

The Influence of Digital Food Marketing on Children's and Adolescents' Food Choices

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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of overweight and obesity among children and adolescents continues to rise, partly driven by high consumption of foods high in fat, sugar, and salt. The evolution of the digital landscape has shifted food marketing toward social media, algorithm-based advertising, influencer content, and advergames, thereby increasing exposure to such marketing. This narrative review aims to synthesize the evidence on how digital food marketing strategies influence food choices and consumption behaviors among children and adolescents. Literature searches were conducted on the ScienceDirect and SpringerLink databases and limited to English language articles published between 2020 and 2026. Fifteen articles including primary and secondary research studies and reviews met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed using a narrative review approach. The results of the synthesis indicate that children and adolescents are heavily exposed to digital food marketing across various platforms. This marketing is delivered through increasingly personalized AI based techniques, influencer support, and peer-to-peer marketing. Such exposure has consistently been linked to higher brand awareness, strong food cravings, and a stronger preference for foods high in fat, sugar, and salt. This drives demand for unhealthy food products. Digital food marketing can influence children's and adolescents' responses to food, including brand awareness, food cravings, preferences, and food intake. Strengthening regulations on digital food marketing, along with digital media literacy and nutrition education, is necessary to create a healthier digital food environment.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology currently has changed the way the food industry communicates with consumers, including the age group of children and adolescents. If conventional food marketing was previously dominated by television advertising, print media, and billboards, today marketing is shifting massively to the digital realm through social media, gaming applications (*advergame*), online videos, as well as a recommendation system that uses algorithms¹. This shift occurs as children and adolescents have increased access to digital devices, where digital marketing is an area of growth in food marketing with teenagers as the main target due to their enthusiasm for new media platforms and increasing purchasing power^{2,3}.

The World Health Organization (WHO) noted that in 2018, more than 390 million children and adolescents aged 5-19 years in the world were overweight or obese⁴. In addition, based on 2023 SKI

data, in Indonesia obese adolescents aged 13 - 15 years have a prevalence of 12.1% and obese adolescents 4.1%. The prevalence of obese adolescents in Indonesia aged 16-18 years is 8.8%, and obese adolescents are 4.7%⁵. Increased intake of foods high in fat and sugar is one of the main causes besides a decrease in physical activity⁶⁻⁷. Overweight conditions in childhood and adolescence tend to persist into adulthood and are at risk of triggering non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer, in addition to impacting emotional well-being and self-esteem⁸.

Food marketing has long been identified as a systemic factor that influences the eating choices and behaviors of children and adolescents. Exposure to food ads increases brand awareness and builds a positive attitude towards the product, making it easier for individuals to remember and choose the product when they want to buy. Most of the products promoted are energy-dense and low-nutrient foods, such as fast food, sugary drinks, sweets, and salty snacks, which if consumed in excess contribute to an increased risk of obesity and non-communicable diseases⁹.

In contrast to television commercials that are one-way and can be supervised by parents, digital food marketing has much more complex characteristics¹⁰. This marketing is often disguised in entertainment content such as games, videos, and uploads *Influence*, spread viral through social networks, and utilize users' personal data to produce highly personalized and targeted ads¹³. The hidden and algorithm-based nature of marketing makes it difficult for children and teens to realize that they are being targeted for advertising, making it difficult for parents, educators, and policymakers to supervise¹².

Social media such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook are the main channels for digital food marketing for children and adolescents. Food content on these platforms is generally packaged through uploads *Influence*, challenge (*challenge*) food-themed, user-generated content (*user-generated content*), as well as personalized display and video ads using artificial intelligence (9). The multinational food industry is actively leveraging these techniques to reach young audiences with much higher reach and frequency of exposure than conventional media¹³. On the other hand, children and adolescents are at a stage of cognitive, emotional, and social development that makes them vulnerable to the influence of marketing¹⁴. Early childhood tends to be unable to distinguish between entertainment content and advertising, while adolescents, despite having more mature cognitive abilities, remain vulnerable due to the great need for social acceptance, self-identity, and sensitivity to rewards from their social environment¹⁵.

