

A study on impact of mass media on food pattern and food choice of Private College students

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The present study was undertaken in Gurgaon district of Haryana state. From DPG Institute of Technology and Management (Private College), a total of 100 college going students of 17-21 year age were selected randomly for the study. Information regarding mass media interaction and eating habits was collected. Mobile phones were used for more than three hours daily by 66 per cent of the respondents followed by newspaper reading and TV watching for one hour daily by 46 and 35 per cent respondents, respectively. Majority of the respondents were watching movies (50%), music videos (48%), daily soaps (46%) and TV news (46%) very often. The data revealed that 34 per cent respondents had one meal outside home daily and 29 per cent skipped a meal daily. Majority of the respondents never had fruits/vegetables/juices or soft drinks/fast foods as a meal outside home.

Key Words : Mass media, Eating habits

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INTRODUCTION

The 'nutrition transition' a term used to describe shifts in diet, physical activity, health and nutrition can be traced to higher incomes, the influence of mass media and food marketing, and a range of changes in the nature of work and leisure (Popkin, 2000). Expenditure on food advertising is high and increasing in developing countries; a significant proportion of this advertising is for energy-dense processed foods targeted at children and youth. The objective of this advertising is to encourage greater consumption of processed foods (WHO, 2007). Factors that further alleviate the problem are (a) the worldwide shifts in trade of technology innovations that affect energy expenditures during leisure, transportation, and work; (b) globalization of modern food processing, marketing and distribution technique (most frequently linked with westernization of the world's diet); (c) vast expansion of the

global mass media; and (d) other changes that constitute the rubric of impacts resulting from an increased opening of our world economy.

Media is playing a havoc with youth's health. On one hand, youth is exposed to high sugar, high fat, high sodium and low fibre junk foods and on the other hand, youth is also exposed to glamour world of fashion, where everyone wants to be ultra thin. The amount of time children spend with different sources of media from: television, film, video games and computer or online media is exceedingly taking up the greater part of their time. With the average five and a half hours children spend using media on a daily basis, the only thing they spend more time doing is sleeping. Also television media increases children's exposure to advertisements that are purposely directed towards them as a young, impressionable audience (Henry, 2004).

The detrimental influence of television media on food choices and eating habits of youth is a serious issue and growing concern for public health officials, registered dietitians, and families interested in living their day to day lives in a healthy manner. Adolescents from 10 to 15 years old who watch more than 5 hours of television per day are likely to get not only influenced by food advertisements but also become sedentary in activity. Such children have more chances of

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having a BMI in the 85th percentile *i.e.* they are more prone to overweight and obesity and obesity related degenerative diseases. Currently, the second leading cause of actual death according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention is poor diet and physical inactivity (Schneider, 2006). With this perspective in consideration, the present study was planned to study the impact of mass media exposure on eating habits and dietary patterns of college going youth (17-21Y).

METHODOLOGY

Selection of respondents :

The present study was conducted on college going students in the age group 17-21 years in the Gurgaon district from eastern zone of Haryana state. Multistage sampling technique was used wherein at first stage state zone, followed by district and college was selected for the study. Further city area of selected district was taken purposively to have the desired respondents. For the respondents from private college, DPG Institute of Technology and Management of Gurgaon district was selected purposively. Total 100 college going students were selected randomly from the selected private institute.

Development of questionnaire schedule :

Keeping in view the objectives of investigation, a well

structured questionnaire cum interview schedule was prepared in accordance with methodological procedure and pre-tested initially on 20 children. Based on the responses, the modifications were made to make it more functional. Interview schedule consisted of questions related to mass media interaction and food pattern/choices. The data were collected by interview cum questionnaire method by paying repeated visits to the study area (college and their home) during the months of April-May, 2012.

Statistical analysis :

Data coding, entry and validation was done using appropriate software mainly SPSS. Frequency and percentages were also calculated.

OBSERVATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

The results obtained from the present study are presented in the following sub heads:

Information regarding mass media interaction :

Information regarding mass media interaction of the college going students is presented in Table 1. Majority of the respondents (66%) used mobile phones for more than 3 hours daily followed by newspaper reading and TV watching for 1 hour daily by 46 and 35 per cent of the respondents,

