DIGITAL MIRROR: SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON YOUTHS SELF-ESTEEM

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media on the self-esteem of youth, focusing on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. The research explores the role of social comparisons, idealized standards, cyberbullying, and the fear of missing out (FOMO) in shaping self-perception and mental well-being. Using a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 youths from Selangor, to capture nuanced insights into their experiences with social media. The findings reveal that frequent exposure to curated content and idealized portrayals leads to negative comparisons, feelings of inadequacy, and a decrease in self-esteem, particularly among young women. However, some informants report positive effects, such as inspiration and motivation, from engaging with uplifting content. The study also highlights the importance of coping mechanisms, including mindfulness practices, support networks, and physical activity, in managing the emotional impact of social media. Based on these findings, several recommendations are made: promoting digital literacy to foster critical engagement with social media, encouraging mindfulness to detach from negative comparisons, strengthening support networks, and setting boundaries to limit exposure to harmful content. Additionally, providing access to mental health resources is essential in supporting youth's well-being. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological effects of social media and provides a foundation for interventions aimed at promoting positive self-esteem and mental well-being in the digital age.

Keywords: *Social Media, Self-Esteem, Young Adults, Social Comparison, Cyberbullying, Self Expression*

Received: 15 July 2024 | Reviewed: 16 Aug 2024 | Accepted: 15 Sept 2024 | Published: 31 Oct 2024
DOI: https://doi.org/10.24191/FK.V19i2.2024_05

Cermin Digital: Pengaruh Media Sosial Terhadap Keyakinan Diri Belia

Abstrak

Kajian ini mengkaji pengaruh media sosial terhadap harga diri golongan belia, dengan tumpuan kepada platform seperti TikTok, Instagram, dan Facebook. Penyelidikan ini meneroka peranan perbandingan sosial, standard ideal, buli siber, dan ketakutan ketinggalan (FOMO) dalam membentuk persepsi diri dan kesejahteraan mental. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, temubual separa berstruktur telah dijalankan dengan 12 orang belia dari Selangor, untuk mendapatkan pandangan mendalam tentang pengalaman mereka dengan media sosial. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pendedahan yang kerap kepada kandungan terkurasi dan gambaran ideal membawa kepada perbandingan negatif, perasaan tidak mencukupi, dan penurunan harga diri, terutamanya di kalangan wanita muda. Walau bagaimanapun, beberapa informan melaporkan kesan positif, seperti inspirasi dan motivasi, daripada berinteraksi dengan kandungan yang membangkitkan semangat. Kajian ini juga menekankan pentingnya mekanisme penanggulangan, termasuk amalan kesedaran, rangkaian sokongan, dan aktiviti fizikal, dalam menguruskan kesan emosi media sosial. Berdasarkan dapatan ini, beberapa cadangan telah dibuat: mempromosikan literasi digital untuk mendorong penglibatan kritikal dengan media sosial, menggalakkan kesedaran untuk melepaskan diri daripada perbandingan negatif, mengukuhkan rangkaian sokongan, dan menetapkan sempadan untuk mengehadkan pendedahan kepada kandungan berbahaya. Selain itu, menyediakan akses kepada sumber kesihatan mental adalah penting untuk menyokong kesejahteraan golongan belia. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai kesan psikologi media sosial dan menyediakan asas bagi intervensi yang bertujuan mempromosikan harga diri dan kesejahteraan mental yang positif di era digital.

Kata Kunci: *Media Sosial, Harga Diri, Belia, Perbandingan Sosial, Buli Siber, Ekspresi Diri*

Introduction

The growth of social media in Malaysia is in line with the global trends especially with the young population who are using social media platforms including TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook for various reasons including political participation, entertainment, and social networking. This paper has identified social media as having a transformative role in the lives of youths, thereby altering their identities and behaviours in the

