



SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON DIETARY HABITS OF ADOLESCENTS

¹Rohit Dhoke, ²Dr. Shaini Suraj

¹BSc Nursing Student 3rd Year, ²Psychological Counsellor and Asst. Professor

^{1,2}Datta Meghe College of Nursing, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India 441110

Corresponding Author: Dr Shaini Suraj,

Abstract: Food habits among adolescents are becoming a major issue of concern. In modern times, it's common for individuals to have multiple profiles on various social media platforms. Unfortunately, these platforms are frequently utilized to promote food brands and unhealthy snacks, often presented in visually appealing packaging. This poses a significant risk to teenagers who may be more vulnerable to harmful food advertisements due to their increased online activity and social media usage. Children between the ages of 10 and 19 cause a lot of damage to their brain and body by consuming too much junk food. The ability of the brain to think, learn and remember is weakened. Among children and teenagers, obesity due to junk food is one of the increasing problems, which tends to maximize the risk of heart problems and cancers. Another disease on the rise is Type 2 diabetes. Globally, this issue is of major concern. Hence adolescents need to be made media literate and healthy food habits have to be encouraged for physical and mental fitness.

Keywords: adolescents, brain, junk food, balanced diet, media.

Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed remarkable progress in various industries, including technology and social media, which have significantly impacted the food industry. Technological advancements have led to great strides in food packaging and preservation, allowing exploration of new ideas and possibilities. The attractive labels and advertisements in social media have people craving for different types of food including junk and fast foods. In contemporary times, teenagers tend to prefer consuming fast food due to its affordability, generous portion sizes, and convenience in terms of time. Furthermore, junk food in various forms has become increasingly popular and has now become an integral component of modern popular culture. According to research by Reichelt (2016) junk food consumption can stimulate the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward. This can create a positive association in the brain between eating junk food and feeling good, leading to a desire for more of these foods to experience the same pleasurable sensation.

Easy availability, low in cost but junk foods have a major drawback of low nutritive value. They are high in calories, more quantity of salt and saturated fat, less in iron and calcium as well as dietary fiber. Examples of junk food are all the carbonated drinks, tasty and salty chips, types of desserts, mouthwatering chocolates, etc (Mandoura et al., 2017). In developed countries the consumption of junk food is high, and there is a similar increase in the developing countries as well (Kearney, 2010). The data also shows a rising trend in South Asian countries (Odegaard et al., 2012; Tabassum and Rahman, 2012). But these foods though harmful, are popular among youngsters. Due to this food consumption, there is higher increase seen in cases of obesity, diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure, and cardiac blockages (Payab et al., 2015). Research by Attuquayefio et al. (2017) suggests that consuming junk foods can have negative effects on one's ability to concentrate and remember things. These foods have been found to cause inflammation in the brain, specifically in the area responsible for memory. In fact, a study involving humans revealed that regularly consuming an unhealthy breakfast high in sugar and fat for four consecutive days resulted in disturbances to the parts of the brain that are crucial for learning and memory.

According to Hawkins et al. (2020), people blindly follow the social media in their fashion, styles, and product buying including food choices. The more they see, the more they believe on social media. Social media not only connects children but also builds a networking chain communicating their shared interest in all aspects including hobbies, interests in games, food, music, etc. With the popularity of social media, more and more people have tuned their lives accordingly. Globally in every 60 seconds about 156 million emails are sent, search requests amount to about 3.8 million, whereas for calls the Skype users use around 2 million minutes (Kemp 2018). According to October 2021 global snapshot, social media is used by people halfway across the globe. Due to the unique developmental stage in adolescents, they are more vulnerable to the various advertisements about food on social media.

Social media platforms leverage the power of peer influence by recognizing that adolescents are highly influenced by the behavior of their friends and comments received on a post (Lakon et al., 2015). Adolescents often place a great deal of trust in social media, and because people are constantly interconnected on these platforms, suggestions and recommendations from their peers are often viewed as a reliable source of information (Westerman et al., 2014). As a result, social media has become a significant factor in shaping the perceptions and beliefs of young people. With the tremendous rise of social media, the western culture has heavily influenced the thoughts of the children. The film stars have also influenced the general population especially the young adolescents who follow them in their styles, eating preferences, at the same time want to look like them (Hawkins et al., 2004). The idea of having a slender body gives rise to extreme dieting habits leading to eating disorders. Social media is thus instrumental in not only the food choices of adolescents but it also influences the thoughts, feelings and behavior pattern of the person. It can be rightly said that social media overly shows its effect on the self-image, self-esteem and food preferences. Social media also encourages and portrays such a body image which is unrealistic and impossible for some, but this promotes abstaining from healthy foods and weight loss behaviors by adolescents. Some adolescents opt to consume junk food in small portions instead of having a full meal to prevent weight gain. However, this practice is associated with numerous health problems. Consistently eating junk food can lead to a variety of health-related complications, even in small amounts.

