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# Relationship between Social Media Engagement and Body Shaming among Malaysian Young Adults

Jasmine Wong Xin Lin, Shirly Anak Labent, Kong Lek Chin, & Siaw Leng Chan

Department of Social Science and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia Bintulu Sarawak Campus, Sarawak, Malaysia

Email: wongjasmine0914@gmail.com, shirlylabent2@gmail.com, kittykong0507@gmail.com

Corresponding Author Email address: chansiawleng@upm.edu.my

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**Abstract**

Body shaming is an unrepeated action in which a person expresses unsolicited, mostly negative opinions or comments about the target's body, which can occur in social media and the real world. The primary purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian young adults. This study utilized a cross-sectional survey method. 193 respondents participated in this study and were selected through inclusion and exclusion criteria by purposive sampling. The data were collected through two questionnaires: the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ) to operationalize social media engagement and two subscales of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OCBS), which is the Body Surveillance and Body Shame scale to measure the frequencies of respondents by monitoring their physical appearance. The finding demonstrated that the relationship between social media engagement and body surveillance showed a negative correlation relationship. The relationship between social media engagement and body shame obtained a positive correlation. Moreover, the relationship between body surveillance and body shame showed a positive relationship, and a significant gender difference was found in body shame. This study concluded that there is a relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian young adults. The implications and future recommendations are discussed.

**Keywords:** Body Shaming, Body Surveillance, Malaysia, Social Media Engagement, Young Adults

## Introduction

Over the last decade, Korea has emerged as a new center for producing transnational pop culture, bringing a phenomenon called "Hallyu" or Korean Wave (Dal, 2018). Korean Wave

primarily refers to Korean culture, which includes the language, dramas and films, food, music, and other artistic creations. K-pop, sometimes called Korean pop, is the most remarkable and influential genre (Jeno & Pasil, 2020). Over time, Malaysia also saw a rise in the popularity of the Korean Wave as Korean dramas airing on regional television networks like TV2, TV3, NTV 7, and Channel 8 when the Korean Wave finally reached Malaysia (Zaizakrani, 2021). Besides, local satellite television ASTRO Malaysia offers the KBS World Channel to satisfy viewers' cravings for Korean dramas, music, and reality shows (Ni, 2019). The success of Korean pop stars and actors has brought them riches, fame, and thousands of adoring fans. However, it also brings new ideas to the beauty industries and strict beauty standards for communities.

Korea is widely known for the most plastic surgery procedures per capita: 13.5 per 1,000 people (Lee, 2018). Zaizakrani (2021) stated that the Korean Wave portrays a more appealing "image of Asian modernization" through K-beauty, a component of K-pop's culture and a hybridized Asian alternative to Western globalization of popular culture. The popularity of a more petite body with more Western-style facial features, which embodies both Western and Asian modernity, can be attributed to K-beauty. For instance, K-pop idols have pushed a particular facial form with wide-set eyes, a high nasal bridge, and white skin, as well as a jawline that is shaped like a "V." These Korean idols also have fit bodies, and their followers pay even more attention to those who have abs. Therefore, it might cause young Malaysian adults to have the wrong perception of body image, which leads to dissatisfaction with physical appearance because celebrities are synonymously slim and attractive (Habibah et al., 2021).

Body shaming is an unrepeated action in which a person expresses unsolicited, mostly negative opinions or comments about the target's body, which can occur in social media and the real world (Schlüter et al., 2021). It is a situation where an individual thinks that he or she is unusual, and most people look suitable and acceptable and thus are recognized as community members. Body shaming has been categorized into four types, which are fat shaming, thin, hair shaming, and tone shaming (Fauzia et al., 2019). The most common kind of body shaming is making offensive remarks about individuals who are fat or plus-large. Girls or women with thin bodies or underweight are frequently the targets of thin shaming. Skin shaming may also apply to those with hairy bodies or dark skin tones.

Social media refers to 'the websites and online tools that facilitate interactions between users by providing them opportunities to share information, opinions, and interests' (Swar & Hameed, 2017). According to Chaitanya (2020), there are five types of social media: social networking, photo sharing, video sharing, interactive media, and blogging or community building. They allow user engagement, such as liking, commenting, post sharing, and story posting. For instance, Instagram users in 2020 shared 500 million stories daily, nearly three times compared with 2018 (Tankovska, 2021). From the era of carrier pigeon until the rise of social media such as MSN, Friendster, and Skype, that made communications more effective and connected people with each other. The development of social media had reached its peak: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and other popular social media platforms were launched. It allows the exchange of information and ideas in virtual communities and networks in a more effective and time-consuming way. They are primarily viral among young adults as most respondents aged 15 to 25 years, with an average age of 21, possess two or more two technological gadgets, according to a study (Devi et al., 2019).

Undeniably, social media was the greatest invention in this modernized era, along with the development of gadgets such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets. However, social media

cultivates the risk of becoming the platform that spreads negative body images, possibly leading to body shaming.