However, children and adolescents should not be considered a homogeneous population in relation to digital food marketing. Differences in cognitive development, advertising literacy, autonomy in food-related decisions, peer influence, and purchasing capacity may shape how each age group perceives, interprets, and responds to digital food marketing. Younger children may have more limited

abilities to recognize persuasive intent, whereas adolescents generally have greater autonomy and purchasing capacity but may be particularly susceptible to peer influence, social identity, and interactive marketing environments. These developmental differences are therefore important to consider when examining how exposure to digital food marketing translates into food preferences, choices, and consumption behaviours. This vulnerability makes digital food marketing have the potential to have a long-term impact on the food preferences and consumption patterns of the younger generation¹⁶.

Current regulations in most countries are still limited to television advertising in children's hours and are generally self-regulatory (*self-regulatory*) a voluntary industry, does not include marketing in schools or the digital realm, and rarely reaches adolescent age groups or families as a whole¹⁷. The lack of data transparency from technology platforms and food companies regarding techniques, demographic targets, and marketing impacts also makes it difficult to research and formulate evidence-based policies in this area¹⁸.

Although previous narrative and scoping reviews have examined digital food marketing among children and adolescents, existing evidence has often focused on describing marketing platforms, advertising techniques, exposure patterns, or specific aspects of children's vulnerability. However, the rapidly evolving digital environment, including algorithm-driven personalization, influencer marketing, advergames, social media challenges, and user-generated content, requires continued synthesis of the evidence. Moreover, there remains a need to more explicitly consider the developmental differences between children and adolescents and to integrate these differences with the mechanisms through which digital food marketing may influence food preferences, food choices, and consumption. Therefore, this review is intended not merely to describe the presence of digital food marketing, but to synthesize how different digital marketing strategies and exposure mechanisms may influence food-related outcomes across these two developmental groups.

Based on this gap, the present narrative review aims to identify and analyse the latest scientific evidence regarding the influence of digital food marketing on children's and adolescents' food choices. Specifically, this review addresses the following question: "How does exposure to digital food marketing influence food preferences, choices, and consumption among children and adolescents?" The review further examines the digital platforms and marketing techniques involved, the mechanisms through which exposure may influence food-related behaviours, and the extent to which developmental characteristics of children and adolescents shape their responses to digital food marketing. The results of the study are expected to provide an overview of digital food marketing platforms, techniques, and mechanisms that contribute to the food choice behaviour of the younger generation, as well as the basis for the development of digital nutrition literacy strategies and better regulatory policies.

METHODS

This study uses a literature review with a narrative method, which is an approach that aims to provide a descriptive synthesis of various research results on the influence of digital food marketing on children's and adolescents' food choices. The narrative method was chosen because it is able to integrate scientific evidence from various research designs, including cross-sectional studies, experiments, and scoping reviews so as to provide a broader understanding of the evolving digital food marketing phenomenon.

The literature search was conducted on two international scientific databases, namely ScienceDirect, and SpringerLink. The search process uses a combination of keywords in English, including *"digital food marketing"*, *"food advertising"*, *"children"*, *"adolescents"*, and *"food choice"*, which are used separately or combined using Boolean AND or OR operators. The core Boolean search string was (*"digital food marketing" OR "digital food advertising" OR "online food marketing" OR "online food advertising" OR "social media food marketing"*) AND (*"children" OR "adolescent"*) AND (*"food choice" OR "food preference" OR "food consumption"*).

Articles included in this study meet the inclusion criteria, the study population consisted of children and/or adolescents, defined as individuals aged 3–18 years, or studies in which the mean/median age of participants was within this range, the study examined at least one form of digital food marketing exposure, including social media marketing, online food advertising, influencer or celebrity marketing, branded digital content, advergames, personalized or algorithm based food advertising, digital promotions, or other food marketing delivered through internet based or digital platforms, the study assessed at least one food related outcome, including food choice, food preference, food purchasing intention or behaviour, food consumption, dietary intake, snack selection, or eating behaviour, eligible study designs included original observational studies, experimental studies, qualitative studies, and relevant review or scoping review articles that provided evidence directly related to digital food marketing and food related outcomes among children and/or adolescents, studies published in the 2020-2026 in English, were eligible for inclusion to reflect recent developments in digital food marketing, and studies conducted in any geographical region or country were eligible, with no geographical restriction applied, to provide a broader understanding of the global digital food marketing phenomenon.

