

Influence of Parasocial Relationships Over Social Media on Food Purchase Behavior Amongst Indian Millennials

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Abstract

The growing obesity trends in Indian millennials bring their food consumption behavior under scrutiny and therefore, the empirical findings of this research can act as a public health initiative to prevent India from more environmental damage and obesity. Social media platforms are proving to be a lucrative channel for the food industry to sponsor influencers and drive the marketing campaigns of their unhealthy products with high sugar, salt contents. This research aims to assess the impact of parasocial interactions over social media and how they influence consumer's purchase behavior. Hence, the key findings of this research can be used to better utilize the parasocial relationships between food bloggers and consumers and encourage the adoption of a healthier sustainable diet. Consumer awareness about trending diets and sustainable organic food products has been growing significantly yet it is not always translated to an actual purchase. It is argued when it comes to assessing consumer's purchase behavior, multi-attribute evaluations should be incurred. Hence, a thorough review of the existing literature on social media's influence on the consumer's food purchase behavior identifies trustworthiness, hedonic and utilitarian motivations, features of the influencer, and the social media platform, that affect their purchase intent. This research is one of the few studies that integrate multiple factors in one research framework to empirically evaluate their influence and give credence to the hypothesis that social media impacts the food purchase behavior among the youth. This research measures the millennial's social media engagement with food brands/bloggers, repercussions of socio-demographic differences, and causes of repeat purchase intention. A demographically represented sample (N = 543) was taken to carry out an online survey whose results revealed significant effects of Hedonic and utilitarian motivations and the features of the influencer on the consumer's purchase intentions.

Keywords: Parasocial Relationship, Marketeer, Millennial, Food, Purchase behavior, Social Media Influencer.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

The social media influencers (SMIs) and food bloggers capitalize on consumer's voyeuristic tendencies of watching food bloggers gorge on scrumptious food (Yuan, 2020). There has been a significant hike in the obesity levels of Indian millennials and social media influence has a sizable role to play in it. (Dey, 2015). Brands rely upon the influencers to drive engagement and increase awareness of their products/services among their followers and leverage upon the parasocial relationships formed between the user and an SMI (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020). Statistics depict that almost one in four millennials refuse to step on the weighing scales and refuse to be judged upon. But this body confidence movement should be given the right direction to health and wellbeing (Independent, 2019).

To measure the impact of parasocial relationships over social media on the Indian millennial's food purchase behavior.

1.2 Research Objective

This research aims to statistically analyze the influence of parasocial relationships over social media on the food purchase behavior of Indian millennials.

The following measurement constructs will be used to provide a pragmatic approach to this research.

- To analyze the effects of features of a social media influencer (attractiveness, gender, expertise, trustworthiness) on the millennial's food purchase behavior or brand choice.
- To evaluate the Hedonistic and Utilitarian motivations that influence consumer's food purchase decision and ultimately lead to a repeat purchase intention.
- To examine the impact of influencer's positive or negative product reviews on the consumer's purchase intentions.

1.3 Significance of the Research

India is currently regarded as the third most obese country in the world and shows a particularly alarming obesity epidemic in the urban areas. The prevalence of obesity has risen by 50% for individuals below the age of 19 and if current trends continue, millennials will not be left far behind (Dey, 2015). Thus, this research holds utmost importance in this digital age to curb this adiposity by understanding the impact of social media on the millennial's food purchase behavior. Previous literature showcases the prominent effects of the influencer-follower parasocial interactions on the follower's purchase intentions (Sokolova et al., 2020). Even though considerable research has been done on the influence of social media on children's dietary choices and the influence of parasocial relationships on the apparel industry, but the influence of parasocial relationships on the food purchase behavior on millennials remains untapped. Hence, the author has identified the gaps from previous literature frameworks and provided comprehensive research on the impact of parasocial relationships on food consumption behavior within Indian youth. Millennials are the most influential generation and the world's powerful consumers and are therefore regarded as trendsetters (Forbes, 2019). Hence, understanding millennial's thought processes would be extremely beneficial for the food marketers and eventually, brands who especially cater to this demographic.

1.4 Research Onion

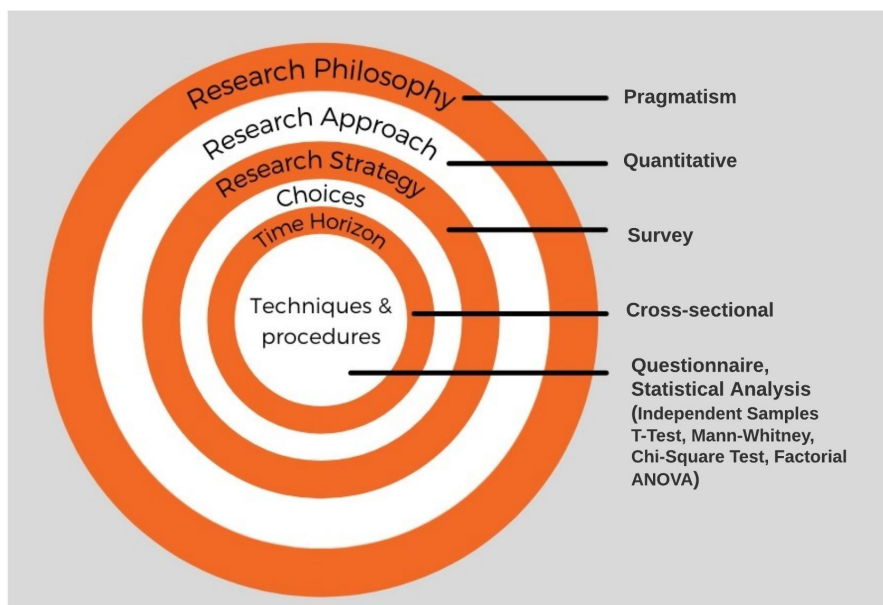


Figure 1: Saunder's Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2015)

The author has taken a pragmatic approach for this cross-sectional research, as shown in Figure 1 and has chosen the quantitative methodology for data collection by rolling out an online questionnaire to a sample size of 543 Indian millennials created via the QuestionPro tool. The survey was shared with the respondents via social media channels like Instagram and WhatsApp. Upon filtering, 206 responses worth of primary data gathered were statistically analyzed using IBM SPSS software to meet the research objectives.

