

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ON DIETARY CHOICES AMONG CHILDRENS

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ABSTRACT

Children are exposed to food and beverage marketing on a more frequent basis, but less is known about the precise consequences of marketing through the medium that kids use the most. The expenditure allocated by the food and beverage industries for marketing to children has significantly increased, which is in line with the global rise in childhood obesity. The study aim is to investigate if there is a substantial link between students' behavioural intent and the opinions of social media influencers on their food choices. A total of 80 online questionnaires were distributed to the Students, However, only 53 questionnaires were returned. The final sample of the study consists of 53 respondents about 37.7 are males while 62.3 are females. Age between 20 and 30 years are participated. Almost half of the students were undergraduates (75%) and others were postgraduates (25%). The relationship b/w age and used social networking site correlation is slightly positive. The null hypothesis (H_0) investigates whether there is a significant relationship between the ages of students towards social media sites. ($\beta = .001$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. The intention of this study was to investigate students' attitude and subjective norms on social media influencers among students in Ibadat International University Islamabad. Furthermore, this study also investigates the relationship between social media influencers and students' behavioral intent on their dietary choices. The findings show a considerable influence on many diet-related consequences of promoting unhealthy food and beverages through children's media. This review offers convincing evidence of the necessity for regulations aimed at screen-based marketing when coupled with current data on this effect in other contexts.

Keywords: Social media, Children, Influencers effect, Dietary Choices, Childhood Obesity, food and beverages industries.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there is no doubt that young adults, especially college students, have their own social media accounts and follow at least one influencer on their account on every social media site. Each user on the platform has their own interest, and there are a number of influential social networks (SMI) on the Internet. Social media influencers are groups of people who have built a reputation by using social media platforms to promote themselves, they are beauty influencers, fashion influencers, food influencers, fitness influencers, etc. All these small and medium businesses have somehow always managed to inspire their users to do something new, i.e. influence their opinion about their lifestyle. These influencers initiate trends on social networks and play a significant role in shaping the opinions of users on the Internet. As influencers, their opinions have played an important role in the lifestyle of young adults, as they are considered to be the dominant users on social networks such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube. This is because their opinion influences the thinking of users – mostly young adults. Nowadays, SMIs also influence the attitude and behavior of young adults when choosing food. When it comes to choosing a diet, it is important to practice a well-balanced diet because poor diets such as eating junk food, skipping meals, as well as lack of adequate nutrition are known to cause various health problems. Choosing the right diet is an essential part of life because it can affect long-term health outcomes. Correspondingly, a healthy diet is also considered to have an important part in the lives of university students. This is due to students' physical well-being and cognitive stability can be strengthened by maintaining a healthy diet. Per the international research findings student life in the university environment is characterized by many changes in eating behaviors and nutritional patterns. According to multiple researches students frequently resorted in bad eating habits and had low dietary health throughout their transition from high to university. At this time, proper nutrition is essential for ensuring overall health, and achieving excellent educational success. Today's society is not the same as the one ten years earlier. People adapt into the way the world is today and so does the society around them. Their choices of lifestyles are heavily influenced by so many factors which include their level of education, interpersonal influences, social networks and etc. As the world and the people are continuously evolving, maintaining a healthy lifestyle could be the most difficult thing to do. At the present time, the dietary choices of young adults are believed to be affected by a variety of rationale. Other than genetics, lifestyles are actually the culprit behind the poor dietary choices among people nowadays. Poor dietary choices can result in obesity which can ultimately lead to multiple health concerns such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and many more serious health concerns. Since

