

Social media and eating habits: A study on the relationship between digital consumption and eating behavior

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ABSTRACT

Social media plays a fundamental role in shaping eating habits, especially among young people, since their use through digital platforms has transformed the way they access information about nutrition, recipes, diets, and healthy lifestyles. Constant exposure to visual content and messages related to food directly influences daily decisions about what, how, and when to eat. The study aimed to establish the relationship of social media with eating habits in university students from a private university in the city of Huancayo, located in the Junín region of Peru. The research was basic under a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional section, the population was made up of 311 university students enrolled in the 2025-I academic period. The results were processed through structural equations using the Jamovi program. These results indicate a high degree of relationship between the study variables, given that the Spearman Rho correlation coefficient was 0.832 and 0.000 as the significance level, demonstrating a strong, positive relationship. The study concluded that there was a strong, significant relationship between the dimensions of the social media use variable (network use, platform type, social interaction, and personal and social impact) and eating habits.

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1. Introduction

Social media has revolutionized the way young people access information about food, generating changes in eating patterns (Can & Alatas, 2019). In the United States, 90% of young people have a profile on some social network and approximately 10% of their published content is related to food, which directly impacts their eating decisions. Constant exposure to images and messages about food on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok has contributed to the adoption of global diets and food trends, both positive and negative (Brady et al., 2023). A study by the UPF Observatory of Scientific Communication showed that more than 50% of those surveyed changed their eating patterns after following influencers on social media. Likewise, the phenomenon of food influencers has shown that 69% of followers of accounts like Carlos Ríos's adopted healthier habits, such as cooking at home and reducing their consumption of ultra-processed foods. (Pérez et al., 2022) However, there is also the risk of following extreme or unfounded diets that can harm your health. The World Health Organization has warned that misinformation on social media contributes to the rise of non-communicable diseases such as obesity and type 2 diabetes, especially among young people. In Latin America, social media use among young people is high and has impacted the perception and consumption of nutritional products (Zambrano et al., 2024). A study in Costa Rica revealed that images and messages about food on Instagram and TikTok significantly influence the dietary choices of young

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people aged 20 to 27. In Latin America, social pressure and beauty standards promoted on social media have increased eating disorders and body dissatisfaction among young university students. In Peru, widespread internet access has increased the use of social media as a primary source of food information (Cortez et al., 2023). 43.3% of young Peruvians use social media between 3 and 4 hours a day, with WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram being the most popular for searching for food information. 88.3% of young Peruvians surveyed reported healthy eating habits, but 11.7% only reported regularly healthy eating habits, reflecting the mixed influence of social media on their dietary decisions. (Martín-Lagos et al., 2022) In Lima, 80% of women buy at least one product marketed as healthy, and 45.3% access social media weekly to research trendy diets, indicating a strong association between the use of these platforms and food choices. 86.2% of women who use social media weekly choose products labeled as healthy, demonstrating the direct impact of social media on food purchases and consumption. The Peruvian Ministry of Health has reported an increase in the prevalence of overweight and obesity in young university students, partly attributed to the influence of social networks and the promotion of ultra-processed products, 95.1% of adolescents and young adults evaluated in a systematic review skipped breakfast, 96.7% consumed energy drinks and 93.1% sugary drinks, in relation to the irregular use of social networks for more than 5 hours a day (Alimenticios et al., 2023).

Educational interventions through social media can have positive effects, such as decreased lipid consumption (7.62%) and increased protein (7.1%) and micronutrient intake, according to experimental studies. In the Junín region, social media penetration among university students is high and has generated changes in eating habits, both positive and negative, depending on the quality of the information consumed. Among young people in Junín, the pressure to belong to virtual communities and follow dietary trends can lead to the adoption of restrictive or unhealthy diets, affecting their overall well-being. Students primarily use WhatsApp (55%), Facebook (36.6%), YouTube (30%), and Instagram (40%) to learn about nutrition, demonstrating the importance of these platforms in shaping their eating habits. University authorities have identified the need to strengthen nutrition education and promote responsible use of social media to prevent unhealthy eating habits (Manjarres & Lozada, 2023).

The aforementioned highlights the complex influence of social media on university students' eating habits, with data demonstrating both risks and opportunities for health promotion. This requires comprehensive strategies tailored to each context to maximize benefits and minimize harm.

