



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE RISK OF DEVELOPING
EATING DISORDER AMONG YOUNG ADULTS
IN UNIVERSITY**

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**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE RISK OF DEVELOPING EATING
DISORDER AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between social media usage and the risk of developing eating disorders among young adults in university. Conducted at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), this quantitative research employs a cross-sectional design with convenience sampling. A total of 143 participants, aged 18 to 25, completed the Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26) to measure symptoms of eating disorders. Data analysis revealed a positive correlation between social media usage and eating disorder symptoms, indicating that increased exposure to social media content is associated with a higher risk of developing eating disorders. Despite the significant findings, the limited sample size constrains the generalizability of the results. Future research should consider employing a longitudinal design and incorporating qualitative methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship. These insights could contribute to developing targeted interventions to mitigate the negative impact of social media on young adults' mental health.

Keywords: social media, eating disorders, young adults, EAT-26

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyelidik hubungan antara penggunaan media sosial dan risiko kehadiran gangguan makan dalam kalangan belia di universiti. Dilaksanakan di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), penyelidikan kuantitatif ini menggunakan pensampelan secara kebetulan (convenience sampling). Sebanyak 143 peserta, berumur 18 hingga 25 tahun, melengkapkan Ujian 'Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26)' untuk mengukur simptom gangguan pemakanan. Analisis data mendedahkan korelasi positif antara penggunaan media sosial dan simptom gangguan makan, menunjukkan bahawa pendedahan yang lebih tinggi kepada kandungan media sosial dikaitkan dengan risiko yang lebih tinggi untuk kehadiran gangguan makan. Walaupun penemuan ini signifikan, saiz sampel yang terhad mengehadkan kebolehgunaan hasil. Penyelidikan masa depan harus mempertimbangkan untuk menggunakan reka bentuk longitudinal dan menggabungkan kaedah kualitatif untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif mengenai hubungan ini. Penemuan ini boleh menyumbang kepada pembangunan intervensi yang disasarkan untuk mengurangkan kesan negatif media sosial terhadap kesihatan mental belia.

Kata kunci: media sosial, gangguan makan, belia, EAT-26

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study aims to investigate the influence of social media on the risk of developing eating disorders among young adults in university. The upcoming first chapter provided a comprehensive review and of the background of the study, the problem statement, the formulation of research objectives categorized into both general and specific objectives, the formulation of the research questions, the development of research hypotheses, the conceptual framework, the significance of the study, as well as the conceptual and operational definitions of key terms utilized throughout the study.

1.1 Background of Study

Feeding and eating disorders, commonly referred to as eating disorders, as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5), demonstrate persistent disturbances in eating or eating-related behaviours, which may result in a shift in food consumption or absorption. Various types of eating disorders have been identified, encompassing a range of harmful actions and mindsets towards food. These include pica, rumination disorder, avoidant or restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID), anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder. Each of these disorders is characterized by different kinds of disordered eating and psychological distress, contributing to significant physical and mental health consequences. The findings of Treasure et al. (2010), found that it has been observed that eating disorders can give rise to significant medical complications. The National Institute of Mental Health website further outlines various symptoms

associated with these disorders, such as self-starvation, laxative abuse, heightened anxiety, and

depression, as well as the display of severe behavioural and emotional responses towards food consumption and weight gain. As stated by Arcelus et al. (2013), it has been observed that eating disorders demonstrate the most elevated rate of mortality among various mental illnesses, and notably, anorexia nervosa, a specific eating disorder, accounts for approximately 20% of all deaths associated with this condition, with suicide being identified as the primary cause.

A wide range of issues, including unhealthy eating habits, negative or altered body image, and body dissatisfaction, can serve as significant cause to the emergence of the diagnosable eating disorders (Hilbert et al., 2014; Liechty & Lee, 2013; Neumark-Sztainer, Levine, et al., 2006; Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, et al., 2006). In the context of sociocultural influences on body image, it has been observed that boys often encounter social pressures that promote the achievement of larger, more muscular physiques (Pope et al., 1997). Conversely, girls are frequently subjected to social standards that emphasize the desirability of having a slim or extremely petite body (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999). According to the findings published by Fortes et al. (2015), their research revealed that the portrayal of an unrealistic and distorted ideal body in society can contribute to a sense of dissatisfaction with one's own appearance. This, in turn, has the potential to give rise to disordered eating patterns, which can have a harmful impact on individuals' overall well-being as well as harm their physical well-being.

Chua et al. (2022) conducted research in Malaysia and discovered that among the total of 818 people who participated in the study, more than 50% of them responded to having the signs of eating disorders. In the words of Littleton and Ollendick (2003), the starting point of eating issues may be broken down into several categories, including

biological, psychological, intrapersonal, and environmental factors. In the context of

this study, it will be focused on examining the environmental component, which is the exposure to social media. In accordance with research conducted by Wang et al. (2017), the proportion of young adults who use social media platforms such as X (Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram to record and share little details of their everyday lives as well as to communicate and trade their opinions has significantly grown over the past few years.

In regard to Malaysia, it is important to point out that a website titled Malaysia Social Media Statistics and Facts (2023) has provided insights into the prevalence of social media usage among the country's population. According to various studies conducted, it has been observed that a significant proportion, specifically 67%, of Malaysian youth actively engage with social media platforms. In addition, some examples of popular social media sites among young adults nowadays are Instagram, TikTok, X (Twitter), YouTube, Pinterest, Snapchat, and many others. Overall, in a comprehensive meta-analysis conducted by Grabe et al. (2008), it was found that individuals who were exposed to media, specifically women and adolescents, exhibited a tendency to allocate a greater amount of financial resources towards enhancing their physical appearance, as well as an increased vulnerability to developing eating disorders, primarily due to the dissatisfaction experienced with their own body image.

1.2 Problem Statement

It is undeniable that in today's world, social media platforms have generated numerous positive effects on the human experience. In the context of young adults, particularly those enrolled in universities, social media can be considered as a potentially helpful resource that may have educational benefits. Students, for instance, have access to a variety of resources, including research, educational material, current

events, and more, all of which may help them improve their knowledge and their learning. In addition, it is interesting to note that social media platforms offer young adults the opportunity to maintain connections with their friends and family members, regardless of the physical distances that may separate them. For example, university students who are living away from their families yet want to stay in touch with them are able to do so through many forms of modern communication. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that despite the advantageous aspects of social media, it also does come with disadvantages as well. In order to provide a more precise description, it is important to recognize that the digital revolution has generated concerns regarding the potential negative consequences it may have on the mental and physical well-being of individuals. According to Zsila and Eric (2023), the utilization of social media platforms has been associated with the emergence of significant stress levels, as well as a heightened tendency to engage in social comparisons, ultimately resulting in increased feelings of sadness and isolation. One of the most important concerns is the effect that social media has on the greater likelihood of having eating disorders, a disease that may have significant and long-lasting implications on an individual's health.

There are, in fact, a great number of studies that investigate the connection between social media and eating disorders. In the most recent study that McCarthy (2022) conducted, it has been noted that there has been a large increase in the prevalence of eating disorders among children and adolescents, caused by the huge amount of time that is spent engaging with social media platforms. However, this existing study has a flaw, which is that it mainly focuses on children and adolescents, ignoring young adults who are enrolled in university settings. Over the past few years, there has been a concerning increase in the utilization of various social media

platforms, such as TikTok,

Instagram, YouTube, and Snapchat, particularly among the younger demographic. Furthermore, one-third of individuals who belong to this age group have expressed concerns regarding their excessive engagement with these platforms (Vogels & Gelles- Watnick, 2023). Tie et al. (2023) conducted another study that investigated comparable research topics during the lockdown. However, the study focused on only two questions in order to quantify disordered eating behaviour. The scope of this study to measure disordered eating behaviours can be considered limited due to the absence of questions that are presented to measure the behaviour. These questions may not adequately capture the complexity of the behaviour, and participants may also be influenced by external factors such as their emotions while they are in the lockdown.

Furthermore, previous study has mostly focused on particular social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram (Talbot et al., 2017), not taking into account other social media platforms such as TikTok, which are popular among young adults. In addition to the growing number of dietary trends, it is essential to point out that social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, amongst others, have emerged as important channels for spreading and supporting idealized body ideas. Since numerous platforms may draw different user groups and content, this has resulted in a reduction in the amount of information that has been obtained. Not to forget, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of the available research that is similar has mostly concentrated on Western and White populations. An example of this would be Rosenbaum et al. (2023), who focused their research on the relationship between eating disorders and social environment factors, but primarily among White people who had earned bachelor's degrees in the United States. When it comes to Asia, the majority of research concentrated solely on the culture of Chinese. The

Chinese community, Mainland China, and Taiwanese are the subjects of the research that have been

conducted up till now (Tie et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2023). This has made it difficult to generalize the findings across a wide range of Asian populations. On top of that, the research conducted by Guo et al. (2022) has not provided any specific insights into the ways in which the participants engaged with social media, which has made it difficult to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the impact that social media has on eating disorders.

Therefore, the existing study that has been discussed comes with its own limits, which need to be addressed in order to get a thorough grasp of this topic. The aim of this study is to fill in the gaps that exist in the current collection of literature by concentrating on a sample that is more diverse in terms of age range, social media platforms, and cultural backgrounds. In addition to this, it intends to make use of a wider variety of validated measures for disordered eating behaviours and investigate more particular social media engagement behaviours, such as peer pressure, social comparisons, and content engagement. The purpose of all of these is to create a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the social media influence increases the risk of developing eating disorders among young adults in university.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

1. To investigate the influence of social media on the risk of the development of eating disorders among young adults in university.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between social media usage and the risk of developing eating disorders.

2. To determine the effect of content engaged, peer pressure, and social comparison on the risk of developing an eating disorder.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Is there a significant relationship between the influence of social media on the risk of developing eating disorders?
2. Does the content engaged, peer pressure and social comparison contribute to the risk of developing eating disorders?

1.5 Research Hypotheses

H₀: There is no significant relationship between the influence of social media usage on the risk of developing eating disorders.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between the influence of social media on the risk of developing eating disorders.

H₀: The content engaged, peer pressure and social comparison does not have a significant impact on the risk of developing eating disorders.

H₂: The content engaged, peer pressure and social comparison have a significant impact on the risk of developing eating disorders.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the study



Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework showing the possible connection between social media usage, as the independent variable and the risk of developing eating disorders as the dependent variable. The framework starts with components associated with social media usage, indicating the time individuals spend on social media platforms. The factor, content engaged applies to the particular type of postings that a user encounters on social media. The example consists of body image content that idealizes perfect bodies, diet content that encourages unrealistic weight loss aspirations or restrictive eating patterns, and thinspiration content that promotes thinness and eating disorders. Peer pressure is the impact of friends or social media followers that can promote dangerous behaviors like fostering negative body image. Social comparison is the desire for individuals to rank themselves against others, frequently observed on social media platforms. Some people frequently compare their bodies to those they see as having ideal bodies. This might result in emotions of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with their own bodies. All these factors together contribute to a higher chance of developing eating disorders, as seen on the right side of the framework.

1.7 Significance of Study

The utilization of social media platforms has become deeply ingrained in the lives of young adults, particularly those enrolled in higher education institutions. As previously mentioned, these platforms serve as valuable tools for facilitating communication, enabling them to establish and maintain connections with their family and social networks, and these platforms may help the exchange of information among university students through the utilization of online study groups. However, it is essential to acknowledge that social media platforms also possess the ability to influence an individual's perception of their body image, self-worth, and expectations from society. The pervasive presence of idealized body images, the act of comparing oneself to others, and the societal expectations regarding appearance that are commonly observed on social media platforms have been identified as potential factors that may contribute to the emergence of unhealthy eating behaviours among individuals in the young adult population.

As a result, in an era where there is a widespread use of social media, the impact that these platforms have on the mental health of young adults who are enrolled in higher education has become a topic that is increasingly concerning. Eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa, binge-eating disorder, bulimia nervosa, and others, are recognized as significant mental health disorders. The National Institute of Mental Health website states that these conditions can be a serious threat to individuals' well-being, and in certain instances, they may even be life-threatening. The prevalence of eating disorders has emerged as a substantial public health concern, primarily due to its widespread occurrence and the consequential severe health implications experienced by individuals diagnosed with this condition. Therefore, it is important to highlight that

while a number of studies have explored this particular research topic, there remains a

lack of research specifically focused on young adults enrolled in universities in Sarawak.

Furthermore, based on the findings of an in-depth study conducted by Robbins et al. (2020), it is evident that individuals in the young adult age group exhibit a heightened vulnerability, primarily due to the combination of social and personal developmental factors during this critical period. This indicates that they are navigating a variety of challenges relating to how they fit into a society as well as their own personal development at the same time. It is important not to neglect the fact that the university years of a young adult's life are a period during which they are more sensitive to being influenced by their environment. The presence of an eating disorder among university students has been found to have negative consequences on various aspects of their lives. Specifically, it has been observed that such disorders can indirectly impact their academic performance, disrupt their daily functioning, and lead to episodes of social isolation.

In light of figuring out the complex processes by which social media influences one's vulnerability to developing eating disorders, this investigation aims at identifying potential risk factors. The acquisition of this knowledge is of utmost importance, especially in the context of formulating precise interventions and preventive measures. It is likely that the findings of this study might be helpful in the creation of evidence-based treatments addressing the harmful influence that social media can have on young adults while they are enrolled in university. These interventions may take a variety of forms, such as awareness campaigns, counselling services, or instructional programs, with the ultimate objective of promoting a healthy connection with body image and social media among university students.

Moreover, this study not only serves to enhance the existing academic knowledge, but also holds the possibility of making valuable contributions to and fostering education within society. Through the conducted study, it is possible for individuals to gain an understanding of the potential negative impacts that can arise on one's mental health as a result of engaging with social media platforms. Thus, individuals might display a potential for improvement in terms of their capacity to make informed decisions regarding their online activities, as well as their inclination to adopt healthier habits related to social media usage. As an example, an individual utilizing social media platforms may exhibit an increased level of mindfulness towards their online content, thereby promoting an accurate portrayal of beauty that aligns with reality rather than recklessly sharing edited images that may have negative effects on the viewers. In addition, some people might as well learn about the possible drawbacks of comparing oneself to others on social media and take action to lessen this damaging behavior. Overall, it is important to point out that this particular study has the potential to serve as a catalyst for increased awareness among individuals, prompting them to adopt a more understanding mindset when it comes to their utilization of social media platforms. This, in turn, could lead to a shift towards placing greater emphasis on meaningful interactions, instead of simply superficial engagement.

From the perspective of policies and regulations, this study has the capacity to produce significant influence on both social media platforms and policymakers. As a starting point, it is important to note that the knowledge derived from this study could be effectively utilized by social media platforms to introduce new measures or warnings regarding content that have the potential to provoke eating disorders. These platforms have an opportunity to introduce features that offer assistance or helpful

resources to

users who actively search for and interact with content related to eating disorders. As an instance, TikTok, a well-known social media platform, has recently implemented measures to address the issue of individuals searching for the keywords 'eating disorder' within their platform. The outcome of the search will result in a message stating, 'You are not alone, if you or someone you know is having a hard time, help is always available'. Additionally, an article related to eating disorders will be provided, covering strategies for overcoming this condition. Therefore, based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that various social media platforms have the opportunity to explore alternative approaches. By doing so, they can effectively contribute to the establishment of a more secure online environment, thereby showcasing their dedication towards the welfare of their users.

On top of that, when considering the broader scope, this study has the potential to make a significant contribution towards shaping legislation and regulations concerning social media. The findings derived from this study possess the potential to contribute useful information for the development of legislation mandating social media platforms to adopt proactive measures aimed at safeguarding users against damaging content that may have harmful effects on mental well-being. Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers in their efforts to establish a system of responsibility for social media platforms, specifically in relation to their influence on the well-being of users. It emphasizes the necessity for these platforms to implement measures aimed at minimizing any negative consequences that may arise.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Social Media Influence

Conceptual Definition: The term social media refers to a number of different technologies that enable users to share their thoughts and information more easily with one another (Dollarhide, 2023). From the website named TechTarget, social media influence refers to an individual's capacity to influence others' perspectives inside a social virtual community. The idea of social media influence may also refer to the major and deep impacts brought about by digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok on individuals' cognitive and emotional states, behaviours, as well as self-conceptualizations. It covers the ways in which these platforms have the potential to encourage comparisons and to develop social standards on eating habits, appearance, and attractiveness.

Operational Definition: Social media influence is the quantifiable assessment of the degree to which university-enrolled young adults are exposed to body-related content, experience peer pressure on social media, and engage in comparisons with others on different social media platforms. The quantification of this occurrence refers to the process of systematically analysing how often and for how long individuals interact with content that encourages unrealistic body standards and social beauty expectations on social media platforms. The measurement of social media influence involved the use of a likert scale questionnaire that was specifically designed to evaluate participants' reactions to different statements that are related to their usage of social media and how it affects their attitudes and behaviours. The likert scale measurement that assigns values ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 representing 'Never' and 5 representing 'Always' were

used. Additionally, it also utilized values ranging from 1 to 3, with 1 representing 'Not at all' and 3 representing 'Extremely' for some questions.

1.8.2 Risk of developing eating disorder

Conceptual Definition: Eating disorders are a subset of mental health conditions that are characterized by abnormal eating behaviours and intense emotional distress related to concerns about one's body image, including body weight and shape. These disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge-eating disorder, pica, avoidant restrictive food intake disorder, other specified feeding and eating disorders, and rumination disorder. Hence, the risk of developing an eating disorder refers to the likelihood or probability for an individual to experience or exhibit the behaviours commonly observed in individuals with eating disorders. For example, they consist of patterns such as restrictive eating or selective avoidance of specific food categories, episodes of excessive food consumption, self-induced purging through methods such as vomiting or misuse of laxatives and engaging in compulsive exercise routines.

Operational Definition: This involves assessing the probability of young adults enrolled in university exhibiting symptoms typically linked to eating disorders. The assessment of mental illness such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge-eating disorder, and other associated conditions, were conducted by employing well-established and validated questionnaires. In the current study, the utilization of the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26), a comprehensive questionnaire comprising 26 items, was employed as a tool for determining potential risk indications of eating disorders. The assessment includes a series of statements associated with the individual, with response options ranging from 1 which suggests 'Never' to 5 which suggests 'Always'.

1.9 Summary

This chapter outlined the increasing importance of social media in modern society and the consequent impact that it had on several aspects of peoples' lives. The research problem focused on the growing concern surrounding the potential connection between increased utilization of social media platforms and a higher risk to the development of eating disorders, specifically within the university environment. Overall, the chapter highlighted the study's value by emphasizing how it filled in gaps in the study's findings and improved both academic discussion and implementation strategies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, it discussed the findings of past research that related to the primary topic, which is the impact of social media on the risk of young adults attending university having eating disorders. Following the description of the concept of social media and eating disorders, it then moves on to the theories that are associated with this relationship, which are the Social Learning Theory and the Social Comparison Theory. Additionally, it focused on the elements that, in the setting of social media, trigger disordered eating behaviour, the challenges that persons who have eating disorders encounter, and it offered suggestions on how individuals who have eating disorders may cope with this disorder.

