

Impact of Social Media on Food Choices Among Females (13-49 Years)

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Abstract:

Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter provide an enormous number of features that enable people to create and engage with content, connect and exchange experiences, making them essential components of contemporary life and people try to modify their life as shown on these social media platforms which affect their eating habits, lifestyle and body image perception.

Aim: The study aimed to assess the impact of social media on food choices and physical activity among females of different age groups (13-49 years).

Methodology: A cross-sectional study was conducted in urban Bengaluru with 500 female respondents aged 13-49 years. A purposive sampling method was employed, and data was collected using a pre-structured and self-designed questionnaire was used which included four sections: socio demographic profile, anthropometric measurements, impact of social media on food choice and physical activity. Data were analyzed using percentages and descriptive statistics. Statistical analysis was done using IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0.

Results: Socio demographic data revealed that most of the respondents were from nuclear families (68.2%) and predominantly belonging to the Hindu religion (58%), half of the respondents (55%) were non-vegetarian and most of the respondents were graduated as educational level (46.6%). A large population is obese (62.33%) and has abdominal obesity (60.4%). Most frequently used social media platforms among respondents include Instagram (61.8%), followed by YouTube (45.2%), whereas the YouTube platform (73.4%) was used for food related content by the majority of the respondents. There was no significant association between social media usage and junk food intake. While the association between social media usage and BMI was found to be significant.

Conclusion: The findings highlighted the widespread use of social media among respondents, with platforms like Instagram and YouTube playing a major role in influencing food related behaviors. While social media had a limited impact on dietary habits, it showed a significant association with BMI, indicating its potential as a tool for promoting healthier lifestyles.

Keywords: Eating habits, Food choices, Lifestyle, Social media

INTRODUCTION

“Influenced To Eat, Inspired To Move: The Digital Push Behind Our Health Habits”. The collection of interactive online tools that enable the production, sharing, and curation of user generated content, whether

individually or collaboratively are commonly referred to as social media. Social media platforms come in a wide range consisting of Facebook, Friendster, Wikipedia, Craigslist, dating websites, YouTube, Instagram, and recipe sharing websites like allrecipes.com. (Jenny et al., 2016). These platforms allow users to interact with each other, share multimedia content such as text, images, videos, and audio, and engage in various forms of communication, including messaging, comments, and reactions (Wesley, 2024). Over a third of the world's population (38%) use social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, with high rates of social media use not confined to the young or specific ethnicities, cultures, genders and/or socio-economic groups. (Goodyear et al., 2021).

As the digital age unfolds, more individuals turn to online platforms for inspiration, guidance and social validation in their dietary choices. The influence of social media platforms has undeniably shaped our food choices, preferences and behaviors, leading to a new paradigm in how we approach and engage with food (Rini et al., 2024). Social media also has a lot of effects on eating practice. Nutritional data and the popularity of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat have significantly influenced people's eating habits and preferences, especially among college students (Aheer et al., 2024). According to Aliya et al., 2023, one of the main causes of bad diets and obesity is unhealthy food marketing on the young population. Social media food marketers are known to target youth. The rise of social media and its ability to help promote a variety of products, including food-related decisions, is one of the benefits of technology. While some consider social media to have increased their healthy food consumption, others blame increased social media usage for consuming junk foods (Ventura et al., 2021). Hence, an attempt has been made to conduct a research on the impact of social media on food choices among females (13 – 49 years).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the year 2025 where 500 females aged between 13 – 49 years were chosen randomly from the neighbourhoods of urban Bengaluru, including schools, colleges and offices. The study was planned and prepared at Smt. VHD Central Institute of Home Science. The research encompass all individuals who engage with social media platforms and come under the age group 13 – 49 years residing in urban Bangalore. It excludes all individuals with nutrition background and who are not engaged in any social media platforms and those outside the age range of 13 – 49 years, who are not residing in urban Bangalore. The questionnaire was constructed and developed by taking reference from existing tool. The questionnaire was validated by the subject experts and statistician. A semi-structured questionnaire that balanced standardized questions and open-ended replies was used to guarantee thorough and trustworthy data gathering. The questionnaire was divided into different sections, like socio demographic profile, anthropometric status and impact of social media on food choices respectively. Data was collected using a validated questionnaire following an ethical consent where all respondents are informed about the study's purpose. The data was collected through appropriate methods, and collected data was compiled and statistically analysed using frequency, percentage and chi-square methods using IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Socio demographic profile of the respondents (N = 500)

