Research Article

Researches on Multidisiplinary Approaches 2025, 5(SI-IXASC2025): 211-222

ISSN:2791-9099

Approval-Seeking in Social Media: Moderating Role of Social Comparison and Cyber Values¹ ©

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Abstract

Young people, as consistently reported in the recent literature, frequently engage in social media. They are more inclined to make social comparisons to determine their self-worth through metrics such as likes, and the number of followers. These comparison tendencies function as underlying needs for approval-seeking. However, online social interactions often result in ethical violations. Therefore, cyber human values should be scrutinized in virtual environments. This cross-sectional study aimed to examine whether approval-seeking predict users' digital behaviours and how psychological processes and ethical values influence users' behaviours in social media ecosystems. After an a priori power analysis using G*Power, it was determined that 263 participants (at least) would suffice to detect a medium effect size with % 80 power. A convenience sample of 270 university students responded to an online survey via Google Forms comprised of 66 items. The results provided a positive significant relationship between social comparison and social media use (r = 0.293, p < .01). Approval-seeking significantly predicted social media use at both moderate (B = .294, p = .001) and high levels of social comparison (B = .447, p < .001), whereas cyber human values did not significantly moderate the relationship between approval-seeking and social media use. This research was theoretically grounded utilizing Social Comparison, Self-Presentation, and Self Determination theories. It is concluded that due to their interactive design, social media platforms not only facilitate self-presentation, but also enable users to meet basic human needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) through digital expression and interpersonal feedback.

Keywords: Approval-Seeking, Cyber Values, Social Comparison, Social Media Use.

JEL Codes: 110, 130, 131

¹This article is derived from a study originally presented at the IX. ASC 2025 Spring Congress (May 15–18, 2025), hosted by İstanbul Gedik University in İstanbul, Türkiye, and has been substantially revised to meet the academic and editorial standards required for publication.

Citation: Koç, A. Ş. (2025). Approval-Seeking in Social Media Moderating Role of Social Comparison and Cyber Values. *Researches on Multidisciplinary Approaches (Romaya Journal)*, 5(SI-IXASC2025): 211-222.

1. Introduction

Social media has become an undeniable platform for interpersonal communication, identity exploration, and emotional regulation, especially among young adults in today's digital society. Ubiquitous mobile devices and online applications allow individuals to engage in social interactions through digital channels that were not previously possible. Social media platforms constantly offer individuals the opportunity to present selected aspects of themselves and gain approval through likes, comments, and shares. This phenomenon has been conceptualized as social validation, which refers to individuals' attempts to gain approval from others for their preferences in digital interactions (Ballara, 2023). Social validation, referred to as "approval-seeking" in this study, is not accidental. Studies have shown that it is based on basic human psychological needs such as social acceptance, belonging, recognition, and identity reinforcement (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015, Yenilmez Kaçar,

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) provides an important theoretical perspective on why individuals compare themselves to others. This theory posits that we compare certain aspects of ourselves (e.g., our behaviours, opinions, status, and success) to others, leading to a better self-image (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). In today's digital age, social media offers a fertile ground for making upward and downward comparisons. The frequency and direction of these comparisons can significantly alter the relationship between approval-seeking and social media use, with important implications for users' mental health and well-being (Taylor & Armes, 2024). A recent meta-analysis (McComb et al., 2023) provides robust findings on how upward social comparisons lead to negative mood and self-evaluations. Salerno et al. (2025) reported in a longitudinal study that online social comparison tendencies predict excessive social media use.

Young adults are more likely to be digitally engaged, and their use of social media has increased significantly in recent years. Statistics show that more than half of global social media users are young adults, with those aged 20-29 (31.8%) being the most "active" social media users (Smith, 2024). Empirical studies show that younger users (Gen Z and young millennials) are more prone to social comparison and digital validation (Pew Research, 2024). Social media use is influenced by age, gender, level of education, time spent online, and preferred devices for accessing social media. A recent qualitative study (Derbaix et al., 2024) highlights that age, gender and media literacy influence users' engagement and their online social comparison tendencies. Therefore, demographic variables are important to understand differences in social media interaction and its psychological effects.

