

Culinary Tastemakers in the Digital Age: The Influence of Content Creators on Food Tourism and Consumption Patterns

Discipline: Commerce

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Abstract: The food domain in the contemporary scenario has undergone a radical change on account of the upsurge of food bloggers and social media influencers. They are now the key impetus in determining the food choices of people and accelerated the growth of food tourism. Their interventions are aggressively transforming international consumption patterns and setting new dietary trends. The food bloggers and vloggers go far beyond modest food testimonials; they largely shape the regional economies, induce food tourism, and cater to the advancement of an international food culture. This paper explores the prominent role played by the content creators in influencing consumer behaviour, marketing strategies, and the rise of culinary-centred tours.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, tastemakers, food bloggers, food vloggers, food tourism, social media influencers

Introduction

In the present digital scenario, the culinary domain has gone through a drastic change, propelled extensively by the upsurge of food bloggers and social media players. These virtual tastemakers have moved ahead of the ambit of conventional advertising and promotional tools. They are the key impetus in determining the choices of people and reinforce the growth of food tourism. By means of the expert content, appealing descriptions, and direct audience interface, influencers exert substantial influence on consumer preferences. They critically influence the cuisine preferences as well as food destinations of the people. Besides, their campaign for certain dietetic course, sustainable routines, and unique cookeries are aggressively transforming international consumption patterns and intensifying the collective appreciation.

This paper explores the prominent role played by content creators in influencing consumer behaviour, marketing strategies, and the rise of culinary-centred tours. It emphasizes that the impact of food bloggers goes far beyond modest food testimonials; they largely figure regional economies, induce food tourism, and cater to the advancement of an international food culture. These creators engender trends that profoundly resonate with followers, emphasizing a composite and developing affiliation among individual taste and social influence. In due course, this study examines the complex undercurrents between food bloggers and the wider cuisine bio network.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the various aspects of attitude of viewers towards food bloggers and influencers
- To examine the relationship between various motivational factors associated with food bloggers and influencers and specific viewer behaviours
- To examine the influence of food bloggers and influencers across different social media platforms on specific viewer behaviours

Review of Literature

- Social media influencers have increasingly asserted their influence in shaping consumer behaviour and attitudes across diverse realms, such as food, travel and lifestyle choices. This growing phenomenon has garnered considerable academic interest; researchers are investigating the impacts and mechanisms of influencer marketing. In the realm of food, influencers assume a pivotal role in endorsing products and moulding perceptions of “good food” (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020).
- Social media influencers have the capacity to sway consumers’ food evaluations and purchasing decisions. Studies indicate that mothers, for instance, are particularly vulnerable to sponsored posts by “mom influencers” (Beuckels and De Jans, 2022).
- The influence of food vloggers on social media users has been documented in various contexts; in Vietnam, for example, the perceived value of advertising content and the credibility of influencers notably shape viewers’ attitudes and intentions towards social commerce (Luong and Ho, 2023).
- Travel bloggers and influencers have increasingly become pivotal in shaping the image of destinations and influencing tourist behaviour. An analysis (specifically) of blogs written by Chinese tourists about New Zealand has shown how user-generated content not only reinforces destination branding but also provides in-depth insights into the perceived image of the destination (Sun et al., 2014).

- There are growing concerns regarding the authenticity of heavily filtered photos found on social media, which can potentially lead to a phenomenon known as value co-destruction in destination marketing (Xie et al., 2023).
- The effectiveness of influencer marketing is often related to parasocial interactions (PSI) and the apparent trustworthiness of the influencer. Studies have shown that both PSI and credibility have a positive effect on purchase intentions; besides, attitude homophily is crucial in the development of PSI (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).
- The influence of the bloggers goes beyond simple buying decisions—indeed, they can considerably shape attitudes and behaviours through the lifestyles they advocate and promote (Sokolova et al., 2024).
- The stimulus of social media influencers spreads beyond simple commercial settings; they largely cater to health promotion as well. A systematic review has exposed that exchanges with these influencers can generate both positive and negative outcomes for the followers (Chee et al., 2023).
- Vloggers have demonstrated an ability to influence young consumers' purchasing intentions, largely due to factors such as health-related homophily, audience engagement and parasocial relationships (Xu et al., 2021). The rise of influencer marketing has transformed certain consumers into what can be described as human brands.
- Through a persistent cycle of negotiating their identities and adapting to new roles, bloggers often transition from everyday consumers to professional influencers, actively reshaping the blogosphere into a novel organizational field (Erz and Christensen, 2018).
- Research on “Versailles literature,” a trend characterized by humblebragging on Chinese social media platforms, indicates that efforts to project humility while simultaneously showcasing one's achievements may inadvertently undermine the individual's self-image instead of enhancing it (Han et al., 2024).
- As influencer marketing is exposed to continuous modifications, researchers are probing into new dimensions; for instance, the utilization of Instagram fashion influencers to unearth innovative consumer demographics, such as the “Mirror Tourist” (Sánchez-Amboage et al., 2024).

