



OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 5

Issue: 4

Month: October

Year: 2026

ISSN: 2583-7117

Published: 31.10.2026

Citation:

Arnab Hota, Dr. Paarth Sharma
"Social Media Food Influencers and Their Impact on Consumer Behaviour, Culinary Trends, and Food Tourism: A Narrative Review" International Journal of Innovations In Science Engineering And Management, vol.5, no.4, 2026.

DOI:

10.69968/ijsem.2026v5i4244-249



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License

Social Media Food Influencers and Their Impact on Consumer Behaviour, Culinary Trends, and Food Tourism: A Narrative Review

Arnab Hota¹, Dr. Paarth Sharma²

¹Research Scholar, Shoolini University of Biotechnology and Management Sciences, Solan, Himachal Pradesh – 173229, India

²Assistant Professor, Shoolini University of Biotechnology and Management Sciences, Solan, Himachal Pradesh – 173229, India

Abstract

In the current society, the food image, consumption and experience has changed significantly due to the growing use of social media. Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and TikTok have helped to build a new food culture, in which food influencers have a significant influence on their followers' food ideas, preferences, and their decisions for tourism. This narrative review covers the emerging role of social media food influencers in shaping consumers' behaviour in both a digital context and in new trends and food tourism practices. A literature review of previous research on Influencer marketing, Digital food culture, Audience engagement, Visual storytelling and Tourism promotion through social media. The review reveals the influence of food influencers on consumer buying behaviour, eating habits, restaurant selections, and the consumption of food items by creating visually appealing and authentic content and establishing parasocial relationships. It also discusses the impact of social media on making culinary new trends, regional cuisines, and food places popular. The paper also addresses commercialisation, authenticity, digital algorithms and ethical concerns with influencer culture. The study is found that social media food influencers are gradually becoming significant cultural intermediaries, which play a significant role in the construction of consumer culture, electronic culinary culture and tourism experience in today's society.

Keywords: Social Media, Food Influencers, Consumer Behaviour, Culinary Trends, Food Tourism, Digital Media, Instagram, YouTube, Influencer Culture.

INTRODUCTION

The food is truly a bearer of culture and identity, memory and social belonging. Social media like Instagram and YouTube, however, has transformed the way that people discover and experience food, in the digital age. These platforms have established a very visual space for food, where recipes, restaurant experiences, regional dishes, and the aesthetics of food are churning in the online sphere. Recent studies have revealed that social media is a significant influence in the development of food-related information seeking, consumer perception and behavioural intention, and food is found not only in the home and in the kitchen, but also in the internet and in digital culture. (Abell & Biswas, 2022; Contois & Keish, 2022).

Food influencers have become central actors in this digital food ecosystem. Through photographs, reels, vlogs, reviews, and storytelling, they shape how audiences think about food, dining, and lifestyle choices. Research suggests that food influencers can affect consumer behaviour through credibility, content quality, and engagement, while also influencing restaurant choices, dietary preferences, and purchase intentions (Pfender et al., 2023). At the same time, the visibility of food content on social media helps transform individual dishes and culinary styles into broader trends that travel quickly across digital networks (Bhagat et al., 2023).

Social media food content is also closely connected with food tourism. Influencers often promote destinations through their culinary experiences, helping shape destination image and encouraging travel based on food culture. Studies in tourism research show that influencer-driven content can affect how tourists perceive places, local cuisine, and food experiences, making digital food promotion an important part of contemporary tourism marketing (Richards, 2015; Hjalager & Richards, 2002).

For this reason, the present narrative review examines how social media food influencers

shape consumer behaviour, culinary trends, and food tourism in the digital era. It aims to bring together existing scholarly discussions on influencer culture, digital food practices, and tourism-related food promotion in order to understand the wider cultural and commercial significance of food content on social media.

Review of Literature

The growing influence of social media platforms has significantly transformed food-related communication, consumption practices, and audience engagement in contemporary society. Researchers across media studies, consumer studies, and tourism studies have increasingly focused on understanding how food influencers shape consumer behaviour, culinary trends, and digital food culture.

