

Social media validation and its effect on the self-esteem of senior high school students

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Abstract

Many adolescents today constantly use social media due to the rise of technology and the internet. As a result, many adolescents, particularly SHS students, use social media to seek validation from others. This study aimed to determine if social media validation affects the self-esteem of SHS students. This study employed a descriptive-correlational design to describe the levels of social media validation and self-esteem among students and to examine the relationship between these variables. The researchers used a 35-item researcher-developed questionnaire to collect data. The findings showed that the SHS students relied more on comments and shares for social media validation than on likes and followers. Additionally, students generally had high levels of self-esteem in academic, social, and physical domains. The results show that students highly value direct, positive feedback, such as likes, viewing it as a meaningful sign of recognition and social interaction. Overall, the results show that social media validation significantly affects SHS students' self-esteem. Thus, this study recommends that teachers integrate discussions of digital literacy and responsible social media use into classroom activities to help students understand that followers should not determine their confidence. School administrations may implement awareness programs that promote balanced social media use so students do not base their worth on online engagement, such as shares. It is also recommended that SHS students and other adolescents promote and develop healthier social media habits and avoid overreliance on social media validation, with support from mentors, friends, and family.

Keywords: self-esteem, social media, validation, senior high school, technology

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1. Introduction

In the United States, 95% of adolescents aged 13 to 17 reported using social media, with over one-third saying they use it “almost constantly” (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023). In the Philippines, social media has become a major part of daily life, especially among adolescents and senior high school students, and the country is even dubbed the “social media capital of the world.” According to Dhingra and Parashar (2022), adolescents and senior high school students are part of a technologically advanced society and learn at an early age to deal with the challenges of the virtual world. With the rapid rise of social media as spaces for connection, many adolescents and students use these platforms to seek validation from others in the form of likes, comments, shares, and followers. Many of them view these engagements as reflections of popularity, self-worth, and self-esteem, and consider them an important part of their social media experience.

At first glance, this phenomenon may not seem significant, given that the need for validation plays a crucial role during adolescence because it boosts self-esteem. Comparing oneself to others and the need for belonging have always been timeless human practices. Adolescence is a crucial transitional phase in life where physical, emotional, and psychological changes occur. In this stage of rapid growth, validation for children and adolescents is essential to their social, emotional, and physical development. Self-esteem also plays a vital role during this transitional period. In this study, self-esteem was examined from three major areas: physical, social, and academic. Physical self-esteem refers to how adolescents perceive and value their body image and physical appearance; social self-esteem involves their sense of belonging and acceptance among peers and in relationships; and academic self-esteem pertains to their perception of intellectual abilities and academic performance. Each of these areas can be influenced by external feedback and validation, such as that received from social media. However, factors such as social comparison may also result in decreased self-esteem.

Studies have consistently shown a strong relationship between social media use and self-esteem. For instance, Jan et al. (2017) reported that approximately 88% of individuals engaged in social comparisons, with 98% of these comparisons being upward, meaning people often compared themselves with others they perceived as better. Similarly, Vogel et al. (2014) found that frequent Facebook users tended to compare themselves to individuals they viewed as superior, which contributed to lower self-esteem. Moreover, a study by Carballo et al. (2024) involving senior high school students in Davao City revealed that overall social media usage was significantly correlated with students’ perceived body image. Although the students generally reported high self-esteem, they also had difficulty responding to criticism and expressed concerns about body-modification preferences. Taken together, these findings highlight how social media exposure influences adolescents’ self-perception and emotional well-being.

