



POSTS TO PLATES: POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOOD INFLUENCERS IN DRIVING MILLENNIAL AND GEN Z PURCHASE INTENTION

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Abstract: Food brands and restaurants collaborate with food influencers on social media by encouraging the latter to post opinions and reviews of the restaurant's food and service on their social media handles by evaluating the taste, quality and ambience with a view to virtually influence the purchase intention of the consumers. This study is aimed at analysing how the food related content and reviews of social media food influencers are perceived by millennials and Gen Z in Chennai city and to what extent is their purchase intention influenced by these influencers. The findings of the study indicate that when the food related content posted by social media food influencers are credible, useful and entertaining, it has a positive and significant influence on the purchase intention of consumers. Food influencers provide consumers with engaging and helpful insights that helps them with deciding their dining choices. Hence, foods brands and restaurants must focus on fostering trustworthy, authentic and creative food related content through social media food influencers to boost sales and increase the purchase intent of consumers.

Keywords: Social Media Food Influencers, Credibility, Usefulness, Entertainment, Purchase Intention

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, social media has become a powerful platform that allows people to communicate and connect with each other, express their opinions, share ideas and explore common interests (Briliana et al., 2020). What was earlier known as celebrity marketing has taken a little twist today. People who are not global or national stars for being actors, athletes, politicians or entertainers but still have a specific audience set for the videos and pictures they post on their social media handles and whose opinions are considered valuable and reliable by their audience or followers are known as influencers. When these influencers evaluate, review and suggest the products they use by posting videos or pictures or blogs in their social media handles then it is known as influencer marketing. A social media food influencer is one who is specifically involved in trying, evaluating, reviewing, recommending and posting food related content on different cuisines, dishes and restaurants through YouTube videos, Instagram and Facebook Reels, Tweets and Blogs (Kazancoglu & Satı, 2020).

People who fall in the age group of 18-43 (Millennials and Gen Z) are the most prone to try new food and outlets both online and offline and are at the same time the highest users of social media (Frederick, 2022). Since the consumers feel that the reviews of social media food influencers are more like an evaluation of the taste and quality of the food and outlets by one of them or is the opinion from someone like them, they find it more reliable and believable than a traditional direct marketing advertisement from a restaurant

or food brand (Frederick, 2022; Pooja & Kannaa, 2024). Thus, when it comes to Millennials and Gen Z, influencer marketing through social media food influencers seems to be a better and convincing medium of marketing as compared to other traditional marketing medium like television or print ads.

II. NEED OF THE STUDY

For today's generation food has become more than just a basic necessity for survival. People love to try new dishes and places but at the same time expect good quality and taste. For information on such outlets and dishes they rely on social media food influencers online. Through this social media connectivity people get to know more about the availability of various options and choices of food and restaurants that would increase their standard and quality of food consume (Nurittamont, 2021; Pandey et al., 2020). At the same time brands and restaurants who have identified the potential of this medium as a marketing tool have to understand how to effectively use the influencers to communicate about their presence in the market and to give constant updates on new menu or price changes or new outlets and discounts available to influence the purchase intention of the consumers (Pooja & Kannaa, 2024).

But do Millennials and Gen Z completely trust social media food influencers on their suggestions and are they willing to purchase foods or visit restaurants suggested by influencers? This study aims to find out how millennials and Gen Z perceive social media food influencers on the basis of credibility, usefulness and entertainment and to what extent do these factors influence their purchase intention.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify consumer's highly preferred type of social media platform for accessing food influencer's reviews.
2. To determine the type of social media food related content preferred by consumers.
3. To analyse the reviews of social media food influencers and the purchase intention of consumers on the basis of credibility, usefulness and entertainment of the food related content.
4. To examine the relationship between the Credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of the reviews of social media food influencers and the purchase intention of consumers
5. To examine the influence of Credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of the reviews of social media food influencers on the purchase intention of consumers

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The results of the study titled **Pooja and Kannaa (2024)** reveal that the YouTube and Instagram influencers are able to highly influence the decisions of consumers through authenticity, relevance and engagement and hence brands may collaborate with influencers keeping these qualities in mind for better responses.

Frederick (2022) undertook a research to understand the different factors that affect the pre and post consumption decision of the millennials relating to food products based on the social media reviews. The findings of the study indicate that though the millennial's purchase decisions based on food vloggers reviews are influenced by perceived enjoyment, perceived benefit and perceived smart phone app usefulness but are not affected by subjective norms.

The findings of the study by **Popy and Bappy (2022)** make it evident that the factors such as ease, usefulness, trustworthiness and information quality of such social media reviews are positively related to the consumer's attitudes for choosing a restaurant. The study also highlighted that the consumers pay attention to the negative reviews as well and hence reduce their intention to visit such restaurants with negative reviews.