2. Literature review

2.1 Social networks

Social networks are online platforms formed by people or organizations who connect around shared interests or values. These platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, and Instagram, operate at different levels—professional, personal, and entertainment—but always allow for the exchange of information and interaction among their members (Roxana et al., 2019). In the virtual realm, social networks have revolutionized the way people connect, share content, and build digital communities. From a sociological perspective, the concept of social networks is not new. At the end of the 19th century, they were already used to analyze interactions between individuals, groups, and organizations. Today, digital social networks have expanded this approach, facilitating creation, sharing, and collaboration in a wide variety of contexts, from educational to professional to recreational (Cerero et al., 2023). Thus, social networks constitute open systems under constant construction, where users identify with similar needs and problems, creating spaces for collaboration and mutual support.

In the educational field, social media has introduced new forms of communication and collaborative learning (Aguilar & Hung, 2022). According to studies conducted at universities, the use of these platforms has facilitated interaction between students and professors, enabling the creation of more flexible and personalized learning environments. Furthermore, access to specialized academic networks, such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu, has enhanced scientific collaboration and the dissemination of knowledge.

The impact of social media is not limited to education; it has also transformed the way we access information, build digital identity, and participate in public life. These platforms allow users to share opinions, disseminate news, and organize social movements, becoming key tools for citizen expression and participation (Gutiérrez & Buiza, 2024). However, their widespread use also poses challenges related to privacy, personal information management, and public exposure, especially among young people.

In short, social media is much more than just websites or apps: it represents a social and technological phenomenon that has profoundly changed the way people communicate, learn, and organize. Their ability to connect individuals, facilitate the exchange of information, and build virtual communities makes them fundamental players in contemporary society.

In this study, the following dimensions of social networks were used: Use of social networks, type of platform, social interaction and personal-social impact:

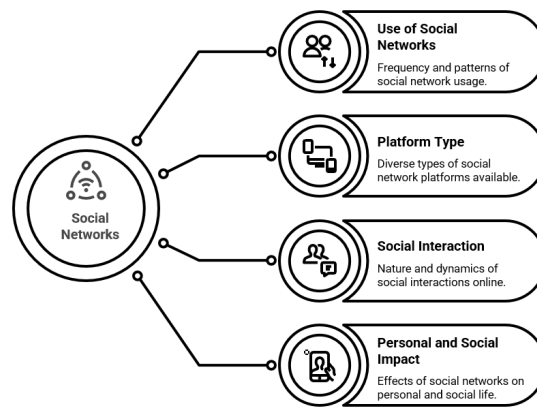


Fig. 1. Dimensions of social media use

- a. **Social Media Use:** Social media use refers to the way people interact, communicate, and share information through digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others. These tools have radically transformed communication, enabling global connectivity that facilitates the rapid dissemination of news, the creation of communities, and the exchange of ideas in real time. According to RD Station , social media is a network of organizations or individuals who connect around shared interests or values, which explains its widespread popularity and constant growth. However, social media use has two sides (Cerero et al., 2023). On the one hand, it contributes to improving communication and raising the profile of social, ethical, and environmental issues, empowering minority groups and encouraging citizen participation (García et al., 2020). On the other hand, it can generate negative effects such as the spread of false information, political polarization, and mental health issues. Constant exposure to idealized images and the search for social approval can trigger anxiety, stress, and addiction, affecting users' psychological well-being.
- b. **Platform type:** Digital platforms are virtual environments designed to facilitate various online activities and services, adapting to specific user needs. Common types include social media platforms, which enable interaction, communication, and community building, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok ; e-commerce platforms, which facilitate the buying and selling of products and services online, examples of which are Amazon and MercadoLibre; and streaming and multimedia content platforms, such as Netflix, Spotify, and YouTube, which offer access to on-demand entertainment. Additionally, there are digital educational platforms, which support distance learning and personalized learning, such as Coursera, Moodle, and Khan Academy. (Quiroz, 2014)Collaboration and productivity platforms, such as Slack and Microsoft Teams , also stand out, enabling real-time communication and teamwork, especially in remote work environments. Other types include digital payment platforms, banking platforms, search engines, and messaging platforms, each with specific features that contribute to connectivity, efficiency, and accessibility in different areas of daily life.
- c. **Social Interaction:** Social interaction is understood as the dynamic, two-way exchange of messages, ideas, and emotions between people within a given context. In the digital environment, especially on social media, this interaction manifests itself through various actions such as likes, comments, shares, mentions, and private messages, which allow users to actively participate and express opinions or feelings regarding content published by others (Chiza-Lozano et al., 2021). This process not only facilitates communication but also contributes to community building and strengthening social ties, even when the interaction is not face-to-face or in real time. Furthermore, social interaction on social media has particular characteristics that differentiate it from face-to-face interaction. It is asynchronous, as it can occur at any time; public, as many interactions are visible to broad audiences; and dynamic, as it evolves with the emergence of new platforms and features. These interactions are essential for increasing the visibility and reach of content, generating engagement , and building lasting relationships between users and brands. Therefore, measuring and promoting social interaction has become a key strategy in digital marketing and social communication.
- d. **Personal and social impact:** The personal impact of social media manifests itself in various psychological and emotional aspects. Excessive or problematic use of these platforms has been associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, and sleep difficulties, especially in adolescents and young adults. Studies indicate that the constant search for social approval and comparison with idealized images on networks like Instagram can negatively affect the perception of one's body image and emotional well-being. Furthermore, social media addiction can lead to isolation, decreased academic performance, and mental health problems, which reduces users' quality of life (Jaimes-Barrera et al., 2021). On the social level, social media has transformed the way people communicate, interact, and build relationships, facilitating instant connection and the large-scale dissemination of information. However, it has also created challenges such as the spread of false information, loss of privacy, cyberbullying, and superficial interpersonal relationships. Excessive use of these platforms can lead to emotional disconnection in real life and the adoption of behaviors and thoughts influenced by fads or trends, affecting individual and collective identity. Therefore, it is essential to promote conscious and regulated use that enhances social benefits and minimizes risks.

2.2 Eating habits

Eating habits are defined as routine patterns of food consumption, that is, the tendencies and preferences a person develops to choose, prepare, and consume certain foods to the exclusion of others. These habits encompass not only what is eaten, but also how, when, and in what quantity the food is consumed, and are influenced by sociocultural, psychological, economic, and familial factors. Munárriz (2009) points out that eating habits comprise a set of routine behavioral rules that govern eating behavior and help us understand what and why we eat what we eat. The formation of eating habits begins in childhood and is consolidated throughout life, with youth typically becoming more established. Most eating habits in adulthood are habits acquired at earlier stages, which explains their resistance to change. (Maza et al., 2022) Furthermore, dietary education and the influence of family and social environments play a fundamental role in consolidating these habits, directly impacting people's health and overall well-being. Maintaining healthy eating habits is essential to preventing chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease. A balanced diet, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-fat dairy products, provides the nutrients necessary for proper body function and contributes to a better quality of life (Lanuza et al., 2022). On the other hand, frequent consumption of ultra-processed foods, rich in sugars, saturated fats, and sodium, is associated with a higher risk of non-communicable diseases. The organization and distribution of meals throughout the day is also part of eating habits (Fisberg et al., 2024). Experts recommend eating four to five meals a day, including breakfast, lunch, dinner, and healthy snacks, avoiding skipping meals and controlling portions. It's also important to maintain proper hydration and prefer healthy cooking methods, such as steaming or grilling, instead of frying.

In conclusion, eating habits are a fundamental component of lifestyle and have a direct impact on physical and mental health. Adopting and maintaining healthy habits requires education, awareness, and consistency, but the benefits are reflected in increased energy, improved mood, and a lower risk of disease (Abdoli et al., 2023). As Hippocrates stated: "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food."

2.3 Structural equation models

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a family of multivariate statistical techniques designed to analyze and estimate complex causal relationships between multiple variables, both observed and latent (Alberto, 2015). These models allow testing theories that propose causal structures, such that some variables influence others, generating chains of effects that can be evaluated simultaneously (Martínez-Ávila & Fierro-Moreno, 2018). A complete SEM consists of two main components: the measurement model, which specifies how latent constructs are measured through observed variables, and the structural model, which describes the causal relationships between these constructs. This technique is an extension of confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis, and is widely used in social sciences, education, psychology, economics and health to model complex constructs that cannot be directly observed (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The use of SEM overcomes the limitations of traditional methods such as regression or correlation by simultaneously modeling multiple relationships and by including latent variables that represent abstract concepts (Meza-Bernaola et al., 2023). In addition, it facilitates the evaluation of the model's fit to the data using statistical indices, which helps to validate theories and better understand causal relationships. Its applications include the study of human behavior, the evaluation of educational interventions and the modeling of disease risk, among others. (Ávila & Fierro, 2018).