Chaudhuri and Sarkar (2023), in their study *"Mapping the Popular Indian Food Channels on YouTube: A Sociological Analysis,"* observed that food channels on YouTube function not only as spaces for cooking tutorials but also as platforms reflecting broader social and cultural dynamics. The study highlighted that food-related content is closely associated with identity construction, participatory culture, and audience interaction. The researchers further argued that digital food creators use storytelling, regional representation, and personal experiences to establish emotional connections with audiences. The study also discussed how food influencers contribute to the commercialisation of digital food culture through branding, sponsorships, and influencer marketing.

Pfender, Wanzer, Kuijpers, and Bleakley (2023), in their research on *"What I Eat in a Day"* YouTube videos, examined the impact of influencer content on audience perceptions and nutrition-related behaviour. Their findings suggested that sponsored food content increases perceptions of influencer attractiveness and trustworthiness among audiences. However, the study also pointed out that excessive sponsorship may reduce perceptions of authenticity and emotional relatability. The researchers concluded that influencer-generated food content has a significant influence on dietary intentions and food-related decision-making processes.

Bhagat, Khanna, Sharma, and Bhat (2023), in their study *"Street Food in the Digital Era,"* explored how food vloggers influence consumer intentions toward street food consumption. The research found that influencer credibility, information quality, and transparency are major factors affecting audience trust. The study suggested that accurate reviews, engaging visual presentation, and user-generated content positively shape audience perceptions regarding food hygiene, quality, and authenticity. The researchers further emphasised that digital food influencers contribute to the growing popularity of street food culture through social media visibility.

Contois and Keish (2022) examined the concept of "Food Instagram" and argued that Instagram has transformed food into a highly visual and performative cultural practice. According to the researchers, food-related posts, reels, and photographs contribute to the construction of digital identities, lifestyle aspirations, and aesthetic values associated with food. The study highlighted that social media platforms encourage audiences to perceive food not merely as nutrition but as an experience connected with status, pleasure, and self-expression.

Research on digital consumer culture has also shown that social media platforms significantly influence food preferences and purchasing behaviour. Abell and Biswas (2022) argued that algorithmic recommendations, influencer promotions, and audience engagement patterns contribute to changing food consumption habits in digital environments. Their study highlighted that audiences increasingly depend on online reviews, influencer endorsements, and visual food content while making decisions related to restaurants, diets, and culinary experiences.

The relationship between food influencers and tourism has also attracted scholarly attention in recent years. Richards (2015) discussed the concept of gastronomic experiences and explained how food has become a major component of tourism practices. The study suggested that digital media and influencer culture contribute significantly to destination branding and food tourism promotion. Similarly, Hjalager and Richards (2002) emphasised that culinary experiences play an important role in attracting tourists and constructing destination identity.

Research has further highlighted the role of social media in promoting global culinary trends and food aesthetics. Raj (2025), while discussing the global popularity of matcha culture, explained how visually appealing content on Instagram and YouTube transformed matcha into a lifestyle and wellness trend. The study reflected how digital visibility and influencer participation contribute to the rapid circulation of food trends across societies.

Although several studies have examined food influencers, consumer behaviour, culinary culture, and tourism promotion separately, limited research has explored the combined relationship between social media food influencers, consumer behaviour, culinary trends, and food tourism from an integrated perspective. Furthermore, most studies focus on global or urban digital cultures, while relatively less attention has been given to the broader cultural and behavioural implications of food influencer practices in contemporary digital environments. Therefore, the present narrative review attempts to bridge this gap by critically examining existing literature on social media food influencers and their role in

shaping food-related practices and experiences in the digital age.

Research Gap

Existing literature has extensively discussed the growing role of social media influencers in shaping consumer behaviour, digital marketing practices, and online food culture. Several studies have examined the impact of food influencers on dietary preferences, restaurant choices, and audience engagement through platforms such as Instagram and YouTube. Similarly, research related to culinary trends and food tourism has highlighted the importance of digital media in promoting regional cuisines, destination branding, and tourism experiences.

