

Correlates of Instagram Usage and Body Dissatisfaction among Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

According to prior studies, massive Instagram usage can lead to body dissatisfaction, an alarming issue that has to be addressed. The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction among Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) undergraduate students. This research employed a quantitative design. Data collection involved an online survey with 151 participants (n=36 males and 115 females), all of whom were undergraduate students. Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 26. The results of Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction ($r = .314, p < .05$), which aligns with the findings in previous studies. The findings revealed that higher level of Instagram usage could lead to higher level of body dissatisfaction. This study encourages participants to track their Instagram usage and enhance their social media literacy skills by critically evaluating Instagram content.

Keywords: Instagram usage, body dissatisfaction, undergraduate students

Abstrak

Menurut kajian terdahulu, penggunaan Instagram secara meluas boleh menyebabkan ketidakpuasan terhadap bentuk badan, isu membimbangkan yang perlu diberi perhatian. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji hubungan antara penggunaan Instagram dan ketidakpuasan terhadap bentuk badan di kalangan pelajar praijazah Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI). Kajian ini menggunakan korelasi kuantitatif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui tinjauan atas talian dengan 151 peserta (n=36 lelaki dan n=115 perempuan), yang kesemuanya adalah pelajar praijazah UPSI. Analisis data dijalankan dengan menggunakan IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Hasil analisis korelasi Pearson menunjukkan korelasi positif yang signifikan antara penggunaan Instagram dan ketidakpuasan terhadap bentuk badan ($r = .314, p < .05$), yang sejajar dengan keputusan kajian literatur yang terdahulu. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa tahap penggunaan Instagram yang lebih tinggi boleh membawa kepada tahap ketidakpuasan tubuh badan yang lebih tinggi. Kajian ini menggalakkan peserta untuk menjejaki penggunaan Instagram mereka dan meningkatkan skil literasi media sosial mereka dengan menilai kandungan Instagram secara kritikal.

Kata kunci: Penggunaan Instagram, ketidakpuasan tubuh badan, pelajar praijazah

INTRODUCTION

Instagram is a social media services that let users capture, edit, and upload photos and videos alongside with captions. Meanwhile, other users are encouraged to like, comment, and interact with each other in reaction to these posts (Trifiro, 2018). It is a social media platform where people interact with their followers or acquaintances online by sharing photos and videos. The users of Instagram can browse,

give likes, leave comments to others' contents as well as share the contents on their story. Instagram has also be defined as a platform that is multifaceted and open to rapid change across time, encompassing geographic locations, participatory culture among its users and other major structures that are always evolving across time (Cara, 2018). It is one of the famous social media applications among youngsters.

Heider et al. (2018) mentioned that "body dissatisfaction (i.e., a negative attitude towards one's own physical appearance) is assumed to originate from a perceived discrepancy between the actual physical appearance (i.e., actual body image) and the desired ideal state of the body (i.e., ideal body image)" (pg.1). Body dissatisfaction is influenced by perceptions of both the ideal and reality body image (Heider et al.2018). In other words, body dissatisfaction exists due to negative evaluation one has for themselves because of difference in their own body and their idealised body. Similarly, according to Alruwasyid et al. (2021), body dissatisfaction is a component of body image characterised as a poor subjective assessment of one's own body's weight and shape.

Digital Business Lab (2022) reports that as of January 2022, 89% of Malaysians were active on social media platform, representing 8% rise over the previous year. In regard to this matter, one of the most active Instagram users in the Asia Pacific region is from Malaysia, with 15.55 million or equal to 47.2% of Malaysia's entire population, were there as of early 2022 with a majority being female (Digital Business Lab, 2022). This increasing trend of Instagram usage over the years may lead to an overuse of Instagram by its users. The prevalence may indicate Malaysians as potential sufferers of body dissatisfaction because the usage of Instagram may lead to social comparison in terms of body image since they are more exposed to the unrealistic Instagram contents.

