

## ***An Unhealthy Promotion of Social Media food advertisements on teenager's dietary choice: A Scoping Literature Review***

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### **Abstract**

*Teenagers face a vital growth progressive phase, is noted by their mental, physical, emotional and social changes. Their food habit and behaviour play an important role in this period. Though, Teenagers are mostly liable to junk food advertisements, which promotes unhealthy energy-dense and poor in nutrients level. Therefore, this research paper scrutinizes such advertisements with the reference to the Indian social media which do academical contributions to the advertisers and the marketers to know the poor eating behaviour and patterns. On the other hand, these social media advertisements use celebrities to endorse the product and do emotional appeals and additionally social media influencers are also started to intensify these effects by influential junk food preferences and regularizing the unhealthy dietary behaviours. This impact in the poor eating habits into the teenagers, which leads to the chronic diseases. This research paper also explores the approaches like educating about nutrition and values, Parental guidance, control over health, encouraging social media influencers to promote for healthy dietary habits and including policy reforms. The researcher used "multi-pronged approach" to contest the negative impact of Junk food advertisement and to encourage the healthy eating behaviours in teenagers.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescents, Dietary habit, junk food, social media, Advertisement.*

### **1. Introduction**

Teenage is a critical developmental stage that is considered by notable physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. It usually lasts from the ages of 13 to 21. It starts throughout puberty and continues till the early twenties. Hall called it a period of "storm and stress," whereas Hurlock concentrated on the end of adolescence and personality stability. Adolescence may transcend conventional bounds, who emphasized social and cognitive growth. Different demographic groups are affected by food advertising differently, depending on things like socioeconomic level and availability of nutritious foods. Adolescents must be encouraged to eat healthily in order to counteract the detrimental impacts of these commercials. This thorough analysis looks at the various functions of food ads, how they affect various populations, and the public health consequences. It also explores the significance of developing wholesome eating habits in adolescence and the potential effects on a person's future. Food advertising affects various demographic groups differently, influenced by socioeconomic status and access to nutritious options. Adolescents need encouragement to adopt healthy eating habits to counteract these ads' negative impacts. This study explores the roles of food advertisements, their demographic effects, and public health implications, while emphasizing the importance of promoting healthy eating during adolescence for long-term benefits. According to Nelson et al. (2008), young adulthood is a critical period

for forming long-term health habits due to growing independence and transitions. Social media may be essential to comprehending the health of young adults since many factors, including personal and environmental ones, influence health-related behaviours. Given the possible significance of health behaviours and the prevalence of technology usage at this developmental stage, it is imperative to ascertain the effect of technology use on health behaviours during young adulthood. Young people consider technology and new media to be a part of everyday life (Brown et al., 2011). Eleven to twelve hours a day are spent using media and technology by youngsters.

### **1.1. Importance of Developing Healthy Dietary habits in Teenagers**

Adolescence is a crucial time for developing healthy eating habits essential for overall well-being. It typically carries on from the ages of 13 to 21. It commences during puberty and extends into the early twenties. Choices made now impact immediate health and set the stage for long-term wellness, making it vital to promote healthy eating practices during this period. Teenagers' dietary habits and food preferences are greatly impacted by junk food marketing on social media, which may also be a contributing factor to health problems like obesity. These advertisements, which frequently target teenagers via a variety of internet channels, encourage unhealthy food and drinks, normalizing bad eating habits and boosting consumption.

**1.1.1. Shaped tastes:** Teenagers' dietary tastes may be influenced by these commercials, increasing the likelihood that they will select unhealthy selections.

**1.1.2. Higher Intake:** Teenagers who are exposed to junk food advertisements on social media are more likely to consume these harmful meals.

**1.1.3. Normalization of Harmful Eating:** social media has the power to mainstream unhealthy eating habits by elevating them to a more appealing and acceptable status.

**1.1.4. Possible Health Risks:** Eating more unhealthy meals can increase your risk of developing a number of illnesses, such as obesity and its repercussions.