Social media and its user engagement also found a link. According to Jiotsa et al (2021), social media has overexposed individuals to ideals of thinness, starting early and lasting over the last 30 years. This situation has changed this idea into a new benchmark. Young women, who are particularly susceptible to thinness standards, frequently equate them with success and attractiveness. Besides, young adults were found to spend six to eight hours daily on screens, with most of the time spent on social media. Users can be exposed to hundreds or thousands of images and photos, including celebrities, fashion, or fitness models. As a result, this internalization of unreachable beauty ideals may increase dissatisfaction with body size and shape or any physical characteristics, leading to body shaming.

An age of disruption has begun because of digitalization. Social media is a movement of developing technologies that revolutionize the global community. It is not new for people, as it started with Friendster, and it allows people to interact and socialize with their old friends and make new ones from around the world (Ulunma, 2020). The modernization of gadgets enables the revolution of social media. The most popular social media usage includes Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, and Tumblr. However, the rise and usage of social media have also brought about the issue of body shaming. Social media enables information exchange more efficiently, and it causes people to be overexposed to inappropriate perceptions. (Jiotsa et al., 2021). For example, thinness ideals are exposed to them early, which might turn them into a new standard, especially for younger women who are the most susceptible to them. This is because they often relate it with success and attractiveness. Hence, people might discriminate when they do not fit into their perception of a standard self-body image.

The main objective of this research was to study the relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian young adults. Subsequently, the time individuals spend on social media platforms and gender differences in social media engagement, body surveillance, and body shame were also examined.

Hence, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian young adults?
2. Are there any differences by gender in social media engagement, body surveillance, and body shame?
3. What is the pattern of time individuals spend on social media platforms based on age, gender, and socioeconomic status?

## Methodology

*Research Design*

A quantitative research approach was utilized to collect the responses from respondents. A cross-sectional survey method was used. It was an example of observational study design. In a cross-sectional study, the outcome and exposure of the respondents were measured simultaneously. The participants in the cross-sectional study were chosen according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria established for the study. This study evaluated the exposure and outcomes once the respondents were selected for the study (Setia, 2016).

Purposive sampling was also used in this research. Malaysian young adults aged 18 to 40 were selected based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria set for the study, which was to study the relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian

young adults. According to Nikolopoulou (2022), purposive sampling was more available, feasible, and capable of selecting study participants who fit the research requirements. Therefore, the current study purposefully employed online and in-person survey methods to engage with its target participants.

*Sample and Data Collection*

The number of participants in the study was 193. The inclusion criteria of this research included (a) Malaysian aged 18 to 40 years old, (b) Does not have a severe mental illness, (c) Proficient in English with minimum PMR/PT3 level, whereas the exclusion criteria included (a) Non-Malaysian, (b) Malaysia aged below 18 years old and above 40 years old, (c) Individual who have severe mental health issues, (d) Illiterate in English which is below PMR/PT3 level and (e) Individual who does not engage in the social media use. Table 1.0 shows the demographic of the respondents.

Before data collection, ethical approval was applied and obtained. Then, the poster regarding the research and the quick response code (QR code) of the questionnaire was created and shared among the young adults through blasting on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, or Instagram to call for the respondents from East and West Malaysia who fulfilled the qualifications to complete to the questionnaire. This study chose a questionnaire as the instrument as it provides a relatively cost-less, quick, and efficient way of obtaining a large amount of information from a large sample of people. The questionnaire provided significant time, cost, and effort savings benefits. The responses were received spontaneously without a personal visit or a lengthy study extension. Besides, the questionnaire method puts less pressure on the respondents as they can be answered anonymously. As a result, they were more confident and at ease when giving a particular view or opinion, as no one could identify them.

*Research Instruments*

The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire. For the respondents' background information, such as gender, age, ethnicity, education level, and marital status, the demographic questions were established in the survey. The social media engagement among young adults was collected and operationalized through the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ) developed by (Przybylski et al., 2013). The SMEQ scale consists of five items (e.g., "How often do you use social media in the 15 minutes before you go to sleep?" and "How often do you use social media after you wake up?). The scale with six response choices ranging from 'not one day,' indicated by 0, to 'every day,' indicated by 7. The individual scores can be computed by summing responses to all five items and forming a reliable composite measure ($\alpha$ = .82 to .89).

Body shaming was measured using the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OCBS) subscales: the Body Surveillance and Body Shame scale. The Body Surveillance subscale comprised eight items (e.g., I rarely think about how I look). This helped to measure the frequencies of respondents by monitoring their physical appearance. Items were rated on a seven-point Likert Scale, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 7 representing "strongly agree." The present study's scale shows acceptable reliability and validity, $\alpha$ = 0.76 (Jackson et al., 2015).

The Body Shame subscale consists of eight items, and it helped to measure the extent to which individuals experience body shame when they believe their appearance falls short of societal norms. The items were also rated on a seven-point Likert Scale from 1 (strongly

disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Based on the present research of Jackson et al. (2015), six of the eight items on the Body Shame subscale were loaded on one component, and there were significant correlations with body surveillance, eating disorders, and perceived media pressure for appearance. α = 0.80 in the present study.

