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Research Paper

Exploring Adolescent Identity: Embodied Selfhood and Meta-Awareness in the Age of Social Media Validation

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ABSTRACT

A critical time for self-discovery, adolescence is a time when people work through the complexity of their identities and look to their peers for approval. Social media plat-forms, on the other hand, have drastically changed this process and brought with them both potential and obstacles. This study seeks to understand how meta-awareness, influenced by the digitization of self-presentation on social media, interacts with the need for validation in adolescents. Additionally, the researcher seeks to understand how the embodied sense of self influences adolescents' perceptions of body image and identity formation in the context of social media platforms. For this study, 120 students were recruited from schools in Pune and were employed a structured questionnaire. This study offers insights for educators, parents, and mental health professionals to help adolescents healthy identity development while also advancing our understanding of adolescent identity formation in the era of social media validation especially when validation is quantifiable.

Keywords: Adolescents, Meta-Awareness, Validation, Social Media Platforms, Identity, Embodiment, Self

Adolescents' go through a variety of physical and developmental changes during a time when gaining social acceptance is essential to maintaining one's self-worth (Vankerckhoven et al., 2023). From seeing changes in their physical appearances to changes in their thoughts and emotions, adolescents experience a turbulence of self-discovery and growth during this transitional period of their lives. This period of *'storm and stress'* often strives to achieve independence, autonomy, establishing one's identity and forming strong peer groups. These young individuals are flag bearers of freedom and privacy as they respect their personal boundaries and are aware of their rights to self-expression. With the invention of social media platforms, adolescents have found a medium to express themselves as these platforms serve as virtual communities that help foster a sense of belonging in them. The landscape of social media is dynamic in nature thus allowing adolescents to explore content that has the power to influence their style, thoughts, ideas etc., (Atske, 2023).

Since its invention, social media platforms have undergone several changes. For instance, Instagram (2010) was primarily invented to share pictures 'instantly'. However, over the

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years, the application has introduced several features such as live streaming of content, uploading reels etc, Other social media platforms such as Twitter (2006), Facebook (2008) and Tik-Tok (2016) have also upgraded and expanded their features as compared to its original utilitarian purpose. These platforms have become popular amongst adolescents due to the liberty given to users in order to curate content. Through selecting desired pictures, posts, thoughts and other content, individuals shape their online identities, presenting a curated version of themselves on such platforms as well as to the digital world. In contemporary society, this process of digital self-representation has become essential for building connections, thus impacting individuals' perceptions of others in both online and offline spheres. However, with the need to express oneself on a globally recognized platform, there also exists the inherent desire to seek validation (Wood et al., 2015). As these adolescents craft their personas on social media platforms, they often seek affirmation, validation and approval from their peer/peer groups so as to build a digital identity worthy of numerous likes and comments. The information that people choose to publish, the personas they present, and the interactions they have on social media platforms can all be influenced by their desire for validation (Wood et al., 2015).

The Need for Validation

Originating from the latin term *'validare'* validation refers to confirming something as correct or true. In the realm of social psychology, the term validation refers to seeking affirmation of one's self-worth, identity or belonging ("Validation," 2024).

The social identity theory developed by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues in early 1970's explains that belonging to a social group is a major source of self-esteem and sense of self for individuals. Social groups could be in line with shared interests of things such as favourite music or favourite artists, gender, ethnicity etc., (Ellemers, 2024).

The urge for approval or affirmation from one's peers or peer groups intensifies during this transitional period as adolescents begin to explore and develop their identity. Their sense of self is greatly influenced by peer interactions as they strive to achieve a sense of acceptance and belonging in their social groups (Shao et al., 2023). Their quest for finding their own identity is often intertwined with seeking validation from their peers. Apart from exploring hobbies, interests and beliefs adolescents often test out identities of individuals within their peer groups as a means of self-discovery and validation. Behaviours of others peers within a group are observed so as to gauge acceptance and validation from their social circles. Subsequently, they navigate their way through the social hierarchies and establish their place and status within the group. Seeking validations for adolescents may mean to conform to the norms and behaviours of their peer group. Loyalty is displayed towards the peer group by standing up for their group members in times of conflicts (Shao et al., 2023). This loyalty creates a supportive environment wherein adolescents feel appreciated and accepted while strengthening relationships and promoting a sense of cohesion and unity among the peer group.

In the current day, social media platforms have emerged as the medium to seek validation and acceptance. Each platform has a quantifiable metric feature that enables the adolescents to seek validation. For instance, the feature of 'likes' on Instagram and Facebook is one way through which users seek validation. When a particular post or content gets a 'like', dopamine present in the brain is triggered (Stevens, 2020). Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that is linked with rewards and reinforcement of behaviours (Recovery, 2022). For

adolescents, receiving a like is similar to achieving a distinction in their exams. The brain translates this achievement as a positive reinforcement thus creating a feeling of satisfaction and validation. Additionally, the visible nature of likes also acts as a form of social validation. When followers see a particular post receiving numerous likes, it is perceived that the individual and his/her content is popular. This boosts the adolescents confidence and they may start posting similar content so as to gain more likes on their subsequent posts (Kalsnes, 2016). On the flip side, if a particular post does not gain the desired likes, the adolescent's confidence may bolster thus leading to feelings of inadequacy or self-doubt. If feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy are persistent the adolescent may start relying on alcohol and substance abuse as a method of coping. This is because they believe that the feature of 'likes' is a measurement for one's self-worth in the digital world. Other features of social media platforms that help adolescents seek validations are comments, followers, stories etc (Stevens, 2020).

While adolescents are in search of creating their own identity; both online and offline, cultivating meta-awareness becomes essential for comprehending the impact of adolescent's online interactions and forming their sense of self in a constantly dynamic digital landscape as they navigate their digital personas in pursuit of validation.

Meta-Awareness and Adolescent's Digital Identity
A condition of intentional focus on the subject matter of conscious thinking that functions as an evaluation of experienced consciousness is known as meta-awareness (Chin & Schooler, 2009). Derived from the Greek meaning beyond/above the term 'meta' refers to anything that is above one's own control.

While adolescents undergo physical changes, they begin to reflect on their thoughts, emotions and behaviour. This development coincides with the concept of meta-awareness which means '*the ability to reflect on and monitor one's thoughts, feelings and mental processes'*. Meta-awareness is often discussed in context with meta-cognition which in simple terms means *'knowing about knowing'* (H & G, 2015).

Meta-cognition has two main components; metacognitive knowledge and regulation of cognition (H & G, 2015). Metacognitive knowledge is the understanding that people have of their own thought processes and coping mechanisms. For instance, a student using mnemonics to help him memorize the periodic table in Chemistry. Regulation of Cognition on the other hand refers to regulating and controlling the cognitive processes. For instance, a student strategically plans and schedules his timetable for his final exams. Meta-cognition is known to help adolescents maintain focus and concentration in their academics while they learn to balance all three aspects of their life - academic, social and family. A study conducted in 2004 aimed to evaluate adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 on their metacognitive views. To attain this objective, the Meta-cognitions Questionnaire for Adolescents (MCQ-A) was developed and validated. The study investigated the frequency and emotional correlates of meta-cognition in adolescents by utilizing the popular adult version of the questionnaire and the seminal meta-cognitive theory of emotional disorders. A sample of 177 students filled out the MCQ-A and emotional well-being questionnaires. A five-component answer that resembled the adult version was found by factor analysis, demonstrating the multifaceted character of adolescents' metacognitive views. High internal consistency on the scale suggested its dependability. The findings show that metacognitive beliefs are developed during adolescence and score differently depending on the age group.

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The relationship between meta-cognition and emotional well-being in teenagers was further highlighted by the discovery of strong correlations between MCQ-A scores and several measures of emotional symptoms. By evaluating the applicability of meta-cognitive theory to teenage emotional disorders, this study expands on earlier research on the subject. Through the modification of the MCQ-A, the study offers scholars and medical professionals a dependable instrument for evaluating metacognitive beliefs in teenagers, enabling additional exploration into their function in emotional growth and psychopathology. The results underscore how crucial it is to take metacognitive processes into account when designing treatments to support teenage mental health and wellbeing.

The neurology department has conducted research that suggests meta-awareness is linked with activity in the brain regions involved in self-referential processing, introspection and cognitive control. For instance, the regions of the prefrontal cortex; the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC) and medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) are connected in the metacognitive processes. These areas of the brain are essential for tracking and controlling mental and emotional states as well as for combining knowledge about oneself and the outside world.

In pursuit of seeking validation meta-awareness plays a crucial role as to how adolescents perceive their interactions on the digital platforms. Recent studies have explained the significance of meta-awareness in adolescent's social and emotional development, especially in the context of digital representation and identity. It has been found that adolescents who possess high levels of meta-awareness may be aware of the potential risks that are associated with depending on the feature of likes and comments received from others on social media sites. They might be aware that looking to others for approval might result in emotions of inadequacy, jealousy, and reliance on outside evaluations to determine one's own value. Adolescents who are aware of this can take action to develop a more balanced attitude to their online interactions by putting real connections and true self-expression ahead of getting approval from others. Additionally, functional magnetic resonance imaging tests (fMRI) have been used to understand how the brain responds when an individual is exposed to social media stimuli such as viewing likes, comments and other forms of feedback. It reveals that the brain's reward system regions i.e. ventral striatum and orbitofrontal cortex gets activated when the individual gets exposed to social rewards (Asai et al., 2016); (Sherman et al., 2016b).