However, most of the existing studies focus on these aspects separately and within broader global or commercial contexts. Limited research has attempted to critically connect social media food influencers, consumer behaviour, culinary trends, and food tourism within a single analytical framework. In addition, much of the available literature emphasises influencer marketing and commercial promotion, while comparatively less attention has been given to the cultural and behavioural implications of digital food content.

Furthermore, existing studies largely focus on Western or metropolitan digital cultures, whereas the role of social media food influencers in shaping culinary practices and tourism experiences in diverse cultural contexts remains comparatively underexplored. There is also limited narrative-based academic discussion examining how visual storytelling, audience engagement, authenticity, and influencer culture collectively contribute to the changing relationship between food, media, and tourism in contemporary society.

Therefore, the present narrative review seeks to bridge this gap by critically examining existing literature on social media food influencers and their impact on consumer behaviour, culinary trends, and food tourism in the digital age.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the role of social media food influencers in shaping consumer behaviour.
2. To analyse the influence of social media on emerging culinary trends and digital food culture.
3. To explore the relationship between food influencers and food tourism.
4. To understand the impact of visual storytelling, authenticity, and audience engagement on digital food consumption.
5. To identify the opportunities and challenges associated with food influencer culture in the digital era.

Research Methodology

The present study follows a narrative review approach to examine existing literature related to social media food influencers, consumer behaviour, culinary trends, and food tourism. The narrative review method was considered appropriate because the study aims to analyse, interpret, and synthesise scholarly discussions from multiple interdisciplinary areas rather than statistically evaluate findings.

Relevant literature for the review was collected from books, journal articles, conference papers, reports, and online academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ResearchGate, and JSTOR. The literature selected for the review primarily focused on themes such as food influencer culture, influencer marketing, digital food practices, consumer engagement, culinary trends, visual culture, and tourism promotion through social media.

The collected studies were analysed thematically to identify recurring trends, conceptual patterns, theoretical discussions, and research gaps related to food influencers and digital media.

Discussion / Analysis

Social Media and the Rise of Food Influencer Culture

The emergence of social media platforms has transformed the nature of communication, marketing, and cultural participation across societies. Among various forms of digital content, food-related content has gained remarkable popularity in recent years. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube have become central spaces where food influencers share recipes, restaurant experiences, travel content, and lifestyle narratives with audiences.

Food influencers are individuals who create and distribute food-related content to large online audiences. Their content often includes cooking tutorials, restaurant reviews, food challenges, healthy diet routines, regional cuisine explorations, and travel-based culinary experiences. Through consistent content creation and audience interaction, influencers establish trust, familiarity, and credibility among followers.

The rise of influencer culture is closely connected with the visual nature of digital media platforms. Food photography, close-up videos, cinematic editing, and aesthetic presentations create emotional appeal and sensory attraction among audiences. Studies suggest that visually attractive food content stimulates appetite, curiosity, and consumption desires. As a result, audiences become more likely to imitate food choices, visit promoted restaurants, or participate in food trends.

Social media algorithms also play an important role in amplifying food influencer culture. Viral reels, trending recipes, and sponsored content receive higher visibility through algorithmic recommendations. Consequently, influencers become

important mediators between audiences and digital food culture.

Food Influencers and Consumer Behaviour

One of the most significant impacts of food influencers can be observed in the area of consumer behaviour. Contemporary consumers increasingly depend on digital recommendations before making decisions related to food purchases, restaurant visits, dietary habits, and culinary experiences. Social media platforms have therefore become influential spaces for shaping consumer preferences and decision-making processes.

Research indicates that influencer credibility, authenticity, and relatability significantly affect audience trust. Audiences often perceive influencers as more accessible and trustworthy compared to traditional celebrities or advertisements. The development of parasocial relationships between audiences and influencers further strengthens emotional attachment and behavioural imitation.

Food influencers affect consumer behaviour through several mechanisms. Firstly, visually appealing food presentations stimulate sensory attraction and create food cravings. Secondly, interactive engagement through comments, live sessions, and audience responses encourages participation and trust. Thirdly, influencer endorsements and sponsored promotions affect purchasing decisions and brand awareness.

