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Patterns of Preferred Communication Channels and Nutrition-Related Trust among Children and Youth in Kazakhstan: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Children and youth of the current decade receive information in a multi-channel environment using various sources and communication channels. Studying the preferences of the population in communication methods will make it possible to adjust the forms of health promotion work to the age, behavioral, and cultural characteristics of the target group.

The objective: to study the most popular communication channels for promoting healthy nutrition among children and youth of Kazakhstan.

Methods. A cross-sectional online survey was conducted among children and youth aged 9-35 years in Kazakhstan in September-October, 2025. A total of 39098 participants were included in the final analysis, 51% were male. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire assessing participants' information communication channels and sources of information on nutrition. Associations were tested using Pearson's chi-square test and Z-tests for proportions; binary logistic regression was used to identify predictors of channel use. Statistical significance was set at $p<0.05$.

Results. Modern digital services focused on instant communication and visual content were most widespread among children and youth of Kazakhstan. The leading preffered sources were WhatsApp (77.1%), TikTok (57.8%), Instagram (35.9%) and YouTube (32.8%). Gender differences were significant: females were more likely to use Instagram than males (43.0% vs. 29.0%, $p<0.001$), whereas males preferred YouTube (36.1% vs. 29.4%, $p<0.001$). Age differences were pronounced: TikTok preference increased from 47.7% among children aged under 12 years to 61.9% in those aged 14-17 years, decreasing to 30.8% among young adults aged 25 and over ($p<0.001$).

In logistic regression, younger age (12-17 years) was the strongest predictor of TikTok preference for communication vs. age 25-35 years (OR=3.2, CI: 2.9-3.7).

Parents or family members were the most trusted source of nutrition information (79.1%), with trust being significantly higher in the Southern region (83.5%) than in the Northern region (70.4%, $p<0.001$)

Conclusion. Significant gender, age, and regional differences in communication channel preferences of child and youth population were identified. Nutrition communication strategies in Kazakhstan should be tailored to gender- and age-specific preferences, regarding social media - with a focus on Instagram for females and YouTube for males and TikTok for adolescents. Given that parents and family stay as

the most trusted source of nutrition information (79.1%), they should be considered a target group for healthy nutrition education interventions.

Keywords: communication, social networking, health communication, healthy nutrition, child, young adult.

1. Introduction

Behavioral attitudes, healthy lifestyle and nutrition skills acquired in childhood are quite stable patterns and persist into adulthood, influencing health and well-being as they grow older. At the same time, among youth, behavioral skills can be formed towards unhealthy habits and risky patterns under the influence of various external factors [1,2].

The implementation of public health strategies and programs, including the promotion of healthy diets among the population, is a complex process that must ensure not only high-quality and tailored content, but also identify appropriate platforms/channels of communication. Among teenagers and young people, communication takes place in a multi-channel environment: interpersonal communication in family and school, digital platforms and social networks. Attitudes towards these methods of communication and obtaining information vary in terms of trust, perception, accessibility, and interactivity. Traditional educational population-based public health activities can be difficult to understand and uninteresting for a young audience. It is known that children and youth in many countries actively use the Internet and watch information and entertainment content [3,4]. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a smartphone is the main means of accessing various media channels, 83% of children aged 7-10 use smartphones, and among teenagers the figure is 89-91% [5]. In the UK, over the past 3-4 years, children's media preferences have rapidly shifted towards social media and online video platforms. Almost one fifth (19%) of children aged 3-5 use social media independently, without the participation of adults. The range of digital platforms used by older children and young people is expanding [6].

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, 94.5% youth and adults use the Internet for the interested information. The average time spent on the World Wide Web is 3-6 hours [7]. Thus, almost every young person has a mobile phone, which allows them to access and spend a lot of time on social media and video platforms.

This aspect provides access to health education information, as well as the opportunity to create this information [8,9]. There is evidence that young people are more effectively involved in health literacy activities through social media [10,11], which can be considered as a platform for promoting health aspects [12,13].

New opportunities have opened up for medical professionals and public health professionals to use social marketing and social media for efforts to change health behavior, conduct large-scale campaigns and individual messages to the target audience [13].

Studying the preferences of the population in communication methods will make it possible to adjust the forms of communication to the age, behavioral, and cultural characteristics of the target group. This will contribute to a more effective assimilation of educational activities, in particular, on healthy nutrition in the information environment.

In this regard, the aim of the study was to investigate the most popular digital communication channels for promoting healthy eating behaviour among children and youth of Kazakhstan.

2. Materials and methods

The study used cross sectional design.

Sample size and procedures.

The study target population was children and youth of the Republic of Kazakhstan aged 9-35 years, considered as youth demographic category by to the national law [14].

According to the Bureau of National Statistics for 2025, the size of this age cohort is N=8 041 429. The minimum required sample size for a large population was calculated using the standard formula for prevalence estimation: $n = Z^2 \times p(1-p) / e^2$=1067, where Z=1.96 for a 95% confidence level, p=0.5 (maximum variance), and e=margin of error. Given the stratified design with 50 strata (5 macro-regions × 5 age groups × 2 sexes), the required sample size to maintain a 3% margin of error within each stratum was substantially larger.

To reach a broad demographic and geographical coverage across the target age range (9–35 years) and 5 marco-regions of the country, this study employed a non-probability, multi-stage sampling design. Recruitment was done using institutional gatekeepers; specifically, regional education departments were contacted to serve as primary distribution nodes for distribution of information about the survey and consent forms along with the digital survey instrument.

In order to reach population from early adolescence through youth period to adulthood, the invitations to participate at the survey were sent to a diverse array of educational and social institutions, including primary and secondary schools, vocational colleges, universities, and regional youth organizations. The data was collected in September-October 2025.