2.1 Social Media

Social media refers to a collection of interactive web-based applications that allow for the manufacturing, curation and exchange of content created by users in either a group format or on an individual basis (Davis, 2016). Basically, it is a variety of technologies that facilitate the sharing of ideas and information among their users, which typically features engagement via likes, shares, comments, and discussions. In accordance with a study done by Schønning et al. (2020), there are an estimated three billion people using social media platforms all over the world, and this has caused social media to develop into an essential component of everyday life. To add on, Wong (2023) also found that as of 2023, an estimated 4.9 billion people use social media across the world. These web-based applications are usually used by individuals to connect with friends and family, used by professionals for networking and business for marketing (Dixon, 2023). To explain in detail, these applications typically provide features like messaging, sharing updates and multimedia content, allowing users to stay in touch regardless of geographical distances. Meanwhile professionals, they will usually use social media in order to connect with colleagues, peers, and potential employers, by displaying their skills, experiences, and achievements on their social media accounts. This will then allow opportunities for their career growth. Social media is used worldwide, with platforms accessible anywhere with internet access (Gregersen, 2019; Wong, 2023), and from the website Social Media Users by Country (2023), Asia is the home to the most social media users in the world. Originally, social media was a controllable application, with only Electronic mail (E-mail) and chat programs that debuted in the early 1970s (Gregersen, 2019). These technologies marked the beginning of online communication, allowing users to send messages and engage in real-time text- based conversations over computer networks. Regardless of

the previously mentioned

function of social media, whereby it offers a feeling of connection and support for individuals, it is essential to be aware of the possible negative effects that it might have (Beyari, 2023). Furthermore, in line with research done by Baruth (2014), the use of social media is associated with a number of established health risks.

2.1.1 Related Theory

2.1.1.1 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory (SLT) is a framework developed by Albert Bandura. This theory is a significant framework that integrates elements of behaviourism and cognitive theory in order to explain how individuals learn from their environment. At its core, this theory introduces the concept of reciprocal determinism, which proposes that an individual's behaviour, environment, and personal factors such as cognitive skills or attitudes interact and mutually influence each other (Rumjaun & Narod, 2020). This means that a person's actions are not only shaped by external stimuli, but also by their cognitive processes and past experiences. The main component of this theory suggests that learning occurs through few components. To be more specific, SLT proposed that learning occurs through observation, attention, retention, motivation, and modelling. Firstly, learning occurs by observing the behaviours of others. Observation, in this theory, can be considered as the initial step in the learning process, where individuals observe the behaviour of others in their environment. Next, attention is crucial for learning through observation. In order to understand and process the observed information effectively, individuals need to pay attention to the behaviour they are observing. This requires focus and cognitive processing to encode the observed behaviour into memory. During the observation, individuals need to pay attention in order to observe the behaviour. Next, the learner also may need to be able to retain the

information they observed in order to learn. Retention involves the ability to store and recall the observed behaviour from memory. This process allows individuals to reproduce the behaviour later, which is essential for learning through observation. Not to forget, motivation plays a significant role in learning according to SLT. Individuals are more likely to imitate a behaviour if they are motivated to do so. Motivation can be intrinsic, stemming from internal desires or goals, or extrinsic, driven by external rewards or punishment. Lastly, in the context of modelling, Bandura identified different ways people learn from others, including live modelling that happens when someone observes a real person doing something, symbolic modelling that happens when someone learns by watching others in the media, and verbal instruction whereby someone learn by hearing, or reading detailed descriptions of how to do something (Bandura, 1977). Due to these key components, SLT has been widely applied in various fields, with significant implications for education. In the educational field, SLT often used to understand how students learn from their environment and used to create effective learning experiences. Overall, Bandura's theory emphasizes that individuals' learning is significantly influenced by their interactions with others.

Following that, the emergence of social media has transformed the landscape and platform of social interaction and human experience (Deaton, 2015). To explain in detail, social media has revolutionized how people connect and communicate, offering new avenues for interaction and information sharing. Based on the findings of the study by McPheat (2017), social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc have become virtual communities where people can observe, learn, and model behaviours, just as Albert Bandura described in his Social Learning Theory. To explain in detail, these platforms provide opportunities for observational learning, as users are able to watch others' behaviours, their successes, and failures

through the

content shared in the platforms. For example, individuals can freely access tutorial videos, providing opportunities for observation. They are able to save and bookmark the posts, to revisit the observed behaviour to easily retain the information. Then, they are able to attempt reproducing the observed behaviour, and might as well be motivated by the number of likes, comments, or shares they obtained after posting the content. All of these shows that symbolic modelling is the main type of modelling that takes place. After all, social media enables individuals to learn anytime they want, allowing autonomous learning, or self-learning (Chu, 2020). In conclusion, social media, which provides a diverse content format including text, images and videos, interactive features such as likes and comments, and a broad range of topics can facilitate social learning. Despite being formulated in the pre-digital era, Bandura's theory is still applicable and relevant in this new environment of social media, without losing its fundamental principles.

2.1.1.1.1 Body-image and diet related content on social media

Given the interplay between principles of social learning theory and social media, the excessive and inappropriate use of social media has been linked to an increased risk of developing eating disorders among young adults. Social media platforms have become pervasive in shaping individuals' perceptions of body image, diet, and exercise. Due to the rise of influencers, or even fitness coaches promoting various diet and exercise contents in the social media, users are often exposed to a broad type of content that may include unrealistic body and beauty standards, and unhealthy behaviours (Padín et al., 2021; Dane & Bhatia, 2023). It cannot be denied that nowadays, social media platforms are influential channels for shaping societal norms, including those related to body image and eating behaviours. Users are exposed to a

wide range of content, portraying idealized body types, promoting toxic diets, whereby only 'clean eating' routines are advised, and displaying intense workout routines (Alleva, 2023). Clean eating refers to a style of eating that only promotes the consumption of whole and unprocessed food (Wu et al., 2024). This glamorization of toxic dieting, and excessive exercises on social media can create unrealistic expectations, and the normalization of unhealthy eating behaviours (Burton & Abbott, 2017; Hower et al., 2022). Individuals who engage with such content, may observe the behaviour displayed, which can then serve as models influencing their own behaviour. When they imitate the actions of toxic dieting and excessive exercise, they might produce outcomes such as loss in weight, causing them to be approved by the society, and become more attractive. As determined by the study done by Yager et al. (2017), they might see this outcome as a reward, and will then be motivated to reproduce the actions, again and again due to the desire for social acceptance and the pursuit of an ideal body image, to the point that it will affect their daily life. After normalizing the toxic dieting and excessive exercise, this will in turn contribute to the risk of developing eating disorders (Dittmer et al., 2018; Martenstyn et al., 2021). They might always have obsessive thoughts about their weight and food. In conclusion, this constant streaming of unrealistic ideas of beauty, and success stories related to toxic dieting and exercise will drive individuals to adopt unhealthy practices, in pursuit of an unattainable ideal beauty standards, leading to the risk of developing an eating disorder. From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, it is related to how observational learning processes that occur in the world of social media contribute to the replication of unhealthy behaviours related to eating portrayed on social media (Filippone et al., 2022; Padín et al., 2021).

2.1.1.1.2 Peer pressure on social media

Furthermore, the interactive nature of social media, which refers to the way users engage with content and each other on these platforms, encourages active participation, and feedback among the users. This interactivity can increase the impact of toxic behaviour, including social reinforcement, and validation. To be more specific, when individuals post toxic content, such as images, or even messages promoting unrealistic beauty standards, the interactive nature of social media allows them to receive feedback from others. This feedback can come in the form of likes, comments, or shares which in turn will serve as social reinforcement. Once the toxic content receives positive reactions such as more than usual amount of likes, supportive or compliment comments, it can cause the individual to get the idea that such content is desirable and accepted by the peers in social media, causing it to become a harmful norm. This is supported by the study done by the UCL researchers (2023), whereby young adults who use social media sites may potentially be at risk of developing image concerns, eating disorders, and poor mental health. Moreover, the study also found that young females with a high BMI and existing body image concerns are at the highest risk of being affected by the content they see online. Next, due to this interactive nature of social media, where likes, comments and shares are highly influential, individuals will then tend to seek validation from their peers. Validation refers to the act of seeking approval or confirmation of one's beliefs, behaviours, or in this case, appearance from others within the online community (Parvez, 2021). For example, individuals might post edited pictures of themselves, promoting unrealistic ideas of beauty in order to seek validation from their peers on the platforms. When the comments are full of compliments, and there are many likes, individuals will feel happy due to the validation received. When these communities

normalize promoting pro-eating disorders contents,

individuals may feel pressured, and end up engaging with or sharing such content in order to become socially acceptable. Align with research done by Stowe (2021), peer pressure plays a significant role in the development of eating disorders. The study also mentioned that one 10-year longitudinal study revealed that disordered eating behaviours did not simply disappear as the individuals grew older, but rather remained a part of their behaviour patterns over the long term, or specifically even 10 years later. After all, this whole point regarding peer pressure in social media platforms is supported by a study done by Grave (2023), whereby the results show that social media platforms have become a common place for young adults to converse about their physical appearance and receive comments about their bodies. The study then highlighted how this issue can contribute to the development of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. To conclude, the excessive use of social media among young adults has brought a concerning peer pressure trend, where these platforms serve as spaces for discussing body image, seeking validation, and sharing content related to physical appearance. This normalization of viewing and uploading of pro-eating disorders content on social media can trigger poor eating habits, and potentially heighten the risk of developing eating disorders (Mozes, 2023).

2.1.1.2 Social Comparison Theory

Social Comparison Theory is a psychological theory that suggests individuals have a drive to assess their own standard by comparing themselves to social ideals and standards (Festinger, 1954). To elaborate, individuals determine their own social and personal worth by comparing themselves to others. According to this theory, individuals engage in social comparison processes as a way to evaluate their domains such as success, attractiveness, wealth, intelligence, etc. Humans tend to judge their own abilities, values, and opinions by contrasting them to those of others in similar

situations, consciously and unconsciously. Moreover, per findings from a study done by Coomber and King (2008), adult women engage in significantly more social comparison to their sisters and female friends than to other family members. Although social comparison behaviour is considered a fundamental aspect of human behaviour that is deeply ingrained in human nature (Suls et al., 2002), there is also a variety of evidence to suggest that social comparison plays a significant role in how appearance-based sociocultural pressures contribute to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Thompson & Bardone-Cone, 2022).

Social comparison theory argues that if people engage in upward comparisons by comparing themselves to someone they judge as better than them, then their appraisal that they are worse leads to negative affect, and in turn, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Festinger, 1954, Fitzsimmons-Craft, 2017). In this theory, there are two types of comparisons which are upward social comparison and downward social comparison. Upward comparisons occur when individuals make comparisons with people who are in a better position than they are (Lockwood & Kunda, 1999), in order to see how achievable it is for them. However, this can lead to negative feelings when individuals see that achieving the higher levels are difficult or impossible for them (Polivy, 2017). On the other hand, human also compare themselves to those who are in less favourable positions than them, and this is the downward comparisons (Lockwood, 2002), and this type of comparison usually make individuals feel good about themselves, and it act as a way to boost their self-esteem by focusing on their advantages compared to others who are less fortunate. However, in the case of young adults especially women, they usually compare themselves upward, which are to fashion models, or even influencers by using pictures gained from social media. These

upward comparisons will then have a negative effect on their own self-esteem and eating habits (Mills et al., 2002; Joshi et al., 2004).

2.1.1.2.1 Social comparison within social media

In agreement with the study outcomes by Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) and Eckler et al. (2016), young adults who spend excessive amount of time on social media platforms may experience heightened concerns regarding their body image, due to the high prevalence of upward social comparison within social media. This suggests that young adults become vulnerable due to the heavy engagement in content showcasing unrealistic and often unattainable beauty standards. For example, men may be browsing through a feed filled with male influencers who play gym, while women often browse through a feed filled with thin and flawless models. This exposure might encourage constant upward comparisons, leaving them feeling inadequate. What is worse is that compared to traditional mass media, social media has been found to encourage more upwards appearance comparison, and thus impacting body dissatisfaction (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Fardouly et al., 2017). This is because the traditional mass media are mainly focused on celebrities, meanwhile current social media allows the comparison with both peers and celebrities. Individuals not just compare themselves to supermodels anymore, but they are also comparing themselves to their seemingly perfect peers, and friends on the lives these people have posted in the social media platforms. To add on, it could not be denied that since these invisible strings of social media comparisons can twist and distort self-perception, leading individuals to believe that thinness is a short-cut to success. They may think that a slim figure is the key to unlocking success (STRIEGEL-MOORE, 1997), when they compare themselves with peers that achieved societal beauty standards who have careers, and even romantic relationships.

Thus, due

to these upward comparisons, it can manifest in unhealthy dieting, or excessive exercise routines all in the pursuit of achieving the standard. In conclusion, the findings of this review suggest a clear link between excessive social media use and heightened risk of developing eating disorders in young adults.

2.2 Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are defined as psychological problems associated with unhealthy eating habits caused by dislike towards food, or concern about gaining body weight or losing body shape (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Eating disorders encompasses various conditions, including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge-eating disorder, pica, among others. They typically involve a persistent disturbance of eating or eating-related behaviour that results in the altered consumption or absorption of food, significantly impaired physical health, or psychosocial functioning (Ekern, 2018). Usually, these disorders can affect people of all ages, any racial or ethnic backgrounds, and genders (Jones, 2022; Engeln, 2018). Nevertheless, it is high in prevalence among females, compared to males. This is aligned with the data found by Mayo Clinic (2018), whereby females in the United States are twice as likely as males to have the illness. As previously mentioned, this illness can affect any racial or ethnic background, and while the website Eating Disorders by Country (2023) stated it is most prevalent in Western countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, they are also prominent and on the rise in Asian countries (Graber, 2021). The symptoms of eating disorders, like the ones recognized today, were displayed, and noticed back in the ancient and medieval times. However, it was not until the late 19th century, that the medical profession widely agreed on and accepted a specific eating disorder, which was anorexia nervosa (Muhlheim, 2020). Per findings from the study

done by Higuera (2014) and the website Mayo Clinic (2018a), eating disorders are diagnosed based on displayed symptoms, a review of eating habits and behaviours, and a series of physical and psychological evaluations. Not only that, but doctors usually will use the diagnostic criteria for eating disorders outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Basically, the DSM-5 serves as a guide for clinicians to identify and diagnose mental health conditions, ensuring consistency and a shared understanding within the medical community. After all, the factors that cause the development of eating disorders likely emerge from a complex relationship. It may be due to genetics, personality traits, or even environmental influences such as social comparison, stressful or traumatic events, cultural beauty standards, or even childhood experiences. For example, Ekern (2017) found that several studies suggest that people with anorexia share genetic abnormalities. Besides, in accordance with research done by Levallius et al. (2015), personality traits such as neuroticism, whereby those who have this trait have a tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, sadness, fear, and irritability usually play a large role in facilitating some eating disorders, particularly anorexia and bulimia. Overall, in this research project, it delved into the environmental influence of eating disorders, whereby it focused on the influence of the media.

2.2.1 Difficulty in maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships.

As determined by research by Arcelus et al. (2013) and Fairburn and Harrison (2003), interpersonal problems have been proposed as an implication in the development and continuation of eating disorders. While interpersonal relationship issues can sometimes contribute to the development of abnormal eating behaviours, it

is more common for the eating disorder itself to worsen the relationships. This is supported by research finding by Arcelus et al. (2013), whereby the result found that individuals with eating disorders frequently report difficulties in social functioning. This happens because the disorder can lead to changes in how a person communicates and behaves around others, which in turn creates a cycle of negative interactions that further damages relationships. Interpersonal problems include various issues that affect a person's social skills and their ability to build and sustain healthy and meaningful relationships with important people in their lives (Jones et al., 2015), and few researchers found that these problems are often linked to poorer treatment outcomes for eating disorders (Carter et al., 2012; Hartmann et al., 2010; Vall & Wade, 2015). Additionally, carers of individuals with eating disorders are also reported to often face a multitude of challenges that contribute to high levels of psychological distress and burden (Treasure & Todd, 2016). This is maybe due to the fact that the carers might experience a range of emotions such as worry, frustration, or helplessness. Besides, it might also be difficult for the carers since they need to plan and monitor the meals of the individuals with the disorder, manage their medical appointments, and end up neglecting their own self-care. This is in line with research by Christensen and Haynos (2020), whereby it found that eating disorders behaviour may create strains on relationships, leading to stressful interactions or even fractured relationships, which in turn will maintain the illness. For example, individuals with the disorder might only focus on food, weight, appearance conversations due to their condition, making it difficult for individuals who are interacting with them to engage in meaningful and supportive conversations. However, the extent of these effects varies among individuals with the disorder. Some of them reported experiencing less pleasure from social encounters and a lower interest in social interaction (Tchanturia et al., 2012). To add

on, patients with eating disorders often display a submissive interpersonal style and struggle with significant social inhibition, leading them to withdraw from social situations and find it challenging to form and maintain close relationships (Ung et al., 2017). After all, this pattern of communication may stem from a fear of judgment or criticism regarding their eating habits, or especially appearance, as well as the low self-esteem which is often associated with eating disorders.

2.2.2 Physical health complications on academic difficulty.

Eating disorders have been associated with various health complications among the patients. They can cause severe psychiatric and medical complications that significantly impact a patient's quality of life, and can even be life-threatening (Friars et al., 2023). Besides psychiatric complications such as depression, anxiety or even substance abuse, eating disorders patients also might experience severe medical complications. For example, anorexia nervosa patients might experience cardiovascular abnormalities (Friars et al., 2023) and loss of kidney functions (Puckett, 2023), bulimia nervosa may cause abnormalities in the oral cavity (Mehler & Rylander, 2015), and binge-eating disorder is often associated with overweight and obesity (McCuen-Wurst et al., 2017). These complications will then decrease the overall quality of life, which can be difficult to young adults who are still studying in university. This is because the range of symptoms that these physical health complications exhibit includes weakness, difficulty concentrating, and fatigue, all of which can significantly interfere with a student's ability to engage in academic activities effectively. Not to mention the difficulty to receive treatments both for physical and mental complications of this illness, due to the time-limited nature of student life (Quinn et al., 2009). For example, the ongoing medical appointments, treatments, or in the worst scenario, hospitalization

which all of this sometimes often require long-term, comprehensive care, may disrupt a student's academic schedule, and make it challenging to maintain regular attendance and focus on the assignments. The cognitive effects of the health complications, which then will impair student's ability to process gained knowledge or concentrate during class. This can lead to feelings of frustration when it impacts their overall academic performance.

