Impact of Food-related Posts in Social Media on Eating Habits and Dietary Choices among the Undergraduates of Sri Lankan Universities

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Abstract

Compared to past decades, there is a notable rise in social media influencers and content creators who focus on food-related content. Simultaneously, the number of viewers who interact with food-related content also increases. Along with the rise of food-related content in social media, the prevalence of eating disorders and poor dietary choices also increased in young adults. Literature exhibits the gap in assessing the impact of FRPs (food-related posts) based on the Sri Lankan context. This study intends to analyze the frequency of exposure to FRPs and their effects on eating habits, food choices, and food cravings among university undergraduates in Sri Lanka. In this regard, an online survey based on the Google Forms platform was conducted to collect the relevant data. Correlation analysis and the χ^2(5% significance level) were chosen to evaluate the association between variables. Some 396 university undergraduates (female=68.9% & male=31.1%) between the age of 18-42 participated in the study. As per the results, the frequency of exposure to FRPs is notably high where the exposure to FRPs is associated with the number of social media accounts. Results indicate the popular site for watching FRPs is YouTube (63.13%) and the highly preferred contents were reviews on street food places, snacks and desserts, and food preparation videos. The study reports a significant effect due to FRPs on eating habits and food choices than food cravings from the analysis (p value<0.05). The impacts of FRPs might be positive and negative an equal ratio (73.7%) of participants' views.

Keywords: ***Food-related posts, social media, food habits, dietary choices, university undergraduates***

I. INTRODUCTION

By today, social media (SM) platforms have become an integral part of university students' lives and SMs have been imposing a multifaceted impact on students. Information retrieval via social networking sites is specifically linked to the needs of youth consumers for inclusion in the emerging trends of cultural and consumption culture, where technology is an agency to the emotions, cognition, and social patterns of Generation Y (Khalid, Jayasainan and Hassim, 2018). Social media usage in Sri Lanka has been significant over the last decades, representing 34.2% of social media users (from the population) and having the highest range of users aged 18 or above (47.0% of the users) (Kemp, 2024). Furthermore, Facebook has become the most popular social media platform, where YouTube and Instagram follow closely behind. In the above cluster of SM users, the 18-34 years age range corresponds to the largest portion who use SMs for more than 1 hour. Furthermore, 46% of users purchase products or services after seeing reviews or recommendations and 90% check online reviews before making a purchase (Digital Outlook Sri Lanka, 2024). This fact highlights the significant role SMs play in governing user decisions, particularly among young adults. Thus, there may be an influence of food-related posts on decision-making among SM users.

To this end, poor dietary choices and eating habits lead to an unhealthy life at an early age. Also, fast food consumption is a significant factor in obesity and causes non-communicable diseases, with a noticeable association between fast food intake and overweight problems among young adults in Sri Lanka (Nirmal and Padmasiri, 2022). The increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity could be mostly due to various behavioral and lifestyle factors, and that is a burden on the population. Overweight and obesity are recognized as the cause of many health-related complications. Unhealthy dietary practices such as high fat and salt intake lead to excess weight gain (Karthijekan and Angela, 2020). Moreover, food consumption behavior in young adults may be influenced by several factors such as

socioeconomic status, educational attainment, and home food availability (Ludwig-Borycz et al., 2023). Studies show a shift towards fast food consumption due to globalization, busy schedules, and the rise of fast-food outlets in Asian countries, leading to health concerns like obesity and non-communicable diseases (Ludwig-Borycz *et al*., 2023). Not only these, the food choice among the youth is highly influenced by their region, age, and gender (Soam *et* al., 2023). In contrast, the attitude of students toward SMIs (Social Media Influencers) does not affect their daily dietary choices, however, the subjective norms in the students' lives on SMIs make a difference in their eating habits (Ahmad and Bruno, 2021).

In reported studies, the impact of food-related posts on SM on eating habits and dietary choices was surveyed in other Asian countries (Alwafi *et al*., 2022; Tami and Alyousef, 2022; Salleh *et al*., 2021; Scheiber, Diehl, and Karmasin, 2023). In a Sri Lankan context, the published works focus on the impact of social media among Sri Lankan population on different aspects such as academic performance (Mufassirin *et al*., 2023; Chandrasiri and Samarasinghe, 2021, Suganya *et al.,* 2020; Shameera and Sabaretnam, 2019), emotional intelligence (Keara and De Zoysa, 2022), mental health (Weerasundera, 2014) and marketing (Dananjana, Yasara, and Abeysekera 2024). Thus, a notable gap in the literature has been identified regarding the specific impact of food-related posts on social media as well as among the young generation. Given these gaps, this study aims to examine the frequency of exposure to FRPs on SM platforms among Sri Lankan undergraduate students and to survey the influence of FRPs on SM on individuals' eating habits, food choices, and food cravings. This study is significant as the outcomes help reveal the current food practices of undergraduates, who will be the working force of the country very soon. Here, we have limited the scope of the study to undergraduates considering the convenience of conducting the research and analysis.

