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Social Media Influences Towards Consumer Eating Behaviour: A Systematic Review

Farah Khayrina Kamarudzaman[1], Fathi Shahira Shamsul 'Anuar[2], Izhar Hafifi Zainal Abidin[3]*, Samsul Bahri Usman[4]

[1234]Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, UiTM Dungun Campus, 23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

Email: [1]farahkhayrina99@gmail.com, [2]fathishahira@gmail.com, [3]izharhafifi@uitm.edu.my, [4]samsu271@uitm.edu.my

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become part of our norms, and almost everyone has at least one social media account. As a result, it became an avenue for companies, including food and beverage enterprises, to advertise their products as there were more viewers. Apart from marketing their products, messages spread through social media may also influence users' thinking and behaviour. This review investigates the role of social media in influencing consumer eating behaviour. Articles were searched through PubMed, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Emerald Insight using the search terms: social media, eating behaviours, consumer decision-making, and food advertisements. Eligible articles were selected for findings based on inclusion criteria. Of the 51 records, 16 studies met the inclusion criteria. The studies revealed two major findings: age has its connection with social influence, and youngsters, especially adolescents' eating behaviour, are heavily influenced by social media, especially in terms of unhealthy food promotions throughout all social media platforms. Restrictions on advertising unhealthy food content on social media should be legislated to prevent users from consuming more unhealthy food content. However, more study is needed to discover how social media affects consumer eating habits and the marketing strategies used by food and beverage firms to influence users since the techniques get more sophisticated every time.

Keywords: *Social media, Eating behaviour, Food advertisements, Consumer decision making*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this day and age, the term "social media" is no longer a foreign concept. Social media can be described as a digital communication tool, either web-based or via smartphone applications, that has developed into a platform for humans to interact with one another online by creating or sharing any content like images, videos, music, ideas, and commentary that they desire (Ventola, 2014). The pervasiveness of social media has had a tremendous impact on how humans communicate and is crucial to society and businesses (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Any content uploaded on online social media platforms can affect someone's behaviour, actions, and ways of thinking (Powell et al., 2018; Rageliene & Grønhøj, 2021). Even if the content appears trivial, it can change a person's mind over the content posted unconsciously. This development has led to social media being an avenue for advertisers to market their products and is an excellent approach to developing brand loyalty in a digital economy, mainly

because it allows direct regular communications with potential customers (Ziyadin et al., 2019). However, this has also had a negative impact altogether. Countless brands are marketing their products to an increasing number of consumers through social media platforms such as Instagram, which uses a high frequency of targeted and selected posts that control consumer emotions rather than convey information regarding their goods (Vassallo et al., 2018). In the food service sphere, the number of social media users advocating junk food and other low-nutrient energy-dense food and beverages outnumbered the number of posts promoting healthy nutrition. Any food and beverages posted and advertised online may entice these individuals to engage with the assigned element and modify it in real life. This exposure to food and drink advertising connects to a high intake of unhealthy diets (Gascoyne et al., 2021). In a study by Kucharczuk et al. (2022), social media may increase the risk of harmful health outcomes such as obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and even mental health issues, and children and adolescents are the primary victims (Aparicio-Martinez et al., 2019; Chung et al., 2021; Fu et al., 2022; Qutteina et al., 2022; Rageliene & Grønhøj, 2021).

This study systematically evaluates published literature to analyse the aspects of social media that affect users' eating behaviour. By understanding these attributes, a health-related goal, such as health interventions or public health campaigns, could be tailored more effectively to intervene in the destructive impacts of social media use. In addition, this study's findings will redound to society's benefits, considering that people are spending more time on social media platforms now than they did in the past.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The review protocol

This study is guided by PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) review protocols. This method combines and analyses data from various studies on similar research topics to present findings (Ahn & Kang, 2018). A systematic approach is more likely to adhere to a pre-defined review protocol that helps protect against intentional or unintentional changes in scope during the review (Booth et al., 2021).