2.2.3 Societal stigma (lack of support)

Despite the fact that mental illness is currently highly prevalent in the community, and significant attention has been paid in recent years to raise awareness of the mental health disorders, there is still a significant amount of stigma and discrimination towards individuals with eating disorders (Bryant et al., 2023). Another research by Roehrig and McLean (2009) and Ebner and Latner (2013) also found that eating disorders are often highly stigmatized within society, and this stigma is primarily due to the misconception that these disorders are a matter of personal choice rather than serious mental illnesses. The study also highlighted that there is a greater stigma attached to eating disorders compared to depression. Individuals with eating disorders are seen as weak, and attention-seeking, less genuine and do not deserve support compared to depression. People may mistakenly believe that individuals with eating disorders choose to engage in harmful behaviours related to food, viewing them as lifestyle choices rather than recognizing them as illnesses with complex psychological and biological complications. This idea suggests that individuals are in control of their condition and could simply choose to stop engaging in disordered eating behaviour if they wanted to. This stigma surrounding eating disorders individuals is likely to explain the lack of representation of this illness among men, (Coopey & Johnson, 2022),

making men less inclined to seek help for these mental health issues (Mackenzie et al., 2006). The Study done by Bryant et al. (2023) also inquired about the personal experiences of respondents with the disorders and found that the majority of the individuals reported to receive unfair treatment, both in their personal and work lives. For instance, they are being avoided or judged by family and friends and being denied opportunities at work. Moreover, healthcare professionals also exhibit judgemental attitudes, and some of them give away medication without sufficient explanation, consultation, or consideration of alternative treatments. Overall, this stigmatization is mainly the key factor of why individuals with eating disorders are reluctant and refuse to seek help, although it brings a variety of mental and physical health complications to them.

2.3 Previous Findings of social media & eating disorders

“Be thin or die” has become the mindset of many young adults nowadays, especially in women (Chen, 2019). This mindset reflects the pressure, and idealization of thinness, which has led to an alarming trend where many young adults feel compelled to pursue extreme thinness as a standard of beauty, often at the expense of destroying their physical and mental well-being. The widespread use of electronic media, which has surpassed older print forms in both reach and influence, significantly impacts young adults, especially in heightening individual’s negative self-perception (Groesz et al., 2002). In agreement with the study outcome by Levine and Harrison (2009), mass media including television, movies, and nowadays social media platforms, holds significant influence in shaping societal expectations, particularly regarding fashion, ideal size, appearance, and weight. The study also mentioned how these mass media exposure act as a key factor in the development of disordered eating among young

adults. These portrayals may influence how individuals perceive their own bodies, intensely analyse their bodies, creating negative outlook and mindset (Shen et al., 2022), leading to exhibition of eating disorders symptoms. According to the research by Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2006), Stice and Shaw (2003) and Stice et al. (2000), body dissatisfaction among young adults is not harmful, but rather serves as a predictor of various negative behaviours. This includes the association with an increased risk of engaging in behaviours such as smoking, binge-eating, unhealthy weight management such as using illegal drugs in pursuit of an idealized body image, eating disorders, and depression. Yet, unfortunately, this issue has worsened with the emergence and rapid development of social media, which allow the access to pictures and articles promoting an ideal body image easily (Shen et al., 2022). Hence, due to the long-term and excessive exposure to this ideal and perfect figure by social media, many young adults who are in university are influenced, they have internalized the social appearance standard set in them (Shen et al., 2021). At the end of the day, the young adults who hold onto this standard might end up feeling pressured to conform, impacting their own perceptions of their body, and contributing to the emergence of disordered eating behaviours.

In addition to that, Rozgonjuk et al. (2023) conducted a similar study with a total of 119 participants, including 34 with a history of eating disorders. The study also found a significant association between smartphone usage and increased symptoms of eating disorders, particularly among women with a history of these disorders. Specifically, this means that the participants in this study who spent more time using smartphones reported more severe symptoms related to eating disorders. Furthermore, Blake et al. (2022) research extends the understanding of this relationship, by investigating how dating apps, a form of social media, influence

personal traits that

contribute to disordered eating. Overall, the research revealed a positive association between dating app usage, and symptoms of eating disorder. This possibly due to the pressures associated with appearance, which are often considered a key element in dating environments. Last but not least, in recent research by Moufawad et al. (2024), the impact of image-based social media on weight bias internalization (WBI) among college women was investigated. To elaborate, weight bias internalization refers to the process where individuals adopt negative beliefs about their weight or body size, which occur due to believing in negative stereotypes about ideal weight portrayed by society (Forouhar et al., 2023). Back to the study, it involved 200 participants and found a significant positive association between overall time spent on social media platforms and weight bias internalization. This finding indicates that the greater amount of time the participants spent on social media platforms, the higher the likelihood of internalizing negative beliefs about their weight and body size. Consequently, this increased vulnerability could lead them to engage in disordered eating behaviors.

2.4 Coping strategies for individual with eating disorder

2.4.1 Find community with the same issues (support group)

It is undeniable that reducing the time spent on social media is the best solution for this issue, since a study done by Hunt et al. (2018) found that reducing social media use resulted in a significant reduction in levels of depression, loneliness, and overall mental health. In this case, reducing the time spent on social media somehow can limit the exposure to unrealistic ideas of beauty contents, which in turn minimizes the chance to gain peer pressure and social comparisons among individuals. However, as university students, sometimes, it is difficult to reduce the

time spent, since it is the primary way of communication they have to engage with their family, for those who

are staying far from home. Not to forget, social media are also platforms where students can find current news, or even issues related to their study for their assignments. Thus, one way to handle this issue is by finding a support community, which includes individuals who are experiencing the same issue. This support community can be both offline and online, depending on the individual's preference. The purpose of a community group, specifically for eating disorders individuals, is to give the participants chances for discussions, encouraging them to support and rely on one another, due to the fact that some individuals with these disorders are stigmatized by their own close friends and family, making them to receive less support (Litchfield, 2014). This community acknowledges the individuals' live experiences with no judgment, giving participants the opportunity to live in a positive environment. In the era of social media, this support community group can also be found online. In line with research by Li et al. (2023), a well-being workshop has been developed, in order to help patients with eating disorders to manage their symptoms. Sometimes, these support groups are not necessarily for the individuals with the disorder only, but it also can be joined by the caregivers for the individuals. Parents of children with eating disorders have voiced a need for a greater support group, including connecting with other parents with lived experience of caring for a child with an eating disorder (Grennan et al., 2022). Another study also found that these type of support groups have been found to alleviate the burden, psychological distress of the individuals associated with this disorder directly or indirectly, by reducing social isolation, facilitate connections with others, sharing problem solving and coping skills, which help establishing sense of power and self-efficacy (Law et al., 2002; Lo, 2010; Bray et al., 2017).

2.4.2 Seek professional help

Eating disorders are a condition that often produces chronic effects (Olmsted et al., 2014), highlighting the importance of prevention. Hence, in order to prevent the potential for serious health complications and leave it untreated, seeking professional help for individuals with eating disorders is crucial. Individuals can seek professional help and engage in treatments such as family-based treatments (Hughes et al., 2015), dissonance-based interventions (DBI), which is based on the Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Simpson et al., 2023) or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) (Frostad et al., 2021). Nowadays, online treatments are also available for access, and it is the primary choice for those people who prefer to reduce lengthy travel times to the place for treatment (Vuillier et al., 2021). This option for online treatment might be beneficial for students whose schedules are filled with classes, yet it depends on the individuals. However, there are certain circumstances when patients feel like there is less connection felt when engaging in online treatment, compared to face-to-face contact. This barrier causes the patient to have the opportunity not to disclose important information, hindering the success of the treatment process (Vuillier et al., 2021). After all, findings from research done by Calugi et al. (2020) found that real-world clinical settings seem better, suitable, and promising, especially for patients with severe and extreme anorexia nervosa. Seeking professional help will treat the condition, preventing escalation to further complications and will enhance the overall quality of life.

2.5 Summary

To conclude, social media has become a powerful influence on the risk of developing eating disorders among young adults in university. Social media's large

audience and influence mould people's ideas about their bodies and lifestyles, which

has an impact on their physical and mental well-being. Social comparison theory suggests that the popularity of unhealthy eating habits, toxic dieting, and excessive exercise material on social media platforms promote the emergence of eating disorders by facilitating social comparison processes. Peer pressure also plays an important part in advancing these ideas as it produces a competitive atmosphere that encourages dissatisfaction. The maintenance of interpersonal relationships is frequently difficult for those suffering from eating disorders, which further isolates them from social support systems. When they receive insufficient support, their illness worsens and has a negative impact on their quality of life and academic performance. The physical health consequences linked to eating disorders, including kidney failure, obesity, abnormalities in the oral cavity, and cardiovascular disease, pose significant risks to students' academic performance and general well-being. Nevertheless, individuals who are battling with eating disorders can get essential help, such as seeking help from professional assistance as well as finding online or offline support networks.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodologies that were employed in the research study to achieve the research objectives. The chapter encompasses the research design, the target population and sample, the utilized instruments, the structure of the instruments, the procedures followed, the pilot study, the processes for data analysis, the analysis of descriptive data, and the analysis of inferential data.

3.1 Research Design

The Research Onion Model was employed during the process of developing the research design. Saunders et al. (2007) came up with the Research Onion model, which is a systematic approach to the process of building a research method. This particular model comprises six main levels, and it is frequently utilized in academic studies to assist researchers in developing an approach that is more well-organized (Phair & Warren, 2021). In the first place, with regard to the research philosophy, this study project adheres to the idea of positivism, which acknowledges that the variables, social media and eating disorder symptoms, are observable and measurable (Dudovskiy, 2019). The information and data gathered were obtained via the use of quantitative approaches, which include surveys, as well as statistical analysis. In the majority of cases, quantitative research is utilized to find patterns and analyse the presence of causal relationships (Bhandari, 2020; Sreekumar, 2023). The focus of the current investigation is on the effect of social media on the risk of developing eating disorders. Hence, this research attempt used primary quantitative research, which is characterized by the direct collecting of data through the use of method surveys. Additionally, some of the data consisted of analysing data that has previously been obtained by previous research.

In terms of the research approach, the second layer of the model, this research project was more inclined towards employing a deductive approach. This was owing to the fact that this research begins with an existing theory, namely the Social Learning Theory and the Social Comparison Theory, both of which are relevant to the subject matter that is being investigated. This was followed by the formulation of specific hypotheses, which were derived from the theories, with the goal of predicting the relationship between the variables. The information gathered were analysed and a

conclusion was produced based on the findings of the analysis of the data gathered.

As

previously stated, the data were gathered through a survey. In particular, the data collection process involved the use of a Google form that consists of questions. These questionnaires included information about the demographics of the participants, as well as patterns of social media activity and the occurrences of symptoms associated with eating disorders.

Afterwards, with regard to the time horizon, the design of this research project utilized a cross-sectional study. In the context of observational research, a cross-sectional study design is a type of study that involves analysing data related to a population at a certain point in time. This approach involves the immediate collection of data relating to the variables of interest from a population or sample, which ultimately results in the delivery of a snapshot of the population that is being investigated at that exact instant in time (Simkus, 2021; Thomas, 2020). Utilizing the cross-sectional design is a common practice when doing research with surveys. This research design was chosen for this specific study because it is often more effective in terms of the collecting of data, and it is also less expensive in terms of the costs that are necessary to construct the instruments. This is taking into consideration the length of time that has been allocated for the completion of the project, as well as the amount of money that is suitable for a student to use in order to carry out the research.

3.2 Population and Sample

The present research delved into the complex relationship between the utilization of social media platforms and the potentiality for developing eating disorders among the demographic of young adults enrolled in higher education institutions. The concentrated demographic, or demographic of significance for this investigation, comprised individuals classified as young adults, ranging from 18 to 25 years of age, in university settings. The rationale for selecting young adults in universities as the

targeted population and sample is based on findings from a study conducted by Naslund et al. (2017), where it revealed that individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 exhibit a significantly higher usage of social media platforms compared to the general population. Specifically, the prevalence of social media usage among this age group ranges from approximately 70% among middle-aged and older individuals to a staggering 97% among younger individuals.

With an estimated population size of approximately 17,000 individuals, it became essential to determine the minimum sample size necessary to make valid generalizations about the population of UNIMAS. Therefore, the minimum sample size needed for this study was approximately 375 participants. The determination of the sample size was achieved by using the Krejcie and Morgan Table. According to KENPRO (2012), the table was developed by Krejcie and Morgan in 1970 as a response to the need for a reliable method to calculate the appropriate sample size in empirical research. The construction of the table was facilitated through the utilization of a formula that enabled the determination of an appropriate sample size.

The sample for this study was selected using a technique called convenience sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling method. Convenience sampling is a method in which the participants are readily accessible, and it is the most straightforward sampling strategy for the researchers (Nikolopoulou, 2023; Hassan, 2022). The selection of procedures for convenience sampling considered the availability at certain times, the geographical proximity, and the willingness to engage in the study. For the purposes of this study, the demographic of interest consisted of young adults who are actively enrolled in higher education. Considering the fact that these individuals are students, it did not seem uncommon for them to have set schedules

that included classes, extracurricular activities, and other activities, which meant that

they are only available at specific times. Some of them may have been inaccessible due to certain factors, so the convenience sampling approach was an excellent option as it collected data from participants who were easily accessible. In addition, the use of this method encouraged a willingness to participate in the research. Furthermore, this suggests that the demographic being targeted was generally accessible within the university. Therefore, this approachable and quick method was also affordable to gather the data, considering the limited amount of time and money available to finish the research project and the data collection.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Instrument Structure

The main technique of data collection adopted in this study involves delving into the participants' personal experiences linked to their utilization of social media platforms. The data collection approach featured the implementation of an online survey. The survey development procedure comprised the utilization of the Google Form platform. The survey covered an evaluation of participants' demographic features, patterns of social media activity, and degrees of familiarity with and manifestation of symptoms associated with eating disorders.

3.3.1.1 Section A

To optimize the accuracy of the survey, the initial section of the questionnaire consisted of questions regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants. This approach was adopted to ensure a comprehensive representation of the participants' demographics. The present section encompasses essential demographic information, including age, gender, ethnicity, and year of study, among others. To elaborate, age was primarily required because it is one of the most important

demographic aspects that this research focused on, which is young adults. In addition to this, it is worth noting that age frequently serves as a significant factor in shaping an individual's life experiences and perspectives. Next, ethnicity was also included in the demographic data collection due to its potential impact on survey responses, as individuals' cultural background and identity can influence their responses. Moreover, for the purpose of ensuring the data accurately reflects the target population, this section additionally included details regarding the participants' academic year and their respective faculty. The utilization of this compilation of demographic data functioned not only as a mechanism to ascertain the identities of the participants, but also as a valuable instrument to facilitate a more precise and significant interpretation of the survey findings.

3.3.1.2 Section B

In this particular section, the participants were given a series of questions related to the world of social media. The main goal of this line of questioning was to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' patterns and behaviors in relation to their use of social media platforms. The initial questions focused on the social media platforms used by the participants and how often they engaged with these platforms. To provide more details, participants were asked about the social media platforms they are using, including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, and how often and regularly they interacted with these platforms. The level of interaction and the frequency of the engagement were used to determine and provide insight into the degree to which social media was deeply embedded in the participants' day-to-day life. This section also delved deeper into factors such as examining the specific nature of the content they typically consumed within the realm of social media. Specifically, participants were

asked to answer questions about the type of content they engaged in, the amount of time they experienced peer pressure, and the amount of time they immersed themselves in social comparisons with others on social media. The participants were also asked if these factors unintentionally affected their behavior, specifically in relation to their regular eating habits and diet plans. Overall, the questions in this section were structured with a Likert scale to investigate participants' social media usage. The goal was to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' social media habits and their potential effects on well-being and mental health.

3.3.1.3 Section C

In addition, the variable that was examined as an outcome measure was the risk of developing eating disorders, which were evaluated using the Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26). The EAT-26 test is a widely utilized self-report questionnaire that serves as a valuable tool for evaluating the presence and severity of symptoms associated with eating disorders. The present assessment comprises a total of 26 items, each of which is evaluated by participants using a 4-point rating scale. The purpose of the test is to assess the display of symptoms that align with the possibility of an eating disorder, while acknowledging that its primary objective is not to offer a formal diagnosis (Garner et al., 1982). This version of the EAT-40 was designed by Garner et al. (1982) as a more condensed version of the original. The present assessment has demonstrated solid internal consistency and test-retest reliability. The Eating Attitudes Test-26 (EAT- 26), a validated and reliable measure of disordered eating behaviors, has demonstrated solid internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.77 to 0.91 across various populations (Garner et al., 1982; Mond et al., 2004; Taib et al., 2021). Moreover, the utilization of this measure is prevalent within both research and clinical

contexts, serving as an instrument to evaluate individuals' attitudes and behaviors related to eating.

3.4 Procedures

The initial phase of the research process involved the crucial step of constructing the instrument or questionnaire that was utilized for the data collection. Before the online survey started, the research project was promoted strategically through different channels to engage and recruit potential participants effectively. Based on the website Clickblogger (2021), there are a few different techniques to attract people to take part in a research study. One potential approach for participant recruitment involved making use of the social media platforms. The present sought to promote the research project by posting it on the personal social media account, as well as various social media groups, with the intention of maximizing the outreach to a broader audience. Moreover, as proposed by Clickblogger (2021), an additional approach included asking for referrals from participants who had previously engaged in the study, thereby encouraging them to recommend it to potential participants who may exhibit interest in participating. A conventional approach was also used for participant recruitment, which involved strategically placing posters and flyers in various public locations, including the state library. A clear statement of the project's goal was included in the advertising that was being distributed for the research project. Providing information about the research purpose and participant criteria was essential as it allowed those interested to understand the study's objectives and the specific characteristics sought in participants, such as age and university enrolment status.

After successfully enlisting the individuals who expressed interest in participating, they were then directed to complete a digital questionnaire. A comprehensive briefing was conducted, clarifying the underlying objectives of the

study, the potential hazards and advantages involved, and the rights that were given upon the participants. The purpose of this briefing was to determine the participants' voluntary tendency to engage in the study, while also alerting them of their right to discontinue their involvement at any point during the data collection phase. After the briefing session, participants received informed consent. In accordance with the University of Oxford (2021), informed consent refers to the procedural act of acquiring full authorization from an individual participating in a research study subsequent to providing them with comprehensive details regarding the study in question. The significance of this process has not been undervalued, as it was widely acknowledged as a fundamental element within the field of research ethics. The primary objective was to ensure that the participants had comprehensive knowledge regarding the study and were capable of utilizing independent judgment in determining their willingness to partake. Participants were kindly requested to thoroughly browse the consent form, thereby ensuring a comprehensive understanding of its contents. Any inquiries or concerns that might have arisen during this process were strongly encouraged to be addressed prior to placing one's own signature. The form included elements like the study's objective, the potential risks and benefits linked to participation, the assurance of confidentiality, and other relevant considerations. According to Legal Dictionary (2015), the concept of informed consent serves the purpose of safeguarding the rights and well-being of individuals participating in research projects. Additionally, it aimed to guarantee that these individuals were treated in a manner that upheld their dignity and respect. Participants were required to undergo a briefing session and provide informed consent prior to proceeding with the complete survey. The online survey was designed with user-friendly features and accessible options, aiming to enhance the convenience and reduce potential burdens experienced by participants throughout the

data collection process. In addition, during the process of data collection, participants had the chance to express any questions or concerns they had, and were provided with appropriate assistance and responses.