Socio demographic parameters		Age group (in years)						P Value
		13 – 15 N = 100	16 – 19 N = 100	20 – 29 N = 100	30 – 39 N = 100	40 – 49 N = 100	Total N = 500	
Gender	Female	100 (100%)	100 (100%)	100 (100%)	100 (100%)	100 (100%)	500 (100%)	
Type of family	Nuclear	57 (57%)	65 (65%)	78 (78%)	68 (68%)	73 (73%)	341 (68.2%)	0.019
	Joint	43 (43%)	35 (35%)	22 (22%)	32 (32%)	27 (27%)	159 (31.8%)	
Religion	Hindu	83 (83%)	72 (72%)	50 (50%)	47 (47%)	38 (38%)	290 (58.0%)	<0.001*
	Muslim	7 (7%)	15 (15%)	25 (25%)	31 (31%)	46 (46%)	124 (24.8%)	
	Christian	3 (3.0%)	3 (3.0%)	10 (10%)	5 (5%)	1 (1.0%)	22 (4.4%)	
	Jain	6 (6.0%)	8 (8.0%)	11 (11%)	17 (17%)	14 (14%)	56 (11.2%)	
	Others	1 (1.0%)	2 (2.0%)	4 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.0%)	8 (1.6%)	
Educational qualification	Illiterate	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	3 (3%)	4 (0.8%)	<0.001*
	School	100 (100%)	30 (30%)	1 (1.0%)	19 (19%)	36 (36%)	186 (37.2%)	
	Graduate	0 (0.0%)	69 (69%)	71 (71%)	54 (54%)	39 (39%)	233 (46.6%)	
	Post graduate	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.0%)	28 (28%)	26 (26%)	22 (22%)	77 (15.4%)	
Occupation	Employed	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.0%)	32 (32%)	50 (50%)	38 (38%)	122 (24.4%)	<0.001*
	Student	100 (100%)	97 (97%)	51 (51%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.0%)	250 (50.0%)	
	Un - employed	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.0%)	2 (2.0%)	3 (3.0%)	7 (7.0%)	13 (2.6%)	
	Home maker	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (15%)	47 (47%)	53 (53%)	115 (23.0%)	
Monthly family income	≥ 1,35,169	15 (15%)	16 (16%)	20 (20%)	18 (18%)	17 (17%)	86 (17.2%)	0.101
	67,587 – 1,35,168	28 (28%)	18 (18%)	23 (23%)	33 (33%)	19 (19%)	121 (24.2%)	
	50,560 – 67,586	30 (30%)	27 (27%)	32 (32%)	24 (24%)	22 (22%)	135 (27.0%)	

	33,793 – 50,559	27 (27%)	39 (39%)	25 (25%)	25 (25%)	42 (42%)	158 (31.6%)	
Dietary habits	vegetarian	65 (65%)	30 (30%)	28 (28%)	44 (44%)	38 (38%)	205 (41.0%)	<0.001*
	Lacto vegetarian	2 (2.0%)	3 (3.0%)	1 (1.0%)	4 (4.0%)	1 (1.0%)	11 (2.2%)	
	Ovo vegetarian	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.4%)	
	Lacto ovo vegetarian	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.4%)	
	Vegan	0 (0.0%)	3 (3.0%)	1 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.0%)	5 (1.0%)	
	Non vegetarian	32 (32%)	64 (64%)	67 (67%)	52 (52%)	60 (60%)	275 (55.0%)	

