

Impact of Social Media on Dietary Choices

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ABSTRACT

The impact of social media on dietary choices has become a matter of increasing concern in recent years. With the widespread use of social media platforms, particularly among young adults, there is a growing need to understand how these platforms influence individuals' dietary behaviors. This research paper provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the subject, aiming to shed light on the mechanisms through which social media can affect dietary choices and the implications for public health. The research begins by examining the definition and types of social media, highlighting their popularity and extensive usage among young adults. It explores the role of social media in information dissemination and its influence on consumer behavior. Additionally, the research delves into the importance of healthy dietary choices, factors influencing dietary behaviors, and public health guidelines and recommendations. Furthermore, the research investigates the mechanisms of influence through which social media impacts dietary choices. It discusses social influence and peer effects, food marketing and advertising, user-generated content and influencers, as well as the comparison and idealization of body image. The availability and accessibility of information related to food choices are also explored. The research then presents the impact of social media on dietary choices. It discusses how social media can increase awareness and knowledge of healthy eating, promote positive eating trends, but also contribute to the consumption of unhealthy foods and body image concerns leading to disordered eating behaviors. In light of these findings, the review highlights various interventions and strategies to address the impact of social media on dietary choices. It explores the role of educational campaigns, health promotion efforts, social media platform interventions, influencer marketing for healthier food choices, and the importance of digital literacy

and critical thinking skills: The paper concludes by discussing the challenges and future directions in this field of research. It addresses methodological limitations, ethical considerations, and the need for longitudinal studies to establish causal relationships. Finally, it emphasizes the potential for positive impact and the importance of targeted interventions to promote healthier dietary choices in the context of social media. Overall, this comprehensive review contributes to a better understanding of the complex relationship between social media and dietary choices. The insights gained from this research have implications for public health initiatives, enabling the development of effective strategies to promote healthier eating habits in the digital age.

Keywords : Digital Media Dietary Choices Social Media

I. INTRODUCTION

Health, according to the World Health Organization, is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity". Eating healthy, balanced meals along with necessary movement leads to a good healthy life. Nutrition is about eating a healthy and balanced diet. Food and drink provide the energy and nutrients you need to be healthy. Understanding these nutrition terms may make it easier for you to make better food choices. (4) During the COVID times, health became the top priority of everyone and the only way to connect with people was through mass media and social media. The term "social media" refers to the wide range of Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities (3). It is a place where people connect, spread, and share or exchange information. The usage of social media apps among young adults is the highest, a majority of 18- to 29-year-olds say they use Instagram (71%) or Snapchat (65%), while roughly half say the same for TikTok (1). Young adults spent a lot of time scrolling through Facebook newsfeeds, which often resulted in seeing health-related content

either from their friends, news sources, or advertisements. Some actively sought out information about specific health areas by joining groups or following relevant pages (2).

Diet is an important contributor to human health and public health bodies are issuing guidelines aimed at favoring healthy food choices. The social media landscape has fundamentally altered how consumers are exposed to food. Users are inundated with visual displays of food, with over 400 million posts on "#food" and 250-million on "#foodporn" on Instagram alone. From a nutritional perspective, humans have long sought foods with characteristics that the brain instinctively recognizes as valuable. Evolutionarily, the ability to visually recognize calorie-dense foods was advantageous during foraging. When it comes to influencing consumers' online behaviors, the link between affect and digital engagement is well documented. People should feel positively when viewing calorie-dense foods because they can forecast the pleasantness of the meal based on its appearance. Furthermore, when something makes people feel good, they are more likely to engage with it. We focus our investigation on digital behaviors associated with social interactions for example like, comment, share and subscribe. (5)

In this study, we aim to investigate the impact of social media on dietary choices, with a specific focus on the digital behaviors associated with social interactions. By examining the ways in which individuals engage with food-related content on social media platforms, we seek to understand the potential influence of social media on dietary decision-making among young adults. This research will contribute to our understanding of how social media platforms can shape nutritional behaviors and guide interventions and strategies for promoting healthy eating choices in the digital age.

