

# “Social networks, both virtual and real, influence young adult’s lifestyle choices.”

## Understanding the influence of the social environment on food and activity choices of Singaporean young adults

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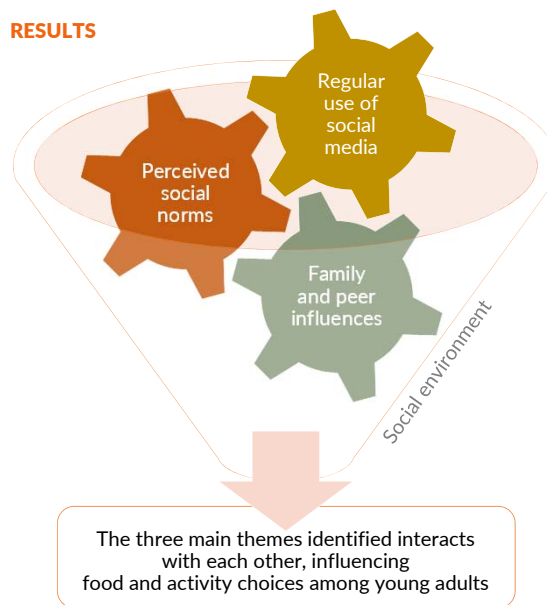
### PURPOSE

- Young adults experience major life-transitions
- Habits formed during this period are indicative of long-term behaviors; an important period for weight control and lifestyle interventions
- While social factors may be a strong determinant of lifestyle choices in younger persons, the influence of these factors on dietary and activity choices of Asian young adults, particularly in the context of increasing social media exposure and engagement, is not clear

### METHODS

- Seven gender based focus group discussions (n = 46) with full-time tertiary students aged 18 – 24 years
- *Incentives:* S\$20 + snacks
- *Recruitment:* Purposive sampling from two tertiary institutes in Singapore
- *Instrument:* Semi-structured interview guide with items on factors affecting participants’ eating and physical activity behaviors, including exposure to social media.
- *Interviewers:* JL (PhD) and TZ (MPH), both received qualitative training
- *Analysis:* Audio-recordings transcribed and analyzed by JL and TZ using thematic analysis with both inductive and deductive approaches

### RESULTS



### DISCUSSION

- Ubiquitous use of social media in young adults facilitates the rapid spread of content and can spur changes in food and activity choices
- Awareness of the types of information that young adults are exposed to and share, inclusive of the kinds of marketed products, can provide an insight into their food and activity choices and/or preferences
- Young adults with supportive social networks tend to develop body positivity, alleviating the pressures to conform to trends in physical aesthetics; they are also better able to start and maintain health promoting habits

### Participants demographics (n=46)



- Gender*
- 59% Female
- Ethnicity*
- 80.4% Chinese, 8.7% Indian, 4.3% Malay
- Age, mean (SD)*
- 20.9 (1.8) years
- BMI, mean (SD)*
- 22.1 (3.0) kg/m<sup>2</sup>

### Subthemes

#### *Regular use of social media*

- Source of health information and inspiration
- Organization of social activities based on shared recommendations and promotions
- Exposure to role modelling by influencers and peers

#### *Perceived social norms*

- Negative perception of gym culture and selected activities
- Studies as top priority for students

#### *Family and peer influences*

- Lifestyle practices and preferences of family and peers
- Family’s perception of gendered-eating behaviors and body image
- Family and peer support as strong motivating factor for maintaining healthy lifestyles

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