This study, therefore, examines how social media validation influences Senior High School students at Divine Word College of San Jose. In today’s increasingly digital and technological society, adolescents are highly exposed to online platforms where validation often comes in the form of likes, comments, shares, and followers. These indicators of approval can shape how young people view themselves and others, influencing their emotions, self-esteem, and confidence. By examining this phenomenon, the study aims to provide meaningful insights into the emotional well-being of students from DWCSJ in relation to social media validation. Specifically, it aims to determine whether online indicators such as likes, comments, shares, and followers serve as encouragement that enhances self-confidence and promotes a healthy self-image, or whether they contribute to reliance, social pressure, and potential negative effects such as insecurity and reduced self-worth. Despite the growing relevance of this topic, limited research and available data exist focusing on the DWCSJ Senior High School student population, highlighting a clear research gap that this study seeks to address. The findings of this study may contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of social media validation in adolescent development and offer implications for

promoting media literacy, resilience, and healthier online practices within the DWCSJ school community.

Statement of the Problem - This study aimed to determine the effect of social media validation on the self-esteem of Senior High School students. It sought to answer the following questions: (1) What is the level of social media validation experienced by SHS students in terms of likes, comments, followers, and shares? (2) What is the level of self-esteem of SHS students in terms of academics, social life, and physical appearance? (3) Is there a significant relationship between social media validation and the self-esteem of SHS students?

Significance of the Study - This research will explore how social media validation affects the self-esteem of Senior High School students. As social media remains a major influence in adolescent lives, this study will provide essential insights into its psychological effects. The findings of this study will offer valuable insights to inform strategies, programs, and policies that support students' emotional well-being and promote healthier social media use. The following individuals and groups are expected to benefit from the results of this study. Firstly, this study may help students understand how social media affects their self-esteem and guide them in developing healthier online habits. It will empower them to build confidence independently of social media and prioritize their mental well-being. This research may also help parents recognize the effects of social media on their children's self-esteem and mental health. It will equip them to set healthy boundaries, foster open communication, and build a positive self-image at home. It may also help inform teachers about social media's effect on students' self-esteem and mental health. It may help them create supportive classrooms, integrate digital literacy, and promote healthy online behavior. Additionally, this study may provide counselors with insights into how social media validation affects students' self-esteem. It may help them design programs and interventions that promote healthier coping and self-worth beyond social media. Lastly, this study may serve as a foundation for future research on social media and self-esteem. It can guide further studies on effective interventions and the long-term effects of social media on adolescents' self-image.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study - The primary objective of this study was to figure out the effects of social media validation on the self-esteem of SHS students, specifically those from Divine Word College of San Jose (DWCSJ) enrolled during the academic year 2025-2026. It specifically sought to determine whether social media validation affects Divine Word College of San Jose SHS students, and, if so, to what extent. Additionally, it aimed to understand how students' self-esteem is affected by the quantity, type, and perceived value of validation (likes, comments, shares, and followers) they receive on social media platforms. The targeted population and demographic were SHS students from Divine Word College of San Jose in Occidental Mindoro who were active users of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. The researchers gathered data through surveys, and self-esteem was measured using a researcher-developed 35-item questionnaire divided into 2 parts. Students from the CDC/GS, JHS, and college departments were not included. The researchers also primarily focused on the social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, as prior observations indicated these were the most commonly used by the students. Additionally, other factors that may influence students' self-esteem, such as family circumstances, academic performance, and in-person relationships, were not addressed in this study. The data gathered relied solely on survey responses, which may have been affected by the respondents' honesty, mood, and willingness to participate during data collection.

2. Methodology

Research Design - This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design, a non-experimental quantitative approach used to describe variable characteristics and examine naturally occurring relationships between them without manipulating the variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, a descriptive design was used to describe the levels of religious practices and service engagement. Moreover, a correlational design was used to determine the significant relationship between the two variables.

Respondents of the Study - The respondents of this study were the senior high school students at DWCSJ who actively use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. The researchers randomly

selected 17 students per section; thus, across 12 sections, the respondents were equal to 204.

