

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCERS IN INCREASING THE DEMAND FOR ORGANIC FOOD

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ABSTRACT:

Social media has transformed the way people access information, it has also become an extremely effective marketing and buying mechanism. With increasing inclination of consumers towards health, wellness and environmental sustainability social media has shaped many trends, growing interest in organic food is one of them. This includes the role of social media platforms and health-conscious and sustainability-minded influencers to educate consumers and promote organic products. This paper delves deeper, at how social media and influencers are driving a growing need for organic food. It underscores the ways that these digital channels impact consumer consciousness, awareness, and purchasing habits. This research analysis primary and secondary data to evaluate the impact of social media and influencers on the popularity of organic foods. The results show that health and nutrition influencers, fitness and lifestyle coaches /influencers play an important role in convincing people to consume organic foods, especially among younger, tech-savvy consumers.

Keywords: Social Media, Influencers, Organic Food, Markets, Digital Marketing, Health, Sustainability.

1. INTRODUCTION:

With the advent of social media, marketing is no longer static, as it allows brands and individuals to reach a global audience. Influencers (people who have a large social media following) are also now effective marketing channels in industries like food. Organic food, seen as healthier and more environmentally sound food is gaining significant traction these days, especially for health-conscious people.

Instagram, YouTube and Facebook have given organic food brands and influencers a means of connecting with as many consumers as possible. These channels make it easy to exchange information, experience and stories about health, food, and sustainability. This research considers the influence of social media and influencers in driving demand for organic food, how their endorsement of organic foods can impact consumers.

2. Objectives of the Study:

- a) Examine the impact of social media on organic food consumer perceptions.
- b) To evaluate the role of influencers in shaping the market for organic food.
- c) To analyze the linkage between social media engagement and buying preferences of organic food.

- d) To evaluate social media advertising and influencer outreach affecting organic food brand trust.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

a) The Popularity of Organic Food is Increasingly Trending.

The demand for organic food has been consistently rising, year on year across the world as people have become more health-conscious, environmentally conscious, and they live in a sustainable manner. The past data reveals organic food to consumers as healthier, safer and better for the environment than food grown and produced traditionally (*Hughner et al., 2007*). Organic inclination also has to do with the growing concern about pesticide residues, GMOs and more natural food options (*Yiridoe et al., 2005*).

b) Influence of social media on Retail Behaviors

Facebook and Twitter changed the customer journey with brands and products. There are online communities of people who share information, reviews, and products experiences. According to *Mangold and Faulds (2009)*, since social media merges the power of word-of-mouth advertising with digital promotion, it has become a good channel for marketing. Instagram, YouTube, Facebook – these sites give visual and engaging content to consumers, especially the younger ones.

Social media is also a channel for brands to connect directly with consumers, say *Kaplan and Haenlein (2010)*. These sites encourage cross-communication, so brands can better understand the needs and wants of customers and how they can market to them. For organic food companies, this relationship is the key to trust and credibility, two key drivers of buying.

c) Influencers as Major Producers of Organic Food Consumption.

Influencer marketing has marked a huge difference when it comes to organic food. *Freberg et al. (2011)* social media influencers: thought leaders who are able to influence other people's purchase decisions based on authority, knowledge, position or connection with their followers. The health and wellness influencers have done exceptionally well with organic food by writing around the consumer's priorities of health, sustainability and authenticity.

De Veirman et al. (2017) revealed that perceived authority and likeability of influencers make a significant difference to how well they promote products. Stories, recipes and testimonials — Influencers like to sell organic food as part of a healthy dietary practices. They make organic foods seem more real and appealing through their ability to make content they can relate to.

d) How Social Media Advertising Has Influenced the Level of Consumer Trust?

Incentives like influencer partnerships are social media promotions that've been found to build consumer confidence in organic food companies. *Casaló et al. (2018)* point out that users identify influencer recommendations with quality products. If you trust influencers then you will be trusted by the products they endorse, so influencers are a critical part of organic food marketing.

Further study by *Ki and Kim (2019)* shows that consumer trust is crucially influenced by influencer transparency. If you disclose sponsorships and stay consistent, the consumers will think endorsements are real. This transparency is especially important for organic food brands as it's in line with the ethos of transparency and integrity that consumers value in the organic market.

e) Consumer Perception and Purchase Behavior

Social media and influencers can make consumers' opinion on anything – including their purchases. eWOM can make a big difference to consumer attitudes towards a product, as *Erkan and Evans (2016)* pointed out. Organic food brands that leverage eWOM on influencer campaigns received more views and purchases.