Malaysian society (Borhan et al., 2024; Tian et al., 2023). According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), about 80% of internet users, and more so the youth are now using these platforms daily with TikTok recording the highest growth (MCMC, 2024).
Social media has become a cultural and social phenomenon in Malaysia, shaping youth identities and fostering a sense of belonging. Malaysian youth exhibit media dependency patterns distinct from those in Western societies, often utilizing platforms for social interaction, cultural engagement, and identity exploration (Nawi et al., 2020; Baboo et al., 2013). This aligns with the collectivist culture of Malaysia, where peer influences and social relationships play a critical role in digital interactions (Khalid et al., 2018). However, the increasing reliance on social media raises concerns about its impact on mental health, social skills, and long-term well-being, warranting further research into its sociocultural implications (Abraham, 2023).
The pervasive use of social media among Malaysian youth presents a double-edged sword. On one hand, it enables self-expression and community building; on the other, it fosters social comparison, cyberbullying, and unrealistic standards that can diminish self-esteem (Arfianto et al., 2024; Moningka, 2017). Research highlights that collective cultural norms in Southeast Asia exacerbate these negative

influences, with studies indicating a significant correlation between excessive social media use and low self-esteem in young adults (Arfianto et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, social media also serves as a platform for positive self-identity and support, suggesting the need for balanced usage and critical engagement with digital content (Regita et al., 2024).

This study aims to explore the psychological effects of social media on Malaysian youths' self-esteem, focusing on both challenges and coping mechanisms. Challenges such as validation-seeking behaviours, exposure to negative content, and increased anxiety and depression have been documented (Victor et al., 2024; Ramlan, 2022). Conversely, promoting digital literacy, time management, and positive self-expression could mitigate these negative effects and enhance resilience (Maliki et al., 2024). By addressing these dynamics, the study seeks to contribute to policy development and mental health interventions that support healthy social media habits among Malaysian youth, ultimately fostering a balanced and informed digital culture (Choudhary & Louis, 2024; Sahharon et al., 2024).

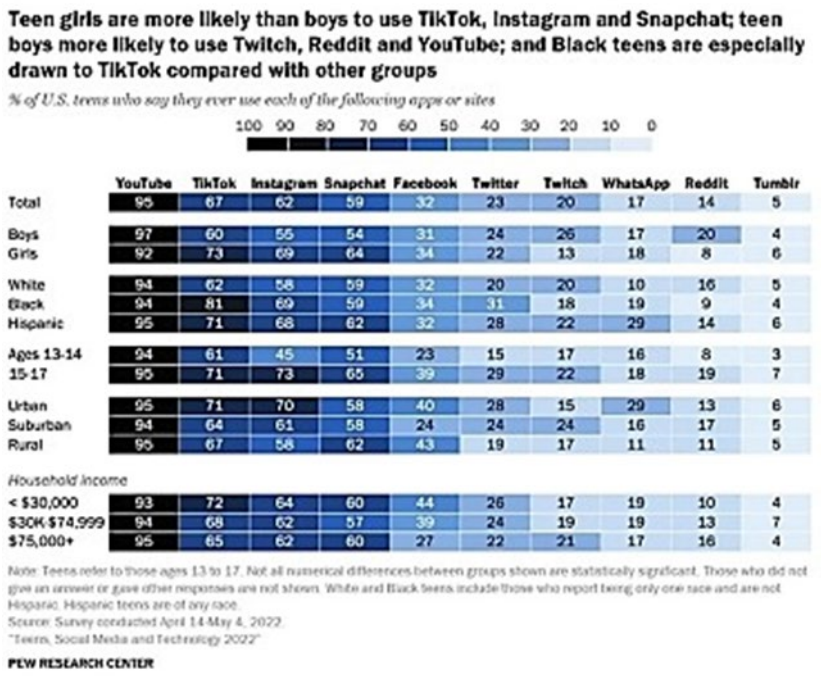

Figure 1: Social media usage in relation to gender and race.

This study is being conducted to understand how social media usage impacts youths' self-esteem. It is well-known that youth commonly own smartphones and use social media for educational purposes (Mohd Azmir & Abdul Aziz, 2018). However, the widespread use of gadgets among youths raises significant concerns, as it increases their exposure to social media content. According to Figure 1, the number of youths aged 13 to 17 engaging with social media is remarkably high. Regardless of their race or socioeconomic background, most of these youths use social media primarily for entertainment and sharing aspects of their lives. Figure 1 also illustrates that all major social media platforms are popular among this age group, which may significantly impact their self-esteem.