the world nowadays actually revolves around social media, young adults especially students are the ones who spend the most time being on social media. As reported by the Digital Information World (2019), people aged between 16-24 years old spend the most time on social media. On the grounds of this, there must be a connection between social media and the students' dietary choices as technically they spend half of the day being on social media. Social media influencers as role models for their lifestyle because the users were able to see correlations between them and influencers in the social media. In other words, the SMIs have the ability to connect with their users on such a level to the point that they are willing to let them affect their process in decision-making. Social media influencers technically are the owner of the internet as they regulate the direction, the type of content people watch, the products people buy, and the thoughts people have to an extent. To put it another way, the influencers seem to have a powerful influence on the lifestyle of their devoted followers. Therefore, there must be a reason that people tend to trust the opinion of the influencers to the extent that they are often dominated by the opinion of the influencers. By way of illustration, most young adults with social media accounts are following at least one SMI of their own liking and they will prefer to listen to the advice of the influencers for the reason that these influencers always seem remarkably reliable in the world of social media. The SMIs are also known as the modern opinion leaders as their opinion tend to have the biggest impact on young adults. Take for example, a social media influencer posted on his blog about his opinion on the recent coffee shop in which he describes it to be peaceful and a great place to do his work while having coffee, the moment he posted it, his followers will be influenced by his opinion. Nowadays, the internet and social media serves as a well-known place where people search for health information. The social media has become a place where anyone can share information regarding nutrition without being a certified dietician or nutritionist. As an influencer, their opinions played an important role in the lifestyles of young adults as they are viewed as the dominant users on the social networking sites such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube. Therefore, without question, the students are actually allowing the social media influencers to guide them in any areas of their lives. As in view of the fact that more people are becoming dependent on social media influencers, they are actually resorting to social media whenever they have any inquiries on any areas of their lives as this is more convenient for them. All they had to do is take out their phone and search for it over the internet. Therefore, again, this alone indicated a relation between the influencer and the lifestyle of students regarding their dietary choices. Young adulthood is a life stage in peoples' lives where they started to develop life skills that will affect their life in the long run and these days, the existence along with the rise of social media influencers (SMIs) affected every area of peoples' lives specifically on their food choices. Data revealed that the formation of habits and likings are related to media use along with the choices of food. It is pivotal to shape the right eating habits during young adulthood as high chances is, the habits they formed now, whether it is good or bad, will remain in their live throughout adulthood. Young adults are consistently fascinated by the fame of the SMIs, and they are their main source of information including fashion tips, food choices and etc. Thus, they tend to build online relationship with the influencers and under those circumstance, the SMIs are able to shape their followers lifestyle. As the number of social media influencers increases, there is an issue on them being unreliable. As claimed by Lofft (2020), some of the influencers are actually unqualified nutritionist and yet, when they post health-related content on their social media accounts, people tend to believe them. Some influencers claimed to be a 'nutritionist' over the internet by selling personalized diets when they are not even a certified nutritionist, and this raises an issue that it is significant to acknowledge that not all social media influencers are what they claimed to be over the internet. Since the social media influencers have the ability to talk about diets and health information with such credibility over the internet, people are more prone into believing them even though, the information that they posted on the internet might not be true. Hence, there must be a reason behind people listening to the opinion of the social media influencers even though there are news informing people that the Through a variety of social media platforms, the internet has created a digital food ecosystem where dialogue about food and nutrition is common. "Digital activities on social media have changed how the public interacts with and receives health information." Given this, the internet's growth has been so profound in so many ways that it now affects how people talk about food in modern society. Influencers frequently fall short of their expectations. It's practically impossible to go through a social media feed without seeing postings from friends and family discussing what they have or will eat, recipes, food-related videos, or images of food in general. Have you ever pondered how your eating habits are affected by all of this social food exposure? In the end, the news is conflicting.

The bad: food related posts can trigger some negative thoughts and behaviors- Research was done by the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and some unsettling findings were discovered. Study participants who used social media the most often were 2.2 times more likely to report having problems with food and body image. Participants who used social media less often did not voice such worries as frequently. 2.6 times more were reported by the most active users. This supports findings from several studies that show seeing images and videos of food

might cause behavioural and physiological reactions that result in excessive hunger. Of course, this might result in poor eating patterns and weight gain.

The good: social media is an outlet for qualified professionals to share legit advice- There is some good news, even while "Foodstagrammers" may be making some of us overeat and annoying others who are sick of the constant barrage of "look at my lunch!" images. The use of social media as a forum for sharing sound diet advice on healthy eating, nutrition, alcohol detox, weight reduction, and other issues is done by certified nutritionists, dieticians, chefs, and wellness firms like Vape Genie. People may not always be able to consult their conventional healthcare doctors for guidance on nutrition and wellbeing. As a result, people are increasingly looking to social media for timely, actionable guidance.

