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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON EATING BEHAVIOUR AND NUTRITIONAL AWARENESS: EXAMINING FOOD CHOICES, DIGITAL INFLUENCE, AND HEALTH LITERACY

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ABSTRACT
Social media has become an important source of information about food, nutrition, and healthy lifestyles. Platforms that share food videos, diet advice, recipes, and nutritional recommendations can influence individuals' food preferences, eating habits, and understanding of healthy nutrition. Although social media provides opportunities to increase nutritional awareness, it can also expose users to misleading health claims, unhealthy food promotions, and unverified dietary advice. These influences may affect how individuals evaluate nutritional information and make everyday food choices. This research article aims to examine the impact of social media on eating behaviour and nutritional awareness, with particular attention to digital nutrition information, food-related content, social media influencers, and health literacy. It explores how exposure to online food trends and nutritional recommendations may shape dietary decisions and influence attitudes towards healthy eating. Recent research has examined the relationship between social media content, food consumption, body image, and eating behaviour, while other studies have investigated the role of health literacy in evaluating online nutrition information. The article also highlights the importance of distinguishing reliable, evidence-based nutritional information from misleading or unsupported claims shared online. Digital health literacy may help individuals critically evaluate food-related content and make more informed dietary decisions. Overall, this research emphasizes the need to promote responsible social media use, improve nutrition education, and encourage the sharing of accurate nutritional information. The study may contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between digital media, human behaviour, and nutritional well-being.

KEYWORDS
Social Media, Eating Behaviour, Nutritional Awareness, Food Choices, Digital Nutrition Literacy, Health Literacy, Food Marketing, Healthy Eating Habits.

INTRODUCTION
Social media has become an important part of modern life, influencing how people communicate, access information, develop preferences, and make everyday decisions. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and other digital networks provide users with continuous access to food-related content, including recipes, nutritional advice, healthy eating tips, diet plans, restaurant reviews, and food advertisements. As a result, social media is increasingly becoming a source of information about nutrition and dietary practices. While these platforms can encourage individuals to learn about healthy eating and explore nutritious food options, they can also influence food choices in ways that may not always support good nutritional health. Understanding the relationship between social media and eating behaviour is therefore important for nutrition research, public health education, and the study of human behaviour. Eating behaviour is influenced by several factors, including psychological conditions, family habits, cultural traditions, economic circumstances, personal preferences, and the availability of food. In the digital age, social media has emerged as another factor that may shape individuals' attitudes towards food and nutrition. People frequently encounter attractive food photographs, short cooking videos, restaurant promotions, diet recommendations, and lifestyle content created by influencers. Such content can influence what people consider desirable, convenient, or healthy to eat. For example, recipe videos may encourage users to prepare nutritious meals at home, while repeated exposure to advertisements for highly processed foods may increase interest in products that are high in sugar, salt, or unhealthy fats. Research examining food-related social media content has highlighted the importance of understanding how digital environments may relate to eating practices and attitudes towards food (Wu et al., 2024).

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One of the major ways social media may influence eating behaviour is through food marketing and digital advertising. Food companies, restaurants, and content creators use attractive images, promotional videos, celebrity endorsements, and influencer recommendations to capture the attention of online audiences. These marketing techniques can make certain food products appear appealing and encourage consumers to try them. Unlike traditional advertising, social media marketing often combines commercial messages with entertainment and personal experiences, which may make promotional content appear more trustworthy or relatable. When users repeatedly encounter similar food products or trends, their preferences and purchasing decisions may be influenced by the content they view. Consequently, examining digital food marketing is essential for understanding the relationship between online exposure, consumer behaviour, and dietary choices. Another important aspect of this relationship is nutritional awareness. Nutritional awareness refers to an individual's understanding of food composition, nutritional value, balanced diets, and the relationship between dietary practices and health. Social media offers opportunities to increase this awareness by sharing educational videos, expert advice, healthy recipes, and information about essential nutrients. Qualified nutrition professionals can use digital platforms to communicate evidence-based information to large audiences and make nutrition education more accessible. Individuals may also discover practical ways to prepare balanced meals, understand food labels, and develop healthier dietary habits. However, the usefulness of this information depends on its accuracy, quality, and suitability for the audience. Not all content creators have professional qualifications in nutrition, and some online recommendations may be based on personal opinions rather than scientific evidence.

