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by :
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Titled:

The impact of social media on the dietary choices of students

In front of the jury:

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Abstract:

Social media has become a pervasive influence on young adults' dietary habits worldwide. This study investigates how social media affects food choices among Algerian university students, considering cultural and economic factors. Using a cross-sectional survey, 261 students reported on their social media use, trust in nutritional information, physical activity, and eating behaviors.

Participants completed a structured questionnaire assessing daily social media engagement, trust levels, and dietary habits. Data were analyzed using chi-square tests to identify associations between demographic variables and food-related behaviors. Comparative analysis was conducted with a 2023 Pakistani study exploring similar themes.

Results show that 93.8% of students use social media daily, predominantly Instagram, and 76.8% trust online nutritional information. Frequent experimentation with new foods was reported by 53.3%, though 54.1% perceive social media as promoting unhealthy eating. Physical activity and income correlated with healthier habits, while younger students and females exhibited greater social media use and trust. Following food trends was linked to increased consumption of unhealthy foods. Comparisons with the Pakistani study reveal consistent patterns across different cultural contexts.

These findings underscore social media's complex role in shaping dietary choices and highlight the need for culturally tailored interventions to improve digital literacy and promote healthier eating behaviors.

Keywords: Social media, food habits, university students, eating behavior, digital influence, nutrition, cultural factors, Algeria, physical activity, dietary choice

الملخص:

تلعب وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي دورًا متزايدًا في تشكيل عادات الطعام لدى الشباب حول العالم. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل تأثير وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي على اختيارات الطعام بين طلاب الجامعات في الجزائر، مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار العوامل الثقافية والاقتصادية. أُجريت دراسة مسحية مستعرضة شملت 261 طالبًا تناولت استخدامهم اليومي لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، مدى ثقتهم بالمعلومات الغذائية، نشاطهم البدني، وسلوكياتهم الغذائية.

شارك الطلاب في تعبئة استبيان منظم يقيس استخدامهم اليومي لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، ومستوى ثقتهم بالمعلومات، وعاداتهم الغذائية. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام اختبار كاي-تربيع لتحديد العلاقات بين المتغيرات الديموغرافية والسلوك الغذائي. كما تم إجراء مقارنة مع دراسة باكستانية لعام 2023 تناولت مواضيع مماثلة.

أظهرت النتائج أن 93.8% من الطلاب يستخدمون وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي يوميًا، مع سيطرة إنستغرام كأبرز منصة. وأبدى 76.8% منهم ثقة عالية بالمعلومات الغذائية المتاحة عبر الإنترنت. وذكر 53.3% منهم تجربة متكررة لأطعمة جديدة، رغم أن 54.1% يرون أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تعزز تناول أطعمة غير صحية. كما ارتبط النشاط البدني والدخل بعادات غذائية أكثر صحة، فيما أظهر الطلاب الأصغر سنًا والإناث معدلات استخدام وثقة أعلى. ويرتبط متابعة الاتجاهات الغذائية بزيادة استهلاك الأطعمة غير الصحية. وكشفت المقارنة مع الدراسة الباكستانية عن أنماط مشابهة عبر سياقات ثقافية مختلفة.

تُبرز هذه النتائج الدور المعقد لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في تشكيل خيارات الطعام، مع التأكيد على الحاجة إلى تدخلات ثقافية موجهة لتعزيز الثقافة الرقمية وتشجيع السلوكيات الغذائية الصحية.

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الكلمات المفتاحية: وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، عادات الطعام، طلاب الجامعات، سلوك الأكل، التأثير الرقمي، التغذية، العوامل الثقافية، الجزائر، النشاط البدني، الخيارات الغذائية

Résumé

Les réseaux sociaux exercent une influence croissante sur les habitudes alimentaires des jeunes adultes à travers le monde. Cette étude analyse l'impact des réseaux sociaux sur les choix alimentaires des étudiants universitaires algériens, en tenant compte des facteurs culturels et économiques. Une enquête transversale a été menée auprès de 261 étudiants portant sur leur utilisation des réseaux sociaux, leur confiance dans les informations nutritionnelles, leur activité physique et leurs comportements alimentaires.

Les participants ont rempli un questionnaire structuré évaluant leur usage quotidien des réseaux sociaux, leur niveau de confiance et leurs habitudes alimentaires. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide de tests du chi carré pour identifier les liens entre variables démographiques et comportements alimentaires. Une analyse comparative a été réalisée avec une étude pakistanaise de 2023 sur des thématiques similaires.

Les résultats montrent que 93,8 % des étudiants utilisent quotidiennement les réseaux sociaux, principalement Instagram, et que 76,8 % font confiance aux informations nutritionnelles en ligne. Une expérimentation fréquente de nouveaux aliments est rapportée par 53,3 %, bien que 54,1 % perçoivent les réseaux sociaux comme promoteurs d'une alimentation malsaine. L'activité physique et le revenu sont corrélés à des habitudes plus saines, tandis que les étudiants plus jeunes et les femmes affichent un usage et une confiance plus élevés. Le suivi des tendances alimentaires est associé à une consommation accrue d'aliments peu sains. La comparaison avec l'étude pakistanaise révèle des tendances similaires dans différents contextes culturels.

Ces résultats soulignent le rôle complexe des réseaux sociaux dans les choix alimentaires et mettent en évidence la nécessité d'interventions adaptées culturellement pour renforcer la littératie numérique et promouvoir des comportements alimentaires plus sains.

Mots-clés: Réseaux sociaux, habitudes alimentaires, étudiants universitaires, comportement alimentaire, influence numérique, nutrition, facteurs culturels, Algérie, activité physique, choix alimentaires

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List of abbreviations:

List of abbreviations :

Abbreviation	Meaning
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BMI	Body Mass Index
CFUs	Colony-Forming Units
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DZD	Algerian Dinar
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SM	Social Media
SNS	Social Networking Sites
WHO	World Health Organization
P	p-value

INTRODUCTION

Introduction:

Social media has become a powerful influence on a variety of behaviours in modern society, especially among younger demographics like students. In addition to being places for social interaction, platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are also important hubs for content production and information sharing. As students use these platforms more frequently, digital content is influencing their eating habits, including how they consume food and how they view it (Boyd & Ellison, 2021; Leung, 2021). Given the substantial effects on students' health and wellbeing, this expanding relationship between digital media and eating habits merits careful consideration.

Social media has a complex effect on students' eating habits, presenting both chances to promote health and serious risks associated with the reinforcement of bad eating habits. On the one hand, public health organisations, influencers, and health professionals have successfully used social media platforms to spread informative content about wellness, healthy living, and nutrition. Students are encouraged to adopt healthier dietary practices by this content, which includes meal planning tutorials, nutritional advice, and plant-based eating trends (Kang & Choi, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022). For students, who frequently encounter limitations with regard to time, resources, and access to formal nutrition education, the availability of such information is especially important (Pew Research Centre, 2024).

However, social media also acts as a venue for the promotion of unhealthy eating habits, especially when it comes to content and ads that highlight highly processed, high-calorie foods. These foods are frequently presented in aesthetically pleasing ways, which can reinforce bad eating habits by establishing associations between indulgence and desirability (Liu &Sundar, 2021). The prevalence of these depictions overshadows the significance of a balanced diet and helps to normalise unhealthy eating habits (Coates et al., 2023; Zhao & Ellison, 2022). Additionally, there are many idealised depictions of body image on social media platforms, which can worsen problems with body image and help normalise drastic dieting methods. Long-term health effects can arise from restrictive eating behaviours or disordered eating patterns, which are frequently adopted as a result of the pressure to meet unattainable beauty standards (Turner &Lefevre, 2022; de Veirman&Hudders, 2020).

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

CHAPTER 01:

Social Media and Its Influence on Daily Life

I. Definition and evolution of social media:

1. Definition of Social Media:

Social media is a varied spectrum of digital platforms and technologies allowing people to create, share, and trade material, ideas, and information inside interactive online settings. These platforms range from social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikHub, YouTube, and LinkedIn to content sharing services, microblogging sites, and messaging apps, each providing different possibilities for interaction and community building (Kietzmann et al., 2021).

Basically, social media gives people the power to build online identities, connect with others, and share different materials from text and pictures to videos and links. Unlike conventional media marked by one way communication, social media promotes bidirectional interactivity so that users may not only receive material but also actively create and react to it using comments, likes, and shares. Social media's interactive character sets it apart as a democratic communication tool (Smith & Anderson, 2020).

The dynamic, user-driven content ecosystem has fueled the emergence of influencers,people who create significant followings and influence consumer behaviour by means of genuine and tailored material. Influencers are a new marketing concept in which personal branding and direct audience interaction take priority over more conventional mass advertising strategies (Jin & Ryu, 2021).

Modern social media sites use complex algorithmic systems that customize material to users' tastes and past activities, hence increasing engagement but also creating "filter bubbles." This trend reduces users' exposure to different points of view, therefore strengthening current prejudices and influencing opinions and actions (Cinelli et al., 2020).

Apart from social engagement, social media increasingly acts as a business platform with e-commerce elements that enable in-app purchasing experiences. This combination of social networking and business distorts the line between material and advertising, hence increasing the impact of social media on customer preferences and lifestyle choices (Chen et al., 2022).

Political and social activism also much depends on social media involvement. Hashtag-driven initiatives like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter show how social media amplify underrepresented voices and organize group action, hence democratizing political involvement and social transformation (Graham & Hajru, 2021).

Social media health communication has grown significantly, offering readily available knowledge on medical advice, wellness, and exercise. Still, questions about false information and the scientific legitimacy of health-related material highlight the importance of careful analysis and government control (Pulido et al., 2020).

2. Evolution of Social Media:

2.1 Early Years: 2000–2005:

The early 2000s marked the beginning of social media platforms that set the foundation for the digital social networks we use today. Friendster, launched in 2002, was one of the first sites to allow users to create profiles and connect with others online. Despite its innovative approach, technical difficulties and scalability issues limited its long-term success (Nahon & Hemsley, 2020).

In 2003, MySpace introduced more dynamic features that allowed users to extensively customize their profiles with music, photos, and blogs, offering a unique form of digital self-expression. This customization particularly appealed to younger users and helped MySpace become one of the most widely used social media platforms in the mid-2000s (Van Dijck & Poell, 2019).

Facebook, founded in 2004, focused on connecting users based on real identities, streamlining interactions through features such as friend requests and the News Feed, introduced in 2006. This shift toward algorithmically curated, personalized content contributed to Facebook surpassing MySpace and dominating the social media landscape (Gillespie, 2021).

Table01: Comparison Chart of Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Smith & Anderson, 2018)

Feature	**Friendster (2002)**	**MySpace (2003)**	**Facebook (2004)**
User Profiles	Basic profile with friend links	Highly customizable profiles	Real-name profiles, standardized
Key Innovations	Social graph concept	Multimedia (music, blogs)	News Feed, real identity focus
Scalability	Limited, technical issues	Better scalability	Highly scalable
Target Audience	General users	Youth, musicians, creatives	Initially college students, then mass market
Interaction Style	Network exploration	Self-expression via customization	Streamlined, social interaction
Impact	Foundation for social networking	Popularized digital self-presentation	Dominates with algorithmic content

2.2 Expansion and Standardization: 2005–2010:

Social media went through a transforming period between 2005 and 2010 defined by the fast growth and popular use of sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. After launching to the general public in 2006, Facebook went from a university-centric network to a worldwide social media behemoth. Key elements like the "Like" button and the debut of the algorithm-driven News Feed transformed how people interacted with material, hence propelling Facebook to the dominant platform with more than 500 million users by 2010 (Kaplan & Haenlein,2024).

Launched in 2006, Twitter used its 140-character restriction and creative use of hashtags to create a new kind of quick, real-time communication. A key factor in political action and news distribution, this approach helped to create worldwide discussions outside of personal networks and amplified social movements as the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street (Kumar&Singh,2021).

By 2010, Google-owned YouTube had evolved from a portal for amateur videos to a professional content centre. Its monetization strategy allowed producers to make money, hence creating digital influencers and a growing creator economy. This development affected later platforms like Instagram and TikHub, which used user-generated video material to drive current digital media consumption (West & Thompson, 2023).

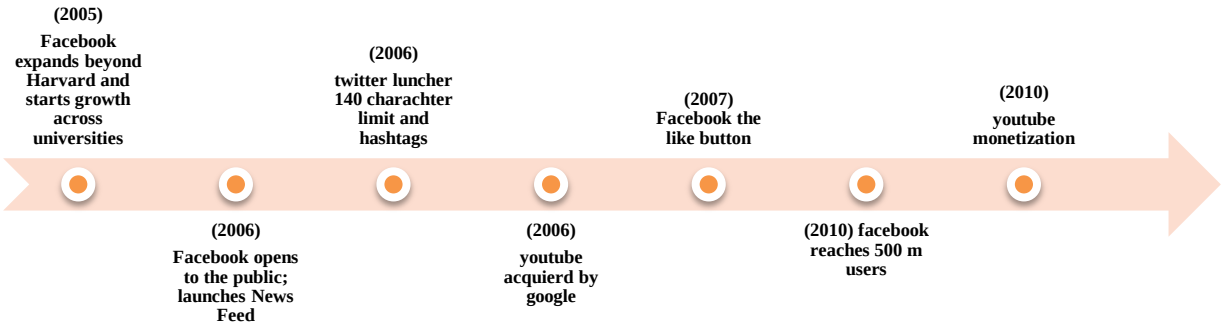


Figure 01: social media 2005-2010 (West & Thompson, 2023).

2.3 Video-Centric Growth: 2010–2015:

2.3.1 The Rise of Instagram and Visual-Centric Culture:

In the 2010s, social media's evolution depended increasingly on video-based platforms, with YouTube leading the charge and other sites fast following suit. Originally centered on photo-sharing, Instagram launched in 2010 and quickly included video as a key feature, enabling users to post 15-second snippets. Video material's inclusion on Instagram in 2013 signaled the start of a visual-centric culture that would influence the next ten years of social media. Instagram's visual-first design, focused on the straightforward sharing of photos and videos, drew a younger audience and promoted self-expression via artistically selected material. Its inclusion into the Facebook ecosystem, particularly after its 2012 acquisition, helped to confirm Instagram's position as a top social media network even further (Shafik, 2024).

2.3.2 The Creator Economy's Growth and YouTube:

At the same time, video-sharing platforms such as YouTube grew quickly. Originally a basic video hosting platform, YouTube grew into a professionalized space allowing content producers to build careers. The birth of the creator economy was heralded by YouTube influencers, who gained significant followings by

generating regular video content on subjects such gaming, beauty, fashion, and technology. Often working with businesses, these influencers helped to create a new kind of tailored marketing that differed from conventional advertising. Based on ad revenue sharing, YouTube's

monetization system confirmed its status as the best platform for video material and enabled producers to financially support themselves by means of their labor (Shafik, 2024).

2.3.3 Snapchat's Creative Approach to Temporary Content:

Started in 2011, Snapchat grew quickly by adding creative features such ephemeral messaging, whereby material vanished almost immediately after viewing. Younger users really connected with this strategy since it upset the traditional permanency of social media postings. Snapchat's user interface brought new kinds of interaction meant for quick, spontaneous communication, including 24-hour visible stories and augmented reality improvements. The platform's emphasis on transient and private sharing started a trend that affected other significant sites, such Instagram and Facebook, to include comparable elements into their products (Smith, 2025).

2.4 The Mobile-First Era: 2015–2020:

Driven mostly by the growing use of smartphones, the period from 2015 to 2020 marks the height of the mobile-first era in social media. Integrated technologies like photo and video sharing, messaging, and live streaming let mobile technology users participate in real-time content generation and consumption. This convergence of features strengthened the supremacy of mobile-centric platforms(Anderson&Jiang,2025).

Instagram's emphasis on visually-oriented, mobile-accessible material mostly drove its fast expansion during this time. Its attraction to influencers and lifestyle-oriented groups was greatly improved with the introduction of Instagram Stories in 2016 and the increase of video upload restrictions. Instagram has over one billion active users before decade's end, so confirming its position as a major worldwide platform (Shafik, 2024).

Snapchat, on the other hand, drew in young people with its augmented reality filters and transient messages. Its emphasis on transient, spontaneous contact questioned the more lasting forms of platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Snapchat's creative features drove other companies to widely implement comparable technologies, hence showing its impact on content-sharing patterns (Taylor,2025).