3. Methodology

The research analyzed the problem and its implications adopting a basic approach, with a non-experimental design, in a cross-sectional period, likewise the characteristics were identified in their natural context (Hernández et al., 2014). No specific situation was generated for the study, but previously existing situations in the population were observed, and through inference, relationships between variables were established to write the text (Nicomedes, 2018). The population was made up of students enrolled in the 2025-I academic period in the Professional Human Nutrition program at a private university located in the city of Huancayo, in the department of Junín in Peru, an institution that trains human nutrition professionals with specific knowledge related to eating habits.

Table 1
Student population of the Human Nutrition degree

Semester	Male	Female	Total
Yo	15	25	40
II	6	20	26
III	15	21	36
IV	11	14	25
V	18	25	43
VI	8	12	20
VII	15	25	40
VIII	11	23	34
IX	4	21	25
X	9	13	22
Total	112	199	311

3.1 Research model

The proposed model aims to analyze the influence of social media use on eating habits, considering various dimensions that comprehensively reflect this relationship (Herrera-Rodríguez, 2018). Currently, social media has become an essential component of daily life, especially among young people, influencing not only interpersonal communication but also lifestyles, based on eating patterns. The model is structured around one variable: eating habits, which is influenced by four latent variables that represent different aspects of social media use.

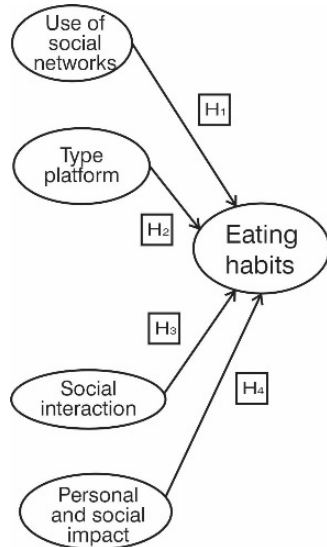


Fig. 2. Proposed research model

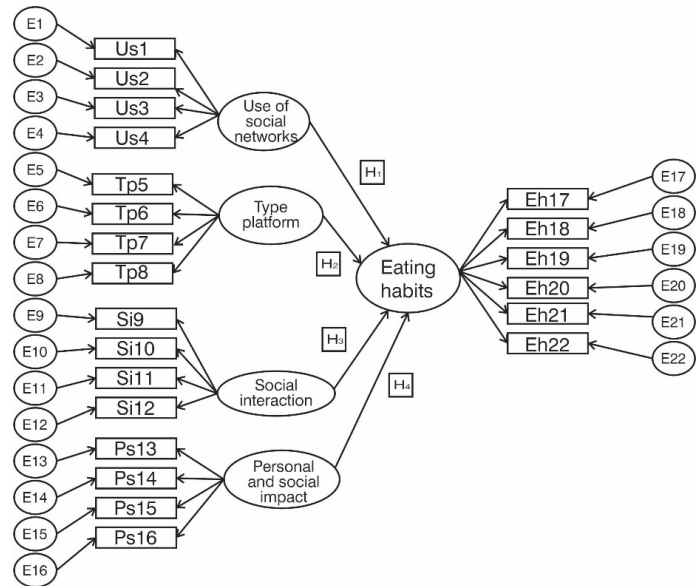


Fig. 3. Proposed research model

According to the model presented in the previous figure, the following specific hypotheses were formulated:

- ✓ Specific hypothesis (H1) There is a significant relationship between the use of social networks (Us) and eating habits (Eh) in private higher education.
- ✓ Specific hypothesis (H2) There is a significant relationship between the type of platform (Tp) and eating habits (Eh) in private higher education.
- ✓ Specific hypothesis (H3) There is a significant relationship between personal social impact (Ps) and eating habits (Eh) in private higher education.
- ✓ Specific hypothesis (H4) There is a significant relationship between social interaction (Si) and eating habits (Eh) in private higher education in Huancayo.

