

Social Media's Influence on Eating Habits Among Adults

RESHMA. C. N¹, NANCY. M²

^{1,2} Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research

Abstract—

Background

For better or worse, the 21st century has entered the era of social media. Social media controls everything, including what customers buy and how they consume. All food and beverage trends are greatly influenced by social media. Naturally, customers will want to participate in whatever hot trends their social media followers have found.

Objectives

To determine the influence of social media on eating habits of people who participate in whatever hot trends their social media followers have found.

Methods An online survey was conducted for 100 subjects using a structured questionnaire to collect information about their demographic details, dietary pattern, social media habits.

Results

The survey's findings show that majority of participants (71%) regularly use social media, and the majority (65%) reported that they follow social media influencers. Only a small percentage of individuals (28%) admitted occasionally trying the diet suggested by social media celebrities. More than half of the participants said they would highly recommend the diet that a social media influencer had promoted to co-workers or friends. 15% of participants stated that social media had increased their need for fast food, and 8% of participants believed that dishes with the most likes and shares on social media were more reliable. It is clear from the survey that YouTube plays a major part in influencing people.

Conclusion

Social media is like an ocean; once users dive in, they will find material that is beneficial or not, relevant, or not, accurate or untrue, and so on. There is a ton of blogs on diets and food that are written by amateurs. People will benefit from a nutrition education programme that includes information on how social media affects diet. There needs to be increased awareness in order for children, teenagers, and adults to have better futures.

Indexed Terms— Social media, eating behaviours, social media influencers, nutrition, food habits.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the internet era, social media's pervasiveness and the internet's extraordinary scale and speed of diffusion, consumers' seeking product or service information and food consumption behaviours have altered significantly. Consumers now rely more on information from social media and other consumers (Cheung.M.L.et al, 2022). The majority of young people take advantage of these expanded choices for social networking such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, etc (Davila, J. et al., 2012). The phenomenon has led to the growth of social media influencers (SMI)—content producers who actively share their opinions and knowledge about products online, some of whom can subsequently draw a large audience and serve as a resource for their followers. SMIs have had a big impact on social media marketing, and brand marketers are now turning to SMIs instead of traditional celebrities to endorse their products. (Cheung.M.L.et al, 2022). Young adult populations can also benefit from social media sites like Facebook and YouTube as well as mobile game nutrition-intervention apps like Food Hero to promote awareness, knowledge, shape core beliefs, and inspire attitudes. Adolescents have acknowledged the value of social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Snapchat in delivering peer support for healthy eating through information sharing and social support (Chung.A.et al,2021). This scoping study sought to clarify the impact of social media on eating habits among 100 subjects between the ages of 18 and 45 years old.

Objectives

- To conduct a survey of 100 subjects to find out their eating patterns.
- To elicit information on the demographic profile of the subjects.
- To assess the eating habits of the subjects.
- To determine the influence of social media on the eating behaviour of the subjects.

II. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of social media on eating behaviour.

2.1 Design of the Study

A survey design was employed to elicit information about the eating behaviour of the subjects. A self-designed, structured questionnaire was created using Google Forms.

2.2 Sampling technique

Convenience sampling was employed for the collection of the study data. The area chosen was Chennai due to familiarity and easy accessibility. The questionnaire was shared with the subjects through Google Forms. Instructions on how to fill out the questionnaire were given.

2.3 Pilot Study

A pilot study among 10% of the study population was carried out to determine the feasibility and validity of the questionnaire. Based on the feedback obtained, suitable modifications were carried out in the questionnaire.

2.4 Sample size

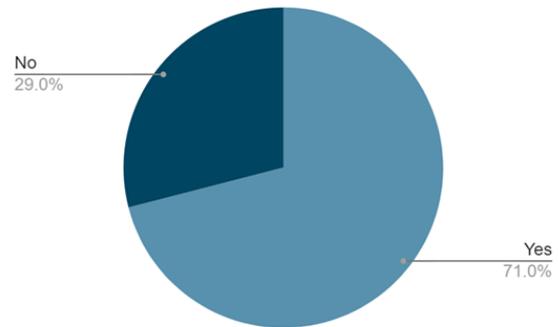
In all, 100 subjects in the age group of 18–45 years completed the questionnaire. The study was carried out over a period of one month to ensure that enough time was given to respondents to fill out the questionnaire and reduce sampling error.

Interpretation

Age Group, Gender, and Educational Qualifications.
The survey was conducted in order to determine the influence of social media on people's eating behaviours. There are 84 percent of female participants and 16 percent of male participants. In terms of age range, the majority (79%) of participants are between the ages of 18 and 25; 19% are between the ages of 25 and 35; and 2% are between the ages of 35 and 45. 12.1% of participants are in high school; 37.4% are undergraduates, and 50.5% of participants hold master's degrees. While research has shown that people's well-being declines with age, they are among the social media users that use it the most. Females' well-being is affected the most when compared to males' (Cara. L. Booker,2018).