Table 1.0
*Respondents' Demographic Profile*

| Variables | | N | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 41 | 21.2 |
| | Female | 152 | 78.8 |
| **Age** | 18 - 21 years old | 49 | 25.4 |
| | 22 - 25 years old | 99 | 51.3 |
| | 26 - 29 years old | 25 | 13.0 |
| | 30 - 33 years old | 13 | 6.7 |
| | 34 - 37 years old | 4 | 2.1 |
| | 38 - 40 years old | 3 | 1.6 |
| **Ethnicity** | Malay | 27 | 14.0 |
| | Chinese | 113 | 58.5 |
| | Indian | 14 | 7.3 |
| | Bumiputera Sarawak | 33 | 17.1 |
| | Bumiputera Sabah | 5 | 2.6 |
| | Bumiputera Semenanjung | 1 | 0.5 |
| **Location** | East Malaysia | 110 | 57.0 |
| | West Malaysia | 83 | 43.0 |
| **Religion** | Muslim | 28 | 14.5 |
| | Hinduism | 10 | 5.2 |
| | Christianity | 90 | 46.6 |
| | Buddhism | 63 | 32.6 |
| | Bahai | 2 | 1.0 |
| **Marital Status** | Single | 168 | 87.0 |
| | Partnered / Married | 23 | 11.9 |
| | Separated / Divorced | 1 | 0.5 |
| | Widowed | 1 | 0.5 |
| **Education background** | Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) / Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3) | 2 | 1.0 |
| | Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) | 8 | 4.1 |
| | Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) | 5 | 2.6 |
| | Diploma / Matriculation / Foundation | 23 | 11.9 |
| | Bachelor's Degree | 145 | 75.1 |
| | Masters's Degree | 6 | 3.1 |
| | Doctorate Degree | 4 | 2.1 |
| **Employment status** | Full time | 56 | 29.0 |
| | Part time | 7 | 32.6 |
| | Disabled (not able to work) | 2 | 1.0 |
| | Students | 128 | 66.3 |

*Note : (N=193)*

*Data analysis*

After the data collection, data cleaning was carried out to check for errors. All data was found valid and can be used. It was analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 23.0. The research used two types of analysis to process the data collected. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to analyze social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian young adults. This method helped to answer the main research question. The descriptive analysis will be used to analyze the profile of the respondents.

**Findings**

*Demographics of the respondents*

Majority of the respondents—152 out of 154 were female, with the remaining responses being male. Only three respondents, or 1.6% of the total, were between the ages of 38 and 40, while 99 respondents, or those between the ages of 22 and 25, topped the chart. In terms of ethnicity, there were 113 Chinese respondents, followed by Bumiputera Sarawak (n=33), Malay (n=27), Indian (n=14), and Bumiputera Sabah (n=5). There was just one Bumiputera Semenanjung respondent out of these groups. In addition, 110 of the respondents were from West Malaysia, while 83 were from East Malaysia. The bulk of the respondents were Christians, with only two being Bahai.

Regarding marital status, the percentages for 168 respondents who were single and 23 respondents who were coupled or married are 87% and 11.9%, respectively. 145 respondents held a bachelor's degree, while just two graduated from Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3 (PT3) or Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR). The majority of the respondents were students (n=128), full-time (n=56), part-time (n=7), and disabled or not able to work (n=2) (refer to Table 1.0).

*The pattern of the amount of time individuals spend on social media platforms based on - Gender, Age, Marital Status, Education Background, and Employment Status*

Regarding gender, there were more female respondents (N=152) than male respondents (N=41). The mean amount of time female respondents spent on social media was less than male respondents. The average engagement point was 24.61, with a standard deviation of about 9.40. The maximum point collected for social media engagement for male respondents was 35, while the minimum point gained was 5. For female respondents, the maximum point gained was 35, while 0 points were obtained for the minimum points (refer to Table 2.0).

Table 2.0

*Amount of Time Individuals Spend on Social Media Platforms by Gender*

| Social Media Engagement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
| Male | 25.3415 | 41 | 8.61571 | 5.00 | 35.00 |
| Female | 24.4079 | 152 | 9.59329 | .00 | 35.00 |
| Total | 24.6062 | 193 | 9.38030 | .00 | 35.00 |

*Note : (N=193)*

From the age perspective, most respondents were 22 to 25 years old (N=99), with the highest mean of 26.62 points. Only three respondents aged 38 to 40 obtained a mean of 17.67 with a standard deviation 10.56. The average engagement point was 24.61, with a standard

deviation of about 9.40. The maximum scoring of social media engagement for all categories of respondents was 35 points, except for respondents aged 38 to 40, as the maximum point obtained was 22. However, only respondents aged 30 to 33 obtained zero engagement scoring points for minimum and 35 points for maximum (refer to Table 3.0).