This literature review included both primary and secondary sources. Primary studies were considered the main evidence for synthesizing findings on the relationship between digital food marketing and food related behaviours among children and adolescents, while secondary sources, including narrative reviews, scoping reviews, and relevant handbook chapters, were used to provide broader context and support the interpretation of the evidence.

The Exclusion criteria included publications that were not available in full text, studies that did not involve children or adolescents as the target population, studies that examined only conventional or non-digital food marketing without a relevant digital component, and publications that did not address food related preferences, choices, consumption, or eating behaviours. Duplicate records were removed before the screening process. Publications that were not relevant to the research question after title, abstract, or full text assessment were excluded from the final synthesis.

Title and abstract screening were independently conducted by two reviewers to identify potentially relevant studies based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The full texts of potentially eligible articles were subsequently assessed independently by the same two reviewers to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the final synthesis. Any disagreements between the reviewers were resolved through discussion.

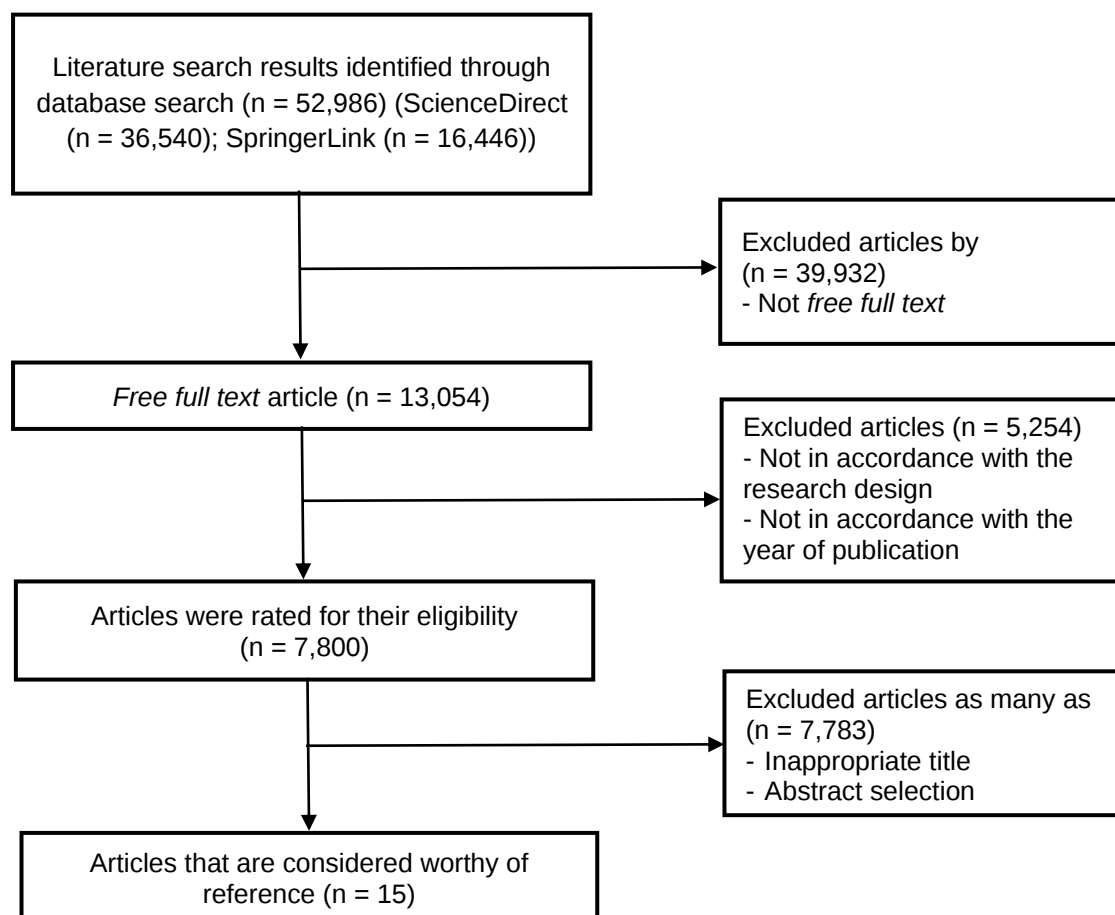


Figure 1. Literature Search Flowchart

RESULTS

After undergoing a literature screening process, articles that met the inclusion criteria were then mapped to provide a structured overview of their characteristics and the available evidence. This

mapping was conducted to facilitate comparisons of findings across studies and to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in research results, which were subsequently synthesized narratively. The results of the article mapping, which form the basis for the synthesis in this review, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Article Data Mapping Results