Research Instrument - The primary research instrument used in this study was a researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 35 items and two main parts. The primary research instrument used in this study is a structured survey questionnaire developed by the researchers. The questionnaire comprises two main parts designed to measure social media validation and self-esteem among Senior High School students. The first part was a Social Media Validation Scale, which measured the level of validation students receive on social media platforms in terms of likes, comments, followers, and shares, as identified in related literature as key indicators of social media validation. This section consisted of five (5) items per indicator, for a total of twenty (20) items. All items were measured using a 4-point Likert Scale. The second part was a Self-Esteem Scale that measured students' self-esteem in academic, social, and physical domains, consistent with the Statement of the Problem. This section consisted of four (4) statements, also measured using the same 4-point Likert Scale. The data gathered from the questionnaire were used to determine the level of social media validation, the respondents' self-esteem, and the significant relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, expert validation was used to determine the validity and reliability of the researcher-made questionnaire. The three experts came from same department who teaches the research subject.

Data Gathering Procedure - Before beginning data-gathering procedures, the researchers secured consent from their research advisor. After approval, the selected participants received informed consent documents that explained all aspects of the study, including its purpose, scope, and confidentiality measures. Once consent was obtained, the researchers distributed survey questionnaires to Senior High School students who actively use Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok and have provided consent to participate in the study. The questionnaires assessed the effect of social media validation on participants' self-esteem. The researchers distributed the validated questionnaires and retrieved them from the respondents face-to-face as the sole method for data collection. The data collection process was conducted within a week. The researchers verified all questionnaires for completeness and accuracy before statistical analysis. All gathered data were kept confidential, and participants experienced no distress or pressure during the research process.

Statistical Treatment of the Data - In this study, the following statistical tools were used to analyze the data gathered from respondents. The levels of social media validation and self-esteem were measured using weighted mean analysis. Additionally, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to assess whether a significant relationship existed between self-esteem and social media validation.

Ethical Considerations - This study adhered to ethical standards when conducting research with human participants. Before collecting data, the researchers secured approval from their research advisor. Respondents were informed about the purpose and process of the study and that participation was voluntary. They were also informed that they could stop answering or withdraw at any time without any problems or consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity of all respondents were strictly maintained. No identifying information was disclosed, and all gathered data were used for academic purposes. The researchers ensured that all responses were treated with respect and stored securely to protect participants' privacy.

3. Results and Discussions

Table 1

Mean Level of Social Media Validation in terms of Likes, Comments, Followers, and Shares

No.	Indicators (Likes)	Weighted Mean	Description
1	I feel better about myself when my posts receive many likes.	3.25	High
2	The number of likes I get affects my mood	2.32	Low
3	I usually keep track of the likes on my posts.	2.50	Low
4	I feel discouraged when the number of likes is lower than I expected.	2.27	Low
5	I compare my likes with those of my peers.	2.00	Low
	Composite Mean	2.47	Low

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No.	Indicators (Comments)		
1	Positive comments make me feel valued as a person.	3.38	Very High
2	I reread comments to reassure myself about how others see me.	2.86	High
3	I pay more attention to comments than to likes.	2.51	High
4	Negative comments make me question my worth.	2.46	Low
5	Encouraging comments make me feel appreciated.	3.26	Very High
	Composite Mean	2.89	High
No.	Indicators (Followers)		
1	Having many followers makes me feel important.	2.50	Low
2	I gain confidence when someone new follows me.	2.77	High
3	I sometimes judge my popularity by my follower count.	2.19	Low
4	I compare my number of followers with that of others.	2.07	Low
5	Getting new followers motivates me to post more.	3.43	Low
	Composite Mean	2.39	Low
No.	Indicators (Shares)		
1	When others share my posts, I feel recognized.	2.99	High
2	A post being shared makes me think my ideas are worth something.	3.06	High
3	I feel proud when someone shares my content.	3.04	High
4	I sometimes create posts to encourage more people to share them.	2.30	Low
5	More shares on my posts make me feel more confident.	2.72	High
	Composite Mean	2.82	High
	OVERALL MEAN	2.65	High

