



Media Globalization and the Rise of Fast-Food Culture: A Catalyst for Obesity in Urban Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The world has undergone massive changes through globalization in terms of the lifestyle, consumption patterns and culture identities which have also been experienced in Pakistan. The rising impact of the global media in the past 20 years has transformed food tastes and consumption trends particularly by the urban population. This research paper examines how the media globalization is connected to the growing popularity of the fast-food culture within the urban centers in Pakistan, and the effect of the cultural and behavior change on the growing prevalence of obesity. The study examines the influence of international media advertisements, celebrity promotion, and social media trends of western cultures to determine the influence of these media on the choice of food that results in the consumption of more calories, sedentary habits, and change in the body image. The mixed-method study that includes surveys, interviews, and content analysis of media responses indicates that exposure to fast food advertisements and Westernized media content have a significant influence on dietary choices of young people and working-class adults. In addition to this, the results also note that fast-food restaurants have become more accessible and socially desirable because of aggressive advertising by multinational companies that have turned fast-food consumption into a modern and convenient way of life, overlooking traditional and healthier eating habits. Gender and income differences in obesity also emerge in the research that associates themselves with different levels of media exposure and the change of lifestyles. Finally, the paper points to the necessity of immediate action on the policies of public health, awareness campaigns, and media literacy to reverse the negative impact of globalization on local food systems and health practices. To solve this problem policymakers, teachers, health facilities and media regulators must come together to ensure that the aspect of modernization is combined with the culture and the health of the population.

Introduction

In its general sense, globalization is the process of increasing the interdependence of economies, cultures, and societies in terms of technological advancement, international trade, and communication systems. Globalization has been one of the most noticeable and influential in terms of the spread of cultural products and lifestyle trends through the global media. It has been a dramatic process in the last two decades of Pakistan changing not only the economic and political order, but also the social behavior, consumption patterns and food preferences. The onset of satellite television, the internet, and social media has enabled the Pakistani viewers to be constantly bombarded with Western media content that glorifies convenience, speed, and modernity, which are strongly linked with the fast-food sector worldwide. The transnational fast-food chains, such as McDonalds, KFC, and Domino, have been in a better position to promote their products to the Pakistani consumers more than ever before due to the advent of global media platforms, like Netflix, YouTube, Instagram, and Tik Tok to name a few. These corporations have integrated fast-food culture into the lives of the Pakistanis living in urban areas through special marketing, celebrity endorsements, and implementation of cultural hybridization strategies. The consequence is a tremendous change of conventional homemade foods, which are usually balanced and nutritious to processed foods that are rich in calories. This shift can be seen especially in

