



IMPACT OF MEDIA ON FOOD CHOICES AMONG SCHOOL GOING CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Today's digital age, children are constantly exposed to various forms of media, including television, social media, and online advertising, which often promote unhealthy food options. The objective of this research is to investigate how media consumption influences the dietary preferences and habits of children. The study explores the impact of media on the food choices of (n = 100) school-going children. This is a cross-sectional offline survey of a convenience sample in Tirupur district (Annurpalayam, Palladam, Thilagarnagar), including 25 questions regarding topics relevant to media consumption, media influence and dietary choices. The responses of the 100 participants (48 male, 52 female; 6-12 years) were evaluated. The maximum number (52%) of school going children watching you tube than the others. The majority of respondents (46%) indicated trying such foods occasionally, while only a minority (13%) reported trying them frequently due to media influence. Sharing information about diets, healthy eating, or food trends on social media is prevalent across all age groups surveyed, with the highest frequency (50%) observed among school-going children. 77% of the school-going children surveyed indicated that they have purchased or consumed a specific food or drink product because they saw it advertised in the media. In contrast, 23% reported that they have not engaged in this behavior. The findings reveal the significant role of media in shaping children's attitudes towards food, with exposure to unhealthy food advertisements correlating with a higher likelihood of choosing such foods. The study's conclusions state that using the media is one of the main factors which influences food choices among school going children. The implications of these findings for promoting healthier dietary habits among children are discussed, emphasizing the need for media literacy education and policies to regulate food advertising targeted at young audiences.

KEYWORDS: Media impact, food choices, school going children ,unhealthy food options, food product marketing tactics

INTRODUCTION

The children of today are growing up surrounded by media, including social and broadcast media. Films and television shows are examples of broadcast media. Social media and video games are examples of interactive media where people may produce and consume content. Information sharing and an engaging, highly individualized digital environment are made possible by interactive media (Utz and Breuer, 2019).

The widespread promotion of foods high in calories but low in nutrients is thought to be a significant environmental factor contributing to children's obesity and bad diets. Food companies have traditionally advertised to children through television, but data suggests that they are now redistributing their advertising budgets to digital marketing, which uses a variety of promotional strategies to connect and interact with youth online, especially on social media sites. These strategies include employing corporate social media accounts to facilitate direct consumer-brand interactions, promoting companies' promotional materials through display and video advertising, and actively promoting peer-to-peer marketing by encouraging users to develop and share their own branded content (Kent M. Potvin *et al.*,2019).

Children's eating habits are difficult to change because a variety of factors are at play. In terms of environmental influences, kids are exposed to many food messages that shape their eating habits. Many people, including parents, teachers, classmates, and the media, are the sources of these dietary messages. Children's eating habits are greatly influenced by the media environment since they spend so much time in front of screens, whether they be TVs, laptops, desktop computers, mobile phones, or handheld game consoles. Children's exposure to food representations that don't disrupt the plot of the related entertainment medium or that viewers can't ignore has been favored by the technology revolution. We are studying what we have called "foods embedded in entertainment media" as a result of the current environment(Victoria Villegas-Navasetal.,2020).

Social media use may have a partial impact on children's and adolescents' eating habits, which could raise the prevalence of eating disorders. The bulk of the time, overthinking about food, body image, and weight leads to the development of eating disorders. Nutritional deficits brought on by a significant change in eating habits can have an impact on the heart, gastrointestinal tract, bones, teeth, and oral cavity. Eating disorders can occur at any age, but they are more prevalent in teenagers and young adults. Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder are the three most prevalent eating disorders (Dr. Sanchari Sinha Dutta, 2022).

II METHODOLOGY

SURVEY

This study was a cross-sectional offline survey of a convenience sample in tirupur district (Annuparpalayam , Palladam, Thilagarnagar).A self completion questionnaire was developed for school going children who influenced by media on their food choices.The fully framed questionnaire ,including 25 questions relevant to topics concerning media consumption, media influence and dietary choices. Before the survey began, participants received a detailed consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. The form stressed voluntary participation and confidentiality assurance. Participants provided explicit consent by signing the form, ensuring informed consent and ethical data collection standards.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire included questions regarding the following topics: (1) Socioeconomic and Demographic Background (name, gender, education level, and age), (2) Media Consumption (social media usage, daily media consumption), (3) Media Influence (peer influence, media exposure, and attitudes towards media literacy and nutritional education), (4) Dietary Choices (dietary behaviors, family influence on food choices, and consumption of healthier snack options), (5) Frequency Table (analysis of food consumption patterns, identification of trends, and correlations with demographic variables or other factors of interest). Developed education tool includes an animated video tailored for young learners, designed to grab their attention and explain the impact of media on food choices. Using child-friendly language and visuals, the video promotes understanding and fosters lifelong healthy eating habits.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, data analysis was utilizing both MS Excel and SPSS tools. Specific datasets were visualized through graphs and pie charts to facilitate ease of interpretation. Significant differences in food choices between groups exposed to different types of media were indicative of the influence of media on dietary preferences. Significance levels were set at $p < 0.05$, with effect sizes calculated to determine the practical significance of findings.