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Very High, 2.51 – 3.25 High, 1.76 – 2.50 Low, 1.00 – 1.75 Very Low

Table 1 presents the mean levels of social media validation in terms of likes, comments, followers, and shares, with an overall mean of 2.65, which is interpreted as high. This indicates that although this validation is more closely linked to qualitative interactions (comments and shares) than to quantitative metrics (follower counts or sheer like counts), respondents typically derive a sense of personal value and social recognition from digital engagement. Moreover, the mean level of social media validation, measured by likes, was 2.47, which falls in the low range. This indicates that students generally do not rely heavily on the number of likes they receive to assess their self-worth. For them, likes are often seen as a normal part of using the platform, something that happens whenever a post is uploaded rather than a meaningful measure of approval or acceptance. These results suggest that students treat likes as routine digital responses rather than as significant indicators of recognition, reflecting a more balanced approach to social media interactions. The statement “I feel better about myself when my posts get a lot of likes” has the highest mean, 3.25, which falls in the high category. Even though students do not depend on likes overall, receiving many likes can still positively affect mood, making them feel noticed or valued for a short time. This suggests that likes may provide a transient enhancement in confidence without influencing enduring self-esteem. It seems that online interactions make students happy for a short time. However, they still have a sense of self-worth grounded in their own experiences, relationships, and successes outside social media. The statement "I compare my likes with those of my peers" has the lowest mean, 2.00, indicating that most students do not compare the likes on their posts to those of their peers'. This means it is a more beneficial approach to using social media, as they are less likely to base their self-esteem on their peers' engagement rates. Students will not doubt themselves if they do not use likes to compare themselves to other people. They also have a stronger and more stable sense of self-worth that does not really depend on getting likes on social media.

Previous studies supported the results. Zhu et al. (2024) showed that a larger amount of likes satisfies the desire for social acceptance, especially when online content aligns with users' ideal self-concept. Similarly, Reich et al. (2017) stated that likes can satisfy psychological needs such as belongingness and self-esteem, which is why they are often viewed as signs of social validation. The finding that students rarely compare their personal preferences with those of others supported Jan et al. (2017) and Krause et al. (2019), who showed that teenagers respond differently to online social comparison depending on individual differences. These findings also aligned with the “looking-glass self” theory, which posits that individuals construct their self-image based on their perceptions of how others think (Rao & Kumar, 2020). The results showed that getting likes had a positive effect on students' self-esteem and emotional health. However, they did not completely determine how much students valued themselves.

Furthermore, regarding comments, the composite mean of 2.89 is considered high. This also shows that the students usually think that comments are a very important way to get social validation. Comments give students direct, opinionated feedback, which they might find more useful and meaningful than likes, which really do not require any action. The statement with the highest mean (3.38) indicates that positive comments do make students feel better about themselves. "Positive comments make me feel valued as a person." Such interactions may improve feelings of belonging, underscoring the significance of meaningful communication in influencing emotional responses on social media. The lowest mean of 2.46 was recorded for the statement "Negative comments make me question my worth." Such as interactions that may improve feelings of belonging, focusing on the importance of communicating in ways that affect how people feel on social media. In general, comments seem to be a stronger way to validate someone socially than likes. They give students both positive feedback and opportunities to maintain their confidence, even when they receive criticism. Previous research also supports these findings, with Pamisa et al. (2025) reporting that positive comments increase resilience and self-worth, whereas negative comments decrease self-esteem. Similarly, Zulfianti et al. (2024) discovered that the frequency and the positivity of online comments are associated with higher self-esteem, supporting the hypothesis that interactive online feedback fosters social relationships and identity. The weaker influence of negative comments was consistent with Midgley et al. (2020), who explained that personal traits and coping strategies can lessen the impact of criticism. The findings show that positive comments had a greater impact on students than negative ones, particularly on emotional well-being and self-esteem. This highlighted the need for healthy online interactions and for students to learn how to deal with criticism on social media.

