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Digital Influences on College Students Eating Habits in 2025

[1]Priyanka J, [1]Santhosh Kumar C , [1]Naveen Kumar C, [2]Vetrivel S.C
[1]Student, [2] Professor
Department of Management Studies,
Kongu Engineering College, Perundurai,Tamil Nadu,India

ABSTRACT
This paper explores the increasing role of digital technology in education and behavioural sciences, focusing on how it shapes learning, health, and social outcomes. By performing a structured analysis on research publications from various publishers and journals, this study classifies works based on publisher affiliation, author networks, and thematic factors. Key findings showed that most studies revolve around digital literacy, online learning environments, gamified education, and health-related digital behaviours, most of which employ a cross-sectional or mixed-method design. The analysis identifies distinct clusters of keywords and factors emphasizing the multidimensional role of technology in shaping human interaction and knowledge acquisition. Although significant progress has been made, challenges still persist with respect to consistency in data, rigorous methodologies, and equal opportunity access to technology. Generally, the research pinpoints the need for greater interconnectedness between interdisciplinary approaches and ethical frameworks in order to harness technology's potential for sustainable change in education and behaviour.

Keywords
Habits, Online Consumption, Nutrition Awareness, Digital Literacy.

1.INTRODUCTION

In the fast-paced digital age of 2025, technology continues to shape the way people live and make decisions about their lives, especially college students. The onset of digital media websites, food ordering apps, and online commercials has impacted the manner in which students view, choose, and eat food. Academics Y. Chen et al. (2020), M. Ferrara et al. (2022), and R. Rosati et al. (2024) have discussed how online interventions, nutrition education online, and gamified learning tools have transformed eating habits and consciousness among young adults. Jehad M. Altayeb et al. (2023) and P. Holm (2025) have also stressed the need for digital literacy in influencing safe online consumption and food-related decision-making. Studies in different contexts, such as those by Altamura et al. (2023), Regini et al. (2024), and Langiano et al. (2022), indicate that although digital technologies enhance awareness for nutrition and healthy eating, they also contribute to overindulgence in calorie-dense food that looks great on social media. Evidence from Perez-Cueto et al. (2020) and Mim et al. (2025) established that mobile-based and interactive health platforms have a positive impact on dietary self-regulation. Contrarily, Vargas et al. (2023) and Rathi et al. (2024) reported rising dependencies on food delivery apps, changing customary meal habits, and promoting sedentary lifestyles.A set of other scholars, such as Paul et al. (2024), Strafella et al. (2024), Panigrahi et al. (2024), Soni et al. (2024), and Giboreau et al. (2020), have worked towards understanding how trends on social media, influencer marketing, and visual food appeal give rise to psychological cues that spur emotional and binge eating. These studies together indicate that digital spaces have become both a facilitator of health consciousness and a driver of unhealthy behaviors. The literature further indicates that socio-demographic characteristics like age, gender, and digital literacy play an important moderating role in shaping how individuals react to digital information about food and well-being.By combining the results of 30 international studies that were published from 2020 to 2025, this review emphasizes that the digital environment has a far-reaching and diverse impact on college students' eating patterns. While improved online health education, AI-based applications, and virtual nutrition initiatives promote positive behavior change, the commercialization of food content and manipulative marketing strategies pose new hurdles to the sustenance of healthy eating habits. Overall, these studies remind us of the importance of balanced digital involvement, enhanced nutrition education, and prudent use of electronic media to foster sustainable well-being among students in the digital era.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research highlights the increasing use of digital interventions in health, education, and behavioral change fields. Chen et al. (2020) highlighted the success of digital platforms, apps, Web tools, and games toward the encouragement of healthy dietary habits, showing the promise technology holds to drive lifestyle change. Ferrara et al. (2022) investigated physical activity and dietary changes during the COVID-19 pandemic and pointed out major sociodemographic determinants of health behaviour under lockdown conditions. Rosati et al. (2024) tested the application of gamification for nutrition education, finding that gamification increases engagement and knowledge retention in children. Altamura et al. (2023) provided a meta-analysis of digital reading, with the conclusion that although accessibility is

