

Workplace Influence Matters: Impact of Co-Workers and Mass Media on Employee Subjective Norms in Health Behaviour Change Intention

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800434>

Received: 21 August 2026; Accepted: 26 August 2026; Published: 08 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Employees' health behaviours, particularly dietary habits and physical activity, are critical determinants of workplace productivity, yet they are often influenced by social and environmental factors within organizational settings. This study examines the role of co-worker interactions and mass media exposure in shaping employees' subjective norms, a core component of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and their subsequent impact on intentions to adopt healthier lifestyles in the Malaysian banking sector. Drawing from existing literature, co-worker support is identified as a key source of interpersonal influence, while mass media provides informational cues that reinforce social expectations and promote health awareness. Despite increasing interest in workplace wellness, limited research has explored how these social and informational influences interact to affect employees' health-related behavioural intentions. The findings underscore the importance of leveraging both peer support and targeted media communication in designing effective workplace interventions to improve employees' health behaviour, enhance well-being, and reduce productivity losses associated with absenteeism and presenteeism. Implications for policy and practice are discussed, alongside recommendations for future longitudinal studies to examine causal relationships in high-pressure professional environments.

Keywords: Workplace Influence, Co-Workers, Mass Media, Subjective Norm, Health Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Promoting healthy lifestyles has become an important global priority as countries face increasing challenges related to physical inactivity, unhealthy diets, and work-related stress among working populations. The World Health Organization consistently emphasizes that lifestyle-related behaviours, particularly unhealthy dietary habits and insufficient physical activity, are among the major contributors to the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) worldwide (WHO, 2025). These conditions have major implications for workforce productivity, organizational performance, and national economic development, as poor employee health has been widely associated with increased absenteeism, presenteeism, and reduced work performance (Quinn et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). As employees spend a substantial proportion of their daily lives in the workplace, occupational settings have increasingly been recognized as strategic platforms for promoting healthier lifestyles and preventive health behaviours. Workplace health promotion initiatives have been shown to improve employees' physical activity levels, dietary habits, and overall well-being, while simultaneously enhancing productivity and organizational performance (Heikinniemi et al., 2025). Recent workplace health studies emphasize that sedentary working patterns and lack of physical activity among office workers are major contributors to declining employee health and reduced work performance (Zhang et al., 2025; Quinn et al., 2025).

In Malaysia, improving the health status of the population has become an important national agenda as the country faces increasing concerns related to both physical and mental health among its workforce due to

recent studies have highlighted growing workplace health challenges in Malaysia, including rising levels of stress, sedentary work patterns, and poor lifestyle behaviours that negatively affect employees' well-being and productivity (Ahmad Dani et al., 2025; Ismail & Tan, 2025). These efforts are aligned with the global development agenda established by the United Nations through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly **Sustainable Development Goal 3**, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for people of all ages (United Nations, 2025). Despite ongoing initiatives, recent reports indicate that lifestyle-related health problems among employees remain prevalent. Workplace health research shows that unhealthy eating patterns, sedentary lifestyles, and inadequate physical activity are increasingly common among working adults due to demanding job responsibilities and limited time for health-related activities (Ismail & Tan, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). These unhealthy lifestyle behaviours are particularly evident among office-based employees who often spend prolonged periods in sedentary work environments, which may increase health risks and negatively affect overall employee well-being and productivity. These health risks are closely associated with reduced employee well-being, increased absenteeism, and decreased productivity in organizations (Heikinniemi et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

The banking sector represents one of the most important service industries contributing to Malaysia's economic development through its role in facilitating financial transactions, supporting business activities, and promoting national economic growth (Latiff et al., 2025; Zulham et al., 2025). However, employees in this sector often experience demanding workloads, strict deadlines, and high performance expectations, which may lead to work-related stress, burnout, and challenges in maintaining work-life balance. Evidence from workplace health studies suggests that poor health behaviours among employees are strongly associated with productivity loss caused by absenteeism and presenteeism. Absenteeism refers to employees' absence from work due to illness, while presenteeism occurs when employees attend work despite health problems, resulting in reduced performance and efficiency. Recent empirical studies indicate that employees' physical health conditions, including body composition and lifestyle behaviours, are significantly associated with the risk of absenteeism and decreased workplace productivity (Albedwawi, 2025; Salo et al., 2025).