The proposed conceptual framework is based on the Social learning theory and combines relevant elements from Dual-process theory, Social cognitive theory, Parasocial interaction theory, and Theory of Planned Behavior. The author has witnessed that the impact of influencer's negative product reviews or feedback on the consumer's purchase behavior has not been addressed so far. It was interesting to see whether the consumers get discouraged based on the influencer's feedback or believe in giving a fair chance to the brand. Even though thorough research has been carried out in the past on understanding consumer's purchase intentions, but the subject of repeat purchase intention also remains untapped. Hence, the author has proposed an integrated conceptual framework of its own using the 5 different theories mentioned above and has addressed these gaps in this research.

1.5 Definition of Terms

Social Media Influencer (SMI):

A social media influencer can be defined as a miniaturized celebrity who has become an internet sensation due to their niche expertise (food, fitness, travel) and a huge fan following on social media platforms (Marwick, 2011).

1.6 Priming Effects of Food Advertising

Scott Cook rightly says "A Brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other it is" (Forbes, 2020). Hence, brands leverage the strong emotional relationship between the consumers and SMIs to target the potential audience and yield desired growth (Casalo et al., 2018). A Parasocial relationship can be described as a psychological connection that a follower establishes with an influencer by sharing highly personalized content

over social media and are perceived as attractive, relatable, trending, and trustworthy (Sokolova et al., 2020).

While the rest of the world is recovering from COVID-19, Indian market leaders are strategizing to increase competition by thriving on consumers awareness and activeness on social media and leveraging on the consumers fear of ‘Do I have enough food’, which has resulted in a huge spike in online shopping and e-commerce industry overall (Kapur, 2020). Promotional campaigns have been used in the food advertising industry for decades now to influence the consumer’s purchase behavior. Kareklas points out that in this digitalized world, SMI’s reason behind promoting sustainable environment-friendly products is much more reliant upon environmental factors than their benefits from a sponsored post. Therefore, it’s easier for young millennials as internet influencers to create a parasocial bond with the youth by inducing trust and credibility with their content (Kareklas, Carlson, and Muehling, 2012). Influencer marketing is a term coined to address the human brand promotion of the products/lifestyle of SMIs who possess a niche level of expertise in the fields such as Food, Fitness, Fashion, and Travel and thereby, create a fan base for them. (Weismueller et al., 2020). Brands leverage influencer marketing to disseminate their potential reach over social media channels such as Instagram and Facebook and give rise to create space for individuals to emerge as marketing mavericks (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020).

Recent studies have shown a drastic increase in the demand for environment-friendly and ready-to-cook convenient products. The reasons could be a shift to a modern lifestyle having time constraints or the influence of social media from where ‘Go green’ trends are picked up very quickly. This is the aim behind conducting this research to measure the impact of the parasocial relationships over social media and the determinants which influence consumer purchase behavior. (Ricci, 2018). The conceptual framework proposed by the author measures the positive and negative impact of SMIs on the food purchase behavior of consumers and the factors contributing to repeat purchase intention.

1.7 Influential Strategy of the Human Brand

Even though the top three players in the social networking industry are Facebook (with 1.95 billion users), Twitter with 339.6 million users, and Instagram with 928.5 million users, YouTube remains the most visited audio-visual platform providing the youth with a creative

space and generate a business through content creation. Although YouTube influencers are widely spread across various fields, travel, lifestyle, and fitness remain in the major league. The children of this digital age use YouTube as an aid to research their academic work apart from the usual perception of an entertainment channel. People form a parasocial bond with their audiences by sharing intimate life updates such as a trip with their family or unboxing their shopping products or live streaming of video games to be able to connect with their followers. Thus, social media has transformed the creative mavericks into marketing professionals, also known as Influencers (Castillo-Abdul et al., 2020). Revenue from social media has been drastically high from 68 billion US dollars in 2018 to an expected 128 billion US Dollars in 2022.

1.8 The journey from Parasocial Interaction to Brand Loyalty

Global brands have capitalized on the use of social media to reach a larger audience through unconventional ways, especially using SMIs (Weismueller et al., 2020). Previous literature suggests that having a large number of followers increases the influencer's credibility and trustworthiness amongst its followers and thus lays a strong foundation of a parasocial relationship and eventually influences the consumer's purchase behavior (De Veirman et al. (2017). It's commonly known that consumers do assess the credibility of the brand influencers to authenticate the product, but in addition to that, is it argued that an influencer's attractiveness, perceived engagement, and expertise also plays a significant role in the formation of a strong connection between the SMIs and the consumers (Lee and Watkins, 2016). It is thus, safe to comment that SMI's credibility has a huge part to contribute to influencing consumer's purchase intentions. It is therefore important for the brands to find the right SMI as an ambassador who could establish the parasocial bond with the end consumers. Weismuller also suggests that brands nowadays even involve consumers in choosing the right brand ambassador. It was pointed out that Nespresso took suggestions from Nespresso club members in choosing the right brand ambassador. This creates a sense of value co-creation that positively affects the consumer's purchase intentions and trust in the long run (Weismueller et al., 2020).