Table 3.0
*Amount of Time Individuals Spend on Social Media Platforms by Age*

| Social Media Engagement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Age** | **Mean** | **N** | **Std. Deviation** | **Minimum** | **Maximum** |
| 18 - 21 years old | 24.2653 | 49 | 9.99745 | 5.00 | 35.00 |
| 22 - 25 years old | 26.6162 | 99 | 8.57465 | 2.00 | 35.00 |
| 26 - 29 years old | 20.6800 | 25 | 9.15478 | 4.00 | 35.00 |
| 30 - 33 years old | 20.3846 | 13 | 10.55571 | .00 | 35.00 |
| 34 - 37 years old | 22.5000 | 4 | 9.46925 | 12.00 | 35.00 |
| 38 - 40 years old | 17.6667 | 3 | 6.65833 | 10.00 | 22.00 |
| Total | 24.6062 | 193 | 9.38030 | .00 | 35.00 |

*Note : (N=193)*

Most of the respondents (N=168) were single, and the minimum scoring for social media engagement was two points, while the maximum scoring was 35 points with a mean of 25.11. The maximum points collected for social media engagement for all categories of respondents was 35 points, except for respondents who are separated or divorced (N=1) and widowed (N=1), as the maximum scoring points obtained were 17 points and five points. In comparison, the minimum points were 17 points and 5 points, respectively. The mean for these two categories was 17.00 and 5.00. The average engagement point was 24.61, with a standard deviation of about 9.40 (refer to Table 4.0).

Table 4.0
*Amount of Time Individuals Spend on Social Media Platforms by Marital Status*

| Social Media Engagement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Marital Status** | **Mean** | **N** | **Std. Deviation** | **Minimum** | **Maximum** |
| Single | 25.1071 | 168 | 9.24454 | 2.00 | 35.00 |
| Partnered / Married | 22.1304 | 23 | 9.52654 | .00 | 35.00 |
| Separated / Divorced | 17.0000 | 1 | . | 17.00 | 17.00 |
| Widowed | 5.0000 | 1 | . | 5.00 | 5.00 |
| Total | 24.6062 | 193 | 9.38030 | .00 | 35.00 |

*Note : (N=193)*

Respondents who graduated with a Bachelor's Degree (N=145) scored zero points for their minimum scoring on social media engagement and 35 points for the maximum scoring, with a mean of 25.03 points of engagement. Only two respondents graduated from Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) or Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) with a mean of 21.50 points, minimum engagement scoring of ten points, and three points for maximum scoring. The highest average mean was obtained from the Master's Degree respondents, which is 28.1

points, while the lowest was from Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) respondents (refer to Table 5.0).

Table 5.0
*Amount of Time Individuals Spend on Social Media Platforms by Education Background*

| Social Media Engagement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Education background** | **Mean** | **N** | **Std. Deviation** | **Minimum** | **Maximum** |
| Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) / Pentaksiran Tingkatan Tiga (PT3) | 21.5000 | 2 | 16.26346 | 10.00 | 33.00 |
| Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) | 17.7500 | 8 | 8.76275 | 5.00 | 30.00 |
| Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) | 15.6000 | 5 | 5.41295 | 10.00 | 24.00 |
| Diploma / Matriculation / Foundation | 26.2174 | 23 | 9.73726 | 2.00 | 35.00 |
| Bachelor's Degree | 25.0276 | 145 | 9.16359 | .00 | 35.00 |
| Master's Degree | 28.1667 | 6 | 8.15884 | 17.00 | 35.00 |
| Doctorate Degree | 21.2500 | 4 | 12.33896 | 5.00 | 35.00 |
| Total | 24.6062 | 193 | 9.38030 | .00 | 35.00 |

*Note : (N=193)*

For employment status, most respondents were students (N=128), with an average mean of 25.23 points and a standard deviation of 9.38 points. The minimum scoring of social media engagement in this category was zero points, and 35 points for maximum scoring. There were only two respondents who were disabled (not able to work) who took part in this research, and they obtained an average mean of 7.50 points with a standard deviation of 3.54. The minimum scoring of social media engagement in this category was five points, and ten points for maximum scoring. The average mean of part-timer respondents (N=7) was reported as the highest, at 27.43 points, while the lowest average mean was for disabled respondents (N=2), at 7.50 (refer to Table 6.0).

Table 6.0
*Amount of Time Individuals Spend on Social Media Platforms by Employment Status*

| Social Media Engagement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Employment Status** | **Mean** | **N** | **Std. Deviation** | **Minimum** | **Maximum** |
| Full time | 23.4286 | 56 | 9.15097 | 4.00 | 35.00 |
| Part time | 27.4286 | 7 | 7.27684 | 15.00 | 35.00 |
| Disabled (not able to work) | 7.5000 | 2 | 3.53553 | 5.00 | 10.00 |
| Students | 25.2344 | 128 | 9.38627 | .00 | 35.00 |
| Total | 24.6062 | 193 | 9.38030 | .00 | 35.00 |

*Note : (N=193)*

In short, the results indicated that the pattern of the amount of time spent on social media platforms varies significantly across different demographic groups and is influenced by factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, which includes marital status, educational background, and employment status.

*Difference of Gender on Social Media Engagement, Body Surveillance and Body Shame*

The independent-sample T-test was used to compare the mean across two categories of people or conditions. In this research, the Independent-Samples T-test was employed to compare the mean scores of two male and female groups in social media engagement, body surveillance, and body shame.

For the social media engagement, the Equal variances assumed were used due to the Sig. Value for Levene's test is greater than 0.05, according to the results obtained. The results showed there is no significant difference between the two groups for males (M = 25.34, SD = 8.62) and females (M = 24.41; t (191) = 0.56, p = 0.573, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.93, 95% CI: -2.33 to 4.20) was very small (eta squared = 0.001). This indicated that only 0.1 percent of the variance in social media engagement is explained by gender. The T-test results for the gender difference in social media engagement are presented in Table 7.0.