Research by Hsu et al. (2017) shows that organic food consumers who have encountered to social media advertisements are more likely to view the organic products as higher quality and worthy of the higher price tag. This perception, coupled with the relatability of influencer recommendations, is a powerful buyer's incentive.

f) Challenges and Limitations

There are downsides, though, to selling organic food through social media and influencers. As noted by *Lou and Yuan (2019)*, overcommoditisation and fakeness of influencer recommendations are reasons consumers doubt it. For this to be resolved, brands will have to find and select influencers whose principles match those of the brand and who still feel confident.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

4.1 Research Design

The descriptive study design is used here because they're analyzing consumer behavior and perceptions.

4.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique.

- a) Sample Size: 200 respondents
- b) Randomized Sampling Method: Randomized sampling with age, gender, education and income stratification.

4.3 Data Collection

- a) Primary Data: Data obtained by structured survey with 5-point Likert scale.
- b) Secondary Data: Data from papers, reports, social media reports.

4.4 Statistical Tools

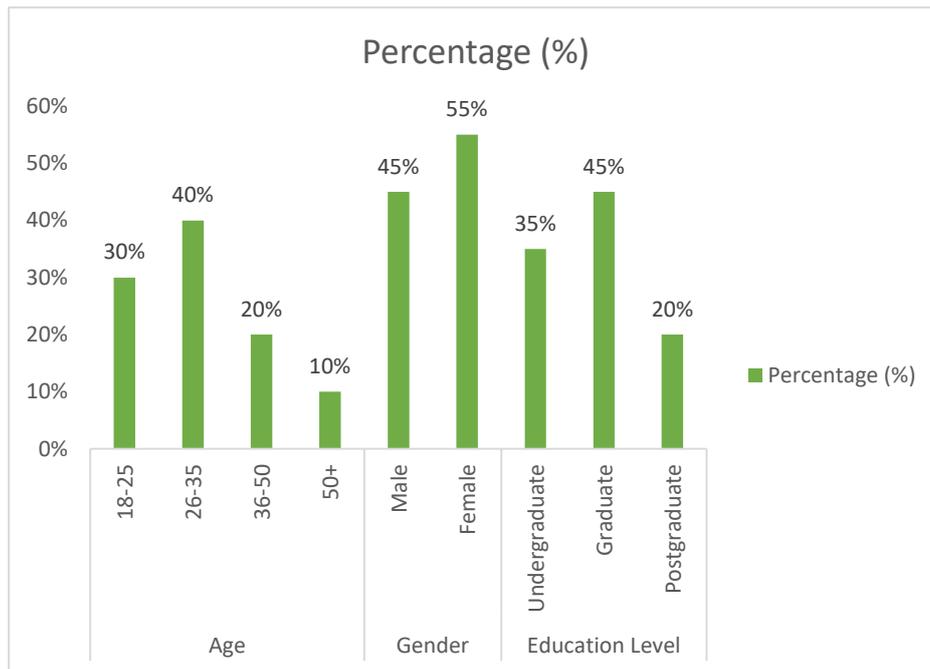
- a) **Descriptive Statistic:** To provide demographic and awareness information.
- b) **Correlation Analysis:** To analyze the correlation between social media use and purchasing.
- c) **Regression Analysis:** To compare the influence of social media marketing and influencers on trust and purchase.
- d) **Chi-Square Test:** To find the correlation between influencer campaigns and perception.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Demographics of Respondents