Chapter 2 Literature Review:

2.1 Introduction

The subject area of Parasocial relationships is gaining exponential interest from varied scholars in recent times. Hence, critically evaluating the previously published literature would help the readers get a better understanding of the determinants that contribute to the formation of the influencer-consumer parasocial relationships on social media and how they impact the consumer's food purchase behavior. For the convenience of the readers, the researcher has divided this section upon 5 different theories and has further proposed an integrated conceptual framework of its own by catering to the identified gaps and combining relevant elements from these theories to achieve the desired results of the research.

2.2 Dual-Process Theory

To address the growing obesity trends and significant environmental damage in the current food system in India, the researcher brings forth the Dual-Process theory which sheds light on two systems of research to assess the social attributes of the human's psychological processes (Evans & Stanovich, 2013). It segregates the determinants of this theory into two broad categories: Intuitive (SMIs' attractiveness) and cognitive-based(Features of the online platform) that play an important role in setting the foundation of the influencer-consumer parasocial relationships, in turn, shaping the consumer's decision-making process Liang (et al., 2019). The theory goes on to explain that system 1(Intuitiveness) is based on the limbic system of the brain where the consumer tends to act impulsively and instinctively, while system 2 (Cognitive-based) is mainly reliant on the frontal cortex of the brain, thus consumers process the available information and are thus able to make more conscious, reasonable decisions in a thoughtful manner (Motro et al., 2018).

A Parasocial relationship has been termed as a prolonged two-way emotional and psychological connection between the SMI and the consumer which gives rise to imaginary social relationships in a digitalized environment (Chung and Cho, 2017). The study conducted by Yuan regarding the Parasocial interactions between celebrities and their followers on social media used a quantitative methodology and formulated a questionnaire with a survey from 273 firms. The participant pool included the lowest to senior-most-held positioned employees from

all genders and varying age groups. It can thus be inferred that the participants have enough knowledge available to bring forth some insightful data from the research. In alignment with this thesis, the results from Yuan’s study emphasizes that the features of the SMI positively affect the parasocial relationship with its followers on three aspects (Yuan, 2020). As shown in Figure 2, Yuan has proposed the following determinants of the Dual Process Theory.

- The online interaction between the social media celebrity (endorser/influencer) and the consumer.
- The trustworthiness of the SMI
- The domain expertise of the influencer in the food blogging industry (Yuan, 2020).

The researcher will also dwell on the aspect of visual communication as a criterion to influence the millennials on social media as visually appealing food pictures and videos leave a strong imprint and gain more views online. It has been observed in the past studies that attractive visuals with eye-catching captions derive strong human emotions and bring forth the consumers hedonic motivations, eventually increases the amount of time a follower spends on an influencer’s page on social media. This social connect which the followers form with the endorsers translates into influencing the follower’s purchase intent (Lagomarsino et al., 2018).

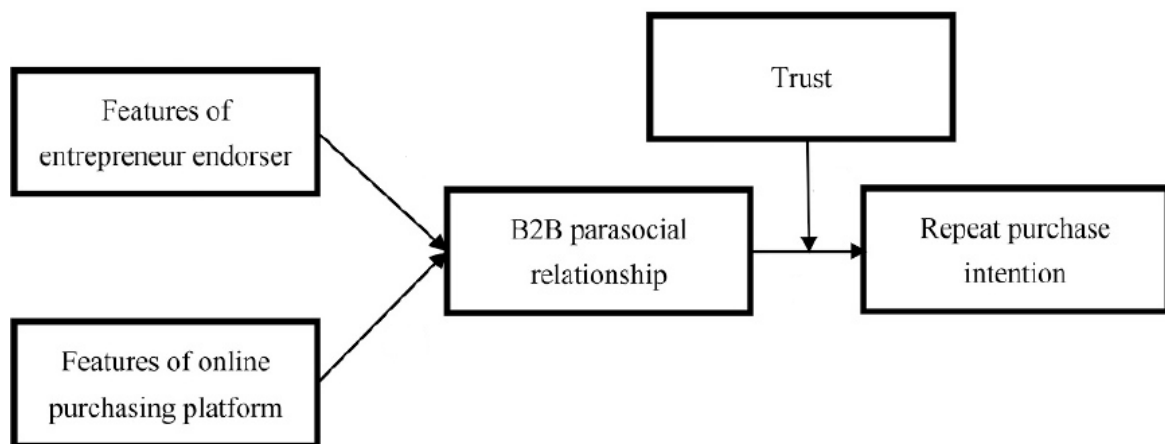


Figure 2: Dual-Process Theory (Yuan, 2020)

Hence, in conclusion, it can be deduced that the features of the influencer and the social media platform are crucial determinants in impacting the parasocial relationships between the online celebrity and the consumer. But for the focus of this study, the researcher has used the

pragmatic approach of Yuan in examining the psychological behavior of human beings towards the features of the SMIs and how positively/negatively it impacts the consumer's purchase intentions.

Although Yuan has highlighted Trust as a crucial indispensable determinant that impacts the Parasocial bond between the influencer and the consumer and has garnered insightful data to support this. But it also has limitations that the researcher has incorporated in this study. Yuan didn't take into account the negative influence that the influencer-consumer parasocial relationships have on the consumers and how they are fooled into trying any trending diet/food products in the hope of becoming like their favorite social media celebrities. Another gap that can be found in Yuan's study is that no demographic element was pictured, which in this particular research at hand is of utmost importance. As the usage of social media platforms and the popularity of SMIs among Indian youth would be a good start to examine the existing marketing practices and assess cross-cultural aspects.

2.3 Parasocial Interaction (PSI) Theory

Another study by Parboteeah features a similar approach of determining the stimuli that cause the Parasocial interactions and eventually leads to impulse buying behavior within consumers (Parboteeah et al., 2009). Thorson & Rodgers further extend this study by putting forth environmental psychology factors and facilitate the ultimate shopping goal i.e. Product usefulness and perceived enjoyment (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006).

