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Research Article

Determining the Approaches to Nutrition Posts on Social Media: Trends in Young Adults

Sosyal Medyada Yer Alan Beslenme Paylaşımlarına Yaklaşımların Belirlenmesi: Genç Yetişkinlerde Eğilimler

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Anahtar kelimeler
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Abstract

Aim: Social media is a very popular communication channel in the world and provides information about many topics. Food and nutrition are frequently shared topics on social media. This study evaluated the effects of social media on nutrition. **Materials and Methods:** Questionnaires were filled in by asking questions to the participants through a face-to-face interview. This cross-sectional study was conducted in Ankara/Turkey. For this study, 4400 individuals, aged between 19-45, were randomly selected. **Results:** It was determined that 93.9% of the participants were using social media and 26.8% of the participants followed dietary posts and 2.0% of the participants used an online diet. 18.3% of the participants applied the healthy recipes which they reached through social media. When the participants were classified according to body mass index (BMI) classification, it was seen that those who have a BMI below 25 kg/m^2 have a higher rate of social media use and following dietary post. Online diet usage was found significantly higher in individuals with a BMI above 25 kg/m^2.
Conclusion: It was observed that following dietary posts and applying healthy recipes on social media are quite high in participants. For this reason, it is important to follow the experts and obtain correct information about food and nutrition through social media.

Öz

Amaç: Sosyal medya, dünyada oldukça popüler bir iletişim kanalıdır ve birçok konu hakkında bilgi sağlamaktadır. Besin ve beslenme sosyal medyada sıklıkla paylaşılan konulardır. Bu çalışmada sosyal medyanın beslenme üzerindeki etkileri değerlendirilmiştir. **Gereç ve Yöntem:** Anketler, yüz yüze görüşme yoluyla katılımcılara sorular yöneltilerek doldurulmuştur. Bu kesitsel çalışma Ankara/Türkiye'de yürütülmüştür. Bu çalışmaya yaşları 19-45 arasında olan 4400 kişi rastgele seçilmiştir. **Bulgular:** Katılımcıların %93,9'unun sosyal medya kullandığı, %26,8'inin diyet paylaşımlarını takip ettiği ve %2,0'sinin online diyet uyguladığı belirlenmiştir. Katılımcıların %18,3'ü sosyal medya üzerinden ulaştığı sağlıklı tarifleri uygulamaktadır. Katılımcılar beden kütle indeksi (BKİ) sınıflamasına göre sınıflandırıldığında, BKİ'si 25 kg/m^2'nin altında olanların sosyal medya kullanım oranları ve diyet paylaşımlarını takip etme oranlarının daha yüksek olduğu görülmüştür. BKİ'si 25 kg/m^2'nin üzerinde olan bireylerde online diyet kullanımı anlamlı olarak daha yüksek bulunmuştur. **Sonuç:** Sosyal medyada diyet gönderilerini takip etme ve sağlıklı tarifler uygulamanın katılımcılarda oldukça yüksek olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Bu nedenle uzmanları takip etmek ve sosyal medya aracılığıyla besin ve beslenme konusunda doğru bilgilere ulaşmak önem taşımaktadır.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media can be defined as a community-based, web-based communication channel which is used as an online social network, where interaction and content are shared (1). Young adults nowadays are constantly exposed to information through social media that can affect their social norms and behaviors (2). Food and nutrition are the primary issues which are posted by healthcare professionals, healthcare organizations, health bloggers, and regular social media users (3). Many healthcare professionals are aware of the possibility that social media offers the opportunity to reach and communicate with young adults. For this reason, social media can be used as an effective platform to offer health promotion campaigns and to increase the sharing of evidence-based health messages (4, 5). However, incorrect information or information that is poorly communicated can influence unhealthy behaviors and poor health outcomes (6). Social media accounts that share nutrition-related posts create content on many different themes, such as giving recipes, providing information on body weight control, increasing nutrition literacy, creating diet plans, and using nutritional supplements (7). Social media platforms have also been used by dietitians to provide nutritional information. On the other hand, it is controversial whether dietitians use social media effectively (8).

This study aims to evaluate the effects of social media on nutritional status in young adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Procedures

Face-to-face interviews were used to collect data for this cross-sectional study in Ankara, Turkey. In the current study, 4400 individuals (2200 male and 2200 female), aged between 19-45, participated. The study was conducted in conformity with the Principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, and informed consent form which was obtained from the participants.