younger generations, as fast food is becoming a certain attribute of modernity, social standing and international self-identification. The use of such foods in films, TV shows, and digital media also added to the popularization of the fast-foods consumption as a normal and even desirable habit in urban Pakistan. This transition has been increased due to urbanization. As the population increases into cities to conduct their education and work, there has been an explosion of demand in fast, cheap, and convenient foods. The rising trend of fast-food in Pakistan can also be compared to the trend in the rest of the world whereby convenience and taste usually take precedence over the health factor. In Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, the local and foreign fast-food chains, and the delivery services specializing in delivering the fast food within minutes, have increased beyond the imaginable level. The result of this shift has been a slow but continued abandonment of traditional food habits of Pakistan those centered on fresh and home-cooked foods in favor of more Western food habits of fats, sugar, and sodium. One cannot overestimate the role of the media that strengthens this shift. The concept of influencer marketing, television adverts, and pleasant to the eye social media content helps form the ideals of the consumer, their food choices, with high calorie food taking the place of high quality food as a new norm in the modern lifestyle of Pakistanis. Obesity is no longer seen as a problem that was exclusive to rich countries in the West, but rather an increasing epidemic in the Pakistani population when it comes to the consumer. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) states that over 22 percent of the adult population in Pakistan is either overweight or obese, which has almost doubled the figure of the same since 2000. Obesity emergence is closely associated with the growing intake of fast food, decrease in physical activity, and the growing sedentary lifestyle caused by digitalization. In this regard, media globalization has acted both ways: it not only fosters the consumption of fast-food, but also makes people adopt the habits of entertainment that imply spending a great amount of time in front of the screen and doing very little. In addition, the beauty ideals of the West that spread with the help of the global media have also led to distorted body images, which results in poor eating habits, such as binge eating or crash dieting, especially in young women. This combination of factors explains how closely the processes of media globalization and the final state of public health have become in the fast modernizing city of Pakistan. The dynamics of the globalization and obesity in Pakistan is a multi-dimensional one. On the one hand, the global media contributes to the development of economics and cultural interaction through opening new business chances and ways of life. Conversely, it also causes socio-cultural conflict by replacing indigenous food systems and encouraging consumerist culture, which is focused on immediate satisfaction. The substitution of conventional diets consisting of grains, lentils, vegetables, and fruits with the Western fast-food archetypes is a part of the comprehensive change in the societal values, in which the modernity and convenience are regarded as the synonyms of success and sophistication. This shift is further supported by the idealistic image of Western consumerism attitudes, especially to the urban youth of Pakistan, who view fast-food restaurants as a symbol of social status and belonging to the world. According to scholars like Popkin (2017) and Hawkes (2020), the globalization of food marketing introduced the blurred lines between the local and the international diet thus establishing a notion of nutrition transition in developing nations. Pakistan is experiencing this change through increasing cases of lifestyle diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and blood pressure. The mass media, a strong cultural diffusion agent, is central in stipulating these dietary shifts through the endless bombardment of people with image and message persuasion of food. This is aggravated by the fact that there are no regulatory policies concerning food advertising particularly those aimed at children and adolescents. The socio-economic consequences of this transformation are far reaching and multinational corporations feel free to engage in selling high-calorie foods, sweet drinks, and snacks, thereby instilling bad behaviors of consuming these products at a tender age. Obesity is an issue not only to the personal health but it is a rising burden to the healthcare system of Pakistan that is already strained. The rise in disposable incomes of various families due to urbanization and economic liberalization has not been met with a corresponding rise in health education and health awareness and thus, the benefits have unconsciously promoted poor health lifestyles. Moreover, obesity has social stigmas in Pakistan, which brings the psychological and emotional pain to the victims of obesity, especially women and adolescents. Against these trends, this paper aims to find out the connection between the globalization of media and increase of the fast-food culture in urban Pakistan to understand how the global exposure to the media affects food preferences, lifestyle decisions, and finally, obesity prevalence.

The aims of the study are three in nature, namely, to examine the role of the global media advertising and content in the promotion of urban Pakistani dietary patterns; to determine the socio-cultural forces that make fast-food culture acceptable and normalized; and to examine the resultant public health implications that arise through this shift. This research will be important as it can fill the gaps in the study of media, nutrition science, and the policy of health promotion in Pakistan. The study adds to the general discourse of sustainable health communication and policy-making by shedding light on the cultural and behavioral processes involved in changing the local diets due to globalization. It demands a re-examination of media regulation, food marketing policies and health education policies that can support the adverse health consequences of globalization and maintain culture identity and nutritional health in the urban Pakistani society.

Literature Review

Media globalization and its influence on dietary changes and obesity have been the topic of the intense scholarly discussion during the last twenty years. The phenomenon itself is not limited to a particular country; it is a process of reorganization of the consumption patterns and lifestyle standards worldwide due to the rapid circulation of the information, advertising, and visual culture across the borders. Ritzer (2004) and Robertson (2003) are among the scholars who find the conceptualization of globalization as the McDonaldization of society, whereby efficiency, calculability, and predictability take on a leading role in the systems of cultures. In this context, the spread of fast-food chains around the world is not only perceived as an economic growth but also a cultural change. A study conducted by Hawkes (2006) has established global media marketing to be a key factor in

diffusion of poor dietary habits. The study notes that international television and online platforms have now allowed food companies to reach people with more accuracy than ever before, with culturally adaptive advertising techniques that incorporate local symbols and western standards of modernity. This has given rise to some sort of cultural hybridization, where the local customers are adopting foreign food habits, but still viewing them as part of the culture development of the locals. Likewise, Popkin and Ng (2022) describe this change with the help of the so-called nutrition transition theory, which states how societies change the traditional grains and vegetables to processed, high-calorie foods as they become urban and enter the global market. This shift is also enhanced by the digital revolution in Pakistan where western advertisement aesthetics have been brought into the mobile phones and TVs of millions of consumers. This correlation between globalization and obesity is confirmed by various empirical studies as well. Drewnowski and Popkin (2019) state that due to the convergence in diets worldwide, food preferences are becoming homogeneous, with local and traditional foods being slowly substituted by globally standardized products based on fast-food.

The change is especially evident in terms of young people and other working-age groups, which are more sensitive to digital marketing and lifestyle branding. Jafar et al. (2020) have discovered that obesity rates among Pakistani adolescents have risen dramatically over the period of 2010 to 2020 and was associated with the rise in international fast-food restaurants and the exposure to media on food-related matters. These results raise the point of a definite interconnection of media exposure, globalization, and health outcomes.