OBJECTIVES -

- to assess the nutritional status of young adults
- to analyze the eating habits of the given age group (20 to 24 years)
- to intervene with them about healthy eating choices

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The research being conducted is an experimental research done to find the true hypothesis, the samples selected are young adults and a certain sample size is chosen.

Hypothesis –

Null Hypotheses (H0): There is no impact of social media on the nutritional status of young adults.

Alternate Hypotheses (H1): There is a significant impact of social media on young adults.

Sample –

The age group of 20-24 is typically considered a crucial period of transition from adolescence to adulthood. Young adults in this age range often experience significant changes in lifestyle, including their dietary choices. There are several reasons for choosing this specific age group for studying the

impact of social media on dietary choices:

Emerging adulthood: Individuals in the 20-24 age group are often in the phase of emerging adulthood, where they face new responsibilities, independence, and decision-making. This transitional phase makes them more susceptible to external influences, including the impact of social media on their dietary choices.

Social media usage: Young adults are among the most active users of social media platforms. They frequently engage with social media for various purposes, including seeking information, social interaction, and entertainment. Thus, studying the impact of social media on their dietary choices becomes relevant due to their high exposure and potential susceptibility to social media content.

Formation of dietary habits: The 20-24 age range is a critical period for the establishment of long-term dietary habits. The dietary choices made during this period can have lasting effects on health outcomes in adulthood. Exploring how social media influences these dietary choices can provide valuable insights into the development of healthier eating habits.

Target audience for health promotion: Interventions and educational programs aimed at promoting healthy eating behaviors often target young adults. Understanding the influence of social media on their dietary choices can inform the design and delivery of effective interventions that utilize social media platforms to promote healthy eating habits.

By focusing on the 20-24 age groups, researchers can gain valuable insights into the interplay between social media, dietary choices, and health outcomes during a critical period of transition and habit formation

Sampling –

You can combine probability and convenience sampling techniques to carry out a questionnaire study on how social media affects eating decisions. Here is an idea for a strategy:

1. Specify the target demographics: Indicate the characteristics of your target market, such as young adults between the ages of 20-24 years who actively utilize social media.
2. Obtain a sampling frame: Make a list of potential participants from a variety of places, such as social networking sites, online forums, college or university directories, or regional community groups geared towards young adults.
3. Probability sampling: Use a random sampling method, such as simple random sampling or stratified random sampling, to select a representative sample from the sampling frame. This helps ensure that each individual in the target population has an equal chance of being selected.
4. Convenience sampling: You can add convenience sampling to your probability sample by enlisting participants from accessible locations or young adults' specific social media groups. Convenience sampling can help attain a bigger sample size more quickly, but it should be used in conjunction with probability sampling because it may add bias.
5. Calculating the sample size: Based on factors including the research objectives, the available resources, and statistical power, determine the ideal sample size. If you want to ensure that the sample size is appropriate for insightful analysis, think about consulting a statistician. Sample size compromises of 100 young adults
6. Participant recruitment and data collection: Use numerous ways to contact the chosen participants, such as email invites, social media posts, or online survey platforms. Give participants a link to the survey and clear

instructions so they may complete it whenever is most convenient.

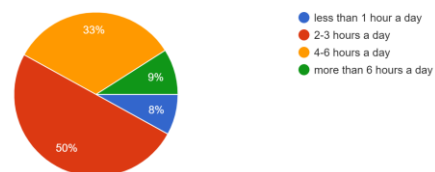
7. Informed consent: Before the participants begin the questionnaire, get their informed consent. Confidentiality is guaranteed, the study's goal is clearly stated, and contact information is provided in case any questions or issues arise.
8. Data analysis: Depending on your study aims and data characteristics, analyse the responses when data collection is complete using relevant statistical techniques, such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, or regression analysis.

III. METHOD USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

The simple random sampling method from probability sampling was used; a questionnaire was formed, circulated and utilized as primary method of data collection, sample of 100 young adults were collected. The questionnaire aimed to gather information regarding participants' social media usage, dietary behaviors, and the influence of social media on their dietary choices.