**1.1.5. Marketing with Celebrities and Influencers:** Using celebrities and social media influencers in these advertisements might increase their impact and encourage teens to choose unhealthy foods.

**1.1.6. Focused Marketing via Social Media:** Teenagers are more vulnerable to the influence of social media platforms' tailored adverts since they are targeted by these platforms using data analytics.

**1.1.7 Absence of Laws and Regulations:** It is feared that the laws and guidelines in place may not be sufficient to shield kids and teenagers from the harmful effects of internet marketing for unhealthy foods.

### **1.2. Role of Social media advertisements in Unhealthy Dietary habits in Teenagers**

Advertising and social media have a big impact on eating patterns, especially in teenagers, where they frequently encourage the consumption of unhealthy foods. Enlarged eating of unhealthy foods and beverages is connected with exposure to food promotion, particularly on social media platforms. On the other hand, interacting with material that encourages eating healthily might also influence dietary decisions in a favourable way. Food and beverage ads are commonly displayed on social media sites, with a particular emphasis on unhealthy options such as sugary drinks, fast food, and snacks. Research suggests that being exposed to these commercials, particularly on social media, is linked to consuming more unhealthy foods and drinks. Because social media frequently promotes idealized and frequently unrealistic body types, it can potentially exacerbate disordered eating practices and body image problems. Dietary habits can be further influenced by social media algorithms that increase exposure to peer-shared material, which may include poor food choices and eating habits.

### **1.3. Significance of the study**

Social media advertisements have a considerable impact on the dietary habits of adolescents by endorsing unhealthy food and beverage options that may negatively influence their health. The exposure to such advertisements can alter appetites, preferences, and the intake of sugary beverages, processed foods, and other harmful products. Advertisements for unhealthy food and drinks are perpetually

saturating social media, primarily targeting young individuals. Research indicates that exposure to these ads correlates with an increased intake of unhealthy items. Consequently, this may lead to a diet that is deficient in essential nutrients and excessive in calories, fats, sugars, and salts. Teenagers may find unhealthy foods more appealing in advertisements, especially those featuring influencers or celebrities. Consequently, exposure to these advertisements may hinder teenagers' ability to make healthy choices, heightening cravings and fostering a preference for specific items. Unhealthy eating patterns promoted by social media advertising can exacerbate various health issues, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, weight gain, and other chronic conditions. These behaviours can have harmful long-term consequences on the physical and emotional health of adolescents. Social media has emerged as the main platform for food marketing, with sponsored posts and influencers significantly contributing to the promotion of unhealthy choices. Some platforms are like YouTube and Instagram, especially shape food consumption trends and preferences. The widespread and continuous exposure to advertisements for unhealthy foods makes it challenging for young individuals to evade them. It is crucial to comprehend the influence of social media advertising on the eating habits of young people. Increasing awareness regarding the misleading nature of certain food marketing tactics on social media is vital. Measures such as stricter regulations on food advertising and the implementation of media literacy programs are essential to alleviate these adverse effects.

#### **1.4. Problem of the research study**

Adolescents are constantly exposed to various forms of food-related content in the new landscape created by social media. This content, often curated by influencers or featured in advertisements, significantly impacts their eating behaviours and food preferences. This serves as an overview of the research topic. To gain a deeper understanding of how teenagers' exposure to food-related content and influencer marketing influences their eating habits and food selections, this research initiative could investigate the correlation between teens' social media usage and their unhealthy eating practices. This encompasses analysing the effects of social media on impulsive eating, perceptions of body image, and the intake of unhealthy snacks and drinks.

## **2. Review of literature**

In recent years, researchers across various academic disciplines have shown a growing interest in social media, attributed to its widespread popularity. To gain a deeper understanding of Teenager's unhealthy dietary habit by watching social media and its influences in visual attraction and craving, we examine a selected number of studies conducted with Adolescents.

