

Digital Misinformation on Nutrition: How Social Media Spreads Dangerous Diet Myths

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In recent years, social media has become a major source of information on health and nutrition, especially among young Filipinos. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok allow users to share tips, recipes, and diet plans widely and rapidly. While these platforms have the potential to educate, they also enable the spread of misinformation, particularly dangerous diet myths. This has created a concerning problem in the Philippines, where many people rely on social media for health advice without verifying the facts. This essay explores how digital misinformation about nutrition spreads on social media, the risks it poses, and the need for better education and regulation.

Social media's influence on nutrition is undeniable. According to a study by the Philippine Statistics Authority (2021), a significant portion of Filipino youth regularly use social media to get health and diet information. However, the study also found that many of these users cannot easily distinguish between credible and misleading content. For example, fad diets promising rapid weight loss, detox regimens, or "miracle" supplements often go viral despite lacking scientific evidence (Philippine Department of Health, 2022). The viral nature of these myths is worsened by influencers who promote unproven products for financial gain, leading many followers to adopt unhealthy habits.

One common myth spread on social media is the belief that skipping meals or extreme calorie restriction leads to faster weight loss. However, experts warn that such practices can cause malnutrition and damage metabolism (Balela & Lagman, 2020). Despite this, many online posts promote "fasting hacks" and "cleanse diets" without highlighting the risks. In the Philippines, where malnutrition is still a public health challenge, the promotion of extreme dieting without professional guidance can have serious consequences.

The impact of nutrition misinformation is more than just physical health. Studies show that exposure to unrealistic body ideals on social media contributes to poor body image and disordered eating among Filipino teenagers (David et al., 2021). This psychological toll is often ignored in viral diet trends, making it harder for youth to develop healthy relationships with food and their bodies.

Combating digital misinformation requires a multi-pronged approach. Education is key. The Department of Education (DepEd) has started integrating media literacy and health education into the curriculum to teach students how to critically assess online content (DepEd, 2023). However, these efforts need to be expanded and paired with public awareness campaigns that target social media users of all ages.

Regulation also plays a role. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the Philippines has issued warnings against false claims on social media regarding supplements and diet products (FDA Philippines, 2023). However, enforcement is difficult due to the sheer volume of content and the fast pace of social media trends. Collaboration between government agencies, social media companies, and health experts is necessary to flag and remove harmful misinformation promptly.

Finally, credible influencers and health professionals should be encouraged to use social media platforms to spread evidence-based nutrition information. This

approach can provide a positive counterbalance to the flood of myths and offer Filipinos reliable resources for their health decisions.

In conclusion, social media is a powerful but double-edged tool in shaping nutrition knowledge in the Philippines. While it can offer accessible information, it also spreads dangerous diet myths that threaten physical and mental health. Addressing this challenge requires stronger education, tighter regulation, and active promotion of credible health content online, by doing so, Filipinos can be empowered to make informed, healthy choices in the digital age.

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