In terms of followers, the composite mean is 2.39, which is considered low. Most students do not think that having a lot of followers is a good way to feel good about themselves. It seems that follower counts do not boost self-esteem as much as comments and shares do. The results show that students do not use the number of people who like them to judge their social acceptance. The highest mean, 2.77 (in the high range), was for getting a new follower. This shows that gaining new followers can give you a short boost in confidence, but it is not very strong. It seems that students care more about personal interactions and meaningful engagement than just getting more followers. This suggests that online recognition is more emotionally reinforced by active participation than by numbers. Comparing their number of followers with those of peers had the lowest mean (2.07), placing it in the low category. This suggests that students rarely engage in social comparison based on follower counts. As a result, they are unlikely to feel pressure or insecurity from online popularity metrics, supporting a healthier and more balanced approach to social media use. The findings, however, are contradicted by previous studies. A systematic examination by Woods (2023) showed that follower counts may influence how individuals view themselves by serving as a form of social approval, contradicting the findings. Moreover, Sciara et al. (2021) found that when individuals with a strong demand for social validation and approval gain substantial amounts of followers on social media platforms like Instagram, they experience positive emotions, whilst having fewer followers led to unpleasant feelings and less motivation to attract attention on the internet, suggesting that changes in the number of followers might have a greater effect on teenagers who actively seek validation. Additionally, Serra and Campaniço (2024) observed that Instagram users' self-esteem and life satisfaction are influenced by their total follower counts. This indicates that although people generally value followers, the students' focus on meaningful interactions rather than mere numbers supports healthier social media practices.

Lastly, in terms of shares, the overall composite mean of 2.82 is interpreted as high. Most students think that sharing things on social media is a good way to get attention. Shares, on the other hand, require a deliberate decision to repost or share the content with others. It is easy and quick to give likes. This is why students often think that shares are a better sign that their content is liked and worth sharing. The statement "A post being shared makes me think my ideas are worth something" got the highest mean of 3.06, which also falls under the high level. This suggests that students associate being shared with personal validation. When people share their posts, they feel like others are listening to their ideas, opinions, or creativity. For them, sharing means more than just saying something on social media. The statement "I sometimes create posts so that many people will share them" had the lowest mean, 2.30, indicating low agreement. This results in most of the students not making content just to get

people to share it. Their answers show they do not really want to involve more people. They seem to post more to share their thoughts than to get likes, which shows that they use social media in a more balanced way. These results suggest that social media validation through shares is positively correlated with students' self-esteem and confidence. Supporting this, Ballara (2023) noted that social validation affects self-esteem and identity as individuals adjust their behavior to feel included. Similarly, Youssef (2025) reported that teens who are more active online tend to have higher self-esteem, whereas less active teens tend to have lower self-esteem. However, Hjetland et al. (2024) cautioned that an excessive focus on online feedback can negatively affect mental health and self-esteem, highlighting the importance of balancing online engagement with other sources of personal validation.

Table 2
Mean Level of Self-Esteem in terms of Academic, Social, and Physical

No.	Indicators (Academic)	Weighted Mean	Description
1	I believe I can handle my schoolwork well.	3.28	Very High
2	I feel proud of what I accomplish in class.	3.37	Very High
3	I am confident when I participate in lessons.	3.23	High
4	I feel capable of handling my academic responsibilities.	3.25	High
5	I believe I can reach my study goals.	3.30	Very High
	Composite Mean	3.29	Very High
No.	Indicators (Social)		
1	I actively take part in group or class discussions	3.20	High
2	I have classmates I can talk to easily	3.42	Very High
3	I can participate in school activities that involve teamwork	3.32	Very High
4	I feel confident sharing my opinions in front of others.	2.88	High
5	I am comfortable working with others during group activities	3.18	High
	Composite Mean	3.20	High
No.	Indicators (Physical)		
1	I feel satisfied with my overall appearance.	2.91	High
2	I am comfortable with how I look in school	2.96	High
3	I feel okay seeing myself in photos and mirrors	2.95	High
4	I can focus on activities without worrying too much about how I look	3.07	High
5	I feel confident about how I look in my school uniform	2.91	High
	Composite Mean	2.96	High
	OVERALL MEAN	3.15	High