Previous research on health behaviour has widely applied the **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)** to explain behavioural intention and actual behaviour. Within this framework, subjective norm represents one of the key components influencing behavioural intention, reflecting perceived social pressure from significant others to perform or avoid certain behaviours. While many studies have examined individual psychological determinants of health behaviour, relatively limited attention has been given to the broader social and informational influences that shape employees' subjective norms within workplace contexts. In particular, the role of co-workers as an important source of interpersonal influence in the workplace and the role of mass media as a source of health-related information remain underexplored in explaining employees' intentions to adopt healthier lifestyles. Considering the increasing prevalence of lifestyle-related health problems and their potential impact on employee productivity, it is important to understand how these social and informational factors influence employees' subjective norms and health behaviour intentions. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of co-workers and mass media on employees' subjective norms regarding health behaviour within the banking sector in Malaysia.

Health Behaviour Change Intentions

Health behaviour, particularly related to physical health, is a crucial factor affecting employees' productivity and organizational profitability through absenteeism and presenteeism. Among the main contributors to productivity loss are unhealthy eating habits and physical inactivity (AIA Vitality, 2019). Eating habits are strongly associated with overall health and the prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, which requires preventive measures and lifestyle modification (Wang & Wang, 2020; Rahmanian et al., 2014). Unhealthy eating patterns among working populations are often influenced by time constraints, busy schedules, convenience of high-calorie foods, and social pressures, which may result in poor nutrition and adverse health outcomes (Sogari et al., 2018; Mohd-Any et al., 2014). In response, organizations increasingly implement initiatives to promote healthy diets and nutrition education, shifting the responsibility of health from being solely personal to a shared organizational concern (Sogaard Jorgensen et

al., 2010; Lim et al., 2024). Despite these interventions, limited research has explored the determinants of healthy eating behaviours among employees in high-pressure sectors such as banking, especially in relation to social and media influences on normative beliefs.

Physical activity (PA) is defined as any bodily movement that increases energy expenditure and has been shown to prevent chronic diseases such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes (Yildizhan & Aggon, 2020; Rhodes et al., 2017). Regular engagement in PA is associated with multiple health benefits, including reduced risk of cardiovascular events, improved lipid profiles, and decreased risk of certain cancers (Lau et al., 2019; Cheah & Poh, 2014). National guidelines recommend that adults engage in at least 150 minutes of moderate or 60 minutes of vigorous activity per week to maintain physical health (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2010; Cai Lian et al., 2016). However, evidence from Malaysia indicates that a significant proportion of adults remain physically inactive, with sedentary behaviour particularly prevalent among blue-collar workers and older age groups (Huei Phing et al., 2017; Lau et al., 2019). Recent studies further highlight that workplace environment, occupational demands, and socioeconomic factors strongly influence PA levels, suggesting the need for targeted interventions in organizational settings to promote health behaviour change (Tan et al., 2024; Lim et al., 2025).

Despite recognition of the importance of healthy eating and physical activity in maintaining employee productivity, there remains a research gap in understanding how social and environmental factors—such as co-worker support and mass media exposure—shape employees' health behaviours in the workplace. While prior studies have explored general lifestyle behaviours among Malaysian adults, limited research has examined the interaction between workplace social influences, media exposure, and subjective norms in motivating employees to adopt healthy dietary practices and engage in regular physical activity, particularly in high-pressure sectors like banking (Nguyen et al., 2024; Kim & Lee, 2025). Addressing this gap can inform more effective workplace health programs and policies aimed at improving both employee well-being and organizational outcomes.