This article has been organized as follows. Firstly, in the methodology, we discuss the development of a detailed online questionnaire to evaluate the influence of food-related posts in SMs on the eating habits of (university) undergraduates. Next, the outcomes of the study will be presented and discussed, which also reveal possible correlations of variables such as the gender of participants with eating habits, dietary choices, and food cravings as influenced by food-related posts (FRPs). We also discuss the reliability of information shared via FRPs and the impact of FRPs based on the outcomes of the online questionnaire. The concluding remarks of the work are finally presented along with potential future works.

II. METHODOLOGY

*A. **Study design and sampling***

An anonymous online survey was conducted from May to June 2024, using a structured questionnaire to collect data from randomly selected undergraduate students (i.e. level-100, level-200, level-300, and level-400 students). The questionnaire was developed in the Google Forms platform and the respondents were invited via the link shared via social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, E-mail, and LinkedIn. The next section will outline the different sections included in the questionnaire.

*B. **Questionnaire***

The questionnaire was created based on a previously validated questionnaire (Alwafi et al., 2022) and modified based on the scope of this study. The questionnaire consists of three major parts as listed below:

1. *Part A:* This section collects socio-demographic details of the participants including their age (five age ranges: 18-22, 23-27, 28-32, 33-37, 38-42 and above), gender (male or female), and type of hometown (i.e. city, country) of the participant to enable a detailed analysis.

2. *Part B:* This section comprises social media (SM) posts-related questions including the types and number of SM accounts, frequency of check-in to SM, frequency of exposure to food-related posts on SM, the preferred SM sites to check food-related posts, and the preferred type of food-related contents that participants watch. A Likert scale was used appropriately to gather the responses.

3. *Part C*: This section includes questions related to eating habit changes including food habits, food choices, and food cravings, the reliability of the information given through food-related posts, and the impact of food-

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related posts based on participants' views. A Likert scale was used appropriately to gather responses.

C. *Statistical analysis*

The appropriate data were analyzed using Minitab-20 software. In the analysis, descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the continuous variables, and Chi-square testing was used for categorical variables at a 0.05 significance level.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Demographic information of the participants*

Out of 396 participants who responded to the questionnaire, a majority represents the 23-27 age range (i.e 81.1%), the 18-22 age group represents the second highest (i.e. 14.9%), and the 38-42 age group represents the lowest (i.e 0.5%), as depicted in Figure 01. There are 68.9% female participants and the highest number of participants are from the town area (i.e. 45.7%) while the lowest number of participants are from the city area (i.e. 23.5%).

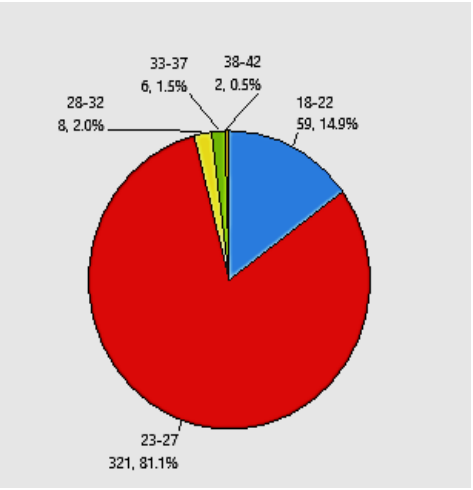

Figure 01: Age distribution of the respondents (18-22), (23-27), (28-32), (33-37), (38-42) represent the age intervals of each segments

B. *Frequency of exposure to social media sites and food-related posts*

According to Figure 02, 93.7% of participants have WhatsApp accounts, and 86.1% have YouTube accounts. Also, 66.7% and 60.4% of the tested population have Instagram and Facebook accounts, respectively. Furthermore, 89.4% of the participants have more than one SM account. Only a very few (< 1%) do not have any SM accounts in the given list.

