Original Article

# Instagram and its influence on the eating patterns of people between 18 and 35 years old

*Instagram y su influencia en los patrones alimentarios de personas de 18 a 35 años*

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to investigate how the social network Instagram affects the eating habits of individuals aged 18 to 35 in Peru. We used a methodological approach that included a virtual questionnaire on Google Forms, which was sent to participants who agreed to collaborate. Participants were selected randomly, and inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. The research was descriptive, observational, and cross-sectional. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0, and we found that there was no significant relationship between following healthy lifestyle accounts on Instagram and the nutritional knowledge of the 296 participants. Additionally, we did not find significant differences in the perception of Instagram's influence among different age groups. Furthermore, we found that the participants' eating behaviors were largely healthy, with no notable influence from Instagram.

**Keywords:** Social networks, eating habits, youth.

**RESUMEN**

El objetivo de este estudio fue investigar cómo la red social Instagram afecta los hábitos alimenticios de personas de entre 18 y 35 años en Perú. Utilizamos un enfoque metodológico que incluyó un cuestionario virtual en Google Forms, enviado a los participantes que aceptaron colaborar. Se seleccionaron participantes de manera aleatoria y se aplicaron criterios de inclusión y exclusión. La investigación fue descriptiva, observacional y transversal. Se analizaron los datos con SPSS versión 26,0 y encontramos que no hay una relación significativa entre seguir cuentas de estilo de vida saludable en Instagram y el conocimiento nutricional de los 296 participantes. Tampoco encontramos diferencias significativas en la percepción de la influencia de Instagram en los distintos grupos de edad. Además, encontramos que los participantes tienen conductas alimenticias mayoritariamente saludables, sin que Instagram tenga una influencia notable.

**Palabras clave:** Redes sociales, hábitos alimentarios, juventud.

## INTRODUCTION

The influence of technological innovations on the education and well-being of the population has been notable in recent years. Teaching has experienced significant improvements thanks to technological tools that allow for more effective and continuous learning. These technologies provide access to a wide range of up-to-date global information, making them essential to humanity. In particular, social networks such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter have been the favorites of the current generation. These platforms offer constant and synchronous connectivity between their users, and are integrated by default into most electronic communication devices, making them accessible to everyone.

Access to information through online internet browsers has allowed a significant part of the population to resolve doubts or consult physical or psychological symptoms, accessing various digital platforms with unlimited content. This access to information in real time can help resolve concerns and doubts effectively. In response to this dynamic, some health professionals have chosen to use social networks and other digital platforms to disseminate relevant information that can raise awareness and promote health and well-being. However, the increase in information on social media has also led to the circulation of manipulated and unverified data, making it difficult for users to determine the validity of content presented on these social networks.

The abundance of information from the media and social networks has significantly transformed people's behavior and social interaction. This excess of data has given rise to a new landscape in the processing and interpretation of messages by social media users.

Given the large amount of information on social networks, it is essential to keep in mind that eating behaviors are not inherent and are shaped throughout human growth, influenced by factors such as family customs, lifestyle and personal relationships. Therefore, it is essential to investigate how social networks, especially Instagram, influence eating behaviors (Martínez, 2020).

Within this group of social networks, Instagram has experienced exponential growth in the number of users, attracting millions of people thanks to its highly accessible, fast and friendly interface, the platform stands out for its focus on publishing photos and stories. , which offers users a visually attractive and dynamic experience (Sharan, 2019).

Among social media platforms, Instagram stands out as the one preferred by the majority of the Hispanic American population. Its popularity is largely due to its accessibility, speed and simplicity compared to other social networks that can be found pre-installed on mobile devices. The platform offers information directly and efficiently, allowing users to access visual content with a single click. This content includes image descriptions, engaging posts with real-time captions, and videos, all accessible across a variety of devices such as mobile phones and tablets. The visual and concise presentation of information avoids texts extensive that could consume the user's time, facilitating navigation and

interaction within the application (Allue de Magdalena, 2017).

Scientific evidence supports the association between inadequate nutrition and the development of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, obesity and overweight, among others. The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that physical activity plays a fundamental role in the prevention of diseases related to inadequate food intake. Likewise, it is noted that the reduction in alcohol and tobacco consumption are additional factors that contribute significantly to maintaining the health of the population; these preventive measures, supported by scientific evidence, are crucial to address the negative impact of inadequate diet on the population. public health and promote a healthy and sustainable lifestyle (WHO, 2017).

Given the widespread exposure of the new generation, known as "Millennials" and "Generation Z", to global information, our main objective is to highlight the role of social networks as vehicles of healthy, authentic and sustainable eating at all stages of the life. Additionally, we seek to analyze how Instagram influences eating behaviors, exploring the factors that lead people to consider this platform as a primary source of nutrition information.