Frequency of Social Media Usage.

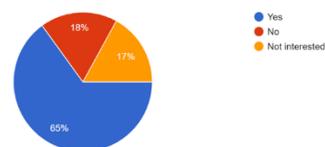
Social media is frequently used by the majority of participants (71%) daily. YouTube is used frequently by 49% of the participants. Of the participants, 73% say that they have never used Facebook. The majority of participants (83%) admit that they never use Twitter. 47% of participants say they never use Snapchat, while 43% of respondents say they never use LinkedIn. It is evident that the participants use social media most importantly majority of them use YouTube. Increasingly, individuals are concerned about the possible harms of social media addiction, especially to their psychological health as well as their food habits. (Swar, B., and Hameed, T. (2017) Chotpitayasunondh, V., and Douglas, K. M. (2016).



Information about the followers of social media influencers.

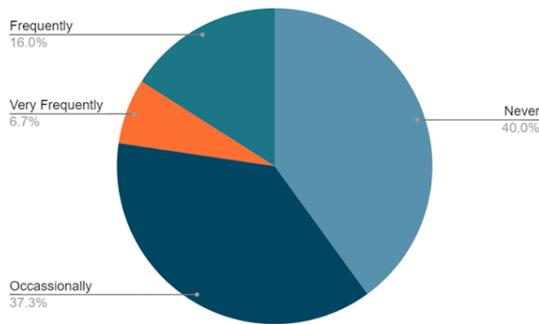
The majority of participants (65%) indicated they follow social media influencers, while 18% said they don't follow any. 17% of participants indicated that they had no interest in following social media influencers. It's becoming more and more concerning that social media posts on food are changing how we view it. We see more unhealthy food on social media because algorithms on those platforms favour material that consumers interact with more. It is obvious that we see more unhealthy foods in our feeds when we follow the influencers (Jessica Brown, 2021).

3. Do you follow social media influencers? A social media influencer is an individual who has access to a large audience and can persuad...s, athletes, health and fitness role models, etc.)
100 responses



Information about trying the diet recommended by social media influencers.

The majority of participants (30%) stated that they have never tried a diet that was suggested by a social media influencer, while 28% said they have occasionally done so. 5% of respondents indicated they very frequently attempt the diet, while 12% of participants said they frequently follow the diet recommended by social media celebrities. The majority of the food content posted by food influencers does not adhere to the standards set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for public health advertising, according to a study conducted by researchers at the Medical University of Vienna and presented at this year's European Congress on Obesity (ECO) in Maastricht, Netherlands. About 45% of those surveyed indicated that they would try the diet, which has an impact on not just their health but also the health of their friends and acquaintances. (TOI, 2022).



- Details on recommending a diet promoted by a social media influencer to friends and/or acquaintances.

Influencers are skilled at promoting fast weight-loss plans, and the general public believes them when they say they will be effective for everyone. Majority of these diets are not scientifically sound and will cause several metabolic imbalances within the body, and will ultimately result in lifestyle disorders (Parashar,2022).From the surveyed data, 52% of the participants said that they very frequently recommend the diet that was promoted by a social media influencer to friends or acquaintances, while 23% said they frequently do, which means there are some people who really get influenced by the food promoted by the influencers.

- Details on the assumption that foods promoted or displayed on social media are healthy.

As a result of the present worldwide trend of increasing health consciousness, businesses have an opportunity to differentiate their goods in fiercely competitive marketplaces, and the promotion of healthier foods is becoming more visible. (Valino. P.S et al, 2020). The majority of participants (34%) indicated they rarely think the items advertised or shown on social media are healthy, while 20% said they occasionally think that way.

- Increase in fast food consumption after using social media.

The fast-food sector is widespread worldwide and is gaining popularity in many countries. Customers form opinions on fast food restaurants based on recommendations from others, promotions from the restaurants, their own experiences, ratings on social media, reviews, etc. (Gogoi.B.J, 2020).Nearly 15% of the subjects confessed that their fast food consumption increased after they started using social media, and 12% of the subjects reported that their fast food consumption never increased after using social media.

- Details about following food blogs and pages on social media.

It has been shown that there is a regular rise in the number of food-related posts on social media, reflecting the interest in healthy food in this digital age. The development of social media technology has made blogs a vital tool for disseminating information on food. The main reason why food blogs are so important and well-trusted is that they are user-generated content that affects consumers' behavioural intentions. (Shah.R and Mishra.K, 2021). The majority of participants (26%) said they rarely follow nutrition blogs or pages on social media, while 23% of participants said they never follow nutrition bloggers or sites.

- Details about the consumption of food/dishes promoted by celebrities.