Legend: 3.26 – 4.00 Very High, 2.51 – 3.25 High, 1.76 – 2.50 Low, 1.00 – 1.75 Very Low

Table 2 presents the mean levels of self-esteem across the academic, social, and physical domains, with an overall mean of 3.15, which is interpreted as high. This suggests that respondents have a positive and consistent self-concept across various aspects of their lives. While they have high confidence in their social interactions and physical self-perception, their sense of self-worth is largely based on their academic proficiency and perceived capacity to succeed in an educational setting. Moreover, the mean level of self-esteem in the academic domain among senior high school students was 3.29, considered very high. The results show that students generally believe in their ability to handle schoolwork, accomplish tasks, and reach study goals. For instance, the highest mean of 3.37 for “I feel proud of what I accomplish in class” indicates that many students have a positive self-view and are confident in their academic skills. This suggests that self-esteem motivates them to do schoolwork. Slightly lower means were observed in statements such as “I am confident when I participate in lessons” (3.23) and “I feel capable of handling my academic responsibilities” (3.25), which remain at a high level. This means that even though most students are confident, they could do better at participating in class and doing schoolwork every day. Students seem confident in their abilities, but providing more opportunities to practice and receive support could increase their interest and improve their performance. Previous research supports these findings by highlighting the link between academic self-esteem and student achievement. Zhao et al. (2021) found that students with higher self-esteem are more engaged in their studies, particularly when they receive support from teachers, peers, or family. Similarly, Ogot et al. (2020) and Srewal et al. (2023) reported that students with higher academic self-esteem tend to achieve better academic outcomes. Basith (2021) emphasized that self-esteem affects how students assess their capabilities, even if it does not always directly translate into performance. Together, these studies suggest that strong academic self-esteem can motivate students' engagement and foster positive learning experiences.

Furthermore, in terms of social, the composite mean of 3.20, which falls under the high level. The results show that most students are confident when it comes to socializing, such as working with classmates, talking in groups, and collaborating with others. The mean score of 3.42 for “I have classmates I can talk to easily” indicates that students believe they have strong friendships with their peers and are comfortable asking others for help. These results suggest that students have a good sense of their social worth, which probably makes them more likely to get involved and work together with others. Some statements, such as “I feel confident sharing my opinions in front of others” (2.88), have lower means than others, although they are still high. This shows that students are usually confident in social situations, but they might be less confident when they have to share their opinions or when they are in front of a large audience. In general, students seem to have high social self-esteem, especially in places where support and teamwork are important. This shows how important relationships with other people are for building confidence and comfort in social situations. These findings are supported by previous research on social support and self-esteem. Anda et al. (2025) found that social support significantly predicted psychological well-being among university students, with self-esteem serving as a mediator. Similarly, Yıldırım et al. (2024) and Bum and Jeon (2016) reported that support from peers, instructors, and parents strengthened students’ self-esteem, promoting positive emotional states and overall well-being. The high level of social self-esteem observed among SHS students may indicate that these support systems help, suggesting that students who feel encouraged and guided in their interactions are more confident in social situations, even if they have some doubts in more public or opinion-driven environments.