No.	Researcher and Year	Article Title	Journals and Databases	Study Design	Conclusion
1	Driessen, C., Bennett, R., Cameron, A.J., Kelly, B., Bhatti, A., & Backholer, K. (2024)	Understanding parents' perceptions of children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing in digital and retail environments	Appetite (ScienceDirect)	A descriptive qualitative study with in-depth semi-structured interviews with 16 parents (caregivers) of children aged 7–12 years.	Parents are more worried about the marketing of unhealthy food in supermarkets than on digital devices, because of the direct link to children's whining behavior. Concerns about digital food marketing are lower because parents are less aware of the actual exposure to children.
2	Elliott, C., Truman, E., & Black, J.E. (2025)	Food marketing to teenagers: Examining the digital palate of targeted appeals	Appetite (ScienceDirect)	An exploratory and participatory study on 468 adolescents (13–17 years).	The "digital palate" (food profile) promoted to teenagers is dominated by sweet and practical products (drinks, fast food, candy/chocolate) about 83% of the total advertisements. Instagram is the platform with the most food ads. The most influential persuasive techniques are visual style (and special offer).
3	Driessen, C., Chung, A., Martino, F., Cameron, A.J., Bhatti, A., Huse, O., & Backholer, K. (2025)	Contemporary digital marketing techniques used in unhealthy food campaigns targeting young people	Appetite (ScienceDirect)	Qualitative conceptual content analysis of 111 industry campaign reports (from the WARC database) related to unhealthy food digital marketing targeting children	Food/beverage companies use four groups of advanced digital marketing techniques: (i) data & technology utilization, (ii) audience profiling & segmentation, (iii) targeting & personalization, and

				aged 3–17 years directly/indirectly, in the period September 2019–August 2023	(iv) participation & engagement (including AI, gamification, and influencers). The impact reported by the industry itself includes increased exposure, purchase/consumption of unhealthy products, and the formation of emotional bonds with brands.
4	De Jans, Spielvogel, Naderer, & Hudders (2021)	Digital food marketing to children: How an influencer's lifestyle can stimulate healthy food choices among children	Appetite (ScienceDirect)	Experiments on 190 children aged 8-12 years.	Influencer content on Instagram that features an athletic lifestyle increases the selection of highly nutritious snacks for children, showing that influencer marketing strategies can influence children's food choices both in healthy and unhealthy directions.
5	Ares, Antúnez, de León, Alcaire, Vidal, Natero, & Otterbring (2022)	"Even if you don't pay attention to it, you know it's there": A qualitative exploration of adolescents' experiences with digital food marketing	Appetite (ScienceDirect)	Qualitative (in-depth interviews with adolescents)	Adolescents are aware of the influence of digital marketing on brand awareness and desire for food, although the influence on actual purchases is felt less, adolescents propose regulation and media literacy education as a mitigation strategy.
6	Théodore, López-Santiago, Cruz-Casarrubias, Mendoza-Pablo, Barquera, & Tolentino-Mayo (2021)	Digital marketing of products with poor nutritional quality: a major threat for children and adolescents	Public Health (ScienceDirect)	Descriptive-exploratory cross-sectional (46 food products on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)	Products with low nutritional content (high in sugar/sodium/fat) were most promoted on social media using a combination of promotional characters (79.1%), incentives (65.1%), and interactive digital techniques (78.3%),