2.2 Systematic searching strategies

This study gathered secondary data from searching through online databases: PubMed, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Emerald Insight. A full-text database was chosen instead of an indexing database, and specific databases were not included to avoid redundancy. Identifying potential literature is the first step in the data collection process. The following keywords: social media and eating behaviours, are developed based on the research questions and will be used in combinations using synonyms and related terms. Field code functions, phrase searching, truncation, and Boolean operators were just a few of the search functions used on these keyword combinations. Table 1 depicts the search string used in this initial stage.

Table 1: The search string

Database	Search String
Google Scholar	Phrase searching: Social media AND eating behavior/ behaviour, diet intake, consumer/ customer decision-making, food advertisement/ ads
ScienceDirect	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("Social media") AND ("eating behavio*" OR "eating disorder*" OR "diet intake" OR "food intake" OR "food pattern*" OR "food consumption" OR "food preference*")
Pubmed	(social media) AND (eating behavi*) OR (eating disorder*) OR (diet intake) OR (food intake) OR (food pattern*) OR (food consumption) OR (food preference*) AND (2017:2022[pdat]) Filters: Full text, Systematic Review, in the last 5 years
Emerald Insight	("social media") AND ("eating behavio*") OR ("food intake") OR ("eating disorder") OR ("diet intake)

Next, a screening process was conducted, automatically eliminating any unsuitable or irrelevant literature to the study. The first step in this process is to remove duplicates and redundancy. Here, title screening was carried out. Several selection criteria were developed, including the literature's reliability and whether it was well-written, carefully constructed, and insightful. The paper is considered well-written based on the author's credentials, the reliabilities of the publishers, and content. The author must have their paper's academic credentials, e-mail addresses, and institutional affiliation to check for eligibility. Basic information, such as the names of the editorial board members and the Editor-in-Chief, is required for publisher credentials and can be found on the journal's website (Radhika, 2018). Non-English papers were also excluded from this research paper. In addition, sources must have been published ranging from 2017 to 2022 in light of the idea of "research field maturity" stressed by Kraus et al. (2020). The fixed time frame was justified not because of the 'outdated' myth surrounding the scientific community but rather because of the maturity of the intended subject: social media. The amount of information that is readily available and accessible might easily overwhelm the review process. This practice also served to gain the recent discoveries in this matured field. The inclusion and exclusion criteria are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: The inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Document sources	PubMed, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Emerald Insight	Academia, StuDo, IJSER, Coursehero and other fake journals websites
Document types	Article journals	News articles, books, reports, brochures
Timeline	2017 and above	Below 2017
Language	English	Non-English

After that, the process of determining eligibility begins with the elimination of any duplicated papers. The retrieved literature was then manually assessed by reading its abstract to ensure that it was eligible before being evaluated by experts. According to Polanin et al. (2019), abstract screening enables the review team to narrow down a large number of identified studies to the citations that should be "full-text" screened and eventually included in the review. This process allows the review team to save time and ensure that only relevant studies are included in the review.

Researchers will then extract data from final papers in their separate approaches during the data extraction process. Following the completion of this step, the data will be

classified utilising iterative definitions to make the process of data analysis more organised and readable. The data are then examined and analysed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying themes and subthemes, and the researchers guarantee that there is little bias in the data analysis process by assessing correlations between the data.

3.0 FINDINGS

The four databases yielded 4206 records as a result of the literature search. Of the 4206 records retrieved, 3989 records did not meet the inclusion criteria, and 11 duplicates were removed thereafter. The remaining 206 records were later screened based on their titles and abstracts; 183 were eliminated, leaving 23 records. After reading the whole text, seven articles were judged to be ineligible due to several factors: two articles were out of context, three papers had irrelevant outcomes, and another two articles had sketchy details about social media influences on consumer eating behaviour. Figure 1's PRISMA flow diagram gives more information on the causes of exclusion. In the end, 16 manuscripts were accepted for evaluation.