A similar study was conducted in 2016 wherein the researchers used fMRI paradigm to investigate the adolescent's behavioural and neural reactions when they were exposed to the feature of 'likes' which acts a social endorsement (Sherman et al., 2016). The findings demonstrated the impact of virtual peer endorsement, as teenagers were prone to like photographs with a large number of likes. This pattern applied to photographs with both risky and neutral conduct. Increased activity in brain areas linked to reward processing, social cognition, imitation, and attention has been linked to viewing photographs with a high number of likes. Furthermore, the cognitive-control network's activation decreased in teenagers who viewed dangerous photographs. These results provide insight into the possible processes that underlie peer influence in the context of social media during adolescence.

A primary change that adolescents go through during their transitional phase is reflecting on what their surroundings have communicated to them. Adolescents may form concrete

connections with their environment as they reflect on their relationships with family, friends, and other adults. Their developing meta-awareness—the ability to reflect on their feelings and ideas—intertwines with this process. Their embodied sense of self and their capacity for introspection interact to increase their sensitivity to bodily events and sensations.

Embodied Self-hood of Adolescents

Studies pertaining to the self-have been one of the decade's most notable scientific pursuits (Asai et al., 2016). Self-research has been one of the decade's most notable scientific fields of study. Current research in psychology and neuroscience has centered on the study of the brain's representation of the self. This trend began by examining our sense of movement and body. In addition to being used to create virtual presence and involvement in Cyberpsychology in conjunction with recent technological advancements, behavioural, neural, and computational methods have shed light on how the subjective feeling of "my own body" or "my own action" is elicited. Given that the perception of an action (such as realizing "I am moving my hand") is dependent on contrasting expected movements with actual output or results, the perception of one's body (such as realizing "this is my hand") depends on integrating multiple sensory inputs (Kilteni et al., 2015); (David et al., 2008). The term "embodied sense of self" (ESS) is being used to describe these subjective self-perceptions that are rooted in our own bodies or sensorimotor systems (Weiß et al., 2014).

While this concept has several origins and has been discussed deeply in other disciplines, formal acknowledgement and research became more well-known in the second half of the 20th century and are still developing today. 'The Principles of Psychology' written by William James in 1890 discusses four key concepts - stream of consciousness, emotion, habit and will. According to James' the *'stream of consciousness'* hypotheses, a human's conscious experience is a never-ending stream of ideas, emotions, and sensations. He maintains that this stream is intricately entwined with physical feelings and behaviours rather than only being the result of cerebral processes. According to James, the body actively contributes to the formation of our subjective perceptions and worldview, serving as more than merely a vehicle for the intellect. The *'body-mind connection'*, postulates that mental and physical states are influenced by one another, is another of James's central ideas. He talks about things like emotion, in which subjective experiences are inextricably linked to physical changes in the body (heart rate, perspiration, etc.). James's concept of *'bodily reverberation'* describes how mental processes are impacted by physical acts and experiences, which in turn affects how we see the world and our sense of self. James also looks into how *habits* influence behaviour and personality. He maintains that our character and identity are greatly influenced by our habits, which are created via repetitive physical actions. According to James, our habits have their roots in bodily practices and experiences and are not merely cerebral inclinations.

Although the concept of embodied sense of self has not been discussed explicitly, he addresses the complex relationship between the human body and mind. Through the four key concepts discussed in his book, his work establishes the groundwork for understanding how our sense of self, perception, and thought processes are shaped by our physical experiences.

The central thesis of embodied sense of self according to Maturana and Varela (1991), dynamic self-organization and self-production are the hallmarks of a biological system, which is referred to as an autopoietic organism (Newen, 2018). According to these

autopoiesis principles, a living thing has a stable border with its surroundings and depends on regular exchange for waste elimination and nutrition. It is suggested that cognitive processes originate from biological systems by using such a biological unit as the evolutionary basis of a cognitive system. A biological system starts to feel self-aware when it develops into a cognitive system that can integrate conscious experiences and self-representation; humans are an example of this type of biological system. This self has its origins in a biological being that experiences the world, acts upon it, and creates instantaneous self-representations. When these self-representations are combined with conscious experiences, they create a transtemporal, multi-featured self that is typical of human selfhood. Three parts of the self are distinguished by further elaboration: the biological being, the capacity for self-representation, and the self-model, which integrates many sources of self-information. This ontological framework is introduced. The ontological recognition of the unity of the self and the person strengthens the case for the embodied self, in contrast to Thomas Metzinger's perspective, which rejects the existence of the self. This method takes into consideration both the immediate and long-term aspects of the self, recognizing the pragmatic and mental aspects of self-awareness (Newen, 2018).

Adolescents are considered as the young youth of our society. They participate in evolving self-organization and self-production during this transition, which is similar to the autopoietic processes that Maturana and Varela have described. Their self-perception and sense of identity are shaped by their experiences and interactions with social media platforms, which are a type of systematic trade with their surroundings. Teenagers are more sensitive to peer validation and acceptance on social media as they develop into cognitive systems that enable self-representation and integration alongside conscious experiences. Their immediate self-representations are reflected in this drive for validation, which gets incorporated into conscious experiences and aids in the development of a transtemporal, multi-featured self. Furthermore, knowledge of the ontological framework of the self—which includes the biological being, the capacity for self-representation, and the self-model—offers insights into how adolescents view themselves online. The intricacy of teenage self-consciousness is acknowledged, embracing both transient validation-seeking actions and long-term identity building processes, in contrast to viewpoints that reject the self (Newen, 2018).

Examining the complex terrain of teenage identity in the face of the ubiquitous effect of social media validation necessitates a review of previous studies and theoretical models that clarify the relationship between embodied selfhood and meta-awareness.

Significance
The significance of this study lies in its potential to shed light on the expanding body of literature on adolescent development and meta-awareness in context to the digital age. Adolescents find themselves in a virtual environment that can either reinforce or question traditional beauty standards due to the widespread use of social media, which affects how they view themselves. It is essential to comprehend teenagers' meta-awareness in the areas of body image and validation when creating focused interventions that support positive online activities. Secondly, the results obtained from this study could also guide therapies, intervention as well as educational programs that promote positive self-perception and resistance against the possible harm that social media may cause to one's body image.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Validation on social media has become a matter of self-esteem for adolescents in the modern day. They are raised in a technologically enhanced environment and must learn to deal with the pressures and difficulties of the virtual world. Humans are validation-seekers by nature, and in adolescence, this need for validation is especially strong since it helps build self-confidence. Rapid changes in physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of adolescence make validation necessary in a number of developmental domains. Due in large part to validation-seeking activities, adolescents' use of social media has increased over the last ten years, giving rise to venues for obtaining approval and feedback from others. Teenagers use social media to express themselves and get validation for their ideas, opinions, and physical attractiveness. This helps them develop their socio-emotional skills and personality. In 2022, a group of researchers conducted a qualitative study to determine whether social media has become a crucial tool in promoting teenage self-esteem and intensifying the desire for popularity and validation. This paper advances our understanding of the effects of social media usage and validation-seeking behaviours on adolescent self-esteem. The paper emphasizes how social media use, adolescence, and conduct driven by a need for validation are all related. It emphasizes how important validation is to teenagers' growth, especially when it comes to their sense of self and social-emotional health. The examination recognizes how social media platforms help adolescents establish their identities and self-concepts and how they might serve as channels for seeking validation. Moreover, it highlights the necessity of doing empirical study to investigate the effects of social media validation on teenage self-esteem and the intensification of their desire for popularity and approval. The absence of actual data that supports up the claims made about how social media validation affects teenage self-esteem is one of the paper's limitations. Even if the discussion poses several significant queries and conjectures, more study is required to thoroughly examine these phenomena and their consequences (Radhika Dhingra and Babita Parashar, 2022).

Social media platforms are of great importance in the contemporary day. However, there are great setbacks when it comes to constant consumption of social media platforms. A study conducted in 2017 aimed to understand the relationship between different types of Facebook use, perceived online social support and the depressed mood of adolescents while considering gender differences (Frison & Eggermont, 2015). This study included 910 participants and they were employed structural equation modelling to analyse the data. Results revealed that active Facebook use in public settings is linked to lower levels of depression in boys, while passive Facebook use is linked to higher levels of depression in girls. On the other hand, females who use Facebook frequently and feel supported by their online community are less likely to be depressed. The study offers insightful information on the complex connections between teenage depression, Facebook use, and perceived social support. It draws attention to the diverse ways that Facebook use affects boys and girls based on gender. The study has limitations even if it offers insightful information. Causal interpretations are limited by the cross-sectional design, and response biases may affect self-reported data. Furthermore, the study ignores other social media sites that teenagers can use in favour of concentrating solely on Facebook use. These limitations might be overcome in future studies by using longitudinal designs and taking a wider variety of social media sites into account.