*Significance at 5% level

Table 1 showed the socio demographic profile of the respondents. Among respondents, 68.2 percent belonged to nuclear families and 31.8 percent to joint families. On the basis of religion, 58.0 percent were Hindu, 24.8 percent Muslim, 11.2 percent Jain and 4.4 percent Christian. Educationally, 46.6 percent were graduates followed by 37.0 percent had completed school education, and 15.4 percent were postgraduates and only 0.8 percent was illiterate. In case of occupation, 50 percent were student, 24.4 percent employed, 23.0 percent were homemakers, and only 2.6 percent were unemployed. The monthly family income being 31.6 percent earned between ₹33,793 and ₹50,559 , 27.0 percent earned between ₹50,560 and ₹67,586 , 24.2 percent ₹67,587 and ₹1,35,168 and only 17.2 percent earned ₹1,35,169 or more. Dietary patterns showed that 55 percent were non-vegetarians and 41 percent vegetarians.

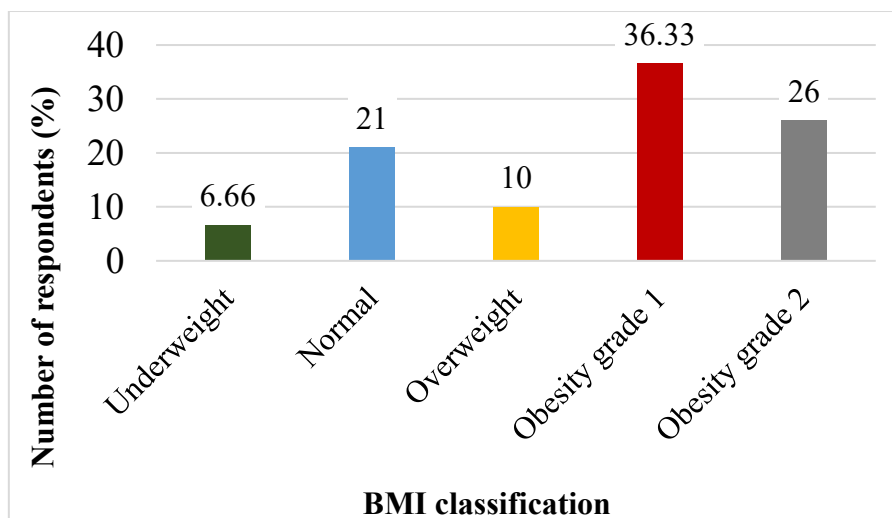


Figure 1: BMI of the respondents

The figure 1 depicted the anthropometric measurements of the respondents. Among them 36.33 percent of them fall under obesity grade 1, 26 percent under obesity grade 2, 21 percent had normal BMI, 10 percent were overweight and least (6.66%) were underweight.