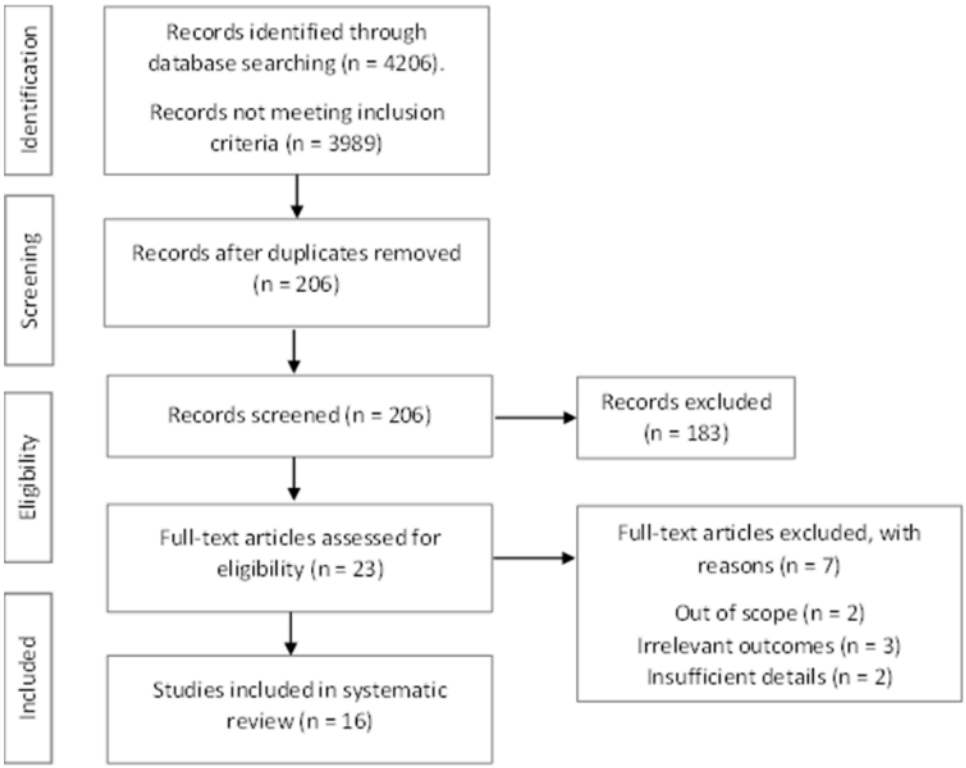

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram

Out of 16 selected articles, three were conducted in the United States, another three were from the United Kingdom, five were in Australia, three were carried out in Malaysia, and one was in each of these countries, notably Canada and Ireland. In terms of the years of publications, twelve editions were released in 2018, 2020, and 2021 respectively, three in 2019 and one in 2022. The results of the thematic analysis led to the development of three themes, which were as follows: social factor, user attributes, and functional factor. These characteristics of social media have been shown to impact user behaviour, explicitly eating behaviour in the context of this research. After conducting more research on the topics, the study was able to identify eleven sub-themes. Table 3 provides a concise summary of the detected overarching themes as well as the subthemes.

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes identified

Studies	Years	Region	Social Factor	User Attributes			Functional Factor		
			SI	UP	UE	UPE	A	TG	K
1. Chung et al.	2021	United States	/				/		
2. Coates et. al.	2019	United Kingdom	/				/	/	
3. Hawkins et al	2020	United Kingdom	/	/	/				
4. Saunders & Eaton	2018	United Kingdom	/		/	/			
5. Kucharczuk et al.	2022	United States	/				/	/	
6. Molenaar et al.	2021	Australia		/	/			/	
7. Baldwin et al.	2018	Australia	/		/		/	/	
8. Potvin Kent et al.	2019	Canada	/		/		/	/	
9. Rounsefell et al.	2019	Australia	/		/		/		
10. Murphy et al.	2020	Ireland	/				/	/	
11. Rummo et al.	2020	United States					/	/	
12. Pung et al.	2021	Malaysia	/				/		
13. Tan et al	2018	Malaysia	/				/	/	
14. Jaffery et al.	2020	Malaysia	/		/		/	/	
15. Gascoyne et al.	2021	Australia	/		/		/		
16. Lambert et al.	2018	Australia	/						/

