**Review Article**

**IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DIETARY CHOICES OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS: A SCOPING REVIEW**

**ABSTRACT**

**Introduction**

Youth are becoming more and more active on social media, with over 90% of them having at least one account. Food and beverage companies take advantage of this trend by targeting teenagers with social media marketing for their products. The influence of social media marketing may raise the possibility of making poor eating choices and unfavourable health outcomes, depending on the products being promoted.

**Objective**

To know how social media impacts the dietary choices of adolescents and young adults.

**Methodology**

The English-language review papers, research papers, and online write-ups regarding the impact of social media and technology on young adults' diet habits were examined.

**Results**

According to the analysis, social media has a significant impact on young adults' nutritional and health choices.

**Conclusion and Implications**

In light of these results, medical professionals and nutritionists should take into account screening young adults and adolescents for social media use and informed dietary choices, as well as informing the public and parents about the risks of these unhealthy eating practices.

**Keywords:** Dietary choices, eating habits, social media, adolescents, young adults

**INTRODUCTION**

Adolescents and Young adults spend more time with media and technology every day than with any other activity (Coyne *et al*., 2013).1 Young adults prefer social media and technology that allows social interaction (Xenos *et al*., 2008).2 Young adulthood is a time of transition (e.g., living arrangements, college, work) and the development of some independence while maintaining some continued reliance on parents for resources like money and emotional support (Aquilino, 2006).3 Young adulthood has been suggested to be an important time for developing long-term health behaviors because of increased independence and transitions (Nelson *et al*., 2008).4 Social media may play a crucial role in understanding young adult health because a lot of things (like individual and environmental) affect health behaviors. It is crucial to determine the impact of technology use on health behaviors during young adulthood because of the potential salience of health behaviors and the frequency of technology use during this developmental stage. Young people see new media and technology as part of daily life (Brown *et al*., 2011).5 Young adults spend eleven to twelve hours a day with technology and media.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics endorses the total diet approach, which emphasizes that a health-promoting lifestyle includes a varied and moderate intake of nutrient-dense food, along with enough physical activity (Graves *et al*.,2013).6 Our understanding of health behaviors includes both diet and exercise, in line with the total diet approach. Young adulthood has been suggested to be a hazardous time for developing poor exercise and diet habits (Nelson *et al*., 2008).4

Various factors, including individual factors, environmental settings, sectors of influence, and social and cultural norms and values, contribute to the complexity of how individuals choose their diet; the social-ecological model explains it well. (Graves *et al*.,2013).6 Psychosocial factors, time availability, and convenience are individual factors in food choices, according to social-ecological theory. The larger societal structures and their impact on food choices and exercise, including government, agriculture, and industry, constitute the sector of influence level of the ecological model. During the past 50 years, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about nutrition have changed due to media and technology, which are also an influence domain (Graves *et al*.,2013).6

As a result of media and technology (e.g., TV, movies, video games, Internet), the Body Mass Index (BMI) of adolescents and young children has increased which is being perceived as sedentary activities, which takes away time from physical activity. Many young adults have access to social media on their mobile phones as a result of technological convergence, which means that they can access multiple technologies from a single device. They also prefer to carry their social networks around with them all the time (Brown *et al*., 2011)5,which may indicate a rise in sedentary behavior. Television viewing, food choices and portion sizes have also been linked (Cleland *et al*., 2008).7 Snacks and beverages taken while watching TV are partly responsible for young adult abdominal weight gain (Cleland *et al*., 2008)7 and young adults are more likely to consume high-density foods like pizza, macaroni and cheese with less moderation when both eating and watching TV at the same time (Blass *et al*., 2006). 8

Social media, like television, can be used as a distraction while eating. However, social media, unlike television, allows for interaction through technology.

**METHODOLOGY**

The English-language review papers, research papers, and online write-ups regarding the impact of social media and technology on young adults' diet habits were examined. Several data collection tools and web browsers, such as Research Gate, Academia, Shodganga, Krishikosh and Google Scholar, were used to search for the publications that were relevant to the study. Additionally, the references given in the printed articles were scrutinized thoroughly to identify the most pertinent research publications. When searching for relevant research publications, search terms like “dietary habits”, “social media”, “food choices” and “snacking” were used.

**DISCUSSION**

The effects of social media and technology on young adults' diet habits were studied and are discussed below.