According to Self-Presentation Theory (Goffman, 1959) individuals manage their impressions to influence others' perceptions. Recent empirical evidence supports the idea in digital contexts. Self-presentation is an important component of social interaction on social media platforms and gives a dynamic direction to users' self and identity construction (Yang & Ying, 2021). Thus, users constantly present themselves in digital environments to appear more attractive and more socially connected. Young individuals find social media desirable because social media provides immediate interaction and feedback to users for developing a sense of self and identity (Skogen et al., 2020). Moreover, digital platforms serve a space for users to present different versions of themselves through managing their impressions (Fullwood et al., 2020). In addition, social media platforms provide users opportunity to curate content, increasing the likelihood of selective self-presentation (Meeus

Each social media platform demands different features for self-presentation (Hollenbaugh, 2021). Therefore, the self-presentation strategy used may vary depending on the platform preferred. A recent study (Muyidi, 2025) found that excessive time spent on social media was associated with using more self-presentation strategies, and that cultural context also shaped these different strategies. Likewise, social media users' selective self-presentation may diversify depending on who the audience is. Because self-presentation requires a target audience and users constantly weigh what their audiences perceive. The audience of the shared content has been found to be the most important criterion for self-presentation (e.g. Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018). Recent studies suggested that excessive self-presentation was associated with anxiety and poor mental health (e.g. Hjetland et al., 2024; Muyidi, 2025) In addition to its negative effects, self-presentation on social media can increase young people's overall subjective well-being in the long term through social approval (Simpson & Janse van Vuuren, 2025).

Behaviours during social interactions in digital environments should include ethical values that all users must comply with. Ethics is a set of values that direct people determine their actions in the real world (Sari et al., 2020). Likewise, one can extend societal norms and values to digital context to shape the social interactions of users with each other on social media platforms (Santhosh & Thiyagu, 2024). Virtual environments offer users countless opportunities to interact on a global scale. However, these social interactions often result in violations of ethical norms (Rösner et al., 2016). Since users are inclined to express their spontaneous ideas on social media platforms, they may unknowingly disregard ethical values (such as respect, honesty, tolerance, and digital responsibility). Their psychological burdens (likes, thoughts, emotions, etc.) may not match those

of the interlocutor. Human values, which are closely tied to ethics, serve as a guide for individuals in daily life and help determining their priorities. These values are internalized over time and serve as enduring beliefs. Thus, while browsing online, we can assume that social media users reflect these core beliefs. Cyber values, in this context, play an important role in understanding the core beliefs and defining ethical behaviours in virtual environments. (Kılıçer et al., 2017).

Despite increasing research on social media use and mental well-being, very little research has been conducted to examine the interconnected effects of approval-seeking behaviour, social comparison, and cyber-human values within a single framework. A critical gap in understanding persists regarding how psychological vulnerabilities and ethical orientations affect user behaviour. To our knowledge, earlier studies lacked a comprehensive examination of the moderating role of social comparison tendencies between approval seeking and social media use. Moreover, the theoretical framework integrating Social Comparison Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Self-Presentation Theory provides a multidimensional perspective for future research addressing theoretical gaps in social media behaviours.

In line with this purpose, this study aimed to examine whether external validation predict digital behaviours and how human psychological processes and ethical digital values influence user behaviours in social media ecosystems. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted to explore the relationships between approval seeking, social comparison, and social media use. An online survey was administered to students at Çağ University via Google Forms during 2024-25 Spring term. Building on the literature, a conceptual model was proposed in which approval seeking, social comparison tendencies, and cyber human values were examined as the key components of social media use among university students. Grounded in three social psychological theories, the model explored how basic human needs for approval and social validation shaped digital behaviours. Accordingly, this study tested three hypotheses addressing both direct and moderated relationships between research variables and aimed to clarify psychological mechanisms underlying social media engagement among young adults.

2. Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Grounding

As of April 2025, 5.31 billion social media users (64.7% of the global population) indicate that more than a half of the users all around the world are getting more engaged in digital environments rather than real-life activities. What is more, a typical social media user is spending an average of 18 hours and

41 minutes per week actively for using or visiting social platforms (CrowdStrike, 2025). It is obvious that social media platforms are not merely venues for communication but also for self-presentation (Zheng et al., 2020), identity construction (Gündüz, 2017), and validation (Ballara, 2023). There may be several reasons why so many people spend considerable time in digital environments. However, the focus of this research on social media use was theoretically grounded in three social psychological frameworks. Self-Presentation Theory (SPT) (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987), Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and Social Comparison Theory (SCT) (Festinger, 1954) provided a framework to examine young adults' approval-seeking behaviour, and their tendencies towards social comparison.

Self-Presentation Theory argues that individuals engage in behaviours to convey their own information or images to others. The motivations behind these behaviours are relatively stable but can change depending on situational factors. The theory asserts two separate propositions for self-presentation motivation: evaluative presence and knowledge of others about the individual's behaviour. The motivation of the individual in the first proposition, called as "pleasing the audience", is to match one's self-presentation with the expectations and preferences of his/her audience. The latter proposition, called as "self-construction", is the motivation that the individual attempts to match his/her self-presentation with his/her ideal self (Baumeister & Hutton, 1987:71).

In this respect, self-presentational motivations through posting on social media correspond to the public display of the users (Zheng et al., 2020). These attempts can be considered as the manifestations of self-construct. Human beings have an innate tendency to be accepted and they strive to manage how others perceive them (Goffman, 1959). This phenomenon may explain why social media users prefer to share their curated images to gain social approval from others (Hjetland et al., 2022). It is plausible that approval-seeking behaviours have increased with the rise in social media use. Human beings are in need for constant validation of others. Inclined to get more favourable responses, they delete or edit their shared content meticulously.

Technological facilities offer users various opportunities for self-disclosure and self-expression in digital environments. Through approval metrics (likes, follows, etc.), social media provides further and instant feedback to users whereas face-to-face interactions may carry certain risks of interpretation. People are concerned to please their audiences, whether they are close or distant friends, on social media. Self-presentation is a purposeful behaviour performed in front of an audience and individuals desire to enhance their visibility on social circles.

Success depends on how much one's self-presentation is appreciated by others (Hollenbaugh, 2021). In addition, it can be hard for the user to manage his/her impression on social media platforms that allow others to contribute to the content shared. The desire for approval reflects the self-presentational motivations. Therefore, social media users frequently take their audiences' preferences into consideration (Lowe-Calverley & Grieve, 2018) because tags and comments have remarkable impacts on the user's self-presentation.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), as a holistic motivation theory, suggests that an individual's behaviour is affected by internal factors (feelings, thoughts, etc.) and external factors (environment). The theory posits that people are motivated by three innate (and universal) psychological needs. Autonomy is the sense that individuals feel they have control over their own behaviour and goals. Competence indicates that an individual has the potential required to perform any behaviour. Relatedness refers to the individual's need to have enduring and intimate relationships with some significant others.

Social media offers individuals opportunities to interact with a wide variety of audience, activities, and applications (Weinstein, 2018). In terms of autonomy, this provides trials for users to feel the sense of control, self-management, personal agency, and contribution to the sense of empowerment by allowing them to organize their public lives on their own terms (West & Vella-Brodrick, 2024). In addition, social media platforms render users many opportunities to test their competence. Digital technologies require specific sets of technical and cognitive skills. Consuming and responding to contents on platforms, participating in cyber communities via hashtags, taking perspective, "having a say" in short, increase the individual's self-esteem and enable them to have a positive sense of self (Budd et al., 2016).

Relatedness can be considered as the most salient feature of social media in the context of Self-Determination Theory. Social media interactions, which might be the continuation of real-world relational ties, facilitate the expansion of social networks regardless of geographical boundaries and provide a sense of recognition and reciprocity (Rousseau et al., 2019). The potential in social media for approval and social influence on others ensures the fulfilment of need for relatedness (Gangadharbatla, 2008). Using social media to bridge and bond with others and devoting to the maintenance of these newly established ties through digital interactions suggest that "need to belong is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation." (Baumeister & Leary, 1995:497).