Figure 03 shows that a majority (i.e. 30.3%) have three SM accounts, which is followed by participants who have four, five, two, and one accounts, respectively. One key reason for this observation could be the free access to these SM accounts. Thus, many undergraduates tend to have different SM accounts for different purposes such as information sharing, marketing their channels, and creating their public image in SM.

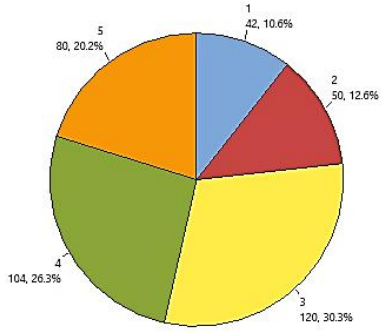

Figure 03: The frequency distribution of social media accounts owned by the participant based on the social media sites including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp

Next, Figure 04 depicts the frequencies at which respondents use the SM. As per results, 49.0% of participants use SM more than five times per day while 30.8% of the population use SM platforms less than two times per day. To this end, a similar study conducted in Sri Lanka states that most undergraduates use SM for less than 2 hours daily while a notable group uses it for over 8 hours daily (Athukorala, 2021). It is clear that the SM usage has increased over three years (i.e. 2021 to 2024) such that more time is consumed for SM. The elevated use of artificial intelligence in SM platforms could be a reason behind this observation.

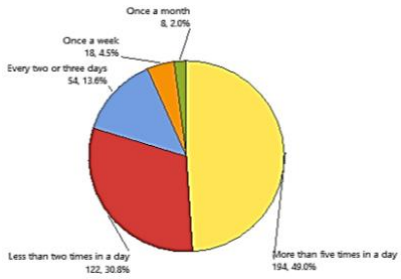

Figure 04: The distribution of frequency of exposure to social media among participants

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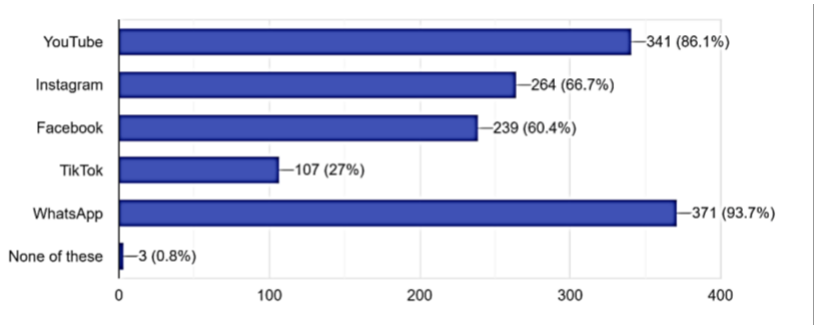

Figure 02: Distribution of the number of social media (SM) accounts participants currently have
Category 1,2,3,4,5 refers to the number of social media accounts participants own.

Figure 05 depicts the frequency of watching food-related posts (FRPs) on SM sites. As per the results, the frequency of watching FRPs on SM often is about 80% (i.e., the sum of percentages of extremely often, very often, and moderately often), and only 8.1% rarely use SM for FRPs. One key reason could be the lack of time that undergraduates have to visit the food shops to check them out due to their busy schedules. By today, most vendors tend to have publicity for their foods on SM, which can also be a reason for undergraduates to use SM to see the related posts.

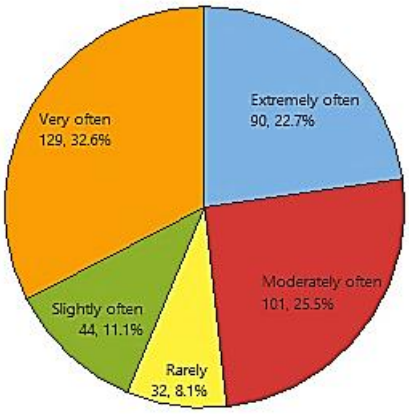

Figure 05: The frequency distribution of watching food-related posts on social media sites

Table 01 shows the relationship between the frequency of watching FRPs on SM and gender and the number of SM. Accordingly, the frequency of watching FRPs is significantly affected (p=0.000) by the number of SM accounts that participants have, while it is not affected by the frequency of engaging in SM (p=0.969). For this observation, one key reason could be the use of different SM platforms to distribute information on FRPs, for example, the same FRPs are shared through TikTok and YouTube shorts, etc.

