

SOCIAL MEDIA DYNAMICS, PEER INFLUENCE, AND DATING BEHAVIOR AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

Adolescent dating behavior is influenced by various factors, including social media use and peer influence. Increased exposure to social media and peer interactions may affect adolescents' dating behavior. This study aimed to determine the relationship between social media use, peer influence, and dating behavior among adolescents in one of the health vocational schools in Brebes Regency. This study used a descriptive correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. A total of 70 respondents were selected using total sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed with the Chi-Square test. The results showed that 52 respondents (74.3%) had negative social media influence, 49 respondents (70.0%) had negative peer influence, and 38 respondents (54.3%) had good dating behavior. Bivariate analysis indicated no significant relationship between social media use and dating behavior ($p\text{-value} = 0.242$), and no significant relationship between peer influence and dating behavior ($p\text{-value} = 0.283$). The study concluded that social media use and peer influence were not significantly associated with adolescent dating behavior. Other factors such as self-control, parenting patterns, and reproductive health education may play a greater role.

Keyword: *adolescents, dating behaviour, peer influence, social media*

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by dynamic physical, psychological, and social changes as part of the transition to adulthood. It is a critical phase in individual development, marked by the search for self-identity, increasing independence, and a strong curiosity about various aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships and sexual behavior [1,2]. Hormonal changes during puberty contribute to the emergence of attraction to the opposite sex, making

adolescents more prone to behavioral exploration that if not properly guided can evolve into risky sexual behavior.

Adolescent sexual behavior is a significant public health issue because it is associated with various negative consequences, such as unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and other psychosocial impacts [3,4]. According to the World Health Organization, adolescent sexual development is influenced by the interaction of various factors, including individual, family, peer, and school

factors, as well as the digital environment, which is currently playing an increasingly dominant role in the lives of adolescents [1]. Therefore, identifying factors associated with adolescent sexual behavior is a crucial step in supporting promotive and preventive efforts.

One factor receiving significant attention is the use of social media. Advances in digital technology have made social media an integral part of teenagers' daily activities whether for communicating, accessing information, or building social relationships [3][5]. One factor receiving significant attention is the use of social media. Advances in digital technology have made social media an integral part of teenagers' daily activities whether for communicating, accessing information, or building social relationships [6][7].

Various studies indicate that social media usage can influence adolescents' sexual attitudes and behaviors. The intensity of exposure to digital sexual content can increase acceptance of premarital sexual behavior and encourage risky sexual behavior.[4,8] Furthermore, social media expands opportunities for adolescents to build relationships with the opposite sex more freely, which, in certain situations, can lead to more intense dating behavior [9]. However, the impact of social media on sexual behavior is not direct; rather, it is influenced by digital literacy skills, self-control, and supervision from the family environment [3][5].

On the other hand, peers also play a significant role in shaping adolescent behavior. During this period, relationships with peers become increasingly dominant, often serving as a source of emotional support and a reference point for actions [10][11]. Social relationships within peer groups can influence adolescents' values, norms, and decisions, including those regarding romantic relationships and sexual activity. Peer pressure can prompt adolescents to adjust their behavior to gain acceptance within the group, including in the context of dating [12].

Previous research indicates that peer influence can increase the likelihood of adolescents engaging in certain sexual behaviors, particularly when they are in social environments with permissive norms [10][13][14]. Conversely, a positive peer environment can also serve as a protective factor that helps adolescents avoid risky behaviors. This demonstrates that peers can exert either a positive or a negative influence, depending on the social dynamics that develop [2].

Nevertheless, research findings regarding the relationship between social media use, peer influence, and adolescent sexual behavior remain varied. Some studies identify a significant association, while others indicate that this relationship is influenced by additional factors such as self-control, parenting styles, school culture, and the adolescent's psychosocial condition. Consequently, adolescent sexual behavior cannot be explained by a single factor; rather, it results from the interaction of various internal and external factors [8][9][15][18].

In Indonesia, the prevalence of dating among adolescents is quite high; however, not all such behavior leads to risky sexual activity [19]. This situation highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the roles of social media and peers in adolescent sexual behavior within the local socio-cultural context.

