

# Effect of Social Media on Food Choice

Amira Essam Ahmed Khalil<sup>1</sup>, Shereen Eassa Mohamed<sup>1</sup> and Asmaa Abdallah Hussein<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Zagazig University, Zagazig, Egypt.

Email: amiraessam@zu.edu.eg

## **Abstract:**

Social media has significantly influenced global food consumption patterns by shaping how people discover, choose, and relate to food. This paper examines the key dimensions of this influence, including impulsive eating, recipe exploration, healthy eating behaviors, and body image issues. While platforms can promote nutritional awareness and diverse food experiences, they also contribute to unhealthy habits and disordered eating. The role of food vloggers and influencers is also explored, highlighting their growing impact on consumer decisions. Understanding these dynamics is essential for individuals, health professionals, and industry stakeholders navigating the evolving digital food landscape.

**Keywords:** social media, food vloggers, eating behavior, impulsive eating, healthy eating, body image

## **Introduction:**

The widespread impact of social media has altered many aspects of our lives in recent years, transcending national boundaries and altering how we interact, get information, and even make decisions (1). Social media (SM) has strengthened consumer voice in the current era by facilitating inexpensive communication and enabling users to share their thoughts and experiences with millions of people (2).

The term "social media" describes applications and websites that provide users with a digital space where they may exchange and receive digital information in order to connect with one another (3). More over 4.5 billion people used social media globally in 2022, accounting for more than 55% of the world's 7.91 billion people. In addition, daily social media consumption has increased over time, averaging 147 minutes in 2021 compared to 97 minutes in 2013 (2).

The way people eat is another area where the digital revolution has a significant impact (4). As the digital age advances, more people are turning to internet platforms for guidance, inspiration, and social acceptability when making dietary decisions. Social media platforms have undoubtedly impacted our eating patterns, preferences, and decisions, resulting in a completely new paradigm for how we engage with and approach food (2).

The extensive usage of social media has given consumers unrestricted access to a multitude of food-related content. Social media sites like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Snapchat are awash with visually attractive images, videos, and posts showcasing delectable culinary marvels, trendy diets, and dining adventures from across the globe (5). By influencing our taste preferences and fuelling our appetites, these online forums have an influence on the food choices we make. Furthermore, social media has grown into a powerful instrument that shapes our perceptions of food, altering our typical eating habits and introducing fresh trends (6).

While some people blame social media for their increased consumption of healthy foods, others blame their increased usage of social media for their increased intake of junk food (7). In other words, social media offers a lot of opportunities and new dishes for consumers to try, but it also poses a number of challenges. Social media also contributes to the propagation of unhealthy eating habits, unrealistic body standards, and misleading information.

Constant exposure to food-related information can also lead to overconsumption, disordered eating behaviors, and detrimental psychological effects (5,8).

For example, Zeeni et al.'s study (9) discusses the connection between young people's exposure to Instagram postings about food and their rising consumption of unhealthy foods. Similarly, Wayles discovered that those who often posted on Instagram had a higher risk of eating problems (10). Nguyen and Nguyen's study revealed a strong correlation between teens' increased willingness to try food products and their exposure to social media influencer marketing for such products (11). Therefore, understanding the dynamics of social media-influenced food intake is crucial for a range of stakeholders, including individuals, influencers, health professionals, lawmakers, and those involved in the food industry. It's crucial to understand, though, that social media does not necessarily negatively impact food consumption. A few studies have shown that social media can increase awareness of healthy eating practices and promote the intake of nutrient-dense foods (12).

### **Dimensions of social media influence on food consumption**

#### **1-Impulsive eating**

"Impulsive eating" refers to the act of consuming food without prompting, rather than in reaction to hunger cues. Because social media posts about food provide users with instant gratification and reinforce certain dietary choices, they may increase impulsive eating. Therefore, it is reasonable to view impulsive eating as a habit that is created by the desire to use food to meet psychological needs, often as a consequence of the influence of social media. There is compelling evidence that using social media can significantly impact impulsive eating behaviors (13,14,15).

#### **2-Recipe exploration**

Social networks are crucial in the culinary and food industries, and online influencers have an effect on food blogs and recipe creation (5). A study by Simeone and Scarpato (16) found that young individuals utilize social media to find recipes, increase the range of food options, and create a platform to share food they have cooked or consumed. Young people use social media for leisure activities like reading and bookmarking recipes, according to study (17).

#### **3-Healthy eating behavior**

Peer support, accountability, and experience sharing offered by social networks and online communities boost motivation and desire to reach healthy eating objectives (18). Positive reinforcement, such as positive comments and ratings on social media, can also influence eating choices. Social media platforms can help people become more aware of their eating patterns and provide helpful advice on selecting healthier meals by employing behavior modification strategies including goal setting, self-monitoring, and tailored feedback (19). A thorough investigation reveals the behavioral mechanisms and effectiveness of social media in encouraging teens to adopt healthy eating practices. It highlights the ways in which social media interventions, such as social support, persuasive techniques, and accessibility, might motivate teens to embrace a healthy diet (20).