Around 2020, TikTok's rise signaled a significant change in digital media consumption. The platform's short-form, algorithmically chosen videos, along with music and editing

capabilities, encouraged viral trends and interactive content. This pointed to a more general shift toward dynamic, user-generated narrative away from professionally created media (Shafik, 2024).

2.5 Diversification and Algorithm-Driven Content(2020–2025):

Marked by platform diversification, the rise of short-form video content, and the growing prominence of algorithmic personalization, the years 2020 to 2025 denote a transforming stage in the evolution of social media. During this period, TikTok became a major player as its algorithm prioritized tailored content suggestions above conventional social networking. This change upset the traditional model of social platforms that mostly depended on user connections to decide content exposure(Auxier&Anderson,2022). Competing sites like Instagram and YouTube added comparable features especially short-form video formats like Reels and Shorts alongside algorithm-driven content streams in reaction to TikTok's rapid success. TikTok's incorporation of e-commerce, together with influencer marketing and viral trends, has also changed advertising strategies. Brands are relying more and more on influencers to create native, user-generated marketing material, hence changing from clear, conventional ads to more natural interaction tactics (Auxier & Anderson,2022).

At the same time, mounting criticism of social media's ethical consequences has sharpened. Policymakers, businesses, and consumers have all become increasingly concerned about privacy intrusions, the dissemination of false information, and platform effects on mental health. This examination has raised expectations for social media platforms to be accountable for their social influence, hence indicating a turning point in their continuous evolution and control (Auxier & Anderson, 2022).

II. Rise of Social Media Among Students: A Timeline

1. Early Adoption and Exploration: 2000–2005:

The early 2000s marked the beginning of social media's integration into students' lives. Initially, social media platforms such as Friendster (2002) and MySpace (2003) were primarily used by early adopters, including students, to connect with friends and create digital profiles. These platforms allowed users to interact with each other in a more informal, creative manner, a departure from traditional forms of communication like email.

Friendster's social networking model and MySpace's highly customizable profiles gave students an avenue for self-expression and the ability to present their digital identities to their peers. MySpace, in particular, gained widespread popularity among high school students, offering tools for users to customize their pages with music, images, and personal blogs. These platforms were an initial introduction for many students to the broader concept of social media as a tool for networking and social interaction (Kumar & Singh, 2021).

Despite the more limited scope and function of these early platforms, they set the stage for social media's role in the lives of students by offering a space for digital communication and interaction. Students, particularly those in high school and college, began to embrace these early social networking platforms as a way to stay connected and share aspects of their lives. Though rudimentary compared to today's platforms, Friendster and MySpace were the starting points in demonstrating the potential of social media to shape peer relationships and student interactions on a broader scale.

2. Mainstream Usage and Integration into Campus Life: 2005–2010:

By the mid-2000s, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter significantly transformed student communication and engagement. Key developments include:

2.1 Facebook's Expansion and Features: Originally available only to college students, Facebook quickly expanded to many universities and opened to the public by 2006. Its real-name policy and News Feed feature encouraged genuine interactions and made it easy for students to stay updated on friends' activities. The platform's simple interface helped students share photos, organize events, and maintain social connections, making Facebook a central tool for campus communication (Smith & Anderson, 2023).

2.2 Twitter's Introduction: Launched in 2006, Twitter gained popularity for its short, real-time messages. Its character limit encouraged concise sharing of thoughts and quick updates, which students used to follow events and engage in public conversations. Twitter's public and immediate nature complemented Facebook's more private networks, allowing students to participate in broader discussions and coordinate activities on and off campus (Kumar & Singh, 2021).

2.3 Shift Toward Academic Use: Over time, students began using social media not only for socializing but also for academic purposes. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter were used to form study groups, share educational resources, and discuss coursework. This shift reflected how social media became a valuable tool for both productivity and collaboration in academic settings (Owusu-Ansah, Arthur, Yebowaah, & Amoako, 2021).

3. Shift to Visual and Interactive Content: 2010–2015:

3.1 The Rise of Mobile-First Social Media: Instagram's Visual Appeal : The 2010s saw the emergence of mobile-first social media platforms that transformed student engagement. Instagram, launched in 2010, introduced a visually-driven approach to social networking, allowing users to share photos, videos, and short stories. Its focus on aesthetics and visual identity contrasted with the text-heavy nature of earlier platforms like Facebook, appealing to students' desire for creative self-expression. By the mid-2010s, Instagram had become a primary platform for students to share personal moments ranging from social events to travel experiences (Johnson & Lee, 2024).

3.2 Snapchat and the Ephemeral Sharing Culture: During the same decade, Snapchat gained popularity among students by offering disappearing messages and photos, which allowed for more spontaneous and private communication. The platform's introduction of Stories in 2013 encouraged real-time sharing of daily moments, fostering informal and intimate interactions within close-knit social groups. Snapchat's ephemeral content model distinguished it from more permanent social networks, providing students with a novel way to connect on a personal level (Johnson & Lee, 2024).

3.3 Short-Form Video Platforms:Vine and TikTok's Impact: The rise of short-form video platforms further influenced student social media behavior. Vine, launched in 2013, and later TikTok in 2016, introduced viral video formats that emphasized creativity and entertainment. TikTok's success is largely attributed to its personalized algorithm, which tailors content to users' interests. For students, TikTok became a key platform for creative expression, participation in social trends, and sharing user-generated content, marking a shift toward more interactive and engaging social media experiences (Davis & Chen, 2024).

4. Academic Integration and Professional Use: 2015–2020

Students came to depend more and more on social media channels for both academic and professional goals as it developed. A must for students hoping to create professional networks, obtain internships, and investigate career prospects, LinkedIn was started in 2003 but saw notable expansion in the 2010s. LinkedIn helped students, companies, and colleagues in their sectors connect by letting users build thorough profiles highlighting academic and professional successes. By 2015, it had become a key platform enabling students' movement from academic to professional life, hence showing social media's growing influence in career development (Nguyen & Patel, 2022).

Social media's educational use also grew at this time. Academic uses for platforms like Facebook and Twitter were growingly used, including planning study groups, engaging in class debates, and distributing educational materials. For example, Facebook Groups grew to be a well-liked venue for class activity coordination and peer cooperation enabling. Teachers also started using social media to interact with students, share course materials, and create academic communities beyond the conventional classroom setting. This combination drew attention to the several ways social media helps students socially, academically, and professionally (Martinez & Wang, 2023).

Students also looked to YouTube as a necessary instructional tool. Its large library of how-to guides, lectures, and tutorials helped informal, self-directed learning outside the conventional curriculum. The expansion of instructional YouTube channels gave students new ways to interact with content at their own speed, hence improving their academic experience. This development underlined websites like YouTube as absolutely vital in contemporary teaching (Thompson & Rivera, 2023).

5. Diversification and Increasing Influence 2020Present:

Social media has been firmly ingrained in several aspects of student life from 2020 forward, including academic pursuits, social connection, and political involvement. From entertainment to significant platforms for activism and social change, websites like TikHub, Instagram, and YouTube have developed. Hashtag campaigns such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo show how students use social media to organize support and increase awareness of worldwide social concerns, hence democratizing activism by offering easily available forums for group action (Leung, 2021).

With digital technologies like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Classroom becoming vital for remote learning, the COVID-19 epidemic hastened social media's influence in education even more. At the same time, conventional social media channels helped to preserve social relationships and involvement in virtual environments in extracurricular activities. This dual use emphasizes social media's essential role in linking in-person and online experiences across social, academic, and professional spheres (Smith & Taylor, 2023).

Furthermore, the growth of e-commerce, live streaming, and influencer marketing on websites like Instagram and TikHub has opened up unique chances for students to participate in commercial and creative activities. Reflecting the integration of social media into both consumer culture and academic life, students more and more behave as brand boosters and content producers. This time frame signals the arrival of a completely connected digital world in which students engage as creators, consumers, and advocates inside several social arenas (Auxier & Anderson, 2022).

III. The Role of Digital Platforms in Shaping Daily Behaviors, Including Food Behaviors

Digital platforms have become ubiquitous mediators of everyday life, orchestrating a vast array of behaviors from communication and leisure to health and consumption. By virtue of algorithmic curation, social feedback mechanisms, and embedded commercial incentives, these platforms actively shape users' routines, preferences, and decision-making processes. In the domain of nutrition, social media and mobile applications exert a particularly strong influence on food choices, eating patterns, and body-related attitudes. The following sections examine key mechanisms through which digital platforms mold daily behaviors, with a special emphasis on food-related practices.

1. Algorithmic Curation and Habit Formation

Modern platforms employ machine-learning algorithms to deliver personalized content streams that align with each user's past interactions, demographic profile, and inferred interests. This continuous optimization creates "digital habit loops" in which users repeatedly return to the app to consume tailored posts, videos, or challenges. Over time, such loops reinforce specific behavioral scripts morning routines punctuated by motivational fitness videos, mid-day breaks filled with recipe reels, or evening scrolls through food-porn feeds.

The cumulative effect is a subtle yet powerful structuring of daily schedules and rituals around platform-mediated prompts (Smith et al., 2021; Zhao & Ellison, 2022).

2. Visual Culture and the Aesthetics of Eating

Image-centric platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest foreground visually compelling food content high-definition photographs, stylized recipe videos, and "day in my plate" vlogs. This aestheticization transforms ordinary meals into shareable "content," privileging photogenic ingredients, vibrant color palettes, and trend-driven presentations (e.g., smoothie bowls, avocado toast). Empirical studies demonstrate that repeated exposure to such idealized food imagery correlates with both aspirational cooking behaviors and disordered eating tendencies, as viewers internalize narrow standards of what constitutes "good" or "healthy" food (Turner &Lefevre, 2022; Coates et al., 2023).

3. Social Proof, Influencer Endorsements, and Peer Comparison

On social media, the popularity metrics attached to content likes, shares, comments serve as digital proxies for social approval. When popular influencers or peer networks endorse particular diets (e.g., keto, intermittent fasting) or products (e.g., meal-delivery kits, health supplements), these behaviors rapidly diffuse through follower communities. Algorithmic reinforcement ensures that highly engaged posts receive even greater visibility, accelerating the normalization of emerging food trends. Recent analyses highlight that influencer-driven marketing can increase purchase intent by up to 30%, even when scientific evidence for health benefits is limited (de Veirman&Hudders, 2020; Coates et al., 2023).

4. Mobile Food Apps, Gamification, and Self-Monitoring

Beyond social media, dedicated mobile applications MyFitnessPal, Noom, Yuka, and similar leverage gamified interfaces to promote self-tracking of calories, nutrients, and grocery choices. Features such as daily streak counts, achievement badges, and progress graphs transform food monitoring into a competitive game. While these tools can facilitate awareness of dietary intake and support weight-management goals, they may also foster obsessive logging behaviors and heighten anxiety around deviation from "ideal" targets (Rodgers et al., 2021; WHO, 2024).

5. In-App Commerce and Impulse Purchase Triggers

The integration of e-commerce into social feeds blurs the boundary between browsing and buying. “Shoppable posts” on Instagram, direct links to meal-kit subscriptions on TikTok, and in-app grocery ordering on Facebook Marketplace enable seamless transitions from content consumption to purchase. Behavioral economics research indicates that reducing friction (i.e., clicks, wait times) in the purchasing process increases impulse orders by as much as 25% (Liu &Sundar, 2021). Consequently, food platforms not only influence what users see but also expedite the acquisition of promoted products.

6. Digital Interventions and Public Health Campaigns

Recognizing both the risks and opportunities of digital influence, public health organizations and researchers have begun deploying online interventions to promote healthier eating. Initiatives include algorithmic nudges that prioritize evidence-based nutrition content, chatbots providing real-time dietary advice, and targeted social media campaigns addressing disordered eating and nutrition misinformation. Early evaluations suggest that such interventions can improve dietary knowledge and self-efficacy, though sustained behavior change often requires integration with offline support systems (Nguyen et al., 2022; WHO, 2024).

CHAPTER 02:

Food Habits and Traditional Influencing Factors

I. Definition of Food Habits :

Food habits, or dietary patterns, are shaped by a complex interaction of cultural, psychological, socioeconomic, and environmental factors rather than biological hunger alone. People learn about food-related norms via their families, the media, and school while they are young, and these norms shape their eating habits for the rest of their lives (Fry et al., 2024). Food is a way for people to display their culture and identity, as shown by cooking traditions that pass down historical knowledge and group membership. The "omnivore's paradox" describes the conflict between wanting to eat a lot of different foods and being anxious about eating, which shapes food routines. Also, people's choices about what to eat these days are more and more based on moral issues, such as animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and political ideals (Guptill et al.,2022).

Eating habits are greatly affected by psychological factors such emotional connections, early exposure, and social support. Food habits have both emotional and mental aspects, as seen in "flavor learning" and "comfort eating." Body image, peer pressure, and online trends can affect what teens eat, even if the science behind it isn't always sound (Kwon et al., 2020). Migration and globalization also change how people eat through acculturation, which is when old and new ways of eating come together. Even if they have changed, people still have deep emotional ties to traditional meals. At the same time, structural issues like agricultural policy, targeted food marketing, and unequal access to food also play a role in larger consumption patterns. Because of this, understanding how dietary habits change in today's globalized world requires knowledge from several fields, including nutrition, psychology, sociology, and public policy (Fry et al., 2024; Popa & Popa, 2023).

II. . Pre-Social Media Influences on Food Habits

Before digital technology and social media were popular, the way people ate was mostly affected by the people and things around them. People learned about food through their encounters with others, their cultural traditions, and their economic situations, not through internet content or platforms that use algorithms. Family, cultural traditions, and socioeconomic status (SES) were important elements that shaped how people thought about, chose, and ate food. These factors created behavioral models and social norms that influenced everyday eating habits (Rosi et al., 2021).

Before digital marketing and social media influencers, people learned about food through their

own experiences. Children copied the eating patterns of their caretakers. Communities kept their culinary traditions alive through religious ceremonies and festivals. Limited economic resources affected not only how people got food but also how valuable it was culturally. These factors helped keep people together and strengthened their sense of identity through the way they ate. Even while food settings are becoming more digital, traditional social structures still affect how people eat, especially in communities where cultural continuity and limited access are still big issues (Gonzalez-Pacheco et al., 2021).

1. **Family: The Primary Socializing Agent**

The family unit is the primary agent in shaping dietary habits from early childhood through adolescence. Parents and caregivers model eating behaviors through both intentional instruction and daily observation, significantly influencing children's food preferences and long-term nutritional choices (Rosi et al., 2021). Parenting style plays a critical role—authoritative parenting fosters healthy eating habits and emotional regulation, while authoritarian or permissive styles are associated with maladaptive behaviors like emotional eating and food aversions (Savage et al., 2020). Regular family meals also enhance dietary quality and psychosocial well-being by offering consistent opportunities for nutritional education, cultural expression, and social interaction (Jackson et al., 2022). In multigenerational homes, grandparents and older siblings contribute additional layers of influence by passing down traditional recipes, modeling food-related behavior, and shaping food preferences through peer-like interactions (van Ansem et al., 2020).

Cultural traditions and socioeconomic conditions further shape the family's impact on food socialization. Mediterranean families often maintain collective, celebratory meals centered on fresh, balanced ingredients, reinforcing communal and healthy eating values, while time-constrained Western households may rely more heavily on processed or convenience foods, weakening mealtime structures (Bennett et al., 2023). Economic stability enables access to nutritious foods and structured routines, whereas financial hardship can restrict food quality and meal regularity due to limited resources and food insecurity (Cummings et al., 2023). Gender roles also influence dietary modeling, with women often taking primary responsibility for food preparation and passing on food traditions, reinforcing both nutritional values and societal expectations (Khan & Fikree, 2022). Despite the rise of digital media and shifting lifestyles, the

family remains a foundational structure in the socialization of food behaviors, particularly in communities where tradition and familial cohesion remain central (Savage et al., 2020).

Table 02 : Summary of Family-Based Influences on Nutrition(Savage et al., 2020)

Factor	**Effect on Food Habits**
Parental Modeling	Shapes preferences through daily observation and repeated exposure to healthy foods.
Parenting Style	Authoritative styles support balance; others may lead to unhealthy eating behaviors.
Family Meals	Encourage better nutrition, routine, and cultural bonding.
Extended Family	Transmit traditions and influence food choices through shared experiences.
Culture & Traditions	Impact food quality and eating practices; communal meals promote healthier habits.
Socioeconomic Status	Affects access to nutritious food and consistency of meals.
Gender Roles	Mothers often lead food preparation, shaping food norms and responsibilities.
Family Legacy	Traditional values continue to influence eating across generations.

