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Impact of Social Media on Youth Culture, Attention and Mental Health in Malaysia

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In Malaysia, social media has become a central part of everyday life, particularly among young people. With widespread smartphone use and accessible internet services, platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp are frequently used for communication, entertainment, and learning. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2023), more than 96% of Malaysian internet users actively engage with social media, with the highest usage among individuals aged 16 to 24.

For many students, social media is not just a tool but a daily routine. It shapes how they interact with others, consume information, and build their identities. Despite its benefits in connecting people and increasing access to information, growing concerns have emerged regarding its impact on mental health. Researchers are increasingly examining the impact of constant exposure to online content on how young people think, feel, and behave. Issues such as shorter attention spans, unrealistic beauty standards, and emotional well-being are increasingly being discussed in Malaysia, with recent studies highlighting rising mental health concerns among youth (Ahlam et al., 2024).

Social Media and Youth Culture

Social media has significantly reshaped youth culture in Malaysia. In the past, young people's lifestyles and values were influenced mainly by family, school, and local communities. Today, digital platforms expose them to global trends, ideas, and lifestyles. One of the most noticeable changes is how easily young people can express themselves online. Social media provides a space for them to share their experiences, talents, and opinions while also connecting with others who share similar interests and perspectives. This sense of interaction and participation can foster a

sense of belonging and help adolescents feel connected to a larger community. In the Malaysian context, social media has also been found to encourage youth engagement and identity formation, particularly among adolescents who actively participate in online communities (Lee & Zhooriyati, 2022).



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1: The younger generation stays connected to share similar interests and voice opinions.

Social media also helps build supportive communities. Students who feel isolated in real life can connect with others online who share similar interests and challenges. This can reduce feelings of loneliness and provide emotional support. Similarly, Malaysian research highlights that social media can improve mental health awareness and encourage help-seeking behaviour among youth (Mohamad & Abd Mubin, 2023). However, there are also negative aspects, as social media often encourages comparisons regarding success, beauty, and lifestyle. This can create pressure to meet unrealistic expectations. The desire for validation through likes and comments may also affect one's self-esteem and emotional well-being. Social Media and Attention Spans

The impact of social media on attention issues is increasingly evident among Malaysian students. Many young people spend hours on their

devices, constantly switching between various types of content. According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (2023), Malaysians frequently access the internet multiple times per hour, reflecting high levels of digital engagement. This constant exposure to fast-paced content may affect students' ability to concentrate on academic tasks, a concern also reflected in Malaysian studies linking excessive social media use to behavioural and cognitive changes among university students (Ahlam et al., 2024). Students may find it harder to focus on lectures, reading materials, or assignments that require sustained attention.

From a psychological perspective, this pattern is linked to the brain's preference for instant enjoyment. Social media provides quick rewards, making slower and more demanding tasks less engaging. However, social media is not entirely harmful. Many Malaysian students use it for educational purposes, such as watching tutorials or accessing study resources. Research suggests that the impact on attention depends on how social media is used, with active and purposeful engagement being less harmful than passive scrolling.

Social Media and Mental Health

The combined influence of social media on youth culture and attention-getters has significant implications for mental health. On the positive side, social media provides access to information, support networks, and platforms for self-expression. In Malaysia, social media has been shown to promote mental health awareness and reduce stigma among young people. However, excessive use can lead to stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue. The pressure to stay connected and maintain an online presence can be overwhelming for students. Additionally, exposure to negative or misleading content can worsen emotional well-being. Recent Malaysian systematic reviews have confirmed that while social media enhances connectivity, its overuse is closely linked to declining psychological health (Norasid & Ashaari, 2024). It is important to recognise that social media does not affect everyone equally. Students with strong support systems may experience fewer negative effects, whereas those with existing mental health challenges may be more vulnerable.

In conclusion, social media plays a significant and complex role in shaping youth culture and influencing how young people interact, learn, and express themselves. While it provides meaningful opportunities for connection and personal development, it also presents risks that can affect well-being. For this reason, a balanced and responsible approach to social media use is essential. With proper guidance, digital awareness, and self-regulation, young individuals can benefit from social media while reducing its negative impact.

For Malaysian youth, developing digital literacy is crucial. This includes managing screen time, critically evaluating content, and maintaining a healthy relationship with technology. Educational institutions such as UiTM can play an important role in promoting awareness and responsible use through their syllabus and students' activities. Ultimately, social media is not inherently harmful but must be used wisely. With the right balance, social media can become a tool that supports rather than harms youth's mental health.



Figure : Excessive use of social media can impact your mental health.

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