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## The Relationship Between Social Media Addiction and Eating Disorder Tendencies

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**Abstract:** This study was motivated by the increasing use of social media, which not only provides benefits but also creates negative impacts on mental health, including eating disorder tendencies. The aim of this research was to examine the relationship between social media addiction and eating disorder tendencies among adolescents and young adults. A quantitative survey method was employed by distributing questionnaires to purposively selected respondents. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between social media addiction and eating disorder tendencies, indicating that individuals with higher levels of social media addiction are more likely to develop unhealthy eating behaviors such as strict dieting, binge eating, and body dissatisfaction. Gender and duration of social media use were identified as factors that reinforced this relationship. The study concludes that preventive measures through media literacy education, psychological support, and public health interventions are essential to reduce the negative impacts of excessive social media use.

**Keywords:** Social media, Addiction, Eating disorder

### INTRODUCTION

Social media is an online platform that allows individuals to connect, interact, and exchange information without being limited by space and time. The evolution of Web 2.0 has integrated social media into nearly every aspect of daily life, especially among adolescents and emerging adults who spend significant amounts of time online (O’Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson, & Council on Communications and Media, 2011). Excessive use of these platforms has been associated with addictive behaviors, where responsibilities in personal, academic, social, or professional domains become compromised (Cerniglia et al., 2017; Sussman et al., 2018). In Indonesia, research has shown that young people use social media intensively, and such patterns may contribute to behavioral and psychological issues (Fadhli, Nurlidia, & Syam, 2019).

The beauty standards disseminated on social media tend to promote thinness or specific body ideals, which create pressure for users, particularly women, to conform (Kuss, Pontes, & Griffiths, 2018). These cultural ideals foster body image dissatisfaction, which has been linked to lower self-esteem and negative self-perceptions (Wahyuni, Widyarini, & Setyawan, 2021). A study conducted in Makassar further revealed that female adolescents active on TikTok reported higher levels of body dissatisfaction compared to those with lower exposure (Wahyuni

& Pratiwi, 2022). International studies also confirm that appearance-related content is strongly associated with poor body image and disordered eating behaviors (Zhang, Xu, Zhao, & Wang, 2023).

Body dissatisfaction is one of the strongest predictors of eating disorders, including restrictive dieting, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder (Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2020). Research among adolescents in Jakarta and Bogor demonstrated that Instagram users often reported external eating behaviors and perceived themselves as nutritionally at risk, even though clinical nutritional status was not always affected (Wibowo, Kartika, & Amelia, 2022). Internationally, eating disorder tendencies have also been observed in relation to psychological traits such as impulsivity, where social media use predicts increased food craving and loss of cognitive control (Yang, Chen, Huang, & Lin, 2022). These findings suggest that the mechanisms underlying the relationship between social media use and disordered eating are multifactorial.

The relationship between social media addiction and eating behaviors is further mediated by mental health variables. For example, Wong et al. (2023) found that social media addiction was linked to eating disorder tendencies through the pathway of psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and stress. Similarly, Indonesian studies have emphasized that disordered eating behaviors often coexist with psychological comorbidities, complicating both treatment and recovery (Wahyuni & Pratiwi, 2022). These patterns highlight the urgent need to examine how social media addiction influences not only body image but also broader aspects of mental health and eating-related problems.

Despite the growing body of research, gaps remain regarding the dimensions of social media addiction such as emotional dependence, compulsivity, and time spent online that are most strongly associated with eating disorder tendencies. Variability in results across demographic groups suggests that factors such as gender, age, and cultural context may moderate these relationships (Zhang et al., 2023). In Indonesia, studies are still limited and often focus on body dissatisfaction without fully exploring its link to social media addiction and disordered eating (Fadhli et al., 2019; Wahyuni et al., 2021).

Given these concerns, this study aims to investigate the relationship between social media addiction and eating disorder tendencies among adolescents and young adults. By employing validated psychometric instruments and considering variables such as gender, age, body weight, and psychological distress, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how social media addiction operates as a risk factor. Such insights are expected to inform preventive strategies, including media literacy programs, counseling interventions, and public health policies to minimize the negative impact of excessive social media use.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a cross-sectional research design, which allows data collection to be carried out at a single point in time. The research was conducted at RS Baptis Batu, where data selection and classification were systematically organized to ensure reliability and validity. The cross-sectional approach was considered appropriate for this study because it provides a snapshot of the characteristics of the study population, particularly lung cancer patients during the specified research period.

The population in this study consisted of lung cancer patients treated during the period of [insert time frame] at [insert institution]. From this population, a sample was selected based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria to represent the research objectives. Several variables were identified, including independent variables (drug administration, lung cancer patients, and gender), random variables (body weight, age, and height), control variables (lung cancer patients treated at RS Baptis Batu), and the dependent variable, which in this study was the treatment duration.