Many of us are fortunate enough to have some control over our diets. We have a plethora of choices when we open the refrigerator or peruse the aisles of the neighbourhood grocery store. But are our dietary choices really as free as we want them to be? What if our food choices were influenced by factors other than our hunger and those that are visible to us? On social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook, you may see image after image of meals that are exquisitely prepared and appear really delectable. Food's aroma and flavour may unquestionably have a strong impact on our desires.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- To investigate if there is a substantial link between students' behavioural intent and the opinions of social media influencers on their food choices.
- To determine whether there is a substantial connection between students' food preferences and the perceived norm on social media influencers.
- To investigate the role of social media influencers and students dietary choices.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Agrawal, A.J. (2016). Suggested that It is less certain if influencers can be utilised to promote good nutrition, despite the fact that influencer marketing has been found to be successful in promoting foods with low nutritional value among youngsters. This demonstrates the findings of experimental research on the question of whether and how influencer marketing on Instagram may be used to encourage children's healthy eating habits. The study specifically investigates whether encouraging youngsters to have active, healthy lifestyles might influence their decision to choose a nutritious snack.. Journal of Food Sciences. 3(13): 12-19.
2. Ali.K. (2018) Suggested that the majority of the unhealthy beverages and foods that are promoted on social media by influencers are those that are rich in sugar, fat, and salt and may raise the risk of being overweight or obese and developing non-communicable illnesses. This demonstrates how vlogs have an effect on kids' poor eating habits. The frequency of children watching vlogs and their consumption of harmful drinks and snacks are correlated, according to longitudinal survey data from 8- to 12-year-old children.. Journal of Food advertising and eating behavior in children. 21(4):27-23.
3. Iqra.A. (2015) Suggested that more than 90% of teenagers have at least one social media account, and that number is rising. Food and beverage companies take advantage of this trend by targeting teenagers with social media marketing for their goods. Social media marketing may increase the chance of acquiring unfavourable health outcomes, including obesity, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes, depending on the nutritional content of the items being sold. Journal of food sciences. 45(11):342-346.
4. Balaban, D. & Mustapea, M. (2019) Suggested that social media influences are pervasive in the lives of young people nowadays and have an impact on their choices. The aim of this study was to better understand how social media influencers affect the food preferences of those between the ages of 18 and 30. Nearly two-thirds of young adults are overweight; thus, health practitioners need to understand the role of factors in their dietary decisions. Journal of Communication & Public Relations. 21(1):31-46.
5. Chung A, Vieira D, Donley T, Tan N, Jean-Louis G, Gouley KK, Seixas A. (2019) Suggested that The website used to connect and communicate with people is known as social media. The most popular social media platforms include Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp. The use of social networks has had a detrimental impact on students' eating habits and has made them sedentary. The study's primary goal was to ascertain the relationship between students' eating habits and their usage of social media. Journal of Medical Internet Research. 23(6):213-218.
6. Almousa, M., Alsaikhan, A., & Aloud, A. (2020) Suggested that the behaviour-related intentions behind students' dietary decisions in light of the Theory of Reasoned Action, as well as their subjective norms about social media influencers (SMIs). The use of social media platforms to promote one has helped social media influencers as a

- group of people to some extent build a name for themselves. *Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media*. 8(11):78-94.
7. Toumpakari, Z, Haase, AM & Johnson, L (2016) Suggested that the connection between exposure to food-related messaging on social media and self-reported eating behaviours of adolescents (including food intake, perceptions of norms, and food literacy). Descriptive norms moderated the positive link between non-core food social media exposure and non-core food intake, which was an interesting finding about how the relationship between food exposure and intake was moulded differently depending on the kind of food. *Journal of Food Sciences*. 2(6):12-31.
 8. Amna.K. (2018) Suggested that Media food marketing, such as food advertisements and sponsorships seen in periodicals and on television (TV), affects eating habits and decisions, particularly among young people. According to a recent review and meta-analysis, media food marketing, especially conventional media (like TV) food marketing, has an impact on adolescents' eating cognitions, attitudes, and behaviours. Foods that are heavy in calories and poor in nutrients, such as fried foods, sweets, and other non-core foods, are consumed more often as a result of media food promotion. *Journal of Food and media*. 10(23):234-238.
 9. Dawn K. Wilson (2021) Suggested that Many individuals now use social media sites as part of their daily lives. On these sites, users are spending an increasing amount of time. This demonstrates how it's crucial to comprehend how individuals communicate on social media in order to comprehend their beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and behaviours. The findings demonstrate that consumers most frequently link nutritious food to a healthy lifestyle, exercise, and nutrition. These foods fall into the categories of being vegan, homemade, healthy, and plant-based. *Journal of Nutrition and healthy lifestyle*. 13 (6):11-18.
 10. Ismail K. (2012) Suggested that Social media enables relatability and direct engagement with followers (such as when an influencer immediately responds to comments from viewers). The influencer and the viewer may have a one-sided or parasocial relationship (PSR), which is a word for an emotional bond that the viewer has for the influencer and in which the influencer is seen as more of a peer or friend. *Journal of digital marketing*. 3(21):12-21

4. METHODOLOGY

I used questionnaire and collect data from the students of University of Lahore, Islamabad campus, investigating youth's social networks in combination with individual, psychosocial, and other environmental factors related to a healthy lifestyle. Students from all departments are included for participation. A five-point liker scale were applied on measuring students attitude and subjective norm on social media influencers on their dietary choices based on the Theory of Reasoned Action. The five-point liker scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' was established in this study. Researchers claimed that the five-point liker scale would decrease the respondents' frustration level of patient while increasing rate of response and quality. The theory is also utilized in investigating the behavioral intention of students as well. A total of 80 online questionnaires were distributed to the Students, However, only 53 questionnaires were returned. The final sample of the study consists of 53 respondents about 37.7 are males while 62.3 are females. Age between 20 and 30 years are participated. Almost half of the students were undergraduates (75%) and others were postgraduates (25%).

