

Academic Validation Culture in Social Media: Educational Management Challenges Against the Digital Achievement Mentality

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Abstrak

Integrasi media sosial ke dalam lingkungan akademis telah memicu munculnya Budaya Validasi Akademis (*Academic Validation Culture/AVC*), sebuah fenomena di mana mahasiswa mengukur harga diri, identitas, dan motivasi mereka melalui pengakuan digital dan metrik kinerja komparatif. Tinjauan pustaka sistematis terhadap 20 studi penelaahan sejawat (2020–2026) ini menyelidiki dampak AVC terhadap manajemen pendidikan tinggi, khususnya interaksinya dengan kinerja akademis, kesejahteraan psikologis, efikasi diri, dan tata kelola institusional. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa AVC diperkuat oleh umpan balik algoritmik, perbandingan rekan sejawat, dan gamifikasi pencapaian akademis. Akibatnya, mahasiswa mengalami peningkatan kecemasan, penurunan motivasi intrinsik, ketidakstabilan konsep diri, serta prokrastinasi. Sayangnya, manajemen pendidikan saat ini gagal memitigasi AVC karena masih mengandalkan intervensi literasi digital generik yang tidak memadai. Sebagai solusi, tinjauan ini mengusulkan Kerangka Kerja Tata Kelola Kesejahteraan Digital Akademis (*Academic Digital Wellness Governance Framework/ADWGF*). Model ini mencakup empat komponen: kebijakan kesadaran AVC, redesain pedagogis berbasis proses, pendidikan kewarganegaraan digital, dan sistem dukungan psikologis terintegrasi. Kerangka ini menyediakan jalur terstruktur bagi pemimpin pendidikan untuk membangun budaya akademis digital yang lebih sehat.

Kata Kunci: Kinerja akademis; mentalitas pencapaian digital; manajemen pendidikan; media sosial; budaya validasi.

Abstract

The pervasive integration of social media into academic environments has catalyzed the emergence of Academic Validation Culture (AVC), a phenomenon in which students increasingly evaluate their academic worth, identity, and motivation through the lens of digital recognition, approval, and comparative performance metrics. This systematic literature review investigates the nature, drivers, and consequences of AVC within higher education, with particular emphasis on its implications for educational management in the era of digital achievement mentality. Drawing on 20 peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2026, this review synthesizes evidence on how social media-mediated validation-seeking behavior intersects with academic performance, psychological well-being, self-efficacy, and institutional governance. Findings reveal that AVC is reinforced by algorithmic feedback loops, peer comparison dynamics, and the gamification of academic milestones on digital platforms. Students immersed in AVC contexts demonstrate heightened anxiety, reduced intrinsic motivation, unstable self-concept, and greater susceptibility to academic procrastination. Educational management systems have largely failed to address AVC as a distinct institutional risk, relying instead on generic digital literacy interventions insufficient for the complexity of this challenge. This review proposes the Academic Digital Wellness Governance Framework (ADWGF), a four-component model comprising: (1) institutional AVC awareness policy, (2) pedagogical redesign toward process-oriented assessment, (3) digital citizenship education, and (4) integrated psychological support systems. The framework offers educational leaders, curriculum designers, and policymakers a structured, evidence-based pathway toward healthier digital academic cultures.

Keywords: *academic performance; digital achievement mentality; educational management; social media; validation culture.*

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Introduction

The rapid diffusion of social media platforms into the fabric of higher education has fundamentally altered the social and psychological contexts in which academic learning occurs. Far from serving solely as channels for communication and information exchange, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and academic networks like ResearchGate have become performative arenas in which students actively construct, curate, and contest their academic identities (Vandeyar, 2020). In these spaces, everyday academic activities, sharing coursework, celebrating awards, documenting research progress, are framed as visible social performances, producing metrics and artifacts that others can instantly evaluate. Out of these practices a distinct cultural formation (Academic Validation Culture/AVC) has emerged, characterized by habitual and often implicit efforts to obtain external affirmation for academic achievements via follower counts, likes, shares, comments, and comparative rankings. By foregrounding such visible indicators, AVC shifts the locus of academic worth from private, process-oriented learning and self-assessment to public, socially mediated validation; academic success becomes not only an outcome but also a consumable signal negotiated through platform affordances and peer recognition.