After data collection was completed, it became crucial to begin a thorough data verification process. This involved a careful examination of the data for potential errors or situations of missing answers. The significance of re-evaluating the data after it was collected is emphasized by several important factors. One primary rationale for employing this method was its capacity to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the collected data. Consistent with the findings presented on the Elsevier website (2023), it is important to emphasize the significance of conducting data rechecks. This practice was crucial as the presence of inaccurate data had the potential to yield incorrect outcomes, thereby compromising the overall validity of the research project. In addition, it helped to promote the maintenance of data consistency and the establishment of reliable outcomes. Engaging in the practice of rechecking data can also serve as a valuable methodological strategy to enhance the accuracy of the dataset and to determine the extent to which the obtained results accurately reflect the characteristics and attributes of the target population under investigation. The collected data was systematically arranged in a format that were both appropriate and helpful for the purpose of analysis. The significance of organizing data after the data collection process is based on the idea that well-organized data makes it easier to navigate, reducing the risk of data loss and unnecessary duplication. Furthermore, the confidentiality of the data was of utmost importance. An implementation of a systematic and structured approach to data management was necessary in safeguarding the integrity and confidentiality of the information collected. By establishing an efficient data organization system, researchers successfully reduced

the risk of

unauthorized intrusion, thereby upholding the privacy rights of the individuals involved in the study. After all relevant tasks were completed, a statistically appropriate method of analysis was carefully chosen. Afterward, the results of the data analysis were examined, and a comprehensive report was created. The report includes the findings, discussion, and conclusions of the research, all based on the results.

3.5 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted using a limited number of participants to evaluate the feasibility and appropriateness of the survey questions. A pilot study, essentially, referred to an initial investigation that took place prior to the primary data collection phase of an investigation. The main objective was to assess the viability and enhance the overall research design. To facilitate the progression of this research project, a pilot study was deemed essential. This pilot study was done for several significant reasons. A primary rationale for conducting a pilot study is its ability to effectively identify potential problems and issues that could have had a negative impact on the subsequent phases of the project. For example, any issues that might have come up regarding the survey questions could have been identified. In addition, the implementation of a pilot study had the potential to yield time and cost savings during the course of the research project. This occurrence can be explained by the proactive identification of potential errors and issues, resulting in a reduction of both time and financial resources expended during the execution of the primary research (Simkus, 2022b). Subsequently, the helpful suggestions derived from the pilot study were employed to enhance the precision and efficacy of the research instruments prior to their actual implementation in the main investigation. The feedback provided may encompass strategies for decreasing the participants' burden or enhancing the clarity

of instructions (Simkus, 2022b). Overall, the feedback received from the pilot study greatly improved the

relevance and meaningfulness of the research, resulting in an overall increase in its quality.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

3.6.1 Descriptive Data Analysis

This study employed descriptive data analysis techniques to efficiently summarize and organize the different characteristics that constituted the information collected. The initial phase of the analysis involved describing the data preparation procedure, encompassing every relevant process such as data cleansing, coding, and transformation. The process of data preparation held significant importance within the context of conducting descriptive data analysis. The process involved engaging in data cleaning, coding, and transformation procedures to ensure the data was ready for subsequent analysis. The process of data cleaning involved the cautious identification and subsequent fixing of any errors or inconsistencies that were present within the given data set. The technique of coding the data involved the systematic assignment of numerical values to the collected information, which helped with its subsequent analysis.

An analysis was conducted to better understand the various attributes of the data, encompassing its distribution, measures of central tendency, and measures of variability or dispersion. Tables, graphs, and charts were used as visual aids to effectively illustrate and represent the collected data in a visually comprehensible manner. The forthcoming section encompassed a comprehensive account of the statistical techniques employed for analysing the collected data, encompassing an examination of the measures of central tendency and variability. The concepts of distribution, central tendency, and variability or dispersion hold significant

importance

within the realm of descriptive data analysis. The idea of distribution within a given data set applies to the relative occurrence or frequency of each distinct value present within the declared data set. Central tendency, a fundamental concept in statistical analysis, pertains to the measure of the typical or average value within a given dataset. This measure can be quantified through various statistical indicators, such as the mean, median, or mode. The concept of variability or dispersion refers to the extent to which the values within a given data set are distributed or spread out. This characteristic can be quantitatively assessed through various statistical measures, such as the range, variance, or standard deviation. The utilization of tables served the purpose of organizing and presenting data in a systematic manner, facilitating comprehension and analysis. On the other hand, graphs and charts were used to visually represent data, allowing for a more intuitive and comprehensive understanding of the information at hand. According to Zhang et al. (2021), the utilization of visual representations in data analysis can facilitate the identification of underlying patterns and trends that may not be readily discernible when examining numerical data in tabular form.

3.6.2 Inferential Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected for this research project was conducted using the most up-to-date version of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 29 (SPSS 29). According to Alchemer (2021), SPSS is a widely utilized software package among researchers for the purpose of conducting detailed statistical data analysis while efficiently managing data. The software for this research was initially introduced in the year 1968, by a corporate entity known as SPSS Inc. However, subsequent after its creation, the mentioned software was acquired by another corporate entity named IBM in the year 2009. Therefore, it can be observed that IBM has been the sole entity responsible for the creation and ongoing development of the SPSS software. The

primary objective that drove the creation of the software was to provide support to researchers in the field of social sciences by enabling the organization and analysis of their data. However, it is interesting that the utilization of SPSS has undergone a transformation from its original intended purpose, making it adaptable and now employed by a wide array of professionals and organizations. Several researchers from various fields have adopted this software for their studies, particularly market researchers, health researchers, and survey companies, among others. Additionally, from the tiniest to the most complicated models, SPSS provides a fast-visual modelling environment (William, 2022). To provide further clarification, the term "fast-visual" implies a methodology wherein the construction of these models is intentionally designed to be quick and accessible to users. This finding suggests that the software possesses a high level of accessibility, thereby enabling individuals with limited programming skills to effectively utilize it. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has been specifically developed to cater to a diverse array of analytical requirements, not only basic descriptive statistics but also the ability to construct complicated models. The data collected from this research project went through various types of data analysis using the SPSS. The analyses included Pearson correlation and Regression analysis.

In the field of statistics, the Pearson correlation is a frequently utilized statistical measure that evaluates the degree and direction of the linear relationship that exists between two quantitative variables (Turney, 2023). Correlation coefficients that are near to +1, which indicates a high positive correlation, and values that are close to -1, which indicates a strong negative correlation, are the primary components of the Pearson correlation. Within the scope of this study, a hypothesis was proposed suggesting a significant relationship between the influence of social media and the

risk

of developing eating disorders. In this context, the influence of social media and the risk of developing eating disorders were both examples of quantitative variables. The amount of time spent on social media was used to determine the level of influence that social media had, while the validated EAT-26 questionnaire was utilized to determine the likelihood of developing an eating disorder. Given this, the data in question met the criteria for the Pearson correlation, which stated that the variables needed to have a linear relationship. Calculations were made to determine the confidence intervals for the correlation coefficient. The intervals provided a range of possible values for the population correlation coefficient, which helped to improve the understanding of the accuracy of the estimation. A scatterplot was constructed using the data to generate a visual representation of the strength and direction of the relationship that existed between the two variables. Not only that, but Pearson correlation is also more reliable when testing higher sample sizes, which in this case is more than 300 sample sizes that are required to generalize the population.

Next, regression analysis is a collection of statistical techniques that are used to estimate the connections between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables (Taylor, 2022). The employment of this instrument makes it possible to assess the degree of connection, as well as to develop a predictive model for future associations of the dependent variable based on the independent factors. This study project had a few hypotheses, one of which was to explore the connection between the risk of developing an eating disorder and the various components that arose from the use of social media. These aspects include peer pressure, social comparison, and content engagement. This study selected regression analysis as the method of choice since it provides a framework for analysing the relationship between the several complicated variables. This study chose regression analysis as the preferred

method because it

offered a framework for analysing the relationship between multiple complex variables. This study aimed to ensure that the findings are accurate and could be applied to a wider population by utilizing Google Forms to collect data from young adults who are currently enrolled in university. In light of this, it was reasonable to consider the possibility of employing regression analysis as an effective tool for investigation of the data. Specifically, this is because there were three independent variables and one dependent variable involved.

Table 1

Research Objectives, Research Hypotheses, and Inferential Analysis

Research objective	Research hypotheses	Inferential Analysis
To examine the relationship between social media usage and the risk of developing eating disorders.	There is a significant relationship between the influence of social media on the risk of developing eating disorders.	Pearson Correlation
To determine the effect of content engaged, peer pressure, and social comparison on the risk of developing an eating disorder.	The content engaged, peer pressure and social comparison have a significant impact on the risk of developing eating disorders.	Regression Analysis

3.7 Summary

In conclusion, the present study utilized a cross-sectional research design in order to gather data from an accurate representation of individuals enrolled in higher

education institutions. The collection of data was facilitated through the utilization of a likert scale questionnaire encompassing various domains, namely demographic information, social media usage patterns, and the occurrence of symptoms associated with eating disorders. Before the beginning of data collection, the research project was spread through personal social media accounts, social media groups, and visible posters were created with the intention of looking for potential participants. Interested participants received a comprehensive overview of the research project and were required to complete an informed consent form prior to engaging in the data collection process. Subsequently, the collected data underwent various analytical procedures employing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 29 (SPSS 29). In general, the application of quantitative methodologies is expected to yield an overall comprehension of the complex relationship between exposure to social media and the risk of developing eating disorders within this particular demographic.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presented an in-depth analysis of the data collected through the survey conducted among undergraduate students at UNIMAS. The chapter began with an overview of the demographic data of the survey, followed by the data analysis for the hypotheses of the research project. In addition, the survey, distributed to the undergraduate students at UNIMAS, gained a total of 143 valid responses. The respondents were selected based on specific criteria, which were between the age of 18 to 25 years old, as the research focused on young adults. The analysis of the survey

data

revealed several important findings, which were presented and discussed in different sections.

4.1 Demographic Data

4.1.1 Gender of

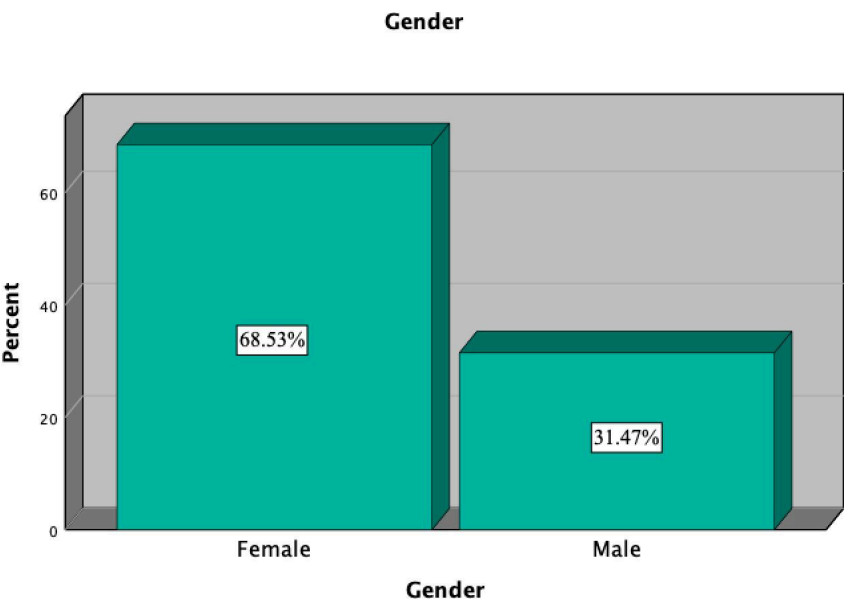
Participants Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Gender

Gender	N	%
Female	98	68.5%
Male	45	31.5%

Figure 2

Bar Chart of Participants' Gender



Overall, a total of 143 respondents participated in this study. Of these, 98 respondents are female and 45 are male. In percentage terms, this translates to 68.53% female and 31.47% male participants. This indicates that a significant majority of the survey respondents are female, with less than one-third being male. The data reveals a notable gender imbalance among the participants, showing a higher proportion of females compared to males. This imbalance could be attributed to a greater willingness among females to participate, particularly in surveys related to social issues.

4.1.2 Age of

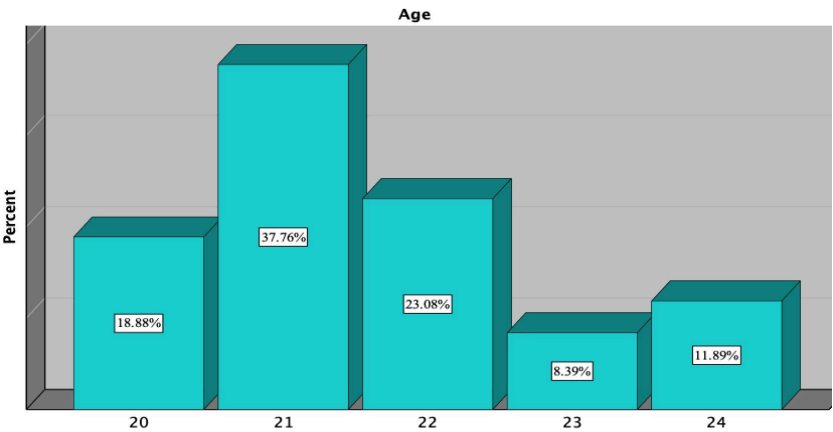
Participants Table 3

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Age

Age	N	%
20	27	18.9%
21	54	37.8%
22	33	23.1%
23	12	8.4%
24	17	11.9%
25	0	0%

Figure 3

Bar Chart of Participants' Age



Based on the bar chart, the largest group of respondents is aged 21, comprising 37.76% of the total participants. This is followed by 22-year-olds, who make up 23.08%, and 20-year-olds, who account for 18.88% of the respondents. The minority of the respondents are aged 24, with a percentage of 11.89% and 23, with a percentage of 8.39%. This distribution indicates that the majority of the survey participants are in their early twenties, with a particularly high representation of 21-year-olds. The lower participation from 23 and 24 year olds might suggest availability to participate in the survey, especially since most of them are in their internship.

4.1.3 Faculty of

Participants Table 4

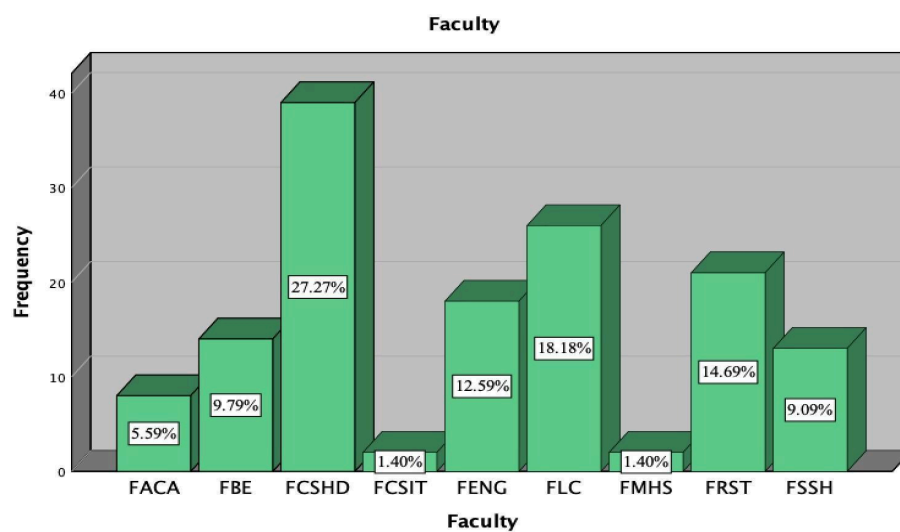
Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Faculty

Faculty	N	%
Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts (FACA)	8	5.6%

Faculty of Built Environment (FBE)	14	9.8%
Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development (FCSHD)	39	27.3%
Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology (FCSIT)	2	1.4%
Faculty of Engineering (FENG)	18	12.6%
Faculty of Language and Communication (FLC)	26	18.2%
Faculty of Medicine and Health Science (FMHS)	2	1.4%
Faculty of Resources Science and Technology (FRST)	21	14.7%
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSSH)	13	9.1%

Figure 4

Bar Chart of Participants' Faculty



From this data, it is evident that the majority of respondents come from the Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development, making up 27.27% of the total participants. This is followed by the Faculty of Language and Communication (FLC) with 18.18%, and the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology (FRST) with 14.69%. On the other hand, the faculties with the least representation are the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology (FCSIT), Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS), both with 1.40% of respondents each. The data suggests that there is a diverse range of participants from various faculties, with a notable concentration from FCSHD.