2. Culture: Tradition, Ritual, and Identity

2.1 Cultural Foundations of Food Behavior

Culture plays a central role in shaping food behaviors, extending beyond nutritional needs to encompass expressions of identity, morality, and social belonging. Across virtually all societies, food functions as a medium through which values are communicated and community ties are strengthened. Cultural norms determine what foods are considered acceptable, how they are prepared, and the social contexts of their consumption. These norms are internalized early through routines, rituals, and shared practices that often precede conscious understanding. Over time, they are reinforced through religious ceremonies, rites of passage, and collective celebrations that bind food with ethical and aesthetic meanings (Nguyen et al., 2021).

2.2 Religious Food Practices as Moral Frameworks

Religious dietary laws illustrate the deep interconnection between cultural identity and food. Practices such as halal in Islam, kosher in Judaism, and vegetarianism in Hinduism transform food consumption into acts of spiritual significance. These are not mere preferences, but moral imperatives embedded in religious observance and daily life. They govern everything from household food storage to travel eating habits and festival rituals. Fasting periods like Ramadan and Lent further reinforce discipline, community solidarity, and historical continuity (Nguyen et al., 2021).

2.3 Symbolism and Aesthetic Philosophy in Food Customs

Beyond religious meanings, food customs often symbolize broader social and philosophical ideals. In Ethiopian culture, eating injera communally reflects principles of respect, equality, and shared responsibility. Similarly, East Asian cuisines emphasize harmony through balanced flavors, colors, and textures, echoing cultural values related to order, health, and moral alignment with nature. In such settings, food becomes not only sustenance but a daily enactment of worldview and aesthetic philosophy (Bennett et al., 2023).

2.4 Rituals and Intergenerational Transmission

Cultural festivals vividly demonstrate food's role in transmitting identity and memory across generations. Celebrations such as the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival, Indian Diwali, or American Thanksgiving center around symbolic foods like mooncakes or traditional sweets. These items carry narrative, historical, and emotional weight, strengthening family bonds and reinforcing continuity. Recipes passed down through oral tradition or demonstration become vital links to ancestral knowledge and cultural heritage (Bennett et al., 2023).

2.5 Cultural Preservation in Multicultural Settings

For immigrant and multicultural communities, food practices become tools for preserving identity and resisting assimilation. Preparing and consuming traditional dishes helps maintain cultural ties, teach younger generations, and navigate the pressures of integration. However, barriers such as limited access to ingredients, financial constraints, and time scarcity especially in dual-income households can complicate these efforts. Despite such challenges, many families continue to prioritize cultural food practices to sustain a sense of rootedness and belonging (Khan & Fikree, 2022).

2.6 Gender Roles in Food Culture

Cultural food labor is often gendered, with women frequently positioned as custodians of culinary tradition and household nutrition. This role places significant responsibility on women to uphold standards, transmit food knowledge, and manage daily rituals. Although their contributions are central to food culture, they are often undervalued in both economic and academic discourse, reinforcing broader gender inequities in domestic and public spheres (Khan & Fikree, 2022).

2.7 Body Image Ideals and Food Behavior

Cultural ideals around body image also shape food choices and attitudes. In some cultures, larger body sizes are associated with health, wealth, and beauty, while in others, thinness is idealized as a marker of self-discipline and modernity. These perceptions influence which foods are deemed acceptable and guide health-related behaviors, from indulgence in high-calorie foods to the adoption of restrictive diets or fasting practices (Nguyen et al., 2021).

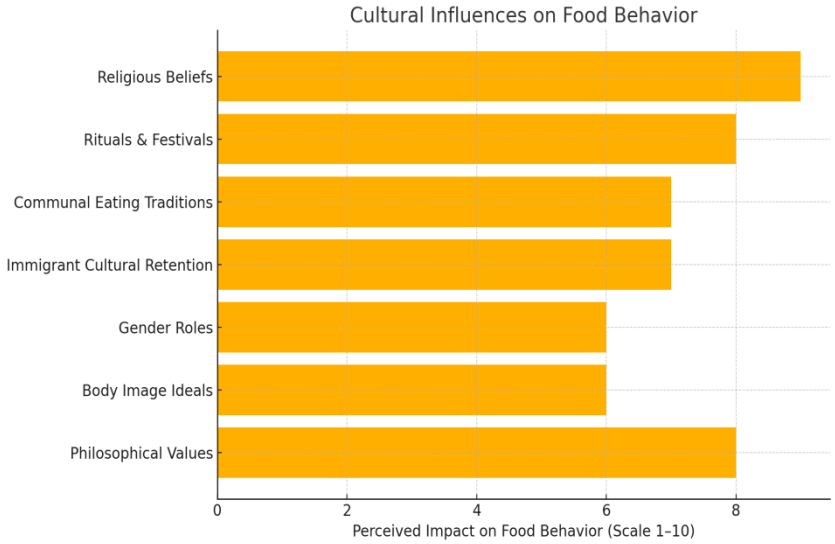


Figure02*:* cultural Influence en Food Behavior(Nguyen et al., 2021).

3. Socioeconomic Status (SES): Access and Inequality

3.1 Socioeconomic Status and Dietary Access

Socioeconomic status (SES) plays a central role in shaping food habits and nutritional health across the lifespan. Encompassing income, education, employment, and geographic location,

SES determines not just what people eat but how, where, and when food is accessed. Those with higher SES typically benefit from greater access to diverse, nutritious food and health education, while individuals from lower-income communities face systemic barriers that restrict their ability to make healthy choices. One major concern is food insecurity, which drives households to prioritize calorie-dense, low-cost foods over nutrient-rich alternatives, contributing to the coexistence of obesity and malnutrition, particularly among women and children. The added psychological stress of poverty often leads to emotional eating and increased reliance on processed "comfort foods" (Gonzalez-Pacheco et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2022).

3.2 Environmental and Educational Inequities

Geographic food access further compounds SES disparities. Low-income areas frequently function as "food deserts" with limited availability of supermarkets and fresh produce, instead offering an overabundance of fast food and convenience stores. In contrast, high-income communities tend to have ready access to healthful options like farmers' markets and organic retailers, reinforcing healthy dietary norms and reducing chronic disease risk (Cummings et al., 2023). Time constraints are another barrier: lower-income households often include adults working long or multiple jobs, leaving limited time for meal preparation and encouraging dependence on pre-packaged or fast food. These dynamics also reduce opportunities for family meals, which are vital for emotional and nutritional development in children. Educational disparities exacerbate the issue, as lower educational attainment is associated with reduced food literacy, greater susceptibility to misleading food marketing, and limited exposure to healthy cooking practices. Nutrition education programs often fail to reach or engage low-SES groups effectively unless culturally and economically tailored (Jackson et al., 2022; Bennett et al., 2023).

3.3 Gendered and Intergenerational Impacts

Gender dynamics further shape food behaviors within low-SES households. In many traditional settings, women are tasked with managing food procurement and preparation but may have less decision-making power over finances, limiting their ability to prioritize nutritional quality. Cultural expectations may lead women to compromise their own dietary needs to feed children or male family members first, contributing to hidden hunger and micronutrient deficiencies among women and girls (Khan & Fikree, 2022). The health implications of SES-driven dietary inequities are far-reaching: individuals in low-income households are more likely to experience

obesity, metabolic syndrome, and developmental delays. Children exposed to chronic food insecurity face heightened risks of stunted growth, poor academic performance, and long-term health complications (UNICEF, 2022). Addressing these challenges demands structural interventions such as food subsidies, targeted school meal programs, and zoning regulations to promote equitable food environments. These strategies must be integrated within broader social policies that account for the complex realities of vulnerable communities (Gonzalez-Pacheco et al., 2021; Cummings et al., 2023).

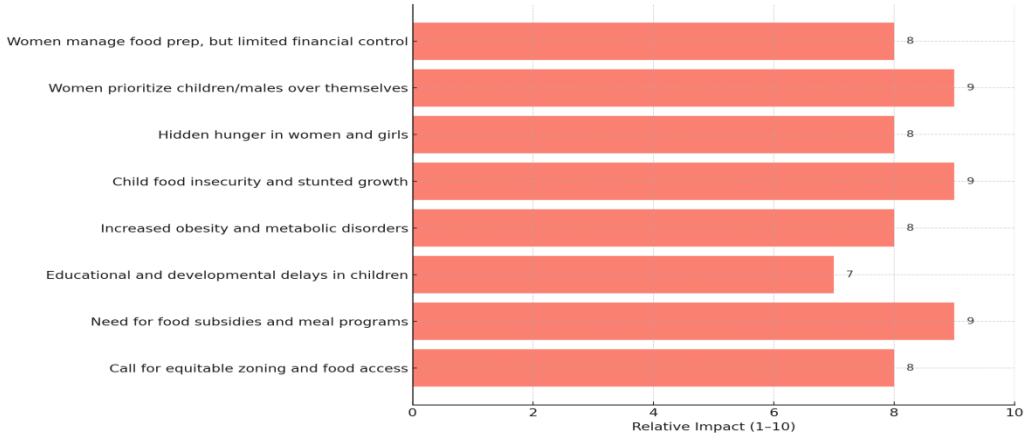


Figure 03: Impact of Gender Roles and Socioeconomic Status on Food and Health Outcomes communities (Gonzalez-Pacheco et al., 2021; Cummings et al., 2023).

III. Transition to Modern Influences: Advertising and Digital Environments

1. The Rise of Food Advertising and Consumer Culture

The shift from traditional food socialization to modern commercial influences began with the rise of mass advertising in the early to mid-20th century. Food advertising played a pivotal role in shaping public taste, normalizing convenience foods, and transforming food into a consumer product rather than a cultural or familial ritual. Brands leveraged mass media including newspapers, radio, and eventually television to promote ready-made, branded food products, often idealized through slogans, jingles, and emotionally charged imagery. These campaigns contributed to the emergence of a consumer culture in which food choices were increasingly guided by persuasive messaging rather than cultural norms or family traditions (Pollan, 2008).

Advertising not only popularized new foods but also reshaped perceptions of nutrition, body image, and lifestyle. Processed foods were marketed as modern and efficient, aligning with

broader societal shifts toward industrialization and time-saving technologies. Marketing strategies frequently targeted women positioning them as responsible for household health and economy while reinforcing gendered norms about food preparation. The promotion of children's foods, breakfast cereals, and snack items also introduced early branding and taste preferences, setting the stage for lifelong brand loyalty and dietary habits (Nestle, 2013).

The rise of television introduced a new visual and emotional dimension to advertising. By the 1960s and 1970s, TV ads were not only promoting products but actively constructing aspirational lifestyles, where eating pre-packaged meals or drinking a specific beverage became tied to identity, success, and belonging. This era also saw the proliferation of mascots and slogans that targeted young consumers, such as Tony the Tiger or Ronald McDonald, embedding food branding within childhood culture and memory (Schlosser, 2001).

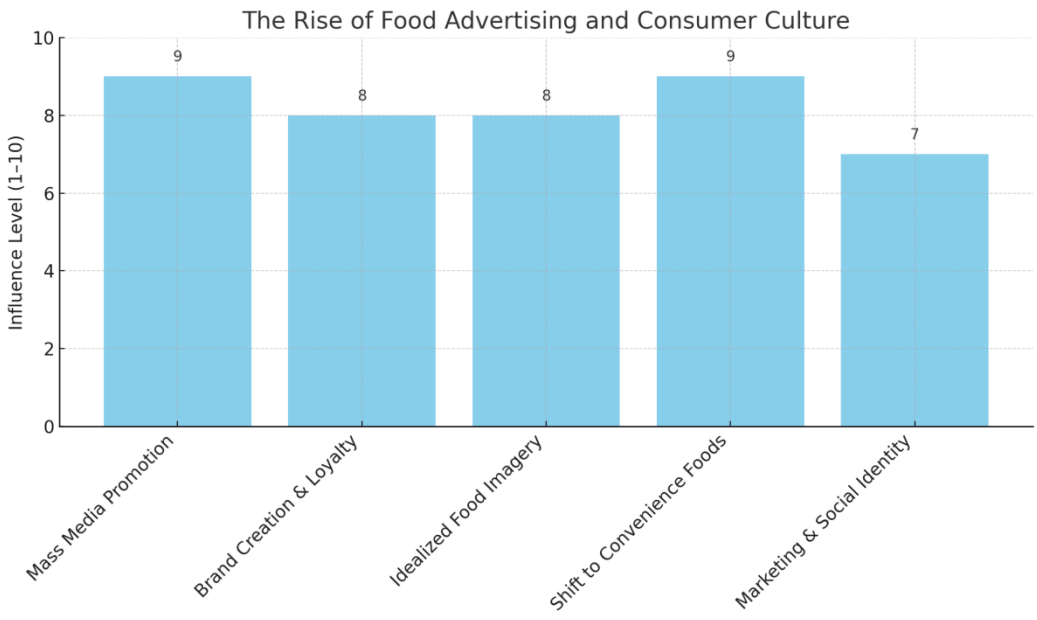


Figure 04: the rise of food advertising and consumer Culture(Schlosser, 2001).

2. Digital Environments and the Algorithmic Foodscape

The rise of digital media has dramatically intensified the commercial influence on food habits. Social media platforms, search engines, and mobile apps now operate as algorithmic ecosystems that personalize food-related content based on user behavior, preferences, and demographics. Unlike traditional advertising, which was static and one-directional, digital food marketing is dynamic, interactive, and tailored in real time. Algorithms curate content that maximizes user

engagement often prioritizing visually appealing, calorie-dense, and emotionally charged food content (Cohen &Ilieva, 2021).

This algorithmic foodscape influences dietary choices in subtle but powerful ways. Food trends on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube can generate viral interest in specific meals, diets, or ingredients. Influencers and sponsored content blur the lines between personal recommendation and advertising, making it difficult for users especially adolescents to critically assess the source or intent behind food promotions. Moreover, digital environments foster continuous exposure, reducing the distinction between eating for nourishment and eating for entertainment (Byrne et al., 2022).

Personal data is now a commodity used to refine marketing strategies. Every like, comment, and click informs food-related content delivery, creating echo chambers of preferences that reinforce specific consumption habits. For instance, users who engage with ketogenic or vegan recipes will see more of the same, potentially narrowing dietary diversity and encouraging one-dimensional health messaging. This data-driven personalization contributes to nutritional polarization, where individuals are fed curated diets not by expert advice, but by engagement metrics (Baum, 2022).

3. Impacts on Children and Adolescents

Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to digital food marketing. Research shows that young people are heavily exposed to food-related content online, much of which promotes ultra-processed foods high in sugar, fat, and salt. These exposures are linked to increased cravings, pester power (influence on parental purchases), and poor dietary outcomes. Unlike traditional commercials, which were often regulated for child audiences, digital content is less transparent and harder to monitor. This raises ethical concerns about the commercialization of childhood and the long-term health implications of early marketing exposure (J. M. Andersson, 2022).

Furthermore, the gamification of food marketing through branded apps, interactive content, and social challenges fosters emotional engagement with products, embedding food brands into children's daily lives. Parental control over children’s food environments is increasingly undermined by the autonomy children exercise in digital spaces. As such, digital marketing not only shapes consumption but also reshapes the authority structures within food socialization (Kelly et al., 2019).

Children are also exposed to parasocial relationships with influencers one-sided emotional bonds with content creators who promote products under the guise of authenticity. These digital figures often appear relatable and trustworthy, making their endorsements more persuasive than traditional celebrity advertisements. This creates powerful associations between social acceptance, aspirational lifestyles, and the consumption of branded food products, complicating efforts to instill critical food literacy among youth (Byrne et al., 2022).

4. Health and Ethical Implications

The modern food environment characterized by ubiquitous advertising and digital influence raises significant public health and ethical concerns. There is growing evidence linking digital marketing exposure to poor dietary quality, increased caloric intake, and rising rates of childhood obesity. These trends disproportionately affect low-income and minority populations, exacerbating existing health disparities. Ethical questions arise about the responsibility of tech platforms, food corporations, and policymakers in curbing exploitative practices and protecting vulnerable consumers (Cohen &Ilieva, 2021).

Calls for policy reform include digital advertising restrictions for unhealthy foods, clearer labeling of sponsored content, algorithm transparency, and increased media literacy education. However, the rapidly evolving nature of digital environments makes regulation challenging. Public health efforts must evolve in tandem with digital technologies to ensure equitable, health-promoting food environments across all age groups and socioeconomic strata (J. M. Andersson, 2022).