Social factors	User Attributes	Functional Factors
SI : Social influence	UP : User perception U.E. : User experience UPE : User personality	A : Age T.G : Type of goods . K : Knowledge

3.1 Social Factors

The link between social media and food choices is determined by how individuals employ social media as a venue for information sharing or discourse around food. The vast majority of individuals use social media to discuss food consumption, dietary restrictions, and advice that may influence their eating habits with others. Therefore, how individuals use social media in their daily lives is crucial. Social media was the most widely reported source of knowledge (Lambert et al., 2018), and the prevalence of social media has increased people's propensity to remember unhealthy meals, and celebrity influence substantially affects dietary choices (Kucharczuk et al., 2022). Social norms and perceived social support may be underpinning peer influences related to the practice of eating. Peer groups and the type and degree of peer influence may shape one's relationship with food. Peer influence on eating behaviours may extend from in-person impact to social media influence (Chung et al., 2020). Popular social media influencer food promotion influences children's food consumption, and influencer marketing of harmful foods increases children's immediate food consumption, whereas equal marketing of healthier foods has no effect (Coates et al., 2019). In addition, Pung et al. (2021) claim that social media is so powerful that it can even influence health supplement intake and is the source of health supplement advice among Malaysian students. Furthermore, the portrayal of new behaviour patterns associated with overeating and weight gain has become a norm in social media; evidently, communicating these norms through social media impacts eating habits (Hawkins et al., 2021) and may have played a role in recent rises in obesity.

3.2 User Attributes

The time spent on social media puts the users at risk of being exposed to unrealistic ideals of beauty, unhealthy food messages, and advertisements that unconsciously condition the viewers. Experiencing food commercials on social media increases the tendency of the users to engage in harmful eating behaviour, even if the users are aware of the negativity of such products (Molenaar et al., 2021). For instance, the consumption of unhealthy foods and beverages was substantially linked to watching food brand video material on YouTube, purchasing food online, and seeing favourite food brands advertised online (Baldwin et al., 2018). According to the findings presented here, Tan et al. (2018) discovered that YouTube is swamped with advertisements that promote non-core foods more than core foods and varied meals. In the same vein, the material found on other Social Networking Services (SNS) such as Instagram and Snapchat are mostly centred on a person's outward looks (Saunders & Eaton, 2018). These signals cause users to experience feelings of body dissatisfaction, weight worries, an over-evaluation of their shape and weight, binge eating, and emotional eating as compensatory behaviours to counterbalance the apparent weight gain from eating, dietary restriction, and low weight status. According to Rounsefell et al. (2019), prolonged exposure to information connected to images may have a detrimental effect on the body image of certain healthy young people and the dietary decisions they make. A considerable influence on these perceptions is exerted by the media's role in highlighting the good or destructive elements of people's behaviours. When it comes to healthy eating behaviour, according to Jaffery et al. (2020), the main positive drivers of attitudes toward fruit and vegetable eating among university students, for instance, significantly correlated with the number of likes, views, comments, and answers on YouTube. These factors were found to be the most influential. In addition, Molenaar et al. (2021) found that advertisements for commercial food used overt forms of persuasion. Young people are an ideal demographic to target with advertising that focuses on pleasure-seeking (taste), affordability, and convenience.