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests that individuals determine their self-worth by comparing themselves to others. According to the theo-

ry, we utilize other people as sources of information and relying on these sources, we make judgments about our abilities, behaviours, or thoughts. Comparisons may include anything concerning the individual such as lifestyle, achievements, appearance, economic status, etc. According to Festinger (1954), human beings have a desire to compare themselves against others to determine their capabilities or accuracy of their ideas, and to determine a benchmark of what they aim to achieve. Social comparison tendencies, regardless of the direction or type, explain a process related to how self-knowledge is acquired. The theory proposes three types of social comparisons. The direction of the comparisons does not always guarantee positive or negative results for the individual.

In upward comparison, the individual compares himself/herself to someone who is superior. The motivation for upward comparisons is stronger when the comparison is made covertly rather than explicitly, if the individual is not at risk of being evaluated as inferior/bad, and when the individual makes investment into a feature or an ability. However, it can lead to negative emotions such as inferiority and depression (Cohen et al., 2017). In downward comparisons, the individual compares himself/herself to someone inferior. We are more likely to engage in downward social comparisons when our sense of self and well-being are threatened; these comparisons help us feel better about ourselves (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). Downward comparisons boost the experience of positive emotions such as happiness while increasing our self-esteem and reducing anxiety. Lateral comparisons are usually made with peers or people who are equal in terms of a specific feature. They usually do not cause distress and the individual feels neither superior nor inferior.

Whether they use social media passively by browsing their own feeds or visiting others' profiles, or actively by sharing posts or sending messages, individuals are inclined to make comparisons on social platforms. The critical point here is the direction of the social comparisons, because it has diverse effects on the individual's social and psychological well-being. Research indicate that active use has more positive effects on psychological health than passive use, while passive use may trigger feelings such as hostility and envy (Verduyn et al., 2017).

It is common for users to make social comparisons to determine their self-worth through metrics such as likes, the number of followers, prompts, alerts, and views of the content (Samra et al., 2022). Consequently, most young users think that people (influencers, in particular) in their feeds are happier, wealthier, and more successful than they are (Chou & Edge, 2012). Social comparison in social media requires considerable attention. Considering the statistics, young adults are at risk for adverse effects

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of social comparison in pursuit of a measure for self-worth (Prichard et al., 2021). This phenomenon can be considered as an adhesion to social feedback loops for self-validation through either content-based or image-based social platforms.

2.1. Research Hypotheses

To examine the interplay between approval-seeking behaviour, social media use, social comparison tendencies, and cyber human values among young adults, three hypotheses were generated. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposes that human beings have an innate tendency to fulfil three fundamental needs. Relatedness, one of which, refers to the desire of connectedness to others and is very central to the sense of being loved and cared for (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Individuals are in a constant search for validating whether they are loved or accepted by some significant others. In purpose for this affirmation, they try to collect social feedback in real world settings. Social media, which can be considered as a displacement of the real world in today's digital environment, provides human beings numerous opportunities to fulfil the need of relatedness. The more the need is met, the more the individual is engaged in social media for approval-seeking. It has been hypothesized that individuals with higher approval motivation would be more likely to engage frequently and intensively with social media platfor-

H1: Approval-seeking behaviour will positively predict social media use among young adults.

Social Comparison Theory (SCT) posits that we fail to accurately self-assess our attitudes and abilities, especially in the absence of objective standards or when faced with uncertainties about our own position in a particular domain. Instead, we inherently compare ourselves to other people for an evalua-

tion (Festinger, 1954). Social media provides countless platforms for users to present their selves and the interlocuters are exposed to the presented contents. Whether the account appeared in their feeds on social media platform is followed or not, users generally make either upward or downward social comparisons through these presented contents. Social media with an interactive nature allows users to interact with relatively filtered, idealized, and curated selves/lives of individuals which may then lead to persistent but unhealthy social comparison tendencies (Qui, 2024). It has been hypothesized that:

H2: Social comparison tendencies will moderate the positive relation between approval-seeking behaviour and social media use.