Table 02 shows the frequency distribution for preferred SMs to watch food-related posts. The results indicate YouTube is largely preferred, while Instagram and Facebook have moderate preferences. On the contrary, a similar study conducted by examining nearly 10 million Instagram posts by 1.7 million users around the world shows that Instagram is highly utilized for food logging and research where the obsession with foods such as desserts, savories as well as healthy eating (Mejova, Abbar, and Haddadi, 2016). A key reason for the observed difference could be that the current study focuses only in Sri Lanka with a limited population. Another reason could be the introduction of YouTube shorts (a short-time video), introduced after 2016 to quickly deliver information.

Figure 06 depicts the likelihood distribution of food-related content participants watch. Results indicate that most of the contents are watched neutrally while contents on snacks and dessert reviews, street food place reviews, and food preparation and cooking videos are watched with great interest. The key reason could be the affordability of purchasing and the majority of participants are female in the study.

Table 01: The relationship between the frequency of watching FRPs on SM and gender, and the number of SM accounts at the significance level=0.05

Variable 01	Variable 02	Chi-square value	p-value	Relationship
Frequency of watching FRPs	Number of SM accounts	654.320	0.000	Dependent
Frequency of watching FRPs	Gender	1.458	0.834	Independent

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FRPs= food-related posts SM= social media

Table 02: The preference distribution for watching Food-related posts (FRPs) on different social media sites

Social media	Moderate to high prefer preference (%)	Neutral preference (%)	Low preference percentage (%)
YouTube	63.13	12.88	23.99
Instagram	43.18	15.91	40.91
Facebook	40.15	22.98	36.87
TikTok	34.34	11.87	53.78
WhatsApp	36.11	11.11	52.78

C. *Influence of FRPs on food habits, food choices, and food cravings.*

Table 03 shows the responses of participants on different statements on FRPs. As per the results, participants agree (i.e. sum of strongly agree and agree) with most of the statements, and the participants are neutral on the statement "The food hacks I have tried have never gone wrong ".

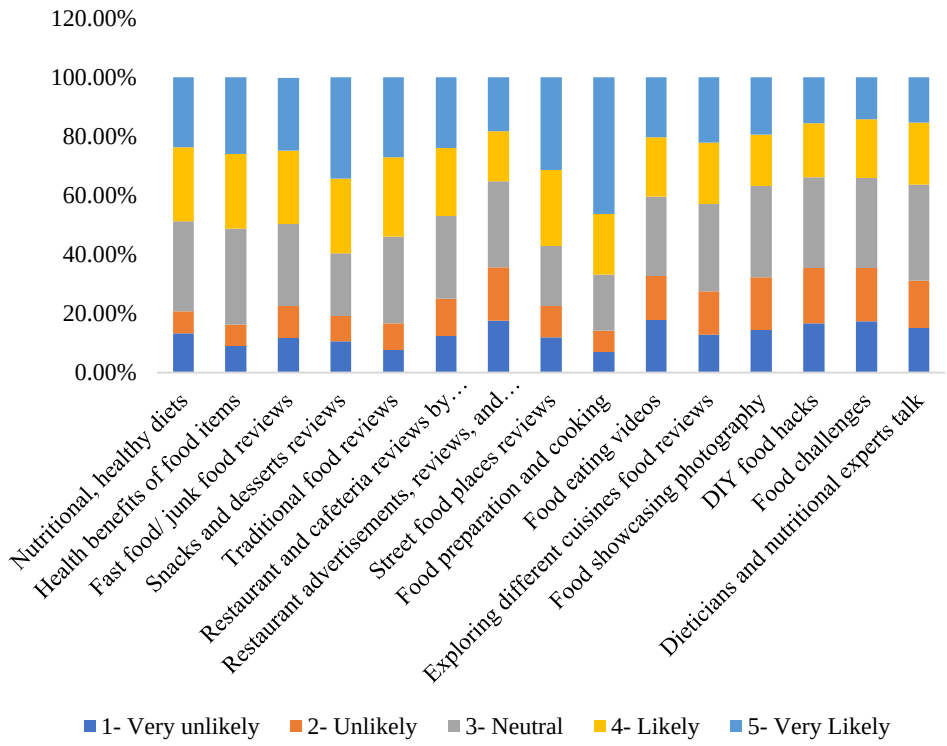

Figure 06: The likelihood percentages of different FRP contents according to the Likert scale 1-5