Based on the model presented in Fig. 2, the structural model was developed using the SEM technique (Structural Equation Modeling), also known as structural equation modeling shown in Fig. 3. The figure above presents variables and dimensions of the research as well as items for each of them.

Variables X - Social Networks:

Use of social networks

- ✓ Indicators: Us1, Us2, Us3, Us4
- ✓ Associated errors: E1 to E4

Platform type

- ✓ Indicators: Tp5, Tp6, Tp7, Tp8
- ✓ Associated errors: E5 to E8

Social interaction

- ✓ Indicators: Si9, Si10, Si11, Si12
- ✓ Associated errors: E9 to E12

Personal and social impact

- ✓ Indicators: Ps13, Ps14, Ps15, Ps16
- ✓ Associated errors: E13 to E16

Variable Y - Eating habits

Model-dependent variable. Measured using six indicators:

Eh17, Eh18, Eh19, Eh20, Eh21, Eh22

Each one is related to its respective error (E17 to E22).

3.2 Measurement relationships

Each of these factors is connected by an arrow to " Eating habits ", indicating that a hypothesis is raised about the influence of this factor on eating habits:

- ✓ H1: Use of social networks → Eating habits
- ✓ H2: Platform type → Eating habits
- ✓ H3: Social interaction → Eating habits
- ✓ H4: Personal and social impact → Eating habits

This model is typical of structural equation diagrams, where causal or associative relationships between latent and observed variables are analyzed.

3.3 Data collection and processing process

Data collection for this study was carried out using a survey technique, from which the data collection instrument called the questionnaire on "Social networks and eating habits" was developed. This instrument consisted of 22 items , which was developed using a Likert scale comprising five items for each question, from "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Neither agree nor disagree", "Disagree" and "Strongly agree ".

The questionnaire was administered using different platforms such as Microsoft Word and Google Forms, which were shared via links to students in the Human Nutrition program, who were able to review and respond to the questions based on their perspective. Regarding the ethical aspect, informed consent was obtained. The instrument was also designed with special consideration for confidentiality and anonymity, as no sensitive or individual-specific information was collected.

After data collection, processing was carried out using statistical programs such as SPSS version 27, Jamovi statistical software , and Microsoft Excel, which allowed for the creation of tables, graphs, models, and the development of descriptive statistics for data inference.

4. Results

4.1 Use of social networks

Social media is used in dietary habits because it acts as a constant source of information, influence, and motivation related to nutrition. Below is the preferred social media usage.

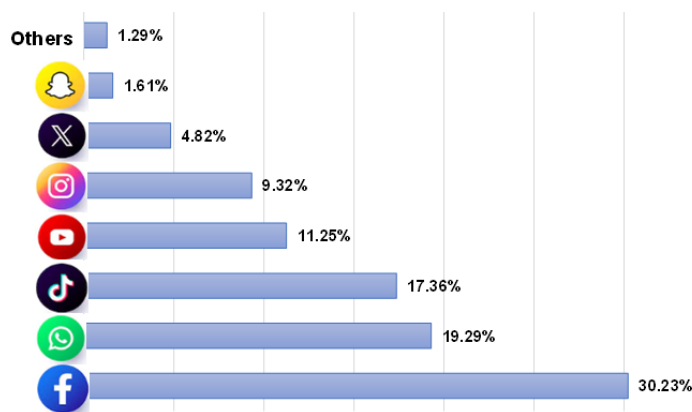


Fig. 4. Use of the main social networks

Fig. 4 shows university students' preferences regarding social media use, highlighting a strong inclination toward widely known platforms. Facebook ranks first with 30.23%, indicating that it remains the most used social network among respondents, likely due to its versatility in sharing content, interacting with communities, and accessing news or information. WhatsApp follows with 19.29%, consolidating its position as an essential tool for daily communication, both in academic and personal settings. In third place is TikTok with 17.36%, demonstrating young people's growing interest in short, visual, and easily consumed content.

