

Short Article

# Media and Social Media Influence on Obesity

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24321/2455.7048.202510>

## I N F O

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### How to cite this article:

Singh M, Parashar M. Media and Social Media Influence on Obesity. *Epidem Int.* 2025;10(3):1-2.

Date of Submission: 2025-10-29

Date of Acceptance: 2025-11-30

## A B S T R A C T

Social media platforms simultaneously fuel body image pressures driving unhealthy habits while offering supportive communities for sustainable weight management journeys. This digital paradox both perpetuates unrealistic standards and democratizes evidence-based health information—making our scrolling either our greatest obstacle or ally in addressing obesity.

**Keywords:** Sustainable, Paradox, Obstacle, Obesity

The burden of obesity which in general terms means excess body weight for a given height in India is 24% in women and 23% in men aged 15-49 years of age. Another better measure is abdominal obesity that is through waist circumference which is of more significance in Indian phenotype. The burden of abdominal obesity is higher; 40% in women and 12% in men (15-49 years age).<sup>1</sup> Similarly the childhood and adolescent obesity is on rise at a rapid rate. The causative factors are many. In this article one predisposing factor that is Communication media or social media; will be discussed which has rapidly gained attention in recent years.

Communication to human beings is equivalent to air and water. It evolved with our species. And in this century, we have developed means of communication which can connect us to other humans (known or unknown) and their thoughts with a speed of light. Technology and media have deeply permeated in daily life of majority of Indians. The media sells products, news, treatment, advices for our minds. Introduction of carbonated sweetened drinks in our country was marketed heavily through advertisements which were luring for brains of children and adolescents especially. This also opened the market for processed foods,

brands which sell high fat and carbohydrate containing ready to eat food which is addictive to tongue and brain on sight. The variety of these foods and drinks are uncountable.

In a study published by Kent et al., in 2024 from Canada provides a detailed examination of posts surrounding popular food and beverage brands on social media by analyzing the frequency and reach of social media posts for food brands frequently targeted at children. It highlighted the social media sites which highlighted the posts related to fast food restaurants and products. It reported that users sharing brand-related content on social media may cause unhealthy eating behaviours as a norm for youngsters, and result in exponential user exposure to food-related content with every share on social media, further perpetuating social dietary norms.<sup>2</sup> The social media platforms collect users and their friends likes, shares and views data for market surveys. The products and restaurants use the data and target each user as per his/her choice in form of showing ads related to items and restaurants. It also tracks the timing of a user when he/she orders a food item and what he/she is talking about in terms of food (if your microphone access is on for these sites, it will be used). This is related to human psychology and behaviour.

At the other end of spectrum are those users who are influenced by the social media and their posts on body image. Chu et al., published their findings in 2024 of Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development study showing relationship between screen time, social media use, and eating disorder symptoms. The influencers on YouTube and Instagram sometimes portray an ideal fit body that leads to dissatisfaction among subscribers or users. This has also been observed to lead to eating disorders like binge eating and purging to achieve a body similar to a model or film star or actors.<sup>3</sup> Those watching do not understand that the virtual reality cannot be validated. Moreover, to quote an example a phenotype of Korean actors cannot be applied on Indian phenotype.

The solutions are limiting the screen time by indulging ourselves and our children in activities which distract us from virtual world. A very easy to advice and most difficult to follow solution is leisure time physical activity, communicate in person with people and validate whatever we see on social media from experts.

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