Pakistan is another country where the fast-food industry has expanded tremendously since the beginning of the 2000s, when the media market was liberalized, and new television channels were established owned by individuals. According to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), commercial TV channels have grown by 2002 to more than 100 and the use of social media has also risen by 400 percent between 2002 and 2022. The result of this proliferation has meant that transnational corporations have been able to control screen space with food advertisements that appeal to people through persuasion especially with Western imagery, slogans, and emotional appeals. Khan and Mahmood (2021) state that these advertisements do not only encourage people to believe that fast food is delicious and convenient to have, but also relate it to joy, companionship, and belonging to a certain group. This cultural discourse that has been created by means of such advertisements transforms fast food not only into a diet but also into a symbol of success, modern life, and globalization (Tomlinson, 2011). With the flow of media around the world, people get exposed to transnational cultural signs, which change their perceptions regarding what is desirable, acceptable, and aspirational. As an example, Western films and TV products often portray the eating-fast-food as a simple, entertaining, and socially acceptable activity, whereas fast-food brands are advertised by digital influencers on Instagram and Tik Tok as a part of a dream lifestyle. Such exposure slowly transforms the societies (such as Pakistan) into eating habits that are more accepting of fast-food habits, as opposed to the previous tradition of dietary moderation and home cooking. The media globalization has led to the blurring of the global and local food identities that has resulted in the, so-called, glocalization of the diets (Ritzer and Miles, 2019), the international foods can be localized to fit regional preferences and preserving all the symbolic value of global modernity. The research in South Asia indicates that young consumers are especially susceptible to the effects of media. A survey of Pakistani university students conducted by Rehman and Malik (2018) discovered that 78 percent of study participants liked to dine in fast-food restaurants because of being affected by western media content and peer trends on social media services. The analogous study conducted by Siddiqui et al. (2020) found that digital advertisements which involved western celebrities and lifestyle scenes had a significant effect on the need to consume fast-food among the adolescent population. The same research indicated that a significant number of the participants viewed fast-food dinner experience as an indicator of being contemporary or being globally integrated. It proves that it is not just that media globalization promotes food products but it puts them into a larger context of identity creation and cultural desire. One more element of media impact is the gendered image of food consumption. According to research by Mehta (2021) the media representations across the globe have produced different gendered discourse on food. An example is that men will tend to see advertisements where the focus is on indulgence and quantity, whereas the female deserves a message that is based on beauty, slimness and social appeal. This contradicting story line brings about contradictory forces, especially on young women in Pakistan, who are at the same time being encouraged to eat fast food and to have slim bodies. Socio-economically, research has shown that income and classes also mediate the effect of media globalization, which further contributes to challenges in the health of the population. The richer families in the cities are the ones who have more exposure to global media and high purchasing power to eat fast food frequently. Nevertheless, the lower middle class, who want to be like the elite in their lifestyles and lifestyles, attempts to affect fast-food culture as a way to symbolically engage in the world culture (Zaidi, 2017). The effect of imitation has democratized the consumption of fast-foods across social classes in Pakistan and obesity has become a cross-class phenomenon in Pakistani urban population. Although the trend has been given an increasing amount of scholarly interest, there is still a lack of localized research on the interplay of media globalization, cultural transformation, and the issue of obesity in Pakistani urban population. Although international literature provides useful theoretical perspectives, contextual studies are important in explaining the interaction of global cultural forces with the unique socio-religious and economic reality of Pakistan. Indicatively, Islam stresses moderation and a balanced consumption but media influences prevailing in the globe encourage excess and material fulfillment. The ensuing cultural dissonance is a factor that increases the psychological stress and health risks.

To sum up, the already available literature demonstrates that media globalization is a trigger of fast-food culture and obesity spread in developing nations and Pakistan is not an exception. It uses various mediums of operation such as advertising, entertainment, social media and symbolic cultural exchange to transform consumption patterns and ways of life. But the proximity