There is also an emerging need to address the psychological dimensions of digital food marketing. The normalization of constant snacking, body image comparison, and performative eating (e.g., mukbang videos) are reshaping not just food choices but mental health. These cultural shifts highlight the importance of interdisciplinary strategies that integrate nutrition, digital ethics, child development, and media studies (Livingstone &Helsper, 2022).

CHAPTER 03:

EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON STUDENTS

I. The Relationship between Social Media and Students' Food Habits

Social media plays a big role in shaping how students think about and choose their food. It brings both good and bad influences by connecting students to peers and a flood of food-related content. This interaction affects their eating habits and overall health in ways that are sometimes positive but also potentially harmful. Understanding this balance is important for helping students develop healthier habits (Auxier & Anderson, 20+22; Leung, 2021).

1. The Influence of Social Media on Students' Food Habits

Students spend a lot of time on social media, making them especially open to the messages these platforms send about food. Whether it's recipes, food trends, or nutrition tips, students are constantly exposed to content that shapes how they see food and what they decide to eat. This ongoing exposure influences their food preferences and lifestyle choices in meaningful ways (Auxier & Anderson, 2022).

Table 3: The Influence of Social Media on Students' Food Habits(Auxier & Anderson, 2022).

Platform	Primary Role in Food Behavior	User Interaction Type
Instagram	Visual food trends and recipes	Likes, comments, shares
TikTok	Short video food challenges and tips	Reactions, duets, shares
Facebook	Group discussions and food community sharing	Posts, comments, group chats
YouTube	Detailed cooking tutorials and nutrition info	Video views, comments, likes

2. Peer Influence and Content Sharing Among Students:

For students, peer influence is a powerful force, and social media makes this even stronger. When friends share posts about food or take part in popular food challenges, it creates a kind of social pressure that encourages others to follow along. This social aspect plays a big role in shaping what students eat and how they think about food (Leung, 2021).

Table 4: Mechanisms of Peer Influence on Student Food Choices (Leung, 2021).

Mechanism	Description	Impact on Students
Peer Sharing	Students sharing food posts with friends	Shapes social eating norms
Social Validation	Likes, comments from peers	Encourages trying new foods or diets
Viral Food Trends	Food challenges or trends among students	Temporary adoption of behaviors

II. Positive Influence: Health Promotion and Education through Social Media:

1. Social Media as a Platform for Health Promotion:

One of the most significant positive impacts of social media is its role in health promotion. In recent years, social media has emerged as a powerful platform for disseminating health, wellness, and nutrition-related information, shaping the way students approach their diets and overall well-being. The unique capacity of social media to reach a broad and diverse audience quickly and efficiently allows influencers, dietitians, nutrition coaches, and even public health organizations to encourage the adoption of healthy eating behaviors among students, many of whom rely on these platforms for advice and inspiration. This accessibility is especially important for students, who often lead busy lives and may lack access to traditional health resources like nutritionists or wellness programs (Kang & Choi, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022).

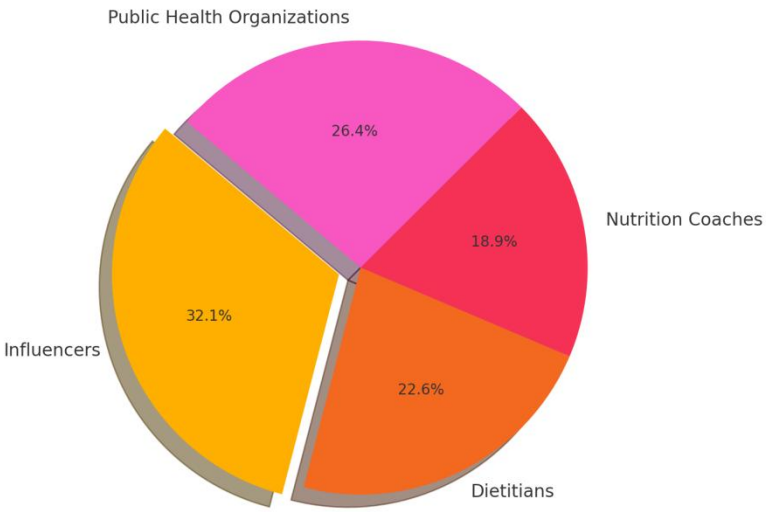


Figure5 : Distribution of Social Media Sources Influencing Students' Health Promotion

(Kang & Choi, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022).

2. Inspiring Healthier Food Choices Among Students:

The impact of social media in promoting healthier food choices is evident through its ability to inspire students to try new, nutritious foods, learn about nutritional value, and develop improved eating habits over time. Platforms such as Instagram have become hubs for health-conscious food influencers who post not only visually appealing food pictures but also detailed recipes, meal plans, and cooking tutorials. These posts often emphasize plant-based diets, low-sugar meals, and whole food alternatives to processed foods. By showcasing healthy, affordable, and easy-to-make meals, these influencers make healthy eating feel attainable and enjoyable. The widespread sharing of meal prep tips and healthy snack ideas encourages students to experiment with diverse recipes, increasing their dietary variety and consumption of nutrient-dense foods. As these ideas spread, students are motivated to integrate healthier options into their daily routines, leading to positive, long-term changes (Kang & Choi, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022).

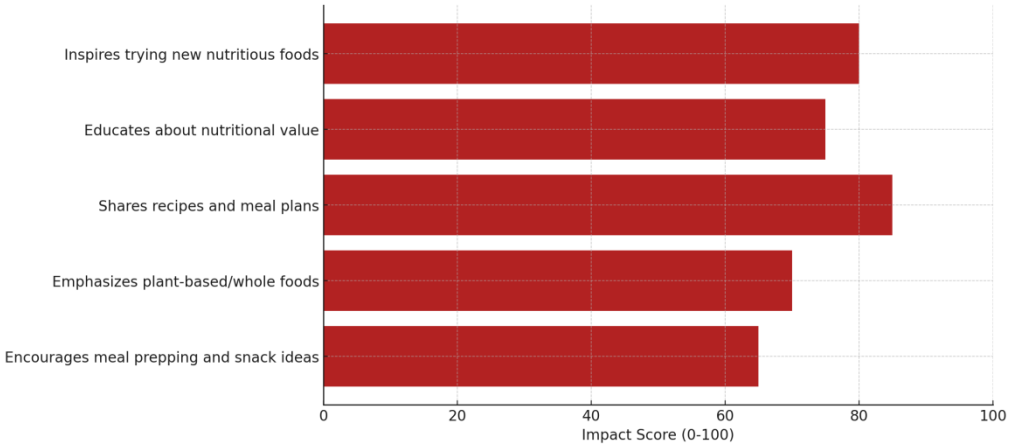


Figure6 : Key Ways Social Media Promotes Healthier Food Choices Among Students (Kang & Choi, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022).

III. Negative Influence: Unhealthy Eating, Body Image Disorders, and Food Misinformation

Social media, while offering many benefits, presents significant challenges to students' eating habits. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube often promote unhealthy, high-calorie foods through appealing visuals, encouraging students to focus more on taste and appearance than nutrition. Additionally, unrealistic body ideals contribute to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. The spread of misinformation, including fad diets and unverified advice, further complicates students' decision-making. Commercial marketing blurs the line between genuine guidance and advertising, influencing food choices in potentially harmful ways. These combined issues highlight the need for better regulation, media literacy, and education to support healthier food decisions among students (Coates et al., 2023; Liu & Sundar, 2021).

1. Promotion of Unhealthy Eating Behaviors on Social Media

Social media platforms are saturated with images and videos showcasing indulgent foods such as fast food, sugary snacks, and high-calorie desserts. These foods are often presented in visually appealing ways, making them appear desirable and aspirational. This constant exposure can lead students to prioritize taste and aesthetic appeal over nutritional value. The glamorization of unhealthy foods fosters an environment where poor eating habits are normalized, contributing to increased consumption of processed and calorie-dense foods. As

food is often portrayed as a luxury or indulgence, students may overlook the importance of balanced, health-conscious diets. (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

Table5 : some marketing stratigies to promote unhealthy food (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

Aspect	Description	Impact on Students
Glamorization of Junk Food	Visually appealing content featuring unhealthy foods	Increased cravings and unhealthy eating habits
Normalization of Indulgence	Food portrayed as a luxury or reward	Neglect of nutritional value
Increased Exposure	Frequent display of fast food and snacks	Higher consumption of processed foods

2. Impact of Unrealistic Body Image Ideals on Students

Influencers and celebrities on platforms like Instagram and TikTok often display idealized body images alongside content about food. This creates a juxtaposition where indulgent eating is linked with maintaining a "perfect" body, leading to pressure on students to conform to narrow beauty standards. Particularly vulnerable are young adults who are still developing their self-esteem and body image. Constant exposure to such content can trigger body dissatisfaction, extreme dieting, and disordered eating behaviors such as anorexia, bulimia, or orthorexia. The association of food with guilt or moral failure further complicates students' relationship with eating. (Williams & Lee, 2023)

Table 6 : Impact of Media-Driven Body Ideals on Student Well-Being (Williams & Lee, 2023)

Aspect	Description	Impact on Students
Idealized Body Images	Influencers showcase unrealistic beauty ideals	Body dissatisfaction and self-esteem issues
Pressure to Diet	Encouragement of restrictive or extreme dieting	Risk of eating disorders
Food and Guilt	Associating eating with moral judgment	Dysfunctional eating behaviors

3. The Spread of Food and Nutrition Misinformation

Social media often circulates unverified health advice and fad diets that lack scientific backing. Wellness influencers may promote detoxes, keto, intermittent fasting, or supplements without credible evidence. Students, lacking critical media literacy, might adopt these trends without understanding their risks. Such diets can cause nutritional imbalances, eating disorders, and long-term health problems if not properly supervised. (Anderson & Patel, 2021)

Table7 : Effects of Unverified Nutrition Claims on Student Health (Anderson & Patel, 2021).

Aspect	Description	Impact on Students
Unverified Diet Trends	Promotion of fad diets and detox cleanses	Confusion and adoption of harmful diets
Lack of Regulation	Limited fact-checking of health claims	Spread of misinformation
Risk of Nutritional Imbalance	Adoption of extreme or restrictive diets	Potential long-term health consequences

4. Commercialization and Sponsored Food Content

Many social media influencers receive compensation for promoting food products, which may not always align with healthy eating. Sponsored posts often feature sugary snacks, energy drinks, or processed foods. These advertisements are integrated seamlessly into content feeds, making it difficult for students to distinguish between genuine advice and marketing. This commercial influence sways students' purchasing decisions and may promote unhealthy dietary choices under the guise of lifestyle endorsements. (Martin & Nguyen, 2020)

Table 8 : How Sponsored Content Shapes Student Food Decisions (Martin & Nguyen, 2020)

Aspect	Description	Impact on Students
Sponsored Promotions	Paid endorsements of non-nutritious products	Misleading perceptions of healthy eating
Blurred Lines	Ads disguised as organic content	Difficulty discerning marketing from advice
Influence on Purchasing	Marketing shapes buying behavior	Increased consumption of unhealthy products

5. Navigating the Multifaceted Challenges of Social Media Influence

The intersection of unhealthy food advertising, idealized body imagery, misinformation, and commercial interests has created a multifaceted media landscape that complicates students' ability to make informed dietary decisions. This issue is particularly acute during critical developmental periods, when individuals are more susceptible to external influences and conflicting messages. To mitigate these negative impacts, it is essential to implement robust regulatory measures, integrate media literacy into educational curricula, and promote access to accurate, evidence-based nutritional information. These strategies are vital for empowering students to critically engage with digital content and make healthier food choices (Martinez, 2023).

Table 9 : Challenges in Student Nutrition and Effective Intervention Approaches(Martinez, 2023).

Challenge	Description	Recommended Solutions
Conflicting Messages	Mixed signals about food and body ideals	Media literacy programs
Influence of Marketing	Commercial interests overshadow health advice	Transparent labeling and ad regulations
Vulnerability of Students	Developmental stage makes students susceptible	Targeted educational interventions

IV. Summary of Key Findings and Identification of Gaps

The analysis of social media's influence on students' food habits highlights both the potential benefits and significant challenges associated with the use of social media platforms. Social media, as a tool for health promotion, can serve as an effective means of encouraging healthier eating behaviors, especially when students engage with credible sources of information such as health influencers, nutritionists, and public health campaigns. These platforms provide valuable resources for students to explore nutritious food options, adopt balanced dietary practices, and participate in supportive health communities. Health-focused influencers and educational content on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok offer engaging, easily accessible advice on nutrition, healthy recipes, and meal preparation. This engagement can inspire students to make informed, health-conscious decisions about their food choices and can contribute to positive changes in their diets, particularly with regards to plant-based eating, balanced meals, and reduced consumption of processed foods (Auxier& Anderson, 2022; Leung, 2021).

Social media also fosters the creation of online communities centered around health and nutrition. These communities, where students can share experiences, challenges, and successes, provide peer support that motivates them to stick to healthier eating habits. For example, social media platforms enable students to connect with like-minded individuals who prioritize health and well-being, creating a sense of belonging that encourages sustained commitment to healthier behaviors. This online interaction can be particularly beneficial in a college environment, where students are often dealing with limited time, financial constraints, and stress, making it difficult to maintain healthy eating habits. The shared knowledge and support found in these digital spaces can help students overcome these barriers and make healthier choices more consistently (Rodgers et al., 2021).

However, the analysis also reveals that social media poses significant challenges when it comes to students' eating behaviors, particularly due to the prevalence of unhealthy food content and the unrealistic portrayals of food and body images. Social media platforms are saturated with food-related content that often glamorizes indulgent, high-calorie foods such as fast food, sugary snacks, and desserts. These foods are presented in an aesthetically pleasing and desirable manner, leading students to prioritize appearance over nutrition. This can lead to unhealthy eating habits, where students make choices based on visual appeal rather than considering the nutritional value of what they are consuming. Additionally, the

widespread promotion of idealized body types on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok exacerbates body image concerns among students, particularly young adults who may be in a vulnerable stage of developing their self-identity. The pressure to conform to these unrealistic body standards can prompt students to adopt extreme dieting practices, potentially leading to disordered eating behaviors (Coates et al., 2023; Liu &Sundar, 2021).

Furthermore, social media platforms often propagate misinformation about food and nutrition. Many influencers promote fad diets, detox cleanses, or supplements that lack scientific validation, which can confuse students and mislead them into adopting unhealthy dietary practices. While some influencers may offer beneficial advice, the prevalence of misleading content without proper fact-checking presents significant risks for students' health. Popular trends, such as keto diets, intermittent fasting, and extreme calorie restriction, are frequently endorsed by social media figures without consideration for their potential long-term health implications. These misleading practices can lead to students making unbalanced dietary choices, unaware of the risks they may be taking for their physical and mental well-being (Zhao & Ellison, 2022; Kang & Choi, 2021).

Despite the insights gained from the existing research, several gaps remain in the understanding of social media's long-term impact on students' food habits. Most of the studies conducted thus far have focused on the immediate effects of social media exposure, leaving a significant gap in research regarding the long-term effects of sustained engagement with food-related content. Future studies should examine how prolonged exposure to food-related content on social media influences students' eating habits over time. This research could provide a clearer picture of the cumulative effects of social media on students' dietary decisions and identify potential areas for intervention (Thompson & Garcia, 2024)

Another critical area that requires further investigation is the role of social media algorithms in amplifying unhealthy food content. The algorithms that power social media platforms are designed to prioritize content that users are most likely to engage with, which often includes sensationalized food content or posts that align with users' current preferences. This can create a filter bubble, where students are continually exposed to content that reinforces existing unhealthy food choices, making it difficult for them to discover healthier options. Research into how these algorithms shape students' food-related content consumption could offer valuable insights into how social media platforms unintentionally perpetuate unhealthy eating habits (Nguyen et al., 2022; Rodgers et al., 2021).

Additionally, more research is needed to assess the effectiveness of interventions designed to mitigate the negative effects of social media on students' food habits. While there have been efforts to introduce healthier, evidence-based content on social media, it remains unclear how effective these initiatives are in reaching students and encouraging sustainable changes in their eating behaviors. Interventions could include promoting healthier food trends, fact-checking popular food content, or using algorithms to recommend balanced food choices over highly processed, unhealthy options. Understanding the efficacy of these interventions will be critical in shaping future strategies for using social media as a tool for health promotion rather than harm (Hernandez & Kim, 2023).

esearch on cultural and regional differences in food-related behavior is limited, as it doesn't explore how these factors intersect with social media content. Students' food choices are influenced by their cultural backgrounds, local practices, and regional norms, which can affect their engagement with food content on social media. Understanding these intersections could lead to more culturally relevant and effective interventions, especially for diverse student populations, making health promotion efforts more impactful and accessible. (Rodgers et al., 2021).