The purpose of the study by **Nurittamont (2021)** was to examine how the Electronic Word of Mouth (e - WOM) impacted the purchasing decisions of working age consumers in Thailand and Bangkok regarding healthy food products. The findings of the study highlight that the purchase decisions are affected and positively influenced by the electronic word of mouth and that the consumer's exposure and technology acceptance were mediating and moderating variables respectively.

Kazancoglu and Sati (2020) demonstrated that consumers do consider the posts and reviews in social media before making a purchase and hence the author suggests the stakeholders of the food sector and brands that such collaborations with food reviewers and vloggers is a good tool for promotions and marketing.

Briliana et al. (2020) depicts that the food vloggers reviews positively affect the purchase intention, mobile app usefulness and perceived enjoyment of Millennials in Indonesia.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary data have been collected for the study. Primary data was collected from 111 respondents through a questionnaire while secondary data has been gathered from the previous thesis and research articles. The sampling technique used to collect the data for conducting the study was convenience sampling. Statistical tools such as percentage analysis, weighted mean, Correlation and Regression has been used to analyse the data. The analysis was done with the help of the statistical package namely Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and MS. Excel.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Table No.1 - General Demographic Profile of the Respondents

S.N O	Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency (N = 111)	Percentage (100%)
1	Gender	Male	31	27.9
		Female	80	72.1
2	Age	Gen Z (18 – 27)	85	76.6
		Millennials (28 – 43)	26	23.4
3	Monthly Income	Less than 20,000	51	45.9
		20,000 – 40,000	23	20.7
		40,000 – 60,000	15	13.5
		60,000 and above	22	19.8
4	Occupation	Student	30	27.0
		Working (Private & Government)	64	57.7
		Self Employed	8	7.2
		Others	9	8.1

Source: Primary Data

Table 1 indicates that majority of the respondents belong to the age group of 18 – 27 - Gen Z (76.6%), are female (72.1%), working (57.7%) with a monthly income of less than 20,000 (45.9%).

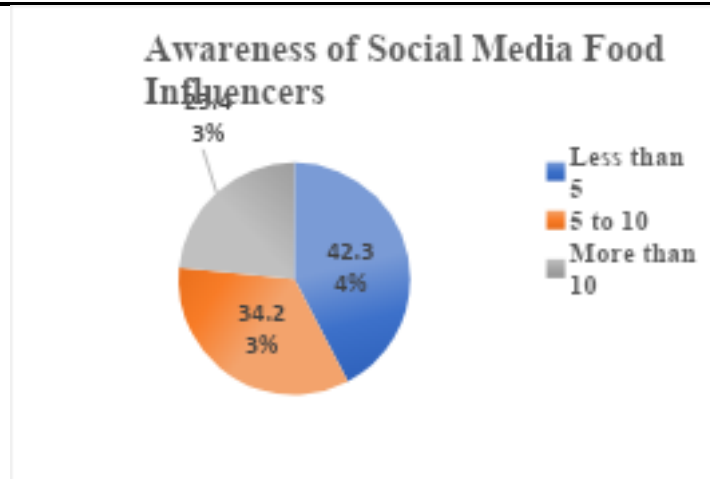
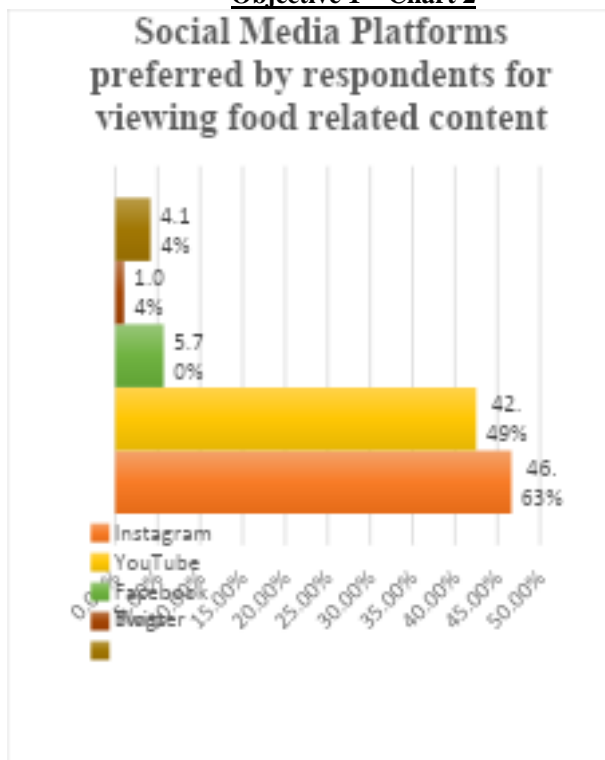