Lastly, in the physical domain among senior high school students, the composite mean is 2.96, which falls under the high category. The findings show that most students are happy with how they look and feel good about how they look at school. Statements such as “I can focus on activities without worrying too much about how I look” (3.07) and “I am comfortable with how I look in school” (2.96) indicate that students have a good view of their physical appearance, which lets them participate in school activities with confidence without worrying too much about how they look. Although all items fall within the high category, none reach the very high level, suggesting that students generally have a good physical self-image but could still work on building confidence in how they look in some areas. For example, “I feel satisfied with my overall appearance” and “I feel confident about how I look in my school uniform” (both 2.91), suggesting that students generally have a good physical self-image. However, they could still work on building confidence in some areas. Overall, the results show that students have a healthy level of self-esteem about their appearance, allowing them to participate in school and social activities without being overly self-conscious. These findings are consistent with prior research linking physical self-esteem to overall well-being and confidence. According to Harter (2012), adolescents who perceive their physical appearance positively are more likely to exhibit higher overall self-esteem and engage confidently in school and social activities. Similarly, Marsh et al. (2017) noted that positive physical self-perception contributes to emotional resilience and reduces vulnerability to social comparison. These results imply that promoting supportive environments and positive feedback about appearance can reinforce students’ physical self-esteem, foster confidence and well-being, and minimize negative self-perception.

Table 3
Correlation Coefficients and p-values for Hypothesis Testing (H0)

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Effect Size	Critical value	t-value	P-value	Interpretation
Social Media Validation (Likes)→ Self-esteem (Academic)	0.247	0.061	1.972	3.623	<0.001	Highly Significant
Social Media Validation (Comments)→ Self-esteem (Academic)	0.168	0.028	1.972	2.422	0.016	Significant
Social Media Validation (Followers)→ Self-esteem (Academic)	0.278	0.077	1.972	4.113	<0.001	Highly Significant
Social Media Validation (Shares)→ Self-esteem (Academic)	0.313	0.098	1.972	4.684	<0.001	Highly Significant
Social Media Validation→ Self-esteem (Academic)	0.294	0.087	1.972	4.372	<0.001	Highly Significant

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Social Media Validation (Likes)→ Self-esteem (Social)	0.302	0.091	1.972	4.503	<0.001	Highly Significant
Social Media Validation (Comments)→ Self-esteem (Social)	0.305	0.093	1.972	4.552	<0.001	Highly Significant
Social Media Validation (Followers)→ Self-esteem (Social)	0.280	0.078	1.972	4.145	<0.001	Highly Significant
Social Media Validation (Shares)→ Self-esteem (Social)	0.342	0.117	1.972	5.173	<0.001	Highly Significant
Social Media Validation→ Self-esteem (Social)	0.356	0.127	1.972	5.241	<0.001	Highly Significant
Social Media Validation (Likes)→ Self-esteem (Physical)	0.215	0.046	1.972	3.129	0.002	Significant
Social Media Validation (Comments)→ Self-esteem (Physical)	0.204	0.041	1.972	2.962	0.003	Significant
Social Media Validation (Followers)→ Self-esteem (Physical)	0.184	0.034	1.972	2.661	0.008	Significant
Social Media Validation (Shares)→ Self-esteem (Physical)	0.264	0.069	1.972	3.890	<0.001	Highly Significant
Social Media Validation→ Self-esteem	0.361	0.130	1.972	5.501	<0.001	Highly Significant

Legend: p-value<0.001 Highly Significant

p-value <0.05 Significant

The correlation coefficients varied from 0.168 to 0.381, with all p-values below 0.05, signifying statistically significant associations. The strongest link was between overall social media validation and overall self-esteem ($r = 0.361$). This implies that students' self-esteem tends to increase with greater social media validation. Social self-esteem showed the strongest correlation with social media validation ($r = 0.356$), indicating that students' confidence in social contexts is more influenced by online validation than by their academic or physical self-esteem. Shares, in particular, showed the strongest association with social self-esteem ($r = 0.342$), suggesting that interactive forms of validation may have a greater effect on students' social confidence.

