

# THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN INFLUENCING ADOLESCENT HEALTH BEHAVIOR: A REVIEW FROM PUBLIC HEALTH, PSYCHOLOGY, AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVES

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## Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the role of social media in influencing adolescent health behaviors from the perspectives of public health, psychology, and digital communication. The method used was qualitative research with a descriptive approach, through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), observation, and analysis of social media content frequently accessed by adolescents. The results show that social media is a primary source of health information for adolescents and has a dual influence. On the positive side, social media encourages healthy lifestyles, increases motivation, and provides easy access to health education. However, on the negative side, it can spread misinformation, encourage extreme diets, and psychological stress due to social comparison and the fear of missing out. The multidisciplinary analysis confirms that public health views social media as an effective campaign tool, psychology highlights social and emotional influences, while digital communication highlights the importance of creative content and the risks of algorithms. This study emphasizes the need for strong digital and health literacy, as well as collaboration between health workers and influencers to optimally utilize social media as a means of adolescent health education.*

**Keywords:** social media, adolescent health behavior, psychology, digital communication

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## 1. Introduction

Today's adolescent health behaviors are increasingly influenced by the content they consume on social media, both directly and indirectly. Through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, adolescents are exposed to a wide range of information about diet, healthy lifestyles, exercise, self-care, mental health, and even the promotion and use of certain health products (Yusuf & Hamdi, 2021). This content can have positive impacts, such as encouraging healthy lifestyle habits, raising awareness of the importance of maintaining good health, and building a supportive community among teenagers. However, on the other hand, unverified information also has the potential to give rise to misinformation, encourage consumer behavior towards health products that have not been medically tested, and even create social pressure that impacts mental health. Thus, social media plays a dual role as an educational tool and a challenge in shaping adolescent health behaviors (Ayuanda et al., 2025).

Social media such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube have now become one of the most popular sources of health information for teenagers due to their easily accessible, interactive nature, and attractively packaged visual and audio-visual content (Sunita, 2024). This platform allows teenagers to get various health tips, ranging from diet, exercise, body care, to mental health issues (Juanta et al., 2025). However, not all information spread on social media is scientifically based or sourced from competent health professionals. As a result, misleading or inaccurate content has the potential to lead to misinformation, which not

only influences adolescents' perceptions of health but can also impact their decision-making and behaviors regarding health.

From a public health perspective, social media plays a significant dual role in shaping adolescent behavior. On the one hand, these platforms can be a positive tool to encourage healthy lifestyles through exercise campaigns, balanced nutrition promotions, and the dissemination of information on the importance of maintaining mental and physical health (Septriawan, 2024). However, on the other hand, social media can also foster risky behaviors, such as the tendency to follow extreme diet trends without medical supervision, the use of drugs or supplements without a doctor's prescription, and substandard health practices. This situation shows that social media functions as a double-edged sword: it can improve adolescent health literacy while also potentially creating new health problems if the information consumed is not critically filtered.

Psychologically, adolescents are in a developmental phase heavily influenced by their social environment, making them susceptible to viral trends, peer pressure, and role models like social media influencers. Their still-forming self-identity makes it easier for adolescents to imitate behavior they perceive as attractive, popular, or in line with current standards (Saputra & Wala, 2024). This can encourage imitative behavior, both positive, such as imitating a healthy lifestyle or exercise habits, and negative, such as following extreme diets, trying health products without supervision, or normalizing risky behavior. Thus, social media is not only a space for information, but also an arena for behavioral formation through psychological mechanisms of identification and imitation (Suhendra & Pratiwi, 2024).

From a digital communication perspective, social media algorithms play a major role in shaping teenagers' information consumption patterns by strengthening echo chambers, namely digital spaces that repeatedly display similar content based on user preferences (Arifah et al., 2025). This situation makes adolescents more frequently exposed to health information that aligns with their interests or search behavior, but without adequate filtering for truth or verification. As a result, false or misleading information can spread quickly, forming misperceptions and reinforcing adolescents' beliefs about health practices that are not always safe or based on scientific evidence. This phenomenon demonstrates how the algorithmic mechanisms of social media can expand access to information while increasing the risk of spreading health misinformation (Pathak et al., 2023).