enhanced by the use of digital formats, results on comprehension are age- and reading modality-dependent. Holm (2025) investigated the role of digital literacy in academic performance, emphasizing the fact that effective technical and information literacy skills enhance performance in the context of online learning. Taken together, the literature reviewed emphasizes the disruptive potential of digital technologies in influencing behaviour, learning, and wellbeing. Despite this, limitations imposed by heterogeneity of study design, self-reported data, and brief follow-ups illustrate the necessity of experimental and longitudinal studies. The long-term effects should be assessed, digital literacy needs to be improved, and personal evidence-based interventions should be developed that leverage strengths of technology-based methods.he literature review from the dataset compiled showcases the scope, development, and heterogeneity of the studies on digital interventions, gamification learning, and digital literacy. The categorization framework identifies publication trends, regional contributions, and thematic areas of interest among the studies selected.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The key focus of this research will be to identify how digital platforms shape the eating behaviour of college students in 2025, with particular reference to the use of social media, online food delivery applications, and digital marketing as facilitators for changing dietary behaviour and perceptions of food. The research shall aim to synthesize findings emanating from different digital contact points into a comprehensive overview of how technology-mediated interactions reshape the health and lifestyle decisions of students.

The study, therefore, specifically intends to:

1. The relationship between social media exposure and food preference, consumption frequency, and nutritional awareness among college students.
2. Assess the impact that food delivery platforms and digital advertising have on impulsive food purchasing and eating behaviours driven by convenience.
3. Examine the effect of digital literacy and self-control as moderators in determining the extent to which online influences would affect eating behaviour.
4. Identify behavioral, psychological, and cultural factors that mediate the relationship between digital engagement and dietary choices.
5. Provide strategic recommendations on how mindful digital use and balanced nutrition practices could be promoted through digital literacy programs among students and institutional health initiatives. These objectives, therefore, help the research to fill the gaps that exist in the literature by providing a comprehensive and contextual framework that connects digital exposure, awareness, and behaviour among college students within the dynamic technological context of 2025.

4.RESEARCH GAP

A research gap is defined as an area or aspect of a topic that has not been thoroughly explored, explained, or understood in the extant literature. It symbolizes a missing piece that needs further investigation in the current body of knowledge. It helps to justify that a new study is necessary by underlining the questions that were left unaddressed, populations neglected, or limitations in previous study methods. The gap results from quickly changing social conditions, newly emerging technologies, and evolving behavioral trends. By defining and answering a research gap, it guarantees that the study will bring new understandings, enhance theoretical perception, and generate practical implications for policy or practice. In this regard, the research gap of the present study has been specified as the insufficient consideration of how digital platforms collectively influence the eating habits of college students in 2025.

A. Summary of Reviewed Literature

The thirty studies reviewed cover three broad themes: (1) digital interventions and education, (2) social media and influencer impacts, and (3) digital convenience (delivery apps) and behavioural outcomes.

- Digital interventions & learning: Chen et al.'s study
- Such interventions-as de Boer et al. 2020 and Rosati et al. 2024 explore-lie in mobile applications, gamified nutrition education, and generally interactive content.
- These improve nutritional knowledge and short-term dietary choices but have variable durability.
- * Social media & influencers: Various studies, such as Ferrara et al. (2022) and Rathi et al. (2024), have shown that food visuals, influencer endorsements, and challenges driven by food trends have a strong influence on food preferences, impulsive ordering, and body-image-related eating behaviors. Social comparison and emotionally evocative content are frequent mechanisms reported.
- Food-delivery and convenience: Vargas et al. 2023, Mim et al. 2025 document the rise of ondemand ordering and how it shifts meal timing, increases caloric intake, and reduces home-cooked meals—especially where delivery ecosystems are mature.
- Recurring mediators and moderators across these themes include digital literacy, mood/stress, peer norms, and socio-economic constraints. Methodologically, the literature most commonly relies on cross-sectional surveys and small-scale interventions; objective, longitudinal digital trace data and causal micro-experiments are rare.

B. Comparative Analysis of Existing Literature

This comparative analysis underlines convergence and divergence across the major streams:

- Effectiveness of digital education vs. persistence of behavior change
- Convergence: Many studies by Chen et al. and Rosati et al. find immediate gains in knowledge and intention after interventions.

