

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DIETARY CHOICES AND FOOD HABITS

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ABSTRACT

Food is the basic necessity of life and food consumption a vital daily practice that affects our health and wellbeing. Social media, cultural norms, food availability, individual preferences and socio-economic status are the primary factors that determine are dietary habits and food consumption pattern. The continued growth of social media and its expanding impact has affected all aspects of human life including food. Social media is undeniably shaping our food choices. The key features of interactive media: ubiquitous connectivity, personalization, peer to peer networking, engagement immersion and content creation are ways in which people are being shaped by this new digital culture. The advertising industry in many instances led by food and beverage market is purposefully exploiting the special relationship the consumers have with social media. The online marketing campaigns create intimacies between consumers and the brands and products which virtually surround them. The media is changing the food habits and choices of people through advertisement, news and post on different platforms. With the avid use of social media and the increased spending power, the consumers have become the primary target of a new "Media and Marketing Ecosystem". Food related promotion of brands via social media represents an increasingly important consumer targeted marketing strategy. Popular social media platforms have been actively used by food companies to promote their product. Being exposed to this type of advertising increases the consumption of unhealthy foods. Watching food brand video content on YouTube, purchasing food online and seeing favorite food brands advertised online are significantly associated with higher consumption of unhealthy foods and drinks. Depending on the nutrition value of the product being marketed, social media influences food choices and contributes to the risk of developing unfavorable health outcomes such as obesity, hypertension, type two diabetes and other non-communicable diseases. Monitoring commercial content on social media should be the code for public health practice. There is an urgent need for additional research and stringent policies that address the growing health threat that consumers face regarding food in the digital marketplace.

Key Word: social media, young adults, dietary choices, food habits, food behavior, obesity.

INTRODUCTION

The transitional period between adolescence and adulthood which is 18 to 30 years is called young adulthood. This is an impressionable life stage, as young adults develop new skills towards their independence, yet remain vulnerable due to lack of life experience. Young adulthood is a crucial time to form healthy food habits which serves them well for the rest of their lives. It is of utmost importance that a person during these transitional years creates and maintains certain habits such as incorporating eating routine, choices in living and patterns of conduct that may persist into adulthood. A growing number of young adults are placing a larger focus on leading a healthy lifestyle, maintaining correct nutrition and engaging in regular physical activity. But the

eating habits of young people have grown increasingly unhealthy over a period of last few years. These young adults are amongst the largest consumers of sugar sweetened beverages and fast foods and have low fruit and vegetable intake. These modifiable food choice behaviors carry long term health implications such as increased risk of chronic metabolic diseases like obesity, cardio vascular diseases and diabetes mellitus.

Social media refers to communication tools based on the internet for sharing ideas information images and other content. It includes Facebook, Twitter YouTube etc. Since social media can be accessed in real time using a smartphone and information can easily be shared, the dependence on social media is increasing in the life of young adults and has become an inseparable part of their life. Young adults have exhibited abnormal eating behaviors as a result of the influence of social media. An increasing number of people are making poor dietary decisions as a direct result of the influence of this media.

The social media has potential benefits

Some of these are: -

- It encourages and inspires. If we follow people who provide healthy model, we feel empowered towards positive change.
- Provides valuable skills and information. The social media provided best information for our dietary needs.
- Creates a positive food community. It has the power to bring likeminded people together.

Potential drawbacks of social media

Some of these are: -

- Distracted eating may lead to over consumption.
- Creates unrealistic beliefs and expectations.
- Ads influence us more than we might think.
- May fuel eating disorders.