The spread of misleading nutritional information represents a significant challenge in the digital environment. Social media users may encounter unsupported claims about weight management, restrictive diets, food supplements, detoxification, and the health effects of particular foods. Such claims can create confusion and make it difficult to distinguish reliable nutritional guidance from inaccurate information. Some content may promote unrealistic expectations about food, health, or physical appearance, potentially affecting individuals' attitudes towards eating. Furthermore, popular food trends may encourage people to adopt dietary practices without considering their individual nutritional needs. Gabellone et al. (2025) examined the relationship between health literacy and the tendency to believe false food-related information, highlighting the relevance of critical evaluation skills when interpreting nutritional messages. This makes it important to investigate not only how much nutrition information people encounter online but also how effectively they understand and evaluate it. Health literacy and digital nutrition literacy are therefore important concepts in understanding the impact of social media on eating behaviour. Health literacy involves the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and use information to make informed health-related decisions. Digital nutrition literacy applies these abilities to food and nutrition information encountered through digital platforms. Individuals with stronger evaluation skills may be better equipped to identify credible sources, recognize unsupported claims, and compare conflicting recommendations. In contrast, users who have difficulty evaluating online information may be more vulnerable to misleading dietary advice. Nutrition education should therefore focus not only on communicating information about healthy food but also on helping individuals develop the skills necessary to assess online content critically. Research on social media influencers and food literacy further demonstrates the importance of examining how online communication relates to nutritional understanding and decision-making (Sercu, 2024).

In addition to nutritional awareness, social media may influence the psychological and social dimensions of eating behaviour. Online communities, food challenges, recipe-sharing groups, and discussions about healthy lifestyles can encourage people to exchange experiences and

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develop shared attitudes towards food. Positive online interactions may motivate individuals to try nutritious recipes, improve meal planning, or learn from credible health professionals. However, social comparison and pressure to follow popular food trends may also affect people's relationships with eating. Food-related content should therefore be considered within a broader behavioural context that includes personal motivation, social influence, emotional responses, and individual differences. The effects of social media are unlikely to be identical for all users because they depend on factors such as age, media habits, nutritional knowledge, and the type of content encountered. The importance of this issue is particularly evident among adolescents and young adults, who frequently use digital platforms for entertainment, communication, education, and lifestyle information. During these stages of life, individuals may develop dietary preferences and eating habits that continue into adulthood. Exposure to nutrition-related content may provide opportunities for learning, but it may also introduce conflicting messages about food and health. Understanding how young people interpret and respond to online food information can help educators, health professionals, and policymakers design more effective nutrition education strategies. Nevertheless, the relationship between social media and eating behaviour should be investigated across different population groups to account for variations in digital access, cultural background, socioeconomic conditions, and nutritional needs.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To identify the potential benefits and challenges of social media in promoting healthy eating habits and improving nutritional well-being.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How does social media influence individuals' eating behaviour, food choices, and nutritional awareness?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media has become an important source of food-related information, influencing individuals' dietary preferences, eating habits, and understanding of nutrition. In recent years, researchers have increasingly examined how digital platforms affect food choices, nutritional awareness, and consumer behaviour. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube provide access to food recipes, nutrition advice, healthy eating tips, and advertisements. Although these platforms can support nutrition education, they may also expose users to misleading dietary information and the promotion of unhealthy food products. Therefore, understanding the relationship between social media and eating behaviour is essential for examining its potential benefits and challenges. Rini et al. (2024), in their systematic review, Social Media and Food Consumer Behavior: A Systematic Review, examined research concerning the relationship between social media and food-related consumer behaviour. Their review highlighted the growing importance of digital platforms in shaping food preferences, purchasing intentions, and consumer decisions. Social media allows food companies, restaurants, and content creators to communicate directly with audiences through attractive images, videos, and promotional messages. These digital interactions may influence individuals' attitudes towards particular foods and their willingness to try new products. The study demonstrates that social media is an important area of investigation for understanding modern food consumption. However, its influence may differ according to the content users encounter, their personal preferences, and their existing nutritional knowledge.