**Molennar (2021)** found in his research study that understanding how advertising affects young individuals, the findings demonstrated that the "weight" of covert advertising and persuasion cannot be evaluated since natural, native, or embedded attempts at persuasion are not given the attention they need. The study's young individuals were susceptible to advertising that plays on price, convenience, and taste-seeking pleasure. It is advisable for health professionals to consider expanding the use of marketing mix and advertising strategies to incorporate appeals that are pertinent to young adults' experiences in order to affect their eating habits. Young adults must be made aware of the advantages of embracing healthy eating habits by the advertising environment, both online and offline, which must promote the intake of nutritious meals.

**Yildirim (2024)** found in his research survey that "Approaches to Nutrition Posts on Social Media: Trends in Young Adults," he discovered that 93.9% of participants used social media, 26.8% of them followed postings on food, and 2% of them followed an online diet. 18.3% of participants made use of the wholesome recipes they came about on social media. Participants were grouped according to their body mass index (BMI), and it was discovered that people who had a BMI below 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup> are more

likely to utilize social media and follow posts about diets. It has been demonstrated that people with BMIs over 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup> utilize internet diets significantly more frequently.

**Kucharczuk (2022)** mentioned that social media probably has some influence on the food choices of teenagers. Teens favoured products with celebrities or other influencers in the advertising, and they were better at recalling unhealthy foods, beverages, and brands. These characteristics may increase health risks if teenagers choose to eat these foods and frequently consume low-nutritional goods.

**Daly (2022)** found in his research survey that Teens frequently battle with body image problems, which may have an impact on their dietary choices. Teenagers' food choices are frequently influenced by taste, price, and convenience. But as teenagers grow older and more self-reliant, social desirability and cultural food standards also have a greater impact on their eating patterns. However, the nutritional milieu that sustains them is equally essential due to their restricted autonomy. Creating more focused therapies for adolescent groups must account for information regarding their nutritional requirements, health and body image issues, as well as the benefits and challenges associated with adopting healthy food choices.

**Rounsefell (2020)** indicate in his study result that certain unhealthy eating patterns are closely tied to social media use, exposure to image-related content, and having a negative body image. Young adults may be more vulnerable to negative body image and food choice outcomes if they engage in negative social media behaviours (negative body talk, seeking reassurance, making appearance-related comparisons, or self-examination) or are exposed to ideal images.

**Sina (2022)** finds that social media use has an impact on kids' and teens' diets by increasing their intake of sugar-filled beverages and unhealthy foods while decreasing their intake of fruits and vegetables. The brain regions linked to memory, reward, attention, and decision-making showed a stronger neural response when exposed to images of unhealthy food than to images of healthy or non-food. Food portion size, energy density, and children's desire levels all affect how they perceive images of nutritious and unhealthy foods and, consequently, how much of them they consume. No evidence of social media's impact on improving children's and teenagers' nutritional literacy or diet quality was found. Although parents had a bigger impact, peers seemed to be more capable of encouraging teens to consume more vegetables than did influences for kids.

**Sampasa-Kanyinga (2015)** declared that Teenagers who utilize social networking sites are more likely to have unhealthy eating habits. Increasing our efforts to disseminate information about healthy eating choices and reducing young screen-related sedentary time are important public health objectives. Future studies are necessary to completely understand how social networks affect eating patterns and the risk of being overweight because social networking sites are widely used and social media influencers have a big impact on people's purchasing decisions in general and food shopping decisions in particular.

### **Research objective**

1. To know the factors that contribute to the complexity of teenagers to choose the dietary choice.
2. To investigate the Persuasive techniques used in social media food advertisements to impact the teenagers.
3. To examine the unhealthy habits on teenager's diet.

**Research Questions**

1. How do social media food advertisements influence teenagers' perceptions of body image and its relation to food choices?
2. What are the visual narrations used in social media food advertisements to influence the buying behaviour of teenagers?
3. How does different types of social media food advertisements affect teenagers' preferences and consumption in eating habit?