In 2022, another study was conducted so as to understand if the number of likes affects the adolescents (Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2022). Additionally, it also explored the social-comparison and feedback-seeking process in adolescents. The feature of 'likes' is a

quantifiable metric measurement due to which any increase or decrease can lead to an emotional or mental turbulence in the adolescent's mind. The study included 182 adolescent participants between the ages of 13 and 18. The study finds that the association between social comparison and feedback-seeking and Instagram usage frequency is significantly mediated by social contact, storage, and gossip incentives. These results imply that teenagers use Instagram mostly for gossiping, social contact, and information storage, all of which have an impact on how active they are on the platform. The study also emphasizes how social comparison and feedback-seeking have a moderating effect on the association between likes and feelings in teenagers. Adolescents who are highly engaged in social comparison and feedback-seeking demonstrate an increased emotional receptivity to feedback from their Instagram audience, especially when it comes to likes. the study emphasizes how crucial it is to take into account psychosocial elements when figuring out why teenagers use Instagram, such as social comparison and feedback-seeking tendencies. According to the research, teenagers' reasons for using Instagram have a big impact on how they use the app and how they react to criticism of it. The study also emphasizes the necessity of interventions in educational settings that encourage safe use of SNSs, especially for teenagers. The study's dependence on self-report measures, which can contain biases and mistakes, is one of its limitations.

Social media disorder in validation has predominantly been seen due to the reward system that benefits from constant engagement and validation-seeking behaviours. A study conducted in 2022, aimed to understand the psychometric qualities of the nine-item Social Media Disorder scale (Boer et al., 2021). It employed a nationally representative population of 6,626 Dutch teenagers between the ages of 12 and 16. One fundamental component was detected, and sufficient factor loadings were observed, indicating strong structural validity. Although test results were most dependable at moderate to high scores on the scale's continuum, internal consistency was good. The factor structure showed measurement homogeneity among various subgroups. Based on the likelihood of approving the criteria, three subgroups were found, and the criterion validity was confirmed by the correlation between higher levels of problematic social media usage (SMU) and higher odds of mental, academic, and sleep issues. 15-year-olds, girls, adolescents with less education, and adolescents from non-Western backgrounds were the most prone to identify problematic SMU. The scale's strong psychometric qualities make it appropriate for studies on problematic SMU in teenagers. The results of the study emphasize how crucial it is to use accurate and valid metrics when evaluating adolescents who are struggling with SMU. The Social Media Disorder scale appears to have good structural validity based on the finding of a single core factor and substantial factor loadings. Additionally, the scale has strong internal consistency, a sign of strong correlation between its items. The scale might be less accurate in assessing lower levels of problematic SMU, though, given the restriction that test results are most credible at moderate to high scores. With implications for focused interventions and support plans, the identification of subgroups based on probability of endorsing criteria sheds light on the various risk factors for problematic SMU in teenagers. There are a few limitations to take into account, even if the study offers insightful information about the psychometric qualities of the Social Media Disorder scale. Causal conclusions regarding the connection between problematic SMU and related outcomes are constrained by the cross-sectional approach. Furthermore, self-report measures may not fully capture the level of problematic SMU because of social desirability bias.

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Large-scale study collections from a variety of disciplines have been synthesized attributable in substantial part to meta-analysis, which has also been crucial in revealing strong trends and effect sizes and offering thorough insights that support evidence-based practices and policy choices (Haidich, 2005). In the field of adolescent development, meta-analysis has been proven useful in illuminating patterns, trends, and variances among heterogeneous groups and situations. A study conducted in 2019, aimed at gaining insight into the connection between body image disturbance and social media use, carried out a meta-analysis. Due to social media's growing popularity, experts are becoming more interested in learning how it affects psychological health, including body image. In this area, however, prior study has yielded contradictory results. A total of 36,552 people from sixty-three separate samples were included in the meta-analysis. The findings showed a weak but statistically significant positive correlation (r =156) between using social media and having a disturbed body image. It was also discovered that moderators like age, ethnicity, nation grouping, body image dimension, and social media type were influencing this association. By offering a quantitative examination of cross-sectional studies on the connection between social media use and body image, the meta-analysis adds to the body of knowledge already in existence. Through the examination of numerous independent samples, the study provides insightful information about the relationship's total effect magnitude. The results imply that, despite the minor effect size, social media use is connected to disturbances in body image. In addition, the discovery of important moderators emphasizes how intricate this relationship is and how important it is that future studies take a more comprehensive approach. The study's conclusions are consistent with earlier research showing a connection between social media use and problems with body image. The association may not be as strong as first thought, though, given the tiny effect size. Our comprehension of this association is deepened by the identification of moderators, such as the type of social media used and demographic characteristics.

Adolescents develop mindfulness, meta-awareness and meta-cognition, crucial for navigating complex cognitive tasks and emotional regulation. In 2011, researchers sought to verify the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale—Adolescent (MAAS–A), a mindfulness measure for teenagers (Brown et al., 2011). Study 1 employed two sizable cohorts of healthy 14–18-year-olds to validate the MAAS–A's single-factor structure, good internal consistency, test–retest reliability, and parallel and progressive validity. 102 psychiatric outpatient adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 made up the sample for Study 2. Those who were randomly assigned to a mindfulness-based stress reduction intervention demonstrated significantly higher MAAS-A scores from the baseline to the 3-month follow-up. Beneficial alterations in a number of mental health indices were linked to these increases. The MAAS-A has been effectively validated by the study as a valid and reliable measure of mindfulness in teenagers. The results of Study 1 show that, in normal adolescent groups, the MAAS–A structure and its psychometric qualities are resilient. Study 2 emphasizes the MAAS-A's sensitivity to modifications after mindfulness training and provides additional evidence of its usefulness in psychiatric adolescent populations. The substantial rises in MAAS-A scores among intervention subjects indicate the efficacy of mindfulness-based therapies in raising adolescent mindfulness levels and promoting mental health results. This study closes a critical gap in the evaluation of teenage mindfulness by validating the MAAS-A for application in adolescent populations. The results add to the expanding corpus of research on mindfulness-based therapies for teenagers and offer a trustworthy instrument for evaluating mindfulness in both healthy and mentally ill populations, benefiting academics and practitioners. There are a few limitations to take into

account, even if the study offers insightful information about the psychometric qualities and applications of the MAAS-A. First off, the inclusion of primarily healthy adolescent samples in Study 1 and a comparatively small sample size in Study 2 may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the use of self-report measures raises the possibility of social desirability effects and response bias.

These studies show how social media platforms have turned into a vicious cycle of actions aimed at gaining validation, in which getting likes, comments, and social approval becomes more and more important for an adolescent's feeling of value and self-worth.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study, quantitative research design was employed. Primary data was obtained through the method of surveys. The survey was administered through Google Forms, enabling the effective distribution and collection of answers from a wide range of participants. The survey questionnaire was developed based on the Embodied Sense of Self Scale (ESSS) and consisted of 28 items that were designed to assess participant's perception of embodied sense of self in the age of social media validation (Asai et al., 2016). The survey was divided into three sections Set A, Set B and Set C. The first set required participants' demographics such as age, gender etc. The second set consisted of statements that required the participant to rate according to their most desired response. Lastly, the third set consisted of short descriptive questions so as to collectively categorize common themes that revolve around the subject matter.

Secondary data, particularly relevant literature, was used to provide a thorough theoretical framework that supported the last aim of the study.

Sample Selection

The sample consisted of 120 participants ranging between 11 years to 20 years, from different socio-economic backgrounds. Participants were recruited via flyers being circulated on social media., WhatsApp. These participants belonged to different schools within Pune. The participants were first briefed about the study and their contribution towards the study via telephonic conversation. They were given two days to confirm their participation in the study. Once their participation was confirmed, they were asked to sign the consent form along with their parent's signature. The researcher aimed to obtain around 100-120 participants for the purpose of this study. With participants of all gender identities welcomed, gender inclusion serves as a focus point and allows for a thorough investigation of the ways in which metacognitive processes interact with the adolescent's sense of self and social media validation across a range of gender experiences. Moreover, the research purposefully accepts a range of social media usage habits, declining to limit participation according to the volume or level of social media interaction. This method attempts to capture the range of teenage social media platform interactions, from infrequent users to those who are heavily involved in more regular and intense online conversations.

To guarantee participant safety and the ethical integrity of the study, exclusion criteria had also been developed. In order to preserve a targeted study into the distinct developmental stage of adolescence, participants who fell outside the designated age range of 11 to 20 were disqualified. Furthermore, adolescents who failed to give informed consent or did not have consent from their parents or guardians were not allowed to participate, underscoring the need of upholding ethical norms and participant welfare. Last but not least, the exclusion of

adolescents with medical or psychiatric issues that would materially affect their ability to participate in the study or understand the questions was a commitment to putting participants' general health and safety first throughout the whole research process.

Procedure

A Google form link was sent to the participants individually so as to avoid any issues pertaining to confidentiality and identity. The participants were given the flexibility to complete the survey at their convenience, whether at home or during a designated time at school. The form was closed within 2 days of distribution so as to ensure timely data collection and adherence to the study timeline. With respect to the limited response window, participant recruitment and data collection were managed effectively, and there was little possibility of response bias or data contamination from lengthy exposure to external variables. Clear instructions were provided regarding the survey's purpose, how to navigate the form, and the importance of providing honest and thoughtful responses. Utilizing a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed with each item on the survey. With the help of a Likert scale, adolescents' experiences and perceptions of their embodied sense of self was quantitatively measured. Short descriptive responses were thematically compiled, revealing general characteristics of the participants. The survey's use of a Likert scale response format allowed for the computation of descriptive statistics and quantitative analysis while also capturing subtle variances in participants' responses. Upon completion of the survey, the data was analysed with the help of SPSS, a statistical software.