					regardless of the type of platform.
7	Fretes, Veliz, Narvaez, Williams, Sibille, Arts, & Leroy (2025)	Digital Marketing of Unhealthy Foods and Non-alcoholic Beverages to Children and Adolescents: A Narrative Review	Current Developments in Nutrition (ScienceDirect)	Narrative review	Children and adolescents in low-middle-income countries are highly exposed to unhealthy food digital marketing, with exposure increasing with age.
8	Tatlow-Golden & Garde (2020)	Digital food marketing to children: Exploitation, surveillance and rights violations	Global Food Security (ScienceDirect)	Conceptual/policy analysis (children's rights perspective)	The practice of personal data extraction and behavioral design in digital marketing violates children's rights to health, privacy, and protection from commercial exploitation, so it requires strict state regulation, not just industry self-regulation.
9	van der Bend, Jakstas, van Kleef, Shrewsbury, & Bucher (2022)	Adolescents' exposure to and evaluation of food promotions on social media: a multi-method approach	International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity (SpringerLink)	Multi-method (survey and interview of youth)	Adolescents are intensively exposed to food promotions on social media and tend to judge it positively, especially when the content involves social interaction such as being uploaded, liked, or consumed by peers and influencers.
10	Meléndez-Illanes, González-Díaz, & Álvarez-Dardet (2022)	Advertising of foods and beverages in social media aimed at children: high exposure and low control	BMC Public Health (SpringerLink)	Rapid review (573 articles filtered into 7 inclusion articles)	Children show high interest and are able to rerecognize unhealthy food brands promoted on social media.
11	Vergeer, Soto, Bagnato, Pauzé, Amson, Ramsay, Olstad, Welch, & Potvin Kent (2025)	Examining differences in exposure to digital marketing of	BMC Nutrition (SpringerLink)	Cross-sectional (online survey in 10-12 year old and 13-17 year old)	The study found high levels of self-reported exposure to digital marketing of unhealthy foods among children

		unhealthy foods reported by Canadian children and adolescents in two policy environments			and adolescents in Ontario and Quebec.
12	Harris, Fleming-Milici, Gearhardt, Grier, Montgomery, Romo-Palafox, & Tatlow-Golden (2025)	Digital Food Marketing and Children's Health and Well-being (bab dalam Handbook of Children and Screens)	Springer Nature (SpringerLink)	Narrative synthesis	About 70% of teens report interacting with up to 48 food brands on social media, disguised digital marketing in entertainment content, spreading through social networks, and tapping into adolescent developmental vulnerabilities such as social affiliation needs and sensitivity to rewards.
13	Ares & Otterbring (2025)	Digital Food Marketing and Implications for Public Health Nutrition (bab dalam Handbook of Public Health Nutrition)	Springer Nature (SpringerLink)	Narrative synthesis	Digital marketing of ultra-processed food is the dominant commercial determinant of health promoting fast food, sweetened drinks, chocolate, and salty snacks on various digital platforms, children and adolescents are considered the most vulnerable group to its persuasive effects.
14	Gupta, Huggins, Salahshornezhad, Bennett, Backholer, & Peeters (2025)	Digital marketing techniques within online food retail platforms: a scoping review	BMC Medicine (SpringerLink)	Scoping review	Online food retail platforms (delivery, online grocery shopping, meal-kits) widely use digital marketing techniques that reinforce the perception of product value, deliciousness, and enjoyment, with most of those techniques tending to

					promote unhealthy food choices.
15	Ares, G., Antúnez, L., Alcaire, F., Natero, V., Gugliucci, V., Machín, L., de León, C., & Otterbring, T. (2025)	Associations between exposure to digital food marketing and food consumption in adolescence: a cross-sectional study in an emerging country	BMC Public Health (SpringerLink	A cross-sectional study with a self-report questionnaire survey of 1,542 adolescents (11–19 years) in 39 schools (29 public, 10 private) in Montevideo, Uruguay.	Almost 90% of teenagers are exposed to food/beverage advertisements in digital media, especially fast food, soft drinks, and salty snacks. Exposure to processed food or fast-food ads was associated with higher consumption of the category, while total social media usage was associated with lower consumption of fruits and vegetables.

DISCUSSION

1. Children, Teens, and the Digital Food Marketing Environment

Children and adolescents are a population group with a high level of digital device use, making them the main target of digital food marketing¹⁹. Harris et al. (2025) report that about 70% of teens admit to interacting with up to 48 different food brands on social media, with more than half of the posts they see being personalized content based on previous browsing history and digital interactions²⁰. This high intensity of exposure makes the digital environment one of the important determinants that shape the food preferences and choices of the younger generation, in line with the statement from Ares & Otterbring (2025) which calls digital marketing one of the most important elements in the marketing mix of the ultra-processed food industry today²¹.