The primary responsibility of education, which falls on parents, includes teaching the importance of maintaining an adequate nutrition throughout life. This fundamental objective of the family unit seeks to establish solid foundations for the adoption of healthy and consistent eating behaviors for the growth and development of individuals. However, this educational effort is challenged by the proliferation of online information and the presence of social media accounts that promote healthy eating practices without scientific basis, presenting quick and attractive results, but lacking empirical support. These external influences distort the perception of food, nutrition and body image, negatively impacting the health and well-being of the population (Montoya, 2017).

Our study focused on Instagram due to its wide adoption: approximately 8 in 10 people use it regularly for various purposes, such as entertainment, information, and work. The simplicity of use of this application encourages the daily consumption and sharing of content among users (Marcelino, 2015).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Lima, Peru, and examines the relationship between Instagram use and eating habits in users between 18 and 35 years old. The study population was defined as Instagram users who reside in Lima, Peru, and are within this age range. The selected sample consisted of 296 active users who agreed to participate in the research and they met the established inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria were: being an Instagram user, being between 18 and 35 years old and residing in Lima, Peru. The exclusion criteria were: not residing in Lima, having visual disability and not accepting the consent agreement to participate in the research. A simple random sampling process was used. To collect data, a questionnaire on the use of Instagram and eating habits was designed, which was distributed through a virtual link disseminated on social

networks. Initial users shared the link with their contacts, which increased the number of questionnaires completed in the study. All participants included in the sample met the established inclusion and exclusion criteria during the period from March 2022 to May 2022.

Regarding the research design, it is a descriptive, observational study with a transversal and prospective approach. The nutritional knowledge and Instagram influence questionnaire developed by Laura Míguez Fernández in 2019 was used as a measurement instrument.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire implemented in the study automatically excluded individuals whose ages were not within the established range, that is, between 18 and 35 years, the analysis of the collected data, represented in figure 1, reveals that the majority of the participants
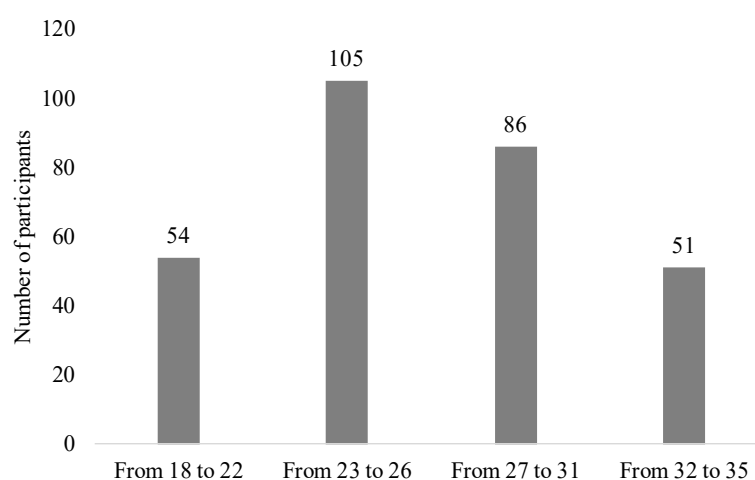


**Figure 1.** Age range of participants.

concentrate in the age range between 23 and 26 years, constituting 35.5% of the total sample, this group is followed by participants between 27 and 31 years old, which represent 29.1% of the total.

It was evaluated whether the respondents followed a specific account associated with a healthy lifestyle through social networks, with an exclusive focus on users of the Instagram platform, as established in the inclusion and exclusion criteria established by the researchers. The results obtained are presented in Figure 2, which illustrates that 99.3% of the participants responded affirmatively to the question about whether or not they followed any account related to

the healthy lifestyle on Instagram, this indicates a high prevalence of following 'healthy life style' accounts among the users of this social network in the group of participants in the study, as we contrast with the research by Rivas Herrero (2020), whose analysis indicated that 93.3% of its sample of young Spaniards use Instagram daily.

Figure 3 presents the perceptions of the participants regarding the influence of 'healthy lifestyle' accounts on their diet. The majority of respondents consider that these accounts exert a certain degree of influence on their eating habits, with the response being more "normal" common, with 28.7% of the participants.

Furthermore, a significant 22.6% indicated that these accounts "almost always" influence their diet, suggesting considerable influence. On the other hand, 18.6% of participants reported that the influence is "from time to time." when", which denotes a variability in the impact. 15.2% of respondents indicated a "a lot" influence and 14.9%