In their Functional Theory of Values (FTV), Gouveia et al. (2014) discuss that values function as a guide to human actions, and as expressions of human needs. The authors explain from an evolutionary perspective that social groups have created sets of values to bond with one another, resist threatening demands, and create shared meanings in their social interactions. These values are essential to survive and to meet basic needs. In psychological respect, human values function as rules for individuals to regulate their actions and needs in social circles. Cyber values, on the other side, can be defined as the set of rules based on basic human values and applied in cyberspace interactions (Shun Xiang & Hasbullah, 2023). Cyber human values (such as respect, responsibility, being peaceful, etc.) are crucial in social media use in terms of ethics. It has been hypothesized that individuals who have internalized cyber human values would resist to conform to socially reinforced approval metrics and behave responsibly in their social media interactions:

H3: Cyber human values will moderate the relationship between approval-seeking behaviour and social media use.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Model

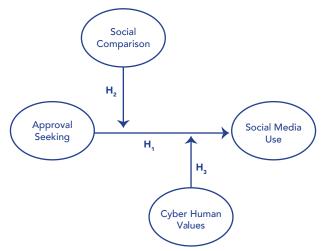


Figure 1. The Research Model

In this study, approval seeking was selected as the independent variable (IV), while social media use was assigned as the dependent variable (DV). The model (see Figure 1) also examined the moderating role of social comparison, based on the assumption that individuals' efforts for external validation might lead them to engage in social comparisons on social media platforms, which in turn might pose a risk for excessive use. Additionally, cyber values were tested as a moderating variable to explore whether the strength of the relationship between approval seeking and social media use varied according to the participants' internalized digital norms and ethical awareness.

3.2. Participants

This study utilized a quantitative, correlational, and cross-sectional survey design. The aim was to explore the relationships between approval-seeking behaviour, social media use, social comparison, and cyber human values. Young people, as consistently reported in the recent literature (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015), frequently engage in social media and they are more inclined to make social comparisons to determine their self-worth through metrics such as likes, and the number of followers on social media platforms. Accordingly, university students were recruited as the target population of the study.

A convenience sample of 270 university students, both at undergraduate and graduate degrees, were selected on a voluntary basis and no incentive was offered. Informed consents were obtained before an online survey via Google Forms was administered. To determine the minimum sample size for a medium effect size (f2=0.05) in a multiple regression analysis, an a priori analysis was conducted utilizing G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007). In line with Cohen's (1988) criteria and for moderation analysis within the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022), the required sample size was calculated to be 263 participants to achieve a statistical power of 0.80 at a significance level of α =.05. Since the sample size provided adequate power for the analyses, data collection via Google Forms was concluded once the submitted responses reached 270 participants.

3.3. Measures

The survey comprised of 66 items, most of which were Likert-typed rating. All variables were measured through self-report questionnaires. Four standardized measurement instruments were used in this study to evaluate participants' demographic traits, social media use, social comparison tendencies, ethical values in online interactions, and inclinations toward social approval. Participants' propensity to pursue social approval was assessed using the Martin-Larsen Revised Approval Motivation Scale (MLAMS; Larsen & Martin, 1984). The Social Media

Use Scale (SMUS; Tuck & Thompson, 2024) was used to gauge the frequency, and level of social media platform engagement. Individual differences in social comparison tendencies were measured using the lowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Scale (INCOM; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). The Cyber Human Values Scale (i-Values; Kılıçer et al., 2027) was used to weigh participants' ethical values in digital interactions. Demographic information was also gathered using an 8-item Personal Information Form. The participants spent approximately 8-10 minutes to complete the survey. In addition, the online format was optimized for clarity and ease of use to enhance data quality.

Reliability analyses in the current sample provided the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients as follow: For The Approval Motivation Scale as 0.914; for The Social Comparison Orientation Scale as 0.863; for The Cyber Human Values Scale as 0.875; and for The Social Media Use Scale as 0.926. The results suggested high levels of reliability for all measures.

3.4. Data Analysis

To analyse the data, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and moderation analyses were conducted. First, the demographic characteristics of the participants were determined using frequency and percentage distributions. Then, descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum values of the scale scores, were calculated. Next, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships between the scales, and to assess the directions and associations among variables. Finally, moderation analyses were performed using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 1) as suggested by Hayes (2022), to test the direct, indirect, and moderating effects among the specified variables. The significance level was set at .05. Data analyses were conducted using the SPSS Statistics version 22.0.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

This non-invasive research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by Çağ University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Approval No: E-81570533-604.01.01-2500002825, Date: 25.03.2025).