This shift constitutes a substantive change in how students perceive and internalize academic achievement. While seeking recognition has long been part of academic life, social media introduces a degree of immediacy, public visibility, and continuous comparison that is novel in scale and intensity (Kotsonis & Dunne, 2023). Students now routinely broadcast examination results, scholarship awards, thesis defenses, conference presentations, and other milestones in real time, producing an ongoing feed of peer performance indicators that continually recalibrate personal expectations and self-evaluations. Such persistent exposure to curated successes, combined with platform features that quantify social approval, amplifies upward social comparison and makes validation contingent on external metrics rather than intrinsic standards. Empirical studies report consistent psychological consequences across varied higher education contexts, including increased social comparison, contingent self-esteem, and heightened performance anxiety (Shahzad et al., 2024; Nemt-Allah et al., 2026), suggesting that the affordances of social media can transform otherwise ordinary recognition-seeking into a persistent source of stress and instability for many students.

From the perspective of educational management, Academic Validation Culture (AVC) presents a layered and urgent governance challenge. Institutional responses so far have largely treated social media as a set of instrumental tools, useful for facilitating collaborative learning, increasing student engagement, and amplifying institutional communication (Galioto et al., 2025; Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). Framing platforms primarily as pedagogical or promotional resources, however, tends to obscure the deeper normative and psychological dynamics that AVC makes visible: platform affordances (visibility, quantification, algorithmic amplification) interact with peer comparison practices to reshape students' motivations, self-concepts, and emotional wellbeing. Consequently, campus leaders, curriculum designers, and student-support teams confront a phenomenon that is at once motivating, by offering recognition and social capital, and potentially harmful, by fostering contingent esteem, anxiety, and maladaptive behaviors. Addressing AVC therefore requires more than technical or one-off digital skills workshops; it calls for coordinated institutional strategies that align policy, pedagogy, and mental-health supports so that social-media-saturated academic cultures can be steered toward healthier, resilience-building practices.

This systematic literature review pursues three interconnected research objectives. First, it seeks to characterize the nature and principal drivers of Academic Validation Culture (AVC) as it emerges within higher education contexts increasingly permeated by social media. Second, it aims to synthesize available evidence concerning the effects of AVC on key educational outcomes, namely academic performance, psychological well-being, and students' capacity for self-regulated learning. Third, the review intends to develop a practical educational management framework to guide institutional

responses to AVC. By bringing these aims together, the review advances an emerging body of scholarship on the governance of digital academic cultures and frames AVC as a distinct, consequential phenomenon that demands targeted, evidence-based interventions rather than generic or ad hoc solutions.

Methodology

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, adhering to PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidance to ensure rigour, transparency, and reproducibility in evidence synthesis. An SLR was chosen because the topic of Academic Validation Culture (AVC) in digitally saturated higher education is emergent: primary empirical work remains partial and dispersed, and a structured, replicable review is necessary to consolidate findings and clarify conceptual boundaries relevant to educational management.

A comprehensive literature search was carried out across major bibliographic databases—Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO—and supplemented with Google Scholar to capture grey-area publications indexed there. Search strings combined Boolean terms such as "academic validation," "social media higher education," "digital achievement," "validation culture," "academic performance social media," "social comparison academic," "educational management digital," "self-efficacy social media," and "digital mentality student." To reflect the rapid post-pandemic digitalization of academic environments, searches were restricted to peer-reviewed publications published between 2020 and 2026.

Inclusion criteria were defined to focus the review on studies most relevant to AVC and its institutional implications: eligible works had to be peer-reviewed and published in English, explicitly examine social media use within educational settings, address outcomes related to academic performance, psychological well-being, or institutional management, and present empirical evidence or conceptually significant theoretical contributions. Studies that concerned social media outside educational contexts or that focused solely on technical platform features without linking to educational outcomes were excluded. Applying these criteria yielded a final sample of 20 studies.

For synthesis, thematic analysis was used to organize results into coherent conceptual categories and to trace the relational pathways among platform affordances, validation-seeking behaviors, psychological effects, academic outcomes, and management responses. The review's conceptual framework, presented in Figure 1, maps these pathways and highlights nodes where institutional policy, pedagogy, and student support could intervene to mitigate AVC's adverse effects.