Wu, Kemps, and Prichard (2024), in their systematic review titled Digging into Digital Buffets: A Systematic Review of Eating-Related Social Media Content and Its Relationship with Body Image and Eating Behaviours, examined how eating-related social media content is associated with body image and eating behaviour. Their review included research on food advertisements, eating videos, and other types of online food content. The findings suggested

that exposure to certain food-related content may influence food preferences, willingness to consume advertised products, and attitudes towards eating. These findings indicate that social media content should not be considered uniform because different forms of digital communication may have different relationships with eating behaviour. Consequently, researchers need to examine the nature of online food content when investigating its influence on individuals' dietary decisions. Another important contribution was made by Sercu (2024) in the study Social Media Influencers, Health Literacy, and Food Literacy: A Correlational Study Among Adolescents. The research examined the relationship between social media influencers, health literacy, and food literacy among adolescents. The findings indicated that social media can be relevant to how young people access and understand health and food-related information. Influencers who share informative content may help audiences learn about food preparation, nutritional choices, and healthy lifestyles. Nevertheless, the usefulness of such information depends on its accuracy and the credibility of the source. This research highlights the importance of developing food literacy and critical evaluation skills so that individuals can distinguish reliable nutritional guidance from unsupported recommendations.

Digital food marketing is another significant factor in the relationship between social media and eating behaviour. Amson et al. (2025), in their study Beyond the Screen: Exploring the Dynamics of Social Media Influencers, Digital Food Marketing, and Gendered Influences on Adolescent Diets, investigated food marketing through social media influencers. Their research examined promotional content on platforms including Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The study demonstrated that influencer marketing is an important part of the digital food environment and that the types of food promoted may vary across audiences and online communities. Attractive food images, endorsements, and entertaining videos can make products more appealing to viewers. This research emphasizes the need to consider digital advertising when studying food choices, particularly among young people who regularly encounter promotional content online. Nutritional awareness and digital health literacy are also important themes in recent literature. Nutritional awareness refers to understanding the nutritional value of foods and recognizing the importance of balanced dietary habits. Digital health literacy involves the ability to find, understand, and evaluate health information available online. Social media can improve nutritional awareness by providing educational videos, healthy recipes, and information from qualified nutrition professionals. However, inaccurate claims about diets, food supplements, and the health effects of particular foods can create confusion. Research published in 2025 on food-related misinformation and food choice highlighted the importance of understanding how misleading information can influence consumer perceptions and decisions. Therefore, users need the skills to evaluate the reliability of online nutritional advice before applying it to their daily eating habits.

More recent research by Çakır and Fırat (2026), titled Eating Behaviors in the Digital Age: The Role of Social Media and Healthy Diet Literacy, examined relationships between social media use, digital healthy-diet literacy, and eating behaviour among adults. The study emphasized the importance of nutritional literacy in helping individuals evaluate online food information and make informed dietary decisions. Its findings suggest that social media use and eating behaviour should be considered alongside individuals' ability to understand and assess nutritional information. However, the relationship between these factors is complex, and social media exposure alone does not necessarily determine what people eat. Family influences, personal preferences, food affordability, cultural traditions, and access to nutritious food may also affect dietary decisions. The reviewed literature demonstrates that social media can influence eating behaviour and nutritional awareness through food marketing, influencer recommendations, nutrition education, and the circulation of health information. While digital platforms can encourage users to explore nutritious foods and

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learn about healthy eating, they can also expose them to misleading advice and promotional content that may not support good nutritional choices. Previous research has examined several aspects of this relationship, including food consumer behaviour, digital marketing, food literacy, and health literacy. However, further investigation is needed to understand how these factors interact in different cultural and social contexts. The present research therefore aims to examine how social media influences individuals' food choices, eating habits, and nutritional awareness, while also exploring the importance of digital nutrition literacy in supporting informed and healthy dietary decisions.

METHDOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the impact of social media on eating behaviour and nutritional awareness. This approach is suitable for understanding how social media content, food advertisements, influencer recommendations, and online nutritional information may influence individuals' food choices and dietary habits. The research will primarily rely on secondary data collected from academic journal articles, research papers, and relevant publications available through Google Scholar, particularly studies published between 2023 and 2026. The selected literature will be reviewed to identify major themes, including digital food marketing, nutritional awareness, eating behaviour, health literacy, and the reliability of online nutrition information. The study will use thematic analysis to organize and interpret the information obtained from existing research and identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns across the literature. Particular attention will be given to the potential benefits of social media in promoting healthy eating and the challenges associated with misleading nutritional advice and unhealthy food promotion. Through this approach, the research aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media use, nutritional knowledge, and eating behaviour, while identifying opportunities to improve digital nutrition literacy and encourage informed food choices.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study uses a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the impact of social media on eating behaviour and nutritional awareness. The research is based on secondary data obtained from academic journal articles, published research papers, and relevant scholarly publications from 2023 to 2026. Google Scholar will be used to identify studies related to social media use, food choices, dietary habits, digital food marketing, nutritional awareness, and health literacy. The descriptive component will explain how social media platforms influence access to food-related information and shape individuals' attitudes towards healthy eating. The analytical component will compare and interpret existing research findings to identify common patterns, potential benefits, and challenges associated with online nutritional content. The collected information will be organized into major themes, including influencer recommendations, food advertisements, nutrition education, and misleading dietary information. The study will use thematic analysis to interpret these themes and develop an overall understanding of the relationship between social media and eating behaviour. This research design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to examine existing evidence systematically without collecting primary data directly from participants. The study may also identify gaps in the existing literature and provide recommendations for improving nutritional awareness and promoting informed food choices through social media.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis for this research will be based on a systematic review and thematic analysis of secondary information collected from academic journal articles, research papers, and scholarly publications published between 2023 and 2026. The selected studies will be examined to understand how social media influences individuals' eating behaviour, food choices, and nutritional awareness. The collected information will be organized into key

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themes, including social media food marketing, influencer recommendations, online nutrition education, digital health literacy, and misleading nutritional information. The analysis will compare findings from different studies to identify common patterns, differences, and relationships between social media exposure and dietary behaviour. Particular attention will be given to the potential role of social media in encouraging healthy eating habits, as well as its possible contribution to unhealthy food preferences and confusion about nutritional advice. The credibility and relevance of the selected sources will also be considered when interpreting the evidence. Finally, the identified themes will be used to develop an overall understanding of the benefits and challenges of social media as a source of nutritional information. Since this study relies on secondary data, the analysis will interpret existing research findings rather than present new statistical results or claim direct cause-and-effect relationships.

FINDINGS

The findings of this research indicate that social media can play an important role in shaping individuals' eating behaviour, food choices, and nutritional awareness. Existing studies suggest that food-related content, influencer recommendations, and digital advertisements may influence users' preferences and attitudes towards different food products. Social media can also provide valuable opportunities to improve nutritional knowledge through healthy recipes, educational videos, and information shared by qualified nutrition professionals. However, the findings from the reviewed literature also highlight challenges, including misleading dietary advice, the promotion of unhealthy food products, and difficulties in distinguishing reliable nutritional information from unsupported claims. Digital nutrition literacy appears to be an important factor in helping individuals evaluate online content and make informed food choices. Furthermore, the influence of social media may vary according to users' age, personal preferences, cultural background, and existing nutritional knowledge. Overall, the reviewed evidence suggests that social media has both potential benefits and risks for eating behaviour and nutritional awareness. Promoting credible nutrition information, strengthening digital health literacy, and encouraging responsible food-related content may help individuals develop healthier and more informed dietary habits.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the important role of social media in influencing eating behaviour and nutritional awareness in the digital age. Social media platforms provide opportunities to share nutritional information, promote healthy recipes, and encourage individuals to develop positive eating habits. However, the increasing availability of food advertisements, influencer recommendations, and misleading dietary advice may also affect food preferences and create confusion about healthy nutrition. The reviewed literature suggests that the influence of social media depends on the type of content individuals encounter, the credibility of information sources, and their ability to evaluate nutritional advice critically. Digital nutrition literacy is therefore essential for helping individuals distinguish reliable information from misleading claims and make informed dietary decisions. Furthermore, nutrition professionals, educators, content creators, and policymakers can contribute to improving nutritional awareness by promoting accurate, evidence-based information through digital platforms. The study concludes that social media can serve as a valuable tool for nutrition education when used responsibly and supported by reliable information. Future research should further investigate how different forms of social media content influence actual eating habits across diverse populations. Overall, promoting digital health literacy and responsible online communication may help individuals make healthier food choices and improve their nutritional well-being.

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