In contrast, the weakest correlation ($r = 0.168$) was observed between comments and academic self-esteem, indicating a smaller but still important relationship. The significant p-values (< 0.05 and < 0.001) support rejecting the null hypothesis. Furthermore, Dhingra and Parashar (2022) examined how adolescents seek validation on social media through sharing photos and stories, linking this behavior to self-esteem boosts via peer approval during a vulnerable developmental phase. Related research highlights social media's role in shaping self-esteem through feedback loops, with adolescents showing heightened sensitivity to likes and comments compared to adults (State Self-Esteem Responses to social media, 2025). Another related study analyzes daily fluctuations in state self-esteem in response to platform interactions, emphasizing social comparison as a key mediator (A comparative study of state self-esteem responses to social media, 2025).

Meanwhile, Rao and Kumar (2020) developed and validated an eight-item Social Media Self-Esteem Scale for 16- to 18-year-olds, grounded in looking-glass self-theory, in which perceived peer responses shape self-views. Supporting literature includes empirical tests of person-specific effects, revealing that 8% of adolescents experience declines in self-esteem associated with social media use, while most show minimal change (Social Media Use and Adolescents' Self-Esteem, 2021). Valkenburg et al. (2020), as an umbrella review, synthesized 25 reviews (2019-2021) on social media's mental health effects, noting weak overall links to self-esteem but highlighting intervening factors like usage patterns and content; related overviews confirm risks such as ill-being from cyberbullying and opportunities like support networks, influenced by demographics and platform design, with lower baseline self-esteem adolescents gaining more from positive feedback (Social media use and its impact on adolescent mental health, 2020).

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were obtained: The students generally showed low reliance

on likes; even those receiving many likes on their posts still experienced increased mood and self-esteem. The results suggest that the students highly value direct and positive feedback, such as from likes, viewing it as a meaningful sign of recognition and social interaction. The results indicate that students generally perceive their content as being shared as an acknowledgment that their ideas or contributions are valued, which increases their self-esteem. The findings indicate that students do not heavily depend on their follower counts to boost self-esteem; however, gaining new followers provides boosts in confidence and positive reinforcement, though its influence is less than that of the other sub-variables. The results found that students generally showed a high level of self-esteem in this regard. In particular, students who show pride in their academic accomplishments may attribute this to high academic self-esteem. The results show that the students also have a high level of social self-esteem, especially in interacting with others, such as their classmates, and can easily talk to them, whether online or in person. The findings indicate that, similar to the other sub-variables in this category, the students also display a high level of physical self-esteem. They can engage freely in school activities without being overly concerned or self-conscious about their physical appearance, indicating a generally positive physical self-perception. The findings suggest a significant correlation between how SHS students portray themselves on social media and their self-esteem. This means that even while online interactions can affect self-esteem, students still have a healthy sense of their value.

Recommendations - Based on the study's results and conclusions, the following recommendation is offered: Students may be encouraged to develop healthy social media habits and avoid relying entirely on likes as a measure of self-worth. Parents may give consistent emotional support and guidance to help their children understand that social media validation, including comments, does not define their value and identity. Teachers may blend discussions about digital literacy and responsible social media use in classroom activities to help students understand that followers should not determine their confidence. School administrations may implement awareness programs that promote balanced social media use, so students do not base their worth on online engagement, such as shares. Guidance offices may conduct seminars and workshops to further strengthen students' academic confidence and self-esteem. School administrations may also create programs that help students manage social comparisons and maintain healthy interactions, thereby supporting social self-esteem. School health offices may promote programs that encourage healthy lifestyles and positive body image among students, helping maintain their physical self-esteem and confidence in participating in school activities. Future researchers may conduct further studies that include variables such as family background, peer influence, academic performance, and mental health factors to gain a broader understanding of the relationship between social media validation and self-esteem. persist as students transition into higher education or independent living and may explore additional variables, such as the specific impact of social media trends and digital payment platforms on the impulse control and record-keeping habits of the youth.

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