This budding area of research underscores the intricate dynamics between digital media, consumer behaviour and marketing strategies in an era dominated by social media influence. Collectively, these studies reveal the substantial and multifaceted effects of food bloggers and social media influencers on consumer choices (including food

selections), as well as health awareness. Their impact ranges from determining restaurant preferences to advocating for healthier eating habits; however, there are potential drawbacks that necessitate further investigation and thoughtful consideration.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study examines the influence exerted by food bloggers and social media influencers on customers' perceptions of restaurant selection and food consumption. This investigation will take place in Thrissur District, Kerala, thereby providing localized insights into consumer behaviour within the realm of food blogging. This specific focus is intended to enhance our understanding of regional trends and preferences.

Methodological Approach

The study employs a mixed-methods design, which combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data on consumer perceptions and behaviours. Data collection will involve distributing surveys to a representative sample of 102 followers of food vloggers; however, in-depth interviews will be conducted with selected participants (comprising college students) to derive deeper insights into their experiences and motivations. Although the sample size is modest, this approach aims to capture a nuanced understanding of the intersection between food blogging and consumer decision-making.

Data Analysis

1. Demographic characteristic of respondents

Table - 1
Demographic Characteristics

		N	%
Gender	Female	72	70.59
	Male	30	29.41
	Total	102	100
Student Category	U G students	81	79.41
	P G students	21	20.59
	Total	102	100
Monthly Family Income (Rs.)	Less than 20,000	12	11.76
	20,000-40,000	31	30.39
	40,000-60,000	23	22.55
	60,000-80,000	17	16.67
	80,000-100,000	13	12.75
	Above 100,000	6	5.88
	Total	102	100

The demographic characteristics of the study's participants reveal a young, predominantly female audience with a focus on students mostly belonging to middle-income brackets.

2. Attitude of viewers towards food bloggers and influencers

Table-2
Gender and Influence on Food related Behaviours

Hypothesis	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig (2 tailed)	Accept/Reject
H ₁ -Significant relation between gender and trusting the opinions of food vloggers and food influencers	1025	1490	-.434	.664	Reject
H ₂ - Significant relation between gender and exploring cultures	974	3602	-.845	.398	Reject
H ₃ - Significant relation between gender and inspiration for culinary interests	1013.5	3641.5	-.541	.589	Reject
H ₄ - Significant relation between gender and updated of new food trends	1021	1486	-.460	.646	Reject
H ₅ - Significant relation between gender and dietary choice	1005	3633	-.580	.562	Reject

The table displays the findings of a hypothesis test aimed at investigating the correlation between gender and diverse dimensions of customer attitudes toward food bloggers and influencers. In all five hypotheses, the p-values exceed 0.05; thus, there is no statistically significant connection between gender and the assorted attitudes (such as trusting their opinions, exploring cultures, culinary inspiration, staying updated on food trends and influencing dietary choices). However, the consistent rejection of the hypotheses suggests that the impact of food vloggers and influencers remains comparable for both male and female participants. This indicates a lack of differentiation based on gender, although the nuances of individual preferences may still exist.

3. The relationship between various motivational factors associated with food bloggers and influencers and specific viewer behaviours

H₆- There is a significant relation between the food vloggers' recommendations on choosing a restaurant and the motive to watch food vlogs.

H₇- There is a significant relation between discovering new restaurants and cafes and the motive to watch food vlogs.

H₈- There is a significant relation between choosing destination based on quality and the motive to watch food vlogs.

H₉- There is a significant relation between trustworthiness of food vloggers recommendations and the motive to watch food vlogs.

H₁₀- There is a significant relation between sharing and recommending food vlogs and restaurant experience among others and the motive to watch food vlogs.