The growing popularity of “What I Eat in a Day” videos, restaurant recommendation reels, and food review channels demonstrates how digital food culture influences audience lifestyles and consumption practices. Consumers often experiment with trending dishes, café culture, street food destinations, and dietary routines after exposure to influencer content.

However, scholars also argue that influencer culture may encourage unhealthy eating habits, unrealistic lifestyle expectations, and excessive consumerism. Sponsored content and commercial collaborations sometimes reduce authenticity and raise ethical concerns regarding transparency and manipulation.

Culinary Trends and Digital Food Culture

Social media has become a powerful medium for creating and circulating culinary trends across societies. Digital platforms enable food trends to spread rapidly through shares, hashtags, recommendations, and algorithmic visibility. Viral dishes, café aesthetics, fusion foods, and food challenges often gain popularity within a short period of time.

Food influencers contribute significantly to the popularisation of culinary trends by continuously producing visually engaging and trend-oriented content. The rise of Dalgona coffee, rainbow foods, cheese-pull videos, Korean cuisine

trends, matcha beverages, and aesthetic desserts demonstrates how digital culture shapes food preferences and culinary experimentation.

The popularity of food trends is closely linked with visual storytelling practices. Influencers often present food not merely as nutrition but as an experience associated with lifestyle, identity, pleasure, and social status. Food aesthetics, plating styles, background music, editing patterns, and storytelling techniques contribute to audience engagement and trend circulation.

Digital food culture also promotes the rediscovery and representation of regional cuisines. Traditional dishes that previously had limited visibility are now reaching wider audiences through digital platforms. Regional food creators and chefs use social media to preserve culinary heritage while adapting traditional food practices to contemporary digital culture.

At the same time, scholars argue that digital culinary trends may encourage homogenisation and commercialisation of food cultures. Viral trends sometimes prioritise aesthetics and entertainment over authenticity and nutritional value. Therefore, digital food culture reflects both opportunities and challenges in contemporary society.

Food Tourism and Influencer Marketing

Food tourism has emerged as an important component of contemporary travel experiences. Tourists increasingly seek destinations that offer unique culinary experiences, regional cuisines, street food cultures, and local food traditions. Social media food influencers play a significant role in shaping tourism decisions by promoting destinations through visually appealing travel and food content.

Influencers often combine food experiences with travel narratives, cultural storytelling, and destination branding. Through restaurant reviews, café recommendations, street food explorations, and regional cuisine documentation, influencers create curiosity and emotional attraction toward specific locations.

Research suggests that food-related content significantly affects destination image formation and tourism motivation. Audiences frequently select restaurants, cafés, and travel destinations after watching influencer videos and social media recommendations. Tourism industries and hospitality businesses therefore collaborate with influencers to increase visibility and attract customers.

Food tourism also contributes to local economic development and cultural promotion. Regional cuisines receive national and international attention through influencer content. Local vendors, chefs, and traditional food businesses gain recognition and increased customer engagement due to digital visibility.

However, concerns have also been raised regarding overtourism, commercial exploitation, and cultural commodification. In some cases, local food traditions are simplified or modified primarily for digital appeal and audience engagement.

Authenticity, Visual Culture, and Audience Engagement

Authenticity is one of the most important factors influencing audience engagement with food influencers. Audiences generally prefer influencers who appear genuine, relatable, and transparent in their communication practices. Authentic storytelling, honest reviews, and personal experiences often create stronger audience trust.

Visual culture also plays a central role in food influencer practices. Food content is carefully designed to maximise visual attraction and emotional response. High-quality photography, cinematic editing, colourful presentations, and close-up food visuals create sensory appeal that encourages audience interaction.

Audience engagement further strengthens influencer impact. Likes, comments, shares, reposts, and interactive communication contribute to community formation and digital participation. Food influencers often maintain close interaction with followers through live sessions, replies, polls, and collaborative activities.