Chart 1

Source: Primary Data

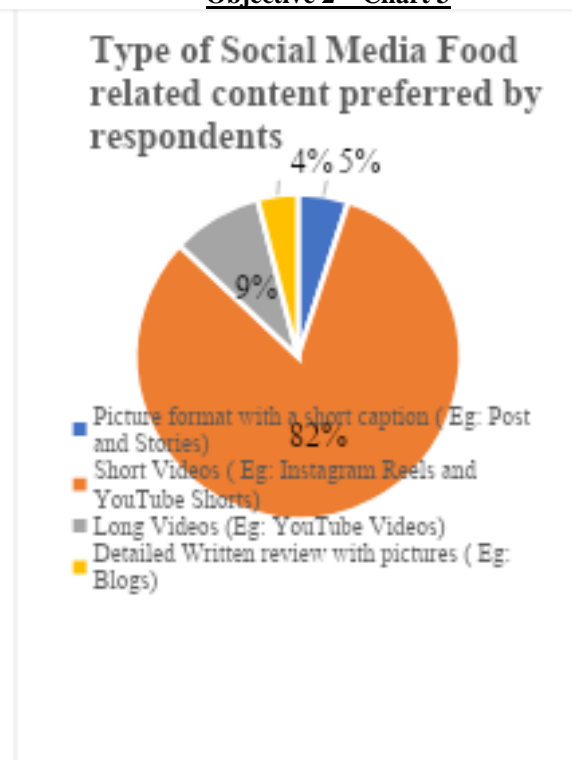
From the above Chart 1 it can be inferred that majority (42.34%) of the respondents are aware of less than 5 social media food influencers while 34.23% of them are aware of 5- 10 social media food influencers and 23.43% of the respondents are aware of more than 10 social media food influencers.

Objective 1 – Chart 2



Source: Primary Data

Objective 2 – Chart 3



Source: Primary Data

The above chart 2 indicates that the respondents majorly prefer Instagram (46.63%) and YouTube (42.29%) for viewing food related content from social media food influencers while Facebook (5.70%), Blogs (4.14%) and Twitter (1.04%) are preferred only as additional social media platforms by few of the respondents.

Chart 3 depicts that a huge majority (82%) of the respondents prefer short videos (Eg: Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts) with only 18% of the respondents preferring the other types of content such as Long Videos (Eg: YouTube Videos) (9%), Picture format with a short caption (Eg: Posts and Stories) (5%) and Detailed written reviews with pictures (Eg: Blogs) (4%). This could be because of the busy lifestyle of respondents where they prefer to get the most information within 30 seconds or 1 minute through short videos rather than spending 15 to 20 minutes in watching long videos or reading a full-length blog.

RELIABILITY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The Cronbach's alpha Reliability test was used to test the reliability of the questionnaire.

Table No. 2

CRONBACH'S ALPHA	NO. OF ITEMS
0.846	12

Source: Primary Data

The reliability score is 0.846 which indicates that the questionnaire is reliable since the Cronbach alpha value is above 0.7.

Objective 3:

Table No. 3 - Credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of the reviews of social media food influencers and the purchase intention of consumers – Weighted Mean

S.No	Factors	Weighted Mean Scores
1	Credibility of the reviews of social media food influencers	3.07
2	Usefulness of the reviews of social media food influencers	3.53
3	Entertainment of the reviews of social media food influencers	3.68
4	Purchase Intention of Consumers	3.45

Source: Primary Data

The weighted mean value of 3.07 indicates that the respondents have moderately agreed that the reviews of social media food influencers are credible. This indicates that the reviews are trustworthy and honest to a certain extent but need not be completely true since it is the perception of the individual influencer only. The weighted mean value of 3.53 depicts that the respondents moderately agree that the reviews are useful as it acts as a good source of information on the availability and quality of various food products and services thereby leading to a wider choice and increased standard of consumption to the consumers. The respondents also moderately agree (3.68) that these social media contents on food are enjoyable and interesting thus make it entertaining to watch and read. Lastly, the weighted mean score of 3.45 indicates that the respondents moderately agree that they are willing to try food and places suggested by social media food influencers and are also willing to recommend the same to their family and peers.

Objective 4

H1: There is a significant relationship between credibility of reviews from social media food influencers and the purchase intention of consumers.

H2: There is a significant relationship between usefulness of reviews from social media food influencers and the purchase intention of consumers.

H3: There is a significant relationship between entertainment of reviews from social media food influencers and the purchase intention of consumers.

Table No.4 - Relationship among Credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of reviews from social media food influencers and the Purchase Intention of Consumers.