RESULTS

The data obtained from the survey were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The results are categorized according to three sets mentioned in the survey; Set A, Set B and Set C.

SET A
Table 1.1 represents the age group of the respondents:

Which age group do you belong to?

	N	**%**
11-13	30	25.0%
14-16	48	40.0%
16-18	11	9.2%
18-20	31	25.8%

From the above table, it can be inferred that 40.0% of respondents belonged to the most common age group, which is 14–16 years old. With 25.8% of the participants, the 18–20 age group is the second largest portion, coming in right behind. The age group of 11 to 13 makes up nearly as much—25.0%—as a quarter of the sample as a whole. On the other hand, just 9.2% of all respondents are in the 16–18 age group, which represents the smallest contingent.

Table 1.2 represents the gender of the respondents:
Please select your gender

	N	**%**
Female	62	51.7%
Male	57	47.5%
Other	1	0.8%

From the above table, it can be inferred that 51.7% of the respondents were females, 47.5% of the respondents were males and 0.8% of the respondents responded as 'others'.

Table 1.3 illustrates data pertaining to participants who are active any social media platforms:

Are you a user of any social media platform? (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Snapchat)

	N	**%**
No	3	2.5%
Yes	117	97.5%

From the above table, it can be inferred that 97.5% of the respondents are users of different social media platforms, whereas 2.5% of the respondents are not users of any social media platforms as listed in the survey.

Table 1.4 represents active users of social media platforms:

Are you an active user of any social media platform(s)?

	N	**%**
No	24	20.0%
Yes	96	80.0%

Within the survey sample, 80% of the respondents are active users of social media platforms whereas the remaining 20% are not active users of social media however, they do use social media platforms.

Figure 2.1 represents the social media platforms used by participants:
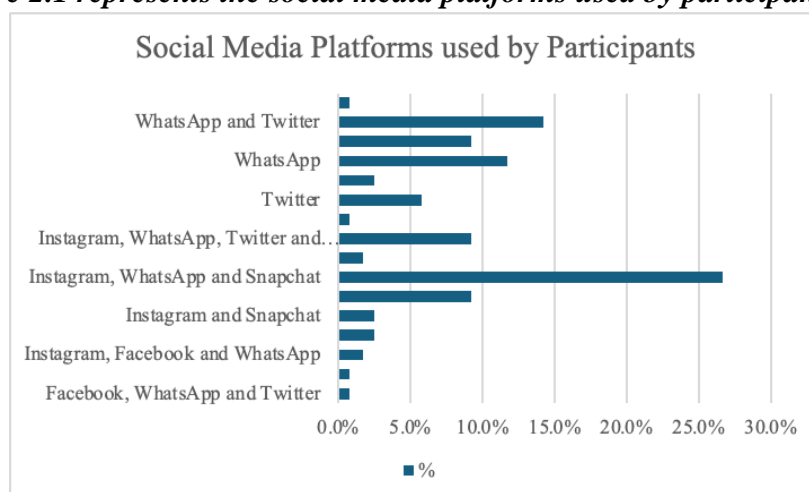
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The percentage of respondents who utilize different combinations of social media networks appears to be represented by the 2-D bar column graph supplied. Based on the data, it is apparent that WhatsApp is the most popular platform, with 11.7% of respondents using it exclusively. Furthermore, 9.2% of users use WhatsApp with Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat, demonstrating the app's adaptability and popularity as a means of user connection. With 9.2% of respondents using, it in addition to WhatsApp and Snapchat and 2.5% using it alone with Snapchat, Instagram is another noteworthy participant. This shows that users are still drawn to Instagram's visually-focused platform for sharing photos and videos, especially when combined with messaging services like WhatsApp for one-on-one interaction.

With 14.2% of respondents using both Twitter and WhatsApp, there appears to be a significant overlap between the two networks. This indicates that Twitter is chosen for its widely accessible and real-time information-sharing capabilities, while WhatsApp might be more geared toward personal conversation. Even if it isn't as popular on its own as Instagram and WhatsApp are, Snapchat is still important, especially when paired with other apps. Its popularity for sharing transient content and interacting with friends is demonstrated by the fact that 2.5% of users use Snapchat in addition to Instagram and 9.2% use it in addition to WhatsApp.

By comparison, Facebook and Twitter seem to have lower individual usage percentiles than WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat. On the other hand, Facebook's importance in promoting cross-platform interactions and content sharing is indicated by its integration with Instagram and WhatsApp, as evidenced in groupings like "Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Snapchat" i.e., 2.5%.

Overall, the data points to a varied spectrum of social media usage patterns, with Twitter and Snapchat coming in close second and third, respectively, and WhatsApp and Instagram emerging as the main players. Respondent's platform combinations demonstrate how social media is interrelated and how they prefer to communicate and share content in diverse ways.

Table 1.5 represents the frequency of respondents using social media platforms:

How often do you use social media platform(s)?

	N	%
Multiple times a day	107	89.2%
Once a day	11	9.2%
Rarely	2	1.7%

The data shows that the respondents who were surveyed had a strong preference for using social media platforms often. 89.2% of respondents, by far, said they used social media several times a day. Given their high frequency, it is likely that social media is a major part of the respondents' everyday life and their main source of recreation, interaction, and information. People in our current age rely on social media platforms for a variety of purposes throughout the day, as seen by the frequency of many daily contacts with these platforms. Even though 9.2% of respondents said they used social media once a day, this group still engages with these platforms on a constant basis. Even if their usage frequency is marginally lower than that of the majority, it still shows that they heavily rely on social media for frequent communication and information consumption. This group might follow

particular habits or inclinations that correspond with regular engagement patterns, including checking social media during intervals or at specific hours of the day.

The study also reveals that a small percentage of respondents—just 1.7%—use social media infrequently. Even though this group only makes up a small portion of the respondents, it indicates that not everyone has the same propensity to use social media frequently. There are a number of possible explanations for infrequent use, such as individual preferences, worries about productivity or privacy, or a conscious attempt to restrict exposure to social networking sites. Gaining an understanding of this group's motivations and activities can help one better understand the range of opinions people have about using social media.

Overall, the review of respondents' social media usage patterns shows a consistent pattern of frequent participation, demonstrating the pervasiveness of these platforms' effect in modern digital society

Table 1.6 represents the weekly engagement hours of respondents on social media platforms:

On an average how many hours do you spend on the social media platform(s) in a week?

	N	%
1-2	4	3.3%
2 to 3	1	0.8%
2-3	7	5.8%
3-4	31	25.8%
4-5	67	55.8%
5-6	10	8.3%

The overall distribution of respondents' weekly hours spent on social media platforms can be observed in the data. The majority of respondents clearly spend a substantial amount of time on social media, as evidenced by the results, with 55.8% of respondents reporting they use it for four to five hours per week. In close pursuit, 25.8% of the respondents reported using social media for three to four hours every week. This group, however to a somewhat smaller degree than the first category, nevertheless constitutes a sizable fraction of individuals who regularly interact with social media platforms. The fact that these two categories together account for the great majority of responses is noteworthy and suggests that the community under study uses these services frequently. Conversely, a lesser percentage of the respondents dedicate a shorter amount of time to social media usage. Just 8.3% of respondents spend five to six hours a week on these sites, indicating that there is a minority that uses them more frequently. There are other smaller parts that spend even less time— 3.3% spend one to two hours per week, and only 0.8% spend two to three hours each week. These groups are probably made up of people who either value offline activities above online activity or use social media seldom.

Overall, the data shows how different the questioned population's levels of social media platform engagement are.

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SET B

This section analyses the results obtained from statements that were developed with the help of Embodied Sense of Scale (ESSS). These statements are measured using Likert Scale, ranging from 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5(Strongly Agree). Certain statements had the same ranges but they were labelled differently.

The data collected in this sections sheds light on the complex interactions adolescents have with social media sites, especially in regards to identification, validation, and self-worth. It describes the descriptive statistical analysis of the statements assessed with the help of Likert Scale. The table consists of 10 items whose scale ranges from 1 to 5. Items 7, 8 and 9 have individual scales however, their measurement remains the same.

Primarily, it is clear that measures of online validation are highly correlated with positive emotions such as encouragement or enjoyment. The high mean scores, for instance, for statements like "I feel happy when I gain more followers/friends on my account" (3.67) and "I feel encouraged to post more content when my previous content gets more likes" (3.76) indicate that users' motivation and positive emotions are greatly enhanced when they receive validation through metrics like followers and likes. Likewise, the recognition of the influence of social media on self-worth (3.68) highlights the intricate emotional dynamics involved.