factor of these forces varies on the basis of national situations, policies on media regulation and the socio-economic systems. The research gap detected in existing literature requires intensive research that would help understand how Pakistani consumers internalize the media discourses around the world and transform them into their daily dieting habits. The current study will address this gap by providing empirical data in terms of determining the effects of global media content on the fast-food consumption habits and how it has led to the behavioral patterns of obesity in urban centers of Pakistan.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was to be developed in such a way that it would capture the multi-dimensional and complex relationship between media globalization and fast-food consumption and obesity in the urban setting of Pakistan. The study took the mixed-method design which incorporated both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies of the study to have the overall picture of the topic. This design was suitable because it could be used to triangulate data, to quantify behavioral patterns and correlations using quantitative surveys, and to investigate the deeper underlying cultural connotations and motivations that informed these patterns using qualitative interviews and content analysis. The mixed-method strategy was explained by the interdisciplinary character of the study as it combines three major metropolitan areas of Pakistan, namely, Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, due to the fact that these areas present the best representation of media exposure, urbanization, and the spread of fast-food restaurants. Such cities also have varied socio-economic and cultural mixes and this fact makes them perfect in terms of getting the complete range of behaviors and attitudes around the issue of consuming global media and fast-food. The target sample was comprised of adolescents and adults aged 15 to 45 years because this purpose is the most active in using digital and broadcast media and, at the same time, more likely to engage in fast-food consumption habits based on worldwide advertising. The quantitative part was comprised of the structured questionnaire that was sent to the 600 respondents in each of the three cities with about 200 participants in each location. The survey was conducted in the field and online, to involve all the participants of varying access to technologies and digital literacy. The questions were developed based on four main areas, which included the habits of media consumption (frequency and type of media exposure), the habits of fast-food consumption (frequency, preferred brands, reasons), the knowledge of health risks, and attitudes towards the modern lifestyle. The analysis of the data obtained in these surveys was done by the use of Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 which included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression models to determine associations between media exposure and dietary behavior. The number of semi-structured interviews carried out was 30 with the respondents of different socio-economic statuses such as university students, working professionals, homemakers, and health practitioners. Such interviews aimed at diving into the meaning people give to global media content concerning food, perceptions of fast-food brands, and how these perceptions shape their day-to-day food consumption. Besides the interviews with the participants, the interviews with experts were also carried out with five media professionals and five nutritionists/public health professionals to understand the media strategies, lack of policy, and how the advertising of fast-food could impact society. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019) in six steps familiarization, coding, theme identification, review, definition and reporting. The process assisted in finding common trends and stories related to the topics of globalization, modernity, and consumption. In a bid to capture the media facet of globalization, a content analysis of fast-food ads was carried out on three platforms, namely, television, social media (Instagram, Tik Tok, and YouTube), and outdoor billboards. To ensure relevancy in the modern context, the advertisements came to be chosen in accordance with popularity, frequency, and exposure in 2020-2024. One hundred advertisements were considered which comprised of 60 social media, 30 television and 10 outdoor advertisements. Some of the important variables to be analyzed included the visual imagery, the language use, the cultural symbolism, emotional appeals, and the gender and lifestyle depiction. The coding framework was informed by the Framing Theory and Cultivation Theory of the media studies describing the process of creating repetitive media messages that determine how viewers perceive and behave in the long-term. Such a combination of survey, interview, and content analysis information created a comprehensive viewpoint on how global media creates and supports the fast-food culture in the urban environment of Pakistan.

A socio-cultural perspective was also used to make sense of the data in the research. The theoretical framework was a combination of the Theory of Habitus by Bourdieu, which involved the explanation of how social and cultural structures influence individual preferences and Theory of Global Cultural Flows by Appadurai that focused on the exchange of media, ideas and consumer goods across the world. The study was able to examine the interaction of globalized media content with local cultural norms which produced hybrid consumption practices which have both Western and Pakistani social identity. Data reliability and validity were achieved in a number of ways. To have a refined questionnaire and also to make the questionnaire culturally relevant, the questionnaire was piloted with 30 respondents in Lahore. The alpha of Cronbach was also computed by the area of every domain of the survey as a measure of internal consistency and the value between 0.78 and 0.85 was found to be very strong and reliable. Two researchers were involved in interview data transcribing and reviewing to reduce the subjective interpretation bias. The overall validity of results was enhanced by triangulation of survey, interview, and analysis of advertisements. Ethics was very much observed during the research. The respondents were made aware of what the research was about and the fact that they could withdraw any time as well as the confidentiality of their answers. The participation was done with written consent. In case of online surveys, a secure form was used to develop online consent. The research model was conducted in accordance with both the Pakistan Medical Research Council (PMRC) and the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) guidelines on the ethical standards of conducting research in the social science field. Data anonymity was also guaranteed where codes were used in place of names of the respondents. The interviews were tape-recorded at the agreement of the participants, and all the information was stored safely on the encrypted drives.