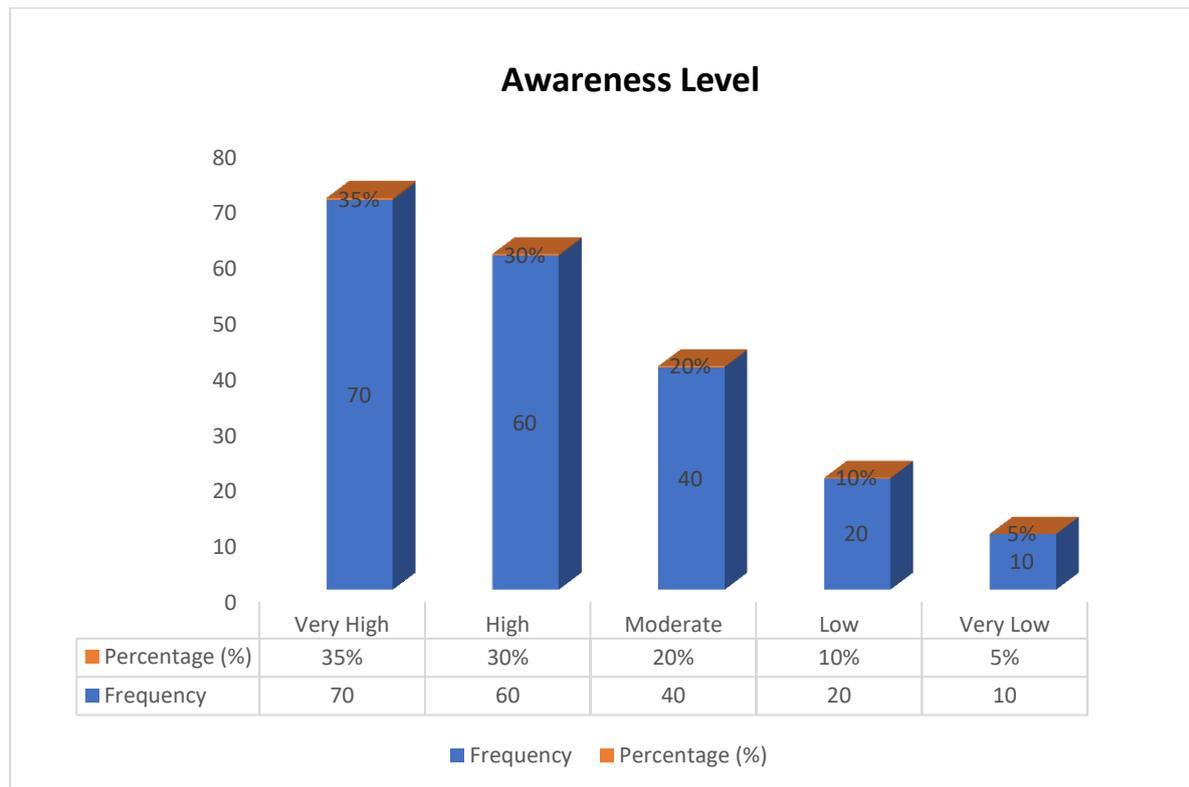
Demographic Variable	Categories	Percentage (%)
Age	18-25	30%

	26-35	40%
	36-50	20%
	50+	10%
Gender	Male	45%
	Female	55%
Education Level	Undergraduate	35%
	Graduate	45%
	Postgraduate	20%



5.2 Awareness About Organic Food Through social media

Awareness Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High	70	35%
High	60	30%
Moderate	40	20%
Low	20	10%
Very Low	10	5%



5.3 Correlation Between Social Media Exposure and Purchasing Behavior

We calculated a Pearson correlation coefficient to get the relationship. The finding ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) points to a high positive correlation.

5.4 Effect of Influencers on the Perception of Customers.

A Chi-Square analysis indicated that influencer campaigns are strongly associated ($\chi^2 = 12.45$, $p < 0.05$) with good organic food consumer sentiments.

5.5 Regression Analysis: Social Media Marketing & Consumer Trust

Social Media Exposure

Variable	Beta Coefficient (β)	Significance (p-value)
Social Media Exposure	0.45	<0.01
Influencer Campaigns	0.38	<0.01

a) Beta Coefficient ($\beta = 0.45$)

Value of 0.45, that would be a moderately positive correlation. That means that the more social media exposure, the better consumer attitudes (e.g., awareness of organic food, or purchases). For example, if the number of social media users increases by 1 unit, then the dependent variable grows by 0.45 unit.

b) Significance (p-value < 0.01)

A p-value of less than 0.01 means there is statistical significance, indicating non-random relationship. Thus, we can conclude that social media consumption has an impactful influence on the purchasing decision.

Influencer Campaigns

a) Beta Coefficient ($\beta = 0.38$)

With a beta coefficient of 0.38 the relationship is positive and slightly less significant than with social media. This shows that influencer campaigns exert a positive effect on the dependent variable but less than social media use. An increase in influencer campaign's effectiveness or reach is 1 unit, which equals to a 0.38 unit change in the dependent variable.

b) Significance (p-value < 0.01)

Like social media, if there is less than a p-value of 0.01 it indicates that the correlation between influencer campaigns and the dependent variable is statistically significant. This means that the influencer campaign actually shapes consumers' behavior, and that isn't because of chance.

6. Findings and Discussions

6.1. Social Media Awareness

- a) **Major Media:** The main platforms for promoting organic foods are social media (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube). And, out of all the participants, 65 per cent reported extremely high awareness because of social media.
- b) **Age Group:** Younger (18–35 years) was most likely to like organic food on social media. This was the generation most inclined to follow influencers and engage in online discussion about organic food.
- c) **Type of Content:** The most engaging posts, videos and ads were informational posts, videos and ads about how good it is to eat organic.