Understanding the influence of social media on the self-esteem of young Malaysians is critical. Being aware of this may help us detect possible concerns such as social comparison and cyberbullying, both of which

can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety. Considering these details, may create targeted treatments that are adapted to the Malaysian environment. These interventions might include instructional initiatives that encourage media literacy and good online behavior. Furthermore, mental health resources may be made more available to young people dealing with the harmful consequences of social media.

Young adults will be more prepared to manage the social media landscape, resulting in a more pleasant and supportive online environment for all Malaysians.

While there is no clear legislation that addresses self-esteem, Malaysia does have relevant regulations. The Communication and Multimedia Act of 1998 (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) addresses internet safety and cyberbullying. Furthermore, the National Strategic Plan for Mental Health (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2020) recognizes the rising concern about mental health difficulties associated with social media usage. This strategy provides ideas for improving mental health accessibility and providing young people with coping techniques for safe online experiences. Working within the boundaries of existing regulations and policies, can build a more positive digital landscape for Malaysia's youth.

Literature Review

The digital age has significantly influenced self-perception and self-esteem, particularly among youths. Social media serves as a "digital mirror," reflecting their sense of self and societal expectations. This article explores the relationship between social media use and youth self-esteem, focusing on media's impact on social reality perceptions, body image concerns, mental health challenges, and coping mechanisms

The Influence of Social Media on the Self-Esteem of Young Malaysians

Youth self-esteem is particularly challenged by social media, primarily due to carefully chosen content and romanticised representations. Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok significantly impact the self-esteem of young Malaysians, often causing insecurity due to unrealistic portrayals and social comparisons (Star, 2024). These platforms promote social comparison, which frequently results in a decrease in self-worth, especially for users who regularly contrast

themselves with peers who appear to be more attractive or successful. According to McComb et al. (2023), upward social comparisons on social media have a detrimental effect on body image and mental health, which lowers self-esteem in general.

Additionally, because of the increased probability of comparisons, time spent on social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram is associated with lower self-esteem (Jan et al., 2017). Excessive use of these platforms is linked to anxiety, body dissatisfaction, and sadness. To address these challenges, enhancing digital literacy is essential to help youth critically assess online content and distinguish between reality and idealised portrayals. Supportive online communities and mindfulness in social media use can reduce harmful comparisons and promote belonging. Incorporating media literacy in schools and expanding access to mental health resources, such as counselling and peer support, can further empower young Malaysians to build healthier relationships with social media and improve overall well-being.

Young women are especially affected by body image issues because social media frequently promotes unattainable beauty standards. According to Chukwuere and Chukwuere (2023) and Steinsbekk et al. (2021), this kind of exposure reinforces negative self-perceptions by fostering dissatisfaction with one's appearance. Self-worth is further undermined by the pressure to live up to these standards, which worsen mental health issues like anxiety and depression (Nene & Olayemi, 2023). Extreme instances of excessive social media use can result in serious deteriorations in mental health and self-esteem (Amor, 2024).

Another important factor on these platforms is the pursuit of social validation. Krause et al. (2019) claim that when users participate in other-oriented activities, including concentrating on other people's posts instead of their own, the lack of anticipated positive feedback can result in a decrease in self-esteem. This phenomena demonstrates how social input has two sides: while it might increase self-esteem when it is given, its absence or unfavourable comparisons can have the opposite impact.

Impact of Social Media on Mental Health in among youth

Recent discussions, including those by Astro Awani, highlight the impact of excessive social media use on youths' self-esteem (Awani, 2023). Social media binge often promotes idealised portrayals, leading to anxiety, loneliness, depression, and issues such as disrupted sleep and declining academic performance. It also fosters harmful social

comparisons and unattainable standards, thereby worsening mental health.

To address these challenges, educational institutions should enhance digital literacy, and help youth critically evaluate online content. Promoting supportive online communities and fostering mindfulness in social media use can reduce negative effects. Additionally, greater access to mental health resources, including counselling and resilience-building workshops, is essential (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2020). These measures empower youth to navigate social media responsibly and support their overall well-being.

Youths use a variety of tactics to lessen the detrimental emotional effects of social media despite these obstacles. Among Malaysian youth, mindfulness exercises, which are frequently influenced by cultural or religious traditions, are becoming more and more popular as useful strategies for controlling emotions. According to Maliki et al. (2022), social media emoticons and symbols allow young people to express themselves and better control their emotional reactions.