Subjective Norm

Subjective norm refers to an individual's perception that important others expect him or her to perform or refrain from performing a particular behaviour (Albarracín et al., 2001; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Within the Theory of Planned Behavior proposed by Icek Ajzen, subjective norm represents the perceived social pressure that influences behavioural intention. It reflects normative beliefs regarding whether significant others approve or disapprove of a behaviour, as well as an individual's motivation to comply with these expectations (Trigueros et al., 2021). In this sense, subjective norm highlights the role of social influence in shaping behavioural decisions, particularly when individuals value the opinions of referent groups such as family members, peers, and colleagues (Penz & Hofmann, 2021). Previous research has also emphasized that social norms can significantly shape individuals' behavioural intentions, especially in health-related contexts where collective expectations and social approval play an important role (Conner & Norman, 2022).

Subjective norm reflects the perceived expectations of important referent groups and plays a significant role in shaping individuals' behavioural decisions across different contexts (Larasati et al., 2025; Jing et al., 2025). Empirical evidence also indicates that subjective norms remain a key determinant of behavioural intentions, including sustainable behaviour and technology adoption (Raghuvanshi & Gurtoo, 2025).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that subjective norm is an important predictor of health-related behavioural intentions. For instance, subjective norm has been found to positively influence intentions to adopt healthy eating behaviours and purchase healthier food options (Rezai et al., 2017; Al Mamun et al., 2020). Similarly, normative support from significant others has been shown to encourage engagement in physical activity and other preventive health behaviours (Lirola et al., 2021). In addition, subjective norm has been linked to sleep-related health behaviours, where social expectations from family or peers influence individuals' intentions to maintain healthy sleep patterns (Kor & Mullan, 2011; Strong et al., 2017). However, findings across studies remain mixed, as some research has reported that subjective norm exerts

weaker or insignificant effects on behavioural intentions in certain contexts, such as among university students or specific demographic groups (Park et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). These inconsistencies suggest that the influence of subjective norm may depend on contextual and environmental factors.

Recent research in health-related behaviour demonstrates that social expectations from significant others influence individuals' intentions to adopt preventive health practices and lifestyle behaviours (Adiyoso et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2025). For instance, subjective norm was found to significantly influence behavioural intention in health-related decision-making and lifestyle choices (Yusuf et al., 2025).

Despite the extensive use of subjective norm in health behaviour research, limited studies have explored how specific social and informational influences shape subjective norms within workplace environments. In particular, the role of co-workers as a source of social influence and support in shaping workplace norms has received relatively limited attention in health behaviour studies. Co-workers often interact closely and may influence attitudes, behaviours, and lifestyle choices through social learning and peer influence (Avci, 2017; Li et al., 2023). At the same time, mass media has increasingly become an important channel for disseminating health information and shaping public perceptions and behavioural norms (Zahid & Din, 2019; Nabi & Prestin, 2020). However, the combined influence of workplace social interactions and external media exposure on employees' subjective norms remains underexplored, particularly in high-pressure sectors such as banking. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining how co-worker influence and mass media contribute to shaping employees' subjective norms related to health behaviour change intentions.

Despite the extensive application of subjective norm in behavioural research, recent literature indicates that most studies primarily focus on individual psychological factors while paying less attention to the influence of workplace social interactions and external informational sources such as mass media. Consequently, further research is needed to examine how co-worker interactions and media exposure contribute to shaping employees' subjective norms, particularly within demanding professional environments such as the banking sector.

Co-workers

Co-workers refer to employees within the same workplace who interact with one another and may influence each other's attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours regardless of whether they perform similar job roles (Quist et al., 2014). In organizational contexts, co-worker support represents employees' general beliefs regarding the willingness of colleagues to provide assistance, encouragement, and cooperation in work-related activities (Ladd & Henry, 2000; Susskind et al., 2003). Positive relationships among co-workers contribute to a supportive work environment that enhances employees' well-being, job satisfaction, and workplace experiences, while negative interpersonal relationships may lead to dissatisfaction and poor work-life quality (Chamberlin & Hodson, 2010). In service organizations, co-worker interactions are particularly important because colleagues often serve as a primary source of social and emotional support that can influence employees' attitudes and behavioural perceptions (Avci, 2017). Recent studies also highlight that workplace social support and interpersonal relationships play a significant role in shaping employees' well-being and behavioural outcomes in organizational settings (Zhang et al., 2024; Janiukštis et al., 2024).