5. MEASURES

Using social networking site the most- Following paradigms of self-report measurement of using the most site exposure was operationalized as Frequency of using. In a systematic comparison of self-reported advertising, exposure measures among males and females. This question regarding mostly used social application provides a reliable and valid estimation. Therefore to measure frequency, students were asked 'Which social networking site you used the most?' They could respond on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 = Facebook to 4 = others. Range 1-4 is 3.00, M 1-4 = 1.0943, SD 1-4 = 0.98575.

Trying to limit fast foods after seeing social media influencer- To assess the number of students that follow social media influencers and trying to limit fast food and beverages intake after seeing their weight loss journey. It is used to estimate that how much directly affect the influencers on someone food choices. Therefore to measure frequency, students were asked 'have you ever tried to limit your sugar/fast food intake after seeing social media influencer weight loss journey?' They could respond on 3-point scale ranging from 0=YES to 2=Maybe. Range 0-3 is 3, M=0.9057, SD=0.76621

Use of social media while eating lunch or breakfast- To measure the number of students who use screen/social media during breakfast/lunch, this question will provides the proper estimation. This provides also estimation about students that they are eating healthy or not. Because use of social media during lunch/breakfast may change dietary

choices. Therefore to measure frequency, students were asked 'how many times you use social media while eating breakfast/lunch?' Response categories ranged from 0 =Never to 3=always on scrolling (4-point scale).

Range= 3

M=1.0755

SD=0.75572

Social media sites hinder personal food choices- For assessing that social media affect on personal food choices or not. This provide information that social media has positive influence on personal dietary choices or negative. Therefore to measure frequency, students were asked 'Do you think that social media hinders your personal food choices?' Responses categories are ranged from 0=YES to 2=SOMETIMES (3-point scale).

Range=2

M=1

SD=0.80861

Better lifestyle if influencers give right info- If social media influencers give right information, post healthy food pictures and tells healthy recipes then this will give us healthy lifestyle. To estimate students' thoughts about this and therefore to measure frequency, students were asked 'Do you think you will achieve better lifestyle if influencers give right info about foods?' Responses ranges from 0=YES to 2=MAYBE (3-point scale).

Range=3

M=1.1509

SD=1.001579

6. RESULTS

Social Media Influencers and Dietary Choices

Table 1 indicates the frequency and valid percentage of the items regarding the role of social media influencers and the dietary choices of respondents.

Table 1: Role of SMIs and Dietary Choices of Students

ITEMS	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCIES	VALID PERCENTAGES
Which social networking site you used the most?	FACEBOOK	15	28.3%
	INSTAGRAM	26	49.1%
	YOUTUBE	4	7.5%
	OTHERS	8	15.1%
Have you ever tried to limit your sugar/fast food intake after seeing social media influencer weight loss journey?	YES	17	32.1%
	NO	25	47.2%
	MAYBE	11	19.9%
How many times you use social media while eating breakfast/lunch?	NEVER	12	22.6%
	SOMETIMES	26	49.1%
	MOSTLY	14	36.45%
	ALWAYS ON SCROLLING	1	1.9%
Do you think you will achieve better lifestyle if influencers give right info about foods?	YES	19	35.8%
	NO	11	20.8%
	MAYBE	24	40.8%
Do you think that social media hinders your personal food choices?	YES	17	32.1%
	NO	19	35.8%
	SOMETIMES	17	32.1%

Based on table 28.3% of the respondents chose Facebook as the social media platform that they follow them on, 49.1% chose Instagram, 7.5% chose YouTube, 15.1% other apps. Consequently, 47.2% said no when asked whether they tried to limit fast food intake after seeing any influencer and the remaining 32.1% said yes, 19.9% said May be. 49.1% said sometimes on asking how many times you use media while eating breakfast/lunch, 22.6% said never,

36.45% said mostly while 1.9% said always on scrolling. 40.8% students said maybe on asking whether they achieve better lifestyle if influencers give right info, 35.8% said no while 32.1% said sometimes. 35.8 respondents said no on asking whether social media hinders their personal food choices or not, 32.1% said yes while 32.1% also said sometimes.