The primary strategy relied on convenience sampling via these institutional channels, although elements of snowball sampling were integrated to capture individuals who might not be currently enrolled in formal education or specific communities. To identify the patterns of communication channels use across the wide developmental span (9–35 years), the sample was stratified during the analysis into five distinct developmental cohorts: children (9-11 years old); early adolescents (12-13 years old); adolescents (14-17 years old); youth (18-24 years old); young adults (25-35 years old).

To ensure the internal validity of the study, participants were included if they: were between the ages of 9 and 35 years at the time of data collection; were informed about the survey and agreed to participate; were currently residing in the Republic of Kazakhstan; and had sufficient literacy in Kazakh or Russian languages to complete the online questionnaire independently or with minimal parental assistance for the young adolescents for technical issues and linguistic clarifications if needed.

Final sample size and response rate

Prior to statistical analysis, the raw database underwent a multi-step data cleaning. Cases with more than 20% missing values across the study variables were excluded from the final analytic sample. Any respondents falling outside the targeted 9–35 range or providing contradictory birth-year data, or missing data on region title were excluded from the analysis.

After excluding incomplete entries and those failing internal validity checks, the final analytic sample consisted of 39098 respondents. Due to decentralized recruitment method, the exact reach of the survey link could not be determined. The final sample size represents participants, voluntary self-selected into the study. The survey covered all five macro-regions of Kazakhstan: Southern, Northern, Western, Eastern and Central. The distribution of respondents by region and gender was corresponded to the official demographic data of the National Bureau of Statistics, and iterative proportional fitting was used to eliminate the imbalances. Although improbability sampling limits the possibility of strict extrapolation of data to the entire population, it makes it possible to effectively identify trends and patterns in the behavior of various age and regional groups. To increase the accuracy of the results, statistical weighting of data by macro-region and gender was carried out, based on official data on the population structure.

Questionnaire. The electronic questionnaire included nine questions grouped into thematic blocks: 1) socio-demographic characteristics, including age, gender, place of residence, urbanization level (urban/rural) and current employment/educational status 2) communication channels and platforms used, and format preferences assessed with multiple-response questions. The questions on platforms/channels for communication and exchange information and on preferable type/format of information allowed for the selection of all applicable choices and included a semi-open ended "Other" category. Another question on most frequently used channels allowed to choose no more than three answer options. 3) sources of trust in obtaining nutrition data. The item allowed choosing no more than three answer options. The questionnaire was available in Kazakh and Russian languages.

The questionnaire underwent a pilot test and focus group discussion with a subsample of the youngest ages group (9-12 year olds, n=10) to ensure clarity of questions/terms used. Based on pilot feedback, the questions were simplified for better comprehension.

Statistical analysis. Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics v.23. The methods of descriptive statistics, comparative analysis, and cross-tabulation were used for the analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) were first calculated to characterize the demographic profile of the sample (N = 39098).

The statistical significance of the differences was assessed using the $\chi 2$ Pearson test at a significance level of $p<0.05$. We conducted comparative analysis with $\chi 2$ (chi-square) independence tests for comparing categorical variables (for example, platform usage in different age clusters). For low expected frequencies, the exact Fisher criterion or category unification was used as well as Z-tests for the difference in fractions (adjusted for weighting). Binary logistic regression was used to model the probability of using a particular platform (yes/no) depending on age, gender, region, place of residence and employment.

To examine the predictors of media platform utilization, a series of binary logistic regression models were constructed. The analysis includes the most common channels - WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and schools/universities. The dependent variable was defined as the probability of using specific means of communication/media platform. The primary predictors included: age as a categorical variable; gender coded as a binary factor, region as a categorical variable. Due to the demographic composition of the sample (majority of the sample comprised of school-

aged children and adolescents, employment status was excluded from the multivariate models to avoid multicollinearity with age. Instead, macro-region was included as a categorical variable to account for potential regional variations in various information exchange means and regional media norms.

For the variable macro-region, Central region was set as the reference category and for age variable, 25-35 year old range was the reference category.

The study was approved by Local Boiethics committee of the Academy of prevention medicine, protocol dated 22.08.2025 and adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki. Due to the online mode of the questionnaire completion, a self-selection recruitment model was employed. The participation at the study was preceded by sending information for participants with consent and the dual-consent process for minors (9–17 years).

3. Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study sample. The most prevalent age group was 14-17 year olds, 51.0% of the sample being males.

Table 1 - Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample (N=39098)

Characteristics	n	%
Age groups (years)		
Children (9-11)	6858	17.5
Early adolescents (12-13)	9758	25.0
Adolescents (14-17)	18386	47.0
Youth (18-24)	2394	6.1
Young adults (25-35)	1702	4.4
Gender		
Male	23064	51.0
Female	16034	49.0
Place of Residence		
Urban	20691	53.0
Rural	18407	47.0
Education/Employment/Status		
Student	36632	93.7
Employed	1174	3.0
Unemployed	515	1.3
Working student	776	2.0

Patterns of media consumption and information exchange. In general, modern digital communication tools focused on instant communication and visual content were most widespread among children and youth, with WhatsApp (77.1%) and TikTok (57.8%) being used by majority of studied population, followed by Instagram (35.9%) and YouTube (32.8%) (Table 2).