On comparing Parasocial interaction theory with the Dual Process theory, it is evident that PSI theory runs in contrast to the Dual Process theory by stating that Parasocial interaction is a one-sided connection where the consumer indulges in a feeling of intimacy with the social media celebrities/influencers (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). A good example of this concept would be that a consumer may form a parasocial relationship with the ambassador of an organic food product's brand on social media and eventually ends up impulsively buying that brand's products (Labrecque, 2014). This is also depicted in Figure 3. Based on the research carried out using the quantitative approach for this study, it can be implied that this concept of Labrecque holds for mostly first times, but the repeat purchase happens due to the utilitarian aspects of the product i.e its usefulness and quality.

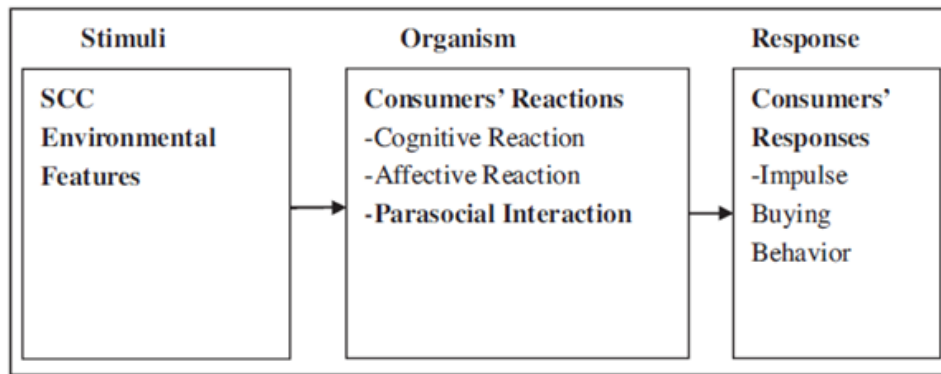


Figure 3: Parasocial Interaction (PSI) Theory (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006)

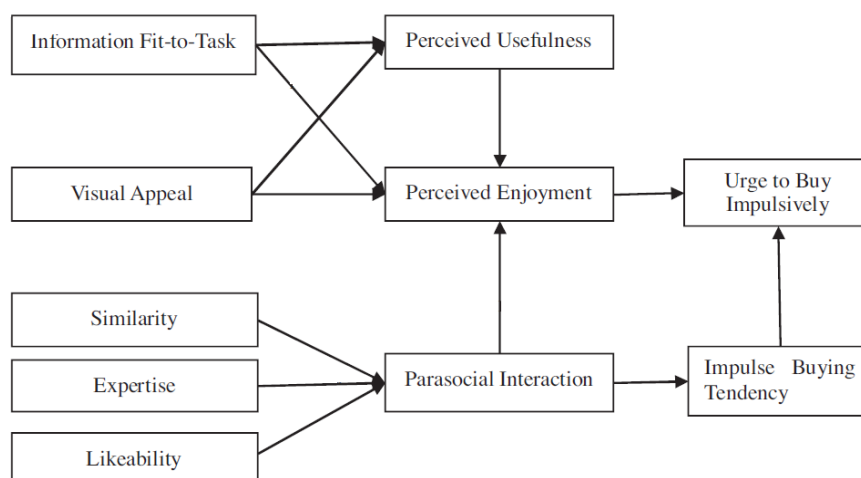


Figure 4: Parasocial Interaction (PSI) Theory (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006)

The PSI theory emphasizes the one-sided relationship between the influencer and the consumer and the feeling of intimacy that the viewer formulates with the celebrity in a TV program or an online show. This results in an imaginary friendship and close connection between the two which in turn, increases the viewer's predictability about the online artist in the show substantially (Ballantine & Martin, 2005). This builds trust and loyalty between the social media celebrity and its audience which can therefore be applied in this instance of the parasocial relations between an SMI and the follower/consumer. Kozinets has thus proposed the following three determinants of the PSI theory that influence parasocial bonds between the SMI and the consumer (Figure 4).

- Product/Service's perceived usefulness
- The feeling of perceived enjoyment
- The visual appeal of the product/communication on social media (Kozinets, 2000).

Xiang, in 2016, explored the consumer's impulse buying behavior through its research on an e-commerce platform using a quantitative approach wherein an online survey was conducted by putting up the questionnaire on China's one of the most influential online shopping platforms, called Mogujie.com. It was a great marketing strategy as it increased the unique number of visits on the online shopping portal Mogujie, where demographic factors such as Income, Age, Educational qualifications, and Social media usage were explored. Although 248 valid responses were received using this research, various limitations to it provide room for future scope of research. The study by Xiang didn't explore hedonic motivations while assessing the impulsive buying behavior of the consumers which has turned out to be a crucial criterion in examining the parasocial relationships according to recent studies (Xiang et al., 2016). Social media is undeniably a fantastic source of sharing indispensable information through its promotional campaigns and trends/challenges regarding Organic, Vegan, and Eco-friendly products/diets. The consumers are bombarded with all the necessary knowledge required to pursue those trending diets as they feel capable and confident in carrying it out. A huge amount of credit for this goes to the SMIs and product endorsers who showcase this as a visually appealing healthy diet and easy to implement which would eventually turn them into looking like their favorite celebrities. They also provide the Millennials with the 'feel-good' aspect of saving the environment and being a responsible person on the planet (You et al., 2020).

2.4 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen and Fishbein's Theory of Planned behavior is based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and examines the relationship between actual and hypothetical consumer behavior and the analysis of attitudes. The theory suggests that the consumer is rational and can make constructive use of the information that is available to them or the knowledge they possess about the food products/brands in the market. And thus, consumers are not swayed by any hedonic motivates or overpowering desires that may lead to an impulsive buying behavior. (Ajzen et al., 2015). The theory goes on to explain that attitudes do not determine behavior directly. In turn, the attitudes and societal pressures influence the consumer's behavioral intentions which further shape a consumer's actions (Martinho et al., 2015).