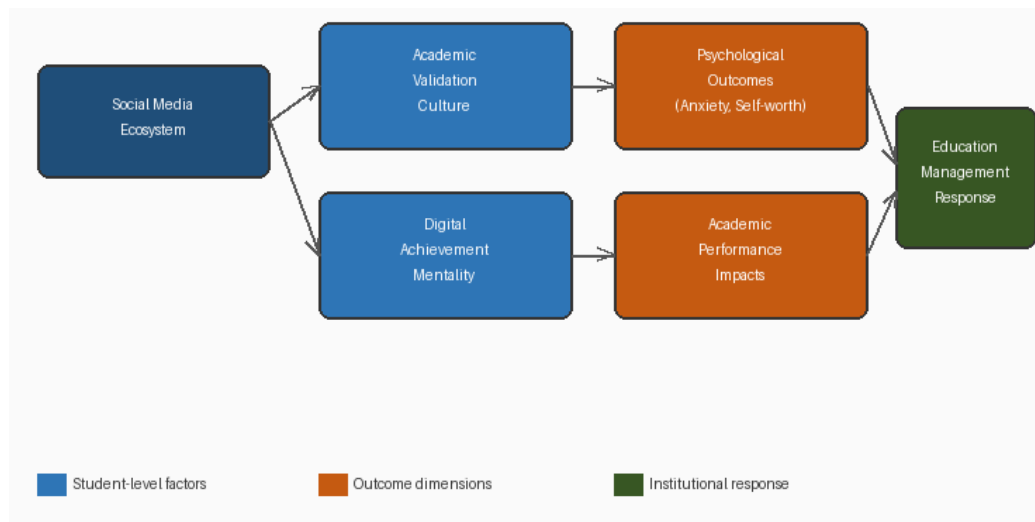


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Academic Validation Culture in Social Media and Educational Management Response

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the synthesized findings of the literature review, beginning with an exploration of how Academic Validation Culture is conceptualized and driven by digital environments.

A. *Defining Academic Validation Culture: Nature and Digital Drivers*

The reviewed literature paints a consistent picture of higher education students as active participants in social media ecosystems that structurally reward visible demonstrations of academic performance. Vandeyar (2020) frames this dynamic as an "academic turn" of social media, in which platforms originally oriented toward social connection are repurposed into stages for displaying and evaluating scholarly accomplishments. This shift is not merely behavioral but is embedded in platform architectures that favor shareable, high-engagement content, conditions under which academic achievements become especially salient and strategically circulated.

Building on this orientation, Nemt-Allah et al. (2026) offer a rigorous empirical account of digital validation-seeking in academic settings, presenting a validated psychometric scale that operationalizes the phenomenon among higher education students. Their work demonstrates that digital validation seeking is multidimensional, encompassing approval orientation (the extent to which individuals seek social endorsement), comparative self-assessment (habitual benchmarking against peers), feedback dependence (reliance on external responses to gauge competence), and achievement-display motivation (the drive to publicize accomplishments). By distinguishing these dimensions, Nemt-Allah and colleagues convert AVC from an abstract observation into a measurable construct with clear implications for institutional assessment and support.

Complementing these empirical contributions, Kotsonis and Dunne (2023) provide a critical pedagogical analysis, showing how the circulation of "unattainable pedagogical exemplars", polished, idealized portrayals of academic excellence and productivity, generates normative pressures that skew students' relationships to learning. These exemplars act as externally imposed benchmarks that encourage comparison and performative achievement rather than process-oriented growth. The combined effect described across studies is a self-reinforcing validation-seeking cycle: students shape their academic behaviors to maximize visibility and social approval, platforms amplify the most visible signals, and normative expectations shift toward performative metrics instead of authentic intellectual development.

B. *Impacts on Academic Performance: The Dual-Edged Evidence Base*

The relationship between social media use and academic performance, as portrayed across the reviewed literature, is complex, conditional, and shaped by students' underlying motivational orientations. Shahzad et al. (2024) explore students' perceptions of social media in an AI-enhanced learning environment and find that, although many students report clear informational and collaborative benefits, those with strong validation-seeking tendencies experience greater volatility in performance and higher levels of anxiety. In other words, the same platforms that facilitate knowledge exchange and peer support can also amplify instability when students approach them primarily as sources of external approval.

Empirical studies reinforce this conditional effect. P & Kumar (2024) document direct negative associations between validation-oriented social media behaviors, such as closely monitoring peers' academic achievements and actively seeking recognition for one's own accomplishments, and sustained academic concentration. Their findings suggest that when usage patterns are oriented toward visibility and comparison, attention and sustained study are undermined. Likewise, Caratiquit and Caratiquit (2023) link social media addiction, which frequently presents in educational settings as compulsive validation-seeking, to increased academic procrastination; this procrastination, particularly in distance learning contexts, mediates subsequent declines in achievement.