METHODOLOGIE

I. Study Objective:

The primary objective of this research is to comprehensively investigate the **impact of social media on the dietary habits of university students**. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Assess how daily engagement with various social media platforms influences students' food choices and eating behaviors.
- Explore the role of **cultural and regional backgrounds** in shaping dietary preferences and how these interact with social media influences.
- Examine the effect of **budgetary constraints** on students' ability to maintain certain dietary habits, especially in the context of social media trends and recommendations.
- Analyze how **physical activity levels** correlate with dietary patterns and whether these are affected by social media usage.

Overall, the study seeks to understand the complex interplay between social media exposure and various socio-economic and lifestyle factors in determining university students' nutrition and eating practices.

II. Study Setting :

The research was conducted within academic institutions across Tebessa, encompassing a broad spectrum of public universities. The university setting was chosen due to its relevance in reflecting a demographic highly engaged with digital technologies and simultaneously navigating the transition to independent adulthood.

Several factors underscore the appropriateness of this setting:

- **High prevalence of social media use** among students, with platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Facebook forming a routine part of daily communication and entertainment.
- **Diverse lifestyle contexts**, including those living on campus, commuting from home, or sharing accommodations, which contribute to varied eating environments such as university canteens, home-cooked meals, and fast food outlets.
- **Cultural and digital diversity** among students, reflecting Algeria's regional heterogeneity and the exposure to both local and global food cultures through online content.

This heterogeneity allowed the research to capture a more representative picture of how dietary behaviors are influenced within the context of modern Algerian student life.

III. Study Population :

The target population consisted of university students and recent graduates (aged 18–35) residing in Algeria. Participants were recruited using a non-probabilistic convenience sampling strategy due to the exploratory nature of the study and logistical constraints during data collection.

IV. Demographic Profile of Respondents:

- **Sample Size:** 261 participants.

The diversity in academic fields, residential status, and socioeconomic background ensured a multifactorial analysis of digital and dietary behavior across various student profiles.

V. Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected over a two-week period through a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed digitally via Google Forms. Distribution channels included:

- University-related Facebook and WhatsApp groups
- Instagram accounts followed by student communities
- Online forums and pages associated with academic institutions

Prior to participation, individuals were provided with a digital consent form outlining:

- The objectives and scope of the study
- Assurance of confidentiality and data protection
- The voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw without penalty

This approach enabled efficient, low-cost data collection while reaching a broad, digitally active student population.

VI. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

1. Inclusion Criteria:

- Individuals aged between 18 and 35 years
- Regular users (daily or weekly) of at least one social media platform
- Currently enrolled in, or recently graduated (within 1 year) from an Algerian university

2. Exclusion Criteria:

- Incomplete survey submissions (e.g., missing responses in key sections)
- Inconsistencies in demographic or behavioral responses suggestive of inattention or falsification

These criteria ensured that the sample was both relevant to the research question and sufficiently reliable for analysis.

VI. Questioner Design:

The survey consisted of 24 items, organized into six thematic sections to comprehensively explore the intersection of digital behavior and nutrition:

1. **Sociodemographic Information:**
    - Age, gender, field of study, living situation, income level
2. **Social Media Use Patterns:**
    - Frequency and duration of use
    - Preferred platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, etc.)
    - Purposes of use (communication, entertainment, information seeking)
3. **Dietary Behaviors:**
    - Food preferences (traditional vs. modern foods)
    - Typical eating locations (home, university cafeteria, restaurants)
    - Frequency of fast food, sugary snacks, and processed food consumption
4. **Engagement with Online Food Content:**
    - Frequency of viewing food-related content (recipes, nutrition advice, influencer posts)
    - Degree of trust in nutritional information

- Actions taken based on content (saving recipes, attempting diets, etc.)

5. **Behavioral Outcomes:**
   - Adoption of new food items or habits based on social media exposure
   - Influence on grocery shopping or meal planning
   - Perceived changes in diet over time
6. **Perceptions and Beliefs:**
   - Beliefs about the healthiness of foods promoted online
   - Attitudes toward influencer credibility
   - Perceived impact of social media on eating habits and body image

Most items were closed-ended, using either multiple-choice or a 5-point Likert scale (from "Never" to "Always") to facilitate quantitative analysis and enhance reliability.

VII. Statistical Analysis

1. **Descriptive Analysis:**

   Basic statistical measures including percentages to summarize the demographic characteristics, social media behaviors, and dietary habits of the sample. These were presented in bar charts, pie charts.

2. **Correlational Analysis:**
   - Study Population vs Social Media Usage
   - Social media usage vs food habits
   - Social media usage vs regional and cultural effects
   - Physical activity and income vs food Habits

All statistical procedures were performed using established software such as **SPSS** version ensuring reproducibility, clarity, and methodological.

I. Descriptive Analysis:

1. Study population:

1.1 Living Situation :

In a sample of 261 individuals, 80% live with family, 15.4% live in a student dorm, 3.1% rent with friends, and 1.5% rent individually, showing a clear preference for living with family. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test comparing this observed distribution to an equal (uniform) distribution across all four living situations yielded a p-value of approximately 8.69×10^{-94}. This extremely low p-value indicates the distribution is highly significantly different from uniform, confirming that the living situation choices are not equally distributed and that most individuals strongly prefer living with family. **(Figure 7)**

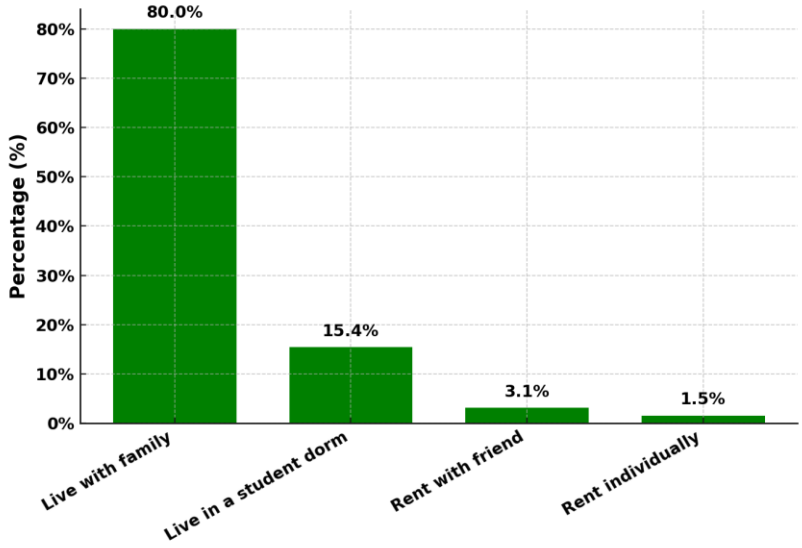


Figure 7: living situation

1.2 Field of Study:

In a sample of 261 students distributed across seven fields of study, the highest percentages were in Science (29.2%) and Humanities (27.3%), while Economics and Business (4.2%) and Other fields (3.5%) had the lowest representation. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test comparing this observed distribution to a uniform distribution showed a highly significant difference with a p-value of 5.57×10^{-23}, indicating that

student enrollment is unevenly distributed among the fields, with clear preferences for some areas over others. **(Figure 08)**

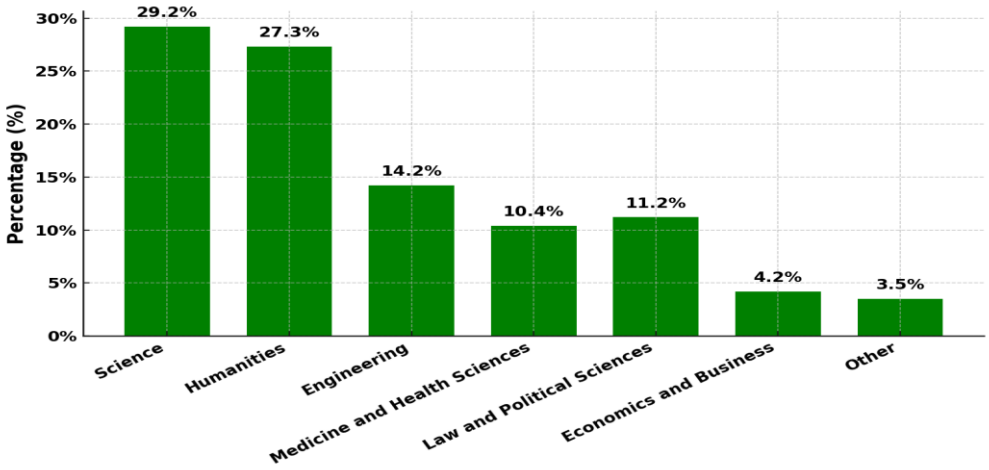


Figure 08:Field of study

1.3 Gender:

In a sample of 261 individuals, the gender distribution is nearly equal, with 50.4% males and 49.6% females. A chi-square test comparing this to a perfectly balanced 50-50 split resulted in a p-value of 0.85, indicating no significant difference from an equal gender distribution and confirming a balanced representation of males and females in the sample. **(Figure 09)**

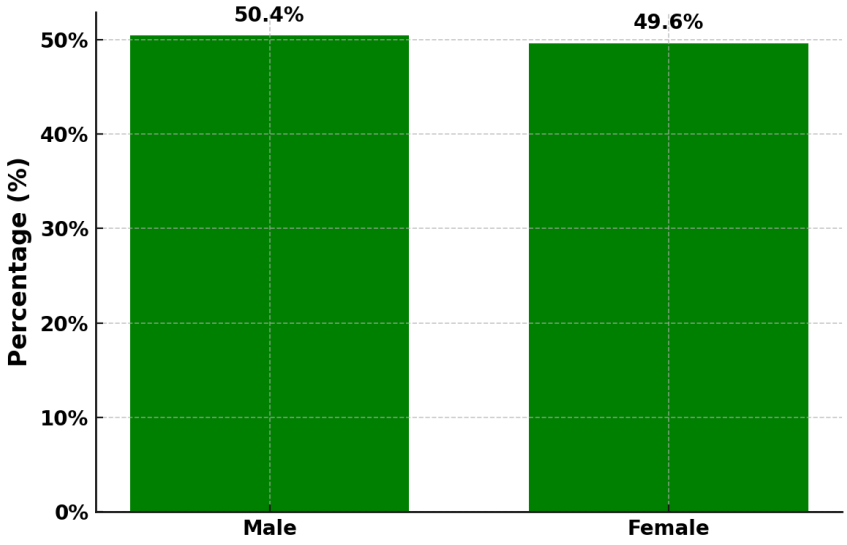


Figure 09: gender bars

1.4 Age:

In a sample of 261 individuals, the age distribution is 39.1% aged 18-22 years, 38.4% aged 23-25 years, and 22.5% over 25 years. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform distribution across the three age groups resulted in a p-value of 0.0011, indicating a statistically significant difference. This suggests that younger age groups (18-25 years) are more represented compared to those over 25 in the sample. **(Figure 10)**

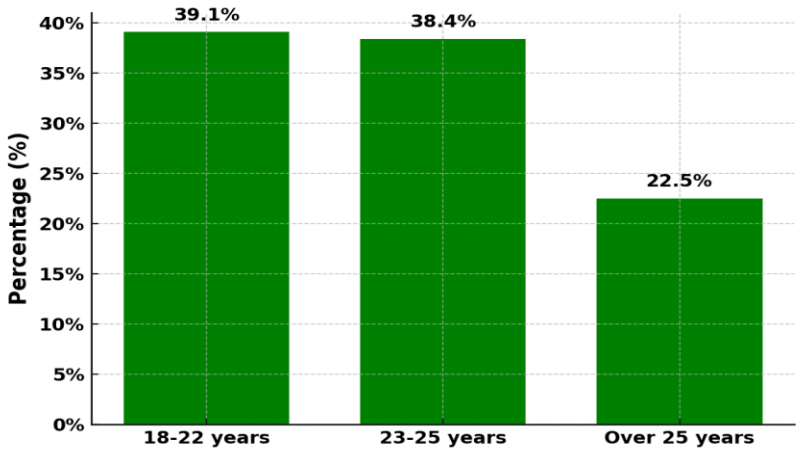


Figure 10 : age bars

2. Social media usage :

2.1 Trust in Nutritional Information on Social Media:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 76.8% completely trust the information, 14.7% sometimes trust it, 5.8% rarely trust it, and 2.7% never trust it. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform distribution yielded a p-value of approximately 5.03×10^{-83}, indicating a highly significant difference. This confirms that the majority have a high level of trust in the information compared to other levels of trust. **(Figure 11)**

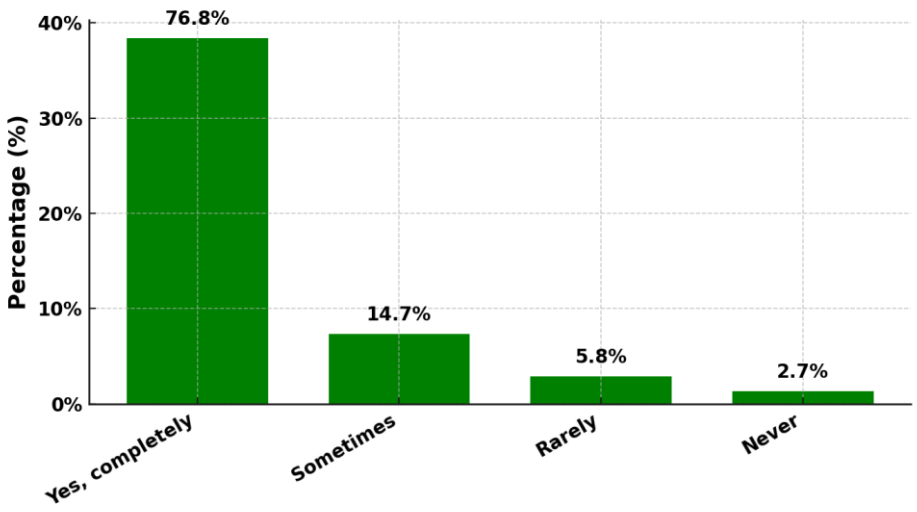


Figure 11: Trust in Nutritional Information on Social Media

2.2 Followed Food Trends on Social Media:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 43.4% responded "Yes," 38.8% "No," 10.9% tried a new food experience, 3.5% follow food trends on social media, and 3.5% chose "Other." A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform distribution yielded a p-value of approximately 1.78×10^{-42}, indicating a highly significant difference. This suggests that responses are unevenly distributed, with most individuals either answering "Yes" or "No" regarding food trends **(Figure12).**

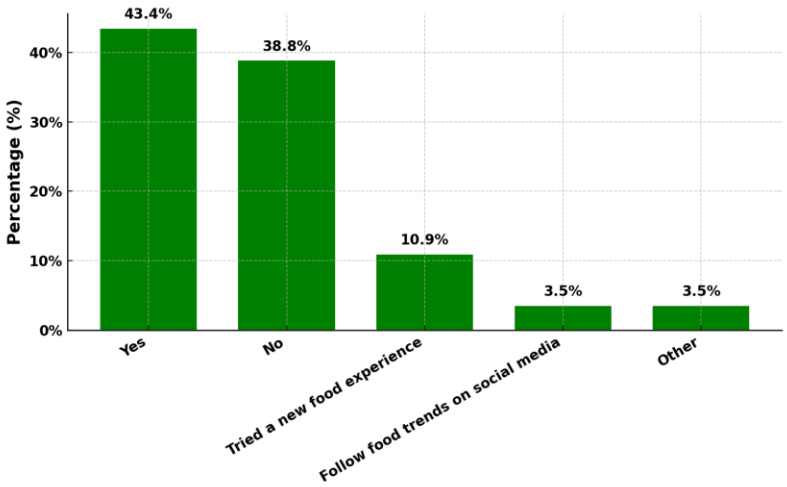


Figure12: Followed Food Trends on Social Media.