Table 7.0
*Difference of Gender in Social Media Engagement*

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| **Social Media Engagement** | **Equal variances assumed** | 1.959 | .163 | .565 | 191 | .573 | .933 | 1.65369 | -2.328 | 4.195 |
| | **Equal variances not assumed** | | | .601 | 69.18 | .550 | .933 | 1.55434 | -2.167 | 4.034 |

*Note : (N=193)*

For the body surveillance, the equal variances assumed were used due to the Sig. Value for Levene's test is greater than 0.05, according to the results obtained. The results showed there is no significant difference between the two groups for males (M = 29.41, SD = 6.43) and females (M = 30.22; t (152) = -0.61, p = 0.541, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.80, 95% CI: -3.38 to 1.77) was very small (eta squared = -0.003). This indicated that only 0.3 percent of the variance in body surveillance is explained by gender. The T-test results for the gender difference in social media engagement are presented in Table 8.0.

Table 8.0
*Difference of Gender in Body Surveillance*

| Independent Samples Test | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Body Surveillance Scale | Equal variances assumed | 2.244 | .136 | -.613 | 191 | .541 | -.802 | 1.308 | -3.384 | 1.779 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -.679 | 73.882 | .499 | -.802 | 1.181 | -3.156 | 1.551 |

*Note : (N=193)*

For the body shame, the equal variances assumed were used due to the Sig. Value for Levene's test is lower than 0.05, according to the results obtained, which is 0.002. Hence, equal variances were not assumed were used because the variances for both males and females are not the same. The results showed there was a significant difference between the two groups for males (M = 29.41, SD = 5.42) and females (M = 31.13; t (152) = 0.09, p = 0.928, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.12, 95% CI: -1.99 to 2.24) was moderate (eta squared = -0.005). This indicated that five-tenths percent of the variance in body shame was explained by gender. The T-test results for the difference of gender in body shame are presented in Table 9.0.

Table 9.0
*Difference of Gender in Body Shame*

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| **Body Shame Scale** | **Equal variances assumed** | 9.400 | .002 | .090 | 191 | .928 | .118 | 1.322 | -2.489 | 2.726 |
| | **Equal variances not assumed** | | | .112 | 92.038 | .911 | .118 | 1.065 | -1.997 | 2.235 |

*Note : (N=193)*

*Relationship Between Social Media and Body Shaming Among Malaysian Young Adults*

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to analyze the relationship between social media and body shaming among Malaysian young adults. This method also helped to answer the main research question.

The social media engagement and body surveillance variables obtained -0.207 and showed a strong negative correlation relationship ($r$ = -.207, $p$ = .004). This indicated that when social media engagement increases, the application of body surveillance may decrease and vice versa. The relationship between social media engagement and body shame variables was a weak positive correlation of 0.107 ($r$ = -.107, $p$ = .138). It indicated that increased social media engagement might cause a few increases in body shame or vice versa.

The result for the relationship between body surveillance and body shame variables was 0.200 ($r$ = .200, $p$ = .005), and it showed a weak positive relationship (refer to Table 10.0). It indicated that increases in body surveillance might also cause increases in body shame or vice versa. In summary, there was a relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian young adults.

Table 10.0
*Relationship between Social Media Engagement and Body Shaming among Malaysian Young Adults*

| | | Social Media Engagement | Body Surveillance Scale | Body Shame Scale |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Social Media Engagement** | **Pearson Correlation** | 1 | -.207** | .107 |
| | **Sig. (2-tailed)** | | .004 | .138 |
| | **N** | 193 | 193 | 193 |
| **Body Surveillance Scale** | **Pearson Correlation** | -.207** | 1 | .200** |
| | **Sig. (2-tailed)** | .004 | | .005 |
| | **N** | 193 | 193 | 193 |
| **Body Shame Scale** | **Pearson Correlation** | .107 | .200** | 1 |
| | **Sig. (2-tailed)** | .138 | .005 | |
| | **N** | 193 | 193 | 193 |

*Note : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*
*(N=193)*

**Discussion**

*Relationship between Social Media Engagement and Body Shaming among Malaysian Young Adults*

This study examined 193 young Malaysian adults who had engaged in social media platforms to explore the relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian young adults. This research aims to identify the relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian young adults. According to the results obtained for this research, social media engagement and body surveillance showed a strong negative correlation relationship. It indicates that when social media engagement increases, the application of body surveillance may decrease and vice versa in this research. According to the data collected through the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ), the mode is 'seven,' which indicates that the majority of the respondents spent their time on social media every day 15 minutes before going to sleep, 15 minutes after waking up, eating breakfast, lunch, and supper.