Previous studies have emphasized that the workplace environment can significantly influence employees' health behaviours, including physical activity, dietary habits, and lifestyle decisions. Workgroups may shape behavioural patterns through social interaction, shared routines, and behavioural modelling among colleagues (Allard et al., 2011; Quist et al., 2014). For instance, social interactions during workplace routines such as lunch breaks may contribute to the formation of shared eating habits among employees (Pachucki et al., 2011). Similarly, colleagues and friends have been identified as key sources of encouragement for engaging in physical activity and maintaining healthy lifestyles (Sandu et al., 2018). Empirical evidence also suggests that co-worker encouragement and behavioural modelling can influence employees' health-related decision-making processes and promote healthier lifestyles within the workplace

(Berry et al., 2018; Burke et al., 2017). More recent workplace health research further indicates that supportive workplace cultures and peer interactions can promote employee engagement in health-related behaviours and improve overall well-being (Zhang et al., 2024; Susilastuti, 2024).

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of workplace social interactions, empirical research examining the role of co-workers in shaping subjective norms related to health behaviour remains limited. Most existing studies have focused on general workplace support or organizational climate rather than examining co-workers as a specific normative reference group influencing employees' behavioural intentions. Recent research also indicates that workplace interpersonal dynamics such as social support, workplace incivility, and peer relationships can significantly influence employees' attitudes and behavioural outcomes (Lee et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2025). However, limited studies have specifically explored how co-worker influence contributes to the formation of subjective norms within the framework of health behaviour change, particularly in high-pressure professional environments such as the banking sector. Therefore, further investigation is needed to better understand how co-worker interactions shape employees' perceived social expectations and behavioural intentions toward health behaviour change.

Mass Media

Mass media plays an important role in shaping societal perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. The development of mass media has significantly transformed the way information is disseminated and consumed by society. Mass media generally refers to various communication channels used to deliver information to large audiences, including printed media, electronic media, and digital platforms such as the internet and social media (Abdul Wahab et al., 2017; Aziz et al., 2017). These communication channels enable rapid dissemination of information and knowledge, thereby influencing individuals' perceptions and decision-making processes (Rogers, 1995). Within the context of behavioural studies, mass media influence refers to the perceived pressure or encouragement generated by media exposure that may shape individuals' behavioural attitudes and intentions (Nor & Pearson, 2008; Zahid & Din, 2019). Recent studies also highlight that digital media platforms and online information sources increasingly shape public perceptions, social norms, and behavioural intentions across various domains, including health-related behaviours (Nguyen et al., 2024; Kim & Lee, 2025).

Within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior, mass media has been identified as an important antecedent influencing subjective norms by shaping individuals' perceptions of socially accepted behaviours (Ajzen, 1985). Previous studies suggest that exposure to media messages can influence individuals' normative beliefs and encourage behavioural intentions through perceived social expectations (Lin, 2014; Liu et al., 2020). For example, media exposure has been found to positively influence subjective norms related to preventive health behaviour and public health awareness (Liu et al., 2020). In addition, the information presented through media channels may affect individuals' emotions, perceptions, and motivation to adopt protective or preventive behaviours. More recent research also indicates that digital media campaigns and online health communication strategies can significantly influence individuals' attitudes, perceived social expectations, and health-related behavioural intentions (Rahman et al., 2024; Park & Shin, 2025).