Platforms such as YouTube (11.25%) and Instagram (9.32%) also show significant engagement. YouTube remains a popular resource for visual learning, tutorials, and entertainment, while Instagram maintains its relevance as a means of sharing images and following trends. However, other networks such as X (formerly Twitter), with just 4.82%, as well as Snapchat (1.61%) and other minority networks (1.29%) have a smaller presence, suggesting that their impact on users' digital lives is limited or being displaced by more dynamic and visual options. Overall, 66.88% of usage is concentrated on the three main platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok), reflecting a strong reliance on these tools for information, communication, and entertainment. This pattern of concentrated usage could have important implications for the development of eating, educational, and social habits, given that the content prevalent on these platforms has a significant influence on their users' perceptions and behaviors. Therefore, it is essential to consider not only which social networks are used, but also how and for what purpose the content disseminated on them is consumed.

4.2 Analysis of structural equation models

The confirmatory model that allowed us to evaluate whether the empirical data fit a previously established theoretical structure on the relationship between observed variables and latent indicators is initially presented, obtaining the following results.

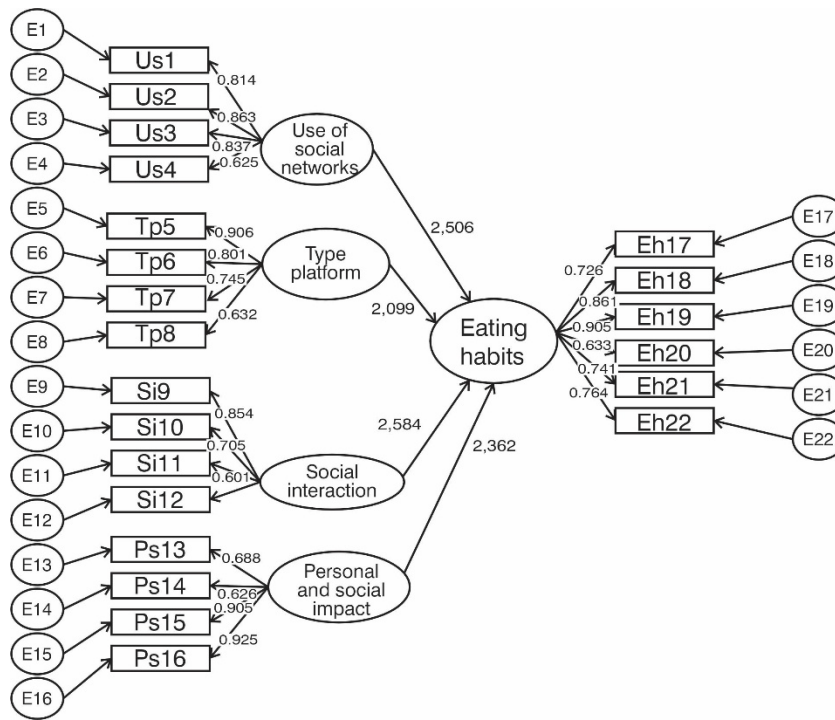


Fig. 5. Confirmatory structural model

Table 2
Confirmatory model

	Reliability		Variance extracted Average variance extracted (AVE)	Discriminating validity				
	Cronbach Alpha	Composite reliability		Hey	Us	Tp	Yeah	Ps
Eating habits	0.901	0.924	0.934	0.988				
Use of social networks	0.962	0.978	0.961	0.974	0.970			
Platform type	0.941	0.969	0.955	0.969	0.965	0.956		
Social interaction	0.921	0.948	0.939	0.961	0.955	0.952	0.945	
Personal and social impact	0.948	0.962	0.955	0.945	0.932	0.889	0.875	0.862
Reference values	>0.7	>0.7	>0.5					

The table presents the model validation, using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability to assess its reliability. In accordance with PLS guidelines (Villalva, 2021), the results reflect adequate internal consistency, as all Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.9. Likewise, the composite reliability coefficients also exceeded this threshold (0.9), confirming optimal composite reliability.

Construct validity was assessed using discriminant and convergent validity (Villalva, 2021). The AVE coefficient (Average Variance Extracted), which quantifies the shared variance between a construct and its indicators, met the criterion established by Hair et al. (2017), showing values greater than 0.50 in all cases. This confirms that more than 50% of the variance of the indicators is explained by their respective constructs.