Table 1. Information regarding mass media interaction

Sources	Contact period				
	Never	Once in a few days	1 hour	Daily 2-3 hour	>3 hours
Television	0(0)	15(15)	35(35)	34(34)	16(16)
Internet	11(11)	45(45)	23(23)	18(18)	3(3)
Radio/FM	21(21)	46(46)	15(15)	12(12)	6(6)
Mobile phone	4(4)	9(9)	6(6)	15(15)	66(66)
Newspaper	8(8)	42(42)	46(46)	3(3)	1(1)
Fashion magazines	52(52)	42(42)	3(3)	2(2)	1(1)
Science magazines	43(43)	54(54)	3(3)	0(0)	0(0)
Sports magazines	40(40)	48(48)	11(11)	1(1)	0(0)
Comic books	60(60)	35(35)	2(2)	2(2)	1(1)

Values in parentheses indicate percentage

Table 2. Programs preferred to be watched on television or internet by college students

Programmes	Contact period		
	Never	Once in a few days	Very often
Movies	9(9)	41(41)	50(50)
Music videos	7(7)	45(45)	48(48)
Daily soaps	27(27)	27(27)	46(46)
Sports/Athletics	30(30)	37(37)	33(33)
Science programs	31(31)	47(47)	22(22)
TV news	9(9)	45(45)	46(46)
Cartoons	44(44)	43(43)	13(13)

Values in parentheses indicate percentage

respectively. The present findings are in agreement with those of Perton (2005) who noted that three of every four adolescent's ages 15 to 17y and 40 per cent of youth ages 12 to 14y carried their own cell phone. Roberts *et al.* (2005) explained that among school-age youth (ages 8 to 18y), 74 per cent lived in a home where the computer had an internet connection, and 60 per cent had access to an instant messaging program and they spent an average of six hours per day using media, and they often used more than one medium at a time. Internet, radio/FM, science magazines and sports magazines were used/listened/read only once in a few days by most of the respondents *i.e.* 45, 46, 54 and 48 per cent, respectively while majority of the respondents *i.e.* 52 and 60 per cent never read fashion magazines and comic books, respectively.

Data in the present study revealed that majority of the respondents *i.e.* 50, 48, 46 per cent were watching movies, music videos, daily soaps and news very often, respectively (Table 2). Sports/athletics (37%) and science programs (47%) were watched once in a few days and cartoons (44%) were never watched by most of the respondents. Tiggeman and Pickering (1996) also reported that the type of exposure, not the amount, is correlated with negative body image. Specifically, rates of exposure to soap operas, movies, and music videos were associated with higher rates of body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness.

Information regarding meals taken outside by college going students:

Data in the Table 3 and 4 highlight the information regarding meals taken outside home by college going students. It was found that majority of the respondents (40%) rarely took meals outside home. There were 34 per cent of the respondents who took at least one meal outside home, 18 per cent took two meals outside home and only 8 per cent respondents took three meals outside home daily. Similar findings have been reported by French *et al.* (2001). They found that frequency of fast food restaurant use (FFFRU) was positively associated with student employment, television viewing, home availability of unhealthy foods, and perceived barriers to healthy eating, and was inversely associated with students' own and perceived maternal and peer concerns about healthy eating. FFFRU was not associated with overweight status.

It was found that equal percentage *i.e.* 48 per cent of the respondents rarely had fruits/vegetables/juices and soft drinks/fast foods for meal taken outside home. Fruits/vegetables/juices were consumed by 36 per cent of the respondents mostly outside home. Almost equal percentage of the respondents *i.e.* 35 per cent had soft drinks/fast foods in a meal taken outside home. According to Neumark-Sztainer *et al.* (2003) whilst evidence about the effect of availability and accessibility on the consumption of fast foods is scarce, but there is limited

Table 3. Information regarding meal pattern of college going students

No. of meals taken outside	Respondents
One	34(34)
Two	18(18)
Three	8(8)
Rarely	40(40)
Skipping of meals	
Yes	29(29)
No	48(48)
Sometimes	23(23)

Values in parentheses indicate percentage

Table 4. Information regarding meals taken outside home by college going students

Meals taken outside mostly includes		
Fruits/vegetables/juices		
Rarely	Mostly	Always
48(48)	36(36)	16(16)
Soft drinks/fast food		
Rarely	Mostly	Always
48(48)	35(35)	17(17)

Values in parentheses indicate percentage

evidence that one or both of these factors may influence the intake of high fat snacks, soft drinks and fruit and vegetable consumption among adolescents.

Conclusion:

There was not much effect of mass media on food pattern and food choices of private college students as only about one third of the respondents skipped a meal. Most of them rarely took a meal outside home daily. Also the meals taken outside by respondents rarely comprised of soft drinks/fast foods etc. Conclusively, even living in a metropolitan city, being near to Delhi and exposure to mass media, number of food joints, International food chains in surroundings, have not influenced much the food habits and choices of the students, may be because of their deep rooted food habits, influence of family members and effect of socio-economic status of the family etc. which need to be studied further.

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