In the context of health behaviour, mass media has been widely recognized as a key mechanism for promoting healthy lifestyles and disseminating health-related knowledge. For instance, health-related programmes, online campaigns, and informational content can encourage healthy eating habits, physical activity, and preventive health practices (Lim et al., 2019). Individuals who are exposed to health information through multiple media platforms are more likely to develop greater awareness of health risks and benefits, which may facilitate informed decision-making and behavioural change (Liu et al., 2020). However, despite the growing influence of digital media in shaping behavioural perceptions, empirical studies examining the role of mass media in influencing subjective norms within workplace contexts remain limited. Most existing research has focused on consumer behaviour or public health campaigns rather than employees' behavioural intentions within organizational settings. Therefore, further research is needed to examine how mass media exposure contributes to the formation of employees' subjective norms toward

health behaviour change, particularly within demanding professional environments such as the banking sector.

Conceptual Framework

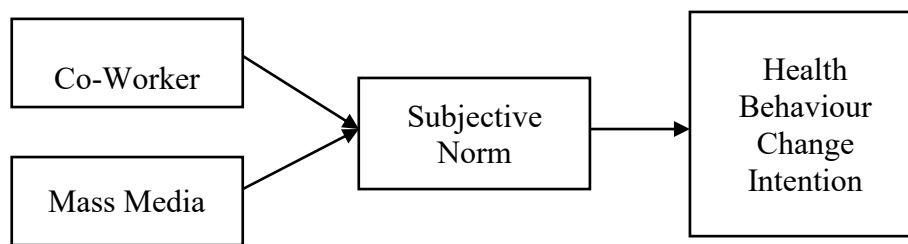


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Based on the above conceptual framework for this study (refer to Figure 1), there are two independent variables which are co-worker (CW) and Mass Media (MM). There are also mediating variables that consist of TPB components which is Subjective Norm (SN). In this study, health behaviour change intentions (HBCI) act as a dependent variable. For this study, there will be two hypotheses that can be tested for the indirect effect of the model. Table 1 shows the three hypotheses.

Table 1: Conceptual Construct in the Model

Hypotheses		Hypotheses
H1	CW-SN-HBCI	Co-worker has a significant influence on subjective norm towards HBCI among workers in the banking sector
H2	MM-SN-HBCI	Mass Media has a significant influence on subjective norm towards HBCI among workers in the banking sector

METHODOLOGY

This study is expected to provide a description of the factors that influence health behaviour change intention (HBCI) among workers in the banking sector. To analyse the relationship between variables this study uses a quantitative approach through a survey using a questionnaire conducted on workers between 20 and 54 years old within the Malaysian banking sector (headquarters and branches) in Selangor with two specific conditions (physically inactive, and unhealthy food consumption). In accordance with the objective to be achieved, this study aims to use PLS-SEM for measurement and structural model evaluation following Hair et al. (2011) as a better means of exploratory study (Reinartz, Haenlein & Henseler, 2009) as recently gained increasing popularity in individual and service study areas (Hair et al., 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights that employees' health behaviour, particularly eating habits and physical activity, is strongly influenced by social and environmental factors within the workplace. Co-worker interactions and perceived support play a significant role in shaping employees' subjective norms, which, as a key component of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), influence their intentions to adopt healthier lifestyles. Similarly, mass media exposure contributes to the formation of subjective norms by providing information, reinforcing social expectations, and promoting awareness about health-related behaviours. These findings underscore that both interpersonal influence from colleagues and informational influence from mass media are critical determinants of employees' behavioural intentions toward improving physical health, and organizations should consider these factors when designing workplace wellness initiatives.

Future research should focus on empirically testing the combined effects of co-worker support and mass media exposure on employees' subjective norms and health behaviours in high-pressure professional

environments such as the banking sector. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine causal relationships between social influence, media exposure, and health behaviour change over time. Additionally, workplace interventions could leverage peer support networks, social modelling, and targeted health communication strategies to enhance employees' engagement in healthy eating and physical activity. Researchers may also explore the role of digital media campaigns and internal corporate communication as moderators in the relationship between workplace social environment and health behaviour. Such insights would provide actionable guidance for organizations to design evidence-based wellness programs that improve employee well-being and overall organizational productivity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to thank Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Melaka for this opportunity and anonymous reviewers of International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS) who have provided their precious feedback and comments.

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