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Research paper

Influence of social media on children's dietary habits

Qasim Kadhim Ashour [1] *

[1] *Assist. Lecturer. Pediatric Nursing Department, College of nursing, University of Kerbala, Iraq*
**Corresponding author E-mail: haider.kadhum@qu.edu.iq*

Abstract

Introduction: Dietary habits refer to the consistent choices made by individuals or groups concerning their food consumption. It has a crucial influence in human health and reflects individual eating choices, which are often associated with culture, education, social background, and health status. Dietary habits may be influenced and altered by life stages and lifestyle factors, including physical activity and social interac-tion. Nutritional consumption significantly influences human health and well-being, particularly during childhood and adolescence, and directly impacts children's health due to their physical, mental, and cognitive development. Approaches: Data has been gathered from 100 children to evaluate the impact of social media on their dietary practices. The questionnaire was administered to professionals to establish its validity and subsequently its reliability. The total number of items in the questionnaire was 19. To evaluate children's behavior on social media about eating practices. The data was gathered by a simple random sampling process and analyzed using both descriptive and inferen-tial statistical techniques. Outcomes The results indicated that among 100 children, the mean age of participation was 15.66 years. The cur-rent study demonstrated a moderate impact of social media on children's food habits. The study demonstrated a substantial statistical link between children's age and hours spent on social media, as well as the impact of social media on children's food habits ($p < 0.05$). The re-sults indicated no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) between social media usage and other demographic variables. Concludes The findings indicated that social media exerted a moderate influence on children's food habits. The study concluded that a substantial statistical link exists between children's age, hours of social media usage, and the impact of social media on children's food habits. The results indicat-ed no significant statistical differences between social media usage and other demographic variables.

Keywords: *Social Media; Children; Dietary Habits; Directorate General of Education.*

1. Introduction

Social media is characterized as any social networking platform that facilitates interactive, user-generated content, enabling the exchange of photos, ideas, movies, and music (Chung et al., 2021). Social media has become a fundamental aspect of daily life and profoundly influences persons' existence. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and WhatsApp continue to be vital communication tools globally (Al Ali et al., 2021).

Research and practice have predominantly concentrated on the positive aspects of social networking. Nonetheless, it is increasingly evident that social media pose significant threats to individuals, communities, businesses, and society at large. Instances of the "dark side" of social media encompass cyberbullying, compulsive usage, trolling, misinformation, and privacy violations (Baccarella et al., 2018). Certain research suggest that social media usage may be associated with adverse mental health consequences, such as suicidality, loneliness, and diminished empathy (Berryman et al., 2018). Additional worries encompass pedophiles who exploit the Internet to entice minors into relationships. Children may also be exposed to pornographic content, violence in video games, explicit song lyrics, online bullying, and access to hazardous chemicals or information regarding weapon creation (Society, 2003). Social media significantly impacts body image and certain eating disorders; behaviors on these platforms, such as viewing and publishing images and soliciting negative criticism through status updates, have been recognized as particularly detrimental (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). Nutritional consumption significantly influences human health and well-being, particularly during childhood and adolescence, and directly affects children's health due to their physical, mental, and cognitive development. Moreover, it exerts enduring impacts on overall health by establishing lifelong dietary habits in youngsters. Nevertheless, the majority of youngsters fail to adhere to prescribed dietary guidelines and lack good eating habits (Naeeni et al., 2014).

Numerous individuals' health choices and behaviors are shaped by social media platforms (Chung et al., 2021).Research indicates that social media significantly adversely affects children's food consumption, particularly influencing their eating habits. Given that 93% of children aged 8 to 11 and 99% of those aged 12 to 15 are currently engaged in the online community, it is imperative to understand the impact of social media marketing of both healthy and unhealthy snack foods through YouTube bloggers and Instagram accounts on children's eating behaviors and snack consumption (University of Liverpool, 2019).

2. Methodology

A descriptive quantitative study was done to examine the influence of social media on children's dietary habits. The study commenced on November 1, 2022, and concluded on February 1, 2023.The study's sample A non-probability (convenience) sample of 100 children. To initiate the research, the researchers first obtained a written permission letter from the educational deputy of the Nursing College at the University of Karbala. Subsequently, they approached the preparation and training department of the Directorate General of Education in Holy Karbala City to secure a signed permission letter from the director for sampling. Following this, they visited the schools with the permission letter and inquired with the school managers and teachers about the feasibility of administering their questionnaire to the children for research purposes, to which they consented.Participants were selected from individuals aged 10 to 18 years who possess a smartphone or iPad, utilize one or more social media platforms, have no mental or physical disabilities, consented to participate in the research, completed the questionnaire, and whose age corresponded with their educational level.The questionnaire was administered to children within the specified time frame, but some children experienced delays in completion, and sampling occurred between 9 am and 5 pm. The survey period spanned 40 days, from November 1, 2022, to February 1, 2023, with each questionnaire requiring an average of 15 to 30 minutes to complete.