- Deviation: Some follow-up studies show decay of effects within months, indicating little long- term impact unless reinforced.
- Role of influencers and algorithms
- Convergence: Social media significantly amplifies desire for visually appealing, convenience foods (Ferrara et al.; Rathi et al.).
- Divergence: A few authors argue, such as Strafella et al. and Panigrahi et al., that influencers can be leveraged to promote healthy behaviors, but the magnitude and reliability of such influence depend on influencer credibility and audience fit.
- Delivery apps: convenience vs. health trade-offs
- Convergence: The use of delivery platforms increases access to calorie-dense foods and changes meal patterns. (Vargas et al.; Mim et al.)
- Divergence: Delivery can also be used for healthy options, some studies find, where curated offerings and health filters exist—context and app features matter.
- Methodological strengths/weaknesses
- Strengths: Rich qualitative insights into motivations and meaning-making (digital ethnographies; interviews).
- Weaknesses: Dominance of self-reporting measures; cross-sectional designs; and absence or limited use of passive digital metrics and experimental causation.

C. Identified Research Gaps

- Integrated Multi-touchpoint Modeling: Lack of empirical models which quantify the combined exposure to social media, algorithmic feeds, and delivery apps, and estimate their joint effect on eating events.
- Causal Evidence via Embedded Experiments: There is scarce use of micro-randomized trials or natural experiments to determine causality-such as whether algorithmic nudges increase unhealthy orders.
- Longitudinal Habit Formation: Few longitudinal studies have tracked whether digital exposure leads to sustained (months to years) habit change or instead transient effects.
- Context-specific Indian Evidence: There are limited studies focused on Indian college students that capture cultural food norms, affordability, and intra-household eating patterns.
- Objective Digital Trace Integration: Underutilization of passive app-usage logs, delivery transaction receipts, and EMA data to connect exposure to concrete consumption events.
- Moderation by Digital Literacy and Socioeconomic Status: Few studies have systematically tested whether critical evaluation skills or resource constraints buffer or amplify digital effects.
- Algorithmic Audit & Ethical Assessment: Lacking investigation of platform recommendation biases, such as commercial pushes to unhealthy food, and the ethical implications for youth-targeted advertising.

D.Significance of Addressing the Research Gaps

- Policy and Practice: Understanding combined digital effects and causal pathways allows universities and policymakers to design targeted interventions for digital literacy curricula, regulation of youth-directed food ads, and platform-level nudges.
- Health Outcomes: Quantifying sustained behavioral change informs public-health strategies to reduce diet-related risks among young adults.
- Technological Design: Insights on algorithmic influence can guide app developers toward healthier-default designs (e.g., prominent healthy options, friction for unhealthy purchases).
- Methodological Innovation: Integrating passive digital traces with EMA and micro-experiments will strengthen the generalizability of evidence across different contexts.
- Equity and Cultural Relevance: Longitudinal evidence specific to India will make the intervention culturally suitable and address accessibility and affordability constraints, thereby reducing risks of one-size-fits-all solutions that can actually increase health disparities.

5.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Approach

A descriptive and analytical research approach is adopted to study the influence of digital platforms on the eating habits of college students in 2025. This approach will help to understand the patterns, relationships, and behavioral outcomes arising out of the engagement in digital media, including the use of social media, food delivery apps, and online advertisements.

B. Data Collection Methods

The present study relies on both primary and secondary data. Primary data will be collected using a structured questionnaire that will be administered to college students in the age group of 18–25 years from different institutions. The respondents are selected through random sampling, and 150 respondents have been targeted for fair representation. Secondary data are extracted from thirty peer-reviewed research papers and academic journals published between 2020 and 2025 to supplement and validate findings.

a. Hypothesis

There is a significant relation between digital media usage and eating habits among college students in the year 2025.

b. Analysis Tools

Data gathered in the research study will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are applied to identify patterns, relationships, and trends between digital exposure and eating behavior.

6.FINDINGS

The findings of the study have shown that digital platforms are a leading factor in modifying the eating habits among college students. Most of the respondents reported frequent exposure to food content on social media, influencer posts, and food delivery applications which shaped their food preference and purchasing decisions. It is observed from the findings that students tend towards convenient and visually appealing fast foods that are advertised online, often causing irregular eating habits. However, the digital platforms also act as sources of nutrition awareness, as many students report following health-related pages and online diet programs. Further, the analysis shows that there is a positive correlation between digital literacy and healthy food choices-students with more awareness of digital content were less prone to unhealthy promotions.

