



## **INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS ON FOOD PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR AMONG YOUNG ADULTS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Advertisements are the paid form of promotion of goods and services through various media. Traditionally the advertisements are made through offline channels such as radio, television, news paper and magazines. In the current context, online advertisements include those sent via email, pop up advertisements and social media - the later one being the most popular among the younger generation. Shubhangam *et al*, 2020 found that social media has evolved as one of the most important channels for consumers to make decisions about buying products. (Shubhangam *et al.*, 2020).

With the widespread use of smartphones, the internet has provided the advertising industry with richer media tools and global influence, it enables marketers to use digital media to disseminate brand information interactively at a lower cost (Asha and Thanga Joy, 2016.). Danaher and Rossiter revealed that as the role of traditional media is gradually weakened, it has led to a significant increase in the popularity of digital advertising.

Young adults are continuously exposed to energy-dense, nutrient-poor food and beverages, particularly through advertising. Exposure can influence poor food choices and negatively impact health (Molenaar *et al.*, 2021). *Suit et al.*, 2017 mentioned that young adults have amongst the poorest dietary behaviour compared to other groups, with diets often high in energy and nutrient poor foods and low in fruit and vegetables. Young adults aged 18 to 24 years' experience a potentially vulnerable and malleable transitional period known as the "emerging adulthood" years (Nelson *et al.*, 2008)

Usage of Social media is especially increasing nationwide. Social media advertisements play a major role in online purchase by customers. Nowadays people attracted by advertisements and wishing to purchase and eat food items. Mostly fast foods are ordered because of these advertisements. Harshani , 2015 studied the influence of social media advertisement on consumer purchase intention and concluded that the users of social media found the advertisements interesting and they show interest by responding to them and purchase the products. This study was conducted with the objectives of knowing the influence of social media advertisements on food purchasing behaviour of young adults and how they react towards social media advertisements.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Jaffna district between the period of February to March 2022. As the Covid 19 pandemic situation prevailed in the Jaffna peninsula, people have the fear of exposing themselves to environment outside their homes and purchase food online. Therefore this time period was chosen for the study. Use of networking sites has risen significantly among young adults. A questionnaire was distributed to randomly selected young adults (21-30 years). The study sample includes students, employees and unemployed personnel from the district. The questionnaire was distributed to 250 young adults who travelled through the University of Jaffna entrance in the morning of the selected day and 234 responded. The questions included Where do the participants see advertisements regarding food purchase, reasons for purchasing, what type of food they order, level of satisfaction, frequency of purchase per week.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Advertisements plays the major role in informing the target market about their products and services. It is the paid form of communication to influence the behavior of the people in an effective and efficient manner. (Haroon, 2011).

Food advertisements can reach a wide range of customers through various platforms. Among several tools exist, social media plays a major role in bringing advertisements in to customers' attention easily. These days use of social media in smartphones has increased. Advertisements creates positive impressions on minds of the consumer (Shakib, 2017). They can easily influence one's food choice especially those of adolescents and younger people. In the digital era, advertising takes place on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Shareef *et al.*, 2019).

Out of 250 questionnaires distributed 234 responses were received.

Table 1: Background information of the participants

Variable	Category	N Participants Percentage of Total
Gender	Male	111 (47.43%)
	Female	123 (52.57%)
Civil Status	Single	200 (85.5%)
	Married	34 (14.5%)
Working	Yes	136 (58.1%)
	No	98 (41.9%).
Residence	Own/rent house with family members	178 (76.07%)
	Out side (Hostel/annexed/other)	56 (23.93%)

83 % of the participants see food related advertisements in social media. In recent years, there has been a substantial shift in media practices of people, from the dominance of television viewing to increasing time being spent online, including social media and content-sharing platforms (Beyond *et al.*, 2020).

Attracted by the picture in the advertisement made 61% of the purchase. Presenting pictures along with food names on advertisements is a common practice in media. Pictures of food on advertisement menus always leads to positive effects of buying (Hou *et al.*, 2017).

Participants consider reviews made by the consumers before purchasing (33%). Customers trust the reviews as they would a word of mouth from a friend or family member. When there are price reductions or coupons available in the advertisements 57 % of the participants purchase food items. Hoyer *et al.*, 2010 revealed that at opinions and reviews given by others in the social media is very important for the buyers. It also helps to build trust on the group and influence the buying decision process.

Discount coupons and price reductions often affect consumer's purchasing behaviour positively by increasing re-consumption willingness. (Ling *et al.*, 2015). However, 38% of the purchasers felt that money was wasted for a particular order. Customers prefer to see or have a close proximity within the product because on social media, consumers do not have the assurance of the quality of the product.

Fast food items are purchased by 63% of the participants. As young adults show the poorest health food purchasing behaviour, the advertisements should focus on healthy food marketing to uplift the nutritional status of the future generation.

Food purchase via applications in smartphones which can deliver food items to the door steps in other parts of Sri Lanka are lacking in the study area of the study.

With the wide use of internet in smartphones the advertisements can reach the consumers easily and the purchase of food items get increases. Lock down, travel restrictions and fear of exposure outside during the Covid- 19 pandemic led to the purchase of food items via online. The social media changes the traditional way of marketing by helping the consumers to purchase food from home easily.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the study it can be concluded that advertisements tend to influence the young adults to purchase food items especially Face book social media advertisements play a major role. The study can be improved by increasing the number of participants. The study was conducted from the perspective of consumers. In future the views of food companies also be included. As considerable number of participants purchase fast food items, the study recommends that the advertisements should focus on healthy food marketing to uplift the nutritional status of the future workforce of the nation.

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