Taken together, these studies indicate that social media's impact on academic outcomes is not uniformly positive or negative but depends on how students engage with platforms: instrumental, collaborative use can support learning, whereas validation-driven, comparison-focused engagement tends to disrupt concentration, increase procrastination, and elevate anxiety. Figure 2 synthesizes these patterns by summarizing the behavioral indicators most often reported as significantly affected by AVC dynamics across the reviewed studies, expressed as the percentage of studies finding a significant effect on each indicator.

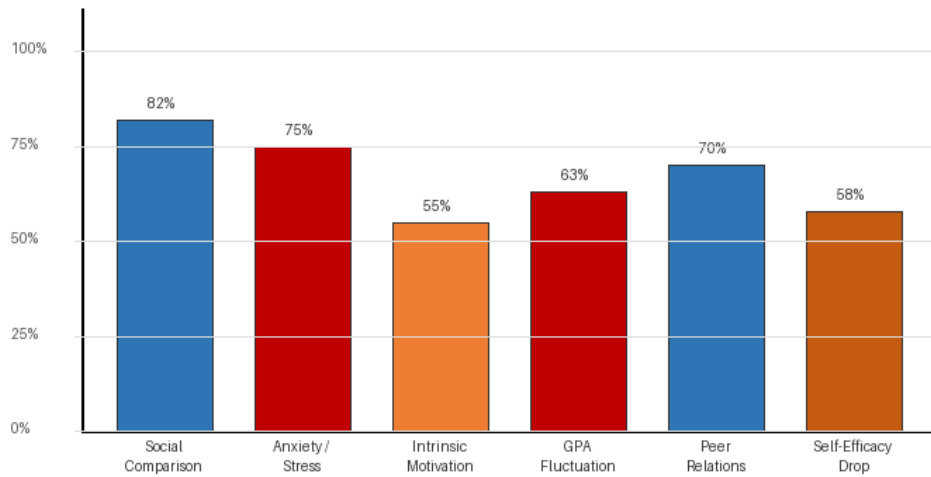


Figure 2. Percentage of Studies Reporting Significant Effect of Academic Validation Culture on Student Behavioral Indicators (Synthesized from reviewed literature, 2020–2026)

To situate the percentage-based findings within their empirical and conceptual contexts, Table 1 provides a systematic summary of the 20 reviewed studies. The table organizes each study’s key characteristics, publication year, geographic or institutional context, research design (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), sample characteristics, and the primary outcomes or constructs examined, so readers can trace how evidence is distributed across time and place. By presenting chronological distribution alongside regional focus and methodological approach, the table clarifies whether particular findings cluster in certain contexts (for example, post-pandemic studies, specific countries, or distance-learning settings) and highlights gaps in the literature. It also links each study’s reported effects to the behavioral and psychological indicators used to compute the percentage values shown earlier, thereby making transparent how the synthesis derives from heterogeneous empirical measures and conceptual framings.

Table 1. Summary of Reviewed Studies on Academic Validation Culture and Social Media in Higher Education

Author (Year)	Context	Method	Key Variable	Main Finding
Vandeyar (2020)	S. Africa	Conceptual	Social media academic turn	Social media reoriented toward academic performance display
Ansari & Khan (2020)	Global	Review	Collaborative learning SM	SM enhances collaborative learning when well-structured
Alamri et al. (2020)	Global	Survey	SM → Academic perf.	SM use positively affects performance with right support
Poshka (2020)	Europe	Conceptual	Digital vs. traditional ed.	Digital culture challenges traditional educational norms
Pumptow & Brahm (2020)	Germany	Survey	Digital self-efficacy	Self-efficacy mediates SM impact on academic outcomes

Author (Year)	Context	Method	Key Variable	Main Finding
Radhia & Abdi (2020)	Algeria	Survey	E-learning via SM	SM facilitates e-learning but risks distraction
Al-Rahmi et al. (2021)	Multi-nat.	SEM	IS success + TAM → SM	TAM and IS success predict SM use in education
Al-Rahmi et al. (2022)	Multi-nat.	SEM	SM satisfaction/perf.	SM engagement improves satisfaction and performance
Damayanto et al. (2022)	Indonesia	Survey	Mgmt challenges digital era	Digital era demands adaptive management strategies
Kotsonis & Dunne (2023)	UK	Conceptual	Unattainable exemplars SM	Social media exemplars generate harmful comparison pressure
Caratiquit et al. (2023)	Philippines	SEM	SM addiction → procrastin.	Procrastination mediates SM addiction → lower achievement
Al-Hail et al. (2024)	Qatar	Qualitative	SM digital learning	SM enables learning but requires institutional governance
Shahzad et al. (2024)	Multi-nat.	Survey	AI + SM → perf.+wellbeing	Positive perceptions mediate SM/AI → academic outcomes
P & Kumar (2024)	India	Survey	SM → Academic perf.	Validation-oriented use negatively impacts concentration
Anh et al. (2025)	SE Asia	Survey	SM influence → acad. perf.	SM use ambiguously affects performance across contexts
Amrosy (2025)	Egypt	Survey	SM use → nursing students	High SM use associated with lower academic performance
Capodanno et al. (2025)	Australia	Mixed	SM marketing education	SM literacy essential for graduate digital readiness
Galioto et al. (2025)	Europe	Survey	Trust + SM engagement	Trust mediates SM institutional engagement in HE
IREJ (2025)	Global	Review	SM impact methodology	Mixed evidence on SM impact depending on usage pattern