This phenomenon is important to study because it can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the interaction between three main aspects public health, psychology, and digital communication jointly shape adolescent health behaviors. From a public health perspective, the study can reveal the extent to which social media contributes to promoting healthy lifestyles while simultaneously creating new health risks. From a psychological perspective, this study can explain how adolescents' susceptibility to social influences, viral trends, and role models shapes imitative behavior. Meanwhile, from a digital communication perspective, the study can demonstrate how social media algorithms create echo chambers that amplify exposure to health information, both accurate and misleading (Cinelli et al., 2021). By examining the interrelationships between these three aspects, research can provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of adolescent health behavior formation in the digital era and serve as a basis for formulating more effective intervention strategies.

Previous research has tended to focus primarily on the negative impacts of social media, such as health misinformation and digital addiction, without adequately addressing its positive potential as a health education tool. Furthermore, existing studies generally emphasize only one perspective, such as public health or psychology, rarely adopting a multidisciplinary approach that integrates multiple perspectives. This paucity of research is also evident in the limited number of studies examining how digital communication mechanisms, including the role of algorithms, influencers, and viral content, mediate adolescent health behaviors. Furthermore, research linking the role of social media to changes in adolescent health behaviors comprehensively, particularly in the Indonesian context, remains very limited, creating an important gap for this study to fill.

This research is novel in adopting a multidisciplinary approach that integrates public health, psychology, and digital communication perspectives to more comprehensively

understand the phenomenon of adolescent health behavior. In addition to highlighting the negative impacts of social media, this study also explores its positive potential as a means of health promotion and education. This research identifies the mechanisms of social media influence, including the role of algorithms, influencers, viral trends, and social interactions, in shaping adolescent health behavior. Thus, this study not only enriches academic research but also provides practical contributions in designing more effective and relevant social media-based health education strategies for adolescents.

The purpose of this study is to describe how adolescents utilize social media as a source of health information, while also analyzing the influence of social media on their health behaviors from the perspectives of public health, psychology, and digital communication. This study also aims to identify the positive and negative factors contained in social media in shaping adolescent health behaviors, and provide strategic recommendations for effective social media-based health education that is appropriate to adolescent characteristics.

## 2. Method

This research method uses a qualitative approach with an interpretative paradigm that focuses on an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions, and meanings formed by adolescents regarding health information on social media, with a multidisciplinary approach that includes public health, psychology, and digital communication (Sarasati et al., 2024). The type of research used is a qualitative descriptive study that emphasizes the exploration of socio-cultural phenomena in adolescent health behavior due to the influence of social media. The research was conducted in schools, adolescent communities, and online groups with adolescent subjects aged 13–19 years who actively use social media such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. The inclusion criteria were adolescents who had accessed or followed health content, while the exclusion criteria were adolescents who did not have social media accounts or rarely used them.

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews with adolescents, parents, health workers, and health content creators, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with adolescents, participatory observation of adolescent interactions on social media, and documentation in the form of analysis of video content, posts, and comments. The research instruments included semi-structured interview guidelines, FGD guidelines, field notes, and observation recordings. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis through the stages of data reduction, categorization, coding, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, with triangulation of public health, psychology, and digital communication perspectives. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checks, and audit trails. The ethical aspects of the research were met by obtaining consent from parents or guardians, maintaining the confidentiality of participants' identities, using informed consent, and providing a safe space for adolescents to share experiences.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Research shows that social media has become a primary source of health information for adolescents, with platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube used more frequently than official sources. The most popular content among adolescents relates to diet, exercise, skincare, and mental health. On the positive side, digital campaigns like #GerakanHidupSehat encourage adolescents to exercise with friends, while health influencers are perceived as more relatable than formal healthcare professionals. Social media also motivates adolescents to try healthy lifestyles in an accessible and engaging way. On the other hand, social media also has negative effects. Some teenagers imitate extreme diets or use weight loss pills without supervision, and circulating health information is often mixed with misinformation, such as the myth of rapid weight loss. Platform algorithms trap teenagers in an echo chamber of information that is not always valid.

