

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The influence of hyperreality social media on adolescent food and beverage choices: A preliminary study

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## Abstract

Social media has become an essential aspect of our lives, especially for adolescents, in this digital age. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and many more have created a hyperreal world that blurs the line between reality and fantasy. This can have significant consequences, particularly when it comes to adolescents' food and beverage choices. This initial study aims to examine how hyperreality in social media influences adolescents' food and beverage choices. The study used surveys and focus group discussions to gather information from 20 adolescents aged 13-18. Participants had to be active users of social media platforms. The study's findings indicate that exposure to hyperreal social media content influences adolescents to make unhealthy food and beverage choices, increasing their risk of developing non-communicable diseases. More research and effective measures are needed to counteract social media's negative effects on adolescent health. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2024; 28 [10s]: 69-73*).

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**Keywords:** Adolescent; food and beverage choices; hyperreality; social media

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## Résumé

À l'ère du numérique, les médias sociaux sont devenus un aspect essentiel de notre vie, en particulier pour les adolescents. Des plateformes comme Instagram, Facebook, TikTok et bien d'autres ont créé un monde hyperréaliste qui brouille la frontière entre la réalité et la fantaisie. Cela peut avoir des conséquences importantes, en particulier lorsqu'il s'agit des choix des adolescents en matière d'alimentation et de boissons. Cette première étude vise à examiner l'influence de l'hyperréalité des médias sociaux sur les choix des adolescents en matière d'alimentation et de boissons. L'étude s'est appuyée sur des enquêtes et des discussions de groupe pour recueillir des informations auprès de 20 adolescents âgés de 13 à 18 ans. Les participants devaient être des utilisateurs actifs des plateformes de médias sociaux. Les résultats de l'étude indiquent que l'exposition au contenu hyperréaliste des médias sociaux incite les adolescents à faire des choix d'aliments et de boissons malsains, ce qui augmente leur risque de développer des maladies non transmissibles. Des recherches supplémentaires et des mesures efficaces sont nécessaires pour contrer les effets négatifs des médias sociaux sur la santé des adolescents. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2024; 28 [10s]: 69-73*).

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**Mots-clés:** Adolescents; choix d'aliments et de boissons; hyperréalité; médias sociaux

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## Introduction

Adolescence is a critical period characterized by rapid physical, emotional, and cognitive development<sup>1</sup>. During this phase, individuals are particularly vulnerable to external influences, including social media<sup>2</sup>. The advent of hyperreality social media platforms, such as Instagram and many more, has created a new environment where adolescents are exposed to idealized and often distorted images of food and body image<sup>3</sup>. Research

conducted in an Indonesian city reveals that social media's hyperreality is influencing adolescents' consumerist lifestyles as they are increasingly drawn towards following the latest trends<sup>4</sup>. Consumer lifestyles can impact food choices and lead to unhealthy eating habits. This is particularly evident in adolescents and can result in premature death in up to 70% of cases<sup>5</sup>. The food and beverage choices made during adolescence have far-reaching consequences for both short-term health and long-term well-being<sup>6</sup>. Understanding these

consequences is essential for highlighting the importance of promoting healthy eating habits among adolescents<sup>7</sup>. However, there is a lack of comprehensive studies exploring the impact of hyperreality of social media specifically on adolescent food and beverage choices. This preliminary study aims to address this gap by examining the influence of the hyperreality of social media on adolescent food and beverage choices and identifying potential areas for intervention.

**Methods**

**Participants:** A sample of 20 adolescents aged 13-18. **Procedure:** This research utilized focus group discussions (FGDs), with the participants being a mix of high school and first-year university students. To conduct the FGDs, the number of participants was divided into four groups, with each group consisting of five people randomly selected from the pool of participants. The characteristics of the participants were teenagers who were active on social media. The FGDs were conducted over four days, with each group being interviewed on a different day. Additionally, the group members were given three questions that they were required to answer during the interview. The discussions aimed to gain in-depth insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding hyperreality social media and its impact on their food and beverage choices. The FGD transcripts were thematically analyzed to identify patterns and themes related to hyperreality, social media, and food and beverage choices.

**Ethical consideration**

Participants were required to sign an agreement before the FGDs stating that the interview would be recorded and kept confidential.

**Results**

After analyzing the data, we found participants' opinions on hyperreality, social media, and food and beverage choices. Below are the results of each question.

**How has social media affected your life?**

Results related to the first question resulted in the categories and codes given. Table 1 presents two

**Table 1:** Adolescent’s views about affected social media

Categories	Codes	P
Pride	Communicate with many friends	5
	More followers and following on social media	15
Anxiety	Have worried about being judged (labeled) as outdated by peers	14
	Comparing one’s own life with others	7

**Table 2:** Adolescent’s views about food and beverage content on social media

Categories	Codes	P
Mouth-watering	Looks tasty and attractive	17
	The dishes are not monotonous	6
Curious about the taste	Crowded with visitors	10
	There’s never been any famous food or beverage	10

**Table 3:** Adolescent’s views about food and beverage content related to social media

Category	Codes	P
Easy to market	Products get popular among adolescents	20
	Low-cost marketing	7

categories and four codes within these general categories for the first question. Examining the answers, the researcher determined the first category as “pride”. Adolescents feel pride in using social media, they have more followers and following on social media (P=15) and feel pride they can communicate with many friends in the world (P=5).