3. The results of the study

Table 1: Distribution of Participants Based on Their Socio-Demographic Traits (N=100)

Demographic characteristic	Subgroup	F	%
Gender	Male	50	50%
	Female	50	50%
	Total	100	100%
Education	Middle school	50	50%
	Secondary school	50	50%
	Total	100	100%
Income	Sufficient	42	42%
	Nearly sufficient	50	50%
	Insufficient	8	8%
	Total	100	100%

Table 2: Evaluate The Impact of Social Media on Children's Food Habits

Items	M	S.D	Eva.
1. The portrayal of food on social media affects my perception of that food.	1.6900	.64659	M
2 .When I engage with social media, I lose awareness of my hunger.	1.7700	.875015	M
3. I observe and engage with many foods on social media that do not align with my dietary habits.	1.6400	.73195	P
4. Despite being satiated, I consume a dish I encounter on social media.	1.7300	.75015	M
5. I believe that the foods depicted on social media are more advantageous for health.	1.1700	.55587	P
6. Since I began utilizing social media, my consumption of fast food and cook-chill meals has risen.	1.7600	.76700	M
7. I follow nutrition-related news, blogs, and pages on social media.	1.8400	.74833	M
8. I effortlessly prepare a cuisine that I encounter on social media.	1.7900	.62434	M
9. I frequently consume snacks while engaging with social media, only to later recognize the extent of my consumption.	2.1000	.68902	M
10. I am intrigued by cuisines and dishes endorsed by celebrities on social media, and I partake in consuming those items.	1.5600	.72919	p
11. While browsing social media, I nibble while feeling satiated.	1.7300	.70861	M
12. I believe that foods or dishes with higher engagement on social media are healthier.	1.6000	.65134	p
13. The cuisines and recipes I encounter on social media stimulate my appetite.	2.2200	.69019	M
14. On days when I engage extensively with social media, my appetite intensifies, resulting in increased food consumption.	1.9400	.70811	M
15. I watch a food photos/videos when you are eating	1.4500	.60927	P
16. I prefer to spent time on social media rather than eat my meal	1.8500	.68718	M
17. I watch more photos/ videos of healthy food (vegetables , fruits) on my social media	1.8500	.62563	M
18. I watch more photos/videos of junk food on my social media	1.8500	.777035	M
19. when I use social media my food amount is reduced.	1.8100	.72048	M
TOTAL	1.7837	.32504	M

M.S = Mean of score; H=High level of barrier (M.S ≥ Cut of point); L=Low level of barrier (M.S < Cut of point); F=Frequency; % = Percentage.

Table 3: The Correlation Between the Impact of Social Media and the Demographic Characteristics of Children

	Statistical analysis	p. value	Sig.
Gender	F= .949	.540	NS
Education	F= 1.401	.136	NS
Income	F= .755	.778	NS
Age	Cc = -.213-	.034	S
Hours	Cc = .234	.019	S

P denotes the probability value; NS indicates Non-Significant at P > 0.05, S signifies Significant at P < 0.05, and HS represents Highly Significant at P < 0.01.

4. Discussion

Table 1 presents the results for 100 children with a mean age of 15.66, comprising an equal number of males and females. In terms of education, there is an equal number for middle school and secondary school, and considering salary income, the majority of participants, 50%, reported virtually sufficient earnings. The average duration of social media usage was 7.1 hours.

This study, backed by Garg (2021), attempted to evaluate the prevalent eating habits, physical activity, and social media usage among school-aged adolescents. The results indicated a sample size of 150 participants (63% male and 37% female), with a mean age of approximately 14.2 years. The study by Sampasa-Kanyinga et al. (2015) aimed to evaluate the correlations between social networking site usage and unhealthy eating habits, as well as excessive body weight among adolescents. The results were based on data from 9,858 students (mean age: 15.2) from middle and high schools who reported using social networks for more than 5 hours daily.The study conducted by Fleming-Milici and Harris (2020) sought to assess adolescents' engagement with food and beverage brands on social media, examine socio-demographic disparities in engagement levels, and explore the correlations between engagement and screen time. The results were based on a sample of 1,564 participants, with a nearly equal distribution of males (46.9%) and females (53.1%). Table 2 presents the results indicating a moderate effect of social media on children's food habits (mean = 1.7837) ($P < 0.05$).

This study, backed by Sampasa-Kanyinga et al. (2015), aims to evaluate the correlations between social networking site usage and unhealthy eating practices, as well as excess body weight in teenagers. This study revealed a statistically significant relationship between social network usage and poor eating behavior at $P<0.05$.

Table 3 demonstrates a substantial statistical association between children's age and hours spent on social media, as well as the impact of social media on children's food habits. The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences.This study, supported by Garg (2021), aims to evaluate the prevalent eating habits, physical activity, and social media usage among school-aged teenagers. This study demonstrated a significant association between children's age and hours of social media usage, indicating that as students' age increased, there was a notable rise in time spent on social media ($p=0.01$).

5. Conclusions

The results indicated that among 100 children, the mean age of participation was 15.66 years. The current study demonstrated a moderate impact of social media on children's food habits. The study demonstrated a substantial statistical link between children's age and hours spent on social media, as well as the impact of social media on children's food habits ($p < 0.05$). The results indicated no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) between social media usage and other demographic variables.

6. Recommendations

The findings indicated that social media exerted a moderate influence on children's food habits. The study concluded that a substantial statistical link exists between children's age, hours of social media usage, and the impact of social media on children's food habits. The results indicated no significant statistical differences between social media usage and other demographic variables.

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