Earlier studies done by Becker et al. (2002) show the influence of television on adolescents with eating disorders. Studies conducted on young adolescent ethnic Fijian girls in 1995 and later in 1998 showed a link between the launch of television and the beginning of eating disorders. The results were recorded after extended use of television in the community and rise in percentage of households having television sets. Data also suggested a link between ideas about dieting, weight loss and following Western media images among peer groups. Further studies in the year 2020 showed that exposure to social media network was also associated with disordered eating pathology (Wilksch et al., 2020). Based on surveys from psychiatrist (2012), the incidence of eating disorders in urban parts of India were increasing (Chandra et al., 2012). This increase was especially seen in Bangalore, as claimed by 23.5% of respondents, 26.5% were of the opinion that rates were constant, and 42% were unsure. Urbanization and socioeconomic status have been found to be linked with an increase in risk of body weight dissatisfaction (Stice et al., 1994). However, this tendency may be seen differently in different parts of the country due to its vast size and diversity (Stice et al., 1994). Many research studies have investigated the link between usage of social media and body satisfaction, also eating disorder symptomatology, and its bad affect. Certain studies done recently show a connection between usage of social media and increase in eating pathology, body dissatisfaction and negative affect (Stice and Shaw H, 1994; Magni et al., 2009). Eating behavior includes all factors like physiologic, mental set up, social

and hereditary factors, all these influences the timing of meals, the quantity of food consumed, and food preferences (Hoek, 2006). As per the World Health Organization report, worldwide seventy million people are estimated to have an eating disorder. Though the disorder affects both males and females, men do talk about their disorder publicly as it is commonly thought that eating disorder is an illness of the female (Striegel-Moore and Bulik, 2007; Farrar, 2014). Hence, they deny their condition, suffer the consequences and do not take medicines. The earlier the illness is detected and treated there is a higher chance of recovery (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Among eating disorders are - binge eating disorder, where in a small time period a large quantity of food is engulfed; anorexia nervosa, in which a person will abstain from eating or excessively exercise to overcome the fear of weight gain; bulimia nervosa, where a person takes a lot of food and then tries to get the food out by purging; pica, another eating disorder where dirt, clay, flaking paint and such other items are consumed and many more disorders including a group of other specified feeding or eating disorders (NIHM, 2015). The risk of death is increased in both disorders that is anorexia and bulimia (Smink et al., 2013). The support of family and friends is essential for the treatment. Also counseling, advice on diet, reducing efforts to eliminate food and reducing excessive exercise may be effective. Some cases may need hospitalization (Agras and Bohon, 2021). It is of importance that these disorders be detected as early as possible. This helps in stopping the progression of physical and psychological repercussions. The purpose of people who suffer from anorexia is to reach such a weight that it does not endanger their life, while the aim of people with bulimia is to control their overeating. Some issues related to this like low self-esteem, thoughts about body image need to be taken care of (Agras and Bohon, 2021).

Conclusion

The impact of social media on adolescents is significant, as they often emulate behaviors and trends they see online. It's important to recognize that if we don't take this matter seriously, it can have severe consequences on the well-being of our young generation, leading to both mental and physical health problems. Therefore, we must prioritize addressing the potential harmful effects of social media on adolescents and take appropriate steps to mitigate any negative impacts. A good start has been done by the social media platforms who are taking responsibility for the influence they have and bringing about a positive change in the young generation. In September 2019, Instagram had come up with new policies for protection of people under 18 years of age from the harmful effects of some weight reducing products and other beautifying procedures. Consumers were given the right to report any content which they thought was problematic and it would be taken off from the platform. It is crucial for parents to play an active role in fostering healthy eating habits and encouraging their children to appreciate the diverse range of nutritious Indian foods. By doing so, they can promote not only physical well-being but also mental health. Additionally, parents and teachers must provide guidance to adolescents on utilizing social media in a positive manner. This can include sharing motivational stories, connecting with loved ones, and using the platform for inspiration and personal growth.

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