However, the respondents gave positive feedback, which is 'Two,' 'Three,' and 'Four,' which indicates disagree, somewhat disagree, and neither disagree nor agree, respectively, to the reverse scoring items, which are negative statements in the Body Surveillance Scale and Body Shame Scale. Social media is trusted as one of the factors that widespread and popularize unreachable and unrealistic beauty ideals (Aparicio-Martinez et al., 2019). However, this statement was not applicable among the respondents in this research, particularly young Malaysian adults. Although they engage in social media frequently, they were not affected by social media towards their body surveillance. This might be caused by the positive content. For instance, Cohen et al (2019) discovered that female participants' body satisfaction rose when they browsed social media and were exposed to body positivity-focused Instagram posts. Instagram users who support a good body image for themselves, ranging from average weight to overweight, are included in body positivity content (Cohen et al., 2021). He pointed

out that most of the body positivity photos on Instagram are of women and that 94% of the content features average to overweight bodies with quotes supporting body acceptance and the idea that beauty exists regardless of physical attributes.

This situation was related to the Social Identity Theory as the female respondents in this research might be affected by the body positivity content on social media, and their self-esteem might be boosted. As a result, their acceptability towards body surveillance might also be boosted, and eventually, a circle of concern for body positivity will be created. Harwood (2020) defined social identification as people categorizing themselves into some of those same groups. They will gain a sense of belonging from that group membership once they "belong" to a group. This stage can be linked to social media as Chan (2017) indicates that the process also occurs in the digital world, although frequently in new, sophisticated, or exaggerated ways. The internet platform provides a massively increased ability to find content that supports social identities. In short, body surveillance might decrease when social media engagement among Malaysian young adults increases.

The relationship between body surveillance and body shame variables shows a weak positive relationship. Although most of the respondents' body surveillance in this research was not affected by social media, the rest of them might still suffer and eventually experience body shame. Fredrickson & Roberts (1997); Pila et al (2021) indicated that increased body shame and anxiety can result from constant body surveillance, as it makes people more likely to notice or imagine appearance flaws. (Frederick et al., 2007). Besides, people live in a society where others may judge, scrutinize, and even objectify them based on their appearance (Deville et al., 2015). This will lead to self-objectification, or the act of considering one's body as an object or a sight to be enjoyed by others, as girls and women internalize the viewing of one's opinions towards them and eventually adopt these viewpoints as their own. Self-objectification is characterized by an ongoing, compulsive examination of one's physical appearance, and it is frequently operationalized as self-surveillance of the body. This may lead to a preference for outward appearance over internal states of their body, such as hunger (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Steer & Tiggemann, 2008). Internalized body shame is believed to result from adverse effects associated with frequent body monitoring.

In addition, Hendrickse et al (2017); Sherlock & Wagstaff (2018) also indicated a connection between the use of appearance-based social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to an individual's physical appearance anxiety, and dissatisfaction with their body, depressive symptoms, and drive for thinness. The results also relate to the theory used to examine the respondents in this research. Most respondents agree, "During the day, I think about how I look many times." The Body Surveillance Scale indicated that the respondents might constantly monitor their body image. The current results are in line with the study by Boursier & Gioia (2022); Shen et al (2022), which pointed out that media exposure to desirable body shapes (ideal self) negatively impacts one's body image. Thompson and Stice (2001) highlighted that people might develop beauty standards based on the media's perceptions of bodies. People monitor their physical appearance to meet internalized body ideals. (Moradi and Huang, 2008; Moradi, 2010). Hence, this situation can be related to Self-Discrepancy Theory. This theory was developed by Edward Tory Higgins in 1987 and stated that the two other domains of self that can influence and inspire are self-guides. The 'ideal' self refers to the characteristics the individual wants to strive for or aspire to have. The 'ought' self reflects the attributes the individual believes he or she has an obligation or duty to possess. Social media users may internalize the body ideals they believe are pervasive in society and mass media. When they cannot fulfill the frequently unattainable body ideals, this might result in

more body dissatisfaction, which might lead to body shaming. (Lavender et al., 2017; Vuong et al., 2021).

*The pattern of the amount of time individuals spend on social media platforms based on - Gender, Age, Marital Status, Education Background, and Employment Status*

This research also studied the pattern of how much time individuals spend on social media platforms on demographic factors. Different factors might influence the types of social media usage and engagement. From the perspective of age, the majority of the respondents, 51.30 percent, were aged 22 to 25 years old, followed by respondents aged 18 to 21 years old, and lastly, respondents aged 38 to 40 years old. This indicates that the amount of time spent on social media platforms is influenced by age. The Social Media Engagement Questionnaire did not indicate their social media type. The current results have been supported by past research whereby the Pew Research Center also indicated that most people in America between 18 and 29 report using Instagram or Snapchat, while over half claim they used TikTok in 2021. Those in the younger age group aged between 18 and 24 are more likely to report using Instagram (76%), Snapchat (75%), or TikTok (55%). However, Lin and Lachman's (2020) multilevel results demonstrated that age mitigated the association between daily social media use and harmful effects: younger individuals experienced higher adverse effects on days when they used social media more often, while elderly used social media more often, the adverse effects were less pronounced.