Usually, body dissatisfaction results from individuals having unfavourable ideas or feelings about their own appearance. Individuals' dissatisfaction with their own bodies primarily stems from the contrast between idealised body images and their actual physical features. The aesthetic features on Instagram definitely can evolve the beauty standard in society. Instagram's portrayal of fit physique pictures for motivating physical activity and healthy eating habits is one of its features (Rafati et al., 2021) and these are known as fitspiration photos (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015 as cited in Rafati et al., 2021). People often compare themselves to individuals who are thought to be better in terms of shape, such as models and beauty influencers who are seen as standard bearers of beauty.

A study by Tuan Abd Aziz and Shukri (2019) found that among 12% of the participants which were undergraduate students from Universiti Malaysia Terengganu have moderate symptom of body dissatisfaction and 2.3% of the participants have severe symptom of body dissatisfaction. Eventually, body dissatisfaction can cause more serious health issues. Being a young adult, it is difficult not to being influenced about appearance when it is one of the most attributes youngsters pay their attention to. Moreover, for university students, transition from adolescent phase make them keen to try new things that they observe on social media, which also includes trying to be more attractive and stylish, which make it important for them to have desired body goals. Social-cultural factor such as value thinness over other attributes of body would enhance people's tendency to regulate their body weight. This issue has been alarmed because it can cause serious health issue to the society.

Body dissatisfaction is often associated with low self-esteem, mental health issues such as depression and physical illness such as eating disorder (Coker & Abraham, 2014 as cited in Noor Azizi et al., 2020). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that body dissatisfaction among teenagers is a predictor of harmful body-change behaviours such supplement use, restricted eating habits and excessive exercise (Vuong et al., 2021). Michels and Amenyah (2017) mentioned that a significant correlation between desired body size and body size dissatisfaction may also exist in the media.

Prior studies demonstrated that frequent time spent on Instagram has correlation with one's body dissatisfaction (Rafati et al., 2021; Vuong et al., 2021). The frequent use of Instagram by teenagers and young adults may increase their body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness, which also increase their risk of developing eating disorders (Jiotsa et al., 2021). Since most of the previous studies about

body dissatisfaction is focused on adolescents, the present study would like to focus on body dissatisfaction among young adults, specifically undergraduate students. Thus, the objective of present study is to investigate the relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction among undergraduate students.

There is similarity found in literatures that studied Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction, in which there is a significant positive relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction (Piccoli et al., 2021; Rafati et al., 2021; Vuong et al., 2021). It was found that Iranian women are more likely to have anxieties about their bodies when they use Instagram more frequently (Rafati et al., 2021). There was also another study that revealed that the number of social media sites visited was a major predictor of body dissatisfaction, but not the amount of time spent on social media (Bennett et al., 2019). A cross-sectional study among adolescents and young women revealed that Instagram browsing was associated with lower levels of body appreciation, with upward social comparison as mediator (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022). The final result shows that Instagram browsing was associated with lower levels of body appreciation, which was mediated by upward social comparison with social media influencers (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022). However, these studies on relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction were not based on Malaysian context and there was no sample study that focused on Malaysians. There was a research carried out by Noor Azizi et al. (2020) that studied about social media usage and body image anxiety among university students in Malaysia, however it was not specifically focused on Instagram usage. This study would like to focus on photo-based social media which is Instagram. Thus, there is a knowledge gap on this issue in Malaysian context and the current study would like to fill in the gap.

Social Comparison Theory by Festinger (1954) as cited in Pedalino and Camerini (2022); Piccoli et al. (2021); Jarrar et al., (2022) is one of the theories that can explain the relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction. The theory proposed that individuals evaluate their self-worth, value, and abilities by comparing themselves to other people (Jarrar et al., 2022). Through comparisons, individuals are able to evaluate themselves, in which it can bring positive or negative effects. For example, upward comparison (comparison with those who have better body shape) can help people to learn more about themselves but at the same time might result in lower self-evaluation (Bunk et al., 2007). In the case of this study, the presence of Instagram gives the users many chances to idolize other people, which become a source of comparison to their own selves. Although some research revealed that upward comparisons were particularly linked to such unfavorable outcomes (Piccoli et al., 2021), other research has demonstrated that women's comparisons of their looks, whether upward or downward, are linked to both body dissatisfaction and a desire for thinness (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Fardouly et al., 2018; Vartanian & Dey, 2013 as cited in Piccoli et al., 2021).