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive Features of The Participants

The descriptive characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1. Of the individuals participated in the study, 68.9% (n=186) were female and

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31.1% (n=84) were male. Regarding age distribution, 7.4% of the participants were between of 18 and 20 years old, 54.1% were between 21 and 25 years old, 8.9% were between 26 and 30 years old, 9.6% were between 31 and 35 years old, 4.4% were between 36 and 40 years old, and 15.6% were 41 years old or older. In terms of educational status, 41.5% of the participants were high school graduates, 24.4% held a bachelor's degree, and 34.1% had a postgraduate degree.

Regarding daily smartphone usage time, 2.2% of the participants reported using smartphones for less than 1 hour per day, 13.3% for 1-2 hours, 43.7% for 3-4 hours, and 40.7% for more than 5 hours. In terms of time spent on social media platforms, 8.9% spent less than 1 hour per day, 33.3% spent 1-2 hours, 44.4% spent 3-4 hours, and 13.3% spent more than 5 hours. Most participants (95.6%) accessed social media platforms via smartphones, while 1.5% use laptops, and 3.0% used desktop computers. Concerning the social media platforms on which participants spend the most time, 57.8% reported using Instagram, 0.7% Facebook, 11.1% TikTok, 14.8% Twitter and 15.6% YouTube.

Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages of the Participants

Groups	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	186	68.9
Male	84	31.1
Age		
18-20	20	7.4
21-25	146	54.1
26-30	24	8.9
31-35	26	9.6
36-40	12	4.4
41+	42	15.6
Latest Graduation		
Highschool	112	41.5
Undergraduate	66	24.4
Graduate	92	34.1
Screen Time		
Less Than 1 Hour	6	2.2
1-2 Hours	36	13.3
3-4 Hours	118	43.7
More Than 5 Hours	110	40.7
Social Media Time		
Less Than 1 Hour	24	8.9
1-2 Hours	90	33.3
3-4 Hours	120	44.4
More Than 5 Hours	36	13.3
Device Used		
Smartphone	258	95.6
Laptop	4	1.5
Personal Computer	8	3.0

Most Used Platform		
Instagram	156	57.8
Facebook	2	0.7
Tiktok	30	11.1
Twitter	40	14.8
Youtube	42	15.6

The average scores of the participants on Approval Seeking, Social Comparison, Cyber Human Values and Social Media Use scales are presented in Table 2. The average Approval-Seeking score was M=2.565~(SD=0.497), with a range of 1.500 to 3.900. The average score for The Social Comparison Scale was M=3.226~(SD=0.696), ranging from 1.000

to 4.830. The average score for The Cyber Human Values Scale was M=3.484 (SD = 0.503), with a minimum and maximum values of 1.000 and a maximum of 5.000, respectively. Finally, the mean Social Media Use score was M=2.779 (SD = 1.373), and ranging from 1.000 to 9.000.

Table 2. Mean Scores of Measures

	N	Mean	Ss	Min.	Max.
Approval Seeking	270	2.565	0.497	1.500	3.900
Social Comparison	270	3.226	0.696	1.000	4.830
Cyber Human Values	270	3.484	0.503	1.000	5.000
Social Media Use	270	2.779	1.373	1.000	9.000

To determine the relationships between variables, Pearson correlation analyses were performed. Approval seeking had positive and significant relationships with Social Comparison (r = 0.389, p < .01), and with Social Media Use (r = 0.293, p < .01), but a negative significant relationship with Cyber Human

Values (r = -0.161, p < .01). There was a significant relationship between Social Comparison and Social Media Use (r = 0.293, p < .01), but no significant relationship was found between Social Comparison and Cyber Human Values (r = 0.071, p = .244) (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation Analyses of Measures

		Approval Seeking	Social Comparison	Cyber Human Values	Social Media Use
Ammuoval Cookina	r	1.000			
Approval Seeking	р	0.000			
	r	0.389**	1.000		
Social Comparison	р	0.000	0.000		
Cyber Human Values	r	-0.161**	0.071	1.000	
	р	0.008	0.244	0.000	
Social Media Use	r	0.293**	0.293**	0.017	1.000
	р	0.000	0.000	0.784	0.000

