

(Over)Eating with our Eyes: An examination of food-related YouTube influencer marketing and consumer engagement with food brands

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Study Overview

The influencer marketing industry is projected to be a \$5-\$10 billion dollar market in the next five years (MediaKix, 2019). Currently, social media has become an increasingly popular platform for food-related displays (Holmberg, Chaplin, Hillman, & Berg, 2016; Jin, 2018; Spence, Okajima, Cheok, Petit, & Michel, 2016). Foodporn on Instagram (McBride, 2013), Mukbang—video broadcasts of individuals eating copious amounts of food (Donnar, 2017), and 10,000-calorie food challenges on YouTube (Gander, 2016) are prominent genres of public social media food exhibitions and openings for food-related social media influencer marketing. For example, Mukbang YouTube videos often feature the (over)consumption of widely recognized branded food products such as McDonalds, Taco Bell, and KFC (Hawthorne, 2019).

This study explores the effectiveness of food-related YouTube influencer marketing and consumer engagement with popular food brands. Study results provide evidence-based implications for influencer marketing strategies, consumer engagement with food brands, and ethical food consumption. Specifically, this study aims to expand knowledge on the prominent role of social media influencers as part of the marketing strategies for many food brands. The following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Social influencer a) expertise, b) trustworthiness, and c) likeability will positively increase brand attitudes.
- H2: Homophily will positively increase brand attitudes.
- H3: Interactivity will positively increase brand attitudes.
- H4: Information credibility will positively increase brand attitudes.
- H5: Argument quality will positively increase brand attitudes.
- H6: Attitudes toward the YouTube video will positively increase brand attitudes.

Methods

Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform (MTurk). A total of 413 participants completed an online survey that was administered on a website hosted by Qualtrics. The average age of participants was 31.7 ($SD = 9.39$) with 40.9% male participants ($n = 169$) and 56.7% female participants ($n = 234$). The race breakdown is as follows: 58.8% Caucasians, 14.3% African Americans, 14.0% Asian Americans, 5.1% Hispanic/Latino, 1.9% American Indian, .5% Native Hawaiian, and 3.2% other.

Measures

Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Likeability. These variables illustrate the source credibility of the influencer. Each variable was measured with 5 items. Examples of adjective pairs include: Inexperienced/Experienced, Dishonest/Honest, Unfriendly/Friendly.

Homophily. This variable assesses the similarity between Influencers and the individual with four items. Sample item includes: "You feel the YouTube Influencer doesn't behave/behaves like me."

Interactivity. This variable measures the interaction between the Influencer and individual. The four-item scale included the following sample item: "This person interacts with me frequently."

