



From Likes to Self-Likes: Social Support for Teenage Online Social Support and Body Image Among Adolescent TikTok Users in Indonesia

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Abstract

Background: The rapid growth of social media use, particularly TikTok, among adolescents has raised critical concerns about its impact on body image and psychological well-being.

Objective: This study aims to analyze the relationship between online social support and body image in adolescent TikTok users in Indonesia.

Methods: The study employed a quantitative approach using a survey method with 1,151 vocational school students aged 15–18 years who actively use TikTok. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants. The instruments included the *Multidimensional Body Self Relations Questionnaire-Appearance Scale (MBSRQ-AS)* and a social support scale designed for social networks.

Results: Data analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation, t-test, and ANOVA. The results revealed a significant positive relationship between online social support and body image ($r = 0.460$; $p < 0.01$). Additionally, significant differences in body image were observed based on gender, the presence of influencers as role models, duration of TikTok use, and primary sources of social support. Online social support demonstrated a contribution to enhancing adolescent body image, although other external factors also play a role.

Conclusion: These findings contribute to digital communication studies and provide evidence-based guidance for parents, educators, and policymakers to foster digital literacy and cultivate a body-positive online environment for adolescents.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial phase of development, characterized by the transition from childhood to adulthood, with significant changes in physical, psychological, and social aspects. During this time, adolescents experience rapid development across multiple dimensions, which not only affects how they perceive themselves but also how they interact with their social environment (Steinberg, 2017). These changes often pose challenges, especially in the formation of adolescent body image, due to pressures from the social environment and societal expectations regarding appearance.

In general, adolescent development can be grouped as follows (Ahyani & Astuti, 2018):

1. **Physical Changes:** During adolescence, there is an acceleration of physical growth, including

- increases in height, muscle development, and changes in the reproductive organs. These changes mark the onset of puberty and often influence adolescent confidence.
2. **Psychological Development:** Adolescents begin to experience improvements in abstract and logical thinking skills, as well as problem-solving abilities. They also start exploring their own identity and personal values.
 3. **Social Development:** Adolescents develop more complex relationships with peers and family members. They have a strong urge for independence, while simultaneously facing pressures from peer groups.
 4. **Emotional Development:** Adolescents often experience emotional instability due to physical, psychological, and social changes. They gradually learn to manage emotions, develop empathy, and reflect on ethical and moral issues. This emotional pressure can also affect their judgment of their physical appearance.

The rise of social media has significantly transformed how teenagers perceive various aspects of life, including social relationships, self-identity, education, and health. Social media is not merely a communication tool but also a primary platform for shaping social perceptions, including societal beauty standards. Teenagers' daily lives are deeply integrated with social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which are used for communication, information gathering, and entertainment. Internet penetration is highest among adolescents aged 15–19 years, reaching 91%, followed by 20–24 years at 88.5%, 25–29 years at 82.7%, 30–34 years at 76.5%, and 35–39 years at 68.5% (Ni'am Sholeh, 2020). According to the 2019 Common Sense Census survey, teenagers spend on average 7 hours and 22 minutes per day on gadgets for activities unrelated to school or homework, such as watching videos, playing games, engaging in social media, and browsing websites (Nesi et al., 2022). However, this high usage intensity increases the risk of social comparisons, which can negatively impact adolescent self-confidence.

In Indonesia, TikTok is the most downloaded social media application among teenagers, with approximately 92.2 million active users in 2023, making the country the second-largest TikTok market globally. Research indicates that Indonesian adolescent social media users frequently engage in appearance-based social comparisons, which are associated with increased body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem (Ramdhany & Hakim, 2024). Despite TikTok's prevalence among Indonesian adolescents, empirical studies examining the relationship between online social support and body image specifically on this platform remain scarce, representing a significant gap in the literature.

TikTok is highly popular among teenagers, offering short videos that combine entertainment and self-expression in a format appealing to users. Personalized content via TikTok's algorithm exposes adolescent users continuously to certain beauty standards, whether through videos, fashion, or lifestyle content. Adolescents frequently viewing such content may compare their bodies to the idealized images portrayed, leading to dissatisfaction with their own body image (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). This exposure has significant psychological effects on adolescent mental development, particularly regarding self-confidence and emotional well-being.