IV. RESULTS

How many hours per day do you spend on social media platforms?
100 responses

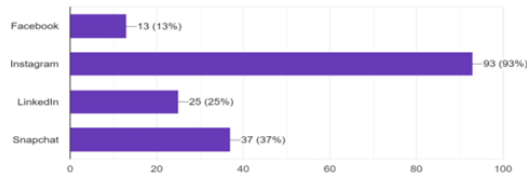


Majority of the young adults spend at least 2-3 hours of their day on social media

Around 33% percent spend between 4-6 hours on social media

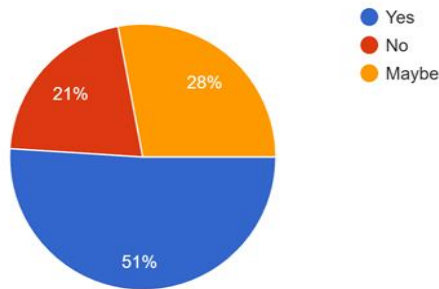
And almost 9% spend more than 6 hours of their day on social media

Which social media platforms do you use the most?
100 responses



The most used social media site/application is Instagram. Instagram is a photo and video sharing social networking service owned by American company Meta Platforms. The app allows users to upload media that can be edited with filters and organized by hashtags and geographical tagging. Posts can be shared publicly or with preapproved followers

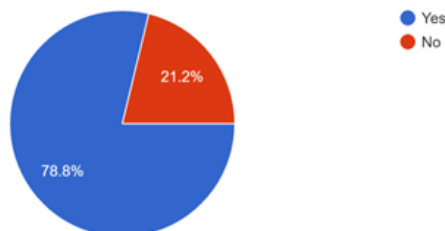
Do you think social media influences your dietary choices?
100 responses



Food related is shared most on Instagram and people very often come across it and acknowledge it.

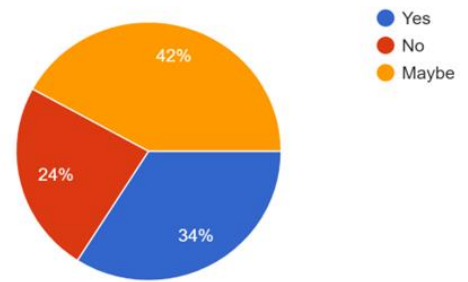
More than 50% young adults think social media does influence a person's dietary and food choices.

Have you ever tried a new food or recipe after seeing it on social media?
99 responses



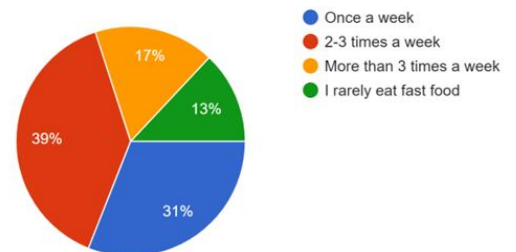
Almost 80% of youth tries and follows recipe found on social media.

Do you think social media promotes healthy eating behaviors?
100 responses



34% young adults believe that social media promotes a healthy eating behavior whereas 24% of them disagree.

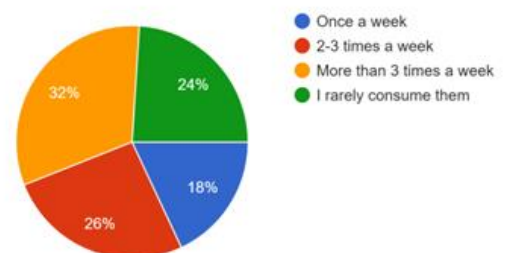
How often do you eat fast food per week?
100 responses



39% of young adults indulge in consuming junk and fast food more than 2-3 times a week, and 17% consumes fast food more than 3 times a week