Spearman's Correlation Between Motivational Factors and Viewer Behaviour

Table - 3
Recipe Inspiration

Motivational Factors	Visit a restaurant based on a food vlogger's recommendation	Follow food vloggers to discover new restaurants and cafes	Food vlogs provide valuable insights into the dining experience of restaurants	Food vloggers are trustworthy and credible in their restaurant recommendations	Recommend and share the food vlogs and restaurant experiences with others
Recipe Inspiration	0.219*	0.141	0.203*	0.317**	0.352**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.027	0.160	0.042	0.001	0.000
N	102	102	102	102	102

Table - 4
Restaurant Recommendations

Motivational Factors	Visit a restaurant based on a food vlogger's recommendation	Follow food vloggers to discover new restaurants and cafes	Food vlogs provide valuable insights into the dining experience of restaurants	Food vloggers are trustworthy and credible in their restaurant recommendations	Recommend and share the food vlogs and restaurant experiences with others
Restaurant Recommendations	0.227*	0.311**	0.162	0.037	0.212*
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.022	0.002	0.105	0.715	0.033
N	102	102	102	102	102

Table - 5
Cooking Tips & Techniques

Motivational Factors	Visit a restaurant based on a food vlogger's recommendation	Follow food vloggers to discover new restaurants and cafes	Food vlogs provide valuable insights into the dining experience of restaurants	Food vloggers are trustworthy and credible in their restaurant recommendations	Recommend and share the food vlogs and restaurant experiences with others
Cooking Tips & Techniques	0.210*	0.104	0.241*	-0.252*	-0.297**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.034	0.300	0.015	0.010	0.002
N	102	102	102	102	102

Table - 6
Food Aesthetics

Motivational Factors	Visit a restaurant based on a food vlogger's recommendation	Follow food vloggers to discover new restaurants and cafes	Food vlogs provide valuable insights into the dining experience of restaurants	Food vloggers are trustworthy and credible in their restaurant recommendations	Recommend and share the food vlogs and restaurant experiences with others
Food Aesthetics	0.044	0.253*	0.305**	-0.071	0.265**
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.659	0.011	0.002	0.480	0.007
N	102	102	102	102	102

Above tables provide a correlation analysis of how different motivational factors influence five behaviours related to with food bloggers. The correlations were tested using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient, and the significance levels (p-values) indicate the strength and direction of the relationships. Here's a detailed interpretation of each factor and its relationship to the five behaviours:

- **Influence of Vlogger Popularity-** The "Number of Followers" shows significant positive correlations with all viewer behaviours. This suggests that more popular

vloggers have a broader and stronger influence on their audience across all measured aspects.

- **Restaurant Recommendations**-Positively correlates with visiting recommended restaurants ($r = 0.227$, $p < 0.05$) and following vloggers ($r = 0.311$, $p < 0.01$). However, it doesn't significantly correlate with trust in recommendations ($p = 0.715$), indicating a potential disconnect between following recommendations and trusting them.
- **Recipe Inspiration**- Shows significant positive correlations with most viewer behaviours. The strongest correlation is with sharing experiences ($r = 0.352$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that recipe content is highly shareable. But no significant correlation with following vloggers to discover new places ($p = 0.160$), implying recipe content might not drive exploration behaviour.
- **Cooking Tips & Techniques**- Exhibits an unexpected negative correlation with trusting recommendations ($r = -0.252$, $p < 0.05$) and sharing experiences ($r = -0.297$, $p < 0.01$). This could indicate that viewers who value cooking tips might be more critical or self-reliant, less likely to trust or share others' recommendations.
- **Food Aesthetics**-Positively correlates with following vloggers ($r = 0.253$, $p < 0.05$), valuing insights ($r = 0.305$, $p < 0.01$), and sharing experiences ($r = 0.265$, $p < 0.01$). But no significant correlation with visiting recommended restaurants ($p = 0.659$), suggesting that visual appeal alone may not drive dining decisions.

4. The influence of food bloggers and influencers across different social media platforms on specific viewer behaviours

H₁₁- There is a significant difference between purchasing decision on food items or certain brands and the usage of social media platforms.

H₁₂- There is a significant difference between the perception of quality or taste of food items or certain brands and the usage of social media platforms.

H₁₃- There is a significant difference between adopting healthy dieting options and the usage of social media platforms.