The concept of social support, as explored by Gao (2025) among college students, suggests that social support is not significantly related to body image. Conversely, Aristantya (2019) found a positive relationship between online social support and body image among high school adolescents using Instagram. These findings indicate that the influence of social media on adolescent body image varies depending on the platform and the nature of social interactions.

The inconsistency in prior findings regarding social support and body image, combined with the lack of research specifically targeting TikTok users among Indonesian vocational high school students with large sample sizes, underscores the need for this study. Unlike previous research focused on Instagram, this study uniquely examines online social support within TikTok's video-based, algorithm-driven environment, addressing a significant gap in the literature.

This study aims to examine the relationship between online social support and body image among adolescents. The results are expected to provide recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers to create a more supportive environment for adolescents facing challenges

posed by social media, while also contributing to communication studies in the digital era. This research represents an important step toward understanding how From Likes to Self-Likes: Social Support for Teenage Online Social Support and Body Image Among Adolescent TikTok Users in Indonesia shapes adolescents' social experiences, particularly concerning body image interpretation.

The problem formulations are: 1) What is the relationship between online social support and the body image of TikTok users. 2) Are there differences in body image based on gender among teenage TikTok users. 3) Is there a significant difference in body image based on the presence or absence of TikTok role models among adolescents. 4) Is there a significant difference in body image based on the duration of TikTok use among adolescents. 5) Who are the main social support providers with the greatest influence on adolescent body image.

Theoretical Framework

Body Image

Body image constitutes the evaluative stance that an individual holds toward their physical form, encompassing both affirmative and negative assessments (Andea, 2010). As posited by Melliana (2006), body image encompasses a person's subjective engagement with their corporeal self, a cognitive representation that integrates thoughts, perceptions, emotions, sentiments, imaginative constructs, evaluative judgments, physical sensations, awareness, and behaviors related to their appearance and physique. This construct is shaped by societal ideals of body image and emerges from a person's social interactions over time within their environment, evolving throughout the lifespan in response to environmental feedback.

Body image encompasses the perceptions, emotions, and cognitive evaluations an individual possesses regarding their own body, typically conceptualized through the synthesis of assessments of body size, evaluations of physical attractiveness, and emotional responses associated with body shape and dimensions (Grogan, 2006). An individual with a positive body image is often characterized by elevated self-esteem, adaptability, and a sense of confidence and ease in social interactions (Franchina & Lo Coco, 2018). Concern for body image can appear early and strengthen with age, especially during adolescence, potentially impacting efforts to control weight.

Social Media

With the development of the internet and technology, individuals increasingly use social media as a primary source of information about social norms and appearance standards (Cohen et al., 2019). For adolescents, having close relationships with peers and gaining recognition from them is important. Social media provides a platform to fulfill these developmental tasks, allowing adolescents to present themselves and express various characteristics related to identity formation (Michikyan & Suárez-Orozco, 2016).

Beyond passive interaction, active engagement on social media affects body image. According to Stevens (2020), image-centered platforms, such as Instagram, attract greater attention to body image than non-image-centered platforms. Fardouly (2018) further support that Instagram can significantly influence users' body image. Vendemia (2021) found that receiving appearance-related comments on uploaded selfies leads to higher self-objectification, and the more individuals objectify themselves, the more hesitant they feel to share selfies.

While Instagram is known for curated, aesthetic content, TikTok features raw, spontaneous, and entertaining content (Seekis & Lawrence, 2023). By expressing themselves through short videos, teenagers can access diverse content related to health, online commerce, education, and politics (Gao et al., 2023). TikTok offers features like likes, which provide positive feedback to creators and can enhance self-esteem (Scissors et al., 2016). Its algorithm curates content for the For You page based on user behavior (Omar & Dequan, 2020). Users are motivated to expand social networks, seek recognition, and express creativity.

In terms of body image, Gao (2023) note that content creators present their image to others, shaping impressions. Mink (2022) observed that TikTok influences users' appearance comparisons, which may stem from video-based media offering more realistic depictions

(Harriger et al., 2023).