Author (Year)	Context	Method	Key Variable	Main Finding
Nemt-Allah et al. (2026)	Multi-nat.	Scale dev.	Digital validation seeking	Validated new scale for measuring AVC in HE contexts

Source: Compiled by authors from reviewed studies (2020–2026)

C. *Psychological Dimensions: Anxiety, Self-Worth, and Motivation Erosion*

The psychological literature consistently highlights AVC’s harmful potential for student mental health and motivational structures. Pumptow and Brahm (2020) show that digital media self-efficacy—students’ confidence in using digital tools effectively, ignificantly moderates how social media engagement affects psychological wellbeing: students with lower digital self-efficacy are more vulnerable to comparison-induced anxiety and fluctuations in self-worth. This pattern implies that AVC amplifies preexisting digital inequalities, disproportionately disadvantaging learners who lack confidence or competence in online environments.

Nemt-Allah et al. (2026) characterize validation-seeking behavior in ways that map closely onto contingent self-esteem: when students tie their sense of academic worth to external digital feedback, they display greater emotional volatility, diminished persistence after negative evaluations, and increased distress from social comparison. These dynamics point to a challenge that goes beyond ordinary distraction or time management problems; AVC implicates the formation and stability of academic identity itself, indicating the need for interventions that target how students internalize achievement and seek recognition.

Adding a cross-cultural dimension, Anh et al. (2025) document that the influence of social media on academic outcomes varies with cultural norms concerning achievement display and collective validation in Southeast Asian contexts. Their findings suggest AVC is not culturally neutral: in educational cultures that prize visible achievement and communal endorsement, pressures to publicize and validate academic success via social media can be especially strong and institutionalized. Together, these studies indicate that AVC produces uneven psychological harms shaped by individual digital competence, identity processes, and cultural context, and therefore requires interventions tailored to these interacting factors rather than one-size-fits-all remedies.

D. *Institutional Responses and Management Gaps*

A consistent conclusion across the reviewed literature is that current institutional responses are inadequate for addressing the challenges that social media integration, and Academic Validation Culture (AVC) in particular, pose to higher education. Damayanto et al. (2022) argue that academic management in the digital era confronts deep structural problems, rapid technological change, gaps in staff capacity, and fragmented policy environments, that leave institutions primarily reactive rather than anticipatory when digital-cultural phenomena emerge. In practice, this reactivity translates into piecemeal initiatives, short-term campaigns, and ad hoc guidance that fail to address the systemic drivers of AVC.

Case studies reinforce this diagnosis. Al-Hail et al. (2024) document the governance challenges in a Qatar-based higher education setting, noting that although faculty and administrators generally acknowledge social media’s pedagogical potential, few institutions possess coherent frameworks to manage its psychological and cultural consequences. The result is a mismatch between enthusiasm for digital engagement and the absence of policies or practices that mitigate validation-driven harms. Galioto et al. (2025) further show that institutional trust, a necessary condition for the successful rollout of social-media-related policies and supports, is eroded when universities use these platforms for communication without concurrently addressing the validation dynamics they amplify.

Taken together, these studies indicate that effective institutional responses require more than technical adoption or generic digital-literacy workshops; they demand adaptive, cross-

functional governance frameworks that build staff capacity, integrate policy across units, and proactively address the normative, psychological, and equity dimensions of AVC.