These questionnaires consist of 6 sections that includes personal information, nutritional habits, social media use, nutrition-related accounts and effectiveness in social media, online diet effectiveness, and anthropometric measurements. Body weight (kg) and height (cm) were taken according to the statements of the participants. Body mass index (BMI) values of the participants were calculated with the body weight/height^2 (kg/m^2) equation by using body weight and height measurements (9).

Statistical Analysis

The study's data were statistically analyzed by using the IBM SPSS Statistics V22.0 program. The number (n) and percentage values (%) were used for the qualitative data and a chi-squared test was chosen to calculate the statistical difference. Statistical significance was considered to be a p-value of less than 0.05 in all comparisons.

RESULTS

A total of 4400 individuals, 2200 male, and 2200 female were included in the study. General information and BMI classification are given in Table 1. According to BMI, 59.7% of participants are normal. There is a significant difference between the genders in terms of BMI classification (p<0.001).

It was determined that 93.9% of the participants were using social media. There was no difference between genders in terms of social media use (p=0.57). It was observed that the most used social media application among male and female participants was Instagram (respectively 78.3%, 81.1%). It was found that 26.8% of the participants followed dietary posts on social media. It was determined that female followed significantly more dietary posts (p<0.001). 90.2% of the participants who followed dietary posts said that the jobs of people who are followed on social media were important. Jobs of people who are followed on social media are significant difference between females and males (p<0.001). While the most followed profession in both genders is a dietitian, males also follow sports trainer more. Jobs of the people who are followed on social media is given in Figure 1.

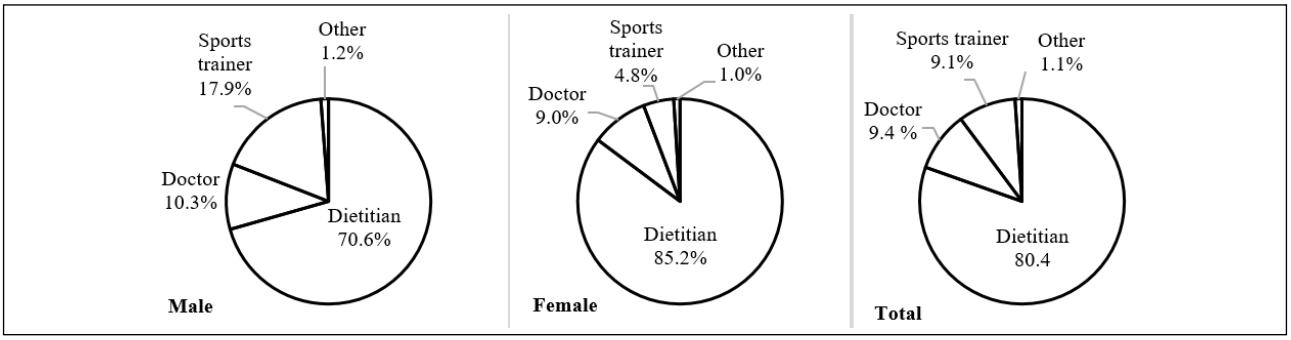

Figure 1. Jobs of people who are followed on social media Note: Multiple options have been reported by participants.

Table 1. General information and body mass index classification of participants

	Male (n=2200)		Female (n=2200)		Total (n=4400)		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	p
Education level							
Primary school	47	2.1	73	3.3	120	2.7	0.131
Middle School	100	4.5	119	5.4	219	5.0	
High School	416	18.9	386	17.5	802	18.2	
College	1549	70.4	1536	69.9	3085	70.2	
Master	74	3.4	72	3.3	146	3.3	
Doctorate	14	0.6	14	0.6	28	0.6	
Working status							
Working	1167	53.0	734	33.4	1901	43.2	**0.000***
Not working	1033	47.0	1466	66.6	2499	56.8	
Marital status							
Single	1423	64.7	1384	62.9	2807	63.8	0.221
Married	777	35.3	816	37.1	1593	36.2	
BMI (kg/m²)							
Underweight	30	1.4	183	8.3	213	4.8	**0.000***
Normal	1202	54.6	1426	64.8	2628	59.7	
Overweight	796	36.2	448	20.4	1244	28.3	
Obese	172	7.8	143	6.5	315	7.2	

BMI: Body Mass Index. *p<0.05 Note: Data are represented as number (n) and percent (%).

It was determined that 2.0% of the participants used an online diet. It was shown that female were much more than males to use the online diets (p<0.05). The professions of the people are interviewed by the participants following the online diet are given in Figure 2. There is a significant difference between females and males (p<0.05). While the most interviewed profession in both genders is a dietitian, males also interviewed sports trainer more. It was determined that 87.6% of the participants provided weight reduction with an online diet.