This theory is in complete contrast to the Parasocial interaction theory (PSI) which relies extensively upon consumer’s hedonic and voyeuristic tendencies that leads to a sense of pleasure and in turn, impulsive or influential buying behavior (Kozinets, 2000). The actions taken by consumers using the PSI model are not always entirely thoughtful. Hence, as per the researcher’s extensive study on this literature and the results of the quantitative analysis in them, it is highly evident that the Parasocial interaction theory holds for the majority in understanding the influence of SMIs on the food purchase behavior among millennials. But it was seen from the results of the survey that the repeat purchase intention is usually a conscious decision based on the utilitarian factors where the Theory of planned behavior will make much more sense.

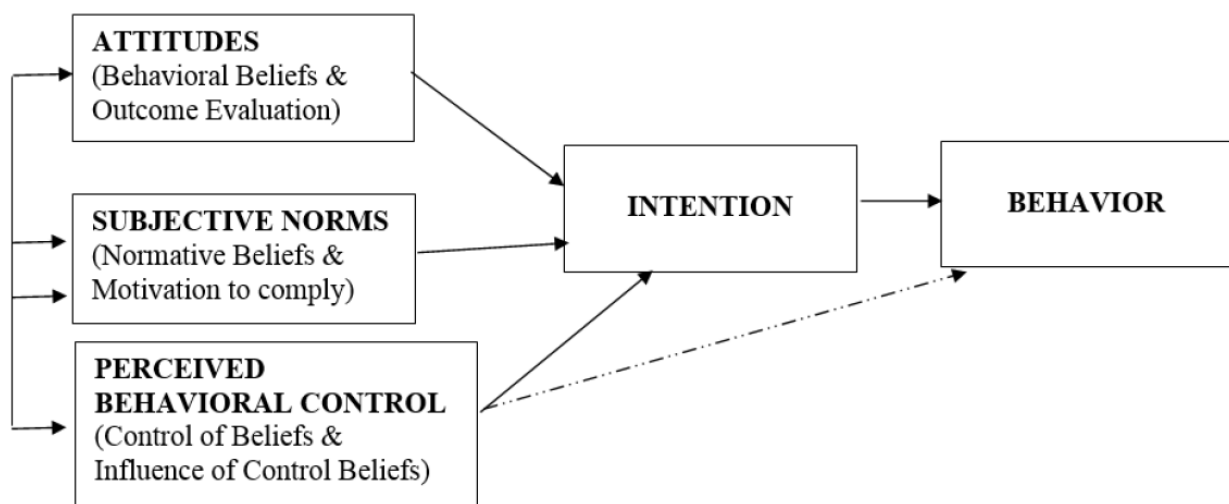


Figure 5: Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 2015)

The theory of planned behavior hence proposes the following determinants of the parasocial interaction that influences the consumer’s purchase behavior.

Attitudes

Figure 5 illustrates three major components which influence the consumer’s intent and in turn, shapes their behavior towards it. Attitude in the TPB model is concerned with the overall evaluation of the behavior. It consists of two broad parts – one is the behavioral beliefs (such as consumption of healthy food will improve health conditions) and the second is outcome evaluation (such as a good health condition is desired and recommended). Hence, the behavioral belief is a subjective assessment of the multi-varied attributes of an object and its

outcome evaluation is the consumer's positive/negative attitude towards the behavior (Ajzen, 2015).

Subjective Norm

A subjective norm is a consumer's evaluation of the socially accepted behavior. It consists of two parts – one is the normative beliefs which is the behavior that your close ones would like you to adopt (such as your husband would like you to lose weight). The second is the normative outcome where you plan to perform the behavior (such as I'd avoid eating junk food for two months so I can lose weight) (Ajzen, 2015).

Perceived Behavioral Control

Perceived behavioral control refers to the person's confidence or capability to perform the target behavior. It consists of two main categories – one is the actual behavioral control which examines how much control the consumer has over the target behavior (such as a highly disciplined routine to control one's diet). The second is the perceived behavior control assess how confident a consumer is while enacting that behavior (such as lack of nutritional knowledge/lack of healthy brand awareness to practice healthy eating behavior). In reality, it is difficult to identify the factors that influence the actual control behavior (Bandura, 2001).

Despite the Theory of Planned Behavior's extensive application in the behavior prediction studies in the academic world, it has faced quite a lot of criticism from varied scholars. Although quantitative studies have used the TPB model to illustrate the significance of predicting health behaviors using a cross-sectional design but the underlying parasocial interactions between SMIs and the consumers associated with the latter's dietary choices have not been considered so far. And Ajzen rightly confirms this in his own words, "the exact nature of these relations is still uncontained" (Ajzen, 2015). It can also be argued that not all the components of the TPB model are applicable at all times, and the attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control are expected to vary with the varying contextual situations. Furthermore, consumers do not tend to undergo an examination of their beliefs every time they perform a behavior as it becomes a routine with every repetition and is performed with much less conscious consideration in the consequent times (Ajzen and Dasgupta, 2015). The theory of planned behavior does not take into account all the plausible behavioral intent attributes and

runs on assumptions that consumer's purchase intent and behavior are consistently followed by their beliefs.

Thus, even though this theory has tasted success in the scholarly world, its simplicity is widely criticized. As researchers of this thesis, we have decided to acknowledge this criticism and explore potential gaps and identify determinants of the parasocial relations on social media and their influence on consumer's purchase behavior in the empirical data collection phase by combining elements of varied theoretical models in the context of millennials.