^{**&}lt;0.01; Pearson Correlation Analysis

This study examined whether the relationship between approval-seeking behaviour (AS) and social media use (SMU) was moderated by social comparison tendencies (SC). The overall model was statistically significant (R = .374, R^2 = .140, F (3,266) = 14.400, p < .001), indicating that the model accounted for 14% of the variance in social media use. Upon the examinations of the regression coefficients, appro-

val-seeking was found to significantly and positively predict social media use (B = .294, SE = .085, t (266) = 3.471, p = .001, 95% CI [.127, .461]). Similarly, social comparison also significantly and positively predicted social media use (B = .327, SE = .086, t (266) = 3.785, p < .001, 95% CI [.157, .497]). Importantly, the interaction term between approval-seeking and social comparison was also statistically significant (B

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= .153, SE = .068, t (266) = 2.238, p = .026, 95% CI [.018, .288]). This result suggested that the strength of the relationship between approval seeking and social media use varied significantly as a function of participants' social comparison tendencies.

As a result of the conditional effects analysis, the effect of approval seeking on social media use was not statistically significant among participants with low levels of social comparison tendency (B = .141, p = .191). However, approval seeking significantly predicted social media use at both moderate (B = .294, p = .001) and high levels of social comparison (B = .447, p < .001). These findings indicated that approval-seeking behaviour had a stronger impact on social media use when participants exhibited higher social comparison tendencies (Table 4).

Table 4. Moderation Analysis: Effects of Approval-Seeking and Social Comparison on Social Media Use and Conditional Effects Results

Variable	В	SE	t	р	95% CI	95% CI
					Min.	Max.
Constant	2,720	,082	33,043	<,001	2,558	2,882
AS (Approval Seeking)	,294	,085	3,471	,001	,127	,461
SC (Social Comparison)	,327	,086	3,785	,000	,157	,497
AS × SC (Interaction)	,153	,068	2,238	,026	,018	,288

 $R = ,374, R^2 = ,140, F(3,266) = 14,400, p < ,001.$

SC Level	Effect (B)	SE	t	р	95% CI	95% CI
					Min.	Max.
-1 (Low)	,141	,108	1,311	,191	-,071	,353
0 (Moderate)	,294	,085	3,471	,001	,127	,461
1 (High)	,447	,110	4,060	<,001	,230	,664

B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; t = t value; p = significance level; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval; R = multiple correlation coefficient; R² = proportion of variance explained.

This study also examined whether the effect of participants' approval seeking behaviours (AS) on social media use (SMU) varied as a function of their level of cyber human values (CHV). The overall model was statistically significant (R = .313, R 2 = .098, F (3,266) = 9.649, p < .001), indicating that the model explained 9.8% of the variance in social media use. Upon examining the regression coefficients, approval-seeking was found to significantly and positively predict social media use (B = .414, SE = .081, t (266) =

5.112, p < .001, 95% CI [.255, .574]). However, the direct effect of cyber human values was not statistically significant (B = .073, SE = .082, t (266) = .897, p = .370). Additionally, the interaction term between approval-seeking and cyber human values was not significant (B = .127, SE = .082, t (266) = 1.548, p = .123). These findings implied that participants' levels of cyber human values did not significantly moderate the relationship between approval-seeking and social media use (Table 5).

Table 5. Effects of Approval Seeking and Cyber Human Values on Social Media Usage

Variable	В	SE	t	р	95% CI	95% CI
					Min.	Max.
Constant	2,799	,081	34,616	<,001	2,640	2,959
AS (Approval Seeking)	,414	,081	5,112	<,001	,255	,574
CHV (Cyber Human Values)	,073	,082	,897	,370	-,088	,234
AS × CHV (Interaction)	,127	,082	1,548	,123	-,034	,288
R = .313, R ² = .098, F (3.266) =	9.649. p < .001					

B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; t = t value; p = significance level; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval; R = multiple correlation coefficient; $R^2 = proportion$ of variance explained.