Social Support

Many individuals use social media to obtain social support, helping manage stress and improve well-being (Gao et al., 2023). Social support is defined as verbal and nonverbal communication between the provider and recipient Albrecht (1987), fostering beliefs that social networks offer emotional and instrumental assistance, as well as information (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). This support conveys feelings of being loved, valued, and connected (Cobb, 1976).

Online, social support is manifested through likes and comments. The like button signals approval, support, and friendliness toward content creators große (2016), whereas comments indicate that a post warrants appreciation (Burke & Kraut, 2013). Positive comments strengthen perceived support and social relationships (Kim & Baker, 2022). The number of likes and comments serves as tangible evidence of online social support große (2016), consistent with Kim (2022), who emphasize that attention from others reinforces feelings of care and support.

Hypotheses

1. There is a significant positive relationship between body image and online social support in teenage TikTok users.
2. There is a significant difference in body image between teenage boys and girls who use TikTok.
3. Role models or influencers on TikTok significantly influence teenage body image.
4. Duration of TikTok use significantly affects adolescents' body image.
5. Primary social support providers (parents, friends, teachers, peers, social media friends) significantly influence adolescents' body image.

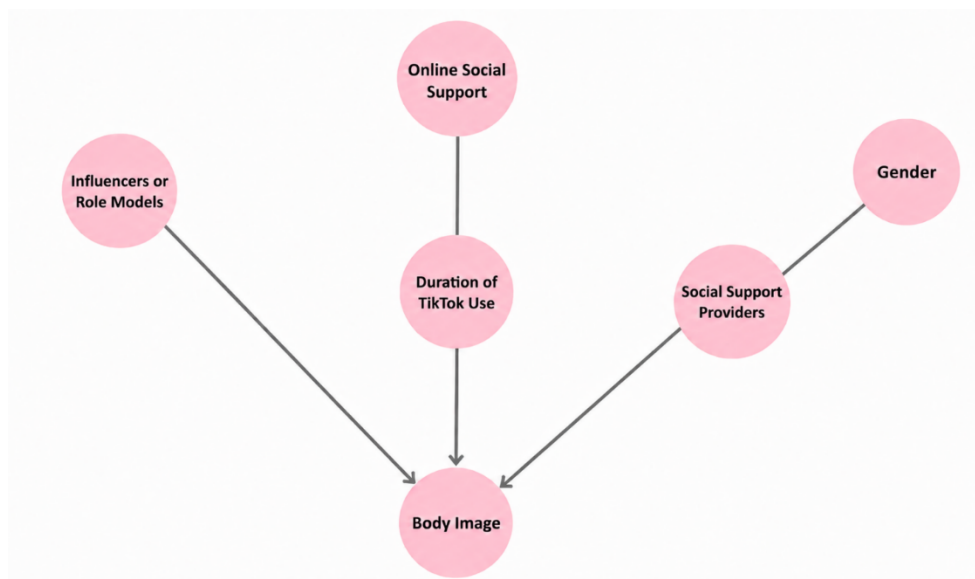


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

METHOD

Research Participants

The participants involved in this study were SMK students in grades X to XII, aged 15–18 years, domiciled in Indonesia, and who had maintained an active TikTok account for at least three months. The total number of participants was 1,151 students, comprising 756 male students (65.7%) and 395 female students (34.3%). The independent variable in this study was online social support, while the dependent variable was body image. Data were collected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique through an online survey (Google Form). Participants were recruited from multiple vocational high schools (SMKs) across different regions of Indonesia. All participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was ensured throughout the data collection process. Inclusion criteria required active TikTok usage for at least three months; students who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

Measurement

Body image was measured using the Multidimensional Body Self Relations Questionnaire-Appearance Scale (MBSRQ-AS), originally proposed by (Cash & Smolak, 2011). This instrument assessed how comfortable or uncomfortable teenagers felt with their physical appearance. The scale initially contained 34 items across five dimensions: appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body area satisfaction, obesity anxiety, and body size categorization. The reliability test revealed that six items did not reach the item-total correlation coefficient threshold and were therefore removed. Consequently, the scale comprised 28 items with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.804.

