

Influence of Media on Food Preferences

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Abstract:

A food preference is an interdisciplinary topic and investigates how people select the food. Food preference comprises psychological and sociological aspects and economic issues. According to Monica food preference is the way in which people choose from among available comestibles [1]. In much of the current literature, food preferences are seen as conditioned by the capitalist or nationalist goals of food purveyors. Also, food preference is a function of individual and environmental influences. Individual influences are psychological as well as biological, whereas, environmental influences include family, friend, and peer networks and other factors such as school meals and fast food outlets. In addition, another important factor is macro-system which includes mass media, marketing and advertising, social and cultural norms of the society [2]. An attempt has been made in this paper to underline the work carried out to establish media as influencing factor of food preferences.

Keywords

Media, Eating disorder, Food preference, Teenager

1. Introduction

The literature shows that a number of factors like family environment [3], peer pressure [4], media habits [5], concern over body image, sociocultural and economic context [3], gender and age [6], influence food preference. Many studies reported that parents, particularly mothers, have a considerable influence on their children's food preference, because of their presumed central role in acting out the nature and importance of thinness and the gender-stereotyped nature of dieting itself [7].

One naturalistic experiment conducted in Fiji provides strong evidence to support the hypothesis that the media has a significant role in the development of food preferences [8]. Borzekowski D. L. G. et al. reported that there are many articles available in websites that not only encourage disordered eating but also influence food preferences [9]. The media (both the printed and the electronic) play significant role in food preferences and body

image concern of the adolescent girls [10].

Very few studies have been done, particularly in India considering food preference of adolescent girls influenced by media.

2. Media and Food Preferences

The heavier TV use and more frequent commercial TV viewing are independently associated with more positive attitudes toward junk food. The ads for nutritious foods promote selected positive attitudes and beliefs concerning these foods [11]. Jennifer studied the relationship between television viewing and unhealthy eating and media interventions. The study demonstrates that children's food preferences are acquired through learning processes, and that these preferences have long-lasting effects on diet. Both television experience and parenting factors independently influenced preferences and diet. Findings of the study provide insights into the potential effectiveness of alternative media interventions to counteract the unhealthy influence of television on diet [12].

Health effects of media on adolescents were studied by Strasburger. The study reviews the research on the effects of media on the health and wellbeing of adolescents. Studies have shown that media can provide information about safe health practices and can foster social connectedness [13]. Several kinds of mass media exposure, media influence, cultural orientation and eating pathology among adolescent female ethnic Fijians was assessed by Becker. Results of the study depict that media exposures are associated with eating pathology in unadjusted analyses, whereas in adjusted analyses only social network media exposure was associated with eating pathology [14].

Shiratori S. and Kinsey J. investigated Media Impact of Nutrition Information on Food Choice on consumers' purchases in U.S. The results show that there is a significant positive impact of nutritional information from the popular media on food choices of consumers of United States [15]. Upadhyay S. et. al. investigated media utilization, preferences and prospect for use in nutrition education service delivery in three villages of Uttarakhand State of India. The results revealed that that the TV is most

commonly possessed and used media. Print media is less popular compared to electronic media. Major reasons for TV usage/ preference are effectiveness for information dissemination, better understanding and entertainment. The results also depict that media preference in descending order is: television, radio, poster, calendar, lecture, audiocassettes, booklets, charts and newspaper. Upadhyay recommended that development agencies should take advantage of women's preferences to ensure optimum effect of various food and nutrition related extension programs [16].

Mishra H. G. and Singh S. made a study on change in eating habits and its direct impact on obesity of teenager of Jammu due to television commercial. It was found that teenager consume unhealthy and low nutritional product while watching TV. They even insist their parents to buy product for them and those have pocket money are influenced by advertisement and opt unhealthy food and suffer from the problem of obesity. Mishra and Singh concluded that teenagers are influenced by advertisements, but those who have high leverage to buy these products inadvertently face the problem of obesity [17]. Keller M. studied the advertising and consumerism in the food Industry. Keller discovered how the images in advertisements and media influence our desire to purchase food and examining the effect that television and advertising has on today's youth, and how it could possibly affect eating habits of 12 to 19-year-old students. Results revealed advertising does seem to have a negative effect on the overall health and wellbeing of society [18].

