general level of self-esteem within the participants.

The first hypothesis proposed that there would be a significant relationship between digital validation and self-esteem among young girls. This hypothesis was supported by the findings. Social Media Validation had a significant positive correlation with Contingent Self-Esteem, $r(352) = .450$, $p < .001$. This finding suggests that individuals who attributed more importance to likes, comments and social media feedback had a higher likelihood of relying on other for their self-worth.

This indicates that digital validation could be pertinent to the assessment of young women in online contexts. Likes, comments, views, shares, follower counts – these are all ways to make the approval very visible on social media platforms. It's easy to turn these signals into popularity, attractiveness, acceptance or social status signals. As people start to take these online reactions as a true sign of their own value, self-esteem can come to rely on other people's feedback.

This result agrees with Social Comparison Theory that people compare themselves with others in terms of their characteristics, performance and social status. Social media offers more opportunities for such comparisons as users are constantly reminded about the lives,

looks, successes and popularity of others who they have connected with. The likes and comments that are visible on the platform can magnify this comparison, as users can see how many likes and comments they are getting compared to others.

This is also backed by Looking-Glass Self Theory. According to this theory, self-concept is partially formed from a person's perception of how they are seen by others. Likes and comments on social media can serve as tangible indicators of peer assessment. Positive reinforcement can cause a fleeting feeling of belonging, while low engagement, negative comments, or no response can cause a person to feel ignored, rejected or less valued. So, it is possible that young women who rely more on feedback from social media will have a greater risk of developing contingent self-esteem.

The second hypothesis was that this digital validation – self-esteem correlation would be significant even when Rosenberg Self-Esteem was included as a control variable. This hypothesis was also substantiated by the results. The first step in the hierarchical regression model showed Rosenberg Self-Esteem to be a significant predictor in Contingent Self-Esteem with an R-squared of .114. This negative correlation revealed that individuals who scored higher on general self-esteem were less likely to make external evaluations as a source to their self-worth.

The model has been significantly improved when Social Media Validation was included at the second step. An additional 14.1% of the variance in Contingent Self-Esteem was accounted for by Social Media Validation, bringing total variance accounted for to 25.5%. Social Media Validation was still a significant and positive predictor of Contingent Self-Esteem after controlling for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem, $\beta = .389$, $p < .001$.

This finding is significant because it demonstrates that contingent self-esteem exists above the global level of self-esteem, and is related to digital validation. That is, having a positive or negative sense of self was not directly associated with using likes/comments as a form of dependence. Rather, social media validation was a unique factor in understanding how much

participants relied on the opinions and approval of others in their self-worth.

The results corroborate earlier studies that indicate that online feedback systems can influence youths' emotions and self-assessment. Because visual platforms often highlight appearance, popularity, lifestyle, and peer approval, young women might be more susceptible to digital feedback. Overseeing and interacting with optimized content and seeing success metrics may prompt users to try to get reassurance from online interactions and to gauge their social worth by feedback.

But, the findings should by no means be taken to mean that contingent self-esteem is a by-product of social media validation. The study was cross sectional therefore data was gathered at one point in time. Likewise, it could be that more contingent self-esteem individuals are more likely to seek out likes/comments for reassurance. Thus, it can be a two-way street, where digital validation leads to contingent self-esteem, and vice versa over time.

In general, the results indicate that social media validation is meaningfully related to young women's reliance on external validation to feel good about themselves. Though social media can be a source of connection, support, and self-expression, excessive reliance on likes and comments can lead to a more fluctuating sense of self-worth and reliance on others' feedback.

5.1 Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the link between digital validation and contingent self-esteem of young women (18-25 years). Result revealed significant positive correlation between Social Media Validation and Contingent Self-Esteem. Those who used more likes, comments, and online feedback were more likely to have external validation as the basis for self-worth.

The hierarchical regression analysis also revealed that after controlling for Rosenberg Self-Esteem, Social Media Validation was still a significant predictor of Contingent Self-Esteem. This was supported by added variance to the model through Social Media Validation which increased the explained variance of Contingent Self-Esteem from 11.4% to 25.5%.

The study helps to enrich the literature because it looks at a particular mechanism of social

media instead of on social media use in general. The findings highlight that likes and comments are not merely engagement indicators. For some young women, they can be important indicators of acceptance, popularity and personal worth.

Finally, an increased use of digital validation correlates with an increased tendency toward self-worth from others' approval. This discovery highlights the need to encourage youths to build up their internal sense of self-worth which remains stable and is not dependent on social media.

5.2 Practical Implications

The results impact parents, teachers, counsellors, educational institutions and young social media users.

Along with helping young women build self-worth through their personal values, skills, relationships, achievements and character, parents and families should also help them develop self-worth without relying on their online popularity. Talking openly about their social media usage, comparing themselves with others and how likes/comments are impacting their self-perception might help young women realize when this is happening.

Digital literacy and emotional well-being programmes can be incorporated into students' development programmes by teachers and universities. These programmes can be helpful in informing students about the way that social media algorithms, curated content, and apparent engagement metrics can shape the social comparison and validation-seeking behaviors. Students can also be helped to learn strategies of how to social media more mindfully.

Mental health professionals and counsellors may want to talk with their youth about their social media use when the youth is feeling insecure, compares, or has a need for approval. Discussing likes, comments, and the number of followers can help to determine if there is an influence of external validation on client's self-worth.

Social media users can gain from establishing healthy limits in monitoring engagement. Less checking the likes and comments and less comparison with others and more meaningful online interactions instead of numbers could lead to less reliance on online approval.

5.3 Limitation and Recommendations for future research

There are several limitations to this study. From the cross-sectional design, conclusions regarding causality are not possible. While there was a significant relationship between Social Media Validation and Contingent Self-Esteem, it remains to be seen in this study whether using social media for validation increases Contingent Self-Esteem or whether those with Contingent Self-Esteem are more likely to use social media for validation.

Secondly, self-report information was used. It is possible that participants responded in a socially acceptable manner or they may not have been fully aware of how much their self-worth was affected by the feedback from social media.

Third, only young women (18-25 years) were sampled. This means that results cannot be assumed to be applicable to males, adolescents under 18 years, older people or people from different cultural and social backgrounds.

Fourth, the study was primarily conducted based on likes and comments as expressions of digital validation. Contingencies of self-esteem may also be affected by other ways of getting feedback online, like followers, story views, shares, direct messages, reposts and influencer engagement.

Longitudinal design should be employed to investigate the interaction between digital validation and contingent self-esteem over time. Experimental studies may also examine the short-term impact of receiving positive or negative online feedback or high or low feedback on self-worth.

Future research will involve larger and more heterogeneous samples such as adolescents, older adults, and males, as well as individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Potential mediators and moderators such as body image, social comparison, fear of missing out, loneliness, psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and social support are also possible factors that may be explored in the research.

A future study would also be interesting to examine protective factors that might decrease such a need for validation online. This can be good family relationships, no on-line social support, self-compassion, media literacy, positive self-esteem, and healthy social media use.

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