Online social support was measured using the Social Support Scale in Social Networks, developed by Fitriani (2014) and adapted by (Suryani, 2014). This instrument included three main aspects: emotional support, reward support, and informational support. The scale consisted of 19 items, answered on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument demonstrated a high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.909.

Research instruments

The instrument for body image consisted of 28 items following the item-removal process. The coding book for the MBSRQ-AS was used to guide data scoring and analysis.

Table 1. Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire Appearance Scale (MBSRQ-AS) after the item deletion/dropping process

No.	Dimension	Items			
		Favorable		Unfavorable	
		Valid	Dropped	Valid	Dropped
1	Appearance evaluation	3, 5, 9, 12	12, 15	18, 19	-
2	Appearance orientation	1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 21	13, 17	16, 20	11, 14
3	Body areas satisfaction	26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34	-	-	-
4	Obesity anxiety	4, 8, 22, 23	-	-	-
5	Body size categorization	24, 25	-	-	-
Total		24	4	4	2

The research instrument employed a Likert scale. Values ranged from 1 to 5 for items in the favorable category, and the scale was reversed for items in the unfavorable category. The second scale measured Social Support in Social Networks, originally developed by Fitriani (2014) and adapted by (Suryani, 2014). This scale included three dimensions across 19 items: emotional support, reward support, and informational support.

Table 2. Scoring Pattern for the MBSRQ-AS Instrument

Statement	Scoring				
	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Neutral (N)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)
Favorable	5	4	3	2	1
Unfavorable	1	2	3	4	5

Data Analysis

This study used the product-moment correlation analysis method to examine the direction and strength of the linear relationship between the independent variable (social support) and the dependent variable (body image). In addition, the study included supplementary analyses using t-tests and ANOVA to identify differences in adolescent body image across various aspects.

Table 3. Social Support Scale in Social Networking Sites

No.	Aspect	Items	
		Favorable	Unfavorable
1	Emotional support	1, 2, 3, 6, 7	4, 5
2	Appreciation support	8, 12, 13, 14	9, 10, 11, 15
3	Informational support	18, 19	16, 17
Total		11	8

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Hypothesis testing was conducted using Pearson's product-moment correlation method to ascertain the direction and magnitude of the linear association between independent and dependent variables. This procedure is intended to provide empirical evidence to either support or refute the proposed hypothesis. The application of the Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis produced a coefficient value of 0.460, accompanied by a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.01$), indicating a statistically significant positive correlation between the variable of body image and the variable of online social support. These results suggest that an increase in online social support received through social media platforms, particularly TikTok, correlates with an enhancement in individuals' perceptions of their body image.

In addition, the intercorrelation analysis showed that all aspects of body image—namely, appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body area satisfaction, obesity anxiety, and body size categorization—were significantly correlated with online social support (Table 4). Although the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.460$) indicates a positive relationship between the two variables, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.2116$) demonstrates that online social support accounts for only a small fraction of the total variation in body image. This is likely due to other factors outside of social media support that also play important roles in shaping a person's body image.

Table 4. Correlation Between Independent Variable and Dimensions of Dependent Variable

Dimension of Body Image	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig. Value (p)
Appearance evaluation dimension	0.197	$p < 0.01$
Appearance orientation dimension	0.110	$p < 0.01$
Body areas satisfaction dimension	0.277	$p < 0.01$
Obesity anxiety dimension	0.243	$p < 0.01$
Body size categorization dimension	0.125	$p < 0.01$

The next hypothesis aims to test whether there is a significant difference in adolescent body image based on gender using the t-test. The test yielded a t-value of -3.684 ($p < 0.05$) for the gender factor. In conclusion, there is a significant difference in average body image between genders, with males exhibiting a lower average body image compared to females, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Mean Differences Between Male and Female Respondents

Gender	Mean (\bar{x})
Male	92.23
Female	94.78

In this study, additional analyses were also conducted using a One-Way ANOVA for the factors of TikTok access duration and main social supporters, as well as a t-test for the factor of whether an influencer on TikTok serves as a role model regarding appearance. The results indicate differences in body image levels across several factors. The main social support factor ($F = 5.701$, $p = 0.000$) shows significant differences in body image levels among different primary social supporters, suggesting that this factor substantially influences body image. Similarly, the

factor of whether an influencer on TikTok serves as a role model in appearance ($t = -3.522, p = 0.000$) also demonstrates a significant impact on body image levels between those who have a TikTok role model and those who do not. Regarding the factor of TikTok usage duration ($F = 4.109, p = 0.017$), results reveal a significant difference in at least one pair of groups with an average difference, indicating that time spent on TikTok affects body image levels.