H₁₄- There is a significant difference between sharing and recommending specific brands among others and the usage of social media platforms.

Table - 7**Correlation Between Social Media Usage and Influence of Food Vlogs on Consumer Behaviour**

Social Media Platform	Purchasing Decisions	Perception of Quality or Taste	Healthier Eating Options	Recommendation & Sharing
Instagram	0.027 (p = 0.788)	0.094 (p = 0.350)	0.068 (p = 0.500)	0.231 (p = 0.021) *
YouTube	0.022 (p = 0.829)	0.073 (p = 0.469)	0.182 (p = 0.068)	0.064 (p = 0.527)
Facebook	0.171 (p = 0.085)	0.063 (p = 0.526)	0.142 (p = 0.155)	0.060 (p = 0.548)
Twitter	0.107 (p = 0.285)	0.083 (p = 0.413)	0.179 (p = 0.071)	0.037 (p = 0.715)

The table provides insight into the relationship between the frequency of social media usage and various consumer behaviours influenced by food vlogs. These behaviours include purchasing decisions, perceptions of food quality, adopting healthier eating options, and recommending food items or brands to others.

§ Instagram-There is a link between Recommendation & Sharing and Instagram usage ($\rho=0.231$ $p=0.021$). This suggests that people who frequently use Instagram are more inclined to recommend and share food products or brands after viewing food vlogs. The noteworthy p value indicates a connection, between these factors. In this study findings indicate that there are connections, between Instagram use and buying choices or views, on product quality and healthier food options.

- YouTube- There are no connections found between YouTube usage and any of these behaviours since all p values exceed 0.05. This implies that YouTube usage, in this dataset doesn't have an impact, in shaping consumers' choices regarding food products and brands showcased in vlogs.
- Facebook- Like, with YouTube usage patterns do not seem to have a connection with any of the observed behaviours when it comes to Facebook use too. It suggests that those who use Facebook often are not really impacted much in terms of their buying choices or views and even their eating habits or sharing suggestions, from food related videos.
- Twitter- Twitter appears to have impact, on consumer behaviours based on the data analysis conducted as weak correlations were observed across all behaviours.

Findings and Implications

The analysis of the hypotheses regarding the relationship between gender and customer attitudes toward food bloggers and influencers reveals that:

- **Uniform Influence Across Genders:** The hypotheses three and five resulted in p-values of 0.05 and higher. It means that no significant statistical relationships exist between the gender and various attitudes towards food blogging and influencer. This means both male and female participants had similar viewpoints and behaviours regarding food content online.
- **Importance for Content Service Providers:** The observed neutrality of attitudes depending on gender implies that food bloggers, as well as brands, will not fear developing content on general thematic bases, and general interests. Thus, a wider audience reach and acceptance of food blogging, and marketing endeavours is possible.
- **Followers:** A significant number of followers is an important impacting factor of a blogger particularly on trust and possibility of open new restaurants.
- **Food aesthetics with recipes:** The two aspects i.e. recipe inspiration and food aesthetics complement engaging the viewers' attention and influence their behaviour, though they have differing effects with respect to trust and sharing behaviour.
- **Trust issues:** There are some exemplary content types and sources, that, resulted in a different level of trust. For instance, cooking tips tend to be trusted more than restaurant recommendations. Consumers are multi-faced when it comes to food vlogging, and to understand.

Limitations and Future Research

1. The study's focus on college students in Thrissur District limits its generalizability. Future research could expand to diverse age groups and geographical locations.
2. The research primarily examined correlations. Causal relationships could be explored through experimental designs in future studies.
3. The rapid evolution of social media platforms necessitates ongoing research to keep pace with changing user behaviours and platform features.
4. Future studies could delve deeper into the psychological mechanisms underlying trust formation and decision-making in the context of food vlogging.

5. The impact of emerging technologies, such as augmented reality or AI-driven recommendations, on food vlogging and consumer behaviour presents an exciting avenue for future research.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive view of how food vlogs influence consumer behaviour in the digital age, particularly among young adults in Kerala. It highlights the complex interplay between content types, platforms, and consumer attitudes, offering valuable insights for content creators, marketers, and researchers in the evolving landscape of food-related digital media. As the field continues to evolve, understanding these dynamics will be crucial for effective engagement in the competitive realm of food tourism and consumption.

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