**3. Research methodology**

The researcher has selected number of English-language review papers, research papers, and internet articles about how social media food advertisement affect the teenagers. After searching 30 papers on the subject, both qualitative and quantitative, the 15 most pertinent ones were chosen and discussed for this scoping review. To find the publications that were pertinent to the study, a broad range of data gathering tools and online browsers were employed, including Google Scholar, Academia, Shodganga and Research Gate. In order to find the most relevant research publications, the references provided in the printed articles were also carefully examined. Search phrases including "dietary habits," "social media," "food choices," and "snacking" were used to find pertinent research publications.

**4. Result and analysis**

This chapter examines the outcomes of the study in relation to the research objectives and questions. According to World Health Organisation (WHO), India is predicted to be the second largest country and it is further highlighted by the increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity among adolescents, with a quadruplicate rise between 1990 and 2023. The pervasiveness of obesity in Indian teenagers has increased significantly since 2000. They also attribute the poor eating habits of youth as a contributing factor. They also suggested teenagers to pick up and acquire good habits to enhance their life and physical function by eating healthily, exercising, and feeling good about yourself. These behaviours are also essential for the learning and development of adolescents. Obesity and other chronic diseases are linked to bad eating practices, such as skipping breakfast and consuming sugar-sweetened drinks. The greatest rates of childhood and teenage obesity are found in China and Canada.

**4.1. Complexity of teenager's dietary choice by watching social media food advertisements**

Teenagers pick up and embrace healthy habits. Being active, eating healthily, and feeling good about yourself are all strategies to enhance your life and physical operation. Also, these behaviours are indispensable to the knowledge and development of teenagers. Unhealthy eating practices, like skipping breakfast and consuming sugar-sweetened drinks (SSB), have been linked to chronic disorders like obesity. But the evidence for SSB is much stronger. The greatest rates of childhood obesity among children and adolescents are found in Canada. According to Tiggemann and Slater (2017), female preadolescent and adolescent Facebook users show higher levels of diet behaviour and beauty worries than non-users, and this relationship gets stronger the more time spent on the social media platform. There has been conjecture that the association between Facebook use and body image issues may be explained by appearance comparison.

When someone is in good mental health, they can understand their own potential, overcome challenges in their daily life, perform effectively at work, and greatly enhance the lives of others. Social media's benefits and drawbacks for mental health are now being examined. Social media plays a crucial role in maintaining our mental health. Mental health, health behaviour, physical health, and mortality risk are all impacted by the number and calibre of social interactions. impacts on young adults and adolescents. Young adults are frequently the target of food product promotion on both traditional and social media channels. The use of overt persuasive techniques in commercial food promotion makes it visible and often

ignored. As a result, the study discovered that Facebook users had addictive symptoms; hence, social networking sites had an effect on users' health. Through her research, Young found that pathological internet usage, or PIU, is a condition in which excessive internet use can lead to mental health problems (Young, 1998). According to the American Psychological Association, over use of online services is seen as an addiction. With addictions to drugs and alcohol, gambling, video games, and specific eating disorders, the PIU can now be classified as an addiction (Abdulahi, 2014).

There isn't any pertinent advice available right now for youth who use social media for health-related reasons. Particularly young people need the kind of assistance that can change with the times when they no longer control the media but rather the media controls them. The study's findings suggest that relevant adults can help young people better appreciate the advantages of social media by assisting them in comprehending the importance and vitality of content, as well as how young people's social media usage affects the health-related information they pay attention to and how their use of social media's interactive features shapes the health-related information that is available to them (Goodyear, 2018). Considering the impact of technology and health during early maturity, Vaterlaus (2015) employed a social ecology framework to examine the perceptions of social media among teenagers (N = 34), including social interacting, as manipulating their health-related behaviours, including exercise and food. Eight focus groups and four in-person interviews were employed to collect data. Three topics emerged from the qualitative phenomenological study. Young individuals perceived technology as having the capacity to both promote and hinder physical activity.