Next, Gerbner and Gross's cultivation theory also highlighted to explain the key role of media to body dissatisfaction (Vuong et al., 2019; Stein et al., 2021). Generally, this theory suggested that exposure to media can affect a user's perception. It implied that regular and repeated exposure to social media information may cause undesirable behaviours and attitudes towards society's ideal beauty (Stein et al., 2021). Spending time by looking at those authentic pictures on photo-based social media like Instagram can generate a socially acceptable standard of beauty that is almost impossible for anyone to achieve. Pictures of people with hourglasses and slender figures as well as muscular bodies on Instagram are always idolized by users and eventually generate a typical beauty standard in the society. Users are persuaded to assume that these images represent the cultural norm and leading them to assimilate them into their own attitudinal repertoire, such as thin-ideal internalization (Stein et al., 2021). Following this process, even little differences between one's actual appearance and the idealised one may trigger severe behavioural attempts to conform to the media's ideals of beauty (Stein et al., 2021).

This study was able to benefit some parties. First, the present study would be able to provide additional knowledge and fill in the gap of knowledge of previous study on this issue. Since previous studies mostly focus on a certain age group or gender such as adolescents and Caucasian women (You & Shin, 2020), current study brought brand new knowledge that focused on both genders in Malaysia

context. Next, result of the study also able to reveal the level of body dissatisfaction among its participants and based on the result, healthcare professional are able to create intervention techniques for those who are experiencing this concern according to their circumstances. They would become more aware of potential students' body dissatisfaction issues and as a result, they would seek solutions to the issue. Next, by analysing the current issues, participants would be more enlightened about social media literacy skills. Having good social media literacy skills would help young adults in developing good self-evaluations and this would reduce the risk of unfavourable evaluations towards one's own body.

The present study aims to investigate the relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction among Univeristy Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) undergraduate students. The research objectives are to investigate the level of Instagram usage and the level of body dissatisfaction as well as to investigate the relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction among UPSI undergraduate students. Previous research has shown that Instagram usage is an important predictor of body dissatisfaction. Taken together, Instagram usage significantly contribute to body dissatisfaction which suggest the following hypothesis:

H₁: There is a significant relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction among UPSI undergraduate students.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study focused on quantitative and cross-cultural correlational design. Correlational design was chosen as the aim of this research was to study the relationship between two variables. For data gathering, cross-sectional design was implemented in which the participants have participated in the study once and did not require any follow-up study in the future. Cross-sectional designs are typically low-cost and simple to carry out compared to longitudinal study. This study also conducted through a survey using an online platform, specifically Google Form. Sending out a quick survey, creating charts, exporting the results for spreadsheet analysis and availability of many question types are all excellent uses for Google Forms.

Sampling technique

University undergraduate students were chosen as the population of this study because this issue focused on educational and student context. The inclusion criteria of this study were all UPSI undergraduate students aged 18 to 25 years old and has Instagram account(s). Additionally, based on Simpson (2018), young adults can be defined as people who are at the age of 18 to 22 or 18 to 25 while later adults are generally defined as mid-20s and older. The age range 18 to 25 years old was chosen because, according to the research, this group is the most likely to use social media and be concerned about their bodies than any other age group (Duggan, 2015 as cited in Jarrar et al., 2022). Participants were obligated to have an Instagram account since this research focused on Instagram as social media platform. The exclusion criteria in which those who did not have any Instagram account was excluded from this study to generate more valid results.