The impact of social media on people's eating habits and their levels of obesity

The National Youth Plan strives to stimulate widespread action on youth development in five key areas, which are education; employment and entrepreneurship; youth leadership and development; health, fitness, and sports; and social justice. The plan has been updated, and the updated version is currently being put into action following a review that has only recently to a productive conclusion. The review was brought to a beneficial conclusion as a result of recent developments, which brought it to an end. This approach describes the difficulties that are connected with nutrition when regarded from the viewpoint of age, together with the essential ideas and frameworks that create the basis for these explanations. Additionally, this method discusses the problems that are involved with nutrition when viewed from the perspective of gender. The difficulties that are related with nutrition may be described utilizing this way when looked at from the perspective of age. In order to gather information on the participants' eating routines, a questionnaire was given to them to complete out. A questionnaire on the participants' eating habits was provided to them to fill out, and they were asked to do so in order to collect information about it. A diet that not only allows an individual to have the experience of fullness but also provides an adequate amount of nourishment not only reduces the overall amount of stress

and the risk of health deterioration, but it also assists with the management of the mental and emotional strain that may be brought on by rigorous training and tests. Because young males will one day be accountable for improving both their own health and the possibilities that are accessible to them in the job, they require more care because of this future obligation. Young women do not face the same future responsibilities. At some time in the future, it will be completely their responsibility to bear the weight of carrying this burden. Young men in today's culture require a higher level of care than they did in previous generations since there is a greater chance that they may one day be required to undertake responsibilities. They need to have this topic brought to their attention in a way that is both incredibly clear and very concise in its explanation for it to be successful in doing so.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To conduct a survey of 100 subjects to find out their eating patterns.
2. To elicit information on the demographic profile of the subjects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research was to investigate the influence that social media has on people's eating behaviors.

The Methodology Behind the Study

In order to collect information from the individuals regarding their eating habits, a survey methodology was used. Through the use of Google Forms, a self-designed and organized questionnaire was developed.

Sampling method

The data for the study were collected using a method called sampling at a convenient time. Because of its familiarity and convenience of access, Chennai was selected as the location. Google Forms was used to distribute the questionnaire to the participants in the study. There were instructions provided for completing the questionnaire, which were followed.

Pilot Study

In order to assess the practicability and validity of the questionnaire, a pilot study consisting of ten percent of the total study population was carried out. On the basis of the comments and suggestions that were provided, the questionnaire underwent the necessary adjustments.

Sample size

The questionnaire was filled out by a total of 100 participants, ranging in age from 18 to 45 years old. The research was conducted over the course of a single month to guarantee that participants had sufficient time to fill out the questionnaire and to minimize the possibility of sampling error.

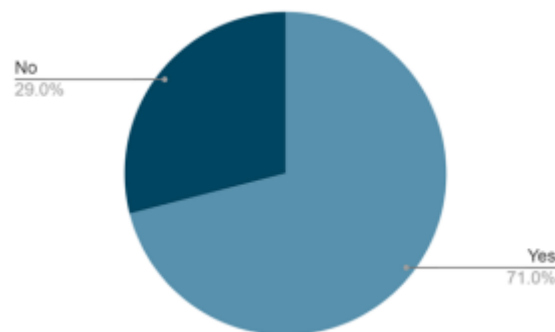
DATA ANALYSIS

Age Group, Gender, and Educational Qualifications for the Interpretation of the Results. The poll was carried out with the purpose of determining the extent to which social media has an impact on the eating habits of people. The percentage of female participation is 84 percent, while the percentage of male participants is 16 percent. In terms of the age range of the participants, the vast majority of them (79%) are between the ages of 18 and 25, while 19% are between the ages of 25 and 35, and 2% are between the ages of 35 and 45. Only

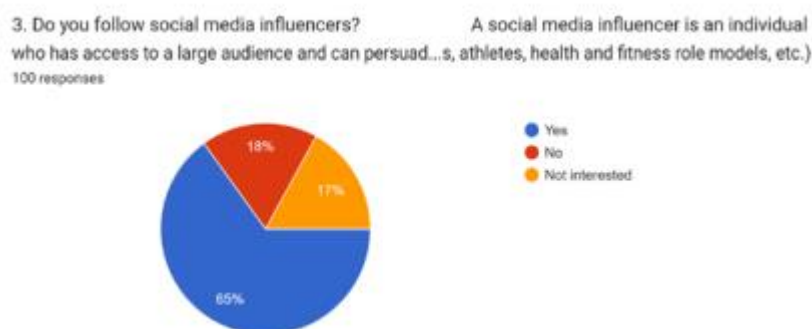
12.1% of participants are now enrolled in high school, 37.4% are enrolled in undergraduate programs, and 50.5% have earned master's degrees. Despite the fact that studies have proven that people's well-being worsens as they get older, older people are among the users of social media who utilize it the most. When compared to males, the well-being of females is negatively impacted more than that of males.