Furthermore, the data suggests a sophisticated understanding of the possible repercussions of looking for approval on social media. While sharing parts of one's identity can lead to feelings of empowerment and enjoyment for individuals (3.71), there is also acceptance and awareness of the negative impacts, as seen by the admittance of inadequacy or insecurity following material viewing (3.46). This dichotomy reflects a nuanced comprehension of the effects of online validation on psychological health.

Additionally, users may be aware of how social media shapes societal norms and expectations around validation, based on their impression of the platform's impact on the need for validation (3.30). A moderate level of knowledge of the possible effects of social media validation on self-esteem is also present (3.38), suggesting that people are becoming more aware of the psychological effects of their online connections.

Ultimately, the data indicates that although social media can offer chances for identity discovery and self-expression, there are drawbacks as well. The impact on understanding one's identity received a moderately favourable mean score (3.37), but the standard deviation (0.869) is rather large, suggesting a wide variety of perspectives. This variation emphasizes how intricate and unique the connection is between social media use and identity development.

The data presents a complex picture of people's experiences with social media validation, accentuating both the advantages and disadvantages of the platform in terms of emotions, identity, and self-esteem. It emphasizes how crucial it is to develop a beneficial connection with social media and advance digital literacy in order to successfully negotiate its intricacies.

SET C

This section analyses the results obtained from short descriptive questions within the survey.

*Figure 2.2 represents Respondents desire to seek validation:*
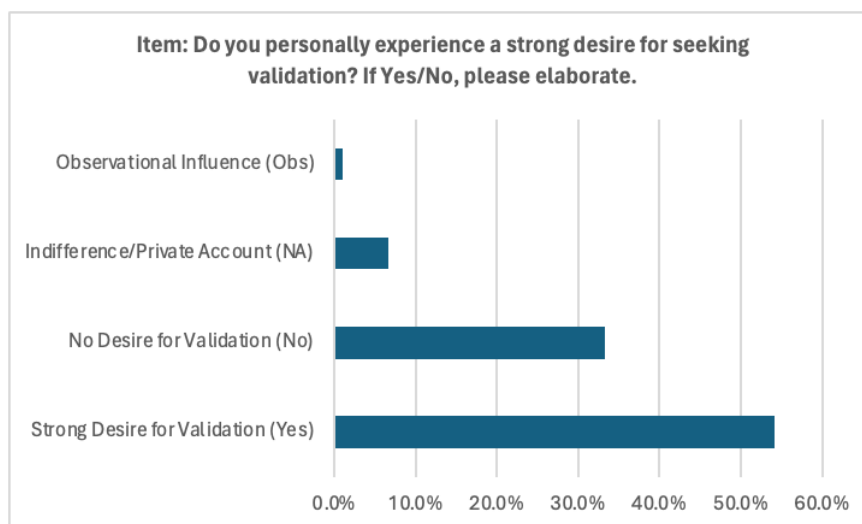
The item asked the respondents if they ever felt a strong desire for seeking validations. Based on the wide-array of responses, four categories arose,

- Category 1 - Strong Desire for Validation (Yes)
- Category 2 - No Desire for Validation (No)
- Category 3 - Indifference/Private Account (NA)
- Category 4 - Observational Influence (Obs.)

Around 54.2% of the respondents responded that they personally experience a strong desire for seeking validation. Adolescents' demand for social acceptability and approval—which is typically vital at this developmental stage—may be reflected in a big way in this part of their online behaviour. Whereas, 33.3% of respondents fell into the second category i.e., No Desire for Validation (No). This group includes about indicating a sizable percentage of the sample that values other parts of their online connections over validation or feels confident in their sense of self. 6.7% of the respondents fell into the third category i.e., Indifference/Private Account. These individuals might not actively seek affirmation, or their online behaviour may be influenced by privacy concerns. They make up about 6.7% of the sample, which is a lesser percentage. Less than 1% of the respondents fell into the final category i.e., Observational Influence. This category makes up a very small percentage of the sample, suggesting that although observational impact does exist, most respondents do not prioritize it.

Figure 2.3 represents respondents' strong desire in various aspects of their life:
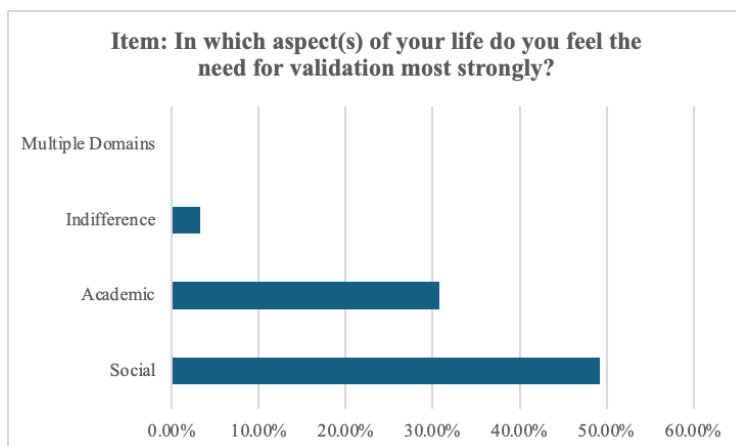
Respondents were asked in which aspects of their life, do they feel a strong need for validation. Around 49.2% of the respondents emphasized that they look for validation from others in social situations, indicating that this is very important to them. Furthermore, a sizable percentage of participants—30.8%—state that they require validation when pursuing academic goals. This emphasizes the pressure that a lot of adolescents have to do well in school and get praise from peers, instructors, or family members. Additionally, the data suggests that certain people require validation in a variety of contexts, including social and academic spheres. This shows that, due to the richness of adolescents' social and scholastic experiences, validation-seeking actions may not be confined to one setting but rather may appear in a variety of contexts. It's interesting to note that just 3.3% of respondents specifically say they don't feel a significant need for validation. Despite the modest size of this group, their viewpoint offers important insights about individual variations in behaviours related to seeking validation from others as well as the range of attitudes regarding receiving it.

*Figure 2.4 represents respondents typical method of seeking validation:*
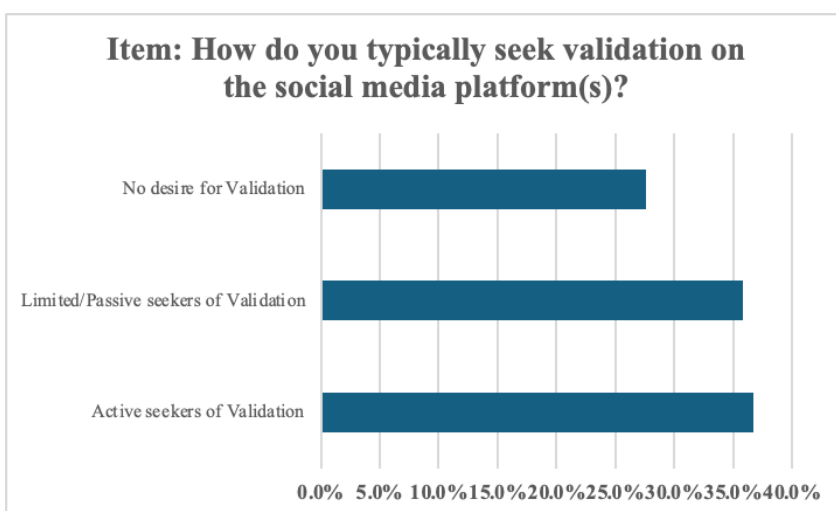
Respondents were asked about their typical manner in which they seek validation on social media platforms. Based on the data collected, three main categories emerged; Active seeking of validation, Limited/Passive Seeking of Validation and No desire for Validation. 36.7% of

the respondents fell into the first category i.e., Active seeking of Validation. Responses showing active attempts to look for validation on social media sites are included in this category. These answers ranged from "*by sharing memes with friends,*" to "*by posting stories often,*" and other iterations of "*posting.*" This category is made up of individuals who intentionally act in ways that are meant to get approval from their social media networks. 35.8% of the respondents fell into the second category i.e., Limited/Passive Seeking of Validation. Respondents in this category may not deliberately look for validation, but they nevertheless participate in activities that may subtly encourage validation-seeking. Responses like "*I don't seek validation on social media platforms*" and "*NA (Not Applicable)*" fall under this category. Even though they might not actively seek approval, their online behaviours could nevertheless serve as a passive source of it. Lastly, around 27.5% of respondents fell into the last category i.e., No Desire for Validation. Respondents in this category made it clear that they don't use social media platforms to look for validation or participate in activities that might be associated with doing so. This group of responses included "*no,*" "*never,*" and "*I don't usually seek validation.*"