Additionally, social networks serve as protective barriers against uncertainty and anxiety. According to Sahharon et al. (2024), communal lifestyles that promote healthy relationships and social cohesiveness are frequently the reason why rural youngsters demonstrate more resilience. However, mental health issues continue to exist, highlighting the necessity of focused interventions. Promoting social media information literacy (SMIL) can improve emotional intelligence and assist young people in forming better digital consumption habits, according to Vistor et al. (2024).

Theoretical framework

Cultivation theory offers a strong foundation for comprehending how extended media exposure affects how people perceive the world. According to Hermann et al. (2023), social media, like television, has a big influence on how people think and feel, especially Asian and younger people. Regular exposure to idealised content heightens the effects of cultivation and alters users' worldviews. For example, youth's interpretations of success, beauty, and social acceptance are influenced by media consumption, which creates views of societal norms that may not match reality. Furthermore, according to Lai et al. (2015), mass media, including television and other platforms, influences people's attitudes and actions by reiterating societal norms and beliefs.

Youth internalise idealised depictions of happiness, success, and beauty because of their frequent exposure to carefully chosen content on social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. According to the Cultivation Theory (refer to Figure 2), a skewed perception of reality is developed over time because of constant exposure to unattainable ideals, such as the "perfect" body image or way of life. It influences young people's trust and fear that goes beyond how they perceive the world. According to Cohen and Weimann (2000), different media genres have the power to moderate levels of interpersonal trust and fear, with different demographic groups responding differently to content. Another important area of influence is how traditional gender roles are portrayed in the media. According to Scharrer and Warren (2022) and Gündüz et al. (2020), media exposure reinforces stereotypical beliefs, with extensive use promoting conventional views about masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, as demonstrated by Tirasawasdichai et al. (2022), cross-cultural media consumption fosters positive perceptions of other societies by improving cultural understanding.

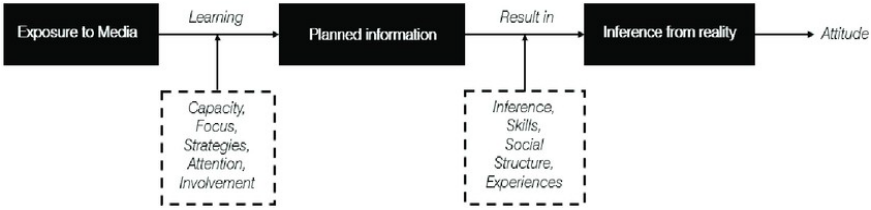

Figure 2: Cultivation Theory

Operational Definition

Social Comparison

Humans naturally seek connections with others, but this often leads to comparisons that result in unpredictable outcomes. This phenomenon can be explained by the social comparison model, which suggests that comparing ourselves to others—especially on social media—can increase anxiety. For instance, people who use social media daily to follow their favourite celebrities or casually scroll through their feeds often encounter content that triggers self-comparison. Over time, this repeated process can contribute to lower self-esteem.

Ideal Standard

As users scroll through social media, they are exposed to various content, including topics on health, lifestyle, and beauty. While such information is often shared positively, it may not always be received constructively by users. For example, in terms of body image, users may compare themselves to the idealised images of models they see online. This repeated comparison can lead to feelings of insecurity and a gradual decline in self-esteem.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying refers to the use of internet communication to harass individuals, often through frightening or threatening messages (UNICEF, 2024). This issue is closely linked to the topic of "How Social Media Shapes Users' Self-Esteem Among Young Adults," as cyberbullying represents a negative online experience that can significantly impact self-esteem.

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Fear of missing out (FOMO) refers to the feeling of being unaware of or excluded from exciting experiences, information, or opportunities. It is particularly common on social media, where carefully curated glimpses of others' lives are showcased (Gupta & Sharma, 2021). For instance, seeing photos of friends at a concert that one was unaware of can trigger FOMO, leading to questions about whether attending would have been more enjoyable. Constant comparison to the seemingly perfect lives portrayed online can negatively impact self-esteem.