Procedure

Since the sample of this study is UPSI undergraduate students, the Malay version of the scales was also used. Back-to-back translation was conducted for Instagram Intensity Scale (IIS) since the Malay version of the scale was unavailable. This research study conducted an online survey for the data collection through Google Form. The link for the online questionnaire was distributed to potential participants via online platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram and official students' email. All the procedures already get approved from Sultan Idris Education University Human Research

Ethics Committee before the distribution of the online survey, with the reference number allocated to this study was 2022-0714-02. Before answering the survey, participants were provided with an informed consent form on the first section of the online questionnaire.

The informed consent insisted on the purpose of study, brief procedure, risk, and benefits as well as voluntary agreement for this study. Participants freely decided whether they wanted to participate in the study or not. Participants who agreed to participate in this study proceeded to the next section of the questionnaire. The online survey was divided into four sections, which are informed consent, demographic information, Instagram Intensity Scale (IIS) by Trifiro (2018) and Body Shape Questionnaire-8C (BSQ-8C) by Evans and Dolan (1993). The Malay version of BSQ-8C was taken from Kuan et al. (2011). After the survey collected 153 responses from the participants, the researcher stopped collecting responses and began analysing the data. Using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the final data.

The Sultan Idris Education University Human Research Ethics Committee approved all procedures before distributing the questionnaire. Participants first completed an informed consent form, confirming their voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any time without consequences. The survey ensured anonymity by not collecting personal identifiers like names or contact details. The form also outlined the study's purpose, risks, benefits, data confidentiality, and provided researchers' contact information for any questions.

Participants

After data outlier's analysis was conducted, the final sample in this study was 151 undergraduate students. According to the information collected, total of female participants were far more than male participants with 76.2% and 23.8% respondents each. 57.6% of the participants were aged 21 to 23 years old which is the majority. The second highest number of age group were 24 to 25 years old with 39.7% and the lowest percentage is 2.6% by the age category of 18 to 20 years old. In terms of race, participants from Chinese and Malay race were among the highest number that took part in answering the survey with 49.7% and 41.7% each. This was followed by Indian, the third highest number with 4.6%. Other minority race groups made up the remaining percentage of the participants, which represented 0.7% each from the entire participants. Next, there was a huge gap in the number of participants based on level of education. 90.7% of the participants were Bachelor's degree students meanwhile only 9.3% of them were Diploma students.

Table 1 The Distribution of Study Participants

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	36	23.8
	Female	115	76.2
Age	18-20	4	2.6
	21-23	87	57.6
	24-25	60	39.7
Race	Malay	63	41.7
	Chinese	75	49.7
	Indian	7	4.6
	Bidayuh	1	0.7
	Banjar	1	0.7
	Dusun	1	0.7
	Bumiputera Sabah	1	0.7
	Bangladesh	1	0.7
	Iban	1	0.7
Level of Education	Diploma	14	9.3
	Bachelor's Degree	137	90.7

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

Analysis using the SPSS statistical package has shown that the participants in this study have a total mean score of 27.81 and 7.32 as standard deviation ($M= 27.81, SD= 7.32$) for Instagram usage. A higher score of Instagram Intensity Scale (IIS) indicated a higher level of Instagram usage among the participants. Mean score of 27.81 indicated that undergraduate students in UPSI have moderate level of Instagram usage.

The mean and standard deviation of body dissatisfaction have been determined by a descriptive analysis using the SPSS statistical package. A higher score of Body Shape Questionnaire-8C (BSQ-8C) represents participants' higher body dissatisfaction for the past four weeks. From the analysis, mean score of 29.62 showed that UPSI undergraduate students have moderate level body dissatisfaction issues ($M= 29.62, SD= 11.13$). See Table 2 below.

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Participants' Body Dissatisfaction

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Body Dissatisfaction	29.62	11.13
Instagram Usage	27.81	7.32

Inferential Analysis

Pearson correlation test was run to test the hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction among UPSI undergraduate students.

Correlation result showed that there was a positive significant relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction ($r= .314, p<.05$ at .05 alpha level). Hence, H₁ was supported. There is a significant relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction among UPSI undergraduate students. The positive correlation indicated that as Instagram usage increases, body dissatisfaction also increases.