Table 2. Academic Digital Wellness Governance Framework (ADWGF): Components, Strategies, and Evidence Base

ADWGF Component	Key Strategies	Supporting References
Institutional AVC Awareness Policy	Formal recognition of AVC as institutional risk; digital culture audit; SM governance protocols	Damayanto et al. (2022); Galioto et al. (2025); Al-Hail et al. (2024)
Process-Oriented Pedagogical Redesign	Shift assessment toward growth portfolios; reduce comparative grading; reframe academic identity narratives	Kotsonis & Dunne (2023); Poshka (2020); Pumptow & Brahm (2020)
Digital Citizenship Education	AVC-specific digital literacy curriculum; algorithmic awareness; healthy SM use modeling by faculty	Ansari & Khan (2020); Capodanno et al. (2025); Al-Rahmi et al. (2021)
Integrated Psychological Support	AVC-informed counseling; validation-seeking screening; peer support programs for digital academic stress	Nemt-Allah et al. (2026); Shahzad et al. (2024); Caratiquit et al. (2023)

Source: Authors' synthesis

E. *The Academic Digital Wellness Governance Framework (ADWGF)*

Synthesizing the reviewed evidence, this study proposes the Academic Digital Wellness Governance Framework (ADWGF) as a coherent, institutionally actionable response to Academic Validation Culture (AVC). The ADWGF brings together four interdependent components that translate empirical insights into practical management levers for higher education institutions (see Table 2 for operational details).

The first component, Institutional AVC Awareness Policy, urges institutions to formally acknowledge AVC as an identifiable institutional risk, on par with issues like academic integrity breaches or student mental-health crises, and to build governance arrangements accordingly. Practical measures include conducting routine digital-culture audits to map how social media shapes campus norms, providing targeted faculty and staff training on AVC dynamics, and adopting social-media communication policies that avoid amplifying validation incentives (Damayanto et al., 2022; Galioto et al., 2025). Such policies also create clear lines of responsibility across units (communications, student services, academic affairs) so responses are coordinated rather than fragmented.

The second component, Process-Oriented Pedagogical Redesign, addresses how assessment culture itself generates incentives for public, comparable displays of achievement. Kotsonis and Dunne (2023) show that outcome-focused assessment and the circulation of idealized pedagogical exemplars on social media interact to produce performative student behaviors. To counter this, the framework recommends shifting toward formative, process-

based assessments, growth portfolios, reflective learning narratives, scaffolded formative feedback, and assessment practices that privilege improvement over instantaneous, shareable outcomes, thereby reducing the structural visibility and comparability that feed AVC.

The third component, Digital Citizenship Education, expands conventional digital-literacy efforts to include critical, affective, and algorithmic competencies. Beyond information evaluation and online safety, students should learn how platform affordances and algorithms amplify certain content; develop emotion-regulation strategies for digital interactions; and cultivate intrinsic, mastery-oriented academic motivations that are resilient to external validation pressures (Capodanno et al., 2025; Ansari & Khan, 2020). Embedding these elements into curricula and co-curricular programs helps students recognize and resist validation-driven behaviors rather than simply policing screen time.

The fourth component, Integrated Psychological Support, responds to the consistent evidence of AVC's psychological harms. Student mental-health services should be resourced and trained to identify and treat validation-seeking as a specific presenting issue, with interventions addressing contingent self-esteem, social-comparison distress, and identity instability in digital contexts. The psychometric scale developed by Nemt-Allah et al. (2026) offers a validated screening tool institutions can adopt to detect high-risk students early and to monitor intervention outcomes.

Together, these four components, policy awareness, pedagogical redesign, enriched digital citizenship education, and integrated psychological support, form a connected institutional strategy. When implemented in coordination, they aim to reduce the platform-driven incentives for performative academic display, strengthen students' internal motivational resources, and equip institutions to govern digital academic cultures in ways that preserve educational integrity and student wellbeing.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review has established Academic Validation Culture as a significant, multidimensional phenomenon at the intersection of social media, academic psychology, and educational governance. The synthesis of 20 peer-reviewed studies demonstrates that AVC generates measurable negative impacts on student psychological well-being, intrinsic motivation, and academic performance, while simultaneously reflecting structural inadequacies in institutional approaches to digital academic culture management. The proposed Academic Digital Wellness Governance Framework (ADWGF) provides educational leaders with a four-component, evidence-based model for institutional response, addressing AVC at the levels of policy, pedagogy, digital citizenship, and psychological support.

Future research should focus on empirical testing of the ADWGF components in diverse institutional contexts, with particular attention to cultural variation in AVC manifestation and the differential vulnerability of student subpopulations. Longitudinal studies examining the developmental trajectory of AVC across academic careers, and intervention studies evaluating the effectiveness of process-oriented assessment redesign in reducing validation-seeking behavior, represent urgent priorities for the field.

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