Psychologically, teenagers tend to imitate the behavior of influencers and are driven by a fear of missing out to follow viral health trends without considering the impact, which affects

self-confidence differently. From a digital communication perspective, visual content such as short videos, challenges, and memes are more effective in influencing behavior than long textual information, while two-way interactions through comments, DMs, or live streaming make teenagers feel close to influencers, and the rapid spread of health information is influenced by trending algorithms.

**Table 2. Forms of Social Media Influence on Adolescent Health Behavior**

Types of Social Media	Popular Types of Health Content	Influence on Adolescent Behavior
TikTok	Sports challenges, fast diets, skincare	- Teenagers are more active in sports.  - Tried many extreme diets.
Instagram	Nutrition education, mental health, fitness influencer	- More aware of the importance of a healthy diet. - Experiencing social comparison (body image).
YouTube	Health education videos, healthy lifestyle tips	- Increase long-term knowledge. - Tend to believe without verification.

*Sumber: Hasil Pengolahan Data 2025*

Social media influences adolescent health behaviors in different ways across platforms. On TikTok, content like exercise challenges, fast-track diet trends, and skincare tips encourage adolescents to become more active through participating in challenges. However, many also try extreme diets to quickly lose weight by following influencers, putting their health at risk (Octaviana et al., 2023). On Instagram, educational content on nutrition, mental health, and fitness influencers help raise teens' awareness of healthy eating and the importance of maintaining mental health, but social comparisons related to body image often fuel self-dissatisfaction. Meanwhile, on YouTube, longer health education videos and healthy lifestyle tips provide more in-depth knowledge, but teens tend to accept information at face value without verifying the source, thus remaining at risk of exposure to misinformation.

### Public health

Social media acts as an effective means of health promotion because it is able to reach teenagers quickly and on a wide scale, exceeding the capabilities of traditional media (Hasibuan et al., 2024). With visual, interactive, and shareable content, health messages can be widely disseminated through short videos, challenges, memes, and creative posts. Furthermore, interactive features like comments, direct messages, live streaming, and polls enable direct engagement among teens, enabling them to interact, ask questions, and share experiences. These advantages make social media a strategic tool for building health awareness, motivating behavior change, and building a community of healthy lifestyle advocates among teens in a more personalized and relevant way.

However, low health literacy among adolescents makes it difficult for them to distinguish between valid and misleading information. This leaves them vulnerable to exposure to inaccurate or even risky content, such as extreme diet myths, the use of supplements or medications without medical supervision, and scientifically unproven health practices. This inability is further exacerbated by social media algorithms that repeatedly

display similar content, further reinforcing misinformation. Consequently, while social media has great potential as a health education tool, adolescents' lack of critical thinking skills in assessing the quality of information poses a major challenge in maximizing the positive effects of these digital platforms (Elwani & Kurniawan, 2020).

The results of this study align with WHO findings, which emphasize that social media has the potential to be a double-edged sword in health promotion. On the one hand, social media can accelerate the dissemination of health information, encourage healthy behaviors, and build communities supporting healthy lifestyles. On the other hand, these platforms also risk spreading misinformation, fostering risky behaviors, and reinforcing misperceptions due to echo chambers and social pressure. These findings emphasize the importance of health literacy and appropriate digital communication strategies to maximize the benefits of social media while minimizing its negative impacts on adolescents.

### **Psychology.**

Psychological factors play an important role in shaping adolescent health behavior, especially through the need for social recognition, the tendency to imitate role models, and self-motivation (Kusumawati et al., 2024). Adolescents are at a developmental stage where self-identity and self-esteem are heavily influenced by environmental perceptions and social acceptance, leading them to seek validation from peers and figures they admire. This need makes them more responsive to health content that receives a lot of attention or "likes" on social media, as well as following viral trends to gain acceptance within their social groups.