Table 2 - Prevalence of online and offline communication channels use

Communication channel/platform	Total, % (n)	9-11 y. (%)	12-13 y. (%)	14-17 y. (%)	18-24 y. (%)	25-35 y. (%)	χ^2 (df=4) (p-value)
TikTok	57.8 (22592)	47,7	61,2	61,9	61,3	30,8	963,1 (<0,001)
Instagram	35.9 (14022)	13,2	22,9	47,9	62,5	56,6	4384,5 (<0,001)
YouTube	32.8 (12826)	37,7	32,2	31,3	34,9	28,7	114,0 (<0,001)

Table 2 (continued) - Prevalence of online and offline communication channels use

Communication channel/platform	**Total, % (n)**	**9-11 y. (%)**	**12-13 y. (%)**	**14-17 y. (%)**	**18-24 y. (%)**	**25-35 y. (%)**	**χ^2 (df=4) (p-value)**
Telegram	26.0 (10160)	10,7	19,3	33,9	51,1	21,0	2335,3 (<0,001)
WhatsApp	77.1 (30127)	72,0	75,9	78,9	77,9	85,9	218,6 (<0,001)
Pinterest	8.8 (3437)	6,8	8,4	9,7	12,1	6,9	88,2 (<0,001)
Neural Network (AI) Chatbots	19.8 (7760)	16,1	19,2	21,5	26,8	14,6	179,4 (<0,001)
Threds	2.1 (804)	0,9	1,0	2,6	5,6	3,0	250,5 (<0,001)
In-games communication (voice or text chats and etc.)	5.4 (2092)	5,4	5,3	5,4	7,5	1,8	56,8 (<0,001)
X (Twitter)	1.5 (599)	1,6	1,2	1,7	2,1	0,4	26,7 (<0,001)
Snapchat	3.0 (1173)	3,3	3,5	2,8	1,7	2,1	28,3 (<0,001)
VKontakte	4.2 (1626)	3,3	3,5	4,4	8,1	5,0	98,5 (<0,001)
Facebook	2.4 (954)	2,2	2,3	2,0	2,8	8,8	288,7 (<0,001)
Email	4.8 (1890)	3,3	3,6	5,0	8,1	13,4	367,6 (<0,001)
School/University (in lessons, classes)	15.7 (6152)	16,1	14,2	17,4	14,8	5,7	178,0 (<0,001)
Personal meetings/offline events, clubs, sections, seminars, distribution of booklets, posters, stands, exhibitions;	6.1 (2389)	4,8	4,7	7,1	9,3	6,3	123,5 (<0,001)
TV	9.0 (3500)	14,3	9,6	6,5	5,2	12,3	443,7 (<0,001)
Other	0.5 (185)	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.1	39.9 (<0,001)

It is noteworthy that almost a fifth of the youth noted the use of AI - chats (19.8%) for information exchange/communication.

Traditional in-person channels of communication and information, such as school/university study were within top 7 means and chosen by 15.7 % of the sample, as expected more prevalence among adolescents (17.4%; χ^2=178.0, p<0,001).

Gender differences were observed. Females were significantly more likely to use WhatsApp (79.9% vs. 74.3%, χ^2=171.18, p<0.001) and Instagram (43.0% vs. 29.0%, χ^2=822.06, p<0.001) compared to males. Males more frequently preferred YouTube (36.1% vs. 29.4%, χ^2=203.31, p<0.001). The use of TikTok was comparable between females and males, with a marginally higher prevalence among females (58.3% vs. 57.2%, χ^2=5,27, p=0,022).

Adolescents aged 14-17 age group was the most actively involved in various channels use and served as a reference point for comparison. WhatsApp shows a high level of engagement in all age groups, peaking in young adults 25-35 (85.9%; χ^2=218.6, p<0,001). TikTok usage peaks in adolescence, 14-17 year olds (61.9%), significantly exceeding the rates among younger

children (9-11 years old, Z≈ -21, p<0.001) and 25-35 years old adults (Z≈ -24, p<0.001).

Instagram usage demonstrated a linear increase with age, peaking at 18-24 age range (62.5%) with some decrease at 25-35 age range (56.6%), while YouTube usage remains relatively stable at all ages, although it is slightly higher among younger (9-11 years old) and youth (18-24 years old) (37.7% and 34.9% respectively). Interest in television viewing showed the opposite trend: it is noticeably higher in younger children, 14.3% (Z≈20, p<0.001) and in young adults, 12.3% (25-35 years old).

An analysis of the frequency distribution of use of various digital platforms depending on gender showed statistically significant differences in almost all studied positions.

Notably, young female participants reported significantly higher engagement with WhatsApp (79.9% vs. 74.3%; χ^2=171,18, p<0.001), Instagram (43.0% vs. 29.0%; χ^2=822,06, p<0,001) and Pinterest (13.5% vs. 4.3%; χ^2=1029.07, p<0.001), while male participants dominated YouTube utilization 36.1% vs. 29.4%; χ^2=203.31, p<0.001) and in-game communication channels (7.9% vs. 2.7%; χ^2=513.51, p<0.001).

TikTok is used approximately equally by young people of both sexes (58.3% vs. 57.2%; χ2=5.27, p=0.022).

The use of e-mail was slightly more common among male participants (5.4% vs. 4.2%; χ2=28.96, p<0.001), while communication through school or university and participation in offline events were more common among female youth (16.3% vs. 15.2%, respectively; χ2=9.26, p<0.01).

To assess the factors influencing the use of various communication platforms and channels, a binary logistic regression was performed. The analysis included the most common channels - WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, schools/universities. Gender and age groups were used as independent variables. (9-11, 12-13, 14-17, 18-24, 25-35 years) and five macro-regions of the country. Age and region were considered as categorical variables.

Binary logistic regression on WhatsApp preference (Table 3) showed that the model was statistically significant (χ2(9)=487.0; p<0.001), however, the explained proportion of variation was small (R2 Nagelkerk=0.019), which was expected, given the widespread use of this messenger. The overall classification accuracy was 77.1%. WhatsApp use was statistically more common among women (Exp(B)=1,34; p<0,001). Age had a noticeable effect (χ2=187.9; p<0.001): Younger age groups were slightly less likely to use the app, especially children aged 9-11 (Exp(B)=0.45) and adolescents aged 12-13 (Exp(B)=0.55), whereas in older ages the usage was consistently high. Differences were also found by macro-regions (χ2=128.2; p<0.001): relative to the Central region, the probability of use was lower in the South (Exp(B)=0.68) and slightly lower in the West (Exp(B)=0.83), however, WhatsApp remains the most versatile and widely used platform in all regions of the country. Thus, WhatsApp was the most widespread and evenly used communication channel among children and youth of Kazakhstan and retains steady popularity in all territorial groups.