Utilization of social media on a Regular Basis

The majority of participants (71%) regularly engage in the usage of social media on a daily basis. 49% of the participants have admitted to making frequent use of YouTube. 73% of the people who took part in the study reported that they have never utilized Facebook. The vast majority of participants (83%) freely acknowledge that they have never even opened a Twitter account. 47% of participants have admitted that they have never used Snapchat, while 43% of respondents have said that they have never logged into LinkedIn. It should come as no surprise that the participants make use of social media; most significantly, the vast majority of them watch videos on YouTube. People are becoming increasingly concerned about the potential negative effects of becoming addicted to social media, particularly with regard to their mental health and the eating habits that they have developed.

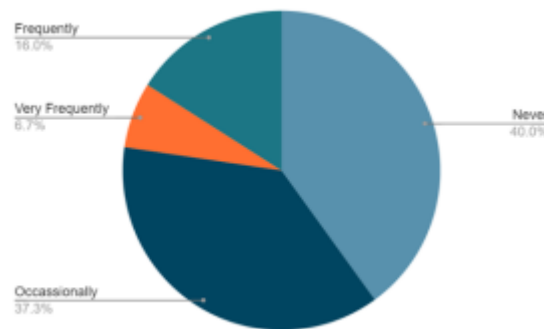


Details on the social media influencers' audiences on various platforms. The majority of participants (65%) answered that they follow social media influencers, whereas 18% of participants claimed that they do not follow any influencers. One in every seven participants stated that they had no desire to follow social media influencers. The fact that posts on social media about food are influencing how we perceive it is becoming an increasingly worrying trend. The algorithms that power social media sites give preference to content that users engage with more, which explains why there is a rise in the promotion of unhealthy eating. When we follow the influencers, it is not surprising that we are exposed to a greater variety of harmful meals in our feeds.



Instructions on how to follow the eating plan advocated by prominent figures on social media. The majority of participants (i.e., 30%) answered that they had never attempted a diet that was given to them by a social media

influencer, whereas 28% of participants claimed that they have occasionally done so. 5% of people who responded said that they very regularly attempt the diet, while 12% of those who participated claimed that they frequently follow the diet that is advocated by social media superstars. According to the findings of a study that was conducted by researchers at the Medical University of Vienna and presented at this year's European Congress on Obesity (ECO) in Maastricht, Netherlands, the majority of the food content that is posted on social media by food influencers does not adhere to the standards that have been set by the World Health Organization (WHO) for public health advertising. About forty-five percent of individuals who were questioned said that they would give the diet a shot, which has an effect not only on their own health but also on the health of their friends and other people they know..



- Specifics on how one might advise friends and/or acquaintances to follow a diet that is being pushed by a social media influencer.

The general public believes influencers when they state that a quick weight loss strategy will be successful for everyone since these individuals are excellent at advertising quick weight loss methods. The vast majority of these diets are not based on good scientific principles; as a consequence, they can lead to a number of metabolic imbalances inside the body, which can, in turn, lead to lifestyle problems. According to the results of the survey, 52% of the participants stated that they very frequently recommend the diet that was promoted by a social media influencer to friends or acquaintances, while 23% stated that they frequently do so. This indicates that there are some people who really get influenced by the food that is promoted by the influencers.

- Specifics on the hypothesis that the foods that are marketed or exhibited on social media platforms are healthful.

Businesses now have the potential to differentiate their products in markets that are intensely competitive as a direct result of the current international trend toward a greater health consciousness. In addition, the advertising of foods that are healthy for you is becoming more prominent. 34% of participants answered that they don't often think the products marketed or presented on social media are healthy, while 20% of participants said they sometimes think that way.