Research findings show that adolescents trust health influencers more than formal healthcare professionals due to the emotional connection and relatability of the influencers' experiences. Influencers are perceived as figures who understand adolescents' daily lives and convey information in accessible language, making the health messages feel more personal and readily applicable. This emotional connection strengthens adolescents' motivation to emulate the behaviors displayed, whether it be exercise habits, diet, or self-care practices (Lubis, 2024).

This phenomenon supports Bandura's social learning theory, which states that behavior is formed through the process of observing, modeling, and imitating role models. Adolescents tend to observe the behavior of influencers, assess the consequences, and then imitate behaviors perceived as positive or beneficial. Thus, social media is not only a source of information but also a powerful social learning tool, where psychological influences play a central role in shaping adolescents' health behaviors (Yanuardianto, 2019).

### **Digital Communication**

In the context of digital communication, short, interactive, and entertaining content formats have proven to be key to the effectiveness of delivering health messages on social media. Short videos, challenges, memes, and infographics attract teens because they are easy to understand, quick to consume, and can be shared with peers. This approach makes health messages more engaging and motivates teens to try the healthy behaviors displayed, compared to long or formal text information. (Anggredi & Rudiarta, 2022).

Social media algorithms also play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of health campaigns. Viral content tends to reappear in users' feeds, increasing exposure and the likelihood of a health message being widely accepted. By understanding algorithm mechanisms, health practitioners can design more targeted communication strategies, leveraging trends, influencers, and interactive features to reach adolescents more effectively. However, using algorithms without quality controls or filters also poses risks. Misleading messages or inaccurate health information can spread rapidly, creating echo chambers and amplifying misinformation. This situation demonstrates that while algorithms can be strategic tools in health promotion, oversight, digital literacy, and information verification are necessary to minimize their negative impacts.

### **Multidisciplinary Integration**

From a public health perspective, social media has significant potential for use as a campaign tool to encourage healthy lifestyles, including promoting balanced nutrition, regular exercise, and mental health awareness. These platforms enable rapid and widespread dissemination of information, enabling health messages to reach adolescents in a more relevant and accessible way than traditional media (Ghahramani et al., 2022).

From a psychological perspective, the primary focus is on improving adolescents' critical literacy and self-efficacy in selecting and evaluating health information. With these skills, adolescents will no longer be passive consumers of social media content but will be able to evaluate the validity of information, distinguish between accurate and misleading content, and make more informed health decisions. Strengthening these psychological aspects is crucial for mitigating the negative impacts of misinformation and risky behaviors (Nisa, 2024).

Meanwhile, from a digital communications perspective, health campaign strategies need to adopt creative, interactive formats that align with trends that appeal to adolescents. Content packaged in the form of short videos, challenges, memes, or other interactive features is more effective in capturing attention and motivating adolescents to actively engage. By combining an understanding of public health, psychology, and digital communications, health campaigns on social media can be designed to be more effective, relevant, and positively impact adolescent health behaviors (Rahmatullah, 2021).

#### 4. Conclusions and Suggestions

This study concludes that social media has become a primary source of health information for adolescents, particularly through TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, due to its easily accessible, visual, and trending content. The influence of social media is dual: its positive side encourages healthy lifestyle behaviors such as exercise, balanced nutrition, self-care, and mental health awareness, while its negative side can lead to risky behaviors, including extreme dieting, unsupervised use of health products, and exposure to misinformation. From a public health perspective, social media serves as an effective health campaign tool, but challenges remain, such as low adolescent health literacy. From a psychological perspective, adolescent behavior is influenced by social factors such as role models (influencers), fear of missing out (FOMO), and the need for social recognition, which can create both positive motivation and psychological distress. Meanwhile, from a digital communication perspective, short, interactive, and creative content formats are more effective in attracting adolescents' attention, although social media algorithms have the potential to amplify an echo chamber of information that is not always valid. These findings underscore the importance of a multidisciplinary approach integrating public health, psychology, and digital communication to comprehensively understand adolescent health behaviors in the social media era. They also emphasize the need for stronger digital and health literacy strategies, collaboration between health workers and influencers, and the use of social media as a safe, accurate, and engaging health education tool for adolescents.

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