Figure 2.5 represents *if* respondent's have felt the pressure to conform to a certain image:
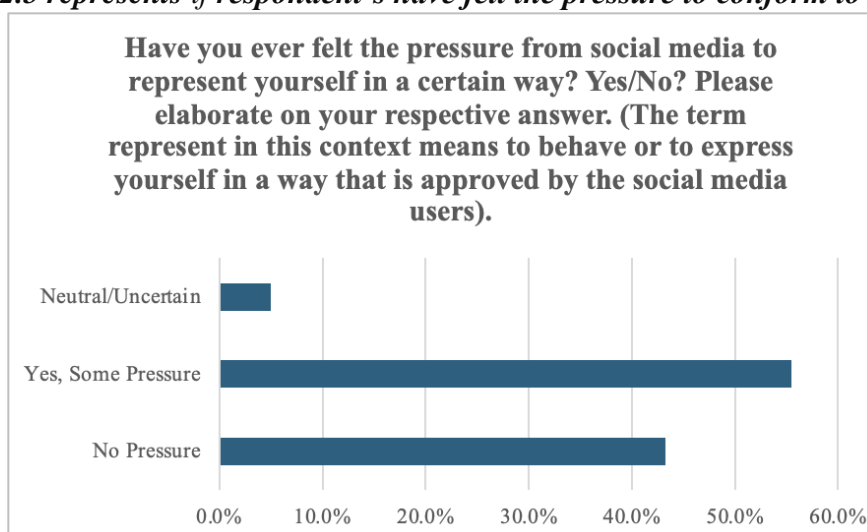
This item sought to understand if the respondents felt pressured to represent themselves in a particular way on social media platforms. The data collected shows that a sizable majority of respondents, 55%, have felt pressure from social media to adhere to particular norms of self-representation. This result illustrates how social media platforms have a widespread impact on how adolescents perceive the world and behave. People in this group could feel pressured to show themselves in a way that pleases their online community, which could result in an increased need for validation and actions related to seeking validation. On the other hand, quite a few of the respondents, 43.3%, stated that they felt no pressure from social media, suggesting a wide range of perspectives and actions regarding how they show themselves online. Those in this category may value real connections or self-expression over fitting in with society's standards since they feel secure in their true selves and are less affected by external validation criteria. 5% degree of ambiguity or ambivalence about the impact of social media on self-representation is shown by the replies that are neutral or unclear. Adolescents must navigate the complicated world of social media dynamics, as evidenced by the fact that several respondents expressed feeling confused or uneasy about their online persona and the pressure to fit in.

Figure 2.6 represents the changes observed in respondent's peers when seeking validation
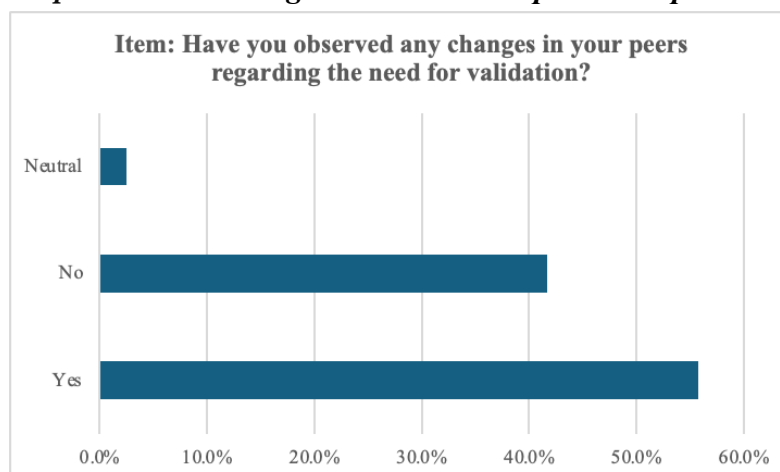
Around 55.8% of the respondents saw shifts in their peers' need for validation. This points to a discernible change in attitudes and behaviours toward using social media platforms to get validation. Online metrics like likes, follows, and comments may have a greater impact on adolescents than in the past, which could result in their being more focused on getting validation and acceptance from their online networks. On the other hand, 41.7% of the respondents stated that they had neither observed any changes nor that the question did not apply to them. This can suggest varying degrees of knowledge or interaction with the online activities of peers. Some people might not be as aware of online dynamics or might place more importance on other facets of social contact, while others might not actively notice changes in their peers' validation-seeking habits. The ambiguous or indifferent replies underscore how complicated the situation is even more. While some respondents notice that their peers' behaviour may be changing, others express uncertainty or note that their peers' approaches to online validation-seeking behaviour vary from person to person.

Figure 2.7 represents Prominent changes observed by the respondent's peers
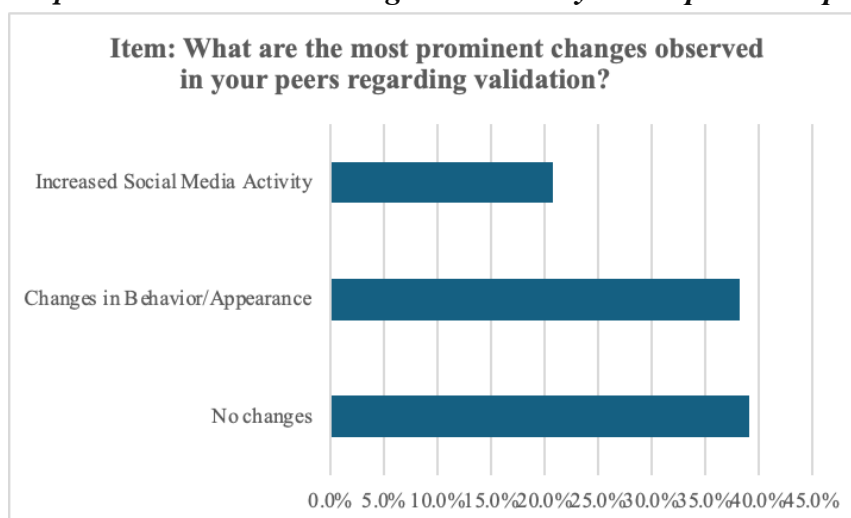
Respondents were asked if they had noticed any prominent changes in their peers with regards to validation. 38.3% of the respondents reported seeing changes in their peers' look and behaviour related to validation. This covers changes to one's personality qualities, manner of dressing, and overall style. These alterations might be a reflection of how social

media shapes one's self-image and the need for approval from others via actions and outward looks. Furthermore, 20.8% of the respondents observed heightened social media engagement among their contemporaries in reaction to the demand for approval. This is consistent with earlier research suggesting that teenagers may use social media more frequently in an attempt to get approval from their followers, likes, and comments. Teenagers' use of social media can be increased by the pressure to keep up an active online presence and get good feedback. On the other hand, 39.2% of the respondents stated that they had not noticed any notable shifts in their peers' validation. This implies that teenagers have a wide variety of experiences with and attitudes regarding using social media to get affirmation. Some people might not be as affected by social influences or might not be actively watching for behavioural changes in their peers.

Figure 2.8 represents coping strategies of respondents when validation is not received:

In this item, the respondents were asked about their coping strategies when they do not receive validation. Around 45.8% of the respondents turned towards disengagement tactics when they don't feel validated on social media. This involves turning off their phones, removing themselves from social media, or even removing the app completely. These reactions suggest a wish to remove oneself from the unpleasant feelings or source of unhappiness, which could be a feeling of not living up to social expectations or not getting acceptance. Furthermore, 6.7% of the respondents use physical coping strategies, like sleeping or binge eating, to manage the emotional anguish brought on by unfulfilled validation requirements. These actions could be indicative of maladaptive coping mechanisms, which, if employed frequently or excessively, can be harmful to one's physical and emotional well-being. Conversely, 22.5% of respondents indicate that they rely on self-validation or do not give external validation much thought. Such individuals might have grown to have a strong sense of autonomy and self-worth, which enables them to preserve their emotional stability and confidence without the approval of others on social media. This implies a constructive coping strategy that can protect against the damaging effects of social media on mental health and self-worth.

Figure 2.9 represents respondent's perceptions of distorted body image:
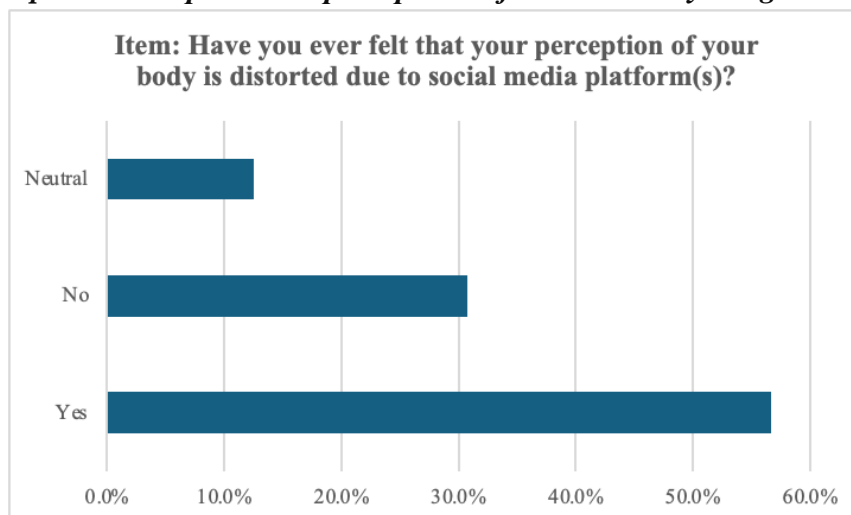
Respondents in this item were asked if they felt that their perception of their body is distorted due to social media consumption. Social media platforms can have a substantial impact on adolescents' body image and self-esteem, as seen by 56.7% of respondents that indicated a distorted perspective of one's body as a result of these platforms. Young users of social media frequently compare themselves to others and feel inadequate as a result of the pressure to live up to idealized standards of beauty that are promoted by the platform. Many detrimental effects, such as low self-esteem, body dysmorphia, and disordered eating habits, might be attributed to this skewed perception. On the other hand, 30.8% of the respondents stated that social media did not appear to have distorted their perception of their bodies. Some individuals might have grown resistant to these influences or they might deliberately oppose the exaggerated representations of beauty that are propagated online. Furthermore, it's possible that the 19.2% of respondents who said they never gave it any thought deliberately limited their exposure to material that might have a negative effect on how they saw themselves. The 12.5% of respondents who indicated they were unsure or neutral about the impact of social media on their body image point to a degree of uncertainty or unpredictability in people's knowledge of this influence. Others might acknowledge the negative consequences, but others might minimize or minimize them.