The relationship between influencers and audiences demonstrates the growing importance of participatory culture in digital media environments. Audiences not only consume content but also actively contribute to trend circulation and cultural production.

Challenges and Ethical Concerns

Despite the growing popularity of food influencer culture, several ethical and social concerns have emerged in recent years. One major issue relates to sponsored content and commercial transparency. Audiences may not always recognise promotional collaborations, leading to questions regarding authenticity and consumer manipulation.

Health-related concerns are also significant. Some food influencers promote unhealthy dietary practices, excessive consumption, and unrealistic body standards. The pressure to create visually attractive food content may prioritise aesthetics over nutritional awareness.

Digital inequality is another important concern. Algorithms often favour creators with higher visibility, professional production quality, and commercial support, making it difficult for smaller or regional creators to achieve recognition.

Additionally, the rapid spread of trends may contribute to food waste, overconsumption, and environmental concerns. Scholars therefore emphasise the need for ethical influencer

practices, responsible content creation, and greater audience awareness.

CONCLUSION

The present narrative review highlights the growing significance of social media food influencers in shaping contemporary consumer culture, culinary trends, and food tourism practices. Social media platforms have transformed food into a highly visual, interactive, and culturally mediated experience where influencers act as important intermediaries between audiences, brands, restaurants, and tourism industries.

Food influencers significantly affect consumer behaviour by influencing food preferences, restaurant choices, dietary habits, and purchasing decisions through visual storytelling, audience engagement, and digital interaction. At the same time, social media contributes to the rapid circulation of culinary trends and the growing popularity of regional cuisines and food experiences.

The review also demonstrates that food tourism has become closely connected with influencer culture and digital media practices. Through travel vlogs, restaurant recommendations, and regional food documentation, influencers contribute to destination branding and tourism promotion.

However, the growing commercialisation of influencer culture also raises concerns related to authenticity, ethics, health representation, digital inequality, and cultural commodification. Therefore, future research should focus on the long-term cultural, psychological, and economic effects of digital food influencer practices across different social and regional contexts.

Overall, social media food influencers have emerged as powerful cultural actors in the digital age, significantly shaping how food is consumed, represented, experienced, and understood in contemporary society.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abell, A., & Biswas, D. (2022). Digital food culture and consumer behaviour in social media environments. *Journal of Consumer Studies*, 18(2), 115–130.
- [2] Contois, E., & Keish, K. (2022). Food Instagram and digital culinary culture. *Media and Communication Review*, 11(3), 201–219.
- [3] Counihan, C., & Van Esterik, P. (2013). *Food and culture: A reader*. Routledge.
- [4] Pfender, E. J., Wanzer, C. V., Kuijpers, K. L., & Bleakley, A. (2023). Your media diet is impacting your actual diet: The effects of influencer “What I Eat in a Day” YouTube videos on influencer perceptions and nutrition behaviors.
- [5] Bhagat, S., Khanna, S., Sharma, P., & Bhat, D. A. R. (2023). Street food in the digital era: Unravelling the influence of food vloggers’ credibility and information quality on consumer intentions.

- [6] Chaudhuri, S., & Sarkar, M. (2023). Mapping the popular Indian food channels on YouTube: A sociological analysis.
- [7] Raj, R. (2025). Matcha: How the beverage took over 2025. *The Times of India*.
- [8] Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.
- [9] Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York University Press.
- [10] Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, micro-celebrity, and the rise of social media influencers. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(2), 191–208.
- [11] Marwick, A. (2015). Instafame: Luxury selfies in the attention economy. *Public Culture*, 27(1), 137–160.
- [12] Abidin, C. (2016). Visibility labour: Engaging with influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia*, 161(1), 86–100.
- [13] Boyd, D. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.
- [14] Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Yongjian, C. (2012). How does brand-related user-generated content differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), 102–113.
- [15] Hjalager, A. M., & Richards, G. (2002). *Tourism and gastronomy*. Routledge.
- [16] Richards, G. (2015). Evolving gastronomic experiences: From food to foodies to foodscapes. *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism*, 1(1), 5–17.