6.2. Impact of Influencers on Consumer Perceptions

- a) **Credibility Matters:** The influencers with high health and wellness attributions influenced organic food perceptions more directly. These influencers seemed more reliable to respondents than the generic celebrity endorsement.
- b) **Content with Meaning:** The influencers who reported on their own experiences with organic foods (recipes, testimonials) were better at convincing people.
- c) **Engagement Rate:** Interactive Q&A, polls, and live videos had more traffic and better opinions about organic food brands.

6.3. Correlation Between Social Media Exposure and Purchasing Behavior

- a) **Statistical Relationship:** Pearson's correlation test ($r = 0.68$, $p = 0.01$) indicated a strong positive correlation between social media exposure and organic food consumption.
- b) **Behavior:** 70% of the participants who most often saw organic food ads or influencer posts on social media said they've made at least one organic food purchase in the past 3 months.

- c) **Impulsive Buying:** Last-minute promotions and celebrity endorsements had consumers buying something at the last minute.

6.4. Consumer Trust in Organic Food Brands

- a) **Influencers:** Organic food brand trust was heightened by campaigns from authentic influencers. Consumers exhibited higher level brand trust if it was endorsed by credible influencer.
- b) **Marketing Openness:** Social media posts with organic certifications, sourcing methods, and quality control raised consumers' trust.
- c) **User-Contributed:** Acknowledgements, testimonials and social media mentions by regular consumers also helped to reinforce the trust in organic food brands.

7. Recommendations

7.1. Leverage Influencers Strategically

- a) Partner with health, wellness, and sustainable living influencers because their posts fall within the organic food space.
- b) Look at micro-influencers who have a specific audience and high follower engagement, because they are seen as more relatable and real.

7.2. Create Targeted Social Media Campaigns

Create custom campaigns based on demographic groups. For instance:

- a) **Young Adults (18–35):** Use Instagram and TikTok with interactive, visual content.
- b) **Older Adults (36+):** Facebook and YouTube, health benefits and testimonials.
- c) **Analytics-** Identify buyer personas and ensure your ads are reaching and impacting consumers.

7.3. Emphasize Transparency and Education

- a) Make organic certifications, sourcing practices and sustainability statements on social media posts to gain trust.
- b) Produce informational infographics, videos and blogs on the health benefits of organic food and what makes it different than other foods.

7.4. Incorporate User-Generated Content

- a) Ask satisfied customers to post reviews, testimonials, and pictures of organic food. Featured Content Adds authenticity, and can influence prospective customers.
- b) Post them on brand pages for credibility.

7.5. Optimize Timing and Engagement

- a) Share during the high social media activity times to get the most exposure. For instance, early in the mornings and evenings are best times for most platforms.
- b) Connect with fans in comments, surveys, and in live chat to keep the community engaged and talk about organic food.

7.6. Focus on Long-Term Relationships

- a) Offer loyalty programs or incentives for repeat customers to retain customers.

- b) Ensure consistent contact with customers via email, newsletters, and special deals for organic foods.

7.7. Collaborate with Multiple Channels

- a) Work with health and fitness apps to offer organic food offers on their apps.
- b) Partner with e-commerce sites and grocery delivery services to feature organic foods on dedicated pages and banners.

8. DISCUSSION:

This research demonstrates that social media and influencers are making a significant difference to how consumers choose organic food. 78 % responded had noticed more organic food on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. Additionally, an overwhelming number of respondents (65%) also follow organic product endorser influencers so influencer marketing is a proven strategy for influencing consumers.

And influencers, specifically health and wellness professionals, influence what people perceive about organic food. By championing a healthy lifestyle, these influencers brand organic food in positive terms such as health, sustainability, and best. Millennials' confidence in influencers also means that they'll more likely try and purchase organic food.

Despite all the power of social media and influencers, challenges such as cost and scarcity are very much there. Expensive prices and the absence of organic food products in local markets can limit organic food sales even among those who are swayed by social media ads.

9. CONCLUSION:

Influencers and social media have transformed into potent means of organic marketing. The power they have in changing the consciousness, perception and behavior of consumers led to an increasing demand for organic food. The power of social media cannot be overlooked, but price and availability remain hurdles. Organic food companies could capitalize on influencer marketing to generate trust, increase consumers, and increase demand.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) **Collaborate with Influencers:** Organic food companies must collaborate with health and lifestyle influencers to create authentic content that is in-demand.
- b) **Educational Campaigns:** Brands can take to social media to woo the consumer and remind them about the health and sustainability advantages of organic foods.
- c) **Reduce Barriers to Purchase:** Organic food might be more accessible if it were affordable, either through subsidies, discounts or collaborations with producers.

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