4.1.4 Race of

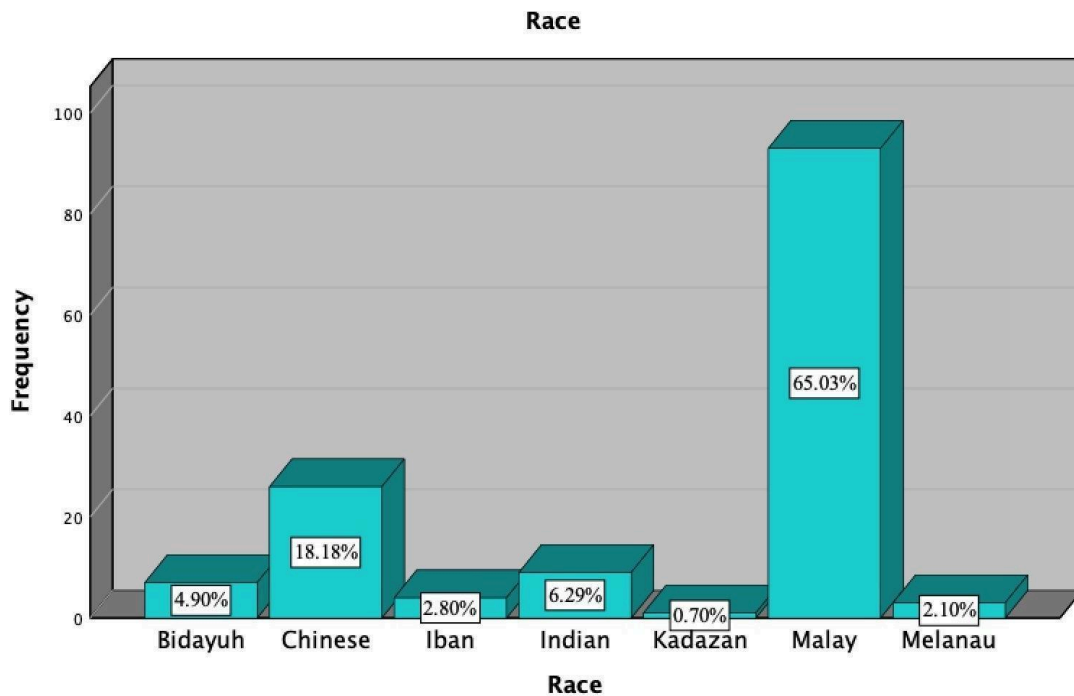
Participants Table 5

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Race

Race	N	%
Bidayuh	7	4.9%
Chinese	26	18.2%
Iban	4	2.8%
Indian	9	6.3%
Kadazan	1	0.7%
Malay	93	65.0%
Melanau	3	2.1%

Figure 5

Bar Chart of Participants' Race



Based on the bar chart, it is evident that the majority of respondents are Malay, comprising 65.03% of the total participants. This is followed by Chinese respondents at 18.18% and Indian respondents at 6.29%. Smaller proportions of respondents are from the Bidayuh (4.90%), Iban (2.80%), and Melanau (2.10%) ethnic groups. The least represented group is Kadazan, making up only 0.70% of the respondents. The data suggests that there is a predominant representation of Malay respondents, indicating a significant majority. The diverse representation from various ethnic groups provides a broad perspective on the influence of social media across different racial backgrounds.

4.1.5 Social Media Used by

Participants Table 6

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Social Media

Social Media	N	%
Instagram	133	93.0%
Facebook	83	58.0%
TikTok	133	93.0%
YouTube	118	82.5%
Pinterest	55	38.5%
X (Twitter)	117	81.8%
Snapchat	20	13.9%
Xiao Hong Shu	5	3.5%

Based on the data regarding the social media platforms used by the respondents in this study, all 143 respondents (100.0%) use WhatsApp, making it the most universally used platform among the participants. In addition, both Instagram and TikTok are equally popular, with 133 respondents (93.0%) using each. This high usage rate indicates that these platforms are key sources of social media interaction for the majority of the participants. Used by 83 respondents (58.0%), Facebook is moderately popular among the respondents, though significantly less so than Instagram and TikTok. With 118 respondents (82.5%) using YouTube, it remains a

highly favored

platform, likely due to its vast array of video content. For Pinterest, this platform is used by 55 respondents (38.5%), suggesting a niche but notable user base among the participants. Next, 117 respondents (81.8%) use X (Twitter), indicating a strong presence of this microblogging platform among the study's participants. Snapchat, used by 20 respondents (13.9%), is less popular compared to the other platforms listed. Lastly, Xiao Hong Shu has the least usage among the respondents, with only 5 participants (3.5%) indicating they use it. This distribution provides a clear picture of the social media landscape among the young adults in this university, highlighting the dominant platforms that could potentially influence them.

4.1.6 Eating Attitude Test-26 item's minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation value.

Table 7

EAT-26 Item's Minimum, Maximum, Mean and Standard Deviation

Eat-26 Descriptive Statistics	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Am_terrified_about_being _overweight	143	3	5	4.49	.542
Avoid_eating_when_I_am_hungry	143	1	5	3.05	1.302
Find_myself_preoccupied_with_food	143	1	5	3.50	1.119
Have_gone_on_eating_binges_where _I_feel_that_I_may_not_be_able_to_s top	143	1	5	2.29	1.309
Cut_my_food_into_small_pieces	143	1	5	3.45	1.118

Aware_of_the_calorie_content_of_foods_that_I_eat	143	1	5	4.28	1.037
Particularly_avoid_food_with_a_high_carbohydrate_content	143	1	5	2.88	1.324
Feel_that_others_would_prefer_if_I_eat_more	143	1	5	2.74	1.452
Vomit_after_I_have_eaten	143	1	4	1.10	.485
Feel_extremely_guilty_after_eating	143	1	5	2.79	1.373
Am_preoccupied_with_a_desire_to_be_thinner	143	2	5	4.10	.862
Think_about_burning_up_calories_when_I_exercise	143	1	5	3.39	1.419
Other_people_think_that_I_am_too_thin	143	1	5	3.56	.924
Am_preoccupied_with_the_thought_of_having_fat_on_my_body	143	1	5	3.17	1.549
Take_longer_than_others_to_eat_my_meals	143	1	5	3.45	1.026
Avoid_foods_with_sugar_in_them	143	1	5	3.51	1.635
Eat_diet_foods	143	1	5	3.38	1.342
Feel_that_food_controls_my_life	143	1	5	3.50	1.477
Display_self_control_around_food	143	1	5	2.76	1.384
Feel_that_others_pressure_me_to_eat	143	1	5	2.87	1.331

Give_too_much_time_and_thought_to _food	143	1	5	3.24	1.736
Feel_uncomfortable_after_eating_swe ets	143	1	5	3.20	1.407
Engage_in_dieting_behavior	143	1	5	3.50	1.404
Like_my_stomach_to_be_empty	143	1	5	3.22	1.593
Have_the_impulse_to_vomit_after_m eals	143	1	5	2.32	1.025
Enjoy_trying_new_rich_foods	143	1	5	2.98	1.594
Valid N (listwise)	143				

The table shown displays the descriptive statistics for the questions employed in this research, specifically the EAT-26 questionnaire. A total of 143 participants have provided responses to the questions. Each row corresponds to a different question, while the column displays the number of responses (N), the minimum and maximum response values, the mean, and the standard deviation for each question. According to the table, all questions have received 143 answers, suggesting a dataset that is complete and does not contain any missing information.

Additionally, the mean serves to reflect the average score for each question, providing insight into the central tendency of the responses. In this scenario, higher mean values suggest a tendency for higher ratings, while lower mean values suggest a tendency for lower ratings. The standard deviation measures the extent to which the responses deviate from the mean, indicating the level of variability or dispersion. A higher standard deviation implies that the responses are more dispersed from the

mean,

which suggests that there is a greater variety in the ways in which respondents responded to the question. On the other hand, a smaller standard deviation implies that the replies are more closely clustered around the mean, indicating a higher level of agreement among the respondents.

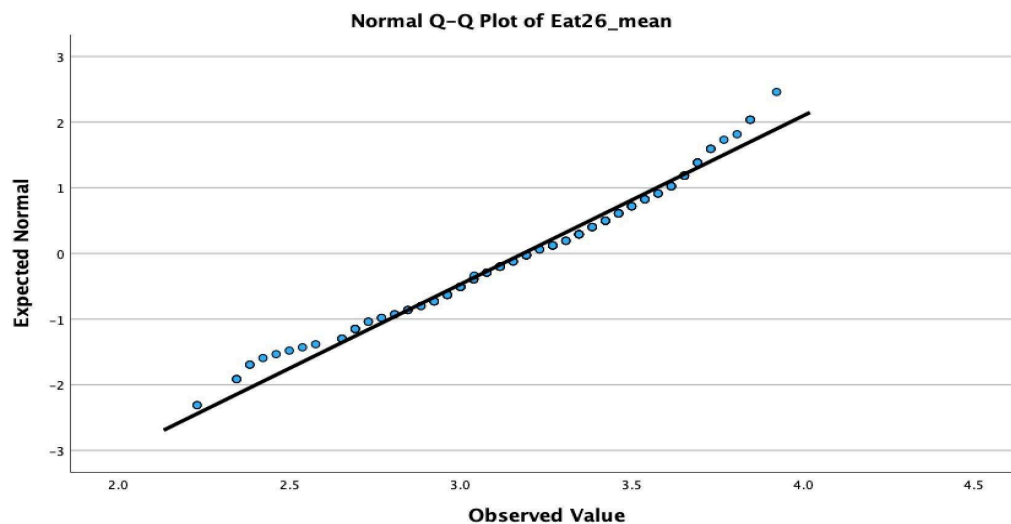
In order to analyze the survey responses more thoroughly, few specific questions that represent different scenarios in terms of the mean and standard deviation value are used as an example. To begin, the first question, “I am terrified about being overweight” produced a total mean of 4.9, and standard deviation of 0.542. This indicates that on average, respondents rated the question quite high, which is close to five on the scale. In addition, there is also relatively low variability in their responses, indicating a high level of agreement among the respondents. The next example, question two “I avoid eating when I am hungry” has a mean of 3.05, with standard deviation of 1.302. This interprets that the average rating for question two is around the midpoint of the scale, with a higher standard deviation, suggesting more varied responses among respondents. Lastly, question nine “I vomit after I have eaten” produced the total mean of 1.10 with the standard deviation of 0.485. This shows that the respondents mostly rated this question very low, with a low standard deviation, indicating a strong agreement towards a lower rating.

4.2 Inferential Statistics (Main Findings)

4.2.1 Normality of

Data Figure 6

Q-Q Plot of EAT-26 Mean



The normality of the data distribution was evaluated using the Q-Q plot for the EAT-26 mean scores. Each point in this figure represents a specific quantile of the actual data, which is then compared against the predicted quantile of a standard normal distribution. The black line represents the line of perfect normality. After careful analysis, it is evident that the points closely align to the diagonal line, indicating that the EAT-26 scores are distributed in a pattern that approximates a normal distribution. Minor deviations are present at both the lower and upper extremes of the distribution, suggesting mild deviations from normality in the tails. Nevertheless, these deviations are not significant, and therefore do not significantly detract from the normality of the data as a whole.

The EAT-26 scores exhibit a close approximation to normal distribution, which justifies the utilization of parametric statistical techniques, such as Pearson correlation,

in this study. The presence of normality is crucial for the accuracy of the results, as it guarantees that the assumptions on which these statistical tests rely are satisfied. In conclusion, the Q-Q plot demonstrates that the EAT-26 scores are adequately normally distributed, which enables study to proceed with the planned statistical analysis with full confidence.

4.2.2 Correlation between Social Media Usage and Risk of Developing Eating Disorders

H₁: There is a significant relationship between the influence of social media on the risk of developing eating disorders.

Table 8

Pearson Correlations of Social Media Usage and EAT-26 Mean

		Social_Media_Usage	Eat26_mean
Social_Media_Usage	Pearson Correlation	1	.496**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		<.001
	N	143	143
Eat26_mean	Pearson Correlation	.496**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	<.001	
	N	143	143

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation was conducted, in order to examine the relationship between social media usage and the EAT-26 mean scores. Based on the table presented above, it can be seen that the results of the Pearson correlation analysis indicate a significant moderate positive relationship between the social media usage and the symptoms of eating disorders, as measured by the EAT-26 questionnaire. To be specific, the Pearson correlation (r) was found to be 0.496, with a p -value of less than 0.001 ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that individuals who spend more time on social media tend to exhibit higher levels of eating disorder symptoms. Hence, the results strongly support the alternate hypothesis, as the direction of the correlation is statistically significant. The null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, which states that there is no correlation between the variables.

4.2.3 Relationship between content engaged, peer pressure and social comparison with the risk of developing eating disorders.

H_2 : The content engaged, peer pressure and social comparison have a significant impact on the risk of developing eating disorders.

Table 9

Model Summary of Content Engaged, Frequency of Comparison and Peer Pressure on EAT-26 Mean

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.445 ^a	.198	.180	.35303

a. Predictors: (Constant), Frequency_compare, Content, Peer_pressure

b. Dependent Variable: EAT26_Mean

Table 10

ANOVA of Content Engaged, Frequency of Comparison and Peer Pressure on EAT-26 Mean

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.272	3	1.424	11.425	<.001 ^b
	Residual	17.323	139	.125		
	Total	21.595	142			

a. Dependent Variable: EAT26_Mean

b. Predictors: (Constant), Frequency_compare, Content, Peer_pressure

Table 11

Coefficients of Content Engaged, Frequency of Comparison, and Peer Pressure on EAT-26 Mean

Un	o
st	ef
a	fi
n	ci
d	e
ar	nt
di	s
z	
e	
d	
C	

Standardized		Coefficients				
			Std.	Beta	t	Sig.
Model		B	Error			
1	(Constant)	2.293	.174		13.201	<.001
	Content	.159	.033	.370	4.806	<.001

Peer_pressure	.080	.035	.215	2.281	.024
Frequency_compare	-.016	.037	-.039	-.421	.674

a. Dependent Variable: EAT26_Mean

Table 12

Residuals Statistics of Content Engaged, Frequency of Comparison, and Peer Pressure on EAT-26 Mean

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	2.7089	3.4415	3.1829	.17344	143
Residual	-.87625	.81099	.00000	.34928	143
Std. Predicted Value	-2.733	1.491	.000	1.000	143
Std. Residual	-2.482	2.297	.000	.989	143

a. Dependent Variable: EAT26_Mean

For this hypothesis, a multiple regression analysis was done to see how the three factors, which are frequency of an individual comparing themselves to another in social media, type of content they engaged in social media, and peer pressure they received from social media can affect the EAT-26 mean score that measures eating attitudes.

The first table, Model Summary measures the correlation coefficient, R, R square, Adjusted R square and Standard Error of the Estimate. To begin, based on the

table the R is 0.445 which indicates there is a moderate positive relationship between

the three factors and the dependent variable, EAT-26 mean. To explain in detail, the correlation coefficient, R , ranges from -1 to 1. An R value of 1 indicates a perfect positive relationship, while R value of -1 indicates a perfect negative relationship. In this case, the R value of 0.445 indicates a moderate positive relationship, whereby as the values of independent variables, the three factors increase, the EAT-26 mean score also tends to increase.

The next table, ANOVA table further supports the significance of the result. Firstly, the F value of 11.425, with a p -value of less than 0.001 ($p < 0.001$) indicates that the factors significantly predict the dependent variable. In other words, this means that at least one of the factors has a significant relationship with the EAT-26 mean, as the dependent variable. Hence, based on this result, the second hypothesis is accepted.

The coefficients table above, provides more detailed information about the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable. In this case, the independent variables are content engaged in social media, peer pressure in social media, and social comparison in social media while the dependent variable is EAT-26 mean. The Unstandardized Coefficients (B) means how much the dependent variable (EAT-26 mean) changes when an independent variable goes up by one unit, while keeping all other variables constant. On the other hand, the Standardized Coefficients shows how much the dependent variable (EAT-26 mean) changes in standard deviation units, when an independent variable goes up by one standard deviation, while keeping other variables constant. The most important part in this table is the p -values, which determines the significance of the relationship for each independent variable with the dependent variable. A low p -value, which is less than 0.05 suggests that the relationship is statistically significant.

To delve deeper, the p-value for content engaged in social media is less than 0.001 ($p < 0.001$), which means that the relationship between content engaged and risk of developing eating disorders (EAT-26 mean) is statistically significant. Next, the p-value for peer pressure in social media is 0.024, which means that the relationship between peer pressure and the risk of developing eating disorders (Eat-26 mean) is statistically significant. Overall, the p-value for frequency of comparing oneself with another in social media is 0.674, showing that the relationship between frequency of comparison and risk of developing eating disorder is not statistically significant.

To conclude, the results of this multiple regression analysis suggest that both content engaged, and peer pressure in social media have a statistically significant positive relationship with the risk of developing eating disorders (EAT-26 mean), meanwhile frequency of comparing oneself to another does not have a statistically significant relationship with the risk of developing eating disorders (EAT-26 mean).

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Social Media Usage and The Risk of Developing Eating Disorder

Based on the result of the Pearson correlation analysis that had been done, this research found a moderate positive correlation between the social media usage and the risk of developing eating disorders, according to the EAT-26 mean. This finding aligns with past research that has similarly identified a significant relationship between social media usage and the development of eating disorders symptoms. For instance, a cross sectional study done by McLean et al. (2015), regarding the relationship between social media usage and body dissatisfaction found that participants who frequently shared their pictures on social media had higher levels of concern about their body shape, dissatisfied with their bodies, and were more likely to

engage in dietary restraint. After

all, these results suggest that social media usage can contribute to eating disorders, especially when an individual keeps on sharing edited pictures of themselves.

Similarly, another study analyzing the psychological processes through which social media usage affects eating behaviors found that the time spent on social media is positively related to food craving scores (Filippone et al., 2022). The study also added that this relationship is indirectly influenced by cognitive impulsivity, meaning that those who spend more time on social media may develop higher food cravings. To elaborate, cognitive impulsivity refers to the tendency for an individual to act without considering the consequences, whereby they make quick, unplanned decisions. Due to the excessive social media usage, an individual will often encounter posts related to food, and sometimes it may be an unhealthy one. When they encounter this, they often feel a strong desire to eat the food, binge eating it, without considering the nutritional value.

Moreover, a recent study, involving 1558 adolescents further supports by showing that social media platforms significantly impact eating disorder pathology and body image (Camilla Lindvall Dahlgren et al., 2024). From the study, the result shows that eating disorders were more prevalent among girls, who always idealized a thin body, while boys tend to idealize muscular bodies. To highlight, most of the girls in the study reported that platforms like Instagram and TikTok made them feel worse about their appearance. These girls also had higher levels of eating disorder symptoms, and felt more pressure to conform to look a certain way.

Supporting these findings, research by Pepin and Endresz (2015) found that social media platforms, like Facebook, are linked to higher body image concerns. In this study, 300 young adults who participated reported feeling pressure to lose weight,

look more attractive, or change their appearance when using social media. Not only that, but the study also showed that using Instagram is related to worrying about an individual's body looks, and using Pinterest is connected to feeling ashamed of one's body. All of these study's results highlight the significant impact of social media on body image, which in turn heightens the risk of developing eating disorders symptoms.

4.3.2 Content Engaged and The Risk of Developing Eating Disorder

Next, from the result of the multiple regression analysis that had been done in this study to support the second hypothesis, it revealed that engagement with specific content on social media is associated with an increased display of disordered eating symptoms, as indicated by the EAT-26 results. The findings aligns with previous research, done by Talbot et al. (2017), which has highlighted that exposure to images tagged with 'thinspiration, fitspiration, and bonespiration' is linked to increased dissatisfaction and decreased self-esteem, contributing to the onset of eating disorders. The research analysis further showed that thinspiration content mainly show thin bodies, while bonespiration posts often highlight visible bones, showing an emphasis on extreme thinness.