2.5 Social Cognitive Theory

The social cognitive theory provides a lot of determinants that can be used to optimally translate the consumer's existing knowledge into effective health practices. Self-efficacy is largely focussed upon by Bandura in his study stating that consumers possess control over their motivations and emotions and are not controlled by external factors such as social media or environmental conscience. Knowledge acts as a crucial foundation for the shift in consumer behavior. If the consumers lack the knowledge about their detrimental lifestyle habits affecting their health, they wouldn't go the extra mile in trying out new products/brands and wouldn't be influenced by anything. Hence, self-efficacy plays a major role in bringing out a change in one's habits. Previous studies suggest that unless a person has some motivation to produce desired changes in their habits/lifestyle, nothing can incentivize or pester you in bringing about that change. A similar theory applies to health behavior as well. Consumers expect their actions to produce certain desired results. It has always been argued that self-efficacy should be graded against impediments that may deter the performance of healthy actions. For instance, skipping a daily exercise routine may happen due to work issues, stress, or foul weather, which proves that the consumer behavior is not merely a personal matter, self-efficacy has a definite role to play in it, including certain obstacles (Bandura, 2001).

Bandura also talks about the Socially mediated ways that influence the consumer's behaviors. Social media plays an important role in motivating, guiding, and advising personal changes in one's life in lieu of desired changes. Forming a network and community on social media leads to a significant share of behavioral changes amongst the consumers (Bandura, 2001). Taylor gives an excellent example wherein young women at risk of eating disorders resist seeking

help, but prefer to use internet-based guidance on social media as it's available almost instantly, convenient, and discards the risk of being exposed. The Social cognitive theory stresses the fact that interactive technologies such as social media platforms are just a medium, but the consumers can't be motivated unless they are capable enough to take the advantage of what social media has to offer (CB et al., 2001).

Health promotion must be taken as a societal challenge to make the health of the youth a priority as previous studies suggests that the majority of the lifelong habits that are detrimental to health are formed during the adolescence phase. The author has applied the same concept in this research wherein the food consumption behavior of youth is given priority to prevent their health in the long run (Bandura, 2001).

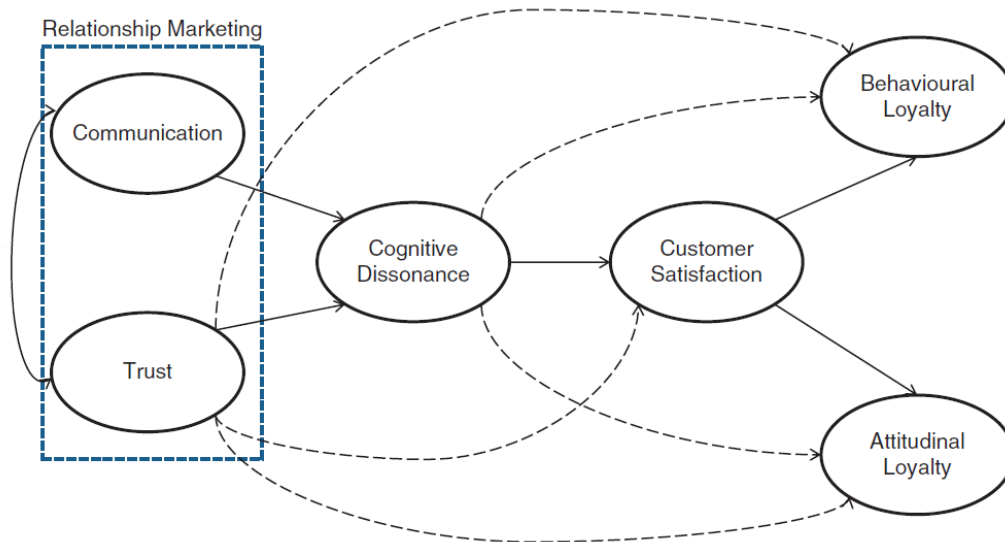


Figure 6: Social Cognitive Theory (Sharifi and Esfidani, 2013)

The social cognitive model puts forth the following determinants that influence the formation of influencer-consumer parasocial relationships.

Relationship Marketing

Palmatier categorized relationship marketing in three levels such as structural, social, and financial wherein the financial incentives encourage incremental sales within the consumers, yet bring in huge cost savings for the company (Palmatier et al., 2007). These can be promoted within the consumers using hedonic and utilitarian motivations, but with the common goal of achieving customer loyalty.

Open communication, trust, and commitment have proved to be indicators of relationship marketing (Figure 6). The objectives of these indicators can be customer retention, customer satisfaction, or customer loyalty. But Trust truly lies in the heart of relationship marketing, hence the greater the trust, the stronger is the bond between the influencer and the consumer, and longer would be the relationship. It's been argued that customers at times buy products out of price and availability factors, and not because of loyalty. This is predominantly evident when dealing with satisfied users of a particular brand. Hence, relationship building influences consumer satisfaction while manipulating the perceived value of the products and their perceptions (Chiu et al., 2005).

Cognitive Dissonance

Bettman argues that while making a purchase decision, the consumer deals with limited knowledge and thus relies mainly on heuristics. On the other hand, previous literature shows that when the consumers are overwhelmed with too much information or alternatives, it tends to complicate their decision-making process and thus, increases sensitivity. Processing such overwhelming information can be associated with additional psychic costs, wherein people try to reduce the complexity of decision-making using their strategies. They would either rely on heuristics or repeat their last purchase to reach a satisfactory decision. Thus, this duality of complexity occurs when too much or too little knowledge of brands/products can cause mental discomfort for the consumers, making their purchasing behavior even more complicated (Bettman et al., 2008).