Table 3 - Binary logistic regression predicting WhatsApp usage

Predictor	**B**	**p-value**	**OR (Exp B)**	**95% CI**
Gender (Reference: Male)				
Female	0.292	<0.001	1.339	[1,28; 1,41]
Age group (Reference: 25-35 years old)				
9-11	-0.794	<0.001	0.452	[0,39; 0,53]
12-13	-0.591	<0.001	0.554	[0,48; 0,64]
14-17	-0.429	<0.001	0.651	[0,56; 0,76]
18-24	-0.583	<0.001	0.558	[0,46; 0,67]
Region (Reference: Central region)				

Table 3 (continued) - Binary logistic regression predicting WhatsApp usage

Predictor	B	p-value	OR (Exp B)	95% CI
Southern region	-0.385	<0.001	0.680	[0,61; 0,76]
North region	-0.116	0.052	0.891	[0,79; 1,00]
Western region	-0.182	0.002	0.833	[0,74; 0,94]
Eastern region	-0.061	0.409	0.941	[0,81; 1,09]
Constant	1.582	<0.001	4.864	

The TikTok model (Table 4) turned out to be statistically significant (χ2(9)=1694.8; p<0.001), while the proportion of correct classifications was 61%, indicating acceptable predictive ability, with a moderate explanation for the variation in the dependent variable (Nagelkirk's R2=0.057). The probability of using TikTok was slightly higher among girls (Exp(B)=1,04; p=0,041). Age had a significant impact: compared to the 25-35-year-old group, adolescents aged 12-17 were significantly more likely to use TikTok (Exp(B)=3.23-3.25) and the use decreased with age. The macroregion factor was also statistically significant (χ2=719.6; p<0.001): relative to the Central Region, TikTok was less likely to be used in other parts of the country, especially in the Southern macroregion (Exp(B)=0.44), where engagement was noticeably lower than in the central and northern regions.

Table 4 - Binary logistic regression predicting TikTok usage

Predictor	B	p-value	OR (Exp B)	95% CI
Gender (Reference: Male)				
Female	0.043	0.041	1.044	[1.00; 1.09]
Age group (Reference: 25-35 years old)				
9-11	0.602	<0.001	1.826	[1.62; 2.06]
12-13	1.178	<0.001	3.248	[2.89; 3.65]
14-17	1.172	<0.001	3.229	[2.88; 3.62]
18-24	0.992	<0.001	2.697	[2.33; 3.12]
Region (Reference: Central region)				
Southern region	-0.826	<0.001	0.438	[0.40; 0.48]
North region	-0.253	<0.001	0.776	[0.70; 0.86]
Western region	-0.390	<0.001	0.677	[0.61; 0.75]
Eastern region	-0.318	<0.001	0.727	[0.64; 0.82]
Constant	-0.192	0.02	0.825	

According to the results of logistic regression for the use of Instagram, gender, age, and macroregion were found to be statistically significant factors (p<0.001) (Table 5). The likelihood of using Instagram was significantly higher among females (Exp(B)=1,869), than among young males. Age also had a strong influence: the older the respondents, the more likely they are to be active on Instagram. The lowest values were observed in children aged 9-11 years (Exp(B)=0.134), and the highest involvement was observed among young people aged 18-24. By macro-region, activity was lower in the south.

Table 5 - Binary logistic regression predicting Instagram usage

Predictor	**B**	**p-value**	**OR (Exp B)**	**95% CI**
Gender (Reference: Male)				
Female	0.625	<0.001	1.869	[1,79; 1,95]
Age group (Reference: 25-35 years old)				
9-11	-2.013	<0.001	0.134	[0,12; 0,15]
12-13	-1.336	<0.001	0.263	[0,24; 0,29]
14-17	-0.211	<0.001	0.809	[0,73; 0,90]
18-24	0.170	0.020	1.185	[1,03; 1,37]
Region (Reference: Central region)				
Southern region	-0.593	<0.001	0.553	[0,50; 0,61]
North region	-0.021	0.679	0.979	[0,89; 1,08]
Western region	-0.390	<0.001	0.677	[0,61; 0,75]
Eastern region	-0.198	0.003	0.820	[0,72; 0,93]
Constant	-0.427	<0.001	0.653	

The results of logistic regression on the YouTube channel showed that the model is statistically significant (χ2=908.8, p<0.001), and the included predictors - gender, age group, and macroregion - have a significant impact on the likelihood of using the YouTube platform (Table 6). The coefficients of determination were R2 Cox and Snell =0.023 and R2 Nagelkerk =0.032, reflecting a moderate explanation of the variation in the dependent variable. The total share of correct model classifications is 67.2%. Significant differences were found by gender: the probability of using YouTube is lower among the female half (B=-0.298, p<0.001; Exp(B)=0.742), that is, male respondents use this platform more often. Age has a small but statistically significant effect (χ2=114.3, p<0.001). Compared to the basic category (25-35 years old), the younger age group of 9-11 years is slightly more likely to use YouTube (Exp(B)=1.15) and gradually decreases with age, especially among adolescents aged 14-17 (Exp(B)=0.84). The macroregion factor is also significant (χ2=600.8, p<0.001). Relative to the base (Central) region, the probability of using YouTube is significantly lower in the South (Exp(B)=0.48) and the Eastern (0.69) regions.