In addition to that, other research also supports the findings of this study, whereby existing pro-anorexia (pro-ana) and pro-bulimia (pro-mia) websites, which have now adapted into social media platforms, have promoted disordered eating lifestyles (Perloff, 2014). These contents and sites often glorify anorexic behaviors, lining thinness with perfection, and success (Bardone-Cone & Cass, 2007). All of the exposure to these websites and contents resulted in negative effects, and lower self-esteem are one of them. Furthermore, another research by Harper et al. (2008) suggests that individuals who frequently engage, and visit pro-ana and pro-mia

contents often

have higher levels of eating disorders symptoms.

Similarly, Boero and Pascoe (2012) also did research, regarding pro-anorexia communities online, where these communities support the practices of like-minded individuals, which in this case those who suffer with eating disorders. The research further highlights that this aspect of community explains how social media content contributes to increased symptoms of disordered eating. This is because these types of contents often provide tips on losing weight, thinspiration images, BMI calculators and calorie counters. These online communities eventually challenge the psychological and medical views of eating disorders by making anorexia as a lifestyle choice rather than an illness. All of these somehow support this research's findings, whereby social media content can encourage disordered eating, especially by presenting these behaviors as normal and less harmful.

In examining real-life cases, a news report by Francis (2016) highlights the dangers of thinspiration content on social media. The report mentions a 10-year-old girl exposed to and influenced by harmful trends, sharing tips on calorie restriction, weight loss, and purging. This widespread content, added with early exposure, supports the idea that specific social media content can encourage disordered eating behavior. To recap, thinspiration content often promotes unrealistic and unhealthy body images, such as a body with visible rib cages and hip bones. This type of content encourages dangerous behaviors like starvation and purging. The fact that the 10-year old girl often sees hunger as an accomplishment is very concerning, where it shows how such content can distort young individuals' perceptions of health and body image.

Lastly, matching the outcomes of studies by Guo et al. (2022), the study observed that females often exhibited severe disordered eating symptoms, when they are more engaged in online weight and fitness management apps compared to males.

To be exact, the weight and fitness management apps, particularly used to calculate calories, guides to diet and exercise, was found to significantly increase disordered eating, dietary restriction, and excessive exercises. After all, the accessibility of these apps and the guidance they provide could potentially induce unhealthy behaviors related to diet and exercises, leading to more severe disordered eating patterns.

4.3.3 Peer Pressure and The Risk of Developing Eating Disorder

Following that, based on the result of the multiple regression, it also found that peer pressure is also associated with an increased disordered eating symptoms. Consistent with the study done by Gondoli et al. (2011), it suggests that adolescents, who engage in mixed-sex interactions, are exposed to societal norms that prioritize thinness, and this in turn increases the pressure to be thin. To add on, the same research also mentioned that peer pressure for thinness was associated with increased body dissatisfaction over time, which in turn able to heighten the risk of developing eating disorders This is because, girls often believe that thinness is an important factor in determining attractiveness, popularity with boys, and dating success (Paxton et al., 2005, Wertheim et al., 1997). On the other hand, boys also reported that a girl's slimness predicts her attractiveness and dating potential (Paxton et al., 2005).

These results mirror the findings drawn by Lieberman et al. (2001), where it suggests that peers can strongly impact how girls develop their eating habits, and feel about their bodies especially when they are in places where looks and weight are really emphasized. The same research further stated that peer pressure is the primary way for transmitting group norms, which is to follow the group's rules or behaviors. Peer pressure is when friends or people in a group influence each other to follow the group's rules or behaviors. In line with Paxton et al. (1999), the frequency with which peers talk

about dieting, influence an individual to have a perfect body, use diet products, or exercise can significantly predict how much they worried about their body image, restrained their diet, binged on food and tried extreme weight loss methods.

Moreover, existing research also shows that peers can also affect an individual's eating behaviors, the way an individual feels about their own bodies, by teasing them (Fabian & Thompson, 1989, Stormer & Thompson, 1996). Not only that, but similar with the research done by Oliver and Thelen (1996), individuals often feel influenced by their peers when it comes to worries about eating, and body image. They believe that likeability is very impactful to them, which makes them more worried about their eating habits and body image. This is because the idea of being thin will make an individual more liked by their peers. Overall, these beliefs can pressure individuals to be more worried about their weight, influencing their eating behaviors more significantly.

4.3.4 Social Comparison and The Risk of Developing Eating Disorder

Lastly, the result of the multiple regression also highlights the relationship between social comparison and the risk of developing an eating disorder. The analysis found that there is no significant relationship between those two variables. Nevertheless, when looking at existing research, many of them found that there is a positive correlation between those two. For instance, an experimental study done by McLean et al. (2014) examined the effects of exposure to thin media images on body satisfaction under three conditions which are Control, Appearance Comparison (AC) and Peer Appearance Norms (PN). The study found that participants in the appearance comparison group, who compared themselves to the images presented, had significantly lower body satisfaction post-exposure compared to the other two groups. This result

suggests that engaging in appearance comparisons can negatively affect body satisfaction, which is often linked to the development of eating disorders. Hence, despite the lack of a significant relationship in the current multiple regression analysis, the variable social comparison still remains a critical factor in understanding the impact of social media on the risk of developing an eating disorder.

In addition to that, another research focused on understanding how self-compassion, social comparison and their interaction influence body image also revealed similar results (Andrew et al., 2013). The study included a total of 266 female university students, and found that self-compassion was negatively related to social comparison, indicating that individuals who are more self-compassionate are less likely to compare themselves to others. This means that, when a person often compares themselves to others, they often have high body dissatisfaction, leading to disordered eating behavior. Hence, targeting and increasing self-compassion, which in turn will reduce social comparison could be beneficial, especially as prevention programs for eating disorders.

Furthermore, Blomquist et al. (2020) also did research on social comparison, focusing on impact comparing oneself to a food model in social media advertisement. The study gathered a total of 168 participants and randomly assigned them to view food and beverages ads with models or without models, then complete self-report measures. Afterwards, the results were compared, and found that participants who viewed the ads with a model reported increased body dissatisfaction compared to those who viewed ads without model, as they feel that they are not capable of maintaining weight and body shape, after consuming the promoted food or beverage. Hence, this eventually can increase the risk of developing eating disorders, whereby they might engage in unhealthy eating behaviors in an attempt to achieve the

perceived ideal body weight

and shape, just like the model in the advertisement.

However, the multiple regression analysis in the current study found no significant relationship between social comparison and the risk of developing eating disorders, suggesting that the connection may not be as straightforward as previously thought. For example, Holtham and Dyck (2014) past study explored the role of self-compassion in the relationship between risk factors and disordered eating. With a sample of 423 participants, the study found that self-compassion was negatively associated with disordered eating, whereby high self-compassion can buffer individuals against the negative effects of social comparison, thereby reducing the risk of developing eating disorders. Basically, high self-compassion provides individuals with a sense of kindness and understanding towards themselves, which can diminish the tendency to compare oneself unfavorably to others.

Aside from that, peer support also has been shown to reduce the risk of developing eating disorders. To be exact, Dearden and Lee (2015) conducted a pilot study, with a total of 110 students to join an interactive program promoting positive body culture. After the program, it indicates an increase in participants' confidence, especially in body image, increased satisfaction, and acceptance of their own body. Not only that, but the study also found significant reduction in media influence, as well as improvements in self-esteem and sense of control over the future. Overall, the program is believed to mitigate the effects of upward social comparison, by reducing media influence, as well as promoting positive body culture, encouraging participants to accept and love their bodies, and reducing social comparison on body image. Align with that, for those who are struggling with eating disorders, peer support was also found to assist them in the recovery process. As evidenced by Wade et al. (2014), eating disorders individuals showed an increase in hope and motivation for recovery, and improved trust in the hotel treatment, highlighting the potential benefits of peer

support.

Not to forget, an individual's religiosity is also found to reduce eating disorders symptoms. For instance, a cross-sectional study with 616 university participants showed that students who describe themselves as more religious had lower levels of body dissatisfaction (Akrawi et al., 2015), which in turn reduced social comparisons. Another similar research also suggests the same findings, whereby strong and internalized religious beliefs, along with a secure relationship with God, were associated with lower levels of concerns with disordered eating, psychopathology and body image concerns (Akrawi, Shanmugam, et al., 2015).

4.4 Summary

To conclude, two types of data analysis were done in this research project, which are Pearson Correlation Analysis for the first hypothesis and Multiple Regression Analysis for the second hypothesis. In this data analysis, the key components are basically the impact of social media usage, content engaged, peer pressure, and social comparison to the risk of developing eating disorders symptoms, based on the EAT-26. Overall, the majority of the result came out to a positive correlation between the variables.

Eventually, all of these variables not only affect individuals without a history of eating disorders, but also affect those who already struggle with eating disorders. For example, constant exposure to pro-eating disorders content on social media might worsen their condition. In other words, the content triggered by social media can lead to higher food cravings, which can be challenging for individuals in recovery, increasing the risk of relapse. The engagement with idealized body images might also cause irrational thoughts, making it more difficult for them to maintain their recovery. All in all, these findings suggest that social media can contribute to both the

development of eating disorders in unaffected individuals, and also relapse in individuals who are already battling these conditions, highlighting the need for interventions to address these issues.

CHAPTER FIVE

LIMITATION, IMPLICATION, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses the limitations of the research study, proposes recommendations for future research, and presents the overall conclusion drawn from the findings. It began by discussing the challenges faced during the study which could have influenced the results. Following that, the chapter also included recommendations aimed at enhancing the robustness and scope of future similar research. All of the recommendations are fully based on the insights gained from this study and suggest practical ways to overcome identified challenges. Finally, the chapter concluded with a summary of the key findings and their implications, providing a comprehensive understanding of the study's contribution. This section synthesized the main outcomes of the study, reflecting how it contributed to the existing body of knowledge and their practical relevance. The conclusions drawn offer a comprehensive understanding of the study's contributions, and provide a foundation for further exploration in the field.

5.1 Limitations of Study

Nevertheless, despite the valuable insights gained from the study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First and foremost, the study's findings are limited due to the relatively small sample size of 143 undergraduate students from

UNIMAS. This restricts the ability to generalize the results to a broader population.

As an instance,

with a larger sample size, the study could achieve more reliable findings, increasing the confidence, and their applicability to a wider audience. A small sample size may not capture the full diversity of experiences and perspectives present in the larger student population, which can lead to an underestimation of the topic being studied. Additionally, the sample was not representative of all university faculties, as certain faculty only had a few students that responded to the survey. This lack of representativeness limits the applicability of the findings across the university settings. Consequently, this could skew the overall findings and reduce their validity when applied to the entire university population.

The next limitation that should be acknowledged is the use of self-report questionnaires. As stated, this research utilized the Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26), which is a self-report questionnaire regarding disordered eating behavior. The use of self-report questionnaires introduces potential biases, as respondents may not always provide accurate or truthful responses. To be exact, respondents might not remember their behaviors accurately, especially considering the survey asks about past events and behaviors. Aside from that, it also might be possible if some respondents intentionally provide false answers to present themselves in a more favorable light, also known as social desirability bias. Basically, social desirability bias occurs when respondents provide answers they think will be viewed favorably by others, rather than their true opinions or experiences (Nikolopoulou, 2022). For example, some may under report unhealthy eating behavior, to avoid judgment. After all, these issues can lead to significant inaccuracies in the data, impacting the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

Following that, another possible limitation in this study is the uncontrollable confounding variable. One of the examples of the confounding variable that may be present is the emotional state of participants at the time of completing the survey, which in turn may have influenced the results. Some participants might have been experiencing significant emotional distress or external stressors might have provided responses that reflect their temporary state rather than their typical behaviors. Additionally, there is a possibility that some participants did not fully understand the survey questions, leading to inaccurate or irrelevant responses. They may misinterpreted the questions, due to unclear wording or even the complexity of the questions leading to responses that do not accurately reflect their true behaviors or attitudes. These unmeasured factors could have affected the reliability of the data.

The last limitation that may be present is the resource constraints present. The data collection was conducted under significant resource constraints including limited time, and costs. To elaborate, the time availability for data collection was restricted, which may have prevented a more thorough study. Due to the limited time frame, it was not possible to collect data from a larger or more diverse sample, which could have provided more comprehensive insights and enhanced the generalizability of the findings. Next, financial limitations also impacted the scope and depth of the research, whereby it restricted the resources available for participant recruitment and data collection. Moreover, being a non-college resident added another layer of difficulty to the data collection process. Being a non-college resident made it challenging to access the university environment regularly, limiting the opportunities to interact with potential participants and collect data effectively. All in all, this geographical constraint further contributed to the limited sample size and diversity.

5.2 Implications of Study

Nevertheless, this study eventually holds several implications across practical, theoretical, social and policy components. To begin, in terms of practical implications, the findings broadened the perspectives, suggesting the need for the development of prevention programs, specifically tailored to young adults who are particularly active on social media. These types of prevention programs should include educational elements focused on media literacy, highlighting the psychological impacts of excessive social media use, as well as encouraging healthy online habits. For example, programs that could teach participants to critically assess the content they engage with on social media, especially edited images and unhealthy exercises or diet routines. This can help them become more aware that what they are watching is often unrealistic. Additionally, the study also highlights the importance of enhancing the existing support services, especially geared towards young adults who may be at risk of developing eating disorders due to social media exposure. This can be achieved by providing specialized training for professionals on issues related to social media's impact on mental health, given it is now part of everyone's daily life. Aside from that, developing online platforms that offer resources such as self-help, guides, informative articles, especially in promoting positive body image should also be considered, serving as a valuable online support service for young adults. These platforms can provide immediate support, fostering a more informed community.

The next implication of study is in terms of theoretical implication. To be exact, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the hypothesis of this study was based on existing theory, which is Social Learning Theory, and Social Comparison Theory. The first theory, Social Learning Theory in this context, basically examines how behaviours,

attitudes, as well as emotional responses are influenced through the observation of others on social media. For example, young adults may replicate behaviors seen in social media such as exercises or dietary routines. When they do not achieve the same results as those they replicate the behaviour from without considering other factors such as metabolism, genetics, etc, it can lead to emotional disturbances, making them feel unworthy. This sense of unworthiness can contribute to body dissatisfaction, leading to unhealthy eating patterns. Next, by investigating the frequency with which individuals compare themselves to others on social media and identifying to whom they often compare themselves to, the study can reveal the emotional consequences, such as feelings of inadequacy. This can happen when individuals constantly measure their own worth against the often unrealistic portrayals of others on social media. All in all, these findings can significantly enhance the understanding of Social Learning Theory and Social Comparison Theory within social media context. This research provides valuable insights that can inform the development of theoretical frameworks, acting as a guide to the creation of interventions.

In addition to that, the findings of the study may serve as a crucial tool for public awareness, educating communities about the negative impact of social media on eating behaviors. They provide a foundational framework for initiatives aimed at raising awareness among diverse audiences. By disseminating these findings widely, communities can gain a deeper understanding of how social media influences eating behaviors. The public awareness efforts can include utilizing multiple platforms, including social media, or community events in order to reach a broader audience. The campaign can include promoting body positivity through diverse role models, by encouraging influencers or famous public figures to foster a supportive online

environment. This somehow indirectly offers encouragement and guidance to young adults facing these challenges.

Lastly, the study also highlights the urgency of implementing stricter regulations regarding the portrayal of unrealistic body images on social media platforms. There is a critical need to establish and enforce guidelines that require platforms to clearly label digitally altered images. Initiatives like utilizing artificial intelligence to detect and flag unrealistic body portrayals can significantly contribute to this effort. For instance, collaboration with social media companies to develop features aimed at promoting mental health and body positivity, such as filtering out harmful content, can act as a proactive step forward. These measures not only protect vulnerable demographics such as young adults from harmful content, but also foster a more inclusive online environment.

5.3 Recommendations

Considering the findings analyzed and the limitations faced during this research project, several strategic recommendations can be proposed to enhance the precision and reliability of future research projects. To begin, future research should prioritize recruiting a larger and more diverse sample. A larger sample size increases the strength of the study, allowing for more reliable and generalizable results. To be exact, with a larger sample size, future researchers can better estimate population parameters and detect smaller effects, thus providing a more accurate representation of the entire population. For example, in this case, if researchers want to investigate the influence of social media on the risk of developing eating disorders among young adults in university, a larger sample is likely to be closer to the true value for the whole population. Additionally, a larger sample size increases the ability to detect

smaller

effects or differences. In the context of social media and risk of developing eating disorders, having a larger sample size allows researchers to accurately detect even small connections between the variables. For example, if there is only a small group of samples, it might be hard to see any clear connection between the independent variable with the dependent variable. However, with a larger group, it is easier to notice the connection even though it might not be very strong.

In addition to that, it is also recommended for future researchers to consider replicating the study in different contexts as it can provide additional evidence to support the validity of the findings. Replication in diverse settings helps ensure that the results are not specific to only one particular context, which increases their generalizability. For example, the current study was conducted at UNIMAS, which is basically a university campus. It is undeniable that it discovered a specific result, but replicating the study in a community setting or other cultural context can determine whether the effect holds true across different populations and environments. Furthermore, expanding the scope of the research to different populations and settings can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic studied. By studying how the relationships between the variables change across different groups, or even environments, future researchers can uncover important information that may have been overlooked in the current study. For example, studying the influence of social media on the risk of developing eating disorders not just among young adults in university but also among adults in different professions, or locations, can provide a more understanding of the phenomenon, allowing the development of more effective interventions.

Following that, future researchers should also consider utilizing experimental designs which involve setting up controlled experiments, to test the effect of specific

variables, in this case, social media exposure on specific outcomes, which is the risk of developing eating disorders. To be exact, researchers can design experiments where participants are randomly assigned to different groups, with each group exposed to different treatment such as types of social media content. With that, after the exposure, researchers can measure different behaviors and attitudes of participants related to body image which in turn affect displays of disordered eating behavior, from each group. By comparing the results obtained between the different groups, researchers can determine the detailed effect of different types of social media content participants were exposed to, on the displays of eating disorders symptoms. Additionally, by identifying specific types of content of social media that might increase the risk of developing eating disorders, compared to the rest, targeted interventions can be developed to address these specific factors, leading to more effective prevention strategies.

Moving on to the next recommendation, future research also could greatly benefit from incorporating qualitative research methods, such as interviews to delve deeper into the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals who might be at risk of developing eating disorders. Qualitative research provides detailed and rich data that quantitative methods might overlook, offering a deeper understanding of the underlying factors or issues that contribute to the development of eating disorders symptoms. To be exact, through interviews, researchers can explore deeper, gain insights into the ways social media influences an individual's thoughts and eating behaviors. Participants in qualitative research are able to share their personal stories, shedding light on issues such as societal pressures they often face, both in social media and real life. For example, interviews can reveal how participants perceive the unrealistic standard of beauty promoted on social media platforms, and how these

feelings translate into their eating behaviors. Not to forget, qualitative methods also allow researchers to explore the

emotional and psychological aspects these individuals face, aside from the behavior. Participants can discuss their feelings of shame, guilt, or even anxiety associated with their eating habits, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the aspect of emotion that accompany these behaviors. All in all, this data is important especially for identifying specific triggers and coping mechanisms that individuals use, which may not be captured through quantitative surveys.