2.3 Interaction with Food-Related Content on Social Media:

Among 261 respondents, 60.4% expressed interest in food content, 16.9% were not interested, 16.2% engaged with food-related content from friends or family, 3.8% had other food-related interests, and 2.7% interacted occasionally. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform distribution yielded a p-value of 9.59×10^{-62}, indicating a highly significant difference and confirming that the majority show strong interest in food content .(**Figure 13)**

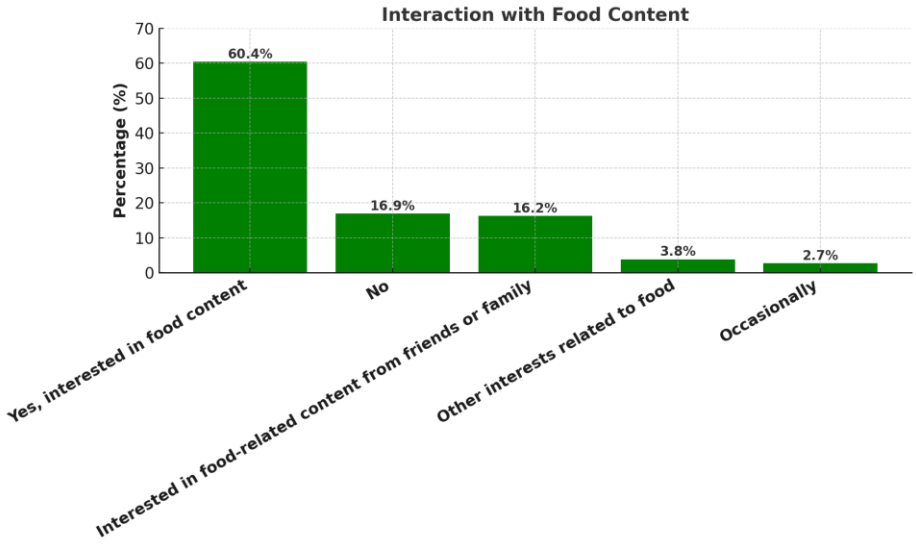


Figure 13: Interaction with Food-Related Content on Social Media

2.4 Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media:

I n a sample of 261 individuals, 47.3% spend more than 4 hours, 35.8% spend 3-4 hours, 13.5% spend 1-2 hours, and 3.5% spend less than 1 hour on social media daily. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform distribution yielded a p-value of 2.15×10^{-27}, indicating a highly significant difference and confirming that most people spend a substantial amount of time on social media. **(Figure 14)**

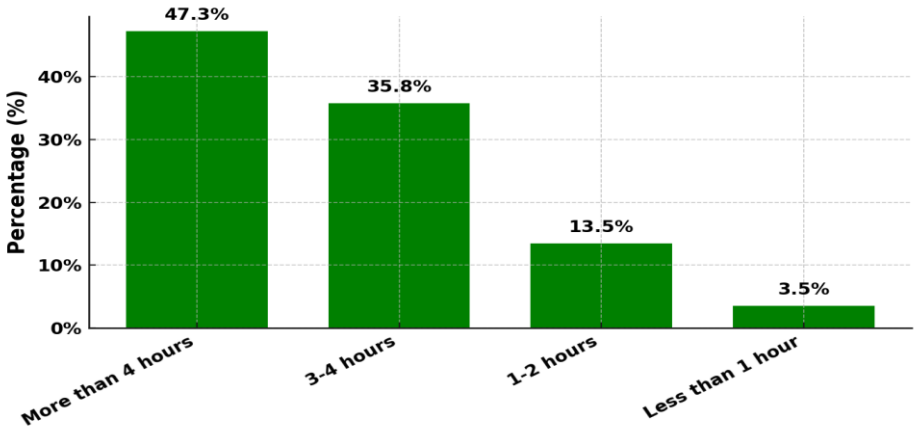


Figure 14 : Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media.

2.5 Most Used Social Media Platforms:

In a sample of 261 individuals, Instagram leads with 86.5% usage, followed by TikTok (54.1%), Facebook (53.3%), YouTube (41.3%), Snapchat (31.3%), and Twitter/X (8.1%). A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform one yielded a p-value near zero, indicating a highly significant difference and confirming uneven platform usage dominated by Instagram **(Figure 15).**

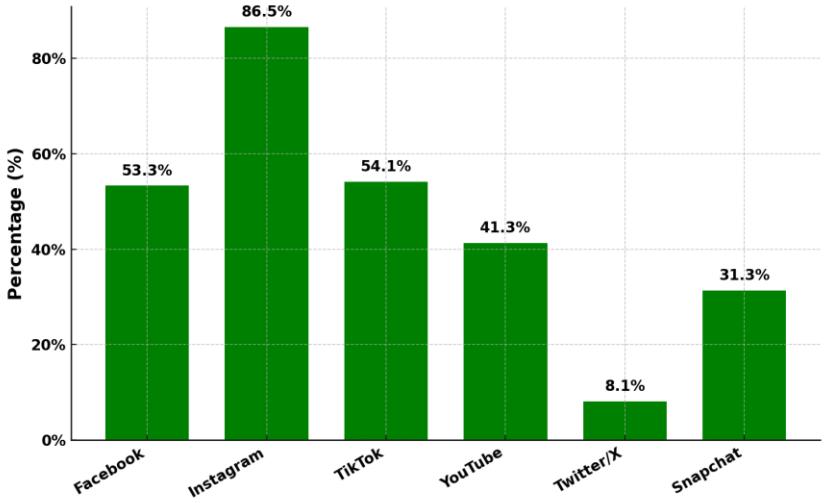


Figure 15 : Most Used Social Media Platforms.

2.6 Use of Social Media Daily:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 93.8% use social media daily, while small percentages use other sources, do not use social media daily, or use it mainly for entertainment. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform distribution yielded a p-value of 8.25×10^{-143}, confirming the dominance of daily social media use in the sample **(Figure 16)**

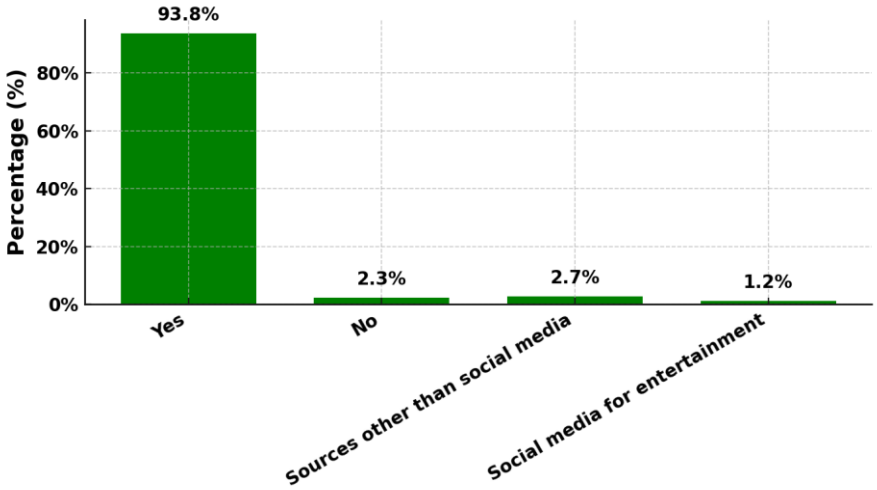


Figure 16 : Use of Social Media Daily

3. Food Habits:

3.1 Frequency of Trying New Foods or Recipes on Social Media:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 53.3% try new foods very often, 26.5% sometimes, 9.3% rarely, and 10.9% never. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform one gave a p-value of 1.11×10^{-28}, showing a significant preference for frequently trying new foods .**(Figure 17)**

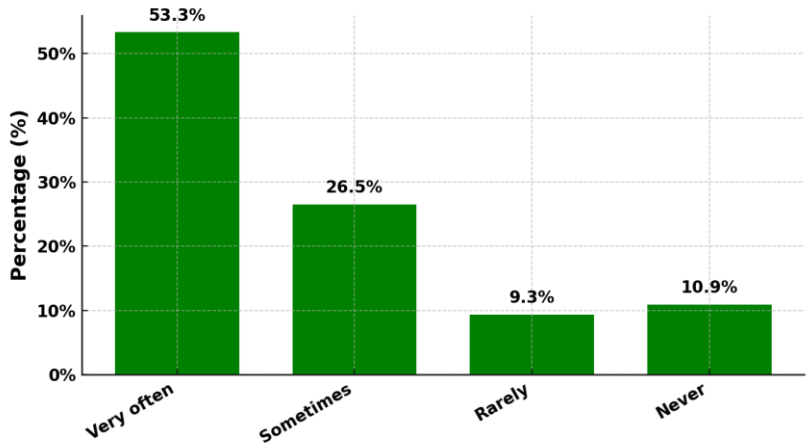


Figure 17 : Frequency of Trying New Foods or Recipes on Social Media

3.2 Cooking Habits:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 36.7% mostly cook at home, 35.5% mostly eat food from outside, 8.1% sometimes mix both, 14.7% cook traditional dishes, and 2.3% prefer convenience foods. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform one gave a p-value of 2.74×10^{-30}, showing significant variation in cooking habits. **(Figure 18)**

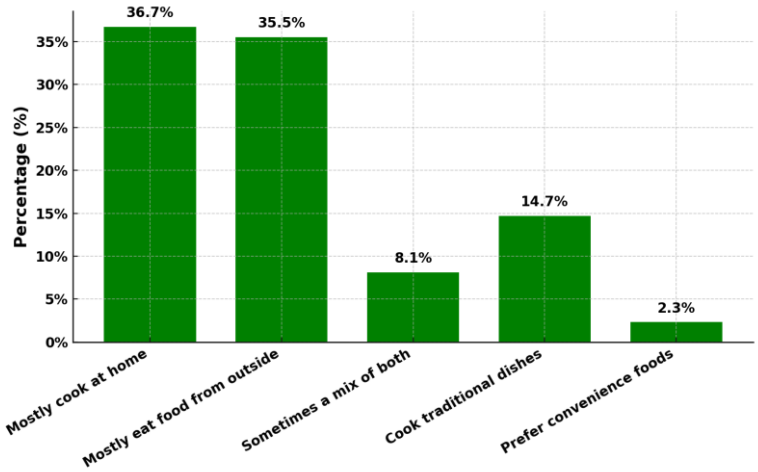


Figure 18 : cooking habits

3.3 Eating Unhealthy Foods After Seeing Them on Social Media

In a sample of 261 individuals, 45.6% admit to eating unhealthy foods, 17.4% do not, 23.9% find unhealthy taste appealing, 9.3% are influenced by food habits, and 3.9% have health concerns. A chi-square test comparing this to a uniform distribution gave a p-value of 2.50×10^{-29}, showing significant variation in attitudes toward unhealthy eating .(**Figure19**)

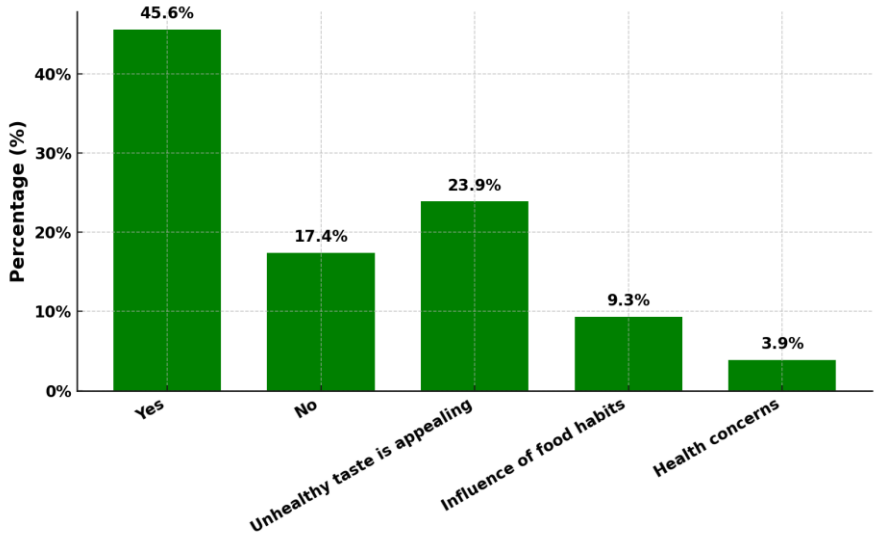


Figure 19 : Eating Unhealthy Foods After Seeing Them on Social Media.

3.4 Impact of Social Media on Food Choices:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 52.1% report no significant impact of social media on their food choices, 18.7% perceive a positive impact, 14.0% a negative impact, and 15.2% are unsure. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform one yielded a p-value of 1.15×10^{-21}, showing significant variation in perceptions of social media's influence **(Figure 20)** .

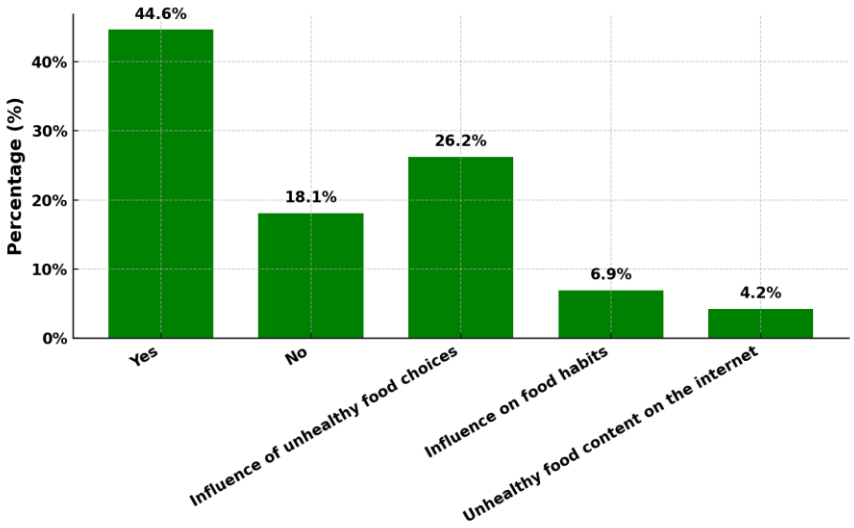


Figure 20: Impact of social media on food habits

3.5 Current Food Habits

In a sample of 261 individuals, 52.1% describe their current food habits as regular and somewhat unhealthy, 25.2% as healthy, 13.2% very unhealthy, 7.8% healthy with occasional indulgence, and 4.3% other. A chi-square test comparing this to a uniform distribution yielded a p-value of 1.70×10^{-37}, showing significant variation with a tendency toward less healthy habits. **(Figure 21)**

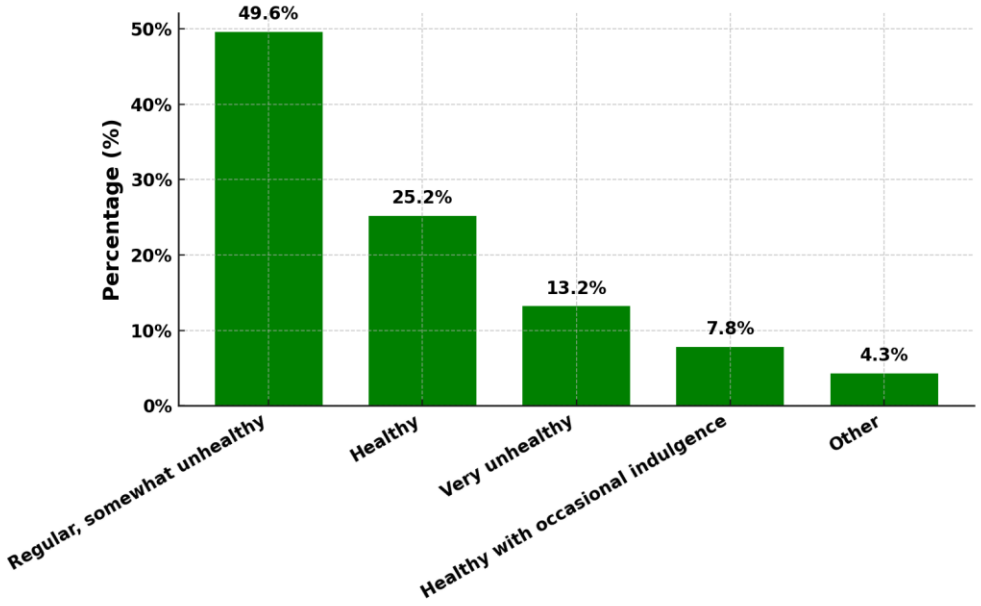


Figure 21: current food habits of students

4. Regional and cultural effect:

4.1 Impact of Social Media on Food Habits:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 52.1% report no significant impact of social media on their food choices, 18.7% perceive a positive impact, 14.0% a negative impact, and 15.2% are unsure. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform one yielded a p-value of 1.15×10^{-21}, indicating a highly significant difference and highlighting varied perceptions of social media's influence on food choices. **(Figure 22)**