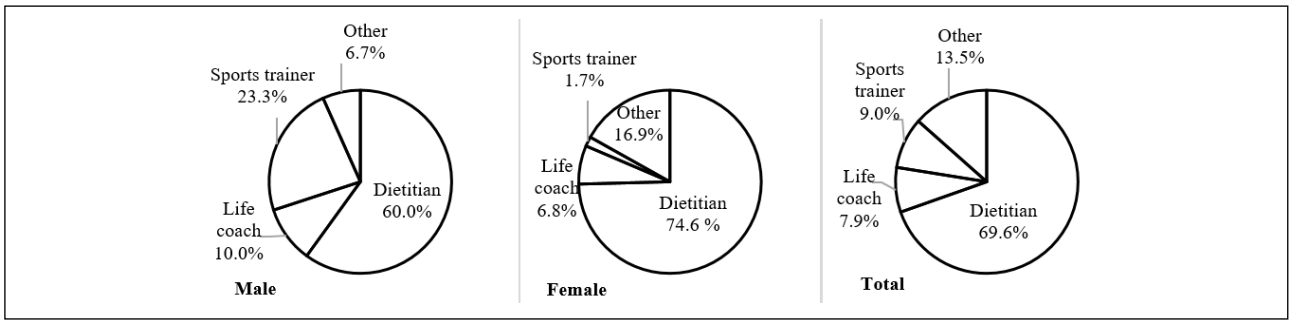

Figure 2. Professions of the people interviewed by online diet users Note: Multiple options have been reported by participants.

It was determined that 18.3% of the participants applied the healthy recipes which they reached through social media. It was observed that female tend to apply more healthy recipes than male (p<0.001). Healthy salads (p<0.05) and healthy desserts (p<0.001) are more preferred by female than male. The most used healthy social media recipes are given in Figure 3.

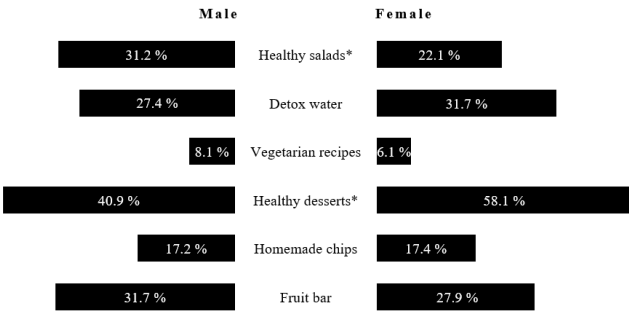

Figure 3. Recommended healthy recipes on social media
Note: Multiple options have been reported by participants. *p<0.05

It was observed that 31.4% of the participants thought that these recipes would help to lose weight. Males pay more attention to the energy of recipes than females (p<0.001). The features to be considered in the healthy recipes in recipes are applied by the participants are given in Figure 4.

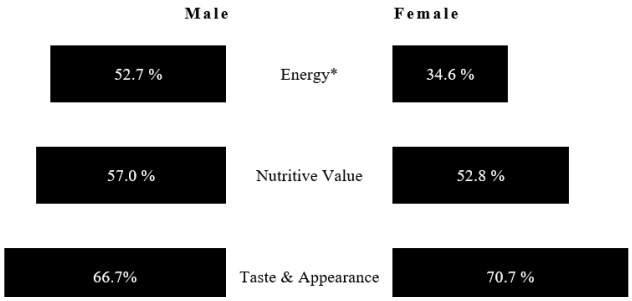

Figure 4. Features to be considered of participants in recipes
Note: Multiple options have been reported by participants. *p<0.05

When the participants are classified according to BMI, it is seen that those who have a BMI below 25 kg/m^2 have a higher rate of social media use (p<0.001) and following dietary post (p<0.05). Online diet usage was found significantly higher in individuals with a BMI above 25 kg/m^2 (p<0.05). Healthy recipe application status did not differ between gender. The distribution of the participants according to the BMI classification is given in Figure 5.