Correlation Analysis- Pearson correlation coefficient analysis is computed in SPSS in order to test the strength and the direction of the relationship among the entire attribute of the study. When the correlation value is $r=0.10$ to 0.29 or $r=-0.10$ to -0.29 , it is regarded little or weak; when the value is $r=0.30$ to 0.49 or $r=-0.10$ to -0.29 , it is considered medium or moderate; and when the value is $r=0.50$ to 1.0 or $r=-0.50$ to -1.0 , it is recognized large or strong. The values of Pearson correlation coefficients range from -1.00 to $+1.00$. A value of $+1.00$ signifies a high positive correlation, a value of -1.00 means negative correlation, and a value of 0.00 indicates that there is no linear relationship between two variables.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis of Using the Most Social App with Gender & Age

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Correlation	Significance	df
Social networking site	Gender	0.022	0.000	3
	Age	0.218	0.1128	6

The relationship b/w Gender and most used social networking site correlation is slightly positive. The null hypothesis (H_0) investigates whether there is a no significant relationship between the genders of students towards social media sites. ($\beta = .000$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. The relationship b/w age and used social networking site correlation is slightly positive. The alternative hypothesis (H_a) investigates whether there is a significant relationship between the ages of students towards social media sites. ($\beta = .218$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis (H_a) is accepted.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis of media while eating breakfast/lunch Gender & Age

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Correlation	Significance	df
Limiting fast foods	Gender	0.193	0.364	3
	Age	0.521	0.890	6

In the relationship b/w Gender and use of SM while eating Correlation is slightly positive. The alternative hypothesis (H_a) investigates whether there is a significant relationship between the genders of students towards social media sites. ($\beta = .364$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. In the relationship b/w age and used social networking site Correlation is moderately positive. The alternative hypothesis (H_a) investigates whether there is a significant relationship between the ages of students towards social media sites. ($\beta = .8909$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis (H_a) is accepted.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis of limiting fast foods after seeing SMI with Gender & Age

Dependent Variable	Independent variable	Correlation	Significance	Df
Use of social media while eating	Gender	0.845	0.354	3
	Age	0.974	.202	6

The relationship b/w Gender and limiting fast foods after seeing SMI Correlation is highly positive. The alternate hypothesis (H_a) investigates whether there is a no significant relationship between the genders of students towards social media sites. ($\beta = .354$, $p > 0.05$).

Therefore, hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. The relationship b/w age and limiting fast foods after seeing SMI Correlation is slightly positive. The alternative hypothesis (H_a) investigates whether there is a significant relationship between the ages of students towards social media sites. ($\beta = .202$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis (H_a) is accepted.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis of estimating that SMI hinders personal choices with Gender & Age

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Correlation	Significance	df
SMI hinders personal choices	Gender	0.298	0.566	2
	Age	0.001	0.001	3

The relationship b/w Gender and If SMI hinders personal food choices correlation is moderately positive. The alternate hypothesis (H_a) investigates whether there is a no significant relationship between the genders of students towards social media sites. ($\beta = .566$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. The relationship b/w age and used social networking site correlation is slightly positive. The null hypothesis (H_o) investigates whether there is a significant relationship between the ages of students towards social media sites. ($\beta = .001$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis (H_o) is rejected

7. CONCLUSIONS

The intention of this study was to investigate students' attitude and subjective norms on social media influencers among students in Ibadat International University Islamabad. Furthermore, this study also investigates the relationship between social media influencers and students behavioral intent on their dietary choices. According to the literature on social media influencers, someone who acquires the skills of a strong social influence where people who possess such skills can convince people to alter their values, behaviors and actions. Prior research showed that the social media influencers influenced the lives of young adults to the point they can shape their identity as well. In this study, the role of social media influencers toward students in University is investigated. Based on the findings of the study, 98.8% of the respondents subscribe to social media influencers on their social media accounts. This finding alone indicated that the students' live are impacted by them. Furthermore, The majority of them are followers of social media influencers on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter. However, the most popular social media platforms to subscribe to them are Facebook and Instagram. Based on existing literature, the daily choices of an individual on the type of food they consumed are called dietary choices. Prior research found out that they found constant positive relationship between the use of social media and disordered eating. The dietary choices of students are generally bad as they are more involve in using the screen during breakfast and lunch. In this study, the dietary choices of students are investigated.

8. REFERENCES

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