3.3 Functional Factors

A few researchers have only investigated age differences in healthy eating and belief about healthy eating. However, age also moderates the influence of the determinants on healthy eating. Murphy et al. (2020) found that young people in the study, who were adolescents, responded considerably more positively to unhealthy food promotion than non-food advertising. According to Potvin Kent et al. (2019), children were exposed to food marketing, and the majority of the exposures discovered promoted unhealthy goods such as fast food and sugar-sweetened beverages. Furthermore, food and sugary drink companies have millions of adolescent social media followers (Rummo et al., 2020). Promoting energy-dense and nutrient-poor (EDNP) food and beverages through social media is well documented as a successful campaign in marketing case studies. Social media platforms are ideal for food and beverage companies to engage with young people. Common techniques used to engage children and adolescents with these unhealthy food and beverage brands included flash animation, music, and games. A high intake of unhealthy drinks was linked to exposure to food and drink advertisements on social media, whereas involvement with such marketing was linked to high consumption of both unhealthy food and unhealthy drinks (Gascoyne et al., 2021). Food and beverage advertising influences children's product preferences, requests, and diet. Although the food and beverage sector has vowed to self-regulate its marketing to children, this has not resulted in a major increase in promoting healthier foods. In conclusion, more than 80% of the studies involved in this review have reached a consensus where those minors, children, and adolescent, have been proven to be the most vulnerable section of the population to the damaging effects of social media.

4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate social media aspects that affect consumer eating habits. Social media can be incorporated into practically every part of people's lives, from social networking to buying products and services to starting a business and getting health and nutrition advice. Most people on social media are likely to receive at least some nutrition, eating habits, and body image messages from the accounts they follow on any social media platform. The results in Table 3 show that all these three factors were connected. Most papers concluded that social influence and age under the category of functional factors became the major influence on user behaviours on social media. Age is associated with social influence, and youngsters, especially adolescents' eating behaviour, are heavily influenced by social media regarding unhealthy food promotions.

Behavioural psychology commonly establishes that when humans are exposed to "social norm messages," they are influenced to imitate such behaviours as closely as possible. In other words, people will aim to acquire eating patterns resembling socially accepted or anticipated standards. Food photos shared on social media may reflect a lifestyle that teenagers admire or desire to promote. Because of viral transmission of poor eating behaviours, social media contagion may have mental health consequences, adding to distinct social norms that affect anxiety levels. Social media involvement or exposure to image-related content was linked to higher body dissatisfaction, dieting or restricting food or overeating, or healthier food choices, according to Rounsefell et al. (2019). Young adults exposed to idyllic images (celebrities, peers, fitness) or negative social media behaviours (negative body talk, seeking reassurance, engaging in appearance-related comparisons, or self-objectification) may be more prone to negative body images and food choice results.

Body shape and size have little to no impact on health, and it has long been recognised that attractiveness is a subjective concept. Users' feeds are overwhelmed with images of bodies that appear to meet the culturally acceptable ideal, resulting in low self-esteem, guilt, and a desire to control their diet to reduce weight, gain weight, or gain muscle. Disordered eating is often misdiagnosed or disguised as healthy or disciplined eating habits due to this way of thinking. According to Saunders and Eaton (2018), social media participation, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, indirectly increases body dissatisfaction and disordered

eating behaviours among young women. Users of Instagram and Snapchat who had an overall negative experience were more likely to engage in body surveillance and upward appearance-related comparison. There were very high connections between body dissatisfaction and binge eating, purging, and cognitive constraint across all three platforms. These actions place a person at the highest risk of having a clinical eating disorder.

It is a sensitive subject to discuss the impact of advertisements and paid promotions on social media. By definition, for-profit advertisements are intended to provoke a response from users that will lead to a purchase. On social media, unhealthy food and beverage brands, particularly fast food and sugary drink firms, have millions of adolescent followers (Rummo et al., 2020). The high number of adolescent followers is alarming because advertising is linked to higher consumption of fast food, sugary drinks, and salty snacks. Adolescent followers are "opting in" to increased food and beverage ad exposure, perhaps increasing their risk of bad dietary decisions due to ad exposure.