Table 6 - Binary logistic regression predicting YouTube usage

Predictor	B	p-value	OR (Exp B)	95% CI
Gender (Reference: Male)				
Female	-0.298	<0.001	0.742	[0,71; 0,78]
Age group (Reference: 25-35 years old)				
9-11	0.139	0.026	1.149	[1,02; 1,30]
12-13	-0.086	0.157	0.917	[0,81; 1,03]
14-17	-0.175	0.003	0.840	[0,75; 0,94]
18-24	-0.134	0.081	0.875	[0,75; 1,02]

Table 6 (continued) - Binary logistic regression predicting YouTube usage

Predictor	B	p-value	OR (Exp B)	95% CI
Region (Reference: Central region)				
Southern region	-0.732	<0.001	0.481	[0,44; 0,52]
North region	-0.160	<0.001	0.852	[0,78; 0,94]
Western region	-0.324	<0.001	0.723	[0,66; 0,80]
Eastern region	-0.369	<0.001	0.692	[0,61; 0,78]
Constant	0.278	<0.001	1.320	

The results of binary logistic regression showed that the young females was slightly more likely to use schools/universities as a communication channel compared to the males (Exp(B)=1,17, p<0,001). Age also had a significant impact (p<0.001): the probability of receiving information through schools and universities increases with increasing age - all age groups had higher chances than the basic category (25-35 years), especially high rates was found among adolescents aged 14-17 years (Exp(B)=3,31) (Table 7).

Table 7 - Binary logistic regression predicting in School/University communication usage

Predictor	B	p-value	OR (Exp B)	95% CI
Gender (Reference: Male)				
Female	0.155	<0.001	1.168	[1,11; 1,23]
Age group (Reference: 25-35 years old)				
9-11	1.094	<0.001	2.985	[2,39; 3,73]
12-13	0.961	<0.001	2.615	[2,10; 3,26]
14-17	1.196	<0.001	3.307	[2,66; 4,11]
18-24	0.947	<0.001	2.578	[2,01; 3,31]
Region (Reference: Central region)				
Southern region	-0.778	<0.001	0.459	[0,42; 0,51]
North region	-0.490	<0.001	0.613	[0,55; 0,68]
Western region	-0.663	<0.001	0.515	[0,46; 0,58]
Eastern region	-0.298	<0.001	0.742	[0,65; 0,85]
Constant	-2.375	<0.001	0.093	

In regards to the preferable format information, the data showed that short videos are the most attractive, which were chosen by almost half of the respondents (49.2%). Long videos are in second place in popularity (25.6%). Approximately one in five children and youth (22.5%) indicated that they like memes and pictures, and the same proportion (22.5%) was for game formats. This indicates a high demand for interactive and entertaining content, including gamified approaches to information transmission. Similar share of studied population (21.1%) choosed stories (short stories), a format that combines visual, brevity and personal presentation.

A relatively smaller proportion of children and youth prefer text articles and posts: 15.2% indicated articles and texts. 12.1% of the participants showed interest in podcasts and audio content, which can be considered as a developing, but still niche format. (Figure 1).

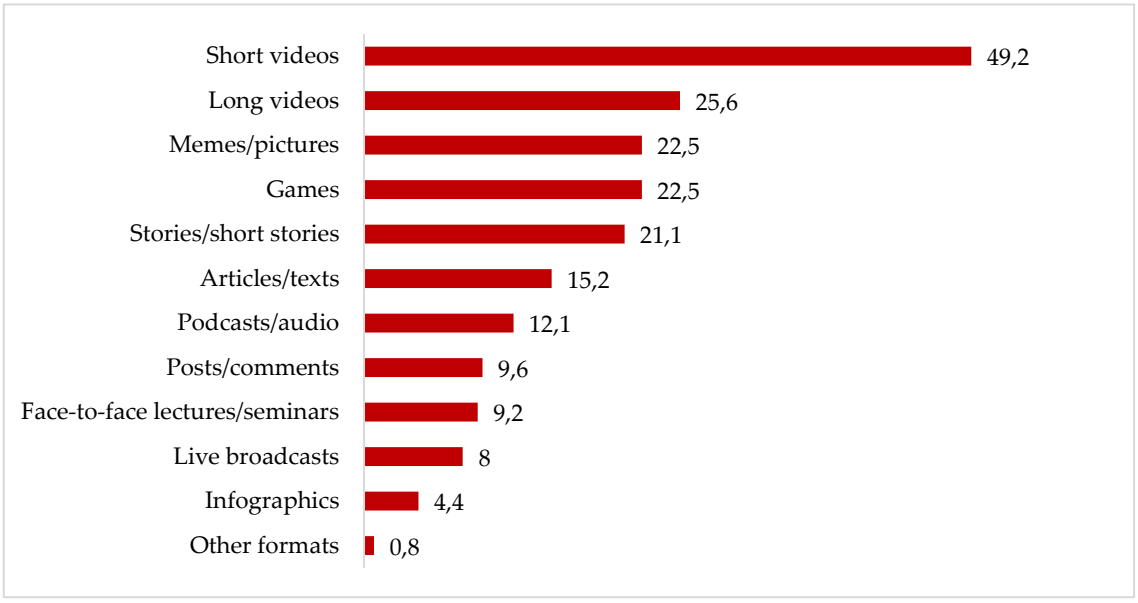


Figure 1 - Preferable format of information among children and youth, %

An important aspect of studying the information behavior of schoolchildren and young people is the analysis of sources they trust when receiving information about nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. The data revealed that parents and other family members had the greatest trust regarding nutrition information among schoolchildren and young people. Almost four fifths of the respondents (79.1%) indicated parents as the most reliable in obtaining information about food and proper nutrition. The second place in terms of trust was occupied by doctors, nurses and medical organizations (38.2%). A slightly lower but still noticeable trust was observed for teachers - 21.1%, supporting the importance of the educational environment as a communication channel on nutrition (Figure 2).