Methodology

An in-depth analysis that considers theoretical frameworks, empirical data, and useful coping mechanisms is necessary to comprehend how social media affects young people's self-esteem. While recent research demonstrates the complex effects of social media on self-worth, cultivation theory emphasises the influence of media in forming perceptions. Society can enable young people to confidently and resiliently traverse the intricacies of the digital mirror by cultivating media literacy and encouraging balanced digital consumption.

The research employs a qualitative methodology, which is a form of scientific inquiry involving systematic investigation to address specific questions. Based on RO1, the key question is: How do you feel social media affects your self-esteem on a daily basis? RO2 explores comparative effects, asking: How do social media comparisons on social media platforms affect your perception of yourself? RO3 examines gender differences, with the question: How do you think being a man or a woman affects the way people feel pressure or view themselves on social media? Finally, RO4 focuses on coping mechanisms, asking: What strategies do you use to maintain a positive self-image while using social media? Qualitative research aims to generate findings that extend beyond the immediate context, contributing to a broader understanding and practical applications (International). This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine the impact of social media on self-esteem among youth in Shah Alam, Malaysia. Semi-structured interviews are utilised to collect in-depth data from participants representing diverse academic backgrounds and social media usage patterns. The target population comprises of 12 youths aged 18 to 29 from Selangor, recruited through snowball sampling.

Data is gathered via face-to-face in-depth interviews, focusing on social media habits, experiences with online content, and self-esteem management strategies. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, are strictly observed. Thematic analysis is employed to identify patterns and themes in the data, with emphasis on variables such as social comparison, idealised standards, cyberbullying, and FOMO.

In the coding process for thematic analysis, the data is first reviewed by reading the interview transcripts multiple times to understand the content. Then, initial coding is done by highlighting key phrases or sentences that relate to the research questions. These codes might include terms like “feeling inferior,” “comparison,” or “pressure.” This can be done manually using tools like Microsoft Word or Google Docs, where text is highlighted and annotated. After the initial coding, similar codes are grouped into broader themes. For example, responses about comparison may be grouped under social comparison, and discussions on idealized standards may form the theme of self-image concerns. These codes and themes can be organized using simple tools like Google Sheets or Excel, where each participant's responses are placed in rows and themes are assigned to columns. This allows researchers to

easily spot recurring patterns and the most prominent themes in the data. After refining the themes, the findings are interpreted to understand how social media affects self-esteem and the coping strategies used by participants. This approach is straightforward and practical for university students, as it does not require specialized software and can be done using common tools.

Findings and Discussions

RO1: To investigate how social media use (content type and frequency) impacts youth' self-esteem.

Self-esteem and Content Consumption

Self-esteem is significantly influenced by the content youth consume on social media, particularly through exposure to idealized images and negative comparisons. Idealized content, such as curated depictions of beauty, success, or lifestyle, often fosters unrealistic expectations and a distorted sense of self. Prolonged exposure to these portrayals can lead individuals to feel inadequate, reducing self-esteem as they compare themselves to unattainable standards. This aligns with the cultivation theory, which suggests that prolonged exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions of reality. In the case of social media, consistent consumption of idealized representations can lead youth to internalize these ideals as standards for their own lives. However, some users demonstrate positive engagement with social media content. For instance, informants 9 and 7 reported constructive experiences on platforms like TikTok an

Instagram, where they primarily consumed K-pop content, explored cafes, and discovered recipes, which contributed positively to their social media usage. This highlights that the nature of the content consumed can influence the outcomes of media exposure, offering a more balanced or uplifting effect when aligned with personal interests and preferences :

"I enjoy watching Korean dramas and use social media for about 5 hours daily. "

"I felt great seeing a friend's successful cooking video, but feeling sad when my own didn't turn out as well."

Meanwhile, as for Emotional Impact shown on the positive feelings side where informant 9 feels happy just by watching K-pop content.

"I scroll, hit like, and drop comments on posts about makeup tutorials, K-pop and outfits."

On the other hand, informant 11 has a negative feeling whenever she's seeing her ex-boyfriend's picture on social media where it's reminiscing her of a toxic relationship which makes them feel bad.