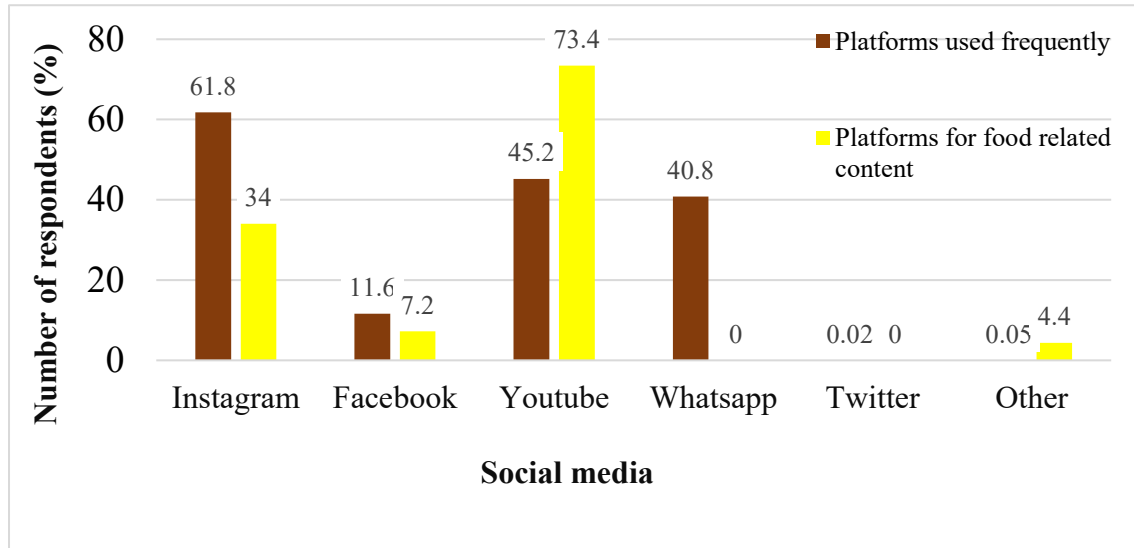


Figure 2: Social media platforms usage among respondents

Figure 2 revealed the different social media platforms used by them frequently and for food related content by the respondents. More than half (61.8%) used Instagram most frequently, followed by 45.2 percent used YouTube and 40.8 percent Whatsapp. Majority (73.4.0%) of them used YouTube for searching food related content, followed by 34 percent Instagram and only minor percent used Facebook (7.2%) and Pinterest (4.4%) for searching food related content.

The results of the current study reveal that Instagram was the most commonly used social media platform among respondents, whereas YouTube was primarily employed for searching food-related content. This differentiation highlights the variations in platform functionality and user intent, as corroborated by existing literature. This is consistent with the research conducted by Radesky et al. (2023), which indicated that video-based food content on platforms such as YouTube has a significant impact on dietary decisions, especially among children, owing to its captivating and immersive nature. Video content enables users to follow recipes, view demonstrations, and witness food behaviors in a manner that static or image-based content fails to achieve, potentially clarifying the strong preference for YouTube during active food-related searches. Despite Instagram registering the highest overall usage (61.8%), its relatively lower engagement for food searches (34.0%) is in accordance with the findings of Vaterlaus et al. (2015), who noted that Instagram is frequently utilized for passive consumption, inspiration, and social interaction rather than intentional information seeking. Food-related content on Instagram is often encountered incidentally through visual feeds, which may clarify its widespread use for general purposes but secondary role in active food information searches.

Table 2: Frequency and duration of social media usage and its influence on food choices among the respondents (N = 500)

	Age group (in years)						P Value
	13 – 15 N = 100	16 – 19 N = 100	20 – 29 N = 100	30 – 39 N = 100	40 – 49 N = 100	Total N = 500	
Frequency of usage of social media							
Daily	61 (61.0%)	82 (82.0%)	85 (85.0%)	85 (85.0%)	79 (79.0%)	392 (78.4%)	<0.001*
Few times a week	29 (29.0%)	11 (11.0%)	9 (9.0%)	9 (9.0%)	11 (11.0%)	69 (13.8%)	
Rarely	7 (7.0%)	7 (7.0%)	6 (6.0%)	6 (6.0%)	10 (10.0%)	36 (7.2%)	
Never	3 (3.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.6%)	
Number of hours spend on social media daily							
Less than 1 hour	48 (48.0%)	11 (11.0%)	8 (8.0%)	23 (23.0%)	45 (45.0%)	135 (27.0%)	<0.001*
1 – 2 hours	33 (33.0%)	25 (25.0%)	44 (44.0%)	38 (38.0%)	38 (38.0%)	178 (35.6%)	
2 – 3 hours	12 (12.0%)	24 (24.0%)	22 (22.0%)	19 (19.0%)	13 (13.0%)	90 (18.0%)	
3 – 4 hours	3 (3.0%)	17 (17.0%)	9 (9.0%)	12 (12.0%)	3 (3.0%)	44 (8.8%)	
More than 4 hours	4 (4.0%)	23 (23.0%)	17 (17.0%)	8 (8.0%)	1 (1.0%)	53 (10.6%)	
Influence of social media on food choices							
Strongly agree	8 (8.0%)	6 (6.0%)	12 (12.0%)	8 (8.0%)	10 (10.0%)	44 (8.8%)	0.620
Agree	46 (46.0%)	35 (35.0%)	42 (42.0%)	46 (46.0%)	43 (43.0%)	212 (42.4%)	
Neutral	30 (30.0%)	35 (35.0%)	33 (33.0%)	33 (33.0%)	33 (33.0%)	164 (32.8%)	
Disagree	15 (15.0%)	22 (22.0%)	13 (13.0%)	13 (13.0%)	14 (14.0%)	77 (15.4%)	
Strongly disagree	1 (1.0%)	2 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (0.6%)	