Frete et al. (2025) found that children and adolescents are highly exposed to online food marketing, with exposure levels increasing with age²². One of the distinctive features that distinguishes digital food marketing from conventional marketing is its ability to precisely target audiences through algorithms¹⁰. In contrast to television advertising that is one-way and uniform to all audiences, digital platforms leverage user behaviour data, what is liked, watched, searched for, and shared, to present individually tailored marketing content. This mechanism makes it difficult for children and adolescents to recognize that they are being targeted by advertising, as the content often blends in with the entertainment or social content, they consume on a daily basis^{23,24}.

2. Digital Food Marketing Platform and Techniques

The food industry today takes advantage of a much broader and more integrated digital ecosystem than the conventional marketing era. Various platforms are used simultaneously to reach children and teens, including social media (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook), ad-loaded gaming apps (*advergame*), platform *streaming*, online food retail sites, to branded mobile applications downloaded directly to personal devices^{11,19}. This cross-platform approach allows food brands to reach young audiences at various digital interaction points throughout the day, rather than just a single moment of air like a television commercial²⁵.

Driessen et al. (2025) who analysed 111 global food marketing industry reports identified four groups of contemporary digital marketing techniques, namely the use of data and technology for campaign optimization, *profiling* and audience segmentation based on demographic characteristics and online behaviour, content targeting and personalization, and content creation that is intentionally designed to generate engagement (*engagement*) such as viral challenges and collaborations with content creators¹⁰.

Among these techniques, interactive digital games specifically designed to promote a brand or product are one of the most studied forms of marketing in the literature¹³. A systematic review from Folkvord (2019) on gamification and serious play on children's eating behaviour found that playing games that promoted snacks (*advergames*) significantly increased children's snack intake afterwards, with the most pronounced effects occurring on unhealthy snacks, while the reward element (*reward*) that are repeated being the most consistent component used to drive behaviour change in various studies²⁶. These findings are reinforced by a meta-analysis by Evans et al. (2023) which confirms that most digital game-based marketing interventions target products high in fat, sugar, and salt²⁷. These findings indicate a predominantly unfavourable direction of digital food marketing exposure, although the magnitude of its effect on food choice varies across study designs, platforms, age groups, and outcomes.

Théodore et al. (2021) found that products with low nutritional quality were most predominantly promoted on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube using a combination of promotional characters (79.1% of uploads), incentives such as discounts and rewards (65.1%), and interactive digital techniques such as quizzes and challenges (78.3%), regardless of the type of platform used (28). These findings collectively confirm that digital food marketing techniques for children and adolescents do not stand alone, but rather complement and overlap, combining narrative elements (characters and stories), and interactive mechanisms (games, quizzes, challenges) to strengthen the emotional appeal and persuasive effectiveness of food products, especially products with low nutritional profiles^{26,29}.

3. Role of Influencers and User-Generated Content

One of the characteristics of digital food marketing is the utilization of *Influence* and user-generated content (*user-generated content*) to build an authentic and trustworthy impression³⁰. Based on the results of research from De Jans et al. (2021) through an experiment on 190 children aged 8-12 years old, it was shown that the lifestyle displayed by influencers on Instagram uploads influenced children's snack choices, when influencers displayed an athletic lifestyle, children chose more nutritious snacks than when influencers displayed a passive lifestyle³¹. These findings indicate that the persuasive power of influencer marketing can steer children's food choices in two directions, both reinforcing the consumption of unhealthy foods and potentially encouraging healthier choices if designed appropriately³¹.

User-generated content also strengthens the marketing effect because it involves social interaction in the form of uploads, comments, and peer-to-peer sharing¹⁸. Van der Bend et al. (2022) found that teens tend to rate food promotions on social media more positively when the content features the interaction of peers or influencers who consume the product, compared to conventional one-way advertising³².

However, most of the existing literature on digital food marketing has focused predominantly on the direct child-content interaction. Other factors such as parental mediation strategies (active co-viewing, restrictive rules on screen time, or open discussion about advertising intent), household food availability, family purchasing power, and parents' own digital literacy may all shape the extent to which digital marketing translates into actual food choices or purchase requests. For instance, a household with limited healthy food options at home may leave children more susceptible to marketing-driven cravings regardless of parental awareness, while parents with low digital literacy may be less equipped to recognize or discuss covert marketing tactics such as influencer endorsements or user-generated content with their children^{33,34}.