Table 03: Participants' responses to statements that measure the impact of FRPs on food habits

	Statements on food habits	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I have tried a nutritional diet plan promoted by social media	12.37% (47)	25.53% (97)	30.00% (114)	19.47% (74)	12.63% (48)
2.	I have added one or more nutritional foods to my daily diet	14.17% (54)	32.28% (123)	30.71% (117)	15.49% (59)	7.35% (28)
3.	I try novel junk food items on social media that are not in my usual eating habits	12.63% (49)	28.87% (112)	27.32% (106)	22.42% (87)	8.76% (34)
4.	Social media posts increased my fast-food consumption rate.	18.44% (71)	30.39% (117)	22.08% (85)	19.22% (74)	9.87% (38)

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5.	I have tried different cuisines from other countries.	13.51% (52)	25.97% (100)	23.12% (89)	21.56% (83)	15.84% (61)
6.	I have promoted many fast foods/junk foods/places with my friends and family members that I watched on social media.	15.89% (61)	24.47% (95)	22.40% (86)	23.44% (90)	13.54% (52)
7.	Social media posts increase my snacking habit.	20.05% (77)	28.91% (111)	22.66% (87)	18.49% (71)	9.90% (38)
8.	I have started preparing dishes that I watched on social media	28.42% (108)	32.89% (125)	21.32% (81)	11.32% (43)	6.05% (23)
9.	I have started having sugar-containing desserts or beverages as a habit after meals.	13.19% (50)	27.70% (105)	27.44% (104)	20.84% (79)	10.82% (41)
10.	The food hacks I have tried have never gone wrong.	12.06% (45)	19.84% (74)	34.85% (130)	21.45% (80)	11.80% (44)

Next, we present the response analysis of food choices. Table 04 exhibits the distribution of the responses to the statements on food choices. Accordingly, a similar agreeing pattern is observed in all statements except being neutral for the statement Social media posts help me find a nutritionally health FRPs= food-related posts SM= social media diet plan that fits me". This shows a current drawback (in Sri Lankan undergraduates) in choosing a healthy diet plan as proposed by FRPs.

Next, Table 05 shows the distribution of responses to statements on food cravings. As per the results, participants agree (i.e. sum of strongly agree and agree) with all statements.

Table 06 presents the correlation among different focused areas in FRPs with the above statements to further analyze any correlations. Here, statements 1-10, statements 11-17, and, 18-26 correspond to eating habits, dietary choices, and food cravings, respectively. As per results, significant correlations are observed between the frequency of watching FRPs and impacts on food habits (i.e. statements 1-10). In fact, the statements, the participants have started preparing their dishes (p= -0.013), increased their snacking habits (p= 0.013), tend to try different cuisines(p=0.017), and have added nutritional foods to their diet (p=-0.021) show strong associations while their fast-food consumption increased (p=-0.053) and they promoted food item/place (p=0.055) might be associated. In reported studies, SM influences eating habits among undergraduates in Malaysia (Ahmad and Bruno, 2021) and exposure to SM depicting unhealthy products, such as sugar, fast food, and snacks, is directly correlated with high consumption among the Saudi Arabian population (Alwafi *et al*., 2022).

Statements 11-17 also report strong and moderate correlations between the frequency of watching FRPs and the statements. Statements including street food places with affordable food items (p-= 0.002), SM posts help to find good restaurants with authentic dishes (p=0.008), SM helps to find a diet plan (p= -0.006) and the reviews are reliable for making choices (p= -0.033). it shows a significant association while the reviews on eateries and foods when visiting certain locations and before ordering (p= -0,.058) might be associated. To this end, in a recent cross-sectional study conducted in Saudi Arabia, state people are influenced by SM when making food-related decisions (Alwafi *et al*., 2022). Thus, the current study outcomes agree with this finding. However, another study conducted in Malaysia claims that the attitude of students towards SM influencers does not affect their daily dietary choices (Ahmad and Bruno, 2021).