#### **4-Body image issues and eating disorders**

Jiotsa et al. examined the relationship between body image disorders and the influence of social media. They found that negative eating habits and a disordered body image are associated with social comparisons and social media exposure (21). Kim and Mackert claim that binge eating causes adolescents to feel dissatisfied with their bodies and develop disordered eating habits (like increased hunger) by exposing them to idealistic body photos, comparing them to others, and placing pressure on their developing brains to meet different cultural standards of beauty (22). Binge eating is frequently linked to emotions of loneliness and isolation, which social media use can intensify. Additionally, those who turn to social media for support or praise may utilize disordered eating as a coping mechanism for emotional discomfort (5).

The development of social media technology has given customers more access to information for dietary reasons, such as comparing food products, evaluating restaurants, or seeking up recipes or cooking instructions. In the end, this knowledge affects the choices, purchases, and/or consumption of certain foods or dishes by customers. The food business is likewise making use of SM's marketing capabilities. For example, popular online chefs share viral food content with their followers on social media, such as restaurant reviews, meal recommendations, or influencers' social media advertising of food and drinks. (23,24).

### **Food vloggers**

Video bloggers, often referred to as vloggers (25) create a range of films, including recipes, restaurant reviews, travel videos, and food-related content (26), to share their experiences with products, services, and businesses. Vloggers typically plan and take part in their videos as regular customers discussing a range of subjects, including menus, costs, and locations. They share their opinions and experiences for a variety of reasons, such as a genuine love of food, a commitment to helping others, or a need for acceptance and a sense of belonging (27, 25).

Vloggers have become significant opinion leaders and informative providers on internet platforms in specific industries or product categories in the current world (28). In addition to their proficiency in creating films about food, food vloggers frequently feature recipes and culinary themes in their videos. Previous studies on food vlogs have examined the effects of food vlogger features on parasocial interactions (29) as well as on sharing and purchase intention. According to these findings, food vloggers have a significant impact on the attitudes and purchasing decisions of their audience. Fans of food vloggers may emulate their brand and food-related behaviors and attitudes as they view them as culinary masters (26, 30).

Consumers are increasingly embracing food-based movies as a "sell assist" to reduce their buy anxiety and quickly gain crucial information about eating experiences (31). Food videos are more interesting for customers than traditional text-based blogging because they combine textual descriptions, motion, and images to convey information both orally and nonverbally (32).

They can feature outdoor decorations and storytelling, and they provide a delightful platform for foodies to share their expertise (33). As a result, they create entertainment, curiosity, and interest among viewers, making them potential tools for food companies to promote their products (34).

To market their products, several food businesses have compensated food vloggers. Even though cooking films are quite popular, there aren't many studies in this field. The vast majority of recent research employs food videos as a source of information and focuses on how source trustworthiness affects consumer decisions (26).

Food vloggers also construct social ties with their viewers and promote food-based content on their channels by encouraging engagement with their audience through comments and critiques (35). There are vloggers who have gained such much popularity and trust from their viewers that they can persuade their followers to buy a product (29).

### **Conclusion**

Social media has a great impact on individuals' food choice. This effect can be beneficial or detrimental to health. People must pay attention to what they follow on media or vloggers as most of them are not based on sound scientific basis.

### **References**

1. Rani, P., Tyagi, R., Kathpalia, J., & Kumari, V. (2023). Impact of Social Media on the Health of the Rural Youth: A Sociological Study. *IAHRW International Journal of Social Sciences Review*, 11(2).
2. Rini, L., Schouteten, J. J., Faber, I., Frøst, M. B., Perez-Cueto, F. J., & De Steur, H. (2023). Social media and food consumer behavior: A systematic review. *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, 104290.

3. Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R., & Stephen, A. T. (2020). The future of social media in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing science*, 48(1), 79-95.
4. Moghbeli, F., Rahimian, S., Farajzadeh, A., Khamineh, A., Moghadam, H. K., & Ghasemi, R. (2023). Social media and nutritional habits among nutrition students: A social work perspective. *Frontiers in Health Informatics*, 12, 173.
5. Patwardhan, V., Mallya, J., & Kumar, D. (2024). Influence of social media on young adults' food consumption behavior: scale development. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1), 2391016.
6. Rounsefell, K., Gibson, S., McLean, S., Blair, M., Molenaar, A., Brennan, L., ... & McCaffrey, T. A. (2020). Social media, body image and food choices in healthy young adults: A mixed methods systematic review. *Nutrition & Dietetics*, 77(1), 19-40.
7. Ventura, V., Cavaliere, A., & Ianno, B. (2021). # Socialfood: Virtuous or vicious? A systematic review. *Trends in Food Science & Technology*, 110, 674-686.
8. Chung, A., Vieira, D., Donley, T., Tan, N., Jean-Louis, G., Gouley, K. K., & Seixas, A. (2021). Adolescent peer influence on eating behaviors via social media: scoping review. *Journal of medical Internet research*, 23(6), e19697.
9. Zeeni, N., Abi Kharma, J., Malli, D., Khoury-Malhame, M., & Mattar, L. (2024). Exposure to Instagram junk food content negatively impacts mood and cravings in young adults: A randomized controlled trial. *Appetite*, 195, 107209.
10. Wayles, K. (2020). Instagram and Eating Disorders: An Empirical Study of the Effects of Instagram on Disordered Eating Habits Among Young Girls. University of Arkansas.
11. Nguyen, T., & Nguyen, D. M. (2024). What will make Generation Y and Generation Z to continue to use online food delivery services: a uses and gratifications theory perspective. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 33(4), 415-442.
12. Aldossari, N., & Al-Mahish, M. (2021). Social media and unhealthy food nexus: Evidence from Saudi Arabia. *Acta Alimentaria*, 50(1), 102-111.
13. He, Z., & Yang, W. (2022). Impulsiveness as potential moderators of the relation between social media dependence and eating disorders risk. *BMC psychology*, 10(1), 120.
14. Filippone, L., Shankland, R., & Hallez, Q. (2022). The relationships between social media exposure, food craving, cognitive impulsivity and cognitive restraint. *Journal of Eating Disorders*, 10(1), 184.
15. Wu, Y., Kemps, E., & Prichard, I. (2024). Digging into digital buffets: A systematic review of eating-related social media content and its relationship with body image and eating behaviours. *Body Image*, 48, 101650.
16. Simeone, M., & Scarpato, D. (2020). Sustainable consumption: How does social media affect food choices?. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 277, 124036.
17. Camargo, A. M. D., Botelho, A. M., Dean, M., & Fiates, G. M. R. (2024). Cooking using social media: young Brazilian adults' interaction and practices. *British Food Journal*, 126(4), 1405-1428.
18. Dessart, L., & Duclou, M. (2019). Health and fitness online communities and product behaviour. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 28(2), 188-199.
19. Chen, Y., Perez-Cueto, F. J., Giboreau, A., Mavridis, I., & Hartwell, H. (2020). The promotion of eating behaviour change through digital interventions. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(20), 7488.

20. Hsu, M. S., Rouf, A., & Allman-Farinelli, M. (2018). Effectiveness and behavioral mechanisms of social media interventions for positive nutrition behaviors in adolescents: a systematic review. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 63*(5), 531-545.
21. Jiotsa, B., Naccache, B., Duval, M., Rocher, B., & Grall-Bronnec, M. (2021). Social media use and body image disorders: Association between frequency of comparing one's own physical appearance to that of people being followed on social media and body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. *International journal of environmental research and public health, 18*(6), 2880.
22. Kim, B. R., & Mackert, M. (2022). Social media use and binge eating: An integrative review. *Public Health Nursing, 39*(5), 1134-1141.
23. Coates, A. E., Hardman, C. A., Halford, J. C. G., Christiansen, P., & Boyland, E. J. (2019). The effect of influencer marketing of food and a "protective" advertising disclosure on children's food intake. *Pediatric obesity, 14*(10), e12540.
24. Folkvord, F., & de Bruijne, M. (2020). The effect of the promotion of vegetables by a social influencer on adolescents' subsequent vegetable intake: A pilot study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(7), 2243.
25. Nguyen, T. M. N., Le, B. N., Leenders, M. A., & Poolsawat, P. (2024). Food vloggers and their content: understanding pathways to consumer impact and purchase intentions. *Journal of Trade Science*.
26. Luong, T. B., & Ho, C. H. (2023). The influence of food vloggers on social media users: A study from Vietnam. *Heliyon, 9* (7), e18259.
27. Chatzopoulou, E., Filieri, R., & Dogruyol, S. A. (2020). Instagram and body image: Motivation to conform to the "Instabod" and consequences on young male wellbeing. *Journal of Consumer Affairs, 54*(4), 1270-1297.
28. Goodman, M. K., & Jaworska, S. (2020). Mapping digital foodscapes: Digital food influencers and the grammars of good food. *Geoforum, 117*, 183-193.
29. Farahdiba, D. (2022). Antecedents and Consequences of Credibility and Parasocial Interaction on Food Shopping Intentions. *Jurnal Manajemen Teori dan Terapan, 15*(1).
30. Mainolfi, G., Marino, V., & Resciniti, R. (2022). Not just food: Exploring the influence of food blog engagement on intention to taste and to visit. *British Food Journal, 124*(2), 430-461.
31. Carter, M., & Egliston, B. (2021). The work of watching Twitch: Audience labour in livestreaming and esports. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds, 13*(1), 3-20.
32. Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of retailing and consumer services, 53*, 101742.
33. Filieri, R., Acikgoz, F., & Du, H. (2023). Electronic word-of-mouth from video bloggers: The role of content quality and source homophily across hedonic and utilitarian products. *Journal of Business Research, 160*, 113774.
34. Rajput, S., & Sharma, P. (2021). Virtual gazing, unhealthy vlogs and food choices: a behavioural analysis. *International Journal Of Multidisciplinary Educational Research, 10*(4), 2.
35. Song, H. G., Kim, Y. S., & Hwang, E. (2023). How attitude and para-social interaction influence purchase intentions of Mukbang users: A mixed-method study. *Behavioral Sciences, 13*(3), 214.