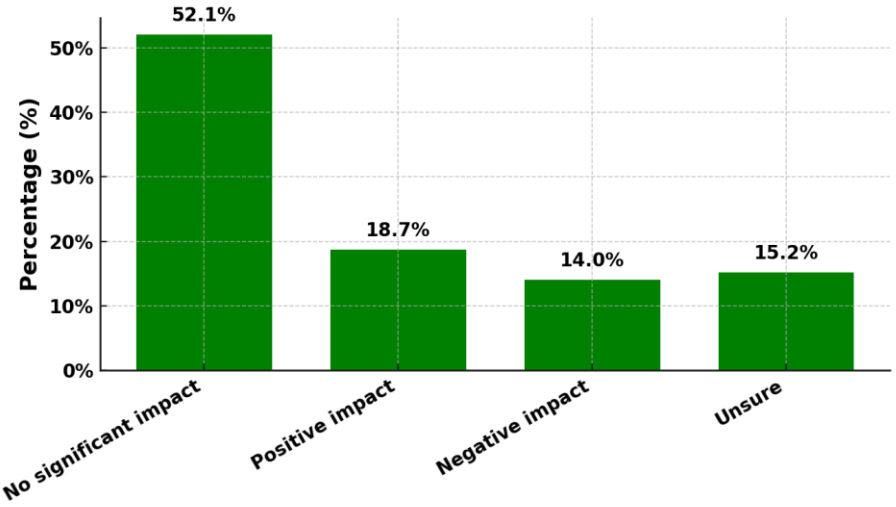


Figure 22: negative and positive impact on students

4.2 Do Social Media Promote Healthy or Unhealthy Eating Habits? :

In a sample of 261 individuals, 54.1% believe social media promotes unhealthy eating habits, 23.0% think it promotes healthy habits, 16.3% see a mix of both, and 6.6% are unsure. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform one yielded a p-value of 2.41×10^{-28}, indicating a highly significant difference and confirming that most perceive social media as promoting unhealthy eating habits. **(Figure 23).**

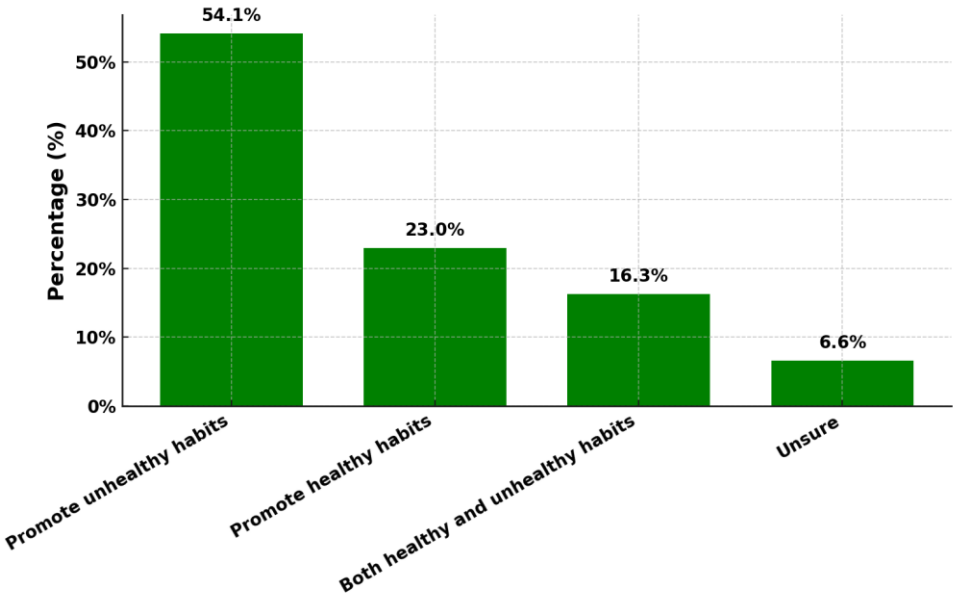


Figure 23: healthy or unhealthy promotion

4.3 Cultural Traditions and Their Impact on Food Choices:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 43.7% say culture affects their food choices a lot, 20.5% somewhat, 7.1% say it doesn't affect much, and 28.7% say not at all. A chi-square test comparing this to a uniform distribution gave a p-value of 2.45×10^{-15}, showing culture significantly influences food choices for most respondents. **(Figure 24)**

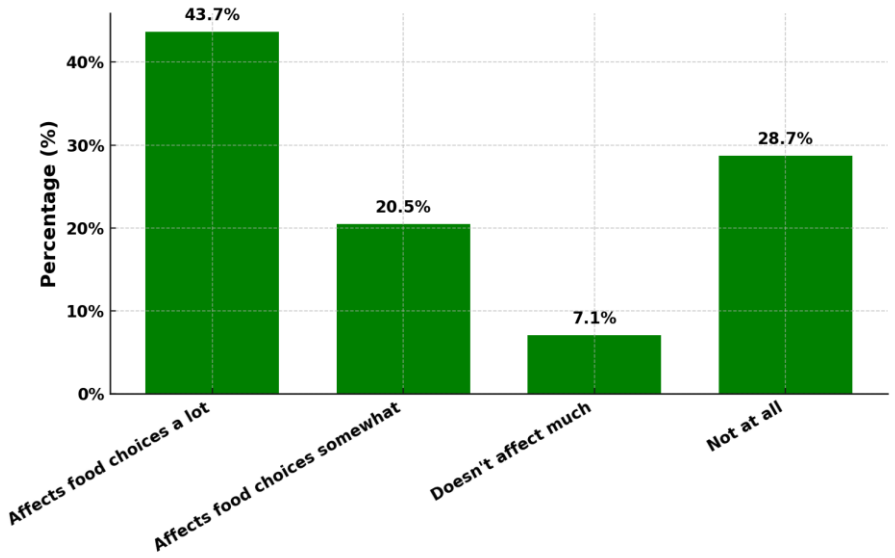


Figure 24 : cultural traditions and their impact on food choices

4.4 Importance of Traditional Algerian Dishes in Daily Meals:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 50.0% eat traditional meals almost every day, 33.7% a few times a week, 14.3% occasionally, and 1.9% do not eat traditional meals at all. A chi-square test comparing this distribution to a uniform one yielded a p-value of 1.37×10^{-30}, showing that traditional meals are commonly consumed regularly among respondents. **(Figure 25).**

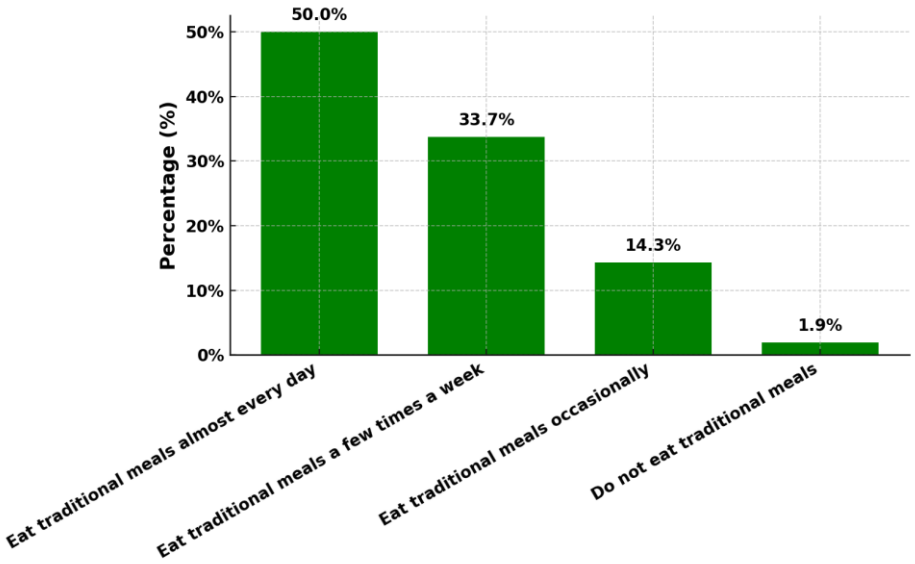


Figure 25 : importance of traditional food

5. Physical activate and income effect:

5.1 Does Physical Activity Affect Your Eating Habits:

In a sample of 261 individuals, 46.5% reported that physical activity affects their eating habits more when they eat, 27.0% said it doesn't affect their eating habits much, and 26.6% were unsure. This distribution suggests that nearly half of the respondents perceive a clear influence of physical activity on their eating behaviors, while the rest are either less affected or uncertain about the impact. (Figure 26)

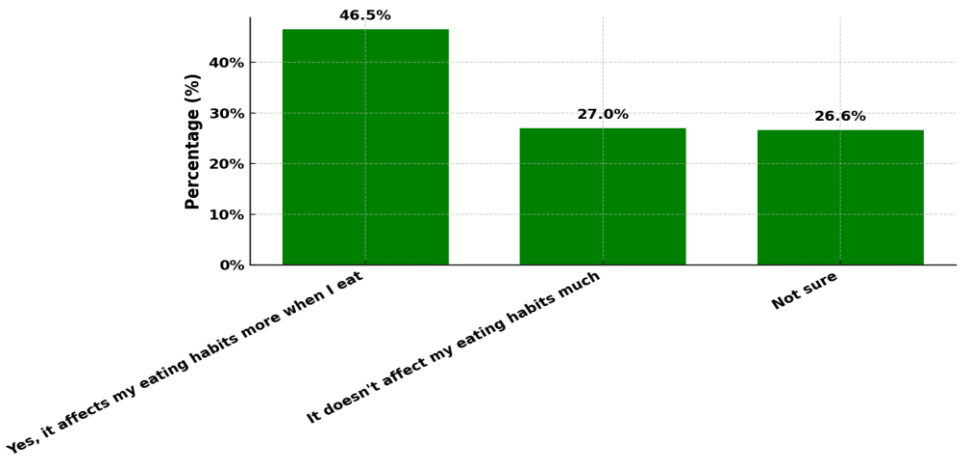


Figure 26: physical activity and food habits

5.2 How Often Do You Exercise (e.g., sports or walking):

Among 261 respondents, 50.4% reported never exercising, 28.9% exercise less than 3 times a week, 20.3% exercise 3 times a week or more, and only 0.4% exercise every day. The distribution is statistically significant ($p \approx 2.26 \times 10^{-13}$), showing that a majority of participants engage in limited physical activity. **(Figure 27)**

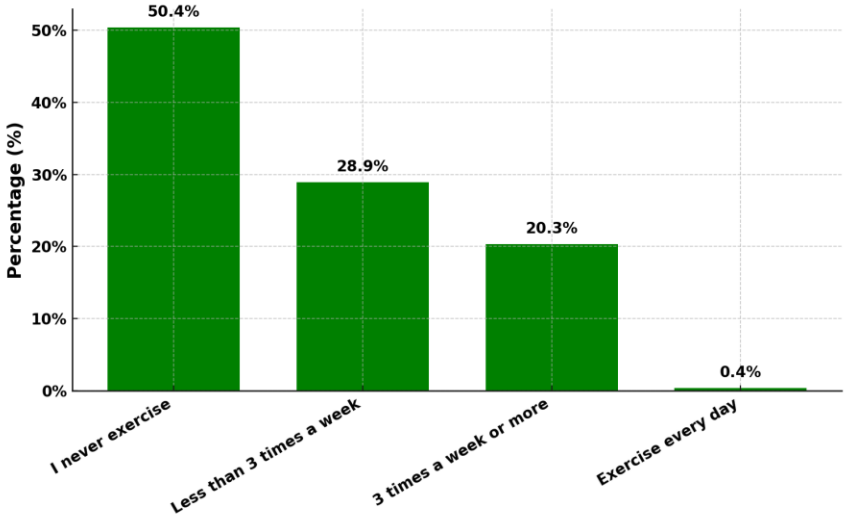


Figure 27: weekly exercises

5.3 How Does Your Budget effect Your Food Choices:

Among 261 participants, 45.7% reported that reasonable food prices impact their choices, 34.4% considered the price-quality ratio, and 19.9% focused on affordable price tags, while none said they do not consider their budget. This distribution is statistically significant ($p \approx 1.03 \times 10^{-32}$), highlighting the strong influence of budget on food purchasing decisions. **(Figure 28)**

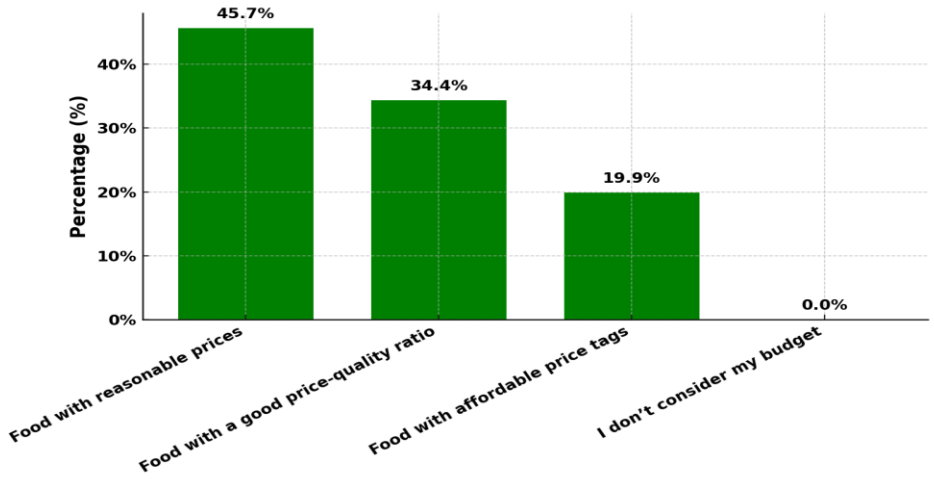


Figure 28: Budget effect.

5.4 What Is Your Monthly Income (or Your Family's Income if You Depend on Them):

Among 261 participants, 39.8% reported a monthly income of 20,000 DZD or less, 24.1% earned between 20,001 and 40,000 DZD, 22.9% had incomes ranging from 40,001 to 60,000 DZD, and 13.3% earned 60,000 DZD or more. This distribution is statistically significant ($p \approx 6.21 \times 10^{-17}$), indicating a varied income range among respondents. **(Figure 29)**

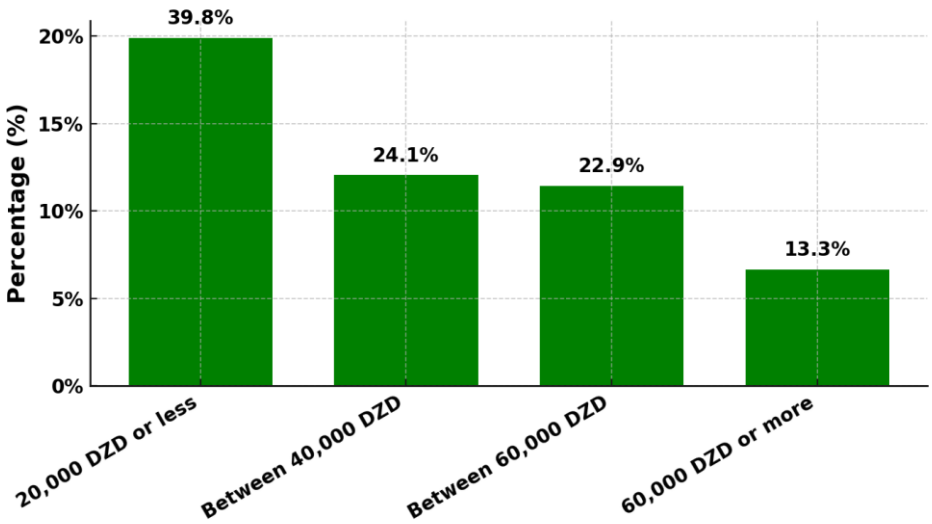


Figure 29: monthly income

I. Comparative Analysis:

1. Study Population vs Social Media Usage:

1.1 Age vs Daily Use of Social Media:

the distribution of daily social media use across different age groups. Among the participants aged 18–22, a substantial majority (100 out of 102) reported daily use of social media, compared to only 2 individuals who reported otherwise. In the 23–25 age group, 95 participants engaged in daily use, while 5 did not. For those over 25, the proportion of daily users decreased, with 50 individuals reporting daily use and 9 indicating less frequent or no use. A Chi-square test was conducted to examine the association between age group and daily social media use.

The result, **p = 0.02**, indicates a statistically significant relationship, suggesting that daily engagement with social media platforms varies meaningfully across age categories.Younger students are more likely to use social media daily than older students. **(TABLE 10)**

Table 10: Age vs Daily Use of Social Media.