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Table 04: Participants' responses to statements that measure the impact of FRPs on food choices

	Statements on food choices	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	I searched for social media reviews on restaurants and street food places when I went to certain locations.	22.79% (85)	34.58% (129)	22.52% (84)	10.99% (41)	9.12% (34)
2.	I check social media reviews on food items before ordering them.	24.46% (91)	33.60% (125)	22.31% (83)	10.22% (38)	9.41% (35)
3.	Social media posts help to find good restaurants with luxury/ hospitality/buffet/authentic dishes.	25.40% (95)	42.78% (160)	19.52% (73)	8.02% (30)	4.28% (16)
4.	Social media posts help to try many food items at Street food places at affordable prices	27.88% (104)	37.00% (138)	21.18% (79)	8.85% (33)	5.09% (19)
5.	I search for the health benefits of natural foods before eating or buying them.	20.64% (77)	34.05% (127)	29.49% (110)	9.92% (37)	5.90% (22)
6.	I feel that the reviews are reliable for making choices most of the time	18.40% (69)	35.73% (134)	32.00% (120)	9.33% (35)	4.53% (17)
7.	Social media posts help me find a nutritionally healthy diet plan that fits me	16.89% (63)	27.88% (104)	34.85% (130)	12.60% (47)	7.77% (29)

Table 05: Participants' responses to statements that measure the impact of FRPs on food cravings

	Statements on food cravings	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Even though I do not feel hungry, I go to restaurants or street food places to satisfy my food cravings which I watch on social media	16.09% (60)	22.79% (85)	26.27% (98)	16.62% (62)	18.23% (68)
2.	I feel interested in preparing dishes at home from the recipe videos	29.87% (112)	35.73% (134)	20.27% (76)	8.27% (31)	5.87% (22)
3.	I feel a food craving for the foods that they are consuming in their posts.	19.29% (71)	34.24% (126)	29.08% (107)	10.33% (38)	7.07% (26)
4.	My cravings for sugary foods and spicy foods increased after watching social media posts	18.25% (69)	32.80% (124)	25.93% (98)	14.02% (53)	8.99% (34)
5.	I feel hungry after watching food-	24.73% (92)	31.72% (118)	23.92% (89)	11.83% (44)	7.80% (29)

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	consuming videos.					
6.	I forget that I am hungry when I am engaged with food-consuming contents	13.17% (49)	26.34% (98)	26.88% (100)	19.89% (74)	13.71% (51)
7.	I feel pressured to try certain foods or to visit specific eateries because they are popular with social media influencers and celebrities.	13.37% (50)	27.81% (104)	31.28% (117)	15.24% (57)	12.30% (46)
8.	Food-making videos make me feel satisfied like I have truly been involved.	25.60% (96)	32.27% (121)	28.27% (106)	8.00% (30)	5.87% (22)
9.	Food showcasing photographs and advertisements induces my cravings.	18.62% (70)	32.98% (124)	27.66% (104)	12.50% (47)	8.24% (31)

Next, considering statements 18-26, a strong correlation is observed between the frequency of watching FRPs and feeling hungry after watching food-consuming videos (p=0.021) while the association between statements 19,20 and 23 is not strong enough to prove. Past studies show that SM exposure increases anxiety and leads to emotional over-eating (Gao *et al*., 2022) and also the sight of food provokes various brain responses related to the preparation for food and the desire to eat. Also, food marketing may convincingly demonstrate that exposure to SM depicting unhealthy products, such as sugar, fast food, and, snacks, is directly correlated with high consumption among children and adults (Alwafi *et al*., 2022). The results along with the literature suggest that FRPs on SM may impact food cravings among the respondents but they are not strong enough to prove.

Table 06: The correlation analysis between statements and frequency of watching FRPs on social media at a confidence level of 0.05 FRPs= food-related posts (Statements 1-10: Eating habits, Statements 11-17: Dietary choices and Statements 18-26: Food cravings)

Focused area in FRP	**Variable 1: frequency of watching FRPs Variable 02**	**p-value**	**Relationship between variables 01 and 02**
Eating habits	Statement 01	-0.096	Independent
	Statement 02	-0.021	Dependent
	Statement 03	-0.101	Independent
	Statement 04	-0.053	Might be Dependent
	Statement 05	0.017	Dependent
	Statement 06	-0.055	Might be dependent
	Statement 07	0.013	Dependent
	Statement 08	-0.013	Dependent
	Statement 09	-0.089	Independent
	Statement 10	-0.069	Independent
Dietary choices	Statement 11	-0.076	Independent
	Statement 12	-0.058	Might be dependent
	Statement 13	-0.008	Dependent
	Statement 14	0.002	Dependent
	Statement 15	0.078	Independent

