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When Social Media Meets Food Culture: Kuwait's Health Growing Public Challenge

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Food influencers. Source: Vikhroli Cucina

A silent public health crisis is boiling under the surface in Kuwait. In recent years, the country has witnessed a sharp rise in nutrition-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. Data from multiple international agencies point unequivocally to worsening health conditions associated with eating practices. The [World Obesity Atlas 2024](#) reports that more than 75% of

adults in Kuwait are overweight, with nearly half classified as obese. Likewise, the World Health Organization's **Global Report on Hypertension (2023)** shows prevalence rates above 40% – far exceeding the global average of 30%.

This phenomenon is not unique to Kuwait, but the national trend is particularly concerning.

According to the **International Diabetes Federation**, the number of adults with diabetes in Kuwait increased from 75,000 in 2000 to over 900,000 in 2021 – roughly one in four adults today. These alarming figures reflect a complex interplay of factors: cultural dietary practices, the accessibility of nutritious food, sedentary lifestyles, and – more recently – digital media influences.

Adding to this issue is the widespread social media culture in Kuwait surrounding food photography. There is a significant trend among individuals, as well as social media influencers, to share food-related content on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat. Influencers, in particular, **use food photography extensively for advertisement purposes**, thereby amplifying the visibility and appeal of various food items. This practice has contributed to a noticeable increase in 'food information' consumption among individuals in Kuwait, where images of appealing, often calorie-dense foods are pervasive on social media feeds. This increased exposure to food content may influence users' dietary habits, as studies suggest that **frequent exposure to food imagery can impact** cravings, food choices, and overall dietary practices.

Moreover, Kuwait's population is highly connected to social media, with **over 99% of Kuwaitis using the internet** and **more than 80%** of them being active social media users, with a substantial percentage engaged on platforms such as Instagram (65%), Snapchat (52%), and Twitter/X (39%), with some **75% of Kuwaitis** also using Whatsapp. These digital platforms, combined with Kuwait's unique social media culture, offer new and unique avenues for studying how online content and interactions might shape food-consumption behaviours. Given the country's diverse population composition, examining the link between social media use and eating practices can provide insights essential for public health strategies tailored to Kuwait's varied demographic and cultural landscape.

Research on social media consumption reveals that the content and interactions on these platforms can shape users' perceptions of food, body image, and lifestyle, potentially contributing to disordered eating behaviours. In Kuwait, the saturation of food content – from ornate desserts to high-calorie street foods – creates a digital ecosystem that subtly reinforces overeating and indulgence, particularly among youth. To investigate the effect, if any, of social media usage and eating practices in Kuwait, we interviewed more than 800 residents of the country in an online survey from July-September 2025, using a novel questionnaire covering topics such as social media usage, production of and interaction with online content, and eating practices, among other topics. Respondents were recruited by **TGM Research**, a pollster specialised in web surveys that maintains and curates an online panel in Kuwait, and their composition match the country's major demographics aspects.

The findings were striking, with approximately 80% of the respondents access social media platforms on a daily basis. When asked how often they produce or interact with posts on food on the social media, impressive 45% of respondents reported to either read, watch or like posts 'always' or 'often', whereas 22% of them also post pictures and 18% post videos on food on such platforms. In other words, almost half of the respondents frequently interact with food content on social media, with one in five also producing food-related online content.

The use of social media and the production of online content has also influenced the dining-out behaviours and food choices of a plurality of respondents. One-third of participants agreed that they 'pick restaurants or cafés that are perfect for social media posts,' while 23% choose food that are great for social media photos'. A sizeable number of respondents also produce food content for the social media with the expectation that their posts will generate interactions: About one in four of respondents agree with statements such as 'I often share photos of my food on social media to show off', 'I share food photos on social media hoping others will like or share them' and 'I value the visual appeal of food more than its nutritional value.'

These findings carry profound implications for public health. The omnipresence of food imagery contributes to what researchers term visual hunger – the psychological response to viewing appetising food cues, which can increase cravings and snacking frequency. Over time, such constant exposure may normalise calorie-dense diets and reduce mindfulness about portion sizes.

In Kuwait's context, this is particularly problematic given the combination of affluence, convenience, and digital immersion. The social pressure to share or consume photogenic meals encourages choices driven more by aesthetics than by health. Traditional home-cooked meals, once central to Kuwaiti food identity, are gradually replaced by restaurant dining or delivery options optimised for presentation rather than nutrition.

Yet, this same digital landscape presents an opportunity. A highly connected society provides fertile ground for innovative health communication. Social media, often blamed for amplifying unhealthy norms, can also be harnessed as a tool for behavioural change. By collaborating with influencers, nutritionists, and local chefs, public health campaigns can craft visually appealing content that celebrates balanced diets and culturally relevant healthy foods.

Traditional health campaigns – delivered through clinics, posters, or school programs – are unlikely to resonate in an environment dominated by digital engagement. Health communication must evolve to speak the language of social media: brevity, visual appeal, and emotional resonance. For instance, rather than condemning 'junk food,' campaigns could promote 'beautifully healthy' alternatives that fit Kuwait's visual and cultural aesthetic. Partnerships with credible figures who blend culinary creativity with health awareness could help reshape perceptions of what is aspirational in Kuwaiti food culture.

Furthermore, digital literacy should be recognised as a public health skill. Just as people are taught to question the credibility of news online, they should also learn to critically interpret food content, understanding its marketing intent and potential psychological effects. Educational programs could integrate discussions of social media influence on food choices, helping young people navigate the digital foodscape more consciously.

In conclusion, the rise of nutrition-related diseases in Kuwait cannot be attributed to one single cause. Yet, the growing influence of social media on how people relate to food is undeniable. Food is no longer simply eaten; it is performed, shared, and validated online. While this shift reflects creativity and connection, it also carries risks when visual gratification replaces nutritional mindfulness. If public health stakeholders can harness Kuwait's digital connectivity for positive change, transforming the aesthetics of health into something desirable and modern, the same social media platforms that currently fuel unhealthy habits may one day become the most powerful tools for reversing them.

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