Popularity of these food stuffs in this age of urbanization has been attributed to quick preparation and convenience of finishing a meal within no time. Great taste, attractive appearance along with advertising has played a major role in attracting people particularly adolescents to the selling joints. (6)

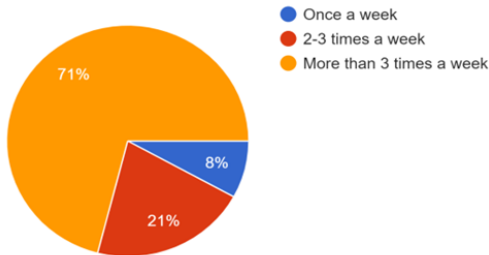
How often do you consume sugary drinks per week?
100 responses



A major chunk of young adults consumes a large quantity of sugary drinks, out of which 32% consume

sugary drinks more than 3 times a week, and 26% consume sugary drinks two to three times a week.

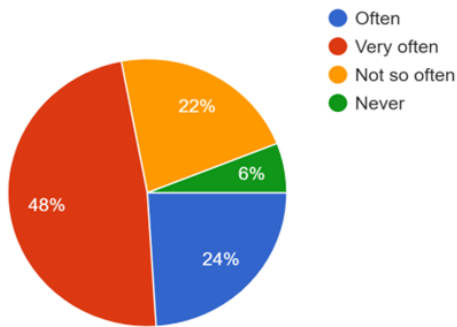
How often do you consume fruits and vegetables per week?
100 responses



A positive outlook from this survey comes up as, 71% of the respondents consume fruits and vegetables more than 3 times a week, and 21% consume two to three times a week.

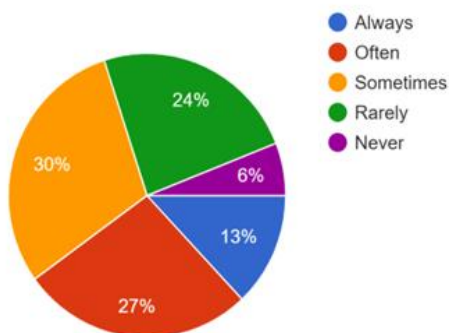
There was also a population that consumes it once a week.

How often do you cook meals at home?
100 responses



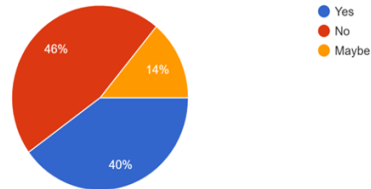
A majority of respondents, 48% cook meals at home very often. 28% of respondents fall under the category who cook meals at home not so often or never.

How often do you eat while using social media?
100 responses



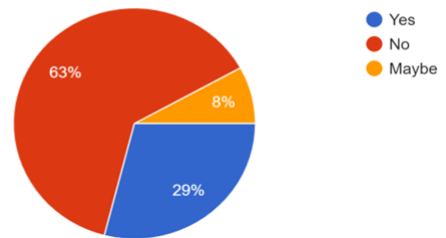
This particular question draws a clear picture of how the social media has ventured into the lives of young adults. 94% of the respondents admitted to use social media while eating, once or more than once.

Have you ever felt pressure to change your dietary habits or body image due to social media?
100 responses



A majority of respondents admitted that social media is not so persuasive to them, to convince to change their dietary choices but the other half also tells you how social media has brought any kind of change in their everyday life.

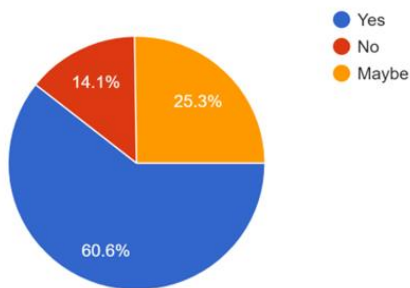
Have you ever tried a weight loss method you saw on social media?
100 responses



A clear majority of respondents feel that social media doesn't persuade them to follow various weight loss methods easily available on social media.