4. Psychological Mechanisms of the Influence of Marketing on Food Choices

The relationship between digital food marketing and children's and adolescents' food choices occurs through several psychological mechanisms. Rather than operating as isolated processes, these mechanisms can be understood as a sequential and mutually reinforcing pathway in which marketing exposure may first facilitate attention and brand awareness, followed by affective responses such as wanting or food craving, and subsequently contribute to preferences and food related intentions. Social influences may operate across these stages by providing normative cues about which foods are popular or socially desirable. The first mechanism is increased brand awareness, repeated exposure to advertising that makes it easier for individuals to recognize and remember a product³⁵.

The second mechanism is the formation of desires (*wanting*) and *food craving* through repeated exposure to visually appealing foods. Ares et al. (2022) through qualitative interviews with adolescents found that they were aware that digital marketing influenced awareness and desire for the promoted product, although some adolescents considered its influence on actual purchasing decisions to be smaller than its influence on attitudes and preferences³⁶. This finding suggests that psychological responses to marketing may be more readily observed at the level of awareness, attitudes, preferences, or desire than at the level of actual purchasing behaviour. Thus, craving and wanting may represent intermediate responses within the pathway from marketing exposure to food-related preferences rather than direct indicators of food consumption.

The third mechanism is social normalization through peer and influencer influence, where products that appear popular or consumed by a well-liked figure are considered more interesting to try³⁷. In this context, social normalization may strengthen the preceding psychological processes by providing social cues that reinforce attention, desire, and perceived acceptability of the promoted product. The combination of these three mechanisms, brand awareness, desire to consume, and social normalization, gradually shapes the preferences of children and adolescents for the most frequently promoted food products digitally, namely foods high in sugar, salt, and fat²⁷.

Furthermore, the characteristics of adolescents' cognitive and psychosocial development are also factors that increase their vulnerability. Teenagers are in the stage of forming an identity and have a strong desire to be accepted by peers. Thus, the combination of algorithmic personalization, the involvement of influential figures, and the psychological vulnerability of young people makes the digital food marketing environment a domain that requires special attention from a public health perspective³⁴.

5. Impact on Food Choice and Consumption

As a consequence of intensive exposure to digital food marketing, children and adolescents tend to prefer and consume food products high in sugar, salt, and fat over balanced nutritious foods. Gupta et al. (2025) found that digital marketing techniques on delivery services, online grocery shopping, and meal-kits consistently reinforce perceptions of product value, deliciousness, and enjoyment, with most of these techniques promoting unhealthy food choices³⁸.

Fretes et al. (2025) in the narrative review also emphasized that exposure to digital marketing of unhealthy foods tends to be followed by an increase in the consumption of these products, with the level of exposure increasing as children age into adolescence²². Consumption patterns formed from an early age due to digital marketing have the potential to persist into adulthood, increasing the long-term risk of obesity, metabolic diseases, and other non-communicable diseases³⁹.

There are several limitations to this study, namely, the literature search strategy, which covered only two databases, and the fact that not all the literature reviewed in this study consists of primary research (original research), but also includes secondary sources and review articles.

CONCLUSION

The available evidence suggests that digital food marketing is an important component of the food environment that may influence children's and adolescents' food related responses, although the strength and direction of associations vary across studies and outcomes. Across the reviewed literature, social media, influencers and user generated content, personalized and algorithm driven marketing, advergames, and online food retail emerged as important channels and techniques through which food products, particularly those high in sugar, salt, and fat, are promoted to young audiences. These marketing practices were associated with outcomes including greater brand awareness, food craving, product preference, and, in some studies, subsequent food intake.

Based on the reviewed evidence, strengthening policies to limit children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing should be prioritized, particularly through improved regulation and monitoring of digital platforms and targeted marketing practices. Digital media literacy and nutrition education for children and adolescents should complement these regulatory measures by improving their ability to recognize and critically evaluate persuasive food marketing content. Together, these approaches may contribute to a healthier and more protective digital food environment for children and adolescents.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This literature review was compiled based on published and publicly available sources and did not involve human participants or the collection of primary data. Therefore, this study did not require institutional ethical approval or informed consent.

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