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Dr. Vipin Charls Wesley
PROF, Indore Nursing
College, Rau, Indore,
Madhya Pradesh, India

Article on the impact of social media on eating habits in children

Dr. Vipin Charls Wesley

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Abstract

The topic of this article explores the relationship between social media usage and eating habits in children. It examines how exposure to food-related content on social media platforms influences children's dietary choices, consumption behaviours, and overall nutritional patterns. By investigating the various ways in which social media impacts children's eating habits are influencer endorsements, advertising, misinformation and parental influence. The psychological impact of social media during eating are dopamine Release, Mindless Eating and emotional impact by various way. That potential health consequences of unhealthy eating habits developed through social media are as following obesity, cardiovascular disease, sleep disturbances and immune system compromise. The common concerns parents have regarding their children's social media use and eating habits are included exposure to unhealthy food content, peer influence and pressure and sedentary lifestyle. This article aims to shed light on the significance of this phenomenon and its implications for child health and well-being."

Keywords: GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease) and IBS (irritable bowel syndrome)

Introduction

Social media: Social media refers to digital platforms and technologies that enable users to create, share, and exchange content, information, and ideas in virtual communities and networks. 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. Examples of social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat, and TikTok Social media has become an integral part of modern communication, connecting people across geographical boundaries and facilitating the dissemination of information on a global scale.



Influence of social media on children eating

1. **Content Exposure:** A multitude of food-related materials, such as pictures, movies, and recipes, are shown to kids, influencing how they view food.
2. **Food Trends and Challenges:** Social media popularizes food trends and challenges, influencing children's food preferences and consumption behaviors.
3. **Influencer Endorsements:** Influencers often promote certain food products or diets, impacting children's purchasing decisions and dietary choices.

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Vipin Charls Wesley
PROF, Indore Nursing
College, Rau, Indore,
Madhya Pradesh, India

4. **Advertising:** Food companies target children with advertisements on social media, promoting unhealthy snacks and beverages, influencing their eating habits.
5. **Peer Influence:** Children may be influenced by their peers' food choices and behaviours showcased on social media platforms, leading to imitation and conformity.
6. **Psychological Factors:** Social media engagement triggers psychological mechanisms like the dopamine reward system and emotional eating, impacting children's eating habits.
7. **Body Image and Diet Culture:** Exposure to idealized body images and diet culture on social media can lead to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating patterns in children.
8. **Misinformation:** Misleading information about nutrition and dieting practices on social media can distort children's understanding of healthy eating, leading to poor dietary habits.
9. **Parental Influence:** Parental guidance and modelling of healthy eating behaviours play a crucial role in mitigating the negative impact of social media on children's eating habits.
10. **Media Literacy:** Teaching children media literacy skills helps them critically evaluate food-related content on social media and make informed dietary choices.

The psychological impact of social media during eating

1. **Dopamine Release:** Viewing appetizing food images or receiving likes and comments on food-related posts can trigger dopamine release in the brain, creating a sense of pleasure and satisfaction. This dopamine-driven reward system can reinforce the behaviour of posting and engaging with food content on social media.
2. **Emotional Eating:** Social media use during eating may exacerbate emotional eating tendencies, as individuals seek comfort or distraction from negative emotions by browsing social media feeds. Emotional responses triggered by social media content, such as stress, boredom, or loneliness, can influence eating behaviours and food choices.
3. **Mindless Eating:** Scrolling through social media feeds while eating can distract individuals from being mindful of their food intake and satiety cues. This may lead to overeating or mindless consumption of unhealthy foods, as individuals become more focused on their screens than on their meals.
4. **Food Cravings and Temptations:** Exposure to food-related content on social media, including images of indulgent or aesthetically pleasing foods, can trigger cravings and temptations. Individuals may feel compelled to seek out similar foods or recipes, leading to impulsive eating behaviours.
5. **Body Image Concerns:** Viewing idealized body images or dieting content on social media during meals may contribute to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors. Comparing oneself to influencers or peers with unrealistic body standards can fuel negative self-perceptions and unhealthy eating habits.
6. **Social Interaction:** Social media platforms provide opportunities for virtual social interaction during meals, allowing individuals to share their dining experiences

and engage with others in real-time. While this can enhance social connectedness, excessive use of social media during meals may detract from face-to-face interactions and disrupt mealtime enjoyment.

7. **Guilt and Shame:** Individuals may experience feelings of guilt or shame if they perceive their own meals as less appealing or nutritious compared to those showcased on social media. This can contribute to negative emotions surrounding food and eating, potentially impacting self-esteem and overall well-being.
8. **Coping Mechanism:** For some individuals, social media may serve as a coping mechanism during meals, providing a distraction or source of comfort in times of stress or boredom. However, reliance on social media as a coping strategy may reinforce maladaptive eating behaviours and detract from mindful eating practices.
9. **Media Literacy and Self-Regulation:** Developing media literacy skills and practicing self-regulation can help individuals navigate the psychological impact of social media during eating. Setting boundaries, such as designated "screen-free" meal times, and cultivating awareness of one's emotional and behavioural responses to social media content can promote healthier eating habits and overall well-being.