Various studies indicate that social media usage and peer influence play a role in shaping adolescent sexual behavior. Landry et al. (2017) and Widman et al. (2016) reported that exposure to social media and peer influence can increase the likelihood of risky sexual behavior among adolescents. However, other studies have yielded different results, suggesting that this relationship is not always direct and is influenced by factors such as self-control, parenting styles, religiosity, and the school environment. These inconsistent findings indicate that the relationship between social media, peers, and adolescent sexual behavior remains inconclusive, necessitating further research across diverse sociocultural

contexts. A preliminary study conducted at a vocational high school specializing in health studies in Brebes Regency revealed high levels of social media usage among students, alongside active peer interactions and dating relationships. Yet, to date, no research has specifically examined the relationship between social media usage, peer influence, and dating behavior among adolescents in that school setting. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the relationship between social media usage, peer influence, and adolescent dating behavior, serving as a foundation for developing reproductive health programs better tailored to the needs of local adolescents.

2. Method

This study employs an observational quantitative design with a cross-sectional approach, meaning that measurements of the independent and dependent variables are conducted simultaneously. The research is being carried out at a vocational high school (SMK) specializing in health studies in Brebes Regency from November 2024 to June 2025.

The study population consists of all students at the school, with a sample size of 70 adolescents. A total sampling technique was used, meaning the entire population served as the study respondents.

The independent variables in this study are social media usage and peer influence, while the dependent variable is adolescent dating behavior. Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire developed based on the indicators for each variable.

Data analysis was conducted using univariate analysis to examine the frequency distribution of each variable and bivariate analysis specifically the Chi-Square test to determine the relationships between variables, with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$.

This study adheres to ethical principles by maintaining the confidentiality of respondents' identities

and using the data solely for research purposes.

3. Results and Discussion

The research results are presented sequentially, ranging from an overview of respondent characteristics and the distribution of research variables to an analysis of the relationships between social media usage, peer influence, and dating behavior among adolescents. The findings are presented in an integrated manner using both tables and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Data collection was conducted on November 4, 2024, involving 70 respondents at a vocational high school (SMK) specializing in health studies in Brebes Regency. The results comprise analyses of respondent characteristics, as well as univariate and bivariate analyses.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	f	%
Years		
14 years	1	1,4
15 years	17	24,3
16 years	25	35,7
17 years	20	28,6
18 years	7	10,0
Gender		
Male	7	10,0
Female	63	90,0
Class		
Class 1	23	32,9
Class 2	17	24,3
Class 3	30	42,9
Major		
Nurse	24	34,3
Pharmacy	46	65,7
Total	70	100

Based on the distribution of respondent characteristics in Table 1, the largest age group was 16 years old, comprising 25 respondents (35.7%), while the smallest group was 14 years old, with 1 respondent (1.4%). Regarding gender, the majority of respondents were female (63 respondents, 90.0%), while 7 were male (10.0%). In terms of grade level, the largest group was in the third grade (30 respondents, 42.9%), while the smallest was in the second grade (17 respondents, 24.3%). Regarding the field

of study, the majority of respondents were from the Pharmacy program (46 respondents, 65.7%), while 24 respondents (34.3%) were from the Nursing program.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Research Variables

Variable	Category	f	%
Social media	Positive	18	25,7
	Negative	52	74,3
Peers Influence	Positive	21	30,0
	Negative	49	70,0
Dating Behavior	Good	38	54,3
	Poor	32	45,7
Total		70	100

Based on Table 2, the majority of respondents experienced negative social media influence (52 respondents or 74.3%), while 18 respondents (25.7%) experienced positive social media influence. Regarding the peer influence variable, most respondents experienced negative peer influence (49 respondents or 70.0%), whereas 21 respondents (30.0%) experienced positive peer influence. As for the dating behavior variable, the majority of respondents exhibited good dating behavior (38 respondents or 54.3%), while 32 respondents (45.7%) exhibited poor dating behavior.

Table 3. The Relationship of Social Media and Peers with Dating Behavior

Variable	Category	Dating Behavior		Total	p-value
		Not enough f (%)	Good f (%)		
Social media	Negative	22 (31,4)	30 (42,9)	52	0,242
	Positive	10 (14,3)	8 (11,4)	18	
Peers Influence	Negative	24 (34,3)	25 (35,7)	49	0,283
	Positive	8 (11,4)	13 (18,6)	21	
Total		32 (45,7)	38 (54,3)	70	

Based on Table 3, the majority of respondents in both the positive and negative social media influence groups exhibited dating behaviors classified as "good." Chi-Square analysis yielded a p-value of 0.242 ($p > 0.05$), indicating no significant relationship between social media usage and adolescent dating behavior. Regarding the peer influence variable, the majority of respondents in both categories also demonstrated good dating behavior; statistical analysis resulted in a p-value of 0.283 ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that peer influence is not significantly associated with adolescent dating behavior either. Overall, the study findings indicate that neither social media usage nor peer influence has a significant link to dating behavior, implying that other factors may exert a greater influence on such behavior.