The study presents AVE coefficient values greater than 0.57, indicating adequate convergent validity according to the criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To verify discriminant validity, the methodology proposed by these authors was applied, which consists of comparing the square roots of the AVE with the correlations between the latent variables. It was concluded that the results meet the required psychometric standards, and the measurement model used in the research, whose indicators are shown in Table 2, demonstrates solid convergent and discriminant validity.

4.3 Analysis of structural equation models

According to the results obtained in Fig. 5, the rejection or acceptance of the specific hypotheses formulated was established.

Table 3

The summary of the results

Hypotheses	Mean sample	standard deviation	Path beta value	Students statistics	p value	Decision
H1: Us →Hey	0.348	0.278	0.259	2.506	0.000	Accepted
H2: Tp →Hey	0.355	0.205	0.298	2.099	0.000	Accepted
H3: Yes →Huh	0.369	0.265	0.278	2.584	0.001	Accepted
H4: Ps →Hey	0.301	0.278	0.339	2.362	0.001	Accepted

$t > 1.96$; $p < 0.05$

According to the results obtained, the accepted hypotheses were H1, H2, H3 and H4. These hypotheses show a significant relationship, with respect to the relationship between the use of social networks (Us) with eating habits (Eh) has values of $\beta = 0.259$ and $p = 0.000$., with respect to the relationship between the type of platform (Tp) with eating habits (Eh) has values of $\beta = 0.298$ and $p = 0.000$., with respect to the relationship between the personal social impact (Ps) with eating habits (Eh) presents values of $\beta = 0.278$ and $p = 0.001$ and with respect to the relationship between social interaction (Si) and eating habits (Eh) has values of $\beta = 0.339$ and $p = 0.001$. In all of them, the relationship between the different dimensions belonging to the use of social networks and eating habits is accepted. To determine the quality of the model fit, the SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual). This measure compares estimated correlations with observed ones. An SRMR between 0 and 0.08 is considered a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The value of 0.069 obtained in this case indicates that the model fits adequately.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 In relation to the use of social networks and eating habits

The research findings validated the relationship between the use of social networks and eating habits, this is clear with the values that were obtained, such as the significance level being 0.000 and a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.948 (González, 2019), this shows a very high positive correlation between the variables studied; social networks directly influence exposure to content related to food. People who spend many hours a day on digital platforms are more exposed to messages, images and videos about diets, food products or healthy or unhealthy lifestyles. This constant exposure can normalize certain eating behaviors, influence purchasing decisions or even generate anxiety regarding body image and diet (Aires-de-Oliveira et al., 2023). The objective of the use of social networks is also a determining factor in eating habits, since through them people can inform themselves about health and well-being which are followed by accounts of nutritionists, trainers or scientific communicators, which can encourage more conscious and balanced habits (Dike et al., 2021). In contrast, those who seek entertainment or follow influencers for fashion or aesthetics may be influenced by dietary trends without nutritional support, such as extreme diets, prolonged fasting, or the indiscriminate consumption of promoted products.

Overall, both the frequency and purpose of social media use can have a significant impact—positive or negative—on eating habits. High frequency of use for unreflective purposes can lead to greater vulnerability to nutritional misinformation, while moderate use with learning-oriented goals can promote healthier eating behaviors (Rando-Cueto & Paniagua-Rojano, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to encourage critical and selective use of these platforms to foster a healthier relationship with food.

5.2 In relation to the type of platform and eating habits

The research findings validated the relationship between the type of social media platform and eating habits. This is made clear by the values obtained, such as the significance level of 0.000 and a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.987 (González, 2019), which demonstrates a very high positive correlation between the variables studied. This relationship shows that the use of social media has significantly transformed the way people access information about food. Platforms such as Facebook, TikTok , and YouTube are full of content related to diets, recipes, ideal bodies, and nutritional trends, which can influence

users' perceptions of what constitutes "good nutrition." This digital environment, dominated by attractive images and simplified messages, can promote both healthy and unbalanced habits, depending on the quality and veracity of the content shared. Furthermore, influencers and content creators play an important role in shaping eating habits, especially among adolescents and young adults (Martínez-Sala et al., 2021). Many users tend to imitate the eating habits of popular social media figures, without considering whether these practices are appropriate for their health or lifestyle (Di-Renzo et al., 2020). This can lead to the adoption of restrictive diets, scientifically unsupported food fads, or excessive consumption of promoted products, negatively affecting nutrition and overall well-being.