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	Statement 16	-0.033	Dependent
	Statement 17	-0.006	Dependent
Food cravings	Statement 18	-0.123	Independent
	Statement 19	-0.058	Might be dependent
	Statement 20	-0.054	Might be dependent
	Statement 21	-0.076	Independent
	Statement 22	0.021	Dependent
	Statement 23	-0.059	Might be dependent
	Statement 24	-0.074	Independent
	Statement 25	-0.081	Independent
	Statement 26	-0.125	Independent

D. ***Impact of food-related posts on social media***

Figure 07 shows the distribution of the frequencies that participants visit the restaurant or taste the food item they watched on SM. As per results, 80% of the population visits the restaurant or tastes the food at least once. Here, only 17% visit just once, and approximately a quarter of the population visits the restaurant more than 10 times. For the former observation, one key reason could be the food was not preferred by the consumers despite the marketing campaign signifying the ignited spark in consumers to visit the restaurant by the SM.

As per the results from Table 07, the participants who visited the restaurant or tasted the food that they checked on SM might have a significant association with gender (χ^2 =7.670 and p=0.053) at 0.05 significance level. However, considering the tested population, no correlation was found between the frequency of tried foods/visits to restaurants and the type of hometown or the frequency of watching FRPs on SM.

One key reason for the above observation could be the countrywide access to SM disregarding the type of hometown. Furthermore, the SM influencers can only make a one-time impact for the first-time visit or first-time tasting of the food as the frequency of tasting the foods is independent of the frequency of watching FRPs on SM. Furthermore, it seems further visits or tasting depend on other factors such as the quality of food, customer service, cleanliness of the place etc.

Next, Figure 08 describes the satisfaction level measure of their own experience they had on visiting the eateries or trying food which they choose from the information via SM posts. Apart from those who have not experienced it (14.4%), the majority of respondents (58.7%) are satisfied. To this end, Qualman (2014) argues "SM users at present trust peer recommendations more than search engines, and this fact is evident from the resonance of SM users with those who review their experiences in product consumption and services on their accounts, particularly on dining out and "cafe-hopping" as a social experience". The study also reveals the information shared about eateries and foods via SM can be mostly reliable.

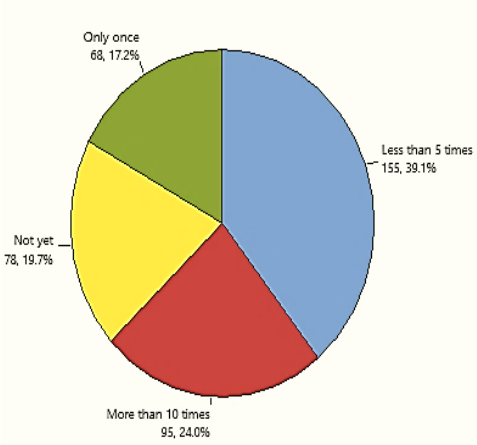

Figure 07: The distribution of frequency of times participants visited the restaurant or tasted the food items.

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Table 07: The relationship between the frequency of trial with food/ restaurants with Gender and type of hometown (i.e. city/village/town) at significance level= 0.05. FRPs= food-related posts SM= social media

Variable 1	Variable 2	Chi-square Value (x^2)	p-value	Conclusion
Frequency of tried foods/visits to restaurants	Gender	7.670	0.053	Might be dependent
	Type of hometown	3.085	0.798	Independent
	Frequency of watching FRPs on SM	6.120	0.910	Independent

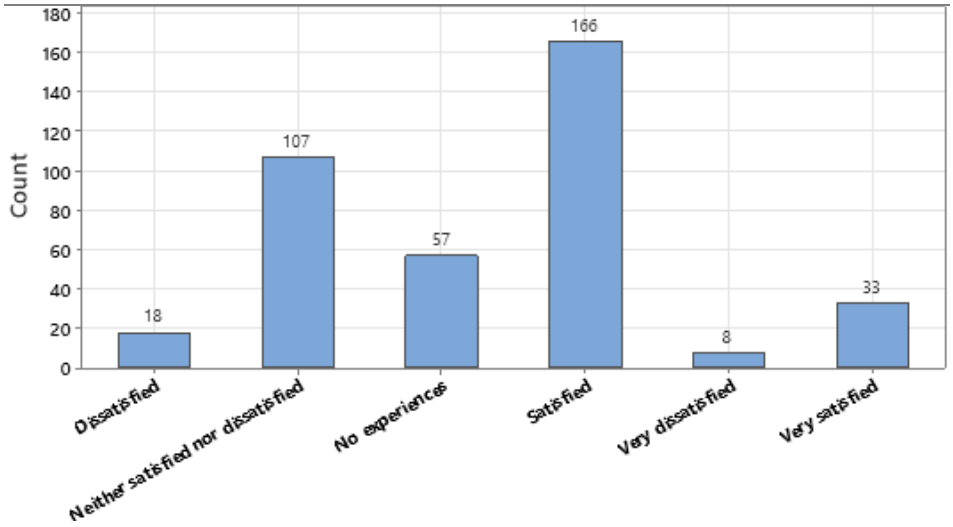

Figure 08. The frequency distribution in measuring the satisfaction level participants had with their own experience of trying foods or visiting eateries that are promoted by social media.