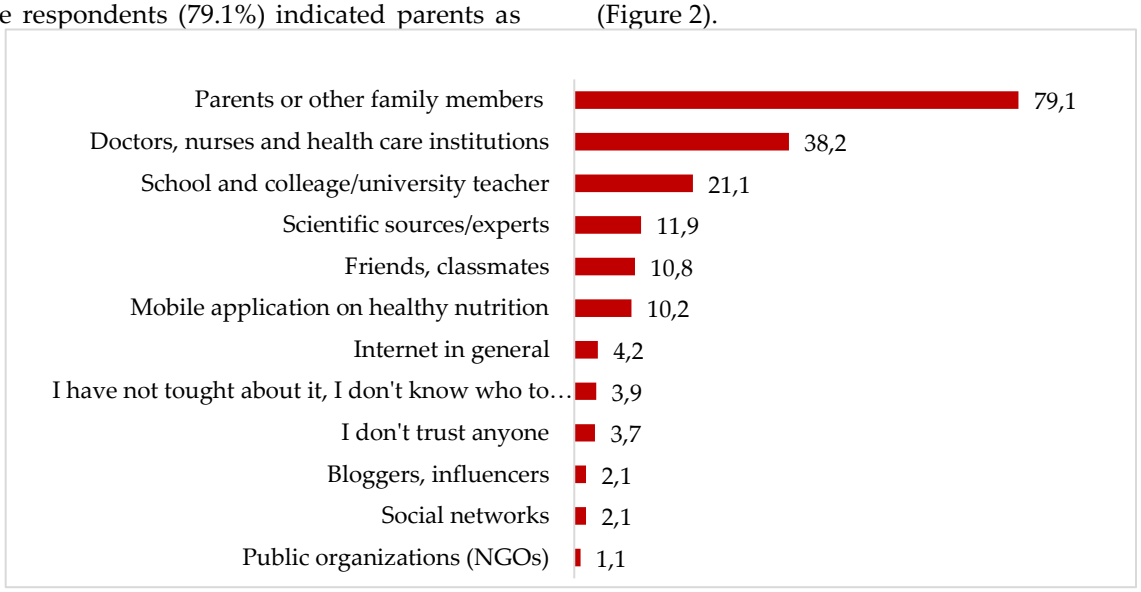


Figure 2 - Sources of nutrition information that respondents trust most often (percentage of those who choose, %)

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The analysis of trust in various sources of nutrition information showed noticeable regional differences. With regard to family and parents, the highest level of trust was observed in the Southern macroregion compared to the Northern region (83.5% vs. 70.4%; χ^2=653.76, p<0.001). Trust in teachers was highest in the Eastern Region and the lowest in the Northern Region (25.0% vs. 17.7%; χ^2=91.11, p<0.001). Health care workers and institutions was selected as trusted source of information about nutrition in the Northern and Central macroregions (45.2% and 45.8%, respectively), while in the Southern - 35.1% (χ^2=334.69, p<0.001).

4. Discussion

Our findings largely confirm that while overall digital platforms use are common, subtle socio-demographic and regional variations persist when navigating specific everyday media channels.

In summary, our study of 39,098 children and youth (9-35 years of age) identified the following key findings:

- The preferred information interaction sources were WhatsApp (77.1%), TikTok (57.8%), Instagram (35.9%) and YouTube (32.8%);

- Significant gender differences were found: females were more likely to use WhatsApp (79.9% vs. 74.3%, χ^2=171.18, p<0.001) and Instagram (43.0% vs. 29.0%, χ^2=822.06, p<0.001) compared to males, while males preferred YouTube (78.0% vs. 62.0%, p<0.001);

- Age trends were evident: TikTok use peaked at 61.9% in adolescents aged 14-17 years and declined to 30.8% in adults 25-35 years (p<0.001), while Instagram use rose from 13.2% in children younger 12 years to 62.5% at 18-24 years of age; WhatsApp shows a high level of engagement in all age groups, peaking in young adults 25-35 year old (85.9%, p<0,001).

In logistic regression, younger age (12-17 years) was the strongest predictor of TikTok use compared to age 25-35 years (OR=3.2, 95% CI: 2.9-3.7), while female gender predicted Instagram use (OR=1.9, 95% CI: 1.8-2.0);

Despite high social media use, parents/family remained the most trusted source (77.0%), with significantly higher trust in the Southern region (83.5%) than in the Northern region (70.4%, p<0.001).

Our data are in line with other studies documenting the most used social networking platforms among the youth. Among 11-15 year old US adolescents TikTok (67.1%), Instagram (66.0%), and YouTube (64.7%) were top used [15]. The same three leaders were noted among Italian children and adolescents [16], while in our study WhatsApp was the preferred media (77.1%). WhatsApp also was popular in the Carrebean region among middle adolescents (82.9%) [17].

The gender differences observed in our study, with females preferring WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok and males reported to use YouTube, is consistent with the findings of data from Nagata et al., who reported a similar pattern of platform preference by gender among adolescents [15]. Our results confirms other studies regarding gender segmentation in media use. Female respondents demonstrated a significantly higher preference toward personalized, visual content (e.g., lifestyle and nutritionist blogs on Instagram), whereas male peers showed a stronger preference for video-hosting platforms (YouTube) and structured text. This gendered difference in information channel selection reflects distinct patterns of digital socialization. Females tend to seek relational, peer-relatable, and identity-driven communication models, while males lean toward functional, task-oriented media formats [18,19].

