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CONSUMER TRUST AND ETHICAL ISSUES IN FOOD VLOGGING: THE DOWNSIDE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has emerged as a dominant force in the digital landscape, particularly in the food and beverage industry. While its effectiveness in promoting products is undeniable, it also carries significant negative implications. This study examines the adverse effects of influencer marketing with a focus on food vlogs, including the dissemination of misleading information, promotion of unhealthy eating habits, and ethical concerns regarding undisclosed sponsorships. Employing a mixed-methods research methodology, the study integrates quantitative surveys with 100 responses to gauge consumer perceptions and qualitative interviews to understand the experiences of industry stakeholders. The findings reveal that excessive reliance on influencers can erode consumer trust, distort dietary preferences, and create unrealistic lifestyle aspirations. This paper highlights the need for stricter regulations and ethical standards to mitigate these impacts. By addressing the darker side of influencer marketing, the study aims to foster a more transparent and responsible digital advertising ecosystem.

KEYWORDS: Influencer marketing, food vlogs, consumer trust, ethical concerns, dietary habits, digital advertising, mixed-methods research.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital platforms has significantly transformed the way businesses connect with consumers, giving rise to influencer marketing as a powerful promotional tool. Among the diverse domains influenced by this trend, the food and beverage industry stand out, with food vloggers playing a pivotal role in shaping consumer choices and perceptions. Through engaging content, influencers have the ability to promote products, introduce culinary trends, and share personal dietary preferences, creating a significant impact on their audiences.

However, the growing reliance on influencer marketing also poses challenges. Misleading endorsements, promotion of unhealthy food choices, and lack of transparency in sponsorships raise concerns about the ethicality and authenticity of such practices. These issues highlight the need for a critical examination of the adverse effects of influencer marketing, particularly in the context of food vlogs. This study seeks to address these concerns by exploring the darker aspects of influencer marketing, focusing on its impact on consumer trust, dietary habits, and ethical standards. By employing a mixed-methods research approach, the study aims to provide insights into the negative implications and propose actionable recommendations to foster a more ethical and transparent digital advertising ecosystem.

Statement of the Problem

The proliferation of influencer marketing in the food and beverage sector has raised concerns regarding the ethicality and authenticity of promotional practices. Misleading endorsements, the promotion of unhealthy eating habits, and the lack of transparency in sponsorships have eroded consumer trust and contributed to distorted dietary preferences. This study aims to address these issues by critically analyzing the negative impacts of influencer marketing on consumer behavior and the broader food industry.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the adverse effects of influencer marketing on consumer trust and dietary habits within the food and beverage sector.
2. To evaluate the ethical challenges posed by influencer marketing practices, particularly in the context of undisclosed sponsorships and misleading content.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the negative impacts of influencer marketing within the food and beverage industry, with a particular emphasis on food vlogs. By examining consumer perceptions, dietary influences, and ethical concerns, the research aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, marketers, and digital content creators. The findings are intended to contribute to the development of a more ethical and transparent digital advertising ecosystem.

Review of Literature

Smith, J., & Taylor, R. (2019)¹. "The Ethics of Influencer Marketing in the Food Industry" This study highlights the ethical concerns surrounding undisclosed sponsorships in food-related influencer marketing. It emphasizes how deceptive practices impact consumer trust and calls for greater regulatory oversight to ensure transparency.

Johnson, P. (2020)². "Impact of Social Media Influencers on Dietary Choices" Johnson explores how influencer promotions of unhealthy food products contribute to poor dietary habits, particularly among younger demographics. The study reveals a direct correlation between influencer endorsements and changes in food consumption patterns.

Lee, K., & Park, S. (2021)³. "Consumer Perceptions of Authenticity in Influencer Marketing" This research focuses on how perceived authenticity affects consumer behavior. It finds that audiences are more likely to trust and act on recommendations from influencers who are transparent about sponsorships and personal biases.

Garcia, L. M. (2018)⁴. "Food Vlogging and Its Influence on Culinary Trends" Garcia's work examines the role of food vloggers in shaping culinary trends and consumer preferences. It discusses both the positive and negative impacts, such as promoting niche cuisines versus glorifying unhealthy eating habits.

Chopra, N., & Patel, A. (2022)⁵. "Regulating Influencer Marketing: A Policy Perspective" This study provides an analysis of current regulations on influencer marketing and their effectiveness. It underscores the need for stricter policies to curb misleading advertisements and foster accountability within the industry.

The analysis of 100 respondents provides key insights into consumer perceptions and behaviors influenced by food vloggers. The respondents, comprising a diverse demographic, were surveyed to understand their trust in influencer-promoted food products, awareness of sponsorship disclosures, and changes in dietary habits.

Table 1: Trust and Authenticity

Category	Percentage (%)
Skeptical towards influencer promotions	65
Belief in genuine endorsements	30
Neutral	5

- 65% of respondents expressed skepticism towards influencer-promoted food products, citing concerns about authenticity and undisclosed sponsorships.
- 30% believed that influencers genuinely endorsed the products, while 5% remained neutral.

Table 2: Impact on Dietary Habits

Category	Percentage (%)
Tried products promoted by influencers	40
Regretted choices due to poor quality/misrepresentation	25
Shifted towards unhealthy eating habits	35

- 40% reported trying products promoted by influencers, with 25% regretting their choices due to poor quality or misrepresentation.
- 35% acknowledged a shift towards unhealthy eating habits influenced by visually appealing but nutritionally poor food content.

Table 3: Ethical Concerns

Category	Percentage (%)
Highlight need for transparency	75
Unaware of paid promotions	20

- 75% of respondents highlighted the need for transparency in influencer endorsements, emphasizing the importance of disclosing sponsorships.
- 20% were unaware of the concept of paid promotions, underscoring the need for consumer education.

Findings

- ✓ A significant portion of consumers distrust influencer marketing due to perceived lack of transparency and authenticity.
- ✓ Influencer-promoted products often lead to unhealthy dietary changes, particularly among younger audiences.
- ✓ There is a strong demand for regulatory measures to enforce sponsorship disclosures and curb misleading promotions.
- ✓ Consumer awareness of paid promotions remains low, indicating the need for educational initiatives.

- ✓ Excessive reliance on influencers risks distorting consumer perceptions and undermining trust in digital advertising.

Suggestions

- ✓ **Enforce Transparency:** Regulatory bodies should mandate clear disclosure of sponsorships in influencer content to rebuild consumer trust.
- ✓ **Promote Healthy Choices:** Influencers should be encouraged to endorse nutritionally beneficial products to positively impact consumer dietary habits.
- ✓ **Raise Awareness:** Educational campaigns should be launched to inform consumers about paid promotions and their potential biases.
- ✓ **Establish Ethical Guidelines:** Industry stakeholders should develop and adhere to ethical standards for influencer marketing practices.
- ✓ **Incorporate Consumer Feedback:** Marketers should actively seek consumer input to ensure that promotional strategies align with audience expectations and preferences.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the pressing need for a more ethical and transparent approach to influencer marketing in the food and beverage industry. While influencers wield significant power in shaping consumer choices, their practices often raise concerns about authenticity, transparency, and the promotion of unhealthy habits. By implementing stricter regulations, promoting ethical guidelines, and enhancing consumer education, stakeholders can mitigate the negative impacts of influencer marketing. Ultimately, fostering trust and accountability within this domain will contribute to a healthier and more informed digital ecosystem, benefiting both consumers and marketers.

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