The data analysis procedure was made in such a way that the quantitative and qualitative results were to be complemented to each other. Quantitative data were able to give objective data on the occurrence and intensity of media exposure and its relation to the consumption of fast-food, whereas qualitative stories were able to provide contextual insights as well as the emotional aspect of these behaviors. With the help of the regression analysis, it was possible to prove that greater exposure to the media (in terms of the number of hours spent on social and broadcast media) was significantly correlated with increased rate of fast-food consumption ($p < 0.05$). It was also observed that gender and income level were moderate variables in this relationship with men and those of higher-income levels showing stronger relationships between media influence and consumption behavior. Conversely, the qualitative interviews showed that most respondents realized the health implications of fast food but engaged in it because of social convenience and aspirational worth.

The media was frequently mentioned as the major promoter of such consumption, particularly the way fast food is being promoted as part of a modern and successful lifestyle. The combination of all three data sources enabled the study to build a subtle explanation of the way globalization works through media to transform eating patterns in urban Pakistan. The three data sources enabled the media professionals to stress the fact that it is economically dependent on multinational food advertisers, which makes the regulation of food advertising a politically and financially difficult task.

To conclude, the methodology will help in providing the necessary systematically and socioculturally based implications on the findings, and on the other hand, the findings will be useful in advising policymakers, teachers and health professionals on the relationship between media globalization and obesity. It provides a multi-dimensional approach to understanding the effects of globalized media messages on fast-food consumption patterns in the Pakistani city centers through the combination of the surveys, interviews, and content analysis. Having theoretical framework and background boosts the interpretive validity of the study to such that it can be used as a model in future interdisciplinary studies in globalization and its effects on the public health among the developing nations.

Results and discussion

This study has brought up some really interesting results that indicate that the interrelation between the globalization of media, consumption of fast-food, and the rising cases of obesity in Pakistani cities is a strong one that is multidimensional. The combination of quantitative, qualitative and content analysis data will give in depth insight into the subsequent ways in which global media platforms affect the practices of population diets, cultural perceptions and health. All in all, the findings suggest that exposure to the media and social media, in particular, is a critical factor determining the preferences towards fast-food, feeding frequency, and social perception of food and contemporary lifestyle. These findings are then analyzed within the scope of existing literature and theoretical constructs such that they indicate both behavioral and cultural implications, i.e. 78 percent of the respondents have a history of dining out on fast food at least 2-3 times a week, and 42 percent of the respondents have a history of 4-5 times a week of dining out on fast food. Out of those, 65% of them claimed that their preferences regarding food were directly affected by the advertisements they saw either in TV, YouTube, Instagram, or Tik Tok. The regression analysis also determined that there was a significant positive relationship between the hours spent on media consumption and frequency of fast-food consumption ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$). Gender and age differences were also found that the males between the ages of 18 and 30 displayed higher levels of fast-food consumption compared to females, who were more concerned about body image and health. Interestingly, the quantitative results were supported by the findings of the qualitative interviews that also offered a better understanding of the psychological and cultural processes that contribute to the consumption of fast-food as something rather affordable and a symbol of modernity and global belonging instead of a mere luxury. Most of the respondents admitted they knew the health dangers of consuming fast food such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes, but said they continued to do so as a form of convenience, taste and living aspiration. Some of the respondents referred to fast food as a contemporary option, time-saving, or an indicator of being socially engaged. The young consumers particularly associated fast-food restaurant meals with recreation and socialization with many university students observing that socialization in fast-food restaurants is turning into a social phenomenon. One of the students aged 23 years of Lahore said, We follow fast food found on Instagram because of the celebrities and influencers. It is an element of being contemporary and networked. This feeling points out the importance of media in redefining eating as a social process that has a strong connection with global identity and digital culture. The analysis of 100 advertisements made in television, social media, and outdoor showed the same trends in messages and images. Advertisements of fast-foods usually focused on young and active youth, colorful color designs, up-tempo music, and a slogan that focused on happiness, fun, and friendship. The percentages of advertisements analyzed were found to have about 70 percent using English taglines i.e. Live it up, taste the world and indulge yourself all of which correlates to fast-food consumption with internationalism and pleasure. About 60 percent were celebrity-sponsored or social media influencers, which only enhanced brand popularity among the younger demographic. The gender issue in the advertisements was also worth noting: men were shown as proud and self-confident buyers, whereas women were shown as socially cultured and fashionable, supporting the gendered ideas of consumption. These tendencies have been consistent with those of Mehta (2021) who argues that gendered advertising practices support the emotionalization of food marketing and reinforce gendered social practices towards eating. Advertisement of fast-food and exposure to entertainment programs across the world has led to the development of the perception that dining out is not only acceptable but also desirable. This can be explained by the Cultivation Theory which proposes that on repeated exposure to media messages, there is a tendency of influencing the audience perception of the reality (Gerbner et al., 2002). In the example of Pakistan, the constant exposure to the Western food advertisement has changed the way people view what is considered to be a