Adolescents learn and adopt healthy behaviours. Feeling good about oneself, being active, and eating well are all ways to improve your life and physical function. These behaviours are also critical to adolescent development and learning. There is a link between unhealthy eating habits, such as skipping breakfast, consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) and obesity and other chronic diseases. However, there is much more evidence for SSB. Canada has the world's highest rates of childhood obesity in children and adolescents. The purpose of Sampasa-Kanyinga study (2015)9 was to find out how time spent on social networking sites and unhealthy eating habits, such as skipping breakfast, and drinking Sugar-sweetened beverages, energy drinks resulted in body weight gain among adolescents. Results showed that majority (81.5%) of students said they used social networking sites (SNS) on a daily basis, and another 10.7% said they used them on an irregular basis. Students who engaged in unhealthy eating habits were more likely to use SNS than students who refrained from such habits. Results also showed a link between using SNS and skipping breakfast. SNS, especially Facebook, have been linked to body image issues among adolescents, similar to conventional media formats like television and magazines. Tiggemann and Slater (2017)10 found that preadolescent and adolescent female Facebook users report more appearance concerns and diet behaviour than non-users, and that this link significantly increases with the amount of time spent on this SNS. There has been speculation that appearance comparison could be a means of explaining the relationship between Facebook use and body image concerns.

A person in a state of mental health is one in which they are able to see their own potential, overcome obstacles in their everyday lives, function well at work, and significantly improve the lives of others. The advantages and disadvantages of social media for mental health are now being discussed. Social networking is a vital aspect of maintaining our mental health. The quantity and quality of social contacts have an impact on mental health, health behaviour, physical health, and mortality risk. Khalaf (2023) 11 examined the effects of technology on the psychosocial functioning, health, and well-being of teenagers and young adults. Higher levels of social media use were linked to lower outcomes for mental health and to a higher risk of internalising and externalising problems in teenagers, particularly in females. Social media use has also been linked to disordered eating and body image issues, particularly in young women. Additionally, social media use may increase the risk of alcohol intake and its after effects in adolescents and young adults.

Food product promotion is a common occurrence in traditional and social media platforms targeted at young adults. Because commercial food promotion uses overt persuasion strategies, it is seen and frequently disregarded. In a study conducted by Molennar (2021) 12 to know about effects of advertising on young adults, the results showed the “weight” of covert advertising and persuasion is un-assessable because attention is not devoted to natural, native, or embedded persuasion attempts. Young adults in this study were vulnerable to advertising that appeals to pleasure-seeking (taste), cost, and convenience. Health practitioners should think about extending the usage of the marketing mix and advertising tactics to include appeals that are relevant to the lived experiences of young adults to influence food-related behaviours. The environment of online and offline advertising must encourage the consumption of healthful foods if it is to help young adults recognize the benefits of adopting healthy eating habits.

In Yildiran study (2024)13 to determine the “Approaches to Nutrition Posts on social media: Trends in Young Adults”, he found that Social media was used by 93.9% of the participants, 26.8% of whom followed food-related posts, and 2% of individuals used an online diet. Of the participants, 18.3% used the nutritious recipes they found on social media. Participants were categorized based on their body mass index (BMI), and it was shown that those with a BMI of less than 25 kg/m2 use social media more frequently and follow diet-related posts. The use of online diets was shown to be substantially higher in those with BMIs over 25 kg/m2. It was shown that a significant portion of participants use healthy recipes and follow food-related posts on social media.

Consequently, the study found that students who used Facebook experienced addictive symptoms; as a result, social networking sites have an impact on users' health. Young's research led her to discover that excessive internet use can result in mental health issues known as pathological internet use, or PIU (Young, 1998).14 Overuse of internet services is considered an addiction according to the American Psychological Association. The PIU can now be included in the category of addictions with addictions to drugs and alcohol, gambling, video games, and certain eating disorders (Abdulahi,2014).15

There is currently an absence of relevant guidance for young people using social media for health-related purposes. Youth in particular require the kind of support that can adapt to the times when they shift from being the media's rulers to the media being their rulers. The results of this study indicate that relevant adults can help young people realise more of the benefits of social media by helping them understand the significance and vital dynamism of content as well as how young people's social uses of social media influence the health-related information they pay attention to and how young people's interactive functionalities of social media shape what health-related information is accessible to them. (Goodyear,2018)16

The results from Rounsefell (2020)17 indicate that there is a complex association between social media involvement and exposure to image-related content and negative body image as well as some unhealthy dietary choices. Negative body image and food choice consequences may be more likely in young adults who engage in negative social media activities (negative body talk, seeking reassurance, making appearance-related comparisons or self-objectification) or who are exposed to ideal images (celebrities, peers, fitness).