5.4 Conclusion

The current research study has provided a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the influence of social media on the risk of developing eating disorders among young adults in university settings. This exploration has highlighted the significant correlation between high social media usage and the displays of disordered eating symptoms. Despite certain limitations encountered during the research process, the study yields critical findings that highlight the potentially harmful impact of social media on young adult's eating behaviors. The widespread nature of these platforms means that young adults are constantly bombarded with images, as well as content that often promotes unrealistic body standards. This exposure can foster a negative body image and unhealthy eating habits, contributing to the development of disordered eating symptoms. The existence of photo editing applications that enable users to alter their appearance further worsens this issue, creating an environment where distorted body images are idealized and normalized.

Hence, given the rapid growth of social media platforms and its negative influence, it is advisable that all of the platforms take proactive steps to mitigate these risks. Implementing measures to restrict access to content that may trigger disordered eating behaviors could be one of the approaches. As an example, platforms could

enhance their content policies, to identify and limit the visibility of posts that glorify unhealthy eating habits, or promote unrealistic body standards. Not only that, but providing users with related resources and support might as well counteract some of the negative impacts of social media exposure. On the other side, users themselves need to foster a critical approach, such as to filter the content they consume on social media. Ultimately, this research study found the correlation between social media and the risk of developing eating disorders, which may act as a guidance for both the platforms, and young adults, especially in handling and navigating these platforms more mindfully. After all, future research study should strive to address the limitations present in this study. For instance, expanding the scope of research to include diverse demographic groups beyond university students could offer a broader perspective on the issue at hand. By addressing the limitations in future studies, it may help to uncover more detailed and actionable insights regarding this growing issue.

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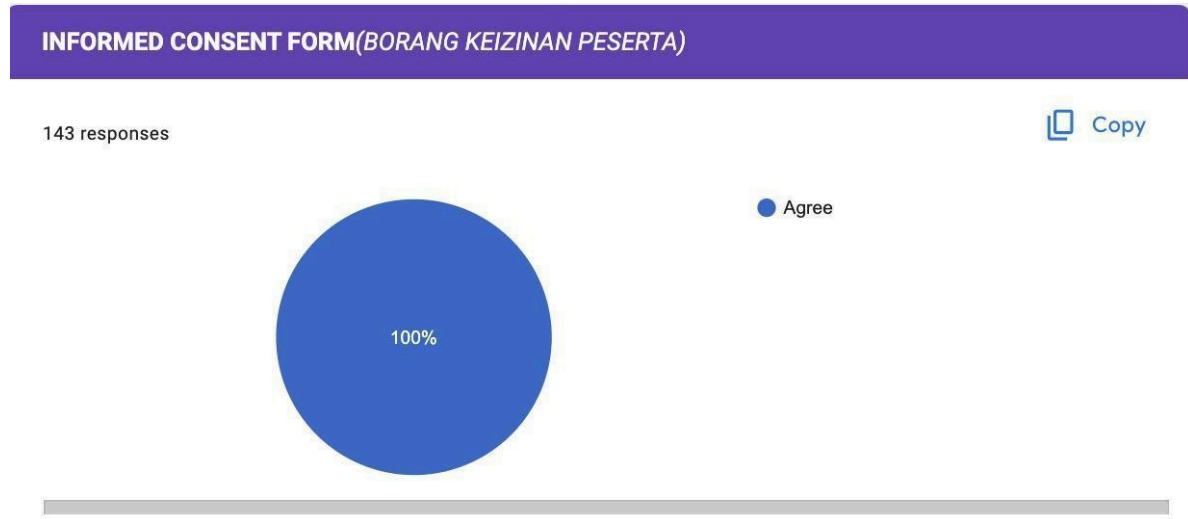
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APPENDIX A

Total Number of Participants Who Completed the Survey and Provided Informed Consent

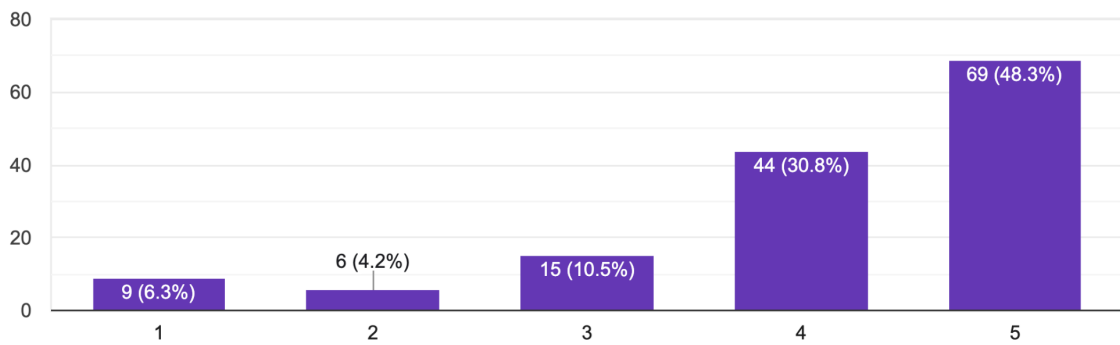


APPENDIX B

Instrument: Eating Attitude Test-26 (EAT-26)

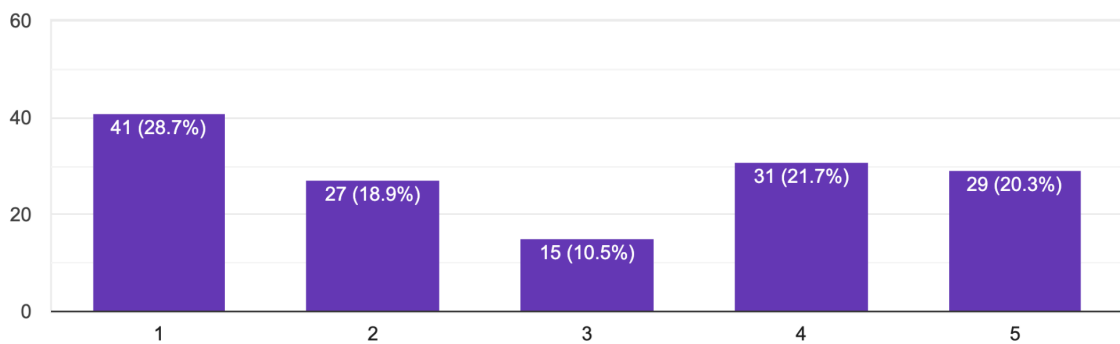
I am terrified about being overweight.

143 responses



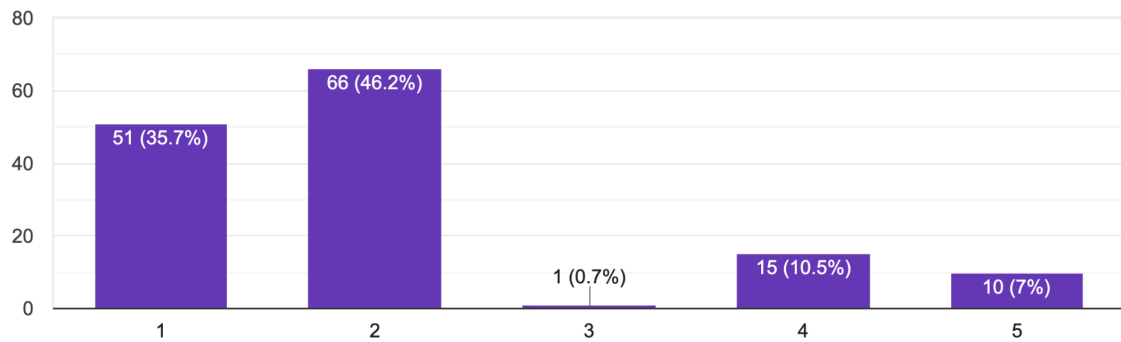
I avoid eating when I am hungry.

143 responses



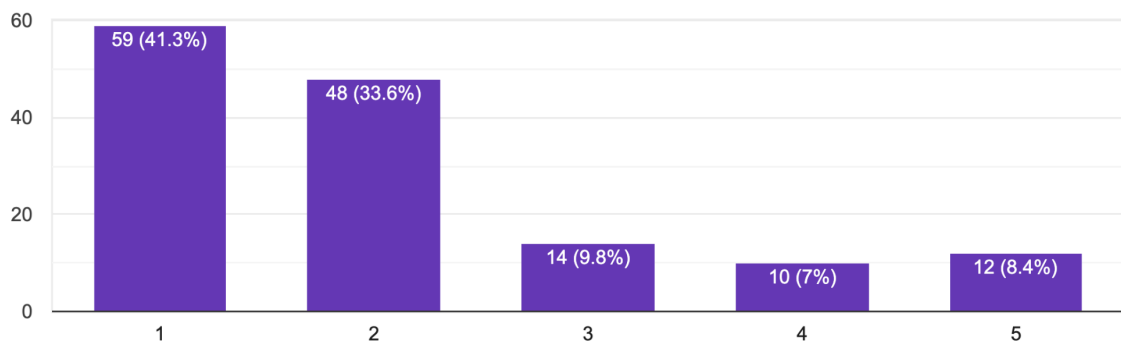
I find myself preoccupied with food.

143 responses



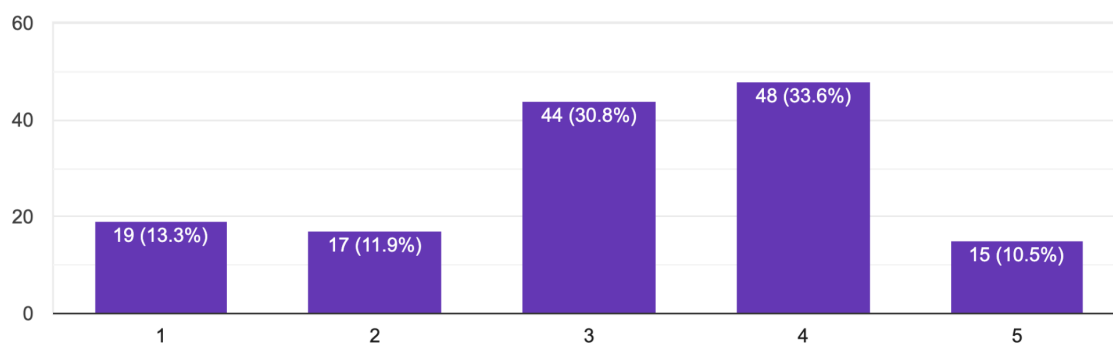
I have gone on eating binges where I feel that I may not be able to stop.

143 responses



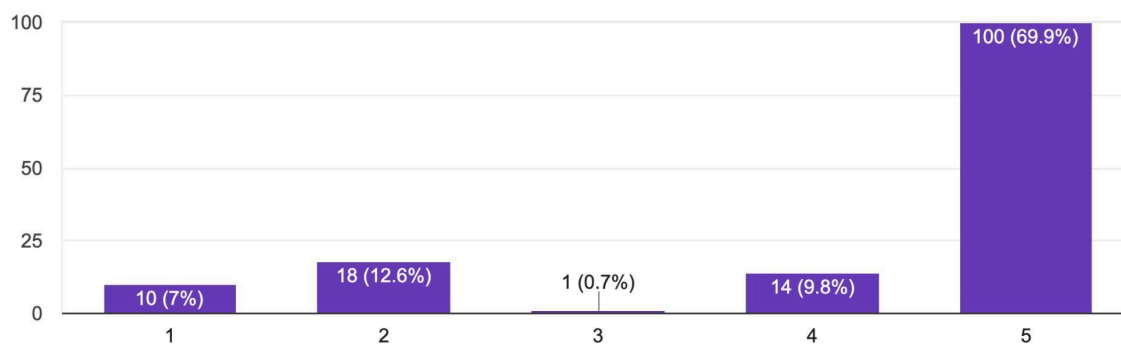
I cut my food into small pieces.

143 responses



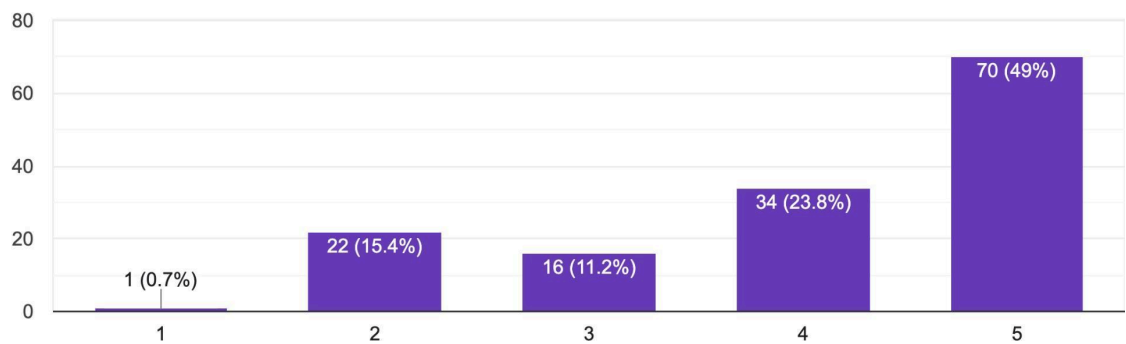
I am aware of the calorie content of foods that I eat.

143 responses



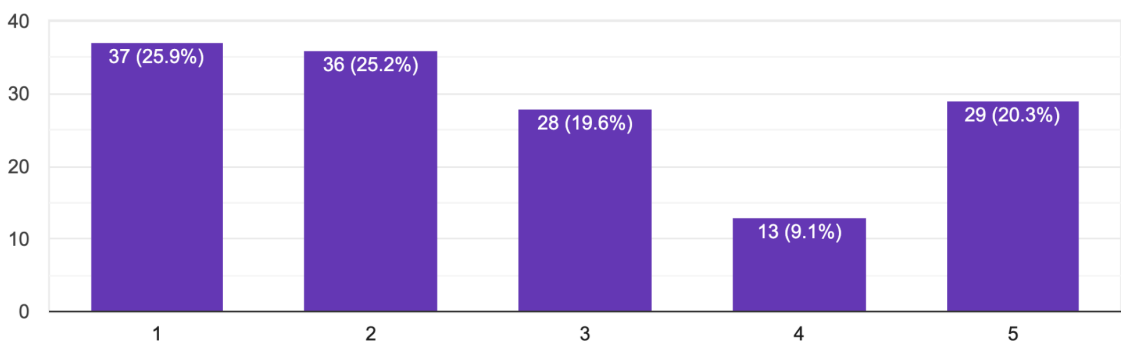
I particularly avoid food with a high carbohydrate content (i.e. bread, rice, potatoes, etc.)

143 responses



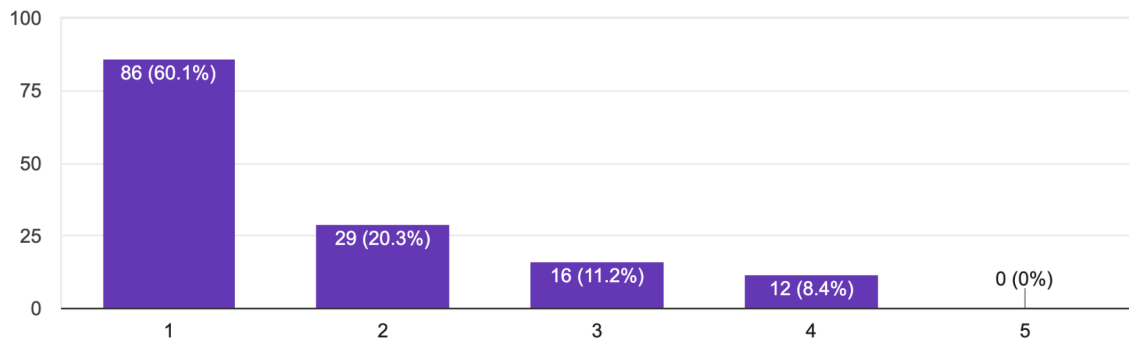
I feel that others would prefer if I ate more.

143 responses



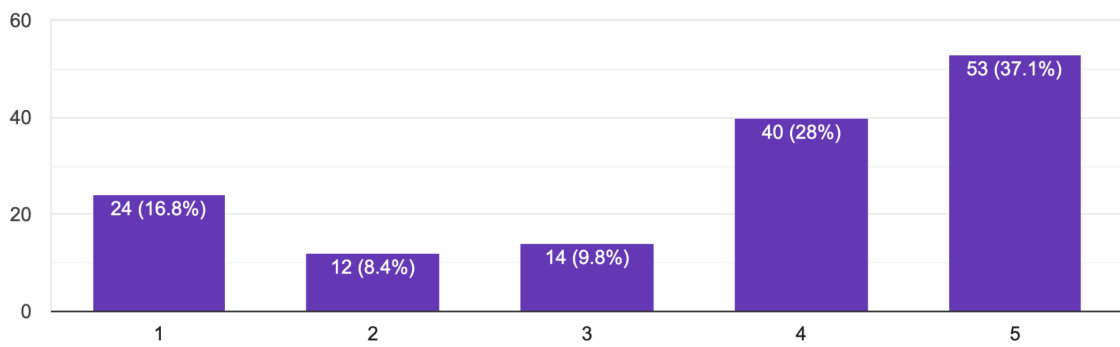
I vomit after I have eaten.

143 responses



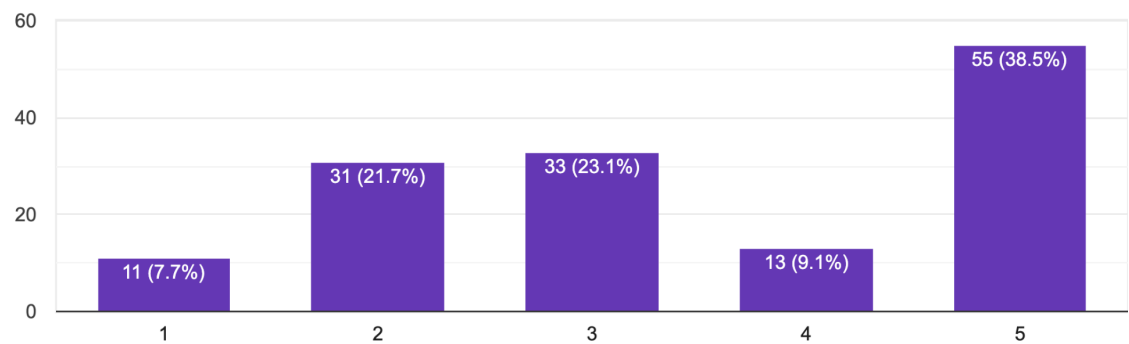
I feel extremely guilty after eating.