normal part of the diet, and as such, the fast food rich in calories now seems to be a regular food item, but not a luxury. Also, the symbolic interpretation of fast food as part of a globalized lifestyle gives rise to aspirational consumerism where one wants to imitate Western norms of comfort and modernity. The other significant point that came out of the interviews was the psychologically contradictory awareness and behavior. The majority of the respondents showed their great awareness of the nutritional dangers of fast food. Nevertheless, this knowledge did not result in healthier behavior, which demonstrates the intention-behavior gap that psychologists have discussed. Most of the participants justified their action as busy city schedules and the inability to cook at home and enjoy the benefits of food delivery services readily available. Moreover, peer pressure and digital trends, including food vlogs, mukbang videos, and the promotion of unhealthy eating behavior by the influencers, also contributed to the strengthening of bad eating patterns. Rehman and Malik (2018) found similar evidence, showing that the consumption of fast-food products in Pakistani youth is more guided by the social desirability on media than by the taste itself.

Higher-income respondents said they were more choosy over food quality often favoring international franchises that were reputed to be clean and prestigious in brand. The middle-income participants on the other hand were more likely to patronize the locally franchised fast-food stores because they were cheap and accessible.

The less affluent participants, who were less common consumers of branded fast food, did become more and more attracted to the local copying of Western cuisine including burgers, fried chicken, and pizza. The effects of globalization, as depicted in this pattern, are alarming in that globalization is not only bringing several new food choices, but also catalyzing domestic changes, thus, producing a new hybrid fast-food market that represents both the global and local economic forces. Experts on health interviewed to be part of this research pointed out a constant increase in obesity especially in children and young adults in urban centers. These findings are consistent with those of WHO (2023), which states that the prevalence of obesity in Pakistani urban regions has grown by 150 percent in the last twenty years. Scholars explained that this was due to the exposure by the media and lack of physical activity caused by too much time in front of the screen. The digital consumption and easy access to fast-food piles pressure in a dual way: on the one hand, stimulating the consumption of high-calorie food, on the other, decreasing physical activity. The responses expressed in the interviews with the public health practitioners have come out as frustrations over the fact there has not been effective food marketing regulation and the fact that there are no national nutrition education programs to combat the consumption behaviors being propagated through the media.

Table 1: Key Media Influence Factors on Fast-Food Consumption and Obesity in Urban Pakistan

Factor	Description	Impact Level
TV Ads	Promote frequent fast-food intake	High
Social Media	Influencers glamorize fast food	Very High
Celebrity Endorsement	Links fast food to modern lifestyle	High
Global Brands	Replace traditional diets	High
Delivery Apps	Promote convenience eating	Moderate
Peer Pressure	Eating out as social bonding	High
Weak Regulation	Excessive unhealthy food ads	Very High
Modern Identity	Fast food seen as trendy	Very High

One common idea in all data sources was the impact of digital platforms in the growth of the fast-food culture. Instagram and Tik Tok were found to be the most effective networks on social media to control the perception of food, particularly in people under the age of 15-25. Influencers, viral challenges and sponsored content have served as the most efficient channels of marketing products in the name of entertainment by fast-food brands in Pakistan. As an example, the popular campaigns such as the one called: Zinger Cravings, PizzaParty Challenge etc. promoted user-created content making consumption an interactive online activity. This can be correlated to trends observed in the world by Montgomery et al. (2019), who state that digital marketing makes the boundaries between advertising and entertainment less clear, thereby making the audience less aware of the persuasive aspect of digital marketing. In the past, Pakistani cuisine has been linked to family, hospitality and religious principles that value moderation. Nonetheless, globalization and media publicity have changed these definitions, changing consumption to individualism and convenience. Among respondents, fast food intake alone or ordering takeout as a reward after a long day was often mentioned as a reward, and such a behavioral trend was especially differentiated as compared to the traditional habits of eating together. This change is connected with the larger sociocultural influence of media globalization when Western values of being independent, efficient, and satisfied with their consumption oppose to the collective food culture based on the cultural heritage. Interestingly enough, the analysis also found the emergence of counter-movements and awakening trends, especially within the circles of educated young people and health-conscious. Some of the respondents said they were also subscribing to online health influencers who advocate such lifestyles as substitutes to fast-food diets, organic foods, and physical activities. This shows that although global media has been encouraging homogenization, it also encourages counter-narratives and localized opposition. This kind of duality sustains the perspective of Appadurai (1996) that globalization is a process of cultural negotiation where the global and the local forces constantly interact to influence the development of hybrid identities. In general, the results affirm that media globalization has not only changed the dietary behavior but also reorganized the cultural logic of food in urban