These results provide a comprehensive look at the intricate interactions between teenagers and social media, especially in relation to identity, body image, validation, and self-esteem. A recurring trend shows up in all of the responses: social media has a big impact on how people see themselves and communicate with others online. While some people welcome the chance to express themselves and connect with others that social media platforms offer, others struggle with the pressure to live up to idealized standards and the possible harm they may do to their mental health. These results highlight the significance of encouraging resilience, digital knowledge, and helping teenagers adopt safe online practices.

DISCUSSION

The data gathered sheds light on the complex interactions that teenagers have with social media, particularly issues of identity, body image, self-esteem, and validation. In order to contextualize and analyse the results, we go into each theme area in the discussion and draw on pertinent literature.

Exploring Adolescent Identity: Embodied Selfhood and Meta-Awareness in the Age of Social Media Validation

From the data, it can be said that social media platform consumption is most prominent among adolescents belonging to the 14-16 years age group with 51.7% being females. WhatsApp has been exclusively used individually alongside grouped with other social media platforms. In this continuously evolving and fast-paced world, WhatsApp has become the instant messenger for every minute detail. Two researchers in 2016 conducted a study to discuss the usage of WhatsApp amongst adolescents (Bhatt & Arshad, 2016). Owing to its multiple advantages such as sending pictures, videos, locations instantaneously, families of the youth are heavily dependent on WhatsApp than any other social media platform. However, this social media platform also has detrimental effects on adolescents. Apart from education being disrupted, adolescents prefer virtual communication over face-to-face which ultimately leads to dependency and reduced control over usage. Additionally, it has also brought in a change in adolescents' social and personal behaviour thus impacting their relationship with the surroundings (Kiran & Srivastava, 2018). While Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat are still in trend, Instagram seems to be the second most popular social media platform amongst adolescents. Due to its flexible features such as curating and sharing reels, posting stories, Instagram is serving as the platform to follow and curate new trends. These trends eventually shape adolescents' perspectives about things such as fashion, food, travel etc. It has also become a platform wherein content creator are born and eventually named as an '*Influencer*' (Nav, 2023). However, there are adolescents who are not on any other social media platforms either due to parental control being exercised or lack of interest in being recognized on a globally recognized platform.

Owing to the constant network of information and data being circulated on social media platforms, adolescents access their social media multiple times a day. Prior to the pandemic, parental control was exercised when it came to social media consumption by adolescents. A study conducted in 2023, in the Unites States of America highlighted that although parental control on social media and electronic devices may seem harsh to adolescents, parents believe in restricting their child/children so as to prevent any further problematic internet usage (Hernandez et al., 2023). However, after the pandemic, there had been a lease of restriction pertaining to social media usage as well as device usage. This was primarily owing to the fact that basic needs such as education and healthcare had also turned towards technology. Schools and colleges started conducting online classes which would physically and mentally drain out the students. Outdoor leisure time was restricted due to lockdown and children would use their devices and social media as a recreational time. In a study conducted in Switzerland, researchers found that children used social media as a form of leisure. Additionally, it was also found that screen time was considerably high in boys as compared to girls due to online video gaming sessions with their friends (Werling et al., 2021).

The embodied sense of scale (ESSS), a psychological tool designed to evaluate how an individual feels about their own body and how their sense of self is integrated with their motor and sensory perceptions. This measure looks at things like agency, body ownership, and feeling rooted in one's body (Asai et al., 2016). This study aimed to understand the manner in which the concept of meta-awareness, influenced by the digitization of self-presentation on social media, interacts with the need for validation in adolescents. The data collected from this study shows a significant relationship between positive emotions like encouragement and happiness and measures of online validation. Getting likes, follows, and compliments on their post provides adolescents with a great deal of incentive and happiness. This emphasizes how important social media analytics are in influencing users' online

emotional experiences and behaviours. A literature based study conducted in Northern Iloilo State University examines how social validation affects user behaviour on various social media platforms, with a particular emphasis on how users show themselves, how they react to others, and how they feel about themselves. Users frequently look for approval in order to strengthen their sense of identity, improve social standing, and increase self-esteem. They must, however, recognize the limitations of social validation metrics and strike a balance between their demand for validation and their need to uphold authenticity. Feedback on social validation elicits a wide range of emotional responses; positive feedback usually elicits feelings of contentment and happiness, while negative feedback might elicit feelings of jealousy and disappointment. Social validation also has a big impact on how people present themselves online and look for approval from others, which shapes their online personas (Ballara, 2023).

Subsequently, the data from this study underscores that adolescents are well aware of the repercussions of seeking validation on social media. Adolescents' responses to the Likert Scale items reveal a sophisticated awareness of the possible consequences of pursuing acceptance on social media. According to the data, teenagers are aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of looking for validation online. For example, affirmations like *"I feel happy when I gain more followers/friends on my account"* highlight the positive sensations that come with validation, but admitting to insecurities or feelings of inadequacy after watching content emphasizes the negative effects. Adolescents' complex understanding of the negative psychological impacts of online validation on their wellbeing is reflected in this dichotomy in their perceptions. Prior studies indicate that although positive reinforcement and affirmation on social media can elevate one's mood and self-worth, it can also result in unfavourable consequences like social comparison, anxiety, and low self-esteem, particularly when people believe they don't measure up to the idealized standards that are promoted on these platforms (Fardouly et al., 2015); (Kross et al., 2013).

Further research is necessary on the complex relationship between identity development and teenage encounters with social media. But these opportunities also present difficulties and complications that influence how their sense of self is formed. The study highlights a crucial element, which is the variation in teenagers' views regarding the influence of social media on their identity understanding. The broad standard deviation implies a considerable range in experiences and viewpoints, even though the mean score generally points to a relatively positive outlook. As adolescents traverse a landscape defined by their own experiences, the influences of society, and their online relationships, this diversity highlights the complex relationship that exists between social media use and identity formation. Furthermore, a number of variables, such as age, gender, cultural background, and socioeconomic level, affect how difficult identity development is on social media. According to studies, for instance, teenagers from underrepresented groups could have particular difficulties and chances when creating their online personas and resolving concerns with authenticity, representation, and belonging ("It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens on JSTOR," 2014); (Valenzuela et al., 2009). Social comparison practices have a significant impact on how adolescents construct their identities on social media. Comparing oneself to the carefully constructed online personas of others can cause anxiety, identity uncertainty, and feelings of inadequacy. Research has demonstrated that teens' self-esteem and body image can be adversely affected by the frequent exposure to idealized depictions of success and beauty on social media sites like Instagram. This can lead to the development of irrational expectations and goals (Fardouly et al., 2015). Adolescents' interactions with

social media are further complicated by the intersectionality of identity variables. Adolescents may navigate various facets of their identities, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability, inside virtual environments that are defined by a range of viewpoints and cultural standards. Through the perspective of intersectionality, we can better understand and solve the particular difficulties that young people from different backgrounds have when navigating the process of developing their identities on social media.

Meta-awareness is hence proved essential, especially for adolescents stumbling through the social media maze in search of approval. Adolescents' moods and behaviours can be greatly influenced by the constant barrage of information and social validation measures available on sites such as Facebook and Instagram. Their sense of satisfaction and self-worth can be greatly increased by positive reinforcement, likes and praises. Adolescents must be aware of the drawbacks of relying exclusively on social media for validation, as this can result in unfavourable feelings like envy and disappointment when expectations are not fulfilled. Researches highlights the necessity for teenagers to find a balance between being real and pursuing approval (Ballara, 2023).

Apart from social media, adolescents have the tendency to seek validation from the academic perspective as well. Nearly two-fourth of the respondents in this study tended to lean towards academic validation rather than validation from social life. While academic validation acts as a reinforcement for students to work harder and stay focussed, constant validation seeking behaviour becomes unhealthy for them as they begin to view themselves as perfectionists. An article published in the 'Southwest Shadow', discusses the negative effects of seeking academic validation. The author analyses how pupils' emotional responses to academic recognition are affected. It draws attention to the pressure that many kids have to perform well academically, whether that pressure is from parents, obtaining top grades, or getting accepted into a famous university. She wonders if the tension and worry that come with doing well in school are really worth it, especially in light of the variety of duties that students must balance. The article admits that although receiving academic recognition might boost motivation and one's sense of value, it can also foster a negative mindset where one values grades more highly than one's own well-being. It inspires students to prioritize their health, find balance in their life, and realize that they are valuable in ways that go beyond their academic performance (Estabillo, n.d.).