Past studies state that a significant positive correlation was found between the level of obesity rate and the mean percentage of followers of sugary drinks or fast-food brands on Instagram and Twitter (Gu *et al.*, 2021), and engagement with unhealthy food brands on SM is common among adolescents (Fleming-Milici and Harris, 2020). Accordingly, the level of agreement on the statement was assessed using 'Most of the foods promoted via SM platforms lead to an unhealthy lifestyle'.

Following the above agreement, Figure 09 shows the levels of agreement with the above statement. Based on results, 44.9% of respondents agree that they lead to unhealthy lifestyles while 41.7% say they are neutral. These findings agree with a recent study in Australia, which reports that SM engagement impacted negatively in body image and food choices in healthy young (Rounsefell et al., 2020).

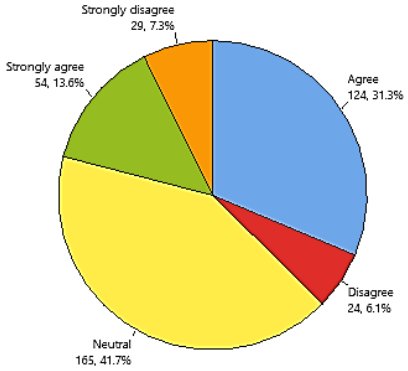

Figure 09: The frequency distribution regarding the level of agreement on the statement "Most of the foods promoted via social media platforms lead to an unhealthy lifestyle'

Figure 10 shows the distribution of responses obtained for overall impact due to food-related posts on SM on the undergraduates. As per results, the majority (i.e. 73.7%) agree that there could be positive impacts as well as negative impacts on an equal ratio from the perspective of the participants. Furthermore, only very few (2 %) are neutral or saying no impact, which implies that the

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undergraduates are well aware that SM has any sort of effect on FRPs.

IV.CONCLUSION

The reported study evaluates the impact of food-related posts on social media on eating habits and dietary choices among university undergraduates in Sri Lanka. The following can be concluded from the study outcomes.

- The time spent on social media in a day shows a rapid increase rate, particularly, the exposure to food-related posts on social media is also notably high among the undergraduates of Sri Lankan universities which strongly correlates with the number of social media accounts individuals have.
- YouTube is the most popular social media site for watching Food-related posts while Instagram and Facebook are moderately popular.
- The participants rather tend to watch food-related content like snack and dessert reviews, street food place reviews, and food preparation and cooking videos.
- The participants' agreement reveals that there are significant impacts on eating habits, food choices, and food cravings due to FRPs. However, correlation analysis results show significant effects due to FRPs on eating habits and food choices rather than food cravings.
- There is a correlation between gender and the frequency of tried foods/visited restaurants watched via FRPs by participants. Most undergraduates are aware that food related posts on social media have both positive and negative impacts on their lives, yet they agree that FRPs possibly lead to an unhealthy lifestyle.

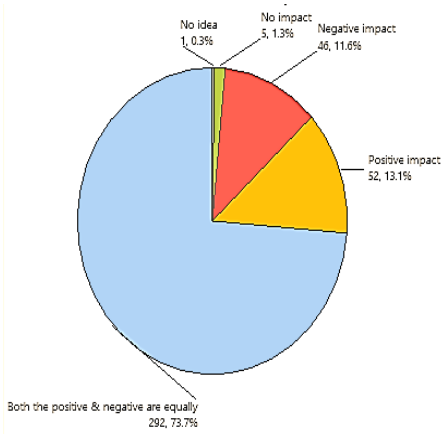

Figure 10: The distribution of the overall impact of FRPs on social media on the young generation

The findings of this study can lead to future research on the association between exposure to food-related posts and the present rise in health complications (i.e. obesity, non-communicable diseases, etc.) among young adults in Sri Lanka.

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