Pei goes on to say that it is true that whenever in case of understanding consumer purchase behavior, there's always some degree of cognitive dissonance associated with it. It often occurs in the post-purchase phase, where consumers get a reality check and compare the performance of the product with their expectations and feel mental discomfort. He suggested that this cognitive dissonance or mental discomfort varies with the importance of the decision and the inter-similarities between the available alternatives (Pei, 2013). While, Gbadamosi negated Pei's theory by confirming that cognition dissonance occurs in instances of low importance as well (Gbadamosi, 2009). To reduce cognitive dissonance, consumers either blame the company for not offering something that would rationalize their decision or they just end up ignoring the attractiveness of available alternatives.

Previous literature on relationship marketing proves that trust and communication increase customer loyalty and improves parasocial relationships (Pan et al., 2012). Personal contact or a high level of engagement leads to customer delight and in turn, satisfaction regarding the purchase decision. Shao suggests that cognitive dissonance affects negatively the consumer's purchase decision and can result in a buyer's regret (Shao and Shao, 2011). Thus, this regret can impact negatively on the consumer's satisfaction levels, but positively on their brand switching intentions (Bui et al., 2011).

Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

Park defines loyalty as the commitment which consumers show to the long-term relationships with particular brands/products, wherein customer satisfaction acts as an antecedent to loyalty. Park emphasizes that customer satisfaction results in repeat purchase intentions and turn, buying frequency. This impacts the behavioral loyalty of consumers positively (Park et al., 2012). Hence, Liu concluded that trust remains a constant factor that builds long-term loyalty between the brand and the consumer. The same can be applied to the parasocial relations between the SMI and the consumer (Liu et al., 2011).

Social cognitive theory has certain elements of Dual-Process theory and Parasocial interaction theory which includes features of the SMIs and utilitarian and hedonic motivations that unconsciously have an impact on consumer behavior. The author has used the negative influence of food advertising over consumers as a determinant in examining the impact on consumer purchase behavior which has been touch-based in the social cognitive theory. The author has also assessed the parameters which lead to repeat purchase intention which according to the Social cognitive theory, is due to the trust formed between the consumers and the influencers (Bargh and Morsella, 2008).

2.6 Social Learning Theory

Another interesting theory is the Social learning theory by Bandura in 1963, which has set a solid foundation in predicting consumer consumption behaviors using socialization agents especially in the fields of communications and advertising (Bandura, 2001). Social learning theory establishes that the consumers derive motivation and eventually exhibit a favorable attitude towards the endorsed products from socialization agents via direct or indirect parasocial interactions. Makgosa in 2010 had revealed that Social learning theory has been

convincingly proving the impact of social media celebrities on consumption behaviors. Hence, the researcher aligns Makgosa's assertion by using Social learning theory as a foundation in examining the impact of SMIs on consumers' purchase behaviors and they can shape the attitude and decision-making process for the consumers (Makgosa, 2010).

Thus, this theory very much aligns with the Dual Process theory of using the features of the influencer (the endorser) such as Credibility, attractiveness, the ability to engage with the followers, and the relevance with the endorsed product as depicted in figure 4 above. The Social learning theory does not consider the negative influence of social media celebrities on the purchase behavior of the consumers and how consumers can get swayed by the negative reviews of food bloggers without giving a fair chance to the product/brand themselves. And how consumers are fooled into engaging in trending diets just to follow the footsteps of their favorite celebrity in the hope of becoming like them (Clark et al. 2001).

The researcher, hence, has identified the gaps in the previous studies and has incorporated them in this study by integrating conceptual frameworks. Bandura puts forward the following determinants from Social learning theory which forms a basis for understanding the parasocial relations between an SMI and a consumer and how it affects the latter's purchase behavior. Therefore, Lim puts forth the following determinants from the Social learning model that establishes an influencer-consumer parasocial bond (Figure 7).

- Source/SMI Credibility
- Source/Influencer Attractiveness
- Relevance of Product with the Endorser
- Social Media Engagement (The ability of the influencer to promote the content) (Lim et al., 2017).

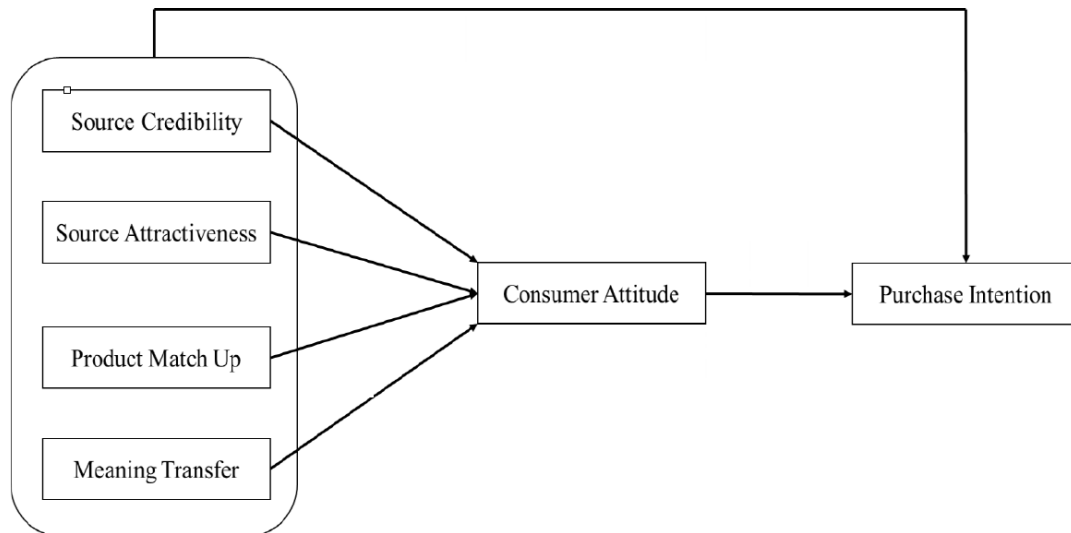


Figure 7: Social Learning Theory (Lim et al., 2017)

Source Credibility

The credibility of the SMI plays a significant role in analyzing the effectiveness of the endorsement and a credible endorser thus has a positive effect on their follower’s perception, opinions, beliefs. Additionally, the influencers who are perceived as experts in their particular field, tend to be more persuasive and hence can impact the consumer’s attitude and purchasing behavior (Wang et al. 2017). Additionally, the Trustworthiness of an endorser leads to a perceived image of honesty and believability. Hence, expertise and trustworthiness result in forming an indifferent attitude of the consumers towards the endorsed products and thus, have higher chances of accepting the endorser's suggestions.