From the gender perspective, 78.76% of female and 21.24% of male respondents had spent time on social media platforms. However, this did not indicate that the time spent on social media platforms varies depending on gender. Similarly, the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire did not indicate their social media type and usage pattern. However, the results showed that the gender distribution of respondents showed that females tend to engage in social media more than males. The current results are horizontal with the past research, in which Volkovich et al (2014) reported that women outnumbered men for most social networking sites, except LinkedIn. Rousseau & Puttaraju (2014); Muscanell and Guadagno (2012) also emphasized that the male gender used social networking sites for networking, making new friends, seeking out potential dates, and playing games, while the female gender used them for relationship maintenance and posting public messages. As a result, this study suggests that females tend to body-shame others or be body-shamed by others. Haferkamp et al (2012) pointed out that females used social media to search for important information and compare themselves with other female users.

As for marital status, educational background, and employment status, the results showed that these factors influenced social media usage and engagement. For marital status, most respondents were single, followed by partnered and married, separated or divorced, and widowed. These results indicated that social media usage also varies across marital status. According to Lennon et al (2011), social media usage among married women increased, whereas married males are not even using these platforms. They represent the fastest-growing market sector on some social networking platforms. The research also shows that single males may use social media to find possible mates, while men find social media less useful after marriage. In addition, most of the respondents in this research are undergraduate students, and 145 were engaged in social media. These results aligned with Hruška and Maresova (2020), who reported that social media presence increases as education increases. This may be because more educated people desire more information, which they try to find on social media. Additionally, people with high household incomes and high levels of

education use social media more than the other groups with lower values (less household income or lower level of education.
Apart from students, 29% of respondents who were employed full-time and 3.62% part-time also reflected their engagement on social media platforms, which showed the variance. These results were found to align with those reported by Hruška & Maresova (2020), who pointed out that users' engagement was not limited to the three most well-known social media platforms, which are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for organization purposes. This demonstrated that the engagement of organizations on social networks is increasing.

*Difference of Gender on Social Media Engagement, Body Surveillance and Body Shame*
This research also compares gender with social media engagement, body surveillance, and body shame. For gender, the results showed there is no significant difference between the two groups of males and females in this research. This might be caused by the majority of the respondents often spending their time every day on social media 15 minutes before sleep, after waking up, eating breakfast, lunch, and supper, according to the results of the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ). The current results also align with those of Ogundele et al (2023), who showed that 90% of the respondents spent at least an hour on social media daily, which caused no significant gender difference. Besides, a study by Kamal et al (2022) also indicated no significant difference between social media engagement and gender.
This study also found no significant difference between males and females in body surveillance. This is because the majority of the male respondents were the same as the female respondents and might have been equally influenced by the experience of body surveillance. These results are supported by past research, which Teng et al (2019) also pointed out the same finding in their study. However, most of the studies argued that males were often more reserved when it came to their body negativity, either by delaying therapy longer than women or by seeking treatment less frequently out of embarrassment. However, women internalize body shame and body surveillance more if compared to males (Brennan et al., 2010).
Furthermore, compared to men, women reported internalizing media norms and body surveillance categories at higher degrees (Kim, 2014). For body shame, there was a significant difference between male respondents and female respondents. This is because different genders might have different expectations and standards of their body image. When they cannot fulfill the frequently unattainable body ideals, this might result in more body dissatisfaction, which might lead to body shame. (Lavender et al., 2017; Vuong et al., 2021). Men and women held each other to varied degrees of beauty standards. In general, a woman was considered beautiful if she was thin, tall, fair, and had long, straight hair, while a male was seen to be handsome if he had an athletic build, was tall, and had fair skin (Evelianti et al., 2020; Kenny & Nichols, 2017). The internalization of unreachable beauty ideals might increase dissatisfaction with body size, shape, or physical characteristics, leading to body shaming (Jiotsa et al., 2021).

**Implications of the Study**
This research has several implications. It assists in educating young adults about the negative consequences of body shaming and increases their awareness of their online presence. One of the factors contributing to social media's influence on body shaming is peer pressure. The other group members are expected to follow if others employ body shaming on social media.

This aligns with past research results showing that young adults will take extreme measures to fit in with their buddy groups and be accepted by their peers. (Mustafa et al., 2022).
This research also increases the awareness among parents, guardians, and educators about the relationship between social media and body shaming. This is because researchers found that a lack of awareness about the relationship between social media and body shaming can cause adverse effects on young adults. The current results are strongly supported by Zulkifli et al (2023), who indicated that young adults could assist in enhancing their confidence and body image if parents or educators have better awareness and understanding of body shaming.
In addition, this research advances the clinical field by raising awareness of professional healthcare agencies and practitioners by employing the most effective patient care strategies. The reason behind this is that the previous researcher discovered that these might potentially be the causes of patients being body shamed. This result is aligned with the recent research published by the American Psychological Association (2017), which observed that the physical health and mental well-being of individuals can be negatively impacted by medical discrimination based on people's size and by unfavorable stereotypes about obese people. Patients who ever experience discourteous treatment or medical fat shaming may experience a change in their behavior, putting them off seeking medical care or avoiding dealing with doctors due to depression.
Furthermore, this research enlightens lawmakers and policymakers to strict or develop rules and legislation to prohibit body shaming incidents from happening more frequently. Researchers found that body shaming also in Malaysia, especially in terms of body weight in social media. This follows a news report published by the New Straits Times in 2022, which noted that a small percentage of people know that body shaming in any form is illegal in Malaysia under Sections 14 of the Minor Offences Act 1955 and 509 of the Penal Code. A person found guilty under Section 14 of the Minor Offences Act faces a maximum punishment of RM100, while those found guilty under Section 509 of the Penal Code face a penalty of up to five years in prison. Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act penalizes those who publicly humiliate others for their body weight on social media. A conviction entails a maximum fine of RM50,000 or a maximum one-year prison sentence, or both.
To put it briefly, young adults stand to gain the most from this research since it helps them spread awareness about body shaming. Additionally, parents, guardians, and educators may benefit by increasing awareness of body shaming and developing effective strategies for guiding and encouraging their children who might be experiencing it. Finally, the government and medical fields might benefit by alerting them about body shaming issues and helping to design the most effective countermeasures.