The binary logistic regression analysis revealed highly nuanced, platform-specific trajectories driven by age groups and gender. In our study TikTok use peaked sharply among adolescents aged 12–17 years and demonstrated a steep inverse relationship with age. Conversely, Instagram engagement peaked slightly later, in the 18–24 age group, while maintaining a similarly strong female orientation.These trajectories corresponds to recent digital media studies [20-23]. TikTok's dominance in early-to-mid adolescence reflects the platform's short-form, low-friction, algorithm-driven video loop that caters to younger cognitive processing styles and peer-entertainment seeking [6, 18]. The shift toward Instagram in the 18–24 cohort illustrates a migration toward identity, aesthetic social capital and justification, and peer-relational lifestyle models [18,24-26].

Our findings indicate that parents represent the most trusted source of information about nutrition among young people (79.1%) that is partially consistent with a study of students where internet was reported as the most trusted source, followed by family and friends [27]. The high level of trust in parents in our study highlights the important role of the family environment in shaping young people's perceptions and behaviours related to nutrition. Thus, interventions aimed at improving nutrition among young people may benefit from considering parents as an important communication and behaviour-change channel rather

than focusing exclusively on direct communication with the youth.

Interestingly, digital sources such as mobile applications were trusted by only a minority of participants, despite the widespread use of digital technologies among young people. This distinction between use of a digital source and trust in the information provided by that source is important. Young people may frequently encounter nutrition related information through digital platforms without necessarily considering these sources sufficiently reliable to guide their behavior. Our finding that medical workers were trusted more than internet in general (38.2% vs. 4.2% for internet as trusted source on nutrition). This pattern is mirrored within digital platforms themselves, where medical professional-style content received significantly higher trust ratings than influencer-style content ($p<0.001$), suggesting that credibility cues related to expertise remain decisive even online [28].

The studied phenomenon aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory and cognitive development frameworks. Younger adolescents prioritize emotional gratification, entertainment, and visual immediacy. Conversely, as individuals transition into higher education and the workforce, their information-seeking behavior becomes more analytical, favoring depth and source credibility over algorithmic engagement [29].

Limitations and future research

Despite its broad cross-regional and multi-cohort sample, this study has certain limitations:

The cross-sectional design restricts our ability to make causal inferences regarding how individual communication preferences evolve over time.

Reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce recall bias or social desirability bias, particularly concerning sensitive lifestyle habits.

Future longitudinal studies should track specific youth cohorts over time to determine whether observed differences reflect true age-developmental progression or distinct generational cohort effects.

5. Conclusion

Our study found that WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube are the preferred information channels among 9-35 year old children and adults with WhatsApp dominating in all groups (72.0-85.9%). The identified gender and age features indicate the categorization of platforms: the female gender is significantly more likely to prefer visually oriented, short formats (TikTok and Instagram) with the peak of their use at 12-24 years old (up to 62.5%). The males (36.1%), on the contrary, prefers the YouTube information search platform with a video format, used to receive detailed instructions.

he following features were identified that parents and family remain the most trusted source of nutrition information, while the level of trust had regional nuances, and trust in medical professionals exceeds trust in social networks, which indicates the continued importance of interpersonal communication against the background of widespread use of digital platforms. Understanding this complex interplay is essential for designing effective digital and in-person health interventions and youth-oriented repated health communication campaigns.

Overall, the findings suggest that effective health and nutrition promoting information among young people should combine the strengths of different channels. Parents may serve as the primary trusted communicators, while healthcare professionals can provide authoritative and evidence-based guidance. Schools and digital technologies can complement these channels by reinforcing consistent messages in environments where young people spend substantial amounts of time. Rather than relying on a single communication platform, a multisectoral approach involving families, healthcare services, schools and credible digital resources may be more effective in improving young people's knowledge, attitudes and engagement in nutrition related skills.

Conflict of interests. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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All authors read, agreed with the final version of the manuscript and signed the copyright transfer form.

AI use declaration. During the preparation of this work, the authors used Meta AI for language editing, proofreading, and manuscript formatting assistance. The authors reviewed, verified, and edited the content and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the work.

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Қазақстандағы балалар мен жастардың тамақтану туралы ақпарат алуға арналған таңдаулы коммуникация арналары мен осы ақпаратқа сену ерекшеліктері: Көлденең зерттеу

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Түйіндеме

Қазіргі онжылдықтағы балалар мен жастар ақпаратты әртүрлі дереккөздер мен коммуникация арналарын пайдалана отырып, көпарналы ақпараттық орта жағдайында алады. Халықтың коммуникация тәсілдеріне қатысты қалауларын зерделеу ағартушылық жұмыс түрлерін мақсатты топтың жас ерекшеліктері, мінез-құлық пен мәдени ерекшеліктеріне бейімдеуге мүмкіндік береді.

Зерттеудің мақсаты Қазақстандағы балалар мен жастар арасында дұрыс тамақтану идеяларын ілгерілету үшін ең көп сұранысқа ие коммуникация арналарын зерделеу болды.

Әдістері. 2025 жылғы қыркүйек-қазан айларында Қазақстанда 9-35 жас аралығындағы балалар мен жастар арасында көлденең онлайн-зерттеу жүргізілді. Қорытынды талдауға 39 098 қатысушы енгізіліп, олардың 51%-ын ер адамдар құрады. Деректерді жинау қатысушылардың медиақалаулары мен тамақтану туралы ақпарат алу көздерін бағалауға арналған құрылымдалған онлайн-сауалнама арқылы жүзеге асырылды. Статистикалық байланыстарды талдау үшін Пирсонның хи-квадрат критерийі, ал үлестерді салыстыру үшін пропорцияларға арналған Z-критерийі қолданылды. Коммуникация арналарын пайдалануды болжайтын предикторды анықтау үшін бинарлық логистикалық регрессия әдісі пайдаланылды. $p<0,05$ болған жағдайда айырмашылықтар статистикалық тұрғыдан мәнді деп есептелді.