Pakistan. The consumption of fast-food which was realized as a luxury just a few years ago has turned into a social habit that is predetermined by the international circulation of media products. Convenience, aspiration, and identity interaction have resulted in creating a strong cultural structure, which supports obesity as a structural phenomenon, but not a personal failure. In a way, this suggests that the impact of the media is not limited to consumer behavior, but rather it cuts across social imagination, and a part of how people view health, modernity, and success. Unless there is deliberate effort to reverse these forces, Pakistan will continue to mainstream an obesogenic culture of global media capitalism. Such findings also confirm the idea that the challenge of addressing obesity in the era of globalization should be done within the framework of addressing dietary practices and the cultural discourses, which are reinforced by media systems that shape what constitutes living, eating, and being in the globalized world.

Conclusion

The results of this paper prove that globalization of media has significantly changed the urban food culture in Pakistan and made consumption of fast-food a regular social practice that has no boundaries regarding economic, generational and gender factors. The relationship between the global media coverage and the emergence of obesity in the city of Pakistan is no longer just correlational, but it is systemic, embedded in the daily activities and attitudes towards modernity, convenience, and social status. The final report on this study highlights the fact that the international media where multinational fast-food companies and influencer marketers have dominated has changed not only the dietary habits of people but also their thinking about food, well-being, and identity. By constantly being bombarded with persuasive media discourse, the Pakistani consumers living in urban areas are unconsciously adapting a T-set of globalized value that makes eating fast-food an equivalent of being progressive, enjoying pleasure, and living in the world of the present. The paradox of knowledge and action, the so-called intention-behavior gap, explains how ingrained the media-based cultural values are in influencing people in their personal decisions. In this meaning, fast food is not merely a way of eating, but a form of symbolic identification of social identity. Consuming branded burger or pizza has become a symbol of global connectedness and contemporary desire especially among the youth in Pakistan as they relate these foods with cosmopolitan way of living. This illustrates the effect of media globalization in creating and strengthening aspirational identities that override any local cultural and health concerns. The quantitative, qualitative and content data, which is integrated in the study, reveal that advertising is the most potent tool in bringing and reinforcing such changes. Fast-food corporations use multimodal marketing techniques (the visual image, the attractive phrases, emotional narratives) to appeal to psychological and social needs, not to food requirements. The mass and the omnipresence of such messages form a media atmosphere in which fast food is seen as an indispensable part of city life. The Cultivation Theory as developed by Gerbner states that the line between mediated imagery and real-life expectations is unclear due to the long-term exposure to such media material and a person starts to perceive such unhealthy dietary practices as normal or even healthy. In the city environment of Pakistan, this cultural conditioning is enhanced through social media where influencers and celebrities serve as intermediaries between brands and consumers that can be trusted. Another important lesson learnt after conducting the study is associated with the process of socio-economic dynamics of globalization of fast-food. Contrary to the previous presumptions that point to fast food as a luxury product that only the elite can afford, this study shows that the product is so much ingrained in the homes of middle- and lower-income urban residents. Globalization in this respect does not concurrently reproduce the Western diets, it localizes them. The affordability of fast food, ease of accessibility in terms of place and home delivery services have made it a democratic right to the people; it has become a cultural equalizer of a sort. However, the cost that has been paid to achieve this democratization is: homogenization of food culture and loss of traditional dietary diversity. Formerly regarded as a nutritious and a community-based cuisine, Pakistani food is now being replaced by lonely, high-energy, time-saving meals being marketed by international companies. Such a transformation underscores the two-sided aspect of globalization, namely, it broadens the options, but at the same time, it reduces cultural identity. The health of the population is affected by these results in a significant way. The increasing rate of obesity in Pakistan urban centres among children, adolescents and young adults is an emerging epidemic attributed to the food marketing and the impact of digital media all over the world. The statistics indicate the existence of the symbiotic relationship between screen time and consumption of fast-food: the longer the people spend on the internet, the more likely they will become exposed to food marketing and, thus, adopt the unhealthy eating habits. In this study, the interviewee officials in charge of health in Pakistan noted that the current programs in nutrition education and food laws are insufficient to overcome these strong forces. This necessitates policy changes that can no longer focus on individual responsibility to structural causes including food labeling, digital advertising ethics and marketing practices.