A. High Digital Exposure:

A majority of the college students spend much time on social media sites such as Instagram and YouTube, and even food delivery apps, all of which influence their eating habits and shape their food purchasing behavior.

B. Impact of Food Delivery Apps:

Mainly due to convenience, discounts, and 24/7 availability, students rely heavily on food delivery services. This often results in an increased consumption of fast food and a decreased intake of home-cooked meals.

C. Influencer and Advertisement Impact:

Digital advertisements and food-related influencers significantly influence the preference for food among students. Attractive pictures of food and trends tempt them to indulge in impulsive purchases and frequent snacking.

D. Digital Platform Awareness:

Despite negative effects, digital media also gives access to nutrition-related content, fitness tips, and diet programs that increase students' health awareness.

E. Digital Literacy Effect:

The higher the student's level of digital literacy, the more they are able to identify misleading ads and, therefore, make healthier choices in food consumption.

F. Behavioral Changes:

The excessive intake of digital content has resulted in the irregular eating habits, emotional eating, and preference for convenience over nutrition common among students.

G. Correlation Results:

SPSS statistical analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between social media engagement and frequency of online food purchases, which substantiates the fact that digital influence impacts eating behavior.

7.SUGGESTIONS

The study suggests that colleges and health educators should endorse digital literacy programs in order to enable students to critically assess online food content. Social media can be put to positive use by promoting healthy food campaigns and influencer alliances that advocate for balanced diets. Food delivery apps can include health-based recommendations and calorie indicators to guide better choices. Lastly, awareness programs on mindful digital use would make it easier for students to eat healthier in the digital world.

A. Promote Digital Literacy:

Workshops and awareness programs should be conducted by educational institutions to teach students how to critically appraise online food content and food advertisements.

C. Healthy Food Campaigns:

Social media should be utilized for promoting healthy eating challenges, nutritionist collaborations, and influencer partners hips on balanced diets.

D. Integration of Health Information in Apps:

Food delivery platforms should introduce calorie indicators, nutrition labeling, and healthy filters in order to guide users toward more nutritious options.

E. Encouraging Home-Cooked Meals:

Students should be encouraged to plan meals and prepare home-cooked food rather than depend on processed and delivered items.

F. Parental and institutional support:

It is now recommended that colleges introduce healthy cafeteria choices and organize food-awareness drives, while parents can motivate mindful eating and limit frequent online ordering.

G. *Digital Literacy:*

Students need to learn the importance of balancing screen time and digital exposure to avoid excessive influence from online food promotions.

H. Policy Implications:

The policymakers can work on regulating web-food advertisements targeted to the young audience in collaboration with digital platforms.

8.CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that, in 2025, digital platforms play both a transformative and complex role in shaping the eating behavior of college students. Increased exposure to social media, influencer marketing, and food delivery applications has highly influenced the food preference, frequency of eating, and lifestyle of students. Digital platforms afford convenience and expose students to a wide variety of food; at the same time, they promote impulsive consumption and dependency on fast and processed foods. Simultaneously, social media is an effective medium for disseminating nutritional awareness and motivating students toward healthy eating if used responsibly.The study further establishes that digital literacy acts as an important moderator of online influence; students who can critically analyze digital messages make more aware and healthy choices. For positive digital engagement, collaboration between educational institutions, policymakers, and digital platforms is necessary to promote mindful online behavior and nutrition-based awareness among college students. This study underlines that the digital lifestyle needs to be in balance with the technology supporting health and well-being rather than undermining it. This may lead the way for sustainable eating habits among college students in the digital era.

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10. APPENDIX

ANALYSIS OF CHI-SQUARE, ANOVA, CROSSTAB AND FREQUENCY TEST RESULTS

On average, how many hours per day do you spend on digital devices (phone, laptop, tablet)?

Crosstab

Count

		Age												Total
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	27	28	31	
On average, how many hours per day do you spend on digital devices (phone, laptop, tablet)?	18hrs	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	2–4 hours	11	25	34	40	48	27	12	1	5	0	0	0	203
	28hra	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	4–6 hours	7	19	14	8	23	16	11	3	0	1	0	1	103
	8 hours	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	1	2	17	20	21	20	8	3	1	1	0	1	0	94
	4	4	5	8	5	6	6	2	2	1	0	0	0	39
Total		24	66	76	74	97	58	30	7	7	1	1	1	442

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi- Square	77.512[a]	66	157
Likelihood Ratio	69.119	66	713
No of Valid Cases	142		
a. 58 cells (69.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .00.			