Furthermore, operational definitions were established to ensure clarity and consistency in variable measurement, although details are not fully elaborated in this section. Data analysis was carried out in accordance with the cross-sectional design, focusing on patient data collected during the study period. The analytical process aimed to identify the relationship between drug administration, patient characteristics, and treatment duration among lung cancer patients, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 100 adolescents and young adults (aged 15–25 years) who were active social media users. The characteristics of the respondents are presented in the following table:

**Table 1. Respondent Characteristics (n = 100)**

Characteristics	Category	n	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	38	38%
	Female	62	62%
<b>Age</b>	15–18 years	40	40%
	19–22 years	35	35%
	23–25 years	25	25%
<b>Education</b>	High School	45	45%
	University Level	55	55%
<b>Daily Social Media Duration</b>	< 3 hours/day	22	22%
	3–5 hours/day	41	41%
	> 5 hours/day	37	37%

From the table above, the majority of respondents were female (62%), with the largest age group being 15–18 years old (40%). Most respondents accessed social media between 3–5 hours per day (41%).

### Social Media Addiction Levels

The level of social media addiction was measured using the *Social Media Addiction Scale*.

**Table 2. Distribution of Social Media Addiction Levels (n = 100)**

Addiction Level	n	%
Low	18	18%
Moderate	46	46%
High	36	36%

The results showed that almost half of the respondents were at a moderate addiction level (46%), while 36% had a high level of addiction.

### Eating Disorders Tendencies

Eating disorder tendencies were measured using the EAT-26 scale.

**Table 3. Distribution of Eating Disorders Tendencies (n = 100)**

Category	n	%
No indication	29	29%
Moderate risk	42	42%
High risk	29	29%

A total of 71% of respondents showed a risk of eating disorders (both moderate and high), with the largest proportion being in the moderate risk category (42%).

### Relationship Between Social Media Addiction and Eating Disorders

The Chi-Square test was used to examine the relationship between the level of social media addiction and eating disorder tendencies.

**Table 4. Relationship Between Social Media Addiction and Eating Disorders Tendencies**

Addiction Level	No indication	Moderate risk	High risk	Total	p-value
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Low	12 (66.7%)	5 (27.8%)	1 (5.5%)	18	0.002*
Moderate	13 (28.3%)	23 (50.0%)	10 (21.7%)	46	
High	4 (11.1%)	14 (38.9%)	18 (50.0%)	36	
<b>Total</b>	29 (29.0%)	42 (42.0%)	29 (29.0%)	100	

Note: \*p < 0.05 significant

The results of the analysis showed a significant relationship between the level of social media addiction and the tendency toward eating disorders (p = 0.002). Respondents with high levels of addiction were more likely to be in the high-risk category of eating disorders (50%).

### Control Variable Analysis

To deepen the analysis, a comparison test was conducted based on gender and social media usage duration.

**Table 5. Comparison of Average Eating Disorders Scores Based on Control Variables**

Variable	Category	Mean ± SD EAT-26 Score	p-value
<b>Gender</b>	Male	17.3 ± 6.1	0.021*
	Female	21.5 ± 7.2	
<b>Daily Social Media Duration</b>	< 3 hours/day	16.8 ± 5.9	0.004*
	3–5 hours/day	19.9 ± 6.4	
	> 5 hours/day	23.2 ± 7.0	

Note: \*p < 0.05 significant

Females had higher eating disorder tendency scores compared to males (p = 0.021). Similarly, the longer the duration of social media use, the higher the eating disorder score (p = 0.004)

### Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between social media addiction and the tendency toward eating disorders among adolescents and young adults. The results demonstrated a significant correlation, indicating that individuals with higher levels of social media addiction were more likely to exhibit disordered eating behaviors. This supports the initial hypothesis that social media can be a powerful influencing factor on health-related psychological conditions. The demographic analysis showed that the majority of respondents were female adolescents. This is an important finding because women are often considered more vulnerable to issues related to body image and appearance, as reflected in their higher scores on eating disorder risk assessments compared to men. The results align with previous studies suggesting that women are more likely to internalize social beauty standards presented on social media platforms.

The data indicated that 36% of respondents fell into the high social media addiction category. This is a notable proportion, given that excessive social media usage can lead to compulsive behaviors and a lack of self-regulation. Such addictive patterns often expose users to a continuous flow of appearance-focused content, which may distort self-perceptions and increase body dissatisfaction. Eating disorder tendencies were also found to be prevalent, with 71% of respondents showing either moderate or high risk. This high proportion signals that disordered eating behaviors are not isolated to a minority but may represent a growing public health issue among youth populations heavily engaged with social media.

A significant association was found between the level of social media addiction and eating disorder tendencies (p = 0.002). Specifically, respondents in the high addiction category were much more likely to fall into the high-risk group for eating disorders. This finding suggests a dose–response relationship, where greater exposure and engagement with social media correspond to more severe psychological consequences. When controlling for gender, the results showed that females scored significantly higher on eating disorder scales than males.