*Significance at 5% level

The table 2 represents frequency of usage of social media among different age groups. Majority (78.4%) use social media daily, 13.8 percent use few times a week followed by 7.2 percent rarely. Between the different age groups there was significant difference in the frequency of usage of social media. The number of hours spend on social media daily by different age groups. Among the respondents 35.6 percent spend

1-2 hours on social media, 27 percent spend less than 1 hour, and 37.4 percent spend more than 2 to beyond 4 hours per day. Between the different age group there was significant difference in the number of hours spend on social media daily.

It depicts the influence on the food choices among different age group. Half of the respondents (51.2%) agreed that social media has an influence on their food choices, 32.8 percent were neutral and only 16 percent disagreed. Between the different age group there was no significant difference on influence of social media on the food choices among different age group.

The results of this study are consistent with earlier research showing how social media is widely used to influence eating and lifestyle choices. Klassen et al. (2018) claim that social media platforms have emerged as a major resource for nutrition and health information, frequently influencing dietary decisions for people of all ages. Similarly, regular exposure to social media content has a considerable impact on eating patterns, especially for younger persons who are more active on the internet, according to Holmberg et al. (2019). Social media influences dietary habits, but it also raises awareness of food trends and health-related behaviors, according to a 2017 study by Turner and Lefevre. In line with the present findings, these authors noted that whereas social media usage varies in intensity among age groups, its impact on food-related decision-making is consistent across all demographics. Therefore, the current study supports previous research, thereby reaffirming the idea that social media has a significant role in influencing dietary habits and food preferences.

Table 3: Influence of social media on diet by the respondents (N = 500)

	Age group (in years)						P Value
	13 – 15 N = 100	16 – 19 N = 100	20 – 29 N = 100	30 – 39 N = 100	40 – 49 N = 100	Total N = 500	
Earlier diet before getting influenced by social media							
Healthy	22 (22.0%)	25 (25.0%)	13 (13.0%)	27 (27.0%)	36 (36.0%)	123 (24.6%)	0.001*
Most healthy	4 (4.0%)	7 (7.0%)	16 (16.0%)	12 (12.0%)	18 (18.0%)	57 (11.4%)	
Balanced	67 (67.0%)	59 (59.0%)	60 (60.0%)	52 (52.0%)	45 (45.0%)	283 (56.6%)	
Mostly unhealthy	3 (3.0%)	6 (6.0%)	6 (6.0%)	7 (7.0%)	1 (1.0%)	23 (4.6%)	
Unhealthy	4 (4.0%)	3 (3.0%)	5 (5.0%)	2 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (2.8%)	
Current diet after getting influenced by social media							
Healthy	22 (22.0%)	18 (18.0%)	7 (7.0%)	20 (20.0%)	27 (27.0%)	94 (18.8%)	0.005*
Most healthy	11 (11.0%)	14 (14.0%)	15 (15.0%)	18 (18.0%)	21 (21.0%)	79 (15.8%)	
Balanced	54 (54.0%)	55 (55.0%)	65 (65.0%)	54 (54.0%)	48 (48.0%)	276 (55.2%)	

Mostly unhealthy	4 (4.0%)	10 (10.0%)	7 (7.0%)	6 (6.0%)	4 (4.0%)	31 (6.2%)
Unhealthy	9 (9.0%)	3 (3.0%)	6 (6.0%)	2 (2.0%)	0 (0.0%)	20 (4.0%)

* Significance at 5% level

Table 3 describes the earlier diet before being influenced by social media among different age groups. Among the respondents, higher percentage (56.6%) reported their earlier diet as balanced, followed by 36.6 percent described it as healthy and smaller percentage (7.4%) as unhealthy. Between the different age group there was significant difference on describing the current diet after getting influence by social media among different age group.