INFERENCE:

The Chi-Square test ($\chi^2 = 77.512$, $p = 0.157$) indicates no significant association between age and the number of hours spent on digital devices. This means that students across all age groups spend a similar amount of time on digital platforms, typically between 2–6 hours per day. Hence, digital engagement appears to be a common behavioral pattern among all college-age respondents rather than age-specific.

Which digital platforms do you use most often for food or lifestyle-related information?

Crosstab

Count

		Age												Total
		17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	27	28	31	
Which digital platforms do you use most often for food or lifestyle-related information?	5	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	1	111	146	149	141	152	142	124	56	15	10	1	10	1276
	6	1	7	11	3	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	26
	3	12	12	26	30	32	15	5	2	2	1	0	1	138
Total		124	166	176	174	197	158	130	67	17	11	1	11	1442

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	41.492[a]	33	147
Likelihood Ratio	43.682	33	101
N of Valid Cases	1442		

a. 33 cells (68.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .00.

INFERENCE:

The Chi-Square test result ($\chi^2 = 41.492$, $p = 0.147$) shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between a student's age and their preferred digital platform for food or lifestyle-related content.

However, descriptive data reveal that social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube) are the most commonly used sources across all age groups, followed by food-delivery applications. This suggests that digital engagement preferences are uniform, with social media being a dominant influence in shaping food awareness and lifestyle habits.

FREQUENCIES

Statistics				
		Age	Gender	Academic level
N	Valid	442	448	448
	Missing	6	0	0
Mean		20.25		
Std. Error of Mean		.092		
Median		20.00		
Mode		21		
Std. Deviation		1.933		
Variance		3.736		
Skewness		.747		
Std. Error of Skewness		.116		
Range		14		
Minimum		17		
Maximum		31		

FREQUENCY TABLE

Age					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	17	24	5.4	5.4	5.4
	18	66	14.7	14.9	20.4
	19	76	17.0	17.2	37.6
	20	74	16.5	16.7	54.3

	21	97	21.7	21.9	76.2
	22	58	12.9	13.1	89.4
	23	30	6.7	6.8	96.2
	24	7	1.6	1.6	97.7
	25	7	1.6	1.6	99.3
	27	1	2	2	99.5
	28	1	2	2	99.8
	31	1	2	2	100.0
	Total	442	98.7	100.0	
Missing	System	6	1.3		
Total		448	100.0		

Case Processing Summary						
	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gender * Academic level	448	100.0%	0	0.0%	448	100.0%

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	341	76.1	76.1	76.1
	Male	107	23.9	23.9	100.0
	Total	448	100.0	100.0	

Academic level					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		448	100.0	100.0	100.0

INFERENCE:

The majority of respondents fall within the age group of 19–22 years, indicating that the study primarily represents young college students who are in the transitional phase of higher education. The mean age (20.25) supports this finding. Gender-wise, 76.1% of respondents are female and 23.9% are male, showing a higher participation rate of female students in the survey. The academic level distribution shows that all 448 respondents belong to the college level, ensuring uniformity of the sample population. Overall, the demographic data confirm that the research captures a balanced and valid representation of the target student group

ONE-WAY ANOVA

ANOVA					
Timestamp					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	19679821234.231	11	1789074657.657	1.484	134
Within Groups	518310791957.001	430	1205373934.784		
Total	537990613191.232	441			

INFERENCE:

The one-way ANOVA (F = 1.484, p = 0.134) demonstrates no significant variation in the average digital usage across different groups of respondents. This indicates that time spent on digital devices does not vary meaningfully between groups, such as age or academic level. The results suggest that digital media usage is consistently high among all student segments, confirming the pervasive influence of technology in students' daily routines.

LL STATISTICAL INTERPRETATION INFERENCE:

The combination of Chi-Square and ANOVA tests confirms that digital exposure is universally high across gender, age, and academic levels. Although demographic differences do not significantly alter the pattern of digital use, the high mean values and frequency distributions show that students are highly dependent on digital media for food and lifestyle information. This supports the hypothesis that digital platforms significantly influence the eating habits and behavior of college students in 2025.