

The Influence Of Digital Food Trends On Eating Habits: An Instagram Perspective

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Abstract— This study examines the influence of digital food trends on eating habits, focusing specifically on the role of Instagram as a driver of dietary behaviors. Utilizing a structured questionnaire, data were collected from a diverse sample of participants regarding their engagement with food-related content, trust in influencer recommendations, and changes in eating habits attributed to Instagram trends. The findings reveal that visually appealing food posts and popular trends on Instagram significantly shape participants' food choices, with many reporting increased experimentation with trendy foods and a greater likelihood of trying aesthetically pleasing dishes. Notably, the perceived credibility of influencers and the number of likes or comments on posts further amplify these effects. The study underscores the pervasive impact of digital food trends on modern eating behaviors, highlighting Instagram as a powerful platform in shaping dietary preferences and social eating norms.

Index Terms— Instagram, food trends, digital marketing, influencer credibility, eating behavior, dietary habits.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a dominant force shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the realm of food and nutrition. Platforms like Instagram, characterized by their visually driven content and high user engagement, have become influential arenas where food trends are rapidly disseminated and adopted. Young people, in particular, turn to social media for meal inspiration, often emulating the food choices and habits showcased by influencers and peers. Research indicates that exposure to food marketing on social platforms can significantly alter eating patterns, increasing the likelihood of trying new dishes, experimenting with healthier or trendier foods, and engaging more frequently in food delivery or dining out.

Instagram's unique blend of visual appeal and social validation—through likes, comments, and shares—creates an environment where users are not only inspired by food trends but also feel a sense of belonging and motivation to participate in popular challenges and share their own experiences. Influencers and high-profile accounts play a critical role in this ecosystem, shaping perceptions of what is desirable or healthy and often driving the popularity of specific food items or dietary practices. As a result, digital food trends propagated through Instagram can lead to both positive and negative shifts in eating habits, including increased experimentation with new foods, greater attention to food aesthetics, and, in some cases, heightened consumption of energy-dense or less healthy foods.

This research seeks to elucidate how Instagram-driven food trends influence individual eating habits, exploring the interplay between visual content, influencer credibility, and social engagement in shaping dietary choices. By analysing survey responses on food-related behaviours and attitudes, the study aims to provide insights into the mechanisms through which digital platforms like Instagram impact contemporary eating patterns.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of food consumption patterns and digital influence has become an increasingly pertinent field of research in recent years. Traditional studies, such as Omidvar and Begum (2014), highlight that food habits among adolescents and young adults are strongly influenced by socioeconomic status (SES), meal-skipping behaviors, snack consumption, and preferences for fast foods. Their work underscores the nutritional implications of fast food consumption and skipping meals, often exacerbated by peer influence, SES disparities, and lifestyle habits.

However, with the evolution of digital platforms, particularly visual-centric apps like Instagram, the narrative around food choices is changing. Instagram has become a dominant source of food-related inspiration, especially among young adults aged 18–44. Unlike previous influences such as family traditions or regional availability, modern food choices are now shaped by visual appeal, social engagement (likes, shares, comments), and influencer credibility.

Studies show that users frequently emulate influencer-endorsed diets, not only for perceived health benefits but also for aesthetic and social approval. The “we eat with our eyes” paradigm is amplified through Instagram's algorithmic exposure to vibrant and stylized dishes, often skewing perceptions of normal and healthy eating. This digital ecosystem promotes both healthy behaviours like trying plant-based trends or “clean eating”—and unhealthy behaviours, such as bingeing on high-calorie desserts that go viral.

Moreover, research suggests that social validation (likes/comments) and fear of missing out (FOMO) further compel users to participate in trends, sometimes overriding their traditional dietary preferences or nutritional awareness. This marks a departure from SES-driven eating habits, as observed in the base study, and emphasizes social media engagement as a new behavioral determinant.

Influencer marketing plays a pivotal role in this shift. Influencers with large followings act as lifestyle role models, shaping not only food preferences but also perceptions of body image and health. The visual storytelling of food through Instagram reels and stories creates a feedback loop, where users feel motivated to share their meals, experiment with new foods, and even alter their eating frequencies or dining habits.

This digital transformation has significant implications for dietary behavior. While it democratizes food exposure and encourages culinary experimentation, it also raises concerns about the normalization of frequent eating out, increased caloric intake, and emotional or impulsive eating behaviors, especially among adolescents.

In summary, current literature reveals a paradigm shift from socioeconomic and cultural determinants of food habits (as emphasized in Omidvar and Begum's work) to digitally-driven, socially validated, and visually inspired behaviors. This underscores the need for contemporary research that explores how platforms like Instagram are reshaping food environments, dietary choices, and health behaviors.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this research is to analyze how Instagram-driven digital food trends influence individual eating habits. This study aims to understand both the positive and negative effects of these trends from the user perspective and provide insights that can inform future strategies in digital food marketing and public health.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a descriptive, cross-sectional research design to examine how digital food trends on Instagram influence the eating habits of users. The cross-sectional approach allows for the collection and analysis of data from a diverse group of participants at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of current behaviors and attitudes related to digital food trends.

4.2. DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Data was collected using a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to capture demographic details (age, employment status, dietary preference), as well as participants' attitudes and behaviors related to Instagram food trends. The questionnaire included 17 close-ended questions, mostly based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." These questions focused on aspects like health consciousness, dietary preferences, engagement with food-related posts, trust in influencer recommendations and changes in eating habits.