It also describes perceptions of current diet after being influenced by social media among different age groups. Among the respondents, 55.2 percent reported their earlier diet as balanced, followed by 34.6 percent described it as healthy and 10.2 percent as unhealthy. Between the different age group there was significant difference on describing the earlier diet before getting influence by social media among different age group.

These results align with existing research, which indicates that exposure to social media significantly influences dietary perceptions and behaviors, particularly among younger and adult women. A study conducted by Ali and Shulamite (2025) showed that frequent interaction with food-related content on social media correlates with higher tendencies towards impulsive eating, cravings for food, and changes in eating habits, including an increased intake of calorie-dense foods and snacks. Patil et al. (2024) found that Indian adolescents show changes in eating behavior and food-related decisions influenced by social networking platforms, such as a preference for dining out and altered food ordering habits. This suggests that cues from social media can impact how individuals assess their dietary quality and make choices.

Table 4: Association between duration of usage of social media and eating junk food (N= 500)

Eating more junk food	Duration of usage of social media					Total n (%)	P value
	< 1 hour n (%)	1 – 2 hours n (%)	2 – 3 hours n (%)	3 – 4 hours n (%)	> 4 hours n (%)		
Strongly agree	10 (7.4%)	17 (9.6%)	13 (14.4%)	5 (11.4%)	9 (17%)	54 (10.8%)	0.370
Agree	43 (31.9%)	55 (30.9%)	24 (26.7%)	18 (40.9%)	13 (24.5%)	153 (30.6%)	
Neutral	42 (31.1%)	67 (37.6%)	35 (38.9%)	16 (36.4%)	22 (41.5%)	182 (36.4%)	
Disagree	33 (24.4%)	32 (18.0%)	13 (14.4%)	4 (9.1%)	6 (11.3%)	88 (17.6%)	
Strongly disagree	7 (5.2%)	7 (3.9%)	5 (5.6%)	1 (2.3%)	3 (5.7%)	23 (4.6%)	
Total	135 (100.0%)	178 (100.0%)	90 (100.0%)	44 (100.0%)	53 (100.0%)	500 (100.0%)	

*Significance at 5% level

P value using chi-square/ exact test; P value >0.05 is considered as not statistically significant.

Table 4 depicts the association between duration of usage of social media and eating junk food. 39.3 percent agreed and 31.1 percent had a neutral opinion that social media influenced to eat junk food when they used social media for less than 1 hour. Equal percentage (41.5%) agreed were neutral when they used social media more than 4 hour. It showed same opinion irrespective of time spent on social media, indicating there is no significant association between usage of social media and eating junk food.

Current findings align with earlier research that highlights the various factors affecting dietary behaviour. Although exposure to social media has been associated with greater access to food advertisements and peer influence, the amount of time spent on these platforms may not necessarily correlate with unhealthy eating practices (Vaterlaus et al., 2015). Factors such as individual tastes, knowledge about nutrition, socioeconomic status, and self-control might be more significant in shaping food choices than the time allocated to social media use.

Additionally, the neutral reactions noted regardless of usage time imply a lack of strong feelings or clear awareness among users about how social media impacts their eating habits. This aligns with findings by Holmberg et al. (2016), who reported that although social media can shape food-related norms, users do not always perceive these influences as significant or direct.