Нәтижесі. Қазақстандағы балалар мен жастар арасында жедел қарым-қатынас жасауға және визуалды контентке бағытталған заманауи сандық сервистер ең кең таралған.

WhatsApp (77,1%), TikTok (57,8%), Instagram (35,9%) және YouTube (32,8%) ақпарат алудың ең көп таңдалатын жетекші көздері болды. Жынысына қарай статистикалық тұрғыдан мәнді айырмашылықтар анықталды: әйел жынысты қатысушылар ер жынысты қатысушылармен салыстырғанда Instagram желісін жиірек пайдаланған (43,0%-ға қарсы 29,0%, $p<0,001$), ал ер жынысты қатысушылар YouTube платформасына көбірек басымдық берген (36,1%-ға қарсы 29,4%, $p<0,001$). Жас ерекшеліктеріне байланысты да статистикалық тұрғыдан мәнді айырмашылықтар анықталды: 12 жасқа дейінгі балалардың 47,7%-ы TikTok платформасын пайдалануды қалайды. Бұл көрсеткіш 14 – 17 жас аралығындағы балалар арасында 61,9%-ға дейін артып, 25 жастағы және одан үлкен жастар арасында 30,8%-ға дейін төмендейді ($p<0,001$). Логистикалық регрессиялық талдау нәтижесінде 25 – 35 жас аралығындағы топпен салыстырғанда жасөспірімдер (12–17 жас) ақпарат алу үшін TikTok платформасын таңдайтын ең күшті предиктор болып анықталды (OR=3,2; сенімділік интервалы: 2,9–3,7). Ата-аналар немесе отбасы мүшелері тамақтану туралы ақпараттың ең сенімді көзі болды (79,1%). Бұл ретте сенім деңгейі Оңтүстік өңірде (83,5%) Солтүстік өңірмен салыстырғанда (70,4%) айтарлықтай жоғары болды ($p<0,001$).

Қорытынды. Қазақстанда тамақтану саласындағы коммуникациялық стратегиялар жыныс және жас ерекшеліктеріне байланысты қалауларға бейімделуі тиіс. Әлеуметтік желілерді пайдалану тұрғысынан әйелдер үшін Instagram, еркектер үшін YouTube, ал жасөспірімдер үшін TikTok платформаларына басымдық беру қажет.

Ата-аналар мен отбасы мүшелері тамақтану туралы ақпараттың ең сенімді көзі болып қала беретінін (79,1%) ескере отырып, оларды дұрыс тамақтану саласындағы ағартушылық іс-шараларды жүргізуде мақсатты топ ретінде қарастыру қажет.

Түйін сөздер: коммуникация, әлеуметтік желілер, денсаулық туралы коммуникация, дұрыс тамақтану, балалар, жастар.

Особенности предпочитаемых каналов коммуникации и доверия к информации о питании среди детей и молодежи в Казахстане: Кросс-секционное исследование

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Резюме

Дети и молодежь нынешнего десятилетия получают информацию в условиях многоканальной среды, используя различные источники и каналы коммуникации. Изучение предпочтений населения в способах коммуникации позволит подстроить формы просветительной работы под возрастные, поведенческие, культурные особенности целевой группы.

Целью исследования являлось изучение наиболее востребованных каналов коммуникации для продвижения идей здорового питания среди детей и молодежи Казахстана.

Методы. Проведено кросс-секционное онлайн-исследование среди детей и молодых людей 9-35 лет в Казахстане в сентябре-октябре 2025 года. В окончательный анализ включено 39098 участников, из которых 51% лица мужского пола. Сбор данных проводился с использованием структурированной онлайн-анкеты,

оценивающей медиа предпочтения и источники информации участников о питании. Анализ статистических ассоциаций выполнен с использованием критерия хи-квадрат Пирсона, для сравнения долей - Z-критерий для пропорций. Для определения предикторов использования каналов коммуникации применялся метод бинарной логистической регресии.Статистически значимыми считали различия при p<0.05.

Результаты. Наибольшее распространение среди детей и молодежи Казахстана имели современные цифровые сервисы, ориентированные на мгновенное общение и визуальный контент.

Лидирующими предпочитаемыми источниками информации являлись WhatsApp (77,1%), TikTok (57,8%), Instagram (35,9%) и YouTube (32,8%). Выявлены значимые различия по полу: представители женского пола чаще использовали Instagram, по сравнению с представителями мужского пола (43.0% vs. 29.0%, p<0.001), в то время как лица мужского пола предпочитали YouTube (36.1% vs. 29.4%, p<0.001). Определены значимые возрастные различия: TikTok предпочитают использовать 47,7% детей до 12 лет. Показатель увеличивается до 61,9% среди детей в возрасте 14-17 лет, и снижается до 30,8% среди молодых людей в возрасте 25 лет и старше (p<0,001). В логистической регрессии младший возраст (12-17 лет) был самым сильным предиктором предпочтения TikTok для получения информации по сравнению с возрастом 25-35 лет (OR=3,2, ДИ: 2,9-3,7). Родители или члены семьи были наиболее доверенным источником информации о питании (79,1%), причем в Южном регионе доверие было значительно выше (83,5%), чем в Северном (70,4%, p<0,001).

Выводы. Стратегии коммуникации в области питания в Казахстане должны быть адаптированы к гендерным и возрастным предпочтениям, в отношении социальных сетей - с акцентом на Instagram для женщин, YouTube для мужчин и TikTok для подростков.Учитывая, что родители и члены семьи остаются наиболее надежным источником информации о питании (79,1%), их следует рассматривать как целевую группу для проведения мероприятий по просвещению в области здорового питания.

Ключевые слова: коммуникация, социальные сети, коммуникация о здоровье, здоровое питание, дети, молодежь.