4.3. SAMPLING METHOD

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was employed. Participants were recruited based on their accessibility and willingness to participate, which facilitated timely data collection but may introduce some selection bias.

4.4. SAMPLE SIZE

The final sample consisted of 60 respondents, as determined by the number of completed and valid survey responses received.

4.5. HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

H₀ (Null Hypothesis): Instagram-driven digital food trends do not have a significant influence on individual eating habits.

H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis): Instagram-driven digital food trends have a significant influence on individual eating habits.

4.6. DATA ANALYSIS

4.6.1. Correlation

	FOMO	FT
FOMO	1	
FT	0.673457	1

There is a high **positive correlation** ($r = 0.673$) between **Fear of missing out** and **interest in food trends**.

	Food trend	Engage
Food trend	1	
Engage	0.366525	1

There is a **moderate positive correlation** ($r = 0.367$) between **interest in food trends** and **engagement**.

4.6.2. ANOVA

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
follow inf	65	169	2.6	2.11875		
changed ea	65	219	3.369231	1.267788		
engage	65	221	3.4	1.5875		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	26.70769	2	13.35385	8.054127	0.000437668	3.042964
Within Groups	318.3385	192	1.658013			
Total	345.0462	194				

Since $F = 8.05$ is greater than $F_{crit} = 3.04$, and $P\text{-value} = 0.00044$ is much less than 0.05 , There is a statistically significant difference in the mean scores across the three groups: Following influencers, Changed Eating Habits, and Engagement.

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Instagram as a Powerful Marketing Channel:

The study confirms that Instagram's visually driven platform significantly shapes consumer food choices. Visually appealing posts and trending food content increase both curiosity and willingness to try new products, making Instagram an essential channel for food and beverage marketers.

5.2. Influencer Credibility Drives Purchase Intent:

Trust in influencer recommendations amplifies the impact of food trends. Followers are more likely to experiment with and purchase products endorsed by influencers they perceive as authentic and credible.

5.3. Social Validation Magnifies Trends:

High engagement metrics-such as likes, comments, and shares act as social proof, further motivating users to participate in food trends and try featured products. This creates a viral loop, where popular content is rapidly disseminated and normalized.

5.4. User-Generated Content Fuels Brand Reach:

Consumers are not passive; they actively create and share food-related content, which brands can leverage to build authenticity and expand organic reach. User-generated posts, branded hashtag challenges, and interactive campaigns have demonstrated massive impressions and positive sentiment.

5.5. Demographic Targeting is Effective:

Younger generations (Gen Z and Millennials) are particularly responsive to Instagram food trends, using the platform as a primary source for meal inspiration and product discovery. Marketing strategies that appeal to these demographics-such as vibrant visuals, influencer partnerships, and interactive content-are especially effective.

5.6. Statistically Significant Impact:

Quantitative analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between FOMO and interest in food trends ($r=0.673$), and a moderate correlation between trend interest and engagement ($r=0.367$). ANOVA results confirmed significant differences in eating habits and engagement among those who follow influencers, indicating that influencer-driven marketing campaigns can measurably shift consumer behavior.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Prioritize Visual Storytelling:

Invest in high-quality, visually compelling content that highlights unique colors, textures, and product presentation. Aesthetics are crucial for capturing attention and driving engagement on Instagram and similar platforms.

6.2. Leverage Influencer Partnerships:

Collaborate with both macro- and micro-influencers to build trust and reach targeted audience segments. Authentic endorsements and creative influencer campaigns can significantly boost brand awareness and product trial.

6.3. Encourage User-Generated Content:

Launch branded hashtag challenges, recipe contests, or interactive campaigns to motivate consumers to create and share their own content. This not only increases organic reach but also strengthens brand credibility and community.

6.4. Utilize Social Proof:

Highlight engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments) and feature positive user reviews or testimonials in marketing content to reinforce desirability and encourage participation in trends.

6.5. Segment and Personalize Campaigns:

Tailor marketing strategies to different demographic groups, especially Gen Z and Millennials, by using targeted ads, personalized offers, and content that aligns with their values (e.g., sustainability, health, convenience).

6.6. Monitor and Adapt to Trends Quickly:

Stay agile by tracking emerging food trends and consumer conversations on Instagram. Early adoption and promotion of viral trends can position brands as innovators and maximize campaign impact.

6.7. Integrate Multi-Channel Approaches:

Combine Instagram campaigns with other digital and offline channels (such as YouTube, TikTok, or in-store promotions) to reinforce messaging and broaden reach, especially when linking traditional and digital media appeals to younger consumers.

7. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Instagram is a highly effective platform for influencing consumer eating habits through visually appealing food trends, influencer endorsements, and social engagement mechanisms. The findings reveal that users are not only inspired to try new foods but are also more likely to experiment with products that are trending or endorsed by credible influencers, especially when these posts garner high levels of likes and comments. Strong positive correlations between fear of missing out (FOMO), interest in food trends, and engagement metrics underscore the role of social validation in driving consumer behavior. From a marketing perspective, Instagram serves as both a catalyst for rapid trend adoption and a powerful tool for shaping perceptions of what is desirable or healthy to eat. However, the same mechanisms that drive positive engagement can also amplify the spread of less healthy food choices or misleading nutrition information. Overall, Instagram's unique blend of visual storytelling, influencer credibility, and community interaction positions it as a central arena for food marketing, offering brands and marketers significant opportunities to shape dietary preferences and capitalize on emerging food trends.

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