On the other hand, simple scatterplot graph (refer Figure 1) showed the relationship between the two variables are linear. Body dissatisfaction level could be predicted based on the level of Instagram usage. Higher level of Instagram usage could lead to higher level of body dissatisfaction.

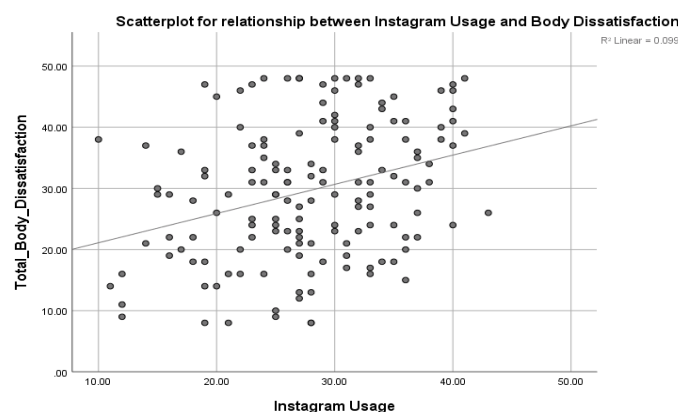


Figure 1 Scatterplot for the relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction

DISCUSSION

The current study set out with the aim of assessing the relationship between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction. Based on inferential analysis, it was found that there is a significant positive relationship

between Instagram usage and body dissatisfaction ($r = .314, p < .05$) among UPSI undergraduate students. Thus, the alternate hypothesis was accepted. The result that was examined using SPSS was aligned with most of literature review discussed earlier. It could be concluded that the more frequent Instagram usage could be associated with higher body dissatisfaction among its users.

The finding broadly supported the work of other studies in this area linking Instagram usage with body dissatisfaction. According to Rafati et al. (2021) and Vuong et al. (2021), Instagram use had a significant positive relationship body dissatisfaction. Another study by Piccoli et al. (2021) reported that Instagram-photo activity was positively connected with body dissatisfaction. The participants that involved in Instagram appearance-related comparison showed a greater desire for thinness and a greater dissatisfaction with their bodies. A possible explanation for this might be that those who spent more time on Instagram were exposed to contents that promote idealised physical appearance by influencers that they follow.

There were few possible factors or reasons that could affect the result of this study. From the result of this study, the moderate level of Instagram usage among the participants lead to moderate level of body dissatisfaction. As stated above, majority of the participants in this study was female. Women were very widely known to be more sensitive than men about their appearance, and them spending more time on Instagram will take a toll on how they perceive their body. This is because Instagram is a great platform where people share about fashion, beauty and designs, topics that would widely cater to women. According to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954 as cited in Pedalino and Camerini, 2022; Piccoli et al., 2021; Jarrar et al., 2022), people tend to determine their self-worth based on comparison they make with other people. In this context, female participants might evaluate their bodies by comparing them to those unrealistic pictures that they see on Instagram. This upward comparison would influence their perspective on ideal body goals and threaten their confidence about their looks and body, which could lead to body dissatisfaction issue among the participants.

On the other hand, cultivation theory by Gerbner and Gross (1976) as cited in Vuong et al. (2021); Stein et al. (2021) emphasized that long-term exposure to media can affect a one's perceptions and beliefs. Spending time browsing those unrealistic photos on social media sites like Instagram might create beauty standard in the society that is difficult to achieve. Owing to the fact that Instagram users are led to believe that these photos are actual representative of their cultural norm. Moreover, participants in this study were Asians and according to Rafati et al. (2021), collectivism is one of the cultural traits of Asian nations. As a result, people in these nations were more aware of what other people think and engaged in more social comparisons to make sure they did not stray too far from the common norm of the society (Rafati et al., 2021). Participants of this study might also hold onto this cultural characteristics and based on photos that was portrayed on Instagram, they believe that they also should attain that kind of bodies.