Social media platform's features such as likes, comments, subscribers., etc have lured adolescents mind's when it comes to seeking validation. Seeking validation for adolescents is very common, however studies show that there are biological neuro-markers that may be relevant to reward system activity that takes place in the brain. The activity of the mesolimbic reward system, in particular the ventral striatum, that is involved in processing rewards and social feedback, is one possible neuro-marker that might be significant (Somerville et al., 2018). When they receive positive feedback, adolescents who are more receptive to social rewards—likes and comments on social media—may show signs of increased activity in the ventral striatum, which drives them to look for more affirmation. Furthermore, differences in the structure of the brain, such as connection patterns and grey matter volume, may also set apart teenagers who are seeking validation from those who are not. Adolescents' vulnerability to peer pressure and social validation, for instance, may be influenced by variations in prefrontal brain development, which is linked to decision-making and self-regulation (Blakemore & Robbins, 2012). Even though the precise neuro-markers

linked to teenagers' validation-seeking behaviour are still unknown, continued studies employing neuroimaging methods like structural MRI and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) may shed more light on the neural mechanisms underlying social validation processing.

In order to increase their sense of self-worth and social standing, active seekers of validation on social media platforms frequently participate in actions meant to get likes, comments, and follows (Nesi et al., 2018). These individuals could experience pressure to always project a positive image of oneself, highlighting their accomplishments, good looks, and way of life in order to win over their peers (Vogel et al., 2015). Mental well-being of adolescents may suffer as a result of this quest for approval, which can result in depressive, anxious, and inadequate sentiments (Fardouly et al., 2015). A mistaken sense of self-worth may also result from an unrelenting pursuit of validation, as people place more value on outside approval than on inherent traits.

Adolescents feel more stressed and anxious about creating the ideal online persona as they negotiate the demand to display themselves on social media platforms in a particular way (Vogel et al., 2015). According to (Nesi et al., 2018), this pressure is frequently caused by a desire to live up to society's expectations of popularity, success, and beauty as well as a fear of being judged and rejected by their peers. Adolescents may thus feel pressured to alter and filter their images, embellish their accomplishments, and provide a distorted impression of reality online, thus fostering a culture of rivalry and comparison (Fardouly et al., 2015). The way that their peers' needs for validation have changed can make adolescents feel even more inadequate and insecure. Adolescents may struggle to keep up with the constantly shifting criteria of success, popularity, and attractiveness as social norms and trends change on social media platforms (Vogel et al., 2015). Constant pressure to live up to the well-manicured online personas of peers can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, creating a vicious cycle of self-defeating comparisons and validation seeking (Nesi et al., 2018).

Significant shifts in their peers' validation behaviours could include a greater reliance on social media to boost self-esteem, anxiety about managing one's online image, and obsession with following, likes, and comments as measures of acceptance and popularity (Fardouly et al., 2015). Adolescents may also observe behavioural changes in their friends, such as posting controversial or attention-grabbing content in an attempt to get approval, promoting themselves excessively, or adjusting their mood in response to comments on social media (Vogel et al., 2015).

Adolescents who don't feel validated on social media may use a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with their emotional turmoil. Respondents of this study resorted to binge eating, switching off their phones, staying absent from social media when they didn't get the desired validation. According to a study conducted in 2018, some people may turn to unconventional methods of obtaining validation, like asking friends and family for comfort or participating in activities that enhance their self-worth offline (Nesi et al., 2018). Some people could choose unhealthy coping strategies, like taking risks or isolating themselves from social situations (Fardouly et al., 2015).

However, some adolescents may feel the need to take extreme steps so as to get validated. According to research, adolescents' emotional resilience, social support systems, and perceptions of the value of social approbation can all have an impact on how far they will go

to get validation (Vogel et al., 2015). When adolescents don't feel validated, they could try harder to get attention online by sharing more frequently, publishing more frequently, or participating in other attention-seeking activities. These people might start using social media more frequently, looking for approval from likes, comments, and shares to reinforce their social position and sense of value (Andreassen et al., 2012). But if the sought validation continues to elude them, this increased engagement may also add to feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. In instances of greater severity, adolescents who are experiencing emotional discomfort due to a lack of validation may turn to maladaptive coping mechanisms. This can entail taking chances, looking for approval from unsuitable people, or becoming dependent on social media as their main source of approval and self-worth (Vogel et al., 2015). While these acts could temporarily take the place of emotions of inadequacy or rejection, they can eventually intensify underlying problems and lead to detrimental effects including social isolation, sadness, and anxiety. Adolescents may also suffer psychological and bodily consequences if they don't get approval on social media. Studies indicate that those who encounter rejection or insufficient validation could display elevated stress reactions, modified emotional states, and modifications in cognitive abilities (Pantić et al., 2012). These consequences may have a lasting impact on the mental health and general wellbeing of teenagers, underscoring the significance of dealing with validation-seeking behaviours in a constructive and encouraging way. Ultimately, a person's personality, social support system, and resilience are just a few examples of the unique aspects that may affect how effective these coping mechanisms are.

Lastly, adolescents who consume social media are subjected to exaggerated images of physical appearance and unrealistic beauty standards, which distorts their perception of their bodies (Fardouly et al., 2015). Adolescents who are constantly exposed to altered and filtered photos may experience low self-esteem, disordered eating patterns, and feelings of body dissatisfaction (Nesi et al., 2018). Furthermore, comparing oneself to photos that have been digitally manipulated can intensify feelings of inadequacy and continue a vicious cycle of self-criticism and negative self-talk (Vogel et al., 2015).

Adolescents' development of meta-awareness can be greatly aided by the support of peers, schools, and parents. Parents may help their youngsters understand the psychological effects of social media validation and set up healthy boundaries. To assist kids in navigating the pressures of social media, schools might include digital literacy and emotional intelligence programs into their curricula. By encouraging genuine self-expression and providing supportive feedback in person, peers can help one another and lessen the need for digital validation (Fardouly et al., 2015). It is essential for teenagers to comprehend the complex impacts of social media validation on mental health in order to make wise decisions regarding their online activities (Vogel et al., 2015).

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at understanding the complex interactions that adolescents have with social media, emphasizing a number of important conclusions and ramifications. It is noticeable that a sizable segment of adolescents using social media platforms demonstrate a strong need for validation, highlighting the significance of social acceptability and approbation at this developmental time. This emphasizes how much teenage behaviour and self-perception are shaped by their online interactions. The data obtained from this study shows clear trends in the conduct of those who want validation, from proactive participation to indifference in

the process. These results highlight the variety of perspectives and methods for pursuing acceptance online, illustrating the intricate interaction between social and personal factors
It is also noted that a significant proportion of those surveyed reported feeling compelled to adhere to specific standards for self-representation on social media platforms, underscoring the influence of peer dynamics and cultural norms on the online conduct of teenagers. This emphasizes how important it is to develop resilience and digital literacy in order to successfully negotiate the intricacies of social media.

The dynamic nature of social media dynamics among adolescents is further highlighted by observations of changes in peers' validation-seeking behaviour. This highlights the significance of ongoing research and intervention efforts to address new trends and encourage healthy online habits.

Adolescents' coping mechanisms when they don't get validation on social media shed light on the possible effects on their mental health and general wellbeing. The use of self-validation emerges as a constructive coping mechanism that builds resilience and self-confidence, despite the prevalence of disengagement tactics. Ultimately the need to seek validation, feeling compelled to look a certain way or deactivate social media accounts are all intertwined together which in long term can be harmful to the adolescent's mental well-being.

Apart from the aforementioned obstacles, it is imperative to foster meta-awareness in teenagers. Understanding one's own ideas, emotions, and behaviours in relation to social media interactions is known as meta-awareness. Adolescents can have a better grasp of the manner in which their online conduct affects their mental health and self-perception by cultivating meta-awareness. Their ability to critically assess the reasons behind their validation-seeking actions and make wise decisions regarding their online behaviour is facilitated by this awareness. In addition, fostering a healthy embodiment of self and identity means motivating teenagers to respect and accept their own characteristics instead of seeking approval from others by fitting in with preconceived notions. Adolescents can handle social media with better resilience and authenticity by developing meta-awareness and a positive self-concept, which will ultimately improve their general mental health and well-being.

Nevertheless it's crucial to understand that actions like deleting social media accounts, feeling pressured to live up to expectations, and the need for validation are all related and may have long-term effects on adolescents' mental health. Parents and guardian can help adolescents navigate their way in this transitional journey by educating the adolescents regarding the implication and consequences of validation seeking behaviours. Consequently, encouraging appropriate online conduct and helping adolescents navigate the challenges of social media requires addressing validation-seeking habits in a constructive and helpful way.

Limitations
Although the study has given insight into adolescent's sense of seeking validation, its impact on their mental health as well as the need for validation, the study has several limitations. Firstly, the study's dependence on a Google Form survey is one of its limitations, as it might have limited the breadth of information gathered. Online surveys may not always capture the subtleties and depth of in-person conversations, which could restrict the understanding of teenagers' experiences with social media validation. Furthermore, restricting the study to

Pune participants may have limited the findings' applicability to a larger teenage population. Furthermore, the results may be biased towards a particular developmental stage, perhaps ignoring the experiences of older or younger teenagers, due to the preponderance of respondents seeking validation within the 14–16 age range.

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