"Women express insecurities more openly, as for me it's usually happened when I see an ex-boyfriend's picture on social media like Instagram which reminds me of the bad old days"

Negative comparisons, such as evaluating one's life, appearance, or achievements against others' online portrayals, can further undermine self-esteem. These comparisons often evoke feelings of jealousy, insecurity, and dissatisfaction, which are strongly associated with diminished self-worth. Additionally, empathy emerges as a notable response, as highlighted by informant 12, who expressed concern for individuals who feel pressured to conform to social media standards.

"It often makes me feel insecure about my appearance and possessions, especially when I see luxury lifestyles"

Research on social media's influence on youth in Shah Alam underscores the critical role of factors such as idealised images and negative comparisons in shaping self-esteem and overall mental well-being.

RO2: Identify how social comparisons and interactions on social media affect well-being.

Comparative effects

The comparative effects of social media on self-esteem are often evident through emotions such as envy

and dissatisfaction. As highlighted in the study, social media exposes youth to the curated lives of others, leading to feelings of envy when they perceive others as more successful, beautiful, or happy. This envy can diminish self-esteem as individuals compare their own worth to what they see online. This aligns with the cultivation theory, which posits that

prolonged exposure to certain types of media content shapes individuals' perceptions of reality. In this case, repeated exposure to idealized portrayals of success, beauty, and happiness can cultivate unrealistic expectations and foster negative self-comparisons. The study also emphasizes that while positive and inspiring content can uplift mood, negative or stressful content can exacerbate negative feelings. This was reflected in the feedback from informants 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, and 12, further supporting the idea that media consumption influences emotional responses and self-perception. In this context, social media content plays a significant role in shaping how youth perceive themselves and others :

"Positive comments make me feel good temporarily, but I feel worse when a post gets little engagement." "Compliments boost my confidence, but negative comments make me feel insecure."

"Positive feedback boosts confidence, but negative comments lower it."

"Compliments make me feel better, but lack of likes or bad comments lower my self-esteem."

"Positive likes and comments make me feel happy and validated, but negative interactions can affect my mood and self-esteem."

"Positive interactions make me feel good, but I often feel worse when there are few likes or negative comments."

Reactions to others' achievements are often positive, with individuals feeling happy and inspired by the success of others. For example, informant 6 shared:

"Seeing a friend's travel photos made me feel happy and motivated to plan my own trip."

In managing their mood, individuals employ various strategies to maintain well-being. Informants 7 and 8 both emphasised the importance of focusing on personal connections and highlighted the value of physical activity and balance, stating:

"I focus on my hobbies and spend time with family to distract myself from negativity."

“I limit my time on social media and engage in sports or other activities I enjoy.”

These approaches highlight diverse yet complementary methods to foster mental resilience. However, constant comparisons can lead to dissatisfaction with one’s own life or appearance, as users perceive themselves as falling short of the idealised portrayals they encounter. This dissatisfaction often results in a negative self-image, undermining overall well-being. The research on social media’s impact on youth in Shah Alam underscores how envy and dissatisfaction, arising from social comparison, can significantly affect self-esteem and mental health.

RO3: Explore potential gender differences in these experiences.

Gender Differences

Gender differences play a crucial role in shaping how youth view themselves and feel pressured by social

media. As noted in the literature, men and women often respond differently to social media content, particularly in relation to self-perception. Women are frequently exposed to unrealistic beauty standards, which can lead to heightened concerns about their appearance and self-worth. While men may not face the same level of pressure regarding beauty, they still encounter societal expectations around success, status, and masculinity. This aligns with the cultivation theory, which suggests that prolonged exposure to specific media content influences individuals' perceptions and behaviors. In this case, consistent exposure to gendered portrayals on social media cultivates certain ideals and pressures. Women may internalize unattainable beauty standards, while men may adopt expectations of success and masculinity. Informants 1 and 3, however, presented differing perspectives, as shown below. This highlights how gendered media portrayals can cultivate different perceptions and pressures based on one's gender, reinforcing the role of social media in shaping identity and self-esteem as shown below :

“I think when women use social media, they are more focused on their appearance. Mostly they want to achieve the beauty standard. But, men are different because they focus on fitness and mostly on sports.”

"Not all men will present themselves doing things that men usually do. For my circle (group of friends) there are some males that share about beauty and skincare. For me, that is normal because that is his preference."