		Credibility	Usefulness	Entertainment	Purchase Intention
Credibility	Pearson Correlation	1	.671**	.362**	.589**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	111	111	111	111
Usefulness	Pearson Correlation	.671**	1	.582**	.731**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	111	111	111	111
Entertainment	Pearson Correlation	.362**	.582**	1	.570**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	111	111	111	111
Purchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	.589**	.731**	.570**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	111	111	111	111

Source: Primary Data

** Denotes Significant at 1%

From the above table no.4, it is evident that there is a strong positive relationship between Credibility (r value: 0.589; p value: 0.000), Usefulness (r value: 0.731; p value:0.000) and Entertainment (r value: 0.570; p value:0.000) of reviews from social media food influencers and the purchase intention of consumers. This indicates that when the reviews seem convincing to the consumers on the grounds of honesty and trustworthiness while providing useful information on food products and services available in the city and at the same time are also interesting and entertaining to watch then there will be an increase in the purchase intention of consumers. Thus, all the 3 hypotheses (H1, H2 & H3) are accepted.

Objective 5

H4: The Credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of the reviews of social media food influencers together significantly influence purchase intention of consumers

Table no.5 - The influence of Credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of the reviews of social media food influencers on the purchase intention of consumers

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.344	.325		-1.058	.292
Credibility	.214	.093	.192	2.285	.024*
Usefulness	.593	.121	.470	4.884	.000**
Entertainment	.283	.095	.227	2.966	0.004**
R	0.765				
R²	0.586				
F Value	50.481				
P Value	0.000**				

Source: Primary Data

** Denotes Significant at 1%

***Denotes Significant at 5%**

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

The regression equation is Y,

Purchase Intention = -0.344 (Constant) + 0.214 Credibility + 0.593 Usefulness + 0.283 Entertainment

From the above table no.5, it is seen that the p value is 0.000 and is less than 0.01. Thus, the overall regression model is significant at 1% level of significance and Hypothesis H4 is accepted. The multiple correlation coefficient (R value) of 0.765 indicates that there is a strong and positive correlation between the combined influence of Credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of the reviews of social media food influencers and the purchase intention of consumers. The Coefficient of determination (R^2 value) of 0.586 indicates that approximately 58.6% of variance in the purchase intention of consumers can be explained by the combined effect of the Credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of the reviews of social media food influencers. From the above regression model, it is evident that all the factors have a positive influence on purchase intention with usefulness being the most critical (p value = 0.000).

VI. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- Majority of the respondents preferred Instagram (46.63%) and YouTube (42.49%) as the sources for accessing food related content thereby bringing to light that influencers and brands can make use of these social media handles effectively to influence consumer perception and purchase intention.
- 42.34% of the respondents are aware of less than 5 social media food influencers and rely on their opinions and suggestions.
- A huge majority (82%) of the respondents were more interested in short videos such as Instagram reels and YouTube shorts indicating that they prefer food related content to be short and crisp as compared to long videos and blogs but also expect it to be more informative than just a post or picture.
- The respondents have moderately agreed that the reviews of social media food influencers they follow are credible and trustworthy, informative and useful, interesting and entertaining to watch.
- There is a strong and positive relationship between the credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of reviews of social media food influencers and the purchase intention of consumers thereby indicating that when these factors of a food related content are enhanced and used appropriately then it would lead to an increase in the purchase intention of consumers.
- The combined influence of the credibility, Usefulness and Entertainment of food related content could cause 58.6% variation in the purchase intention of consumers thus indicating the positive influence of these factors of a social media food influencer's review on the purchase intention of consumers.

VII. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has considered only food influencers while further study can be undertaken on other areas such as fashion influencers, travel vloggers etc. Only credibility, Usefulness, and entertainment factors of the reviews of social media food influencers have been analysed. Other factors like familiarity or similarity to followers, expertise of the influencer can be taken for further study. This research has been confined only to the Millennials and Gen Z of Chennai city while further research can be conducted across other age groups or other geographical locations.

VIII. CONCLUSION

From the study it is evident that consumers do take the opinions and reviews of social media food influencers into account while making a purchase decision. But the extent to which these influencers can impact the purchase intention of consumers depends on how credible, useful and entertaining their review and content is (Popy & Bappy, 2022). Consumers consider food influencers as a source of useful information while deciding on where to eat what and also prefer this information in a short, crisp and interesting content form (Briliana et al., 2020). Thus, food brands and restaurants must understand and leverage these aspects of influencer reviews while deciding to approach them for branding and marketing (Kazancoglu & Sati, 2020). Brands and social media food influencers must always keep in mind that honesty

and creativity in their reviews when combined would enhance their advertising efforts thereby leading to an increase in the purchase intention of consumers.

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