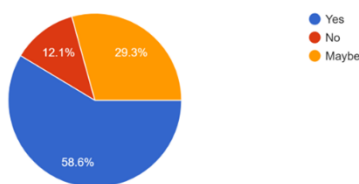
But the 29% respondents have responded that the social media did persuade them to follow a certain type of weightloss method, the remaining 8% is still confused about it.

Do you think social media promotes unrealistic body standards?
99 responses



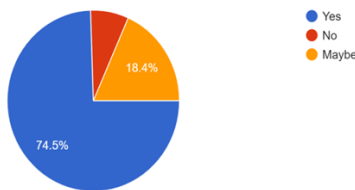
60.6% of the respondents admitted that they believe, social media promotes unrealistic body standards.

Do you think social media platforms should be responsible for promoting healthy eating behaviors?
99 responses



58.8% of the young adults which constitute a majority believe that social media platforms should be responsible for promoting healthy eating behaviors.

Would you be interested in using a social media platform that promotes healthy eating behaviors?
98 responses



A huge majority (74.5%) are keen to promote healthy eating behaviors via the help of social media platforms.

It had a neutral response from the respondents. For some, social media had a positive impact on their dietary choices whereas, some had a negative impact on their dietary choices.

V. DISCUSSION

The impact of social media on dietary choices is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that warrants careful analysis and discussion. This study aimed to explore the relationship between social media and dietary behaviors among individuals, particularly

focusing on young adults. The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the influence of social media on dietary choices and have implications for public health interventions and strategies.

Influence of Social Media on Dietary Choices:

The study findings reveal that social media plays a significant role in shaping individuals' dietary choices. Participants reported being exposed to a wide range of food-related content, including recipes, restaurant reviews, and food trends, through various social media platforms. The visual nature of social media, such as food photos and videos, has a powerful impact on individuals' food preferences and cravings. Moreover, the study highlights the influence of social media influencers and peer interactions in promoting specific dietary behaviors.

Positive Impact on Dietary Choices:

One noteworthy finding is the positive impact of social media on dietary choices. Participants reported that exposure to healthy food options, recipes, and nutritional information through social media platforms motivated them to adopt healthier eating habits. Social media platforms have emerged as valuable platforms for disseminating health-related content, promoting awareness of the importance of a balanced diet, and encouraging individuals to make informed food choices. The study findings suggest that social media can serve as a powerful tool for health promotion and education.

Negative Impact on Dietary Choices:

Despite the positive aspects, the study also reveals some negative influences of social media on dietary choices. Participants reported being exposed to a significant amount of unhealthy food-related content, such as indulgent recipes and food challenges, which could lead to increased consumption of calorie-dense and nutritionally poor foods. Additionally, the study identified the potential for social media to contribute

to body image concerns and disordered eating behaviors. Comparisons with idealized body images and exposure to diet-related content can negatively influence individuals' self-perception and drive unhealthy dietary practices.

Implications for Public Health:

The findings of this study have important implications for public health interventions and strategies. Recognizing the significant influence of social media on dietary choices, it is crucial to develop targeted interventions that leverage the positive aspects of social media while mitigating the negative influences. Health promotion campaigns, educational content, and collaboration with social media influencers can help promote evidence-based nutritional information and encourage healthier dietary behaviors. Additionally, digital literacy programs should be implemented to enhance individuals' critical thinking skills and empower them to navigate social media platforms effectively.

Limitations and Future Research:

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The research focused primarily on self-reported data, which may be subject to recall bias and social desirability bias. The study also relied on a specific age group (young adults), limiting generalizability to other populations. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships and explore the long-term effects of social media on dietary behaviors. Additionally, qualitative research methods can provide deeper insights into individuals' experiences and perceptions of the impact of social media on their dietary choices.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the influential role of social media in shaping dietary choices among young adults. While social media can positively impact dietary behaviors by promoting healthy eating

and providing nutritional information, it also poses challenges by exposing individuals to unhealthy food content and contributing to body image concerns. By understanding these dynamics, public health interventions and strategies can be developed to harness the positive potential of social media while addressing its negative effects on dietary choices.

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