III RESULT

The responses of the 100 participants (48 male and 52 female) aged between 6 to 12 years were evaluated. According to recent data, YouTube emerges as the most popular social media platform among school-going children, with 52% of respondents indicating regular usage. Instagram follows with 29%, while Twitter and Pinterest account for 7% and 3% of the usage, respectively. It indicates varying levels of engagement among school-going children with food-related content on media platforms. A notable portion, 17%, spends less than 10 minutes daily, suggesting minimal exposure to such content. In contrast, a significant 31% allocate around 20 minutes daily, indicating a moderate level of interest and consumption. Additionally, 15% dedicate approximately 30 minutes each day to watching food-related content, demonstrating a higher level of engagement compared to the other groups. Perceptions of Media Influence

on Dietary Choices among School-Going Children 9% strongly agree that media significantly influences their dietary choices,18% agree that media has some influence on their dietary choices,51% expressed a neutral stance on the influence of media,17% disagree that media affects their dietary choices,5% strongly disagree that media has any influence on their dietary choices.These findings reveal a spectrum of viewpoints regarding the role of media in shaping eating habits among children. School children place their trust for information on healthy eating Parents and Guardians (53%) most children rely on their parents and guardians for guidance on healthy eating, Teachers (12%) minority trusts teachers for information on healthy eating, Healthcare Professionals (22%) nearly a quarter of children prefer information from healthcare professionals like doctors or nutritionists, Friends (7%) children turn to friends for information on healthy eating, Social Media (6%) a small percentage trusts information from social media platforms.It suggests that a significant majority of school-going children, specifically 77%, have purchased or consumed a particular food or drink product due to seeing it advertised in the media. This indicates that media advertisements play a considerable role in influencing the consumption choices of school children. Only 23% of the children surveyed reported not being influenced by media advertisements when making their purchasing decisions.

IV DISCUSSION

Within the age range of 6 to 12 years, there's a slight predominance of females (52%) over males (48%). While not statistically significant, exploring the potential reasons behind this distribution could offer valuable insights.The utilization of YouTube by 52% of school-going children highlights its considerable popularity among this demographic. This could be attributed to YouTube's diverse range of content, spanning from educational materials to entertainment, appealing to a broad audience.Analysis of the table indicates that a significant portion of school-going children, the majority being 31%, allocate approximately 20 minutes per day to watching food-related content. This suggests a prevalent interest in such content among this demographic.Notably, 51% of respondents adopt a neutral stance regarding the influence of media on dietary decisions. This indicates a substantial portion of individuals neither strongly affirm nor oppose the idea of media impacting their dietary choices. Despite the increasing popularity of social media platforms, only 6% of respondents trust them for information on healthy eating. This lack of trust may stem from concerns about the credibility and reliability of information shared on social media, as well as the presence of marketing and misinformation.The data underscores the significant influence of media advertisements on the purchasing or consumption behavior of school-going children, with 77% indicating that they have purchased or consumed a specific food or drink product after encountering it in an advertisement. This emphasizes the substantial role that media advertisements play in shaping children's food preferences and choices.

V CONCLUSION

The analysis of various aspects of school-going children's behaviors and influences offers valuable insights into the complexities of their educational and dietary landscapes. While the gender distribution appears relatively balanced, further investigation into underlying factors is crucial for a comprehensive understanding. Understanding the usage of social media platforms among school-going children provides insights into their digital behavior, preferences, and challenges in education and online interaction. Additionally, the prevalence of watching food-related content underscores the need to address the influence of media on dietary behaviors and overall health. The range of opinions on media influences on dietary choices highlights the importance of promoting media literacy and critical awareness. Collaboration among parents, healthcare professionals, educators, and efforts to promote media literacy are essential for fostering a supportive environment conducive to healthy dietary behaviors. Moreover, the substantial influence of media advertisements on purchasing and consumption behaviors emphasizes the need for parental guidance, health education, and regulatory interventions to promote healthy dietary habits among children. By addressing these factors, stakeholders can work towards creating environments that empower children to make informed decisions about their health and nutrition, ultimately fostering lifelong wellness.

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