indicated little influence. The results obtained suggest that 'healthy lifestyle' accounts exert influence in feeding the survey participants. However, while the study by Miguez (2019) found that 46.57% follow such accounts, differing from our findings, this discrepancy is possibly due to geographic variations in the samples.
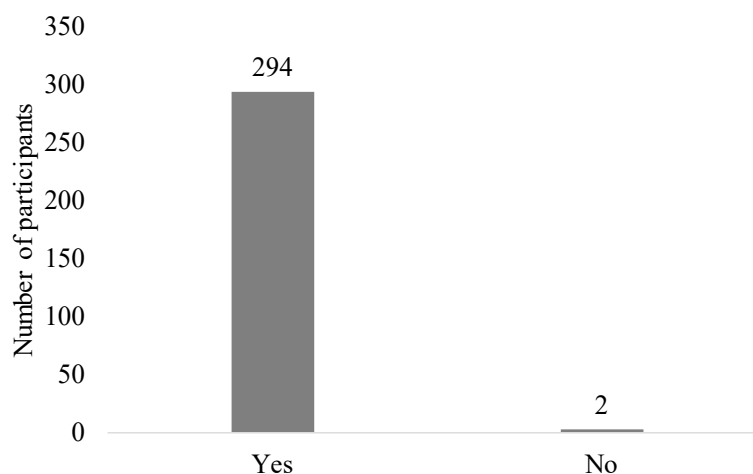


**Figure 2.** Do you follow any healthy lifestyle accounts on Instagram?
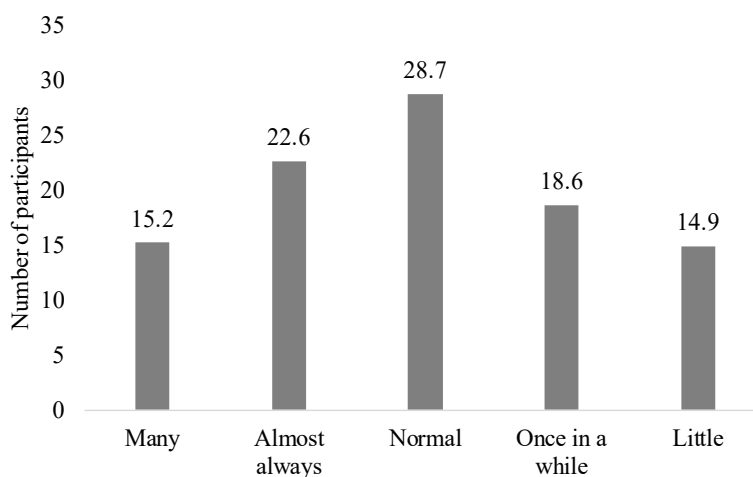


**Figure 3.** Do healthy life style accounts on Instagram influence diet?

Figure 4 presents an analysis of the participants' responses to the question asked in the questionnaire about the quantity of daily servings of fruits and vegetables recommended by experts.

The results show that a considerable 62.5% of the participants wrongly answered that they should consume 3 servings of fruits and 2 of vegetables a day. According to the Dietary

Guidelines for the Peruvian Population (2019), recommendations for adults include consuming 3 servings of vegetables at each main meal and 3 or more servings of fruit daily, as indicated by 37.5% of the remaining participants analyzed.
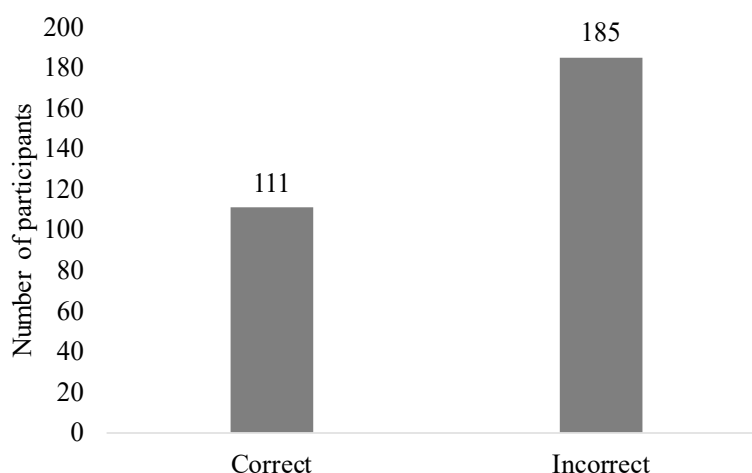


**Figure 4.** How many servings of fruits and vegetables do experts recommend to eat per day?

## CONCLUSIONS

The use of Instagram does not significantly influence eating behaviors or nutritional knowledge among the sample of participants aged 18 to 35 years. No significant differences were found in the perception of the influence of Instagram between the different age groups, nor was a relevant correlation established between the frequency of use of this platform and the level of nutritional knowledge of the participants. However, it is important to note that the study had some limitations, such as the lack of a control group, which could have affected the results. In addition, the questionnaire used did not evaluate the quality of the nutritional information provided in the accounts followed by the participants, which could have influenced the results.

While the study did not find a significant relationship between Instagram use and eating behaviors and nutritional knowledge, it is important to continue researching this topic to better understand how social media, such as Instagram, can influence the health and well-being of people. Furthermore, it is suggested to conduct future studies that include a control group and assess the quality of the nutritional information provided on the accounts followed by the participants.

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