

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA PRESSURE
ON BODY IMAGE AND EATING BEHAVIOURS AMONG
STUDENTS AGED 14 TO 16 IN SMK SHAH ALAM**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the association between social media pressure on body image and eating behaviours among adolescents aged 14 to 16 years in SMK Shah Alam. The increasing use of visual-based platforms such as Instagram and TikTok exposes adolescents to idealised body standards, which may affect their self-perception and eating attitudes. The research aimed to assess the internalisation of appearance ideals, identify the prevalence of disordered eating behaviours, and examine the relationship between these factors. A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed involving 300 secondary school students. Data were collected using validated Malay versions of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3) and the Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26), alongside anthropometric measurements to calculate BMI-for-age. Results revealed that 87.4% of respondents experienced moderate to high levels of social media pressure, while 22.3% were at risk of disordered eating behaviours. A moderate positive correlation was found between social media pressure and disordered eating (Spearman's $\rho = 0.392$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that increased exposure to social media is linked to internalisation of societal beauty standards and unhealthy eating patterns. This highlights the need for targeted interventions such as media literacy education, early screening, and supportive school-based programs to promote positive body image and healthy dietary behaviours among Malaysian adolescents.

Keywords: social media, body image, eating behaviour, adolescents, SATAQ-3, EAT-26

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Social media is one of the well-known developments in widespread communication. A study has shown that 80.3% of Malaysian users are between 13 and 34 years old, although people of all ages use social media (Siddharth et al., 2022). Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram have recorded high penetration rates of 94%, 89%, and 75%, respectively. The severity of usage manifests how social media forms an interplay and may affect users, particularly among the young generation (Muller, 2021).

The huge number of audiences on social networking sites affects how individuals see and judge their body appearance. This is because most of the users tend to engage in self-comparison. This may hurt self-esteem (Hajat, 2024). However, these comparisons can also stimulate some positive reinforcement of certain body image ideals, as some of them may be linked to social media usage and body image concerns (Datta et al., 2023).

Nowadays, some users may feel pressure to be slim due to the idealised images and discussions about body types that are constantly bombarded. This is generally referring to "social media pressure." For instance, social media pressures manage to change users' body satisfaction and shape attitudes toward food and eating. When things go wrong, such exposures and unmet expectations will lead to negative self-evaluations and engagement in harmful behaviour, particularly concerning their diet (Mehmood et al., 2023).

Eating behaviour is a complex activity influenced by both internal and external factors. Recently, social media have become one of the major external influencers. To live up to unrealistic expectations, individuals tend to restrict food intake and exercise excessively. These are mainly due to exposure to images of thinness ideals on social networks (Górska et al., 2023).