In addition, unhealthy brands have more adolescent followers than healthy brands, and because social media advertisements blur the line between entertainment and advertising, adolescents may be more susceptible to this form of marketing. According to Tan et al. (2018), the presence of unhealthy food advertising on YouTube can hold the attention of youngsters. Due to the range of accessible advertising formats, unhealthy foods were marketed to children more aggressively than other foods. Exposure to information that emphasises unhealthy meals and beverages promotes unhealthy behaviour. In addition, marketing corporations utilise pictures of family-friendly events to peddle harmful foods. Due to the typically unregulated nature of internet marketing channels, this widely distributed information can significantly influence eating habits and may be viewed as manipulative by public health specialists.

According to Baldwin et al. (2018), Coates et al. (2019), Potvin Kent et al. (2019), and Pung et al. (2021), children who connect with food brands more frequently, especially through internet videos, are more likely to eat unhealthy foods and beverages. Children who buy food online may wind up being online for longer periods, being subjected to increased marketing, or ordering unhealthy takeaway meals for themselves and the rest of their families. Exposure to food marketing with a food cue would have similar effects for unhealthy cues but not healthy ones. Children have a greater propensity to spend more time on social media sites, implying that they will be subjected to more influencer marketing on food. Furthermore, on social media platforms, children and teenagers are exposed to harmful food and beverage marketing, which comes from various sources, including commercials, user-generated and celebrity-generated content, and other entertainment content. Adolescents were more likely than children to be exposed to food marketing on social media platforms. Adolescents were not only more likely than children to be exposed to food marketing, but they also watched more food marketing videos on average. A proportion of students aged 12–17 reported a high unhealthy food and drink intake by frequency of exposure to and involvement with food or drink advertising on social media, according to a study by Pung et al. (2021). A higher frequency of liking or sharing food or drink posts on social media was linked to a higher likelihood of consuming unhealthy foods and beverages.

The food industry targets children in various ways, including television, the Internet, online games, sports or concert sponsorships, children's apps, apparel, branded toys, and fast-food toy giveaways, to name a few. Children's dietary tastes can be influenced by unhealthy meals and food brands that are aggressively advertised to them for the rest of their lives. According to Kurcharczuk et al. (2022), social media may impact adolescents' dietary choices. Adolescents were better able to recall unhealthy foods, beverages, brands, and favourite products advertised by celebrities or influencers. If teens choose these foods and consume low-nutrition goods regularly, these impacts may increase health risks. Aside from that, whether assessed by attention, recall, favourable peer judgement, or probability to 'share,' young people's responses to unhealthy food advertising were much stronger than their responses to healthy and non-food posts (Murphy et al., 2020). Adolescents spent more time watching unhealthy food commercials and remembered unhealthy food brands.

Social media platforms' complexity, richness, and ever-changing nature affect users' eating behaviours and perceptions of their bodies. The health, nutrition, and wellness businesses have found a home on social media because of the growing need for easily digestible and actionable information, ideas, guidance, and services that may help people make positive changes to their lifestyles that are beneficial to their health. The unfortunate reality is that most mainstream health and nutrition advice shared on social media has adverse effects on people's health and well-being over the long run, even though it was likely intended to do quite the opposite. Parents should keep an eye on their children's social media activity and the information they are exposed to because of the profound influence these platforms may have on developing minds. The healthcare industry is responsible for educating the public about the negative effects of social media exposure on eating habits. Users can be deterred from consuming more unhealthy content by making it illegal to promote such stuff on social media platforms. To guarantee their material is beneficial to their followers' mental and physical health, social influencers must keep a few things in mind. First, social influencers need to develop trusting relationships with their followers if they want to persuade them to adopt positive lifestyle changes, such as eating more healthily. Increasing people's food intake will require novel strategies to promote the intake of fruits and vegetables. Due to their prominence among their intended audience, social influencers present a golden opportunity for health promotion campaigns. More study is required to understand how social media affects consumer eating habits and how food and beverage firms utilise marketing to sway consumers. Still, we cannot ignore how social media may fan the flames of food shaming and restriction, which can cause humiliation, trauma, and an eating disorder.

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