Table 5: Association between duration of usage of social media and BMI (N = 300)

BMI	Duration of usage of social media						P value
	< 1 hour n (%)	1 – 2 hours n (%)	2 – 3 hours n (%)	3 – 4 hours n (%)	> 4 hours n (%)	Total n (%)	
Underweight	2 (2.6%)	7 (5.8%)	5 (9.3%)	1 (4.2%)	5 (19.2%)	20 (6.7%)	0.026*
Normal	7 (9.2%)	26 (21.7%)	16 (29.6%)	9 (37.5%)	4 (15.4%)	62 (20.7%)	
Overweight	8 (10.5%)	13 (10.8%)	4 (7.4%)	2 (8.3%)	4 (15.4%)	31 (10.3%)	
Obese grade 1	32 (42.1%)	40 (33.3%)	19 (35.2%)	9 (37.5%)	9 (34.6%)	109 (36.3%)	
Obese grade 2	27 (35.5%)	34 (28.3%)	10 (18.5%)	3 (12.5%)	4 (15.4%)	78 (26.0%)	
Total	76 (100.0%)	120 (100.0%)	54 (100.0%)	24 (100.0%)	26 (100.0%)	300 (100.0%)	

*Significance at 5% level

P value using chi-square/ exact test; P value <0.05 is considered as statistically significant.

Table 5 indicated the association between duration of usage of social media and BMI. Majority (77.6%) are obese when they use social media for less than 1 hour whereas 50 percent are obese when they are using social media for more than 4 hours. 15.4 percent of respondents belonging to normal BMI use less than 1 hour on social media and only 9.2 percent of them use social media more than 4 hours. Similarly, 2.6 percent of respondents who are underweight are using social media for less than 1 hour whereas 19.2

percent of them are using social media for more than 4 hours. It showed there was significant association between usage of social media and BMI.

These results were in line with findings of Mahmood et al. (2021), who found that sedentary behavior and poor snacking behaviors were associated with increased BMI when daily screen exposure was longer. According to Alqarni et al. (2020), teens who spend a lot of time on social media are more likely to be obese, which they attribute to a decrease in physical activity and an increase in calorie consumption. Accordingly, social media encouraged obesogenic habits, such as frequent consumption of foods high in energy, which were impacted by online advertising and food influencer marketing (Robinson et al. 2022). Sung et al. (2023) provided evidence in support of this, showing that more exposure to digital food settings was positively associated with unhealthy eating habits, raising the chance of becoming overweight or obese. When considered collectively, the current study is consistent with other research, showing that a combination of behavioral, dietary, and lifestyle factors may predispose people to higher BMI, especially obesity, through continuous or even minimal but passive social media use.

SUMMARY

Majority of the respondents were from nuclear families (68.2%) with Hindu religion wise (58%) and 55 percent were non-vegetarian. All the respondents were predominantly graduated (46.6%), student (50.0%) and employed (24.4%). Majority (62.33%) were obese and 60.4 percent had abdominal obesity indicating risk for metabolic diseases. Most frequently used social media platforms include Instagram (61.8%) followed by YouTube (45.2%). For food related content YouTube (73.4%) platform was used the highest. Majority of the subjects (78.4%) used social media daily and 35.6 percent accounting for 1 – 2 hours/day. Whereas 51.2 percent agreed that social media had an influence on food choices. According to this study majority of the respondents (46.4%) used social media platform for searching the recipes, 37.8 percent rarely tried diets promoted online and a lesser percentage (11.8%) followed nutrition related nutrition related content often. The majority of respondents (56.6%) said their previous diet was balanced, followed by healthy (36.6%) and unhealthy (7.4%). The results show that age groups differed significantly in how people described their diets before and after being affected by social media. There was no significant association between social media usage and junk food intake, whereas the association between social media usage and BMI was found to be significant.

CONCLUSION

The research offers important understanding of the socio-demographic characteristics, patterns of social media use, and their impact on food choices among 500 female participants aged 13 to 49 years. The use of social media has become almost a universal practice, with the majority of participants using it every day. Social media affected the respondent's food choices, even though this effect showed little variation among various age brackets. The influence of social media on purchasing choices were clear, as numerous participants indicated that they purchased food items due to advertisements seen online. Social media had limited impact on dietary habits. Social media can have a beneficial effect on awareness and motivation related to food, its actual impact on behaviour is complicated and occasionally inconsistent. The need for more organized initiatives and digital skills to leverage the benefits of social media while reducing its dangers.

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