P2 said, “*Social media can make me many friends in other countries and I am proud...maybe I hope to celebrity on Instagram*”. P7 said, “*I think social media has changed making friends and I think you'll be cool if you play social media*”.

The second category is “anxiety”. Adolescents feel anxiety about judgment by peers (P=14) and comparing one’s own life with others (P=7).

P8 said, “*I think you’ll be labelled a noob if you don’t understand anything, social media is easy to access*”. P1 said, “*...because the world of adolescents is not far from social media, but I’m*

worried my friends will label me". P6 said, "I have been told that as grandpa doesn't have gadgets because I'm too late and don't update on social media. So, it feels embarrassing and makes me have to update". P5 said, "...I also don't like being labelled as not hits by my friends...I feel that if we update to follow the new trends, I feel like I'm popular".

### **How about food and beverage content on social media?**

Results related to the second question resulted in the categories and codes given. Table 2 presents two categories and four codes within these general categories for the second question. The researcher examined the answers and determined the first category as "mouth-watering". Adolescents view food and beverage content on social media, they view looks tasty and attractive (P=17) and the dishes are not monotonous (P=6).

P3 said, "...that viral food looks so tempting...it's not just food but we have the experience of trying it". P5 said, "Food on social media can be more interesting to look at, photograph, and enjoy". P10 said, "...now the food must be made interesting so that the appetite increases". P16 said, "...not only seen from the food but also the packaging or serving the food". P19 said, "I agree with you. The food should be visually appealing and taste good. The more visually appealing it is, the more likely we are to buy it....".

It determined the second category as "curious about the taste". The view that crowded with visitors (P=10) and there's never been any famous food or beverage (P=10).

P1 said, "I wonder why the food is so viral and has a waiting list...did they use shamans?". P17 said, "...I want to be a food reviewer, so I don't have to stand in line to buy viral food". P14 said, "...but not many viral foods are good, but I always want to know the taste". P13 said, "I'm also not bored of viral food taste, but creating content and trying food is ok". P6 said, "...usually the food that goes viral is because there is no food in this city, then it goes viral there and we join in". P9 said, "Yes, I

think it's the same as other friends, especially since viral food is for us".

### **How does food and beverage content relate to social media?**

Results related to the third question resulted in the categories and codes given. Table 3 presents one category and two codes within this general category for the third question. Examining the answers, the researcher determined the category was easy to market. Adolescents view food and beverage content related to social media, they view products get popular among adolescents (P=20) and low-cost marketing (P=7).

P5 said, "...sellers should now be grateful because with the existence of social media, food or beverages are recognized by many people". P11 said, "Now that I'm an adolescent just need to scroll to find viral products". P15 said, "Actually a product known through social media is easy and cheap...". P19 said, "I think marketing through social media is the most effective". P2 said, "...the marketing uses influencers that are favoured by adolescents today."

## **Discussion**

Social media has become an integral part of modern society. A study found that adolescents feel both pride and anxiety on social media. Pride is a multifaceted emotion that people express in various ways on social media platforms. Studies indicate that individuals often use selective self-presentation to project a positive image of themselves by highlighting their achievements, positive experiences, and desirable traits<sup>8</sup>. Anxiety, especially in the context of social media, has become a growing concern for mental health professionals and researchers alike. Studies suggest that excessive social media use can cause anxiety, leading individuals to compare their lives to idealized depictions and fear missing out on rewarding experiences<sup>9</sup>. Pride and anxiety on social media impact online interactions, self-esteem, and idealized portrayals of life. These behaviors perpetuate a culture of comparison and validation-seeking, negatively affecting the well-being of individuals within the digital ecosystem.

The second result explained adolescents' views about food and beverages. A study found that adolescents feel mouth-watering and curious about the taste. The appearance of photos or videos of food or beverages on social media looks very attractive. The sensation of savoring delicious, delectable food is a joy that transcends borders. Exploring new and unusual flavors can lead to exciting discoveries about different cultures. However, indulging in food or beverage pleasures can also have its downsides. Moreover, the consumption of mouth-watering food triggers the release of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, which are associated with feelings of pleasure and reward. This neurological response is a key factor in the enjoyment of indulgent, decadent foods, and it reinforces the desire to seek out and consume such foods<sup>10</sup>. For the taste, foods popular on social media are often low in nutrition and health value. Adolescents tend to choose fast food options<sup>11</sup>. The third result explained adolescents' views about food and beverage content related to social media. A study found that easy to market. Social media has revolutionized the way businesses interact with their customers, especially in the food and beverage industry<sup>12</sup>. It has proven to be a game-changer in influencing consumer behavior, making it an indispensable tool for food and beverage companies. The power of visual advertising reinforces the findings of this study. Food and beverage brands on social media influence consumer behavior. Engaging content and influencers increase brand awareness, product consideration, and purchase intent. Consumers can share feedback and engage with brands, shaping their perceptions and buying decisions. The popularity of modern food and beverage promotions through social media is well-known. Social media platforms are used for promotion because it is considered fast and easy to spread among adolescents<sup>11,13</sup>.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that social media hyperreality among adolescents can have an impact on their food and beverage choices, particularly given that social media is increasingly being used as a marketing tool by businesses.

Adolescents need to be mindful of their health and make informed decisions about what they eat and drink, even if it has been promoted on social media. However, this research is limited in scope and further investigation is needed to improve our understanding of this issue.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Contribution of authors

Abigael Grace Prasetiani: conceptualized and designed the study

Sri Widati: conceptualized and edited the paper.

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