

# Impact of Digital Food Environment on Eating Habits of Indian Population: A Qualitative Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The digital food environment encompassing online platforms such as Instagram and YouTube as well as food delivery apps shape how individuals interact with food. It has transformed food accessibility, creating convenience for consumers but also influencing their dietary habits in ways that may not always promote health. With the growing prevalence of diet-related health issues, such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases, it has become crucial to understand how this digital ecosystem affects eating behaviours.

**Aim:** This study aims to assess the impact of the digital food environment on dietary habits of the Indian people.

**Methodology:** In this study we conducted 2 focussed group discussions on the population aged between 18-45 years old. The probes were developed around the effect of social media and digital marketing on food habits, how food delivery apps are changing people's dietary intake and their recommendations on improving these dietary habits. One of the groups consisted mainly of college going students (both home and hostel residents) and were 7 in number. The other group had adults (both working and non-working) of 30-45 years of age. 7 open ended questions were asked to guide the discussion, the data was audio recorded, and important points were noted to draw conclusions.

**Results:** The studies have showed that the population of age groups around 18-25 were more influenced by social media platforms and food delivery apps. Hence the frequency of their order was more (at least once a week). Whereas the elderly population around 35-45 years of age preferred more of home cooked meals and were less likely to be influenced by these online apps as they are less likely to view influencers as role models. The elderly population focused more on healthy options whereas the younger ones focused more on price and convenience.

**Conclusion:** Digital food environment is affecting eating behaviour of individuals in a lot of ways. As, the choices are not always healthy, the unhealthy eating behaviour is leading to obesity, diabetes and other cardiovascular health issues. The results suggest the need to put a control on the negative impact of these platforms and in turn identify ways in which it can help build healthier eating habits.

**Implications:** This highlights the importance of targeting digital food environments with health-conscious campaigns, especially for younger audiences, to promote healthier choices and reduce the risk of diet-related health issues like obesity and diabetes. Policymakers and app developers can play a key role in shaping the food environment to encourage better dietary habits across all age groups.

**Keywords:** Digital food environment, Unhealthy eating habit

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