Meanwhile, Informant 4 expresses that she is pressured to present herself on social media:

"For me, I try to follow the trend to maintain my popularity among my friends. A bit of pressure when I cannot achieve the makeup look that I wanted."

The pressure to meet these standards can lead to feelings of stress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction with one's identity. These gender-specific experiences underscore the importance of considering gender differences when examining how social media influences self-esteem, as explored in the study of youth in Shah Alam.

RO4: Examine coping mechanisms youth use to manage negative social media influences.

Coping Mechanism

Coping mechanisms, such as mindfulness and support networks, are essential for managing the negative effects of social media on self-esteem. As highlighted in the study, practicing mindfulness helps youth stay aware of their emotions and reactions to social media, allowing them to detach from negative comparisons and unrealistic expectations. This self-awareness can reduce the emotional impact of social media and foster a healthier relationship with online content. This aligns with the cultivation theory, which suggests that prolonged exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions of reality. In this context, coping strategies act as a counterbalance to the distorted reality often presented on social media. By practicing mindfulness and engaging in offline activities, individuals can counteract the negative influence of unrealistic portrayals and reduce the emotional impact that comes from constant exposure to idealized standards.

Coping strategies among individuals reflect a conscious effort to mitigate the negative effects of social media while cultivating a positive mindset. Informant R7 emphasized the importance of finding joy in offline activities and personal connections to counter negativity. Similarly, Informant R8 highlighted the role of limiting social media usage and

engaging in physical activities to maintain a healthy balance and positive outlook. These coping strategies reflect an active effort to create a more balanced and less distorted relationship with social media, further supporting the idea that media consumption can shape perceptions and behaviors.

“I focus on my hobbies and spend time with family to distract myself from negativity.”

“I limit my time on social media and engage in sports or other activities I enjoy.”

Additionally, having strong support networks, whether through friends, family, or online communities, can provide emotional validation and encouragement, helping individuals cope with feelings of insecurity or anxiety triggered by social media. The research on youth in Shah Alam underscores the crucial role these coping strategies—mindfulness and support systems—play in maintaining self-esteem and mental well-being amidst the pressures of social media.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations can help mitigate the negative impact of social media on self-esteem and well-being. First, promoting digital literacy is essential. Educating youth on how to critically engage with social media will enable them to distinguish between authentic content and idealized portrayals, reducing unhealthy comparisons and fostering healthier self-perceptions. Additionally, encouraging mindfulness practices can help individuals become more aware of their emotional responses to social media. Regular self-reflection allows users to detach from the negative effects of social comparison, promoting a more balanced approach to content consumption. Strengthening support networks, whether through friends, family, or online communities, plays a significant role in providing emotional validation and encouragement, helping individuals cope with insecurity or anxiety triggered by social media. Setting boundaries to limit exposure to harmful content, such as unrealistic beauty standards, is another vital strategy. Following accounts that promote body positivity and mental health

awareness can foster a more positive online environment. Promoting positive online engagement, focusing on kindness and constructive feedback instead of superficial metrics, can also improve self-esteem. Finally, providing greater access to mental health resources, such as counselling services and workshops on coping strategies, will ensure that youth have the support they need to navigate the emotional challenges of social media. These recommendations aim to empower individuals to use social media in a way that promotes self-esteem and overall well-being.

Conclusion

In certain respects, this study demonstrates that social media serves as both a platform for connection and a source of challenges for youth in Shah Alam. While it enables self-expression and access to diverse content, it also exposes users to idealized portrayals, social comparisons, and pressures to seek validation through likes, shares, and comments. These dynamics, coupled with factors such as cyberbullying, ideal standards, and the fear of missing out (FOMO), significantly impact self-esteem and overall mental well-being. The findings underscore the complexity of social media's role in shaping self-perception and highlight the need for effective strategies to navigate these influences.

To conclude, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of fostering digital literacy, mindfulness, and supportive networks to address the challenges posed by social media. By equipping youth with the skills to critically engage with online content and manage their social media habits, they can cultivate healthier relationships with these platforms. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of social media and provides a foundation for interventions aimed at promoting positive self-esteem and mental well-being in the digital age.

Author's Declaration

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