143 responses



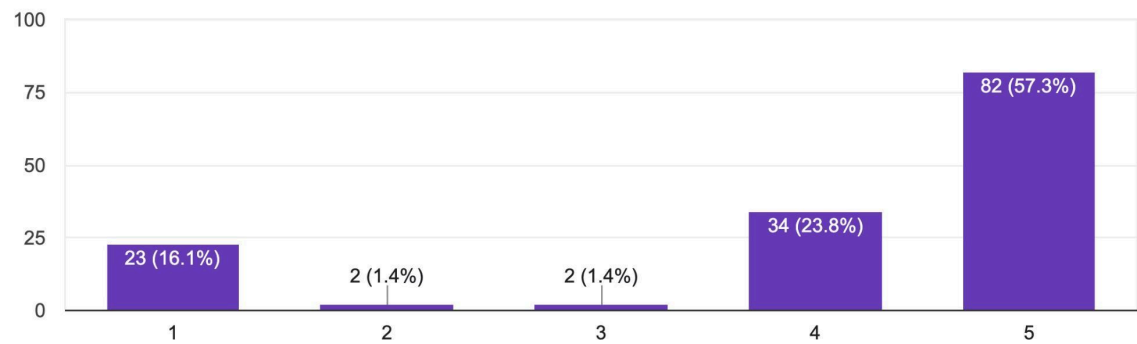
I am preoccupied with a desire to be thinner.

143 responses



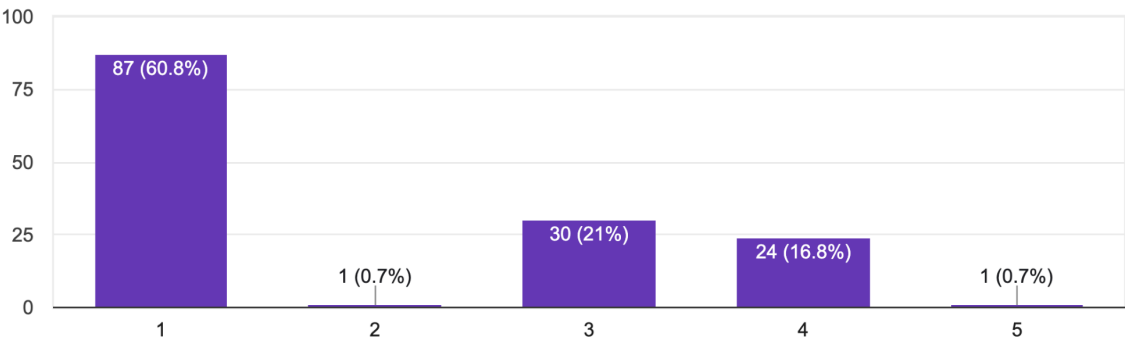
I think about burning up calories when I exercise.

143 responses



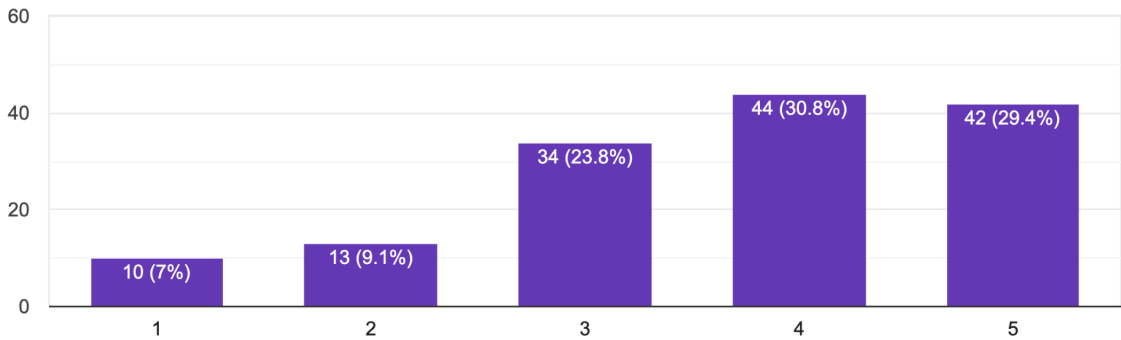
Other people think that I am too thin.

143 responses



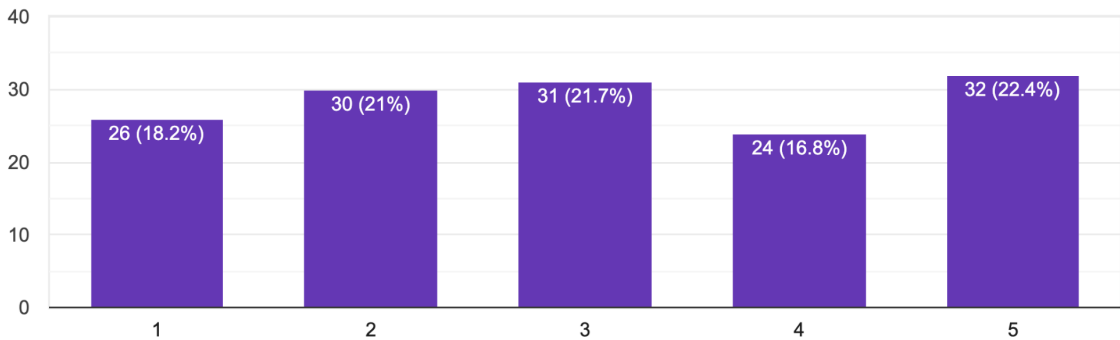
I am preoccupied with the thought of having fat on my body.

143 responses



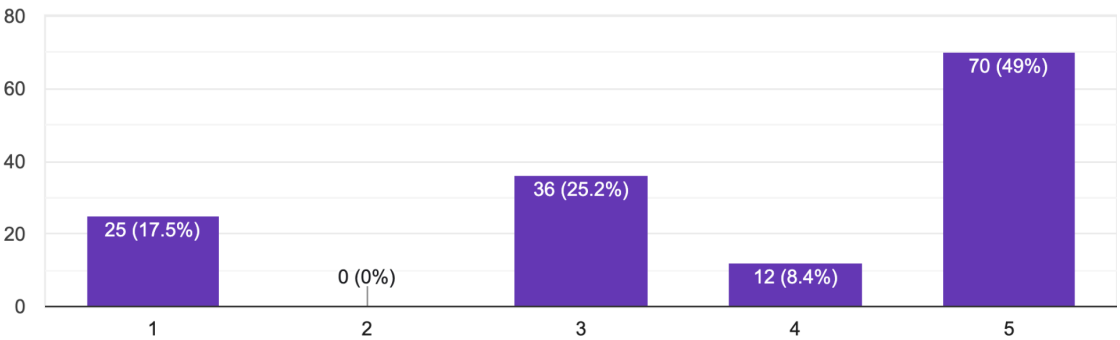
I take longer than others to eat my meals.

143 responses



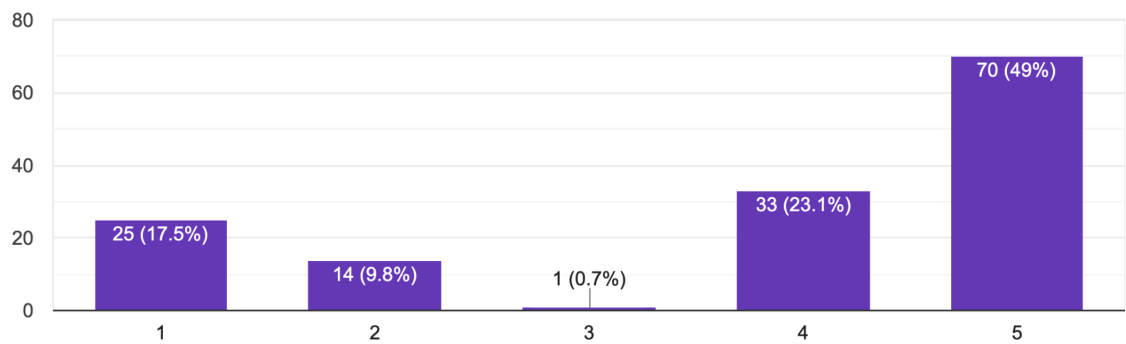
I avoid foods with sugar in them.

143 responses



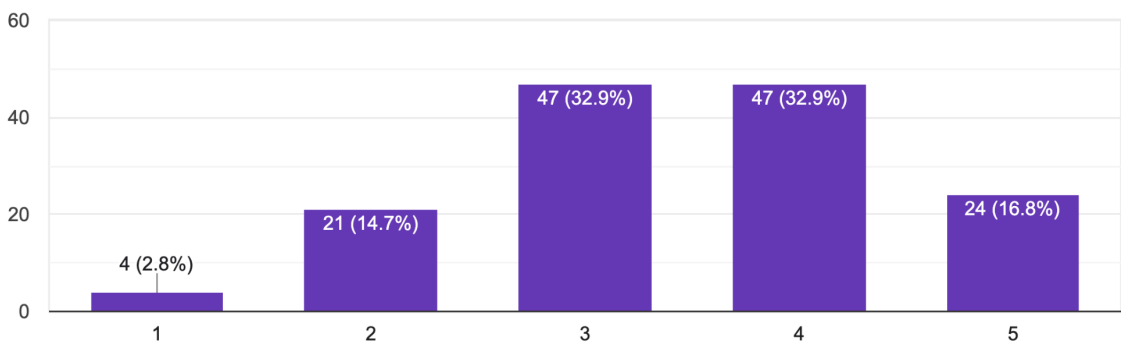
I eat diet foods.

143 responses



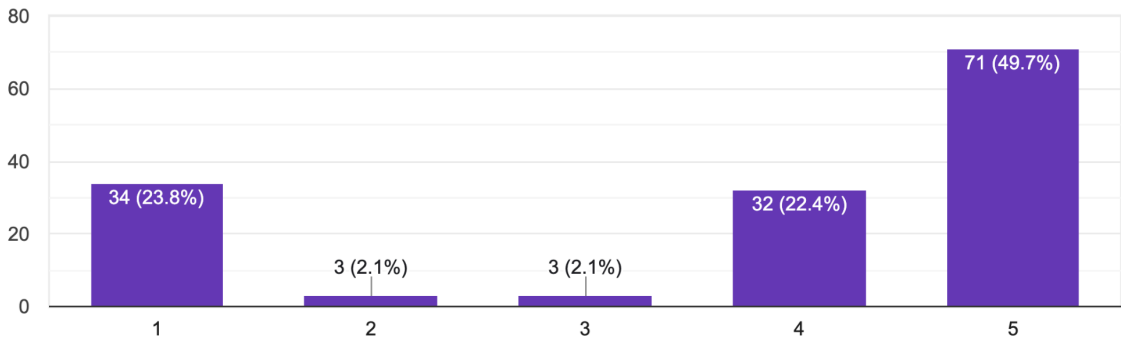
I feel that food controls my life.

143 responses



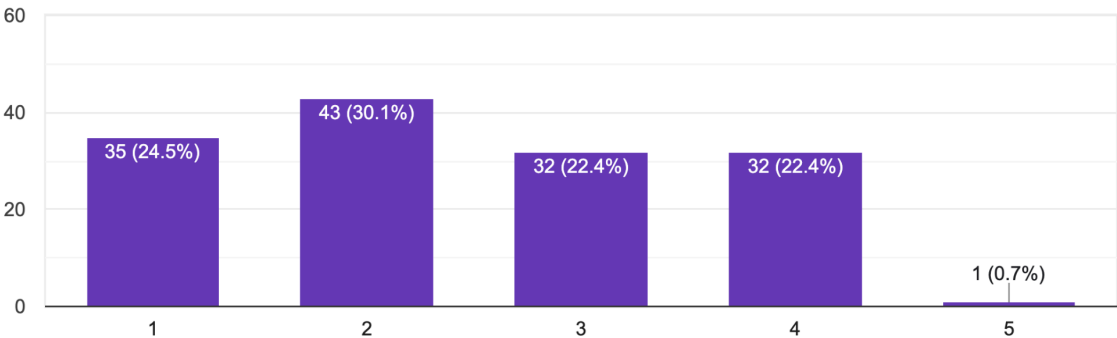
I display self-control around food.

143 responses



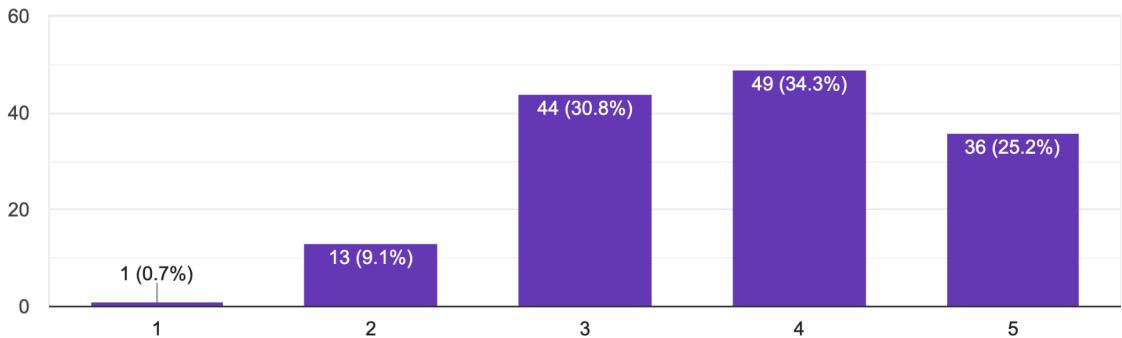
I feel that others pressure me to eat.

143 responses



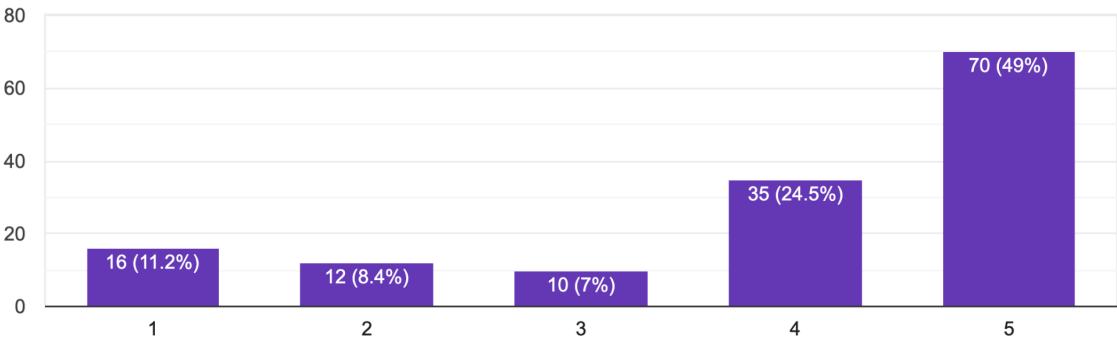
I give too much time and thought to food.

143 responses



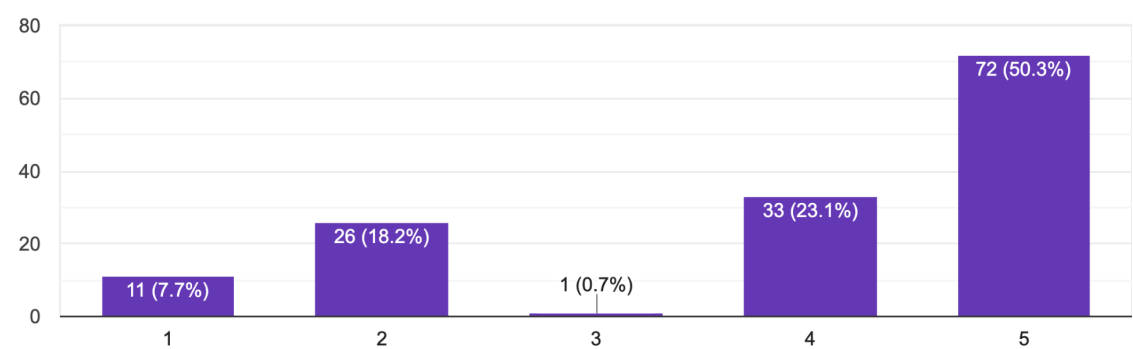
I feel uncomfortable after eating sweets.

143 responses



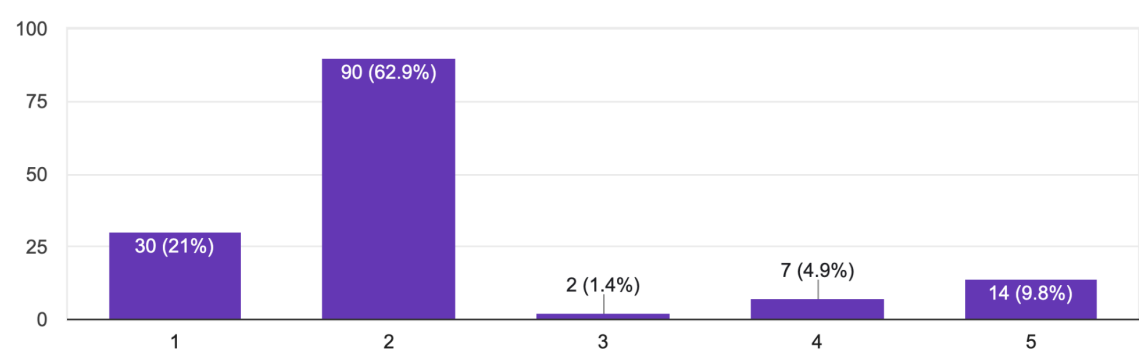
I engage in dieting behavior.

143 responses



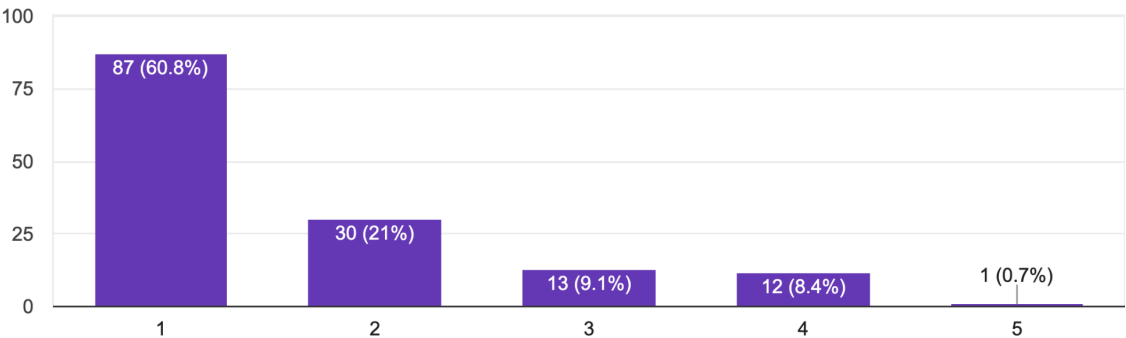
I like my stomach to be empty.

143 responses



I have the impulse to vomit after meals.

143 responses



I enjoy trying new rich foods.

143 responses