The results of the study are in line with the research conducted internationally showing that the globalization-related food transitions are a worldwide event but localized. In some countries such as Pakistan where the socio-cultural norms are changing very fast due to the influence of the global media, limited awareness of the population, poor regulatory frameworks, and the socio-economic pressures compound the health effects. The existing government intervention of intermittent campaigns on healthy eating has little effect due to its inability to counter the existent discourse in the media and consumer culture. The research is urgently needed to create evidence-based policies that would bring media literacy into education, regulation of unhealthy food marketing to youth, and the support of indigenous dietary knowledge as the means of cultural preservation and health protection. In addition, the research would be applied to theoretical knowledge by expanding the discussion of globalization to the area of public health and social psychology. The notion of media-enforced cultural assimilation comes out with a critical framework of analyzing the way media content is not only a conveyer of information but also a way of creating the aspiration of lifestyles and consumption identities. Pakistan, the imitation of Western dietary habits is not only connected with taste, but with a more profound psychological need of belonging to the world. This trend disrupts the conservative ideas of cultural independence

and indicates the erasing of borders between local and global, healthy and unhealthy, authentic and artificial through digital globalization. These insights demand interdisciplinary solutions to the problem of obesity, i.e. the solutions integrating sociological, psychological, and communicative views, instead of focusing on medical treatment only. It was found through interviews that the families that had a higher health literacy were more inclined to avoid fast-food intake and promote homemade meals. The problem however is how to translate research into everyday action especially in dual-income urban families where time is the driving factor leading to the use of convenience foods.

The strategies that should be embraced by the public health educators, thus, should consider these social realities yet they should encourage realistic and sustainable alternatives. Media campaigns employing similar emotional and visual instruments as corporate advertisements but to educate about healthy eating may be a transformational factor. The implications of this study are not only on the political economy of media globalization, but also on the cultural resonance of the traditional Pakistani food and collective eating as a sign of national pride and wellbeing. MNCs have perfected the art of integrating their products into the culture of third world nations, and making the daily consumption ritual an opportunity to make a profit. These companies run on advanced branding networks taking advantage of cultural symbols, local language, endorsement by celebrities to have emotional appeal. The fast-food industry of Pakistan is a kind of a micro-scale of this process in the world, as the effects of economic liberalization, Internet connectivity, and cultural aspiration merge into the dominance of the corporations. In response to this, the policymakers should acknowledge the fact that globalization requires cross-sectoral cooperation, that is, internationalization of the economy, culture, and health, which is causing the disappearance of local identities and health resilience at the same time. The spread of the culture of fast-food is not only about the expansion of eating patterns but also about ideologies of convenience instead of tradition, speed instead of savor, and appearance instead of substance that are distributed worldwide. These changes in ideology are the reflections of the larger social changes where consumer identity is substituted with the cultural one. In Pakistan, a country that traditionally had food as an identity, cultural, and hospitality indicator, this shift can be seen as the profound cultural re-alignment that is to be addressed by the academic community as well as by the general population. The implications of this study also represent the future research focus. Longitudinal researches are required to analyze global media exposure among different generations as far as health-related outcomes, body-esteem attitudes, and cultural identity are concerned in the long term. Moreover, comparative research of rural and urban populations may help highlight the disproportionate distribution of the effects of globalization on a socio-economic and geographic barrier. To conclude, the study confirms that the obesity crisis in Pakistan cannot be solved without engaging the global media apparatus that encourages and supports the unhealthy eating behaviors. The globalization of media has resulted in a condition where eating unhealthy food is not only acceptable but also celebrated, and individual change is all the harder without changing the structure. It needs a re-conceptualization of health communication that, like unhealthy behavior, is creative, pervasive, and emotionally touching. The governments, educators and media practitioners need to come together in order to develop counter-narratives that glorify stability, tradition and well-being in a contemporary context. Pakistan can only proceed to a healthy and more self-conscious future by perceiving obesity as a cultural and communicative phenomenon which is closely connected to globalization. Global consumption and local health will not inevitably intersect, but it is a policy, awareness, and cultural agency choice. The results obtained in this paper therefore provide the call to the collective societal wake up to the unseen price of media-induced globalization-price that is not merely economic or ecological but of the most human nature.

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