Becker studied the impact of Novel, prolonged exposure to Television on disordered eating attitudes and behaviors among ethnic Fijian adolescent girls. The study revealed subjects' interest in weight loss as a means of modeling themselves after television characters. The naturalistic experiment suggests a negative impact of television upon disordered eating attitudes and behaviors in a media-native population [8]. (2002)

3. Influence of Media on Children's Food Preference

There are experimental evidences on the impact of food advertising on children's knowledge about and food preferences. Better food knowledge is not seemingly linked to healthier food preferences and diet apparently has no significant effect on weight status [19]. The traditional policy strategies, based primarily on informational and educational goals, are insufficient to decrease the effects of advertising on children [19].

Christopher J. F. et. al. studied advertising and fictional media effects on healthy eating choices in

early and later childhood. The study examines advertising effects on children aged 3 to 12. Using a randomized experimental design, children were exposed to advertisements clips with healthy or unhealthy food options. It was found that Young children (3–5) are influenced by media clips of food and advertisements. Children of age group of 6 to 8 years are influenced mainly by their parents, whereas older children (9+) are influenced by neither of these. This study illustrates how advertisements influence children's eating choices and which age categories of children are most vulnerable. Frequent ingestion of snack foods is not a habit for most children, possibly because of an acknowledged parental interference, but these are the food items they bought with their own money [20]. Almost all children watch Daily TV, especially during meals and before bedtime [21].

A survey was conducted by Wood K. A. consisting of questions pertaining to body-esteem, body image, eating attitudes and behaviors, and media attitudes found that the children have relatively healthy body image and eating attitudes. The survey also found that, girls are more impacted by media interventions than boys [22].

4. Influence of cartoon characters on children's food preference

Popular cartoon characters can make a difference in encouraging children to select one food over another. In a study Jennifer A. K. find that children are more willing to try more pieces of a healthy food if a favored character, in comparison with an unknown character, is promoting that food [23].

In another study the influence of cartoon media characters on children's attention to food preference and beverage products was studied by Andrew D. O. et. al. [24]. It was found that children paid more attention to products with characters and preferred less-healthy products. Children's choices significantly differed based on age, sex, and the specific cartoon character displayed, with characters in this study being preferred by younger boys [24].

Children have high brand logo recognition abilities. In a study aimed to find relationship between the ability to recognize brand logos, eating behaviors, food knowledge and preferences in children aged 9 to 11 years, Kopelman C. A. et. al. showed that there is no strong correlation between higher brand logo recognition ability and poorer eating behaviors, food knowledge and preferences. Although many children are familiar with common logos of food products, brand awareness does not appear to be a major influence on the consumption of a poor diet amongst children [25].

5. Suggestions

Publishing in popular media can be an effective communication approach to promote consumers' health [15]. The regulation or restriction of food advertising to children is unlikely to have a significant impact on obesity rates among children unless combined with measures to address other detrimental influences [25]. Putting licensed cartoon characters on more-healthy food/beverage products could increase selection of healthy foods among some, particularly younger children, boys, and those who like the featured character(s) [24].

6. Conclusion

It is evident that TV is the most commonly possessed and used media and print media is less popular compared to electronic media. Media can provide information about safe health practices. Nutritional information from the popular media has significant positive impact on food preferences, whereas advertising does seem to have a negative effect on the overall health and wellbeing of society. The ads for nutritious foods promote selected positive attitudes and beliefs concerning these foods. Children's food preferences are acquired through learning processes. Children paid more attention to products associated with cartoon characters. Girls are more impacted by media interventions than boys. Girls have interest in weight loss as a means of modeling themselves after television characters. Teenager consume unhealthy and low nutritional product while watching TV.

This paper reveals that most of works have focused on impact of media on eating disorder, with less attention given to the food preferences. There is not much existing work that has firmly demonstrated the link between food preferences influenced by media. In addition, no research has been found for the media influence on college girl's food preferences.

7. References

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