#### **4.2. Social media food advertisements affect teenagers' preferences and consumption in eating habit**

Because social media gives young adults a forum to showcase the food they cook or consume, it has also been considered responsible for increasing their access to more types of food preparation choices. whatever their age, social media exposure affects the diets of kids and teens, who consume more sugar-filled drinks and unhealthy snacks and fewer fruits and vegetables. The brain areas linked to memory, reward, attention, and decision-making showed a stronger neural response when exposed to images of unhealthy food than to images of healthy or non-food. The energy density, portion size, and hunger levels of children all affect how they perceive images of both good and unhealthy meals and, consequently, how much of them they consume.

This study examined the connection between an audiovisual appearance on social media and its capacity to affect dietary choices (Tamby, 2019). The analysis's findings show that respondents do experience this influence, especially while viewing social media videos. This implies that watching videos on social media might readily influence people to change their food preferences or intake. They also consider the visual and aural quality of the videos, as well as the way the food is presented on screen and how it affects the viewer's level of satisfaction. People are more inclined to try something that is uncommon and something they have never seen or tasted before than they are to listen to other people eat. They also have less control over what they eat than the models who promote the food. People are influenced not only by movies but also by food photos that are shared on social media and have vibrant colors that convey the idea that the food is nice and colorful. Teenagers who utilize social networking sites are more likely to have unhealthy eating habits. Increasing our efforts to disseminate information about healthy eating choices and reducing young screen-related sedentary time are important public health objectives. Given the extensive usage of social networking sites, further research is needed to completely understand how social networks affect eating patterns and the risk of being overweight (Sampasa-Kanyinga, 2015).

#### **4.3. Techniques used by the social media food advertisements to cover the teenager's**

On the other hand, Celebrity endorsements are a popular marketing strategy that can have a big impact on teens' food choices and consumption, especially when it comes to advertising junk food to

them. This tactic may be a contributing factor to the increase in childhood and teen obesity since it uses the fame and power of celebrities to promote unhealthy food and drink items. Social media food advertisements use a variety of persuasive techniques to effectively capture the attention of teenagers. One of the most common strategies is the use of celebrity and influencer endorsements, where popular figures promote food products in a relatable and appealing manner. Teenagers often admire these personalities and are likely to imitate their food choices. Additionally, visually appealing content such as high-quality images, vibrant colors, and slow-motion videos of food being prepared or eaten—is designed to trigger cravings and emotional responses. Advertisers also make use of emotional appeal and humor, crafting content that resonates with teenage interests, moods, and cultural trends. Hashtag challenges and giveaways are another popular technique, encouraging teens to engage directly with the brand by sharing content or tagging friends, which boosts visibility and peer influence. Personalized advertising through algorithms ensures that once a teenager engages with a food-related post, similar content continues to appear on their feed, reinforcing the message. These techniques, often disguised as entertainment or casual content, subtly influence teenagers' food preferences and consumption habits without them fully realizing they are being targeted by marketing.