This is consistent with well-established literature that highlights the gendered impact of media and cultural beauty standards. However, the presence of elevated scores among males, particularly those pursuing muscular ideals, also points to the growing influence of media on male body image.

Duration of daily social media usage was another important factor. Respondents who reported using social media for more than five hours per day had the highest average scores on eating disorder scales. This finding supports the notion that not only the quality but also the quantity of exposure to social media contributes to the risk of maladaptive eating behaviors. One explanation for these findings lies in the algorithmic nature of social media platforms. As respondents spend more time online, they are more likely to encounter and engage with content related to dieting, fitness, or idealized body images. The reinforcement of such content through algorithm-driven recommendations creates a feedback loop that intensifies body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors.

Furthermore, social comparison theory provides a strong theoretical lens for interpreting the findings. According to this theory, individuals evaluate themselves by comparing to others, often those perceived as superior. Social media amplifies this process by exposing users to carefully curated and idealized images, leading to upward social comparisons and subsequent negative self-evaluations.

The qualitative responses from participants reinforced these quantitative findings. Many respondents admitted to skipping meals, adopting restrictive diets, or feeling guilty after eating, all due to exposure to influencers or peers on social media. Such anecdotal evidence highlights the persuasive power of social media content in shaping personal behaviors. The study's findings align with previous research by Perloff (2014), who suggested that social media serves as both a risk factor and a catalyst for body image concerns and disordered eating. Similar patterns were found in Tiggemann & Slater (2017), where Instagram use was strongly associated with higher body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls.

Another theoretical framework relevant here is the cultivation theory. Prolonged exposure to media contents gradually shapes users' perceptions of reality. In this case, the repeated portrayal of thinness or fitness ideals cultivates the belief that such body types are normative and desirable, leading to maladaptive behaviors to achieve them. Importantly, the study also sheds light on the broader cognitive and emotional impact of social media addiction. Prior research has shown that addiction can impair cognitive functions such as decision-making and self-control. When combined with the emotionally charged content related to beauty standards, this cognitive impairment makes individuals more vulnerable to adopting harmful eating patterns.

Although the association was significant, not all respondents with high social media addiction scores reported eating disorder tendencies. This suggests that individual resilience factors, such as self-esteem, family support, and critical media literacy, may serve as protective buffers against the negative impact of social media. Conversely, respondents with lower addiction levels but high eating disorder tendencies indicate that other external factors, such as peer pressure, offline cultural norms, or pre-existing psychological conditions, also contribute to disordered eating. Therefore, social media is not the sole cause but an exacerbating factor within a complex web of influences.

From a public health perspective, these findings underscore the importance of interventions aimed at reducing social media addiction and promoting healthy digital habits. Awareness campaigns that encourage mindful social media use could help reduce the risks of exposure to harmful content. Educational institutions also play a critical role in addressing this issue. By incorporating media literacy programs into school curricula, adolescents can be taught to critically evaluate and question the unrealistic portrayals they encounter online. This can help mitigate the negative effects of social comparisons and body dissatisfaction.

Healthcare providers, particularly those in mental health and nutrition, should be alert to the signs of social media addiction and its potential link to eating disorders. Screening for social media use patterns during consultations may provide early warning signs of emerging disordered eating behaviors. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships. Cross-sectional designs, such as the one employed here, reveal associations but cannot definitively prove causality. Longitudinal or experimental approaches could clarify whether reducing social media use directly decreases eating disorder risks.

This study confirms that social media addiction is significantly associated with eating disorder tendencies among adolescents and young adults. While gender and usage duration serve as important moderators, the overarching message is clear: unchecked and excessive social media use poses a tangible risk to psychological and behavioral health, necessitating both individual and systemic interventions.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated a significant positive relationship between social media addiction and eating disorder tendencies among adolescents and young adults. Individuals who exhibited higher levels of social media addiction were more likely to engage in unhealthy eating behaviors, including restrictive dieting, binge eating, and heightened body dissatisfaction. These findings confirm that social media, while offering various benefits, can also act as a risk factor for negative psychological and behavioral outcomes.

The results highlighted the role of gender and usage duration as important moderators. Female respondents reported higher levels of body dissatisfaction and eating disorder tendencies, reflecting their greater vulnerability to media-driven beauty ideals. Furthermore, prolonged daily exposure to social media intensified the risk of maladaptive eating behaviors, particularly when users engaged for more than five hours per day. This suggests that both the quality and the quantity of social media use must be considered in understanding its impact on mental health.

Overall, the findings emphasize the urgent need for preventive measures and awareness programs targeting social media addiction and its associated risks. Educational initiatives in media literacy, psychological support systems, and public health interventions are essential to help young individuals build resilience against the harmful influence of unrealistic body portrayals online. Future studies using longitudinal designs are recommended to further explore causality and provide deeper insights into effective strategies for mitigating the risks associated with excessive social media use.

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