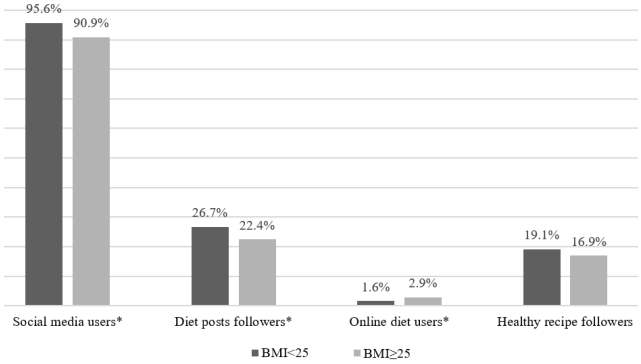

Figure 5. Nutrition-related activities in social media of participants according to BMI classification BMI: Body Mass Index, *p<0.05

DISCUSSION

In the current study, the social media usage of the participants was questioned. It was determined that the majority of the participants used social media (93.9%) and the most frequently used social media platform was Instagram. In a study which was conducted in the America, it was determined that the most frequently used social media is Snapchat, followed by Facebook and Instagram. However, it was determined that even though the frequency of use is less than the others, most of the time is spent on YouTube (10).

Social media is a platform where individuals can access true or false information on many health-related issues. Misinformation about health includes issues such as vaccination, virus infections, nutrition, cancer, fluoridation of water and smoking (11). For this reason, the accuracy of the information and the authority of the person sharing are very important in social media posts. Misinformation can be decreased by promoting reliable social media sites and educating people on how to use them properly, both of which can be done by researchers and health care professionals (6, 12). In this study, it was determined that 26.8% of the participants followed diet posts on social media. It was seen that the followed accounts were dietician, doctor, and sports trainer, respectively. The professions followed show a significant difference between the genders. The main reason for this is that following sports trainers are higher in male than in female. The tendency to bodybuilding in male can be a reason for following a sports trainer (13).

An online diet is defined as the diet service which is received on web. It was determined that 2.0% of the participants follow an online diet and 87.6% of those loss weight. In a systematic review, internet-based dietary interventions were found to improve lifestyle changes and adiposity. However, it's long-term effectiveness is controversial since the working time is less than one year (14). Online diet usage was found significantly higher in individuals with a BMI above 25 kg/m^2 in this study. This result shows that individuals with higher body weight prefer online diet as a way of weight loss. However, it has been found that they use an online diet in individuals with normal body weight, and the use of an online diet is higher in female. It has been observed that the effect of social media on body image is mostly negative, especially in female (15).

Another topic in the use of social media for nutrition is to follow and make healthy recipes. In this study, it was found that 18.3% of the participants followed healthy recipes on social media. In another study, it was found that approximately 96% of the participants used the internet to find recipes. While the most common source for accessing online recipes is Facebook (43.2%), health institutions such as the American Heart Association remained at 8.9% (10). This suggests that there are uncertainties about accessing healthy recipes in reliable sources.

It is thought that social media is more successful than increasing the intake of healthy food groups than reducing negative eating habits (16). For this reason, healthy recipes presented on social media can increase positive eating habits in people. Healthy desserts, salads, fruit bars, and detox juices are among the most frequently followed healthy recipes in this study. It was seen that the participants attached great importance to taste and appearance in the recipes. However, in another study, 3 million food-related posts which was shared on Instagram were examined and it was observed that the sharing rate of desserts that were high especially in terms of fat, cholesterol and sugar content was higher (17). In a systematic review, it has been shown that young adults are willing to receive healthy recipes through social media but are reluctant to share personal information about bodyweight (18).

CONCLUSION

Social media is an increasingly popular communication tool for individuals to access nutritional information. The interest in nutrition-related content in individuals with normal body weight as well as overweight or obese individuals shows that social media may be a useful health-promotion setting. Therefore, it is very important to transfer the correct information by experts on these platforms. Although many healthcare institutions and healthcare professionals try to take part in social media, it is not sufficient yet. The main reason for this inadequacy is that healthcare professionals do not have enough time. Although online diet is far from face-to-face communication, it is another topic which is discussed because it is easily accessible. It should be remembered that the most effective method for healthy weight loss is to resort to health professionals.

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Yazarlık katkısı - Author contributions: Çalışmanın tasarımı: HY, MGK; Çalışma verilerinin elde edilmesi: HY, FGB, MGK; Verilerin analiz edilmesi: FGB; Makale taslağının oluşturulması: FGB; İçerik için eleştirel gözden geçirme: HY, MGK; Yayınlanacak versiyonun son onayı: HY, FGB; MGK - Study design: HY, MGK; Data collection: HY, FGB, MGK; Data analysis: FGB; Draft preparation: FGB; Critical review for content: HY, MGK; Final approval of the version to be published: HY, FGB, MGK.

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