Table 6. Results of Additional Analysis on Several Factors Using t-test and ANOVA

Factor	Test Result
Main social support person	$F = 5.701, p = 0.000$
Presence or absence of a TikTok figure or influencer as a role model for appearance	$t = -3.522, p = 0.000$
Duration of TikTok access	$F = 4.109, p = 0.017$

Discussion

Social support can be defined as the perception that an individual has strong and reliable social relationships, as well as feeling cared for, loved, and valued by those around them. Through technology, social support can be obtained more easily via online media, including social media platforms such as TikTok. This study confirms that online social support has a significant influence on the body image of adolescent TikTok users. Positive interactions on social media can contribute to teens' positive self-perception. These findings reinforce prior research, which suggests that online social support can profoundly influence adolescents' self-perception and body image (Aristantya & Helmi, 2019). TikTok, with its visually dynamic content, allows teens to receive positive feedback through likes, comments, and various other forms of social interaction. This contributes to a healthier body image, consistent with the findings of this study.

However, although these findings indicate that social support is closely related to body image, the determination coefficient ($R^2 = 0.2116$) suggests that many other factors also contribute to body image and cannot be explained solely by online social support. For instance, internal factors such as adolescents' self-perception and personal experiences, as well as external factors such as mass media influence and societal beauty standards, play an equally important role in shaping adolescents' body image (Fardouly et al., 2018; Grogan, 2006). Exposure to idealized body images on social media, as described by Tiggemann (2013), can often lead to body dissatisfaction, although social support may positively affect overall self-confidence.

Appearance orientation refers to the extent to which an individual evaluates themselves based on their physical appearance. It encompasses the degree to which physical appearance is central to one's identity and how a person judges themselves accordingly. Online social support, particularly when positive and constructive, can strengthen appearance orientation by providing recognition and validation of efforts to maintain one's appearance. Consistent with this study's results, social support correlates with appearance orientation, which is one of the dimensions used to measure body image. Aristantya (2019) found a positive relationship between online social support and the appearance orientation dimension among adolescents using Instagram.

Appearance evaluation involves self-assessment of how one perceives their appearance relative to prevailing beauty standards. The relationship between social support and appearance evaluation aligns with Tiggemann (2013) findings, which suggest that interaction with friends or communities on social media can increase concerns about adolescent girls' body image. The study also found a significant relationship between online social media use and heightened body image concerns, indicating that social interactions on these platforms can affect self-evaluation.

Analysis of the body size aspect of body image also revealed a correlation with social support. This aligns with Aristantya (2019), who reported that social support from friends or followers on social media can enhance self-acceptance of body size, even when individuals face societal pressure to conform to beauty standards. Support from others on platforms like TikTok provides validation that reinforces self-acceptance.

Obesity anxiety refers to worries about weight or the possibility of having a body considered "too fat." Fardouly (2017) found that social media platforms, including TikTok, can

play a role in reducing this anxiety, particularly when individuals receive positive and inclusive feedback from their online community. Social support that conveys acceptance of different body shapes helps alleviate anxiety and fosters a sense of being valued regardless of body differences, consistent with findings that obesity anxiety correlates with social support.

Body area satisfaction concerns the extent to which an individual feels satisfied with various parts of their body, from head to toe. Aristantya (2019) found that social media interactions, especially on TikTok, can influence perceptions of body appearance. Positive comments or inclusive messages about physical appearance increase body satisfaction, as individuals feel more valued and accepted. This study supports a correlation between social support and body satisfaction, showing that individuals who receive positive feedback tend to feel more satisfied with their bodies.

Gender differences were observed in body image, with adolescent girls exhibiting different patterns compared to boys. Adolescent girls are more exposed to stringent social beauty standards, making them more susceptible to body image concerns (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). While beauty standards affect both genders, social media often emphasizes slim and idealized female bodies, exacerbating dissatisfaction among adolescent girls.