Potential health consequences of unhealthy eating habits developed through social media

1. **Obesity:** Excessive consumption of high-calorie, low-nutrient foods promoted on social media can contribute to weight gain and obesity. Regularly indulging in unhealthy eating habits, such as binge eating triggered by food-related content, can lead to an imbalance between energy intake and expenditure, resulting in obesity.
2. **Nutritional Deficiencies:** Focusing on visually appealing but nutritionally deficient foods showcased on social media may lead to inadequate intake of essential nutrients. Relying on processed and convenience foods promoted on social media can compromise overall dietary quality, increasing the risk of nutrient deficiencies.
3. **Cardiovascular Disease:** Diets high in saturated fats, sugars, and sodium, often promoted on social media, are associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. Unhealthy eating habits developed through social media influence, such as frequent consumption of fast food and sugary beverages, can contribute to hypertension, dyslipidaemia, and other cardiovascular risk factors.
4. **Type 2 Diabetes:** Excessive intake of sugary foods and beverages, commonly promoted on social media platforms, can lead to insulin resistance and ultimately, type 2 diabetes. Unhealthy eating habits developed through social media influence may contribute to the rising prevalence of type 2 diabetes, particularly among younger populations.
5. **Digestive Disorders:** Consuming large quantities of processed and high-fat foods promoted on social media can disrupt digestive health and contribute to gastrointestinal disorders. Unhealthy eating habits, such as irregular meal patterns and excessive intake of

greasy or spicy foods, may increase the risk of conditions like gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

6. **Dental Health Issues:** Diets high in sugars and acids, often featured in food content on social media, can contribute to dental caries (cavities) and erosion of tooth enamel. Unhealthy eating habits developed through social media influence, such as frequent consumption of sugary snacks and carbonated beverages, can increase the risk of dental health problems.
7. **Mental Health Concerns:** Unhealthy eating habits developed through social media influence may negatively impact mental health, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and depression. Body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviours triggered by exposure to idealized body images and dieting content on social media can contribute to poor mental well-being.
8. **Sleep Disturbances:** Consuming stimulating foods and beverages promoted on social media, such as caffeinated drinks and sugary snacks, close to bedtime can disrupt sleep patterns. Unhealthy eating habits developed through social media influence may contribute to sleep disturbances, such as difficulty falling asleep and poor sleep quality.
9. **Immune System Compromise:** Diets lacking in essential nutrients and antioxidants, as promoted on social media, can weaken the immune system and increase susceptibility to infections and illnesses. Unhealthy eating habits developed through social media influence may compromise immune function, impairing the body's ability to defend against pathogens and maintain overall health.
10. **Reduced Quality of Life:** Chronic health conditions resulting from unhealthy eating habits developed through social media influence can impair quality of life and increase healthcare costs. Long-term consequences of poor dietary choices promoted on social media may lead to diminished physical and mental well-being, affecting overall quality of life and longevity.

Common concerns parents have regarding their children's social media use and eating habits

1. **Exposure to Unhealthy Food Content:** Parents are concerned that their children's exposure to food content on social media, including advertisements, influencers, and viral trends, may promote unhealthy eating habits.
2. **Influence on Dietary Choices:** Parents worry that social media may influence their children's dietary choices, leading them to prefer processed, sugary, or fast foods over nutritious options.
3. **Body Image and Self-esteem:** Parents are concerned that idealized body images and dieting content on social media may negatively impact their children's body image and self-esteem, leading to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviours.
4. **Disrupted Meal Patterns:** Parents are concerned that excessive social media use may disrupt their children's meal patterns, leading to irregular eating habits, skipped meals, or mindless eating behaviours.

5. **Peer Influence and Pressure:** Parents worry that their children may be influenced by their peers' food choices and behaviours showcased on social media, leading to peer pressure to conform to unhealthy eating norms.
6. **Sedentary Lifestyle:** Parents are concerned that excessive screen time spent on social media may contribute to a sedentary lifestyle, reducing their children's physical activity levels and overall health.
7. **Lack of Parental Control:** Parents are concerned about their limited control over their children's social media use and the potential for unrestricted access to inappropriate or harmful content.
8. **Addictive Behaviour:** Parents worry that their children may develop addictive behaviours related to social media, leading to compulsive use, withdrawal symptoms, and difficulty disengaging from screens, including during meal times.
9. **Communication and Supervision:** Parents are concerned about maintaining open communication with their children regarding their social media use and eating habits, as well as the challenges of effectively supervising and monitoring their online activities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the influence of social media on children's eating habits is undeniable and multifaceted. From exposure to enticing food content to the psychological processes at play, social media plays a significant role in shaping what children eat and how they eat. However, this influence is not without its consequences. Parents have valid concerns about their children's social media use and its impact on their eating habits, including worries about exposure to unhealthy content and the potential for addictive behavior. Yet, amidst these challenges, there are opportunities for intervention and positive change. Educational initiatives and collaborative efforts from various stakeholders are crucial in addressing the complex interplay between social media and children's eating habits. By working together to mitigate the negative influences of social media and promote healthier lifestyles, we can help ensure that children grow up with a balanced approach to food and digital media.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

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