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Is Social Media Associated with Obesity: A Pilot Project of Food Images

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Recent studies have shown the influence of paid advertisements on individual's dietary habits. With the social networking advertisement industry growing rapidly, individuals are being subjected to images of relatively unhealthy food from restaurants, fast food establishments, etc. Recent studies also show an increase in media usage has an increased impact on physical activity and sleep disorders and therefore, obesity. With the rising popularity of social media, there is a need to determine if social media is associated with obesity. This study seeks to understand how social media influences dietary habits. A pilot study is underway at the University of [College]. Student (N=25) social media images are being observed to determine what college students post about food. Face book, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat are currently being utilized to collect the data. A preliminary ocular (visual) analysis indicates that posted food images are relatively more unhealthy than healthy. With this information, it is then necessary to investigate portion sizes, nutrient density and food preparation techniques. The My Plate recommendations from USDA will be used to analyze portion sizes and nutrient density in food images. The surroundings of the food images will be used to analyze food preparation techniques. Implications and recommendation will be developed for an array of audiences. Understanding the relationship between social media and obesity is key to overcoming this global epidemic.

Biography:

Sara Maples is a graduate of Mississippi State University with a B.S in Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communications. She is a second-year graduate student at the University of Arkansas. She is pursuing a master's of science in Agricultural and Extension Education with a concentration on Agricultural Communications. Her thesis research is on food literacy. She has presented and attended conferences in U.S including the National Health Outreach Conference in May 2017 and Association of Leadership Educators in July 2016.