Source Attractiveness

Previous research depicts that the co-relation between endorser attractiveness and consumer’s behavior/attitude has been quite positive which in turn, leads to a positive impact on the consumer’s purchase intentions. Till and Busler sheds light on how an attractive influencer can positively impact a consumer’s attitude by capturing their attention and subsequently influencing their purchasing intentions (Till and Busler, 2000).

Product Match Up

This match-up theory arises quite often whenever an endorser is associated with a brand as an ambassador or its advocate as the consumer tends to find the similarities of features that act as

a perfect fit with the associated product/brand. Shrimp stressed the fact that a strong correlation between the brand/product and the SMI will greatly strengthen the advertising goal and thus, positively impact the consumer's purchase behavior (Shimp, 2000).

Meaning Transfer

It has been observed that influencers on social media tend to orchestrate an image/story with the endorsed products, to have a positive effect on how the products are perceived by the consumers. A study by Peetz validates that there is a distinct correlation between the meaning transfer and the consumer's purchase intentions (Peetz et al., 2004). Hence, it is good market practice to lure customers by choosing the right product endorser/SMI who can form a connection with its followers.

Consumer Attitude

Chen interestingly argues that consumer attitude plays a favorable role in the consumer's purchase intentions, which is developed under the influence of social media celebrities (Chen, 2007). Hence, an influencer's credibility, attractiveness, relevance, and engagement on social media has a significant impact in improvising consumer's attitude, which in turn increases the chances of influencing the consumer's purchase intentions as well (Bandura, 2001).

The Social learning theory combines Hedonic and utilitarian motivational aspects from Dual-process theory and Parasocial interaction theory, hence the author has based the foundation and conceptual framework of this research study on Social learning theory and added elements from Dual-process theory and Parasocial interaction theory to meet the existing limitations. In reality, Social learning theory does have certain limitations which the author has addressed in this research study, i.e. examining the negative influence of SMIs on the purchase behavior of the consumers and the determinants for a repeat purchase intention.

2.7 Conclusion

The five theories discussed in the above themes have discussed a comprehensive review of the multi-attribute parameters that contribute to establishing an influencer-consumer parasocial relationship over social media. Some of the theories run in parallel to each other, while others pose contrasting opinions. For instance, Dual Process theory implies that a Parasocial

interaction is a one-way relationship from the consumer's side, while the PSI theory suggests that it is a two-way interaction. Each theory has its limitations, but for this research, the author has based the integrated conceptual framework on the Social learning theory by including the gaps such as negative influence on consumer behavior and repeat purchase intention. And have incorporated relevant determinants from the remaining theories which haven't been done before.

Chapter 3 Research Question and Hypothesis

Research Question: 'What is the influence of Parasocial relationships over social media on the food purchase behavior amongst Indian millennials?'

Research Objectives

The following sub-questions can be derived from the focus area of this research.

- 1) Do SMIs affect Indian Millennial's food purchase behavior or brand choice?
- 2) How impactful is the parasocial relationship between the SMIs and their followers and on which determinants is it dependent?
- 3) Does this social media influence result in impulsive buying, constant brand switching, or repeat purchase intention.

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (Brand Awareness):

H1: Social Media Influencers significantly increase the new brand's awareness in consumer's lives.

The SMIs are perceived as entertaining and approachable who fulfill consumers' innate desires of intimacy and relatedness unlike Bollywood celebrities (Ki and Kim, 2019). Hence, corporate brands are becoming more eager to spend their efforts and money on the right internet influencers who can increase their brand awareness and sales through promotional campaigns and reach a larger millennial audience (Harrigan et al., 2020). Influencers leverage on the

consumer's curiosity and impulsive buying of trending products that are new to the market and thus generate huge profits by creating hype of the emerging brands among their followers on social media (Hu et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 2 (Perceived Interactivity):

H2: Perceived interactivity on social media directly and positively affects the parasocial relationship of the consumer and the influencer.

The perceived interactivity between an SMI and its followers in the form of posts and messages over the social media platforms tends to induce a sense of direct conversation and further instills a closeness between the two. This is the foundation of a parasocial relationship which is based upon a virtual intimacy through continuous interaction via social media channels (Tsai and Men, 2013). Hence, a higher perceived interactiveness makes the follower feel much more safe and open with the influencer. It is mostly a one-sided closeness that the audience forms with the media celebrity and becomes almost predictive about their idol's day-to-day lives through the personalized content posted by the influencers. This imaginary friendship results in a parasocial interaction between the consumer and the SMI and considerably impact the consumer's purchase behavior (Hu et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 3 (Trustworthiness):

H3: Trustworthiness directly and positively impacts the parasocial relationship of the consumer and the influencer.

Trust issues have risen abundantly in E-shopping and therefore credible websites are proven to be a significant factor for effective online transactions (Johnson, 2009). Past examinations have shown that credibility is emphatically linked to the attitude of the way of conduct of the SMI and how honestly the influencer reviews the endorsed products/services. This credibility of an influencer leads to gaining the trust of the consumers and maintaining or establishing the parasocial bond with consumers, in turn becoming loyal to the sponsoring brands. Information put up by a credible source i.e. the SMIs instill a sense of belonging and can impact the beliefs and opinions of