The absence of a significant relationship between social media usage and dating behavior may be attributed to the respondents' usage patterns, which focused more on entertainment and communication than on accessing sexual content. Adolescents currently use social media for various purposes, including communication, entertainment, education, and general social interaction. [3][5]. Thus, high-intensity social media use is not necessarily synonymous with exposure to sexual content or engagement in risky sexual behavior. In this study, social media appears to be utilized primarily for communication and entertainment, and therefore does not directly correlate with dating behaviors.

These findings differ from previous research indicating a link between social media use and adolescent sexual behavior [4][8][15]. The study explains that exposure to sexual content and online interactions can influence adolescents' perceptions of sexual relationships and increase the likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behavior. However, the impact of social media on sexual behavior

is significantly influenced by how adolescents use these platforms, their level of digital literacy, and the presence of family supervision [16]. Therefore, social media usage cannot be viewed as a sole risk factor without considering the context of its use.

Furthermore, self-control plays a crucial role in determining how adolescents respond to social media exposure. Adolescents with good self-control tend to be better able to filter information and avoid the negative influences of digital media [17]. This condition may explain why social media usage in this study did not show a significant relationship with dating behavior. Although adolescents have extensive access to social media, self-control can serve as a protective factor that reduces the likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behavior.

Regarding the peer influence variable, the results of this study also indicate no significant relationship with dating behavior. Theoretically, peers are a crucial factor in shaping adolescent behavior, as adolescents during this period tend to seek social acceptance from their peer groups [10][11]. Peer influence can shape social norms that affect adolescents' decisions regarding dating and sexual behavior. However, in this study, that influence was not found to be significant.

The insignificant relationship between peer influence and dating behavior can be caused by the presence of other protective factors such as family values, religious education, and teenagers' ability to maintain personal values [2][18]. Adolescents with a strong sense of values tend to be less susceptible to peer pressure. Consequently, even when in a peer environment where dating behavior is prevalent, they are able to maintain behavior consistent with their own values.

This finding differs from the study by Widman et al., which suggests that adolescents are vulnerable to peer influence in sexual situations [10]. Differences in these results may be

influenced by variations in respondent characteristics, social environments, culture, and the research methods employed. Cultural factors and local social norms can moderate the influence of peers on adolescent sexual behavior, meaning the relationship is not always consistent across studies [12][13].

The results of this study indicate that adolescent dating behavior is influenced by complex and multidimensional factors. Social media and peer influence represent only a small fraction of the factors contributing to adolescent sexual behavior. Other factors such as parenting styles, reproductive health education, religiosity, self-control, and the school environment likely exert a greater influence on the shaping of adolescent behavior [16][18][20]. Therefore, interventions aimed at preventing risky sexual behavior among adolescents should not focus solely on restricting social media use or monitoring social interactions, but should also strengthen internal and external protective factors [21].

Overall, the study findings indicate that social media usage and peer influence do not have a significant relationship with the dating behaviors of adolescents. Nevertheless, these two factors warrant attention as components of the adolescent social environment that may interact with other factors to influence sexual behavior. These results underscore the importance of a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to guiding adolescent sexual behavior one that involves strengthening the role of the family, providing school-based reproductive health education, enhancing adolescent self-control, and fostering a social environment that supports the development of healthy behaviors. Consequently, interventions should not focus solely on restricting social media use or monitoring social interactions, but also on reinforcing protective factors that empower adolescents to make responsible decisions regarding their sexual behavior.

4. Conclusion

The study results indicate that social media exposure and peer influence experienced by the majority of respondents do not have a statistically significant relationship with adolescent dating behavior. Bivariate analysis yielded p-values of 0.242 for social media usage and 0.283 for peer influence both exceeding the 0.05 threshold suggesting that neither variable is significantly associated with dating behavior among adolescents.

These findings indicate that social media usage and peer influence are not the primary factors shaping adolescent dating behavior in this study. Adolescent dating behavior is likely influenced more by factors such as self-control, parenting styles, reproductive health education, the family environment, and the adolescents' own social values. Therefore, fostering healthy sexual behavior among adolescents requires a comprehensive approach that engages the family, school, and social environment.

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