The duration of TikTok usage significantly affects body image. Greater exposure to idealized body images can worsen teens' body image, particularly if they perceive their bodies as not meeting these standards. This supports Fardouly (2017), who suggest that constant exposure to ideal body images increases body dissatisfaction among adolescents.

Significant differences were also found in body image based on main social support providers, including parents, friends, or none. Parental support is crucial in helping adolescents develop a healthy perception of their bodies, providing encouragement that strengthens confidence. Kim (2022) noted that parental support improves adolescents' self-perception, enhances confidence, and promotes a positive body image even amid unrealistic social media beauty pressures.

Support from close friends similarly fosters acceptance and appreciation, improving self-evaluation of physical appearance. Franchina (2018) demonstrate that positive interactions, whether in person or online, significantly contribute to a more positive body image. Friends often serve as the first point of emotional sharing about appearance, reinforcing better self-perception.

Conversely, the absence of social support can exacerbate body image issues. Fardouly (2017) found that adolescents lacking support from parents or friends tend to experience more negative body image, as they are more influenced by social media beauty standards. This study confirmed that the presence or absence of social support significantly influences adolescents' body image.

Research on whether TikTok influencers serve as role models for appearance revealed differences in body image. Influencers promoting idealized bodies can establish unrealistic beauty standards, affecting teenagers' body perception. Aristantya (2019) found that adolescents frequently exposed to idealized content on social media tend to experience dissatisfaction with their bodies. Bucknell (2020) also noted that TikTok usage among pre-teens and teens affects body perception through exposure to idealized content, leading to negative social comparisons. Consequently, the influencers adolescents follow likely shape their body image perceptions.

These findings have practical implications for multiple stakeholders. For parents, the results highlight the importance of maintaining open communication about social media use and body image, monitoring TikTok content, and providing consistent emotional and social support to counteract potential negative effects of online beauty standards (Kim & Baker, 2022). Educators and school counselors are advised to implement digital literacy programs that teach adolescents to critically evaluate body-related content, recognize manipulative use of filters and idealized imagery, and cultivate a healthy, body-positive self-concept (Fardouly et al., 2018). At the policy level, educational institutions and governmental bodies should promote campaigns encouraging diverse and inclusive body representation on digital platforms like TikTok to foster a healthier online environment for adolescents (Harriger et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a significant positive relationship ($r = 0.460$, $p < 0.01$) between online social support and body image among Indonesian vocational high school adolescents aged 15–18 years who use TikTok, indicating that adolescents who receive greater online social support tend to report a more positive body image. However, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.2116$) suggests that online social support accounts for only 21.1% of the variance in body image, highlighting that other internal and external factors also substantially shape adolescents' body perception. The study also identified significant gender differences in body image, with adolescent girls showing higher body image scores yet being more susceptible to appearance-related pressures from social media. The presence of influencers on TikTok who promote specific body standards, the main sources of social support, and the duration of TikTok use further contribute to the formation of adolescents' body image.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged, including its cross-sectional design, which prevents causal inferences; reliance on self-report measures, which may introduce response bias; and the use of purposive sampling from specific vocational schools, which limits generalizability to the broader Indonesian adolescent population. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, probability-based sampling methods, and expand to diverse school types and regions to enhance representativeness, while also examining social comparison as a moderating variable. The use of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, can provide deeper insights into adolescents' subjective experiences. Integrating gender perspectives in the analysis would be valuable, given the differing perceptions and needs between boys and girls. Further studies may also explore the role of other social media platforms in shaping body perception and compare their influence with that of traditional media.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Christania Pingkan Putrinita: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Collection, Formal Analysis, Writing Original Draft Preparation. Anggie Nur Fitrianti: Methodology, Validation, Data Interpretation, and Supervision. Kamaratih Purnama Kusuma: Investigation, Data Curation, Resources, and Validation. Meyta Roida Rebecka Hutapea: Formal Analysis, Visualization, Project Administration, and Manuscript Preparation. All authors contributed to the development of the study, approved the final version of the manuscript, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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