## 5. Discussion

Social media has transformed the way brands engage with their target audiences, especially teenagers and young adults, in today's digital landscape. Unlike traditional media advertisements, which were typically easy to identify, the line between promotion and content is often blurred on social media platforms. Celebrities and influencers social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Snapchat as prime marketing venues, either directly or indirectly endorsing food products many of which are high in calories, fat, sugar, and salt. The consistent and targeted exposure to these food advertisements significantly influences the eating habits and food preferences of adolescents. Peoples are in an important stage of growth during teenage years, which leaves them particularly open to outside influences. Their desire to model after the role models, their ongoing process of identity building, and the desire for social approval all have a significant impact on their behaviours and decisions at this point in their lives. When celebrities or social media influencers promote unhealthy food options, they build a strong mental believe the between these products and positive attributes like confidence, success, popularity, and attractiveness. Young people are therefore more likely to look for, purchase, and consume these unhealthy goods often without fully weighing the possible long term health effects. Moreover, social media platforms are algorithm-driven. Similar content keeps coming onto a teen's feed if they interact with a food advertisement or a celebrity's food post. As a result, poor eating habits are reinforced in a digital echo chamber. Junk food eating becomes normalized as a result of repeated exposure, appearing to be a commonplace and socially acceptable behavior. The lack of transparency in many celebrity endorsements is a serious concern as well. Teenagers frequently lack the ability to discern between sponsored advertisements and real lifestyle content. A lot of influencers don't always make it obvious when their postings are sponsored. Teenagers find it much more difficult to evaluate the material they consume critically because of this ambiguity. In contrast, public health messages tend to be formal, less appealing, and do not employ the same emotional or aspirational tactics used in celebrity marketing. Research indicates a clear link between the frequency of exposure to food advertisements featuring celebrities and an increase in junk food consumption among teenagers. These dietary patterns are significantly associated with escalating rates of obesity, diabetes, diminished academic performance, low energy levels, and mental health challenges such as anxiety and low self-esteem. Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge the psychological effects of celebrity culture. Adolescents who look up to and idolize celebrities tend to replicate their behaviours, including their food preferences. When a well-known figure is observed enjoying a fast-food meal or endorsing a sugary drink, it conveys an implicit message that consuming such items is part of an appealing lifestyle. This emotional connection frequently surpasses any health advisories or nutritional data. Additionally, the competitive landscape of social media, where young individuals relentlessly seek affirmation through likes, comments, and shares, drives them to imitate

celebrity behaviors, including dietary trends. Popular hashtags like #foodie, #cheatmeal, or #snackattack often promote indulgent, calorie-rich foods, embedding them into the social media 'cool' culture. Additionally, there is a significant absence of regulation in social media advertising when compared to television or print media. Although some nations have started to implement guidelines aimed at restricting unhealthy food marketing directed at children, the enforcement of these regulations remains limited and inconsistent, particularly in digital platforms.

## 6. Conclusion

This research investigation shows how social media food advertisements, especially those including popular figures, have an important influence on the food choices of teenagers. Teenagers' consumption of unhealthy food is promoted by an influential marketing environment that combines psychological appeal, aspirational advertising, and continuous exposure. The influence of famous patrons makes low in nutrients, high-calorie foods appear shiny and socially acceptable. Teens are especially susceptible to these advertisements because they are at an important stage in the development of lifetime habits. They are exposed to these ads frequently, unfiltered, and as part of the everyday information they consume. In their social groups, poor eating therefore becomes accepted and even acknowledged. Media Literacy Education: Teenagers need to be actively educated by parents and schools how to evaluate media information carefully. Teaching them on how to identify advertising techniques, know influencer sponsorships, and distinguish between sponsored and genuine content is essential. Policy and Regulation: Stronger rules should be put in place by governments and regulatory agencies to keep an eye on and manage the marketing of food to children online. There should be laws regulating publication of paid sponsorships and limiting the promotion of unhealthy food to teenagers. Parent and Community Support: Parents and community leaders need to establish better eating conditions at home and at schools and be conscious of the impact social media has on young people. Having open talks about social norms, body image, and influence from media can also help teenagers make healthier eating choices. Platform Responsibilities: Social media businesses need to be more responsible for selecting the content that is displayed to teenagers. As part of this, unhealthy food marketing is identified, artificial expansion of such content is decreased, and health-based ads are supported. In conclusion, social media food ads involving celebrities are effective marketing tool, but there are serious risks to health connected with their unchecked influence on youth. This is a problem that needs to be addressed by politicians, schools, parents, and the media by raising public awareness, educating the public, creating relevant advertising, and working together. Our efforts can help future generations adopt healthier eating habits and protect their health by promoting a more transparent and safe digital food culture.

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