5. Conclusions

ct of approval-seeking in social media use. Results suggest that users are inclined to meet fundamental needs on social media platforms and other users on platforms are a significant source of feedback (whether positive or negative) in regulating individuals' self-knowledge in the context of Social Comparison Theory. In purpose to reveal the moderating role of social comparison tendencies, an association between approval seeking and social media use was found to intensify as individuals' tendencies towards social comparison increased. These findings are significantly consistent with recent social media research (e.g. Stapleton et al., 2017). According to Zhao et al. (2008), identity is not an innate individual characteristic, but rather a socially constructed product shaped through interactions with others in social environments. Within the framework of Self-Presentation Theory, social media platforms may serve as channels that provide individuals meaningful opportunities for identity construction. As can be expected, online postings may have the potential to ensure experiencing two core self-presentation motivations: self-construction and self-evaluation. Empirical studies have demonstrated that social media use is positively associated with a tendency towards social comparison (e.g. Tian et al., 2024; Loi et al., 2020; Gallinari, 2018). Individuals with a high propensity for social comparison are more likely to use social media more intensively, which supports the idea that social comparison may amplify the relationship between approval-seeking and social media use. Additionally, it is plausible that social comparison may contribute to sustained social media use by reinforcing users' inclination to evaluate themselves against others. Consistent with the findings of the current study, prior research highlights that social comparison intensifies individuals' motivation to seek approval, thereby increasing social media use (e.g. Vogel et al., 2015). For individuals with a high tendency towards social comparison, approval-seeking behaviour may more strongly predict social media use. This illustrates how the structural features of social media platforms interact with individuals' psychological dispositions to shape their behaviours. However, cyber human values did not demonstrate a significant moderating effect in the study. In other words, the ethical values did not significantly alter the relationship between approval-seeking and so-

This research was conducted to examine the impa-

However, cyber human values did not demonstrate a significant moderating effect in the study. In other words, the ethical values did not significantly alter the relationship between approval-seeking and social media use. Since social media provides immediate social feedback and gratification, it is likely that basic psychological motives (such as the need for approval) are more prevailing in shaping user behaviours. Consistent with this interpretation, Nemoto & Fujimoto (2019:36) have described social media platforms as "haven for people's approval desire and the self-expression" for information transmissi-

on. Due to their interactive design, these platforms not only facilitate self-presentation, but also enable users to experience the foundational components (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) of Self-Determination Theory, through digital expression and interpersonal feedback. The theory posits that individuals are inclined to internalize the values endorsed by significant others. However, such internalization is more likely to occur in environments that support the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. Individuals are more likely to adopt and internalize the values when they experience competence in actions, autonomy in decision-making, and a sense of relatedness within their social context. Values represent individuals' commitment to ethical considerations in their thoughts and behaviours. Cyber human values, which can be seen as the digital equivalent of universal human values (Kılıçer et al., 2017), may vary across cultural contexts. In a digital world where billions of users interact simultaneously, it is not plausible to expect uniformity in value systems among all social media users. This cultural diversity may provide an explanation to the absence of a significant moderating effect of cyber human values in the current study. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of this study may have limited the dynamic nature of cyber values, thereby affecting the confirmation of the hypothesized moderation effect.

6. Limitations and Further Suggestions

This study aimed to examine whether young adults' approval-seeking behaviours predict social media use, and to what extent social comparison and cyber human values influence this relationship. However, the proposed research model did not account for the direction of social comparison (i.e., upward vs. downward), which may have offered a more nuanced understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying approval-seeking behaviour. Future research might consider differentiating between these orientations to better reveal their distinct effects.

Additionally, incorporating variables such as positive and negative affect may provide deeper insights into the emotional dimensions of approval-seeking tendencies in digital contexts. Reliance on a convenience sampling method, overrepresentation of female participants, and examination of a young adult sample limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research would benefit from recruiting larger and more diverse samples across different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and demographic profiles.

Moreover, the cross-sectional design of the present study prevents any conclusions about causal relationships between research variables. To establish temporal and directional associations, future studies might employ longitudinal or experimental designs, which may yield more comprehensive understanding into approval-seeking, and social media use over time.

Disclosure

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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