Teenagers' dietary preferences are likely influenced by social media to some extent. Teenagers were better at remembering unhealthy foods, drinks, and brands, and they preferred products that featured celebrities or other influencers in the advertising. If adolescents choose to eat these foods and regularly consume low-nutritional items, these factors may raise health hazards (Kucharczuk, 2022).18

Given the importance of technology and health in early adulthood, the study by Vaterlaus (2015)19 used a social ecology framework to investigate how young adults (N = 34) perceived the impact of social media, such as social networking, on their health behaviours, such as diet and exercise. Four personal and eight focus group interviews were used to gather data. By using phenomenological qualitative analysis, three themes were found. Technology was seen by young adults as having the potential to both discourage and encourage physical activity. Additionally, social media was blamed for increasing the number of food options available to young adults by making a wide range of recipes accessible, giving them a platform to showcase the food they cook or consume, and diverting them from making healthful food decisions.

Teenagers often struggle with body image issues, which can influence what they eat. Commonly recognised factors influencing teenage eating decisions include taste, cost and convenience. However, as adolescents get older and become more independent, social desirability and societal food norms also play a bigger role in influencing teenage eating habits. But because of their limited independence, the dietary environment that supports them is also crucial. Information on adolescent nutrition needs, their concerns for health and body image, and the incentives and barriers for making good food choices should be taken into account when creating more focused interventions for adolescent populations. (Daly, 2022).20

Regardless of age, social media exposure affects children's and adolescents' diets by making them consume more unhealthy snacks and sugar-filled drinks and less fruits and vegetables. Compared to healthy or non-food images, exposure to images of unhealthy food elicited a greater neural response in brain regions associated with memory, reward, attention, and decision-making. Food portion size, and its energy density, and youngsters' appetite states all influence how they interpret photos of healthy and harmful foods and how much of them they eat as a result. There was no proof discovered about the effect of social media on enhancing the nutritional literacy and diet quality of children and adolescents. Parents had a greater influence, but peers appear to have a greater ability to increase vegetable intake in teenagers than influencers among children (Sina,2022).21

Through socialisation agents like peers and social media influencers, as well as internal incentives like engagement and social integration, information, and compensation, consumer socialisation theory can be utilised to explain food purchase behaviour. Almousa (2020)22 in his study emphasised the significant influence that social media influencers have on purchasing behaviours in general and food shopping behaviours in particular.

The relationship between an audiovisual appearance on social media and its ability to influence food choices was investigated in this study (Tamby, 2019).23 The results of the analysis indicate that respondents do, in fact, feel this influence, particularly when watching videos on social media. This suggests that individuals are easily persuaded to alter their food intake or preferences when they watch videos on social media. When watching the videos, they also take into account the audio and visual quality that are displayed, as well as how the food is displayed on screen and how it influences the viewer's satiation. When food is unusual and something they have never had or seen before, individuals are more drawn to try it than when they are drawn to the sound of other people eating. They are also less swayed by the models who promote the food in their meal choices. Apart from movies, individuals are also impacted by food photos that are shared on social media and have vivid colours that make the image appear appetising and lively.

Adolescents who make use of social networking sites are more likely to engage in bad eating habits. Important public health goals include lowering youth screen-related sedentary time and stepping up our efforts to spread information about good eating choices. Future research is required to fully comprehend the influence of social networks on eating habits and the risk of being overweight due to the widespread use of social networking sites (Sampasa-Kanyinga, 2015).9

**CONCLUSION**

Social media has an important role in making dietary choices of adolescents and young adults. More unhealthy decisions are typically made by adolescents and young adults who use social networking sites more frequently than those who use them less. Young adults who engage in negative social media behaviours (negative body talk, seeking reassurance, making appearance-related comparisons, or self-objectification) or who are exposed to ideal images (celebrities, peers, fitness) may be more susceptible to negative body image and the consequences it has on their eating choices. Our results demonstrate the necessity of including social media into laws and guidelines intended to reduce youngsters' exposure to advertising for unhealthy foods.

**COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:**

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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