On the other hand, social media can also be a positive tool when used judiciously. There are specialized communities and accounts that promote nutritional education, self-care, and access to information supported by health professionals (Ramos et al., 2015). In this sense, the impact of social media use on eating habits depends largely on the type of content consumed, the user's critical thinking, and their ability to distinguish between valid recommendations and potentially harmful trends.

5.3 In relation to the personal social impact and eating habits

The research findings validated the relationship between personal social impact and eating habits. This is made clear by the values obtained, such as the significance level of 0.001 and a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.863 (Gustems et al., 2017), which demonstrates a very high positive correlation between the variables studied. Eating habits are strongly influenced by personal factors such as emotions, mood, self-esteem, and individual beliefs about health and the body. On a personal level, stress, anxiety, or pressure to meet certain physical standards can lead to inappropriate eating behaviors, such as excessive consumption of ultra-processed foods or restrictive diets. Likewise, the personal perception of what it means to "eat well" can be conditioned by past experiences, nutritional education, and individual goals, such as losing weight or improving physical performance. From a social perspective, the environment also plays a decisive role in eating habits (Feijoo et al., 2023). Family, friends, and communities influence people through customs, celebrations, mealtimes, and attitudes toward certain foods. Furthermore, in many contexts, social pressure can lead people to follow food trends or engage in unhealthy practices in order to fit in or receive approval. This type of social influence can be positive, when it promotes body care and health, or negative, when it generates constant comparisons or reinforces harmful stereotypes.

Together, personal and social impacts constantly shape dietary decisions. Daily choices about what, when, and how much to eat respond not only to biological needs but also to emotional and social factors (Muñoz, 2017). Therefore, promoting healthy eating habits requires considering both the emotional well-being of the individual and the social environment in which they operate, promoting supportive spaces, education, and collective awareness about the importance of a balanced diet.

5.4 In relation to social interaction and eating habits

The research findings validated the relationship between social interaction and eating habits. This is made clear by the values obtained, such as the significance level of 0.001 and a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.904 (Gallardo, 2017), which demonstrates a high positive correlation between the variables studied. Social interaction significantly influences the formation and maintenance of eating habits. Sharing meals with family, friends, or in community settings not only fulfills a nutritional function, but also an affective and cultural one. These social experiences shape food preferences from an early age, since people often adopt habits based on what they see and share with their close circle, whether through family traditions or group customs. Furthermore, dietary decisions are often conditioned by the desire for belonging and social acceptance (Elizondo-Montemayor et al., 2012). This type of social pressure can lead to both positive behaviors, such as trying new foods or adopting healthy practices, and harmful behaviors, such as the excessive consumption of foods high in fat, sugar, or alcohol.

Finally, in contexts such as school, work, or even social media, interaction with others can reinforce or modify eating habits. Constant exposure to comments, judgments, or recommendations from others can influence the way a person eats or perceives their body. For this reason, fostering positive social environments where dietary diversity is respected and healthy practices are promoted without imposing stereotypes is key to developing a balanced relationship with food.

6. Conclusions

- ✓ It is concluded that frequent social media use has a significant influence on the eating habits of university students. Constant exposure to content related to diets, food products, and digital influencers influences both healthy and unhealthy eating behaviors, depending on the type of information consumed and the user's intention when using these platforms.
- ✓ It was evident that the type of digital platform used directly influences the development of eating habits. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube tend to present visually appealing content, but with simplified messages that can lead to the adoption of food trends without scientific basis. However, there are also spaces that promote evidence-based nutritional education, which highlights the need for information curation by users.
- ✓ Emotional, social, and cultural factors decisively influence the adoption of certain eating patterns. Self-esteem, social pressure, the desire for acceptance, and the influence of close circles (family, friends, or digital communities) can lead to

both healthy behaviors and restrictive or unbalanced practices. These personal and social factors act as filters that reinforce or weaken the messages received through social media.

- ✓ Social interaction in digital environments, especially on social media, reinforces attitudes and decisions related to food. Likes, comments, shares, and membership in virtual communities generate a form of social validation that influences dietary choices. This dynamic can become a positive tool if responsible content is promoted and a digital culture focused on well-being and conscious eating is fostered.

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