**Limitations of the Study**

This research also has several limitations. In this research, the limitation is that the respondents who answer the questionnaire might not represent the section of the entire group. Some important sections of the group might not answer the questionnaire. For example, the questionnaire for this research gained most of the responses from university students. As a result, it cannot represent other respondents who are working. Educational backgrounds and employment statuses might have different definitions, perceptions, and experiences toward body shaming. Hence, this might affect the accuracy of this research's data collection and analysis.

Besides, lacking previous studies in the same field will also limit the research. This research found a few previous studies published by scholars and experts related to the relationship between social media engagement and body shaming, and the researcher does not have many years of experience writing scientific papers or completing studies. Therefore, challenges occur in the literature review that might support the researcher's perception.
Furthermore, the research's scope may be constrained by the definition of specific concepts. The independent variables were based on self-report. To quantify the variable "time spent using social media," participants were asked how frequently they typically spent on social media each day by the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ). While this question accurately gauges use time, it is unclear if users actively use a certain program over their logged-on session. Future research can more effectively analyze heavy and light users by asking about the number of messages sent or received daily.
Besides, the typical social media usage description offered a workable empirical explanation to investigate the research questions. However, it might not fully capture the intricate complexity of a person's usage habits. Individuals may utilize social media platforms (e.g., chat, upload photographs, audio, or video) daily. Developing instruments to capture the intricacy of social media and user behavior or engagement will benefit the researcher.

**Future Recommendations**

A few suggestions have been made to enhance this research. It is recommended that the sample size of this research be increased. This research found that the significant relationship between variables in this research is weak. According to a University of Southern California (n.d.) article, these results suggested that researchers may have trouble identifying meaningful relationships in the data if the sample size is small. This is because statistical tests typically call for a larger sample size to guarantee a representative population distribution and to be regarded as representative of the groups of people to whom the results will be generalized or transferred. Hence, other categories of respondents will also be able to participate in the questionnaire.
This research also suggested referring to a more detailed questionnaire or adding variables to the current questionnaire. This is because the Social Media Engagement Questionnaire (SMEQ) only focuses on quantifying the frequencies of respondents' time spent on social media. It does not indicate the types of social media engagement that are frequently employed by the respondents. By employing more variables, the researcher can identify the type of social media engagement that causes a relationship between body shaming and the effect of body shaming.
In addition, current research employing quantitative methods is suggested to turn into qualitative methods. According to Verhoef and Casebeer (1997), qualitative research was better suited for developing hypotheses and theories and describing processes like decision-making or communication, while quantitative research was well suited for establishing cause-and-effect relationships, testing hypotheses, and determining opinions, attitudes, and practices of a large population. While quantitative research delivers factual, accurate result data that can typically be generalized to some more significant populations, qualitative research creates rich, complex, and valid process data based on respondents' perspectives and interpretations rather than the researchers'. As a result, the researcher is encouraged to use qualitative methods to further study the relationship between social media engagement and body shaming in the future to gain more information from the respondents' perspectives.

In short, it is advised to follow the previously mentioned recommendations as it can aid in avoiding biases like attribution (the act of attributing positive events and outcomes to one's agency while attributing adverse events and outcomes to outside forces), exaggeration (the act of representing outcomes or embellishing events as more significant than is suggested from other data), and telescoping (the recalling of events that occurred at one time as if they occurred at another time).

## Conclusions

In conclusion, there is a relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among Malaysian young adults. This was supported by previous research, which indicated that media social media trust was the factor that widespread and popularized unreachable and unrealistic beauty ideals (Aparicio-Martinez et al., 2019). Besides, the American Psychological Association (2023) also noted that young people who spend an average of six to eight hours per day on social media might be exposed to hundreds or even thousands of images and photos daily, including those of celebrities and fashion or fitness models.

As is well known, this exposure to these images and photos can cause young people to internalize beauty ideals that are almost impossible for most people to achieve, increasing their dissatisfaction with their body weight and shape. Compared to peers who continued to use social media at the same levels, teens and young adults who cut their social media usage by 50% for just a few weeks have significantly improved their weight and general appearance. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the relationship between social media engagement and body shaming among young adults. By understanding this interconnection, this research can broaden the existing theoretical and contextual knowledge of body shaming from an Eastern country's perspective. Essentially, the current study will dig further by pinpointing the specific social media activities that have the most vital connection to the likelihood of body shaming in the future. This will raise awareness within the community and ultimately counteract this conduct.

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