The current study has raised important questions about the nature of using social media, specifically Instagram and its relation with body dissatisfaction. There was not much study that was focused on body dissatisfaction issue in Malaysia, especially in educational context. Thus, this study contributed to adding the gap from previous research. As young adults are considered as active social media user, there might be a chance of them to develop body dissatisfaction issue. Moreover, another implication of this study was the possibility of realization that there would be consequences of intensity Instagram usage that could potentially lead to body dissatisfaction. Hence, the participants would start monitoring their Instagram usage. On the other hands, this would promote social media literacy skills among students, in which they were able to carefully analyse content they saw on social media. Psychoeducation should be given by clinicians and educators to people who used social media heavily. By raising people's knowledge of how frequently Instagram photographs were edited and present unrealistic ideals, the users could be assisted to avoid trying to live up to these expectations and experiencing problems with their body image. Screening and counselling session for those who are facing or in verge of having body dissatisfaction issue would be a good idea to combat this issue.

The scope of this study was limited in terms of sample size. A larger sample size was preferred

since it could give the researcher more reliable results. This is because the number is still low to generalize the finding to all UPSI undergraduate students. Next, there was no original scale that is used to measure Instagram usage. Some of the previous study use self-reported items and established scale that have been altered to make it appropriate with the study conducted. Thus, in order to measure Instagram usage, there was no specific scale or indicator. Besides, since the Instagram Intensity Scale was considered new, it still not widely used in research field. Thus, the Malay language version of the questionnaire was not available. Last but not least, there was also some challenges while collecting the data. It took a longer time that the researcher expected to collect the data. There was also lack of participants' compliance which answering the online survey. Some of the participants might not read the items properly and provided answer mindlessly.

In spite of its limitation, the study suggested that bigger sample size is preferable as it could provide more validity for the research and to ensure that the findings can be generalised to the represented population. On the other hand, future research should actually developed the actual scale that could measure Instagram usage among the participants. For Malaysian context, it would be better if there is a Malay version of the newly establish scale. It would be helpful since it can provide better understanding about the context of the item. Lastly, in measuring Instagram usage, future study is recommended to also focused on Instagram activity or purpose of using Instagram. Based on their activity on Instagram, researcher is able to decide whether their activity can become one of the factors that lead to body dissatisfaction or not. Apart from that, it would be a good idea to focus of individual differences such as inclusive society. It is recommended to conduct the study about body dissatisfaction among people with disabilities such as people with muscular dystrophy, body dysmorphic disorder or eating disorder. This is because people with these disabilities might have different perspective on body dissatisfaction and it is a good chance to discover this issue among them. Next, based on previous studies, there are other variables such as upward social comparison (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022), drive for thinness (Jiotsa et al., 2021) and social anxiety (Jarrar et al., 2022) that could potentially moderated the relationship between the two variables,

CONCLUSION

Humans start forming perceptions of their bodies at a young age, and dissatisfaction towards own body image can lead to negative physical and psychological outcomes. The current study has raised important questions about the nature of using social media, specifically Instagram and its relation with body dissatisfaction. The research hypothesis revealed a notable link between Instagram usage and individuals' body dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the study suggests that increased Instagram use may lead to body dissatisfaction, which could prompt participants to become more mindful of their social media habits. As a result, some students who were previously unaware of body dissatisfaction might begin to address the issue. They would be aware and started to acknowledge the presence of more serious illnesses caused by body dissatisfaction, such as eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder. Clinical and psychological interventions are desperately needed to improve the quality of life for individuals who are suffering from body dissatisfaction because it is a severe threat that can result in other serious health issues. Interventions targeting self-objectification and concerns about negative appearance judgments may offer practical and promising methods for preventing and addressing this illness among young adults. Other related variables could also be explored to gain a deeper understanding of the development of body dissatisfaction and its relation to social media. Overall, this study can shed light on the problem of body dissatisfaction among undergraduate students, and researchers anticipate further research on this topic from diverse groups of participants in the future.

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