Many consumers are eager to buy and pay a premium price for the things their favourite celebrities endorse because celebrity endorsement is a communication strategy that makes products and companies more attractive and enticing to potential customers. Similar

to this, celebrities are becoming more influential today among customers as a result of their increased use of social media. Evidence also supports the idea that celebrity endorsements on social networking sites have an increasing impact on how consumers behave. (Porral.C.C et al, 2021). 29% of the participants stated that they rarely consume food that is promoted by celebrities whereas 17% of the participants said that they will sometimes consume the food item or dishes promoted by them.

- Reliability of foods/dishes with more likes/shares on social media.

After opting to buy, a buyer creates a list of possibilities to help him/her choose the best goods. Even if e-commerce sites provide a variety of tools for browsing, searching for the goods, and proving product specifications, the task of the buyer is still challenging. People are looking for evaluations, suggestions, and rankings from previous clients as well as from reliable sources, such as employees of businesses, members of their families, and friends. Social networking websites allow users to easily browse and access postings and comments as well as quickly connect with friends, family, and other trustworthy people online. The consumer can learn about product information shared and posted by others on social media by using this strategy. (Gayathri.U and Poongodi.P, 2021). From the inferred data, it was found that 8% of the subjects felt that the dishes with the most likes and shares on social media were more reliable than the others.

DISCUSSION

Social media is like an ocean; once users dive in, they will find material that is beneficial or not, relevant, or not, accurate or untrue, and so on. There is a ton of blogs on diets and food that are written by amateurs, and some people may immediately start following a diet without doing adequate study or seeking professional advice. These are issues that require attention from the populace. According to the results of the survey, it is evident that majority of respondents (71%) regularly use social media, and the majority (65%) said they follow social media influencers. It is also clear that YouTube plays a major role in sharing information or attracting people. Few participants (28% of them) admitted to occasionally trying the diet

recommended by social media influencers. More than half of the participants stated that they highly suggest to colleagues or acquaintances the diet that was advertised by a social media influencer. 15% of the participants admitted that using social media had boosted their appetite for fast food. People will also believe a post based on the number of likes, shares, and followers. For instance, 8% of the participants thought that social media dishes with the most likes and shares were more trustworthy. This study only provides a high-level overview; in-depth research will reveal how social media affects mental and physical health, how it encourages sedentary behaviour, how it leads people to believe false diet information, how it tempts users with food posts from influencers, how it contributes to the rise in lifestyle disorders and obesity, etc. People will benefit from a nutrition education programme that includes information on how social media affects diet. There needs to be increased awareness in order for children, teenagers, and adults to have better futures.

REFERENCES

- [1] Cheung.M.L et al, (2022). I follow what you post!": The role of social media influencers' content characteristics in consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs). *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*.Volume 66.
- [2] Davila.J et al, (2012). Frequency and Quality of Social Networking Among Young Adults: Associations with Depressive Symptoms, Rumination, and Co Rumination. *Psychology pop media culture*.Volume 1(2).
- [3] Chunga.A et al, (2021). Adolescent peer influence on eating behaviours via social media: Scoping review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*. Volume 23(6).
- [4] Swar, B., and Hameed, T. (2017). "Fear of missing out, social media engagement, smartphone addiction and distraction: moderating role of self-help mobile apps-based interventions in the youth," Paper presented at the 10th International Conference on Health Informatics (Porto).
- [5] Chotpitayasonondh, V., and Douglas, K. M. (2016). How "phubbing" becomes the norm: the antecedents and consequences of snubbing via

smartphone. *Comput. Hum. Behav.* 63, 9–18.
doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.018

- [6] Cara. L. Booker, Yvonne J. Kelly and Amanda Sacker. (2018). Gender differences in the associations between age trends of social media interaction and well-being among 10–15-year-olds in the UK. *BMC public health*, 18, p 321.
- [7] Brown, Jessica. “How food influencers affect what we eat.” BBC, 21st December 2021.
- [8] “The harmful impact of social media influencers on our daily diet.” *Times of India*, 8 May 2022.
- [9] Shah.R and Mishra.K.(2021). The emergence and influence of food bloggers in India: The instagram way of networking. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*. Volume 11(1).
- [10] Gayathri.U and Dr. Poongadi.P. (2021). Impact of social media consumer buying behaviour of organic food products in Tamil Nadu. *International Advanced Research Journal in Science, Engineering and Technology*. Volume 8(6).
- [11] Gogoi.B.J.(2020). Changing consumer preferences: Factors influencing choice of fast food outlet. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*. Volume 24(1).
- [12] Portal.C.C et al, (2021). The influence of celebrity endorsement of food consumption behaviour. *Foods*. Volume 10 (9).
- [13] Valino.P.C et al (2020). Perception of advertisement for healthy food on social media: Effect of attitude on consumers’ response. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. Volume 17(18).
- [14] Parashar, Vaishnavi (2022). “How diets recommended by social media experts could do more damage than good.” *India Today*, 15 July 2022,