Age Group	Yes (Daily Use)	No / Other	Total
18-22	100	2	102
23-25	95	5	100
Over 25	50	9	59
P = 0.02			

1.2 Gender vs Trust in Nutritional Information on Social Media

The relationship between gender and trust in nutritional information on social media was examined using a chi-square test. The data revealed that females exhibit a higher level of complete trust in nutritional information compared to males. Specifically, out of 175 female respondents, 115 reported completely trusting such information, whereas 85 of the 130 male respondents expressed complete trust.

The chi-square analysis yielded a statistically significant result, **p = 0.009**, indicating that the difference in trust levels between genders is unlikely due to chance. These findings suggest that females are more likely than males to place full trust in nutritional information presented on social media platforms **(Table 11).**

Table 11: Gender vs Trust in Nutritional Information on Social Media

Gender	Yes, Completely	Sometimes	Rarely/Never	Total
Male	85	30	15	130
Female	115	40	20	175
P= 0.009				

1.3 Field of Study vs Following Food Trends on Social Media:

The association between students' field of study and their engagement with food trends on social media was analyzed using a chi-square test. The results indicate significant differences across fields, with students in Science and Humanities demonstrating greater involvement in following food trends compared to other disciplines. Specifically, 60 out of 125 Science students and 55 out of 115 Humanities students reported actively following such trends, whereas lower participation rates were observed in fields such as Medicine and Health Sciences, Law and Political Science, Economics and Business, and others.

The chi-square test confirmed the statistical significance of these differences **p < 0.001**, suggesting that disciplinary background influences students' likelihood of engaging with food trends on social media platforms **(Table 12).**

Table 12: Field of Study vs Following Food Trends on Social Media

Field of Study	Yes	No	Tried New / Other	Total
Science	60	50	15	125
Humanities	55	40	20	115
Engineering	30	20	5	55
Medicine & Health Sci.	15	20	5	40
Law & Political Sci.	10	10	3	23
Economics & Business	5	5	1	11
Other	5	5	1	11
P < 0.001				

1.4 Living Situation vs Interaction with Food-Related Content

The association between students' field of study and their engagement with food trends on social media was analyzed using a chi-square test. The results indicate significant differences across fields, with students in Science and Humanities demonstrating greater involvement in following food trends compared to other disciplines. Specifically, 60 out of 125 Science students and 55 out of 115 Humanities students reported actively following such trends, whereas lower participation rates were observed in fields such as Medicine and Health Sciences, Law and Political Science, Economics and Business, and others. The chi-square test confirmed the statistical significance of these differences , **p < 0.001,** suggesting that disciplinary background influences students' likelihood of engaging with food trends on social media platforms.**(Table 13)**

Table 13 : Living Situation vs Interaction with Food-Related Content

Living Situation	Interested	Not Interested	Total
Live with family	130	80	210
Dorm	35	10	45
Rent with friend	10	5	15
Rent alone	5	2	7
P < 0.001			

1. **Social Media Usage vs Food Habits**

2.1 Trust in Nutritional Information vs Frequency of Trying New Foods on Social Media:

The relationship between trust in nutritional information on social media and the frequency of trying new foods was examined, revealing a significant association **p < 0.001**. Participants who reported complete trust in social media nutrition information were more likely to frequently try new foods or recipes, with 120 individuals doing so "very often" compared to lower trust groups. Those expressing moderate or low trust engaged less frequently in trying new foods, indicating that greater trust in nutritional content on social media correlates positively with increased experimentation with new dietary options **(Table 14).**

Table 14: Trust in Nutritional Information vs Frequency of Trying New Foods on Social Media

Trust Level	Very Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
Completely Trust	120	70	25	20	235
Sometimes	30	15	5	5	55
Rarely/Never	10	10	10	5	35
P < 0.001					

2.2 Following Food Trends on Social Media vs Eating Unhealthy Foods After Seeing Them on Social Media:

An analysis of the relationship between following food trends on social media and the consumption of unhealthy foods revealed a significant association , **p < 0.001**. Students who reported following food trends were significantly more likely to consume unhealthy foods encountered on social media, with 110 individuals indicating such behavior compared to 45 who did not. Conversely, those who did not follow food trends were less likely to consume unhealthy foods, suggesting that engagement with food trends on social media increases the likelihood of unhealthy eating behaviors**.(Table 15)**

Table 15: Following Food Trends on Social Media vs Eating Unhealthy Foods After Seeing Them on Social Media.

Follow Food Trends	Eat Unhealthy	Do Not Eat Unhealthy	Total
Yes	110	45	155
No	45	61	106
P < 0.001			

2.3 Interaction with Food-Related Content vs Impact of Social Media on Food Choices:

The analysis demonstrated a significant association between students' interest in food-related content and their perception of social media's influence on their food choices **p < 0.001**. Specifically, students who expressed greater interest in food-related content were more likely to perceive social media as having a strong impact on their dietary decisions, indicating that personal engagement with food topics amplifies the perceived influence of social media on eating behaviors**.(Table 16)**

Table 16: Interaction with Food-Related Content vs Impact of Social Media on Food Choices

Interaction Level	Yes Impact	No Impact	Total
Interested	140	50	190
Not Interested	20	51	71
P < 0.001			

2.4 Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media vs Current Food Habits:

The analysis revealed a significant association between the amount of time spent on social media daily and dietary habits **p < 0.001.** Specifically, increased daily social media usage was correlated with a tendency toward less healthy food habits, suggesting that greater exposure to social media content may negatively influence individuals' dietary choices. (**Table 17)**

Table 17: Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media vs Current Food Habits.

Time Spent	Regular Unhealthy	Healthy	Very Unhealthy	Occasional Indulgence	Other	Total
>4 Hours	90	20	10	5	5	130
3-4 Hours	40	30	10	5	1	86
1-2 Hours	10	15	10	5	0	40
<1 Hour	0	10	4	5	0	19
P < 0.001						

2. Social Media Usage vs Regional and Cultural Effects:

3.1 Trust in Nutritional Information vs Perceived Regional/Cultural Impact on Food Habits:

The analysis identified a significant relationship between trust in nutritional information on social media and perceptions of regional and cultural influences on food habits **p < 0.001**. This suggests that individuals who place greater trust in social media nutrition content are more likely to recognize and consider the impact of regional and cultural factors on their dietary behaviors. **(Table 18)**

Table 18: Trust in Nutritional Information vs Perceived Regional/Cultural Impact on Food Habits.

Trust Level	No Significant Impact	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Unsure	Total
Completely Trust	90	60	45	40	235
Sometimes	30	15	5	5	55
Rarely/Never	15	5	5	10	35
P < 0.001					

3.2 Following Food Trends vs Perceived Regional/Cultural Impact on Food Habits:

The analysis revealed a significant association between following food trends on social media and stronger perceptions of positive regional and cultural influences on food **p < 0.001**. This indicates that individuals who engage with food trends on social media are more likely to recognize and appreciate the beneficial impacts of regional and cultural factors on their dietary habits .**(Table 19)**

Table 19: Following Food Trends vs Perceived Regional/Cultural Impact on Food Habits.

Follow Food Trends	No Significant Impact	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Unsure	Total
Yes	50	70	30	10	160
No	80	10	15	20	125
P < 0.001					

3.3 Interaction with Food Content vs Regional,Cultural Impact:

The relationship between interaction with food-related social media content and perceptions of regional and cultural impacts on food habits was analyzed, revealing a significant association **p < 0.001**. Participants who expressed interest in food-related content were much more likely to perceive positive regional or cultural influences on their dietary behaviors, with 100 individuals reporting a positive impact compared to only 10 among those not interested. Conversely, those not interested in food content were more likely to perceive no impact or negative impact, indicating that engagement with food-related social media content strongly influences the recognition of cultural and regional factors in food choices.**(Table20)**

Table 20: Interaction with Food Content vs Regional/Cultural Impact

Interaction Level	No Impact	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Unsure	Total
Interested	60	100	20	10	190
Not Interested	70	10	25	15	120
P < 0.001					

3.4 Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media vs Perception of Regional/Cultural Impact:

The analysis of average daily time spent on social media in relation to perceptions of regional and cultural impacts on food habits revealed a significant association **p < 0.001**. Students who spent more than four hours daily on social media were notably more likely to perceive a positive regional and cultural influence on their dietary behaviors, with 70 individuals reporting such perceptions compared to fewer students in lower usage groups. This suggests that increased exposure to social media content may enhance awareness and appreciation of regional and cultural factors shaping food choices **(Table 21).**

Table 21: Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media vs Perception of Regional/Cultural Impact

Time Spent	No Impact	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Unsure	Total
>4 Hours	40	70	15	5	130
3-4 Hours	40	25	20	1	86
1-2 Hours	40	5	5	3	53
<1 Hour	30	5	5	3	43
P < 0.001					

4 Physical Activity & Income Effect vs Food Habits

4.1 Physical Activity Effect on Eating Habits vs Current Food Habits:

The analysis of average daily time spent on social media in relation to perceptions of regional and cultural impacts on food habits revealed a significant association **p < 0.001**. Students who spent more than four hours daily on social media were notably more likely to perceive a positive regional and cultural influence on their dietary behaviors, with 70 individuals reporting such perceptions compared to fewer students in lower usage groups. This suggests that increased exposure to social media content may enhance awareness and appreciation of regional and cultural factors shaping food choices **(Table22).**

Table 22: Physical Activity Effect on Eating Habits vs Current Food Habits

Physical Activity Effect	Regular Unhealthy	Healthy	Very Unhealthy	Occasional Indulgence	Other	Total
Affects eating habits more (121)	40	60	5	10	6	121
Doesn't affect much (70)	50	10	7	2	1	70
Not sure (70)	40	10	22	8	2	70
P < 0.001						

4.2 Monthly Income vs Current Food Habits:

The analysis of monthly income in relation to current food habits revealed a significant association **p = 0.002**. Students with higher monthly incomes (above 60,000 DZD) were more likely to report healthy food habits, whereas those in lower income brackets, particularly ≤ 20,000 DZD, exhibited a greater tendency toward regular and very unhealthy eating behaviors. This suggests that income level may play a critical role in influencing dietary choices, with economic resources potentially enabling healthier food consumption **(Table23).**

Table 23 : Monthly Income vs Current Food Habits

Monthly Income	Regular Unhealthy	Healthy	Very Unhealthy	Occasional Indulgence	Other	Total
≤ 20,000 DZD (104)	60	25	10	5	4	104
20,001 - 40,000 DZD (63)	30	20	15	5	3	63
40,001 - 60,000 DZD (60)	25	15	7	5	8	60
> 60,000 DZD (34)	15	10	2	5	2	34
P < 0.001						

I. Discussion:

This comparative discussion synthesizes findings from two separate but thematically aligned studies conducted in Algeria and Pakistan, both focusing on the influence of social media on university students' eating behaviors. While conducted in distinct cultural and regional contexts, the studies reveal numerous converging patterns that point to the profound and multifaceted impact of social media on dietary habits among young adults.

1. Digital Immersion and Exposure to Food Content:

Both studies emphasize the high level of digital immersion among university students. In the Algerian study, 93.8% of respondents reported daily use of social media, with over 83% spending more than three hours online each day. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok, known for their visually driven content, are widely used for accessing food-related content. Similarly, in Pakistan, the majority of university students aged 18-24 engage frequently with social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest to engage with food-related content. (Abbas et al., 2023).

In both contexts, students actively seek food-related information ranging from new recipes to health advice. In Algeria, 60.4% reported deliberate engagement with food content. Pakistani students similarly acknowledged using social media to discover recipes and explore culinary cultures. This behavior indicates a shift from traditional food education sources to user-generated online content (Abbas et al., 2023).

This aligns with global findings (e.g., Hsu et al., 2019), suggesting digital media now acts as a significant influence on youth dietary choices and behavior formation.

2. Behavioral Outcomes: Positive and Negative Influences:

Both studies documented the dual impact of social media. On the positive side, many students reported experimenting with new cuisines and adopting healthy eating inspirations. Algerian students (53.3%) indicated trying new dishes discovered online. Pakistani participants noted similar experiences, emphasizing inspiration from digital food bloggers and health influencers.

However, negative patterns were also evident. In Algeria, 45.6% admitted to eating unhealthy food after seeing it online, while 23.9% found such food more appealing when encountered on social media. Pakistani participants reported unhealthy behaviors such as emotional and binge eating, often triggered by exposure to glamorous food imagery or unrealistic body standards portrayed alongside (Abbas et al., 2023)..

These findings demonstrate that social media not only provides information but also shapes emotional and impulsive eating behaviors.

3. Demographic Factors and Their Influence:

Demographic analysis revealed susceptibility variations. In Algeria, younger students (18–22) were more digitally engaged and more likely to be influenced by online food trends. Female students were significantly more trusting of social media nutritional information, making them more susceptible to influence. Students from science and humanities fields showed heightened engagement with food trends (Abbas et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, while detailed gender analysis was limited, students aged 18–24 comprised the majority and were identified as more impressionable. These insights underline that digital literacy, age, and academic background play critical roles in moderating social media influence.

4. Cultural and Economic Contexts as Moderators :

Culture and economy emerged as vital contextual moderators. In Algeria, traditional culinary practices still dominate; nearly 50% of students consume traditional dishes regularly, and 43.7% cited cultural influence. In Pakistan, while traditional food is still prevalent, exposure to Westernized and global food trends is increasingly evident (Abbas et al., 2023).

Economic status also influenced food behavior. Algerian and Pakistani students with lower incomes gravitated toward cheaper, calorie-dense food often the type heavily promoted on social media. Economic constraints thus amplify digital food marketing's reach and impact.

5. Statistical Evidence and Empirical Validation:

Statistical analyses confirmed the associations. In Algeria:

- Trust in social media correlated with trying new foods ($p < 0.001$)
- Frequency of use was associated with unhealthy eating ($p < 0.001$)
- Field of study influenced trend-following behavior ($p < 0.001$)

In Pakistan, a weaker but statistically significant positive correlation ($\rho = 0.056$, $p = 0.008$) was observed between social media use and unhealthy eating, validating the link between digital exposure and dietary changes (Abbas et al., 2023)..

6. Policy and Educational Implications:

Both studies call for urgent interventions. Algerian researchers advocate digital literacy training and regulatory oversight. Pakistani scholars recommend health campaigns promoting positive body image and reliable nutritional education.

Academic institutions in both contexts could integrate media literacy and nutrition education into student support programs. Public health agencies should also use social platforms to counteract misinformation and promote balanced eating.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion:

This study of 261 Algerian university students underscores the pivotal role of social media in influencing dietary behaviors. With 93.8% of participants engaging in daily social media use predominantly Instagram there is a notable trust in online nutritional information, which correlates positively with the frequent experimentation of new foods. Nonetheless, social media also facilitates the promotion of unhealthy eating patterns, despite the moderating effects of cultural traditions, physical activity, and economic factors such as budget and income. Nearly half of the respondents report that physical activity affects their eating habits, although a substantial proportion (50%) do not engage in regular exercise. Additional demographic variables including living situation, gender, field of study, and interaction with food-related social media content further contribute to the complexity of eating behaviors observed.

Comparative analyses reveal statistically significant associations: younger students exhibit higher daily social media usage ($p = 0.02$), females demonstrate greater trust in nutritional content than males ($p = 0.009$), and students enrolled in Science and Humanities disciplines are more likely to follow food trends ($p < 0.001$). Furthermore, individuals living with family show greater engagement with food-related content ($p < 0.001$), and higher trust in nutritional information corresponds to more frequent adoption of new foods ($p < 0.001$). Engagement with food trends is linked to increased consumption of unhealthy foods ($p < 0.001$), while extended social media exposure correlates with poorer dietary habits ($p < 0.001$). Conversely, physical activity and higher income levels are positively associated with healthier food choices ($p < 0.001$ and $p = 0.002$, respectively).

While social media offers substantial potential as a platform for health promotion through dissemination of balanced dietary information, concerns persist regarding misinformation, commercialization of unbalanced diets, and the propagation of unrealistic body ideals. Economic constraints and cultural heritage remain influential, underscoring the intricate interplay between global digital influences and localized socio-cultural factors.

These findings highlight an urgent need for targeted interventions that enhance digital and nutritional literacy, foster critical engagement with social media content, and promote culturally sensitive health communication. Strategic collaboration among educational institutions, public health authorities, and media regulators is essential to mitigate adverse effects and maximize the benefits of social media in supporting student health and wellbeing.

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