- An increase in the consumption of fast food as a result of utilizing social media.

The fast-food industry is pervasive all over the world and is gaining popularity in a great number of countries. Customers create their impressions of fast-food restaurants based on the suggestions of others, the promotions offered by the businesses themselves, their personal experiences, ratings on social media and reviews, and other factors. Nearly one-fifth of the participants admitted that they ate more fast food after they began using

social media, while another one-tenth of the participants indicated that their intake of fast food did not rise at any point after they began using social media.

- Information on the food blogs and sites that may be followed on social media.

It has been demonstrated that there is a consistent increase in the number of postings on social media that are linked to food, which is reflective of the interest in nutritious eating in this day and age. Because of advances in social media technology, blogs have become an extremely useful instrument for the dissemination of knowledge on food. The fact that food blogs are user-generated material that influences the purchasing decisions of customers is the primary factor contributing to their prominence and high level of credibility. The majority of respondents (26%) claimed that they only occasionally read nutrition blogs or pages on social media. On the other hand, 23% of respondents claimed that they never follow nutrition bloggers or sites.

- Information on the celebrities who endorse certain foods and meals, including how often they eat them.

Because celebrity endorsement is a communication technique that makes items and firms more appealing and intriguing to potential customers, many consumers are willing to purchase and pay a premium price for the things that their favorite celebrities advocate. In addition, many consumers are keen to buy the things that their favorite celebrities endorse. In a manner analogous to this, the rising usage of social media by celebrities is leading to a rise in the influence that they wield on consumers in the modern day. The assumption that celebrity endorsements on social networking sites have a growing influence on how customers behave is supported by evidence as well. 29% of the participants reported that they do not consume food that is marketed by celebrities very often, whereas 17% of the participants reported that they do consume the food item or meals advocated by celebrities on occasion.

- The dependability of meals and dishes that have had a greater number of likes and shares on social media.

When a potential purchaser has made the decision to make a purchase, the next step is to compile a list of options that will assist them in making an informed purchase decision. Even while e-commerce websites offer a wide variety of tools for browsing, looking for the items, and providing product characteristics, the job of the customer is still difficult. People are seeking for reviews, recommendations, and rankings not only from former customers but also from trustworthy sources such as workers of businesses, members of their families, and friends. Users are able to swiftly connect with friends, family, and other reliable individuals online by making advantage of the social networking features offered by websites. These features include the ability to read and access postings and comments with ease. By utilizing this tactic, the customer has the opportunity to learn about product information that has been shared and uploaded on social media by other users. According to the inferences drawn from the data, eight percent of the sample participants believed that the meals that had received the most positive feedback and comments on social media were more trustworthy than the others.

CONCLUSION

Once individuals go into social media, they may come across stuff that is either valuable, relevant, correct, truthful, etc. The vastness of the sea of social media. Since there are many diet and food blogs written by amateurs, some people may immediately begin following a diet without performing proper study or seeking expert counsel. These weblogs are available on the web. These issues require the input of the general people. The results of the survey show that the vast majority of people surveyed (71%) regularly engage in social media activity, with a similar proportion (65%) reporting that they follow social media influencers. It's also

glaringly obvious that YouTube plays a big part in drawing people in and spreading information. About a quarter of the people who took the survey (28% to be exact) admitted to have ever followed the diet promoted by social media celebrities. Over half of the participants stated they would tell their friends, coworkers, and anyone else they knew about the diet that was pushed by a social media influencer. Fifteen percent of the study's participants admitted that their cravings for fast food had increased after they started using social media. The number of likes, shares, and followers may all contribute to a post's credibility. The results of this survey indicate that students are generally aware of the fundamental concepts that underpin a healthy diet, but they also show that a sizable percentage of students do not really follow these ideas. This would indicate that students lack an understanding of the fundamental concepts that form the basis of a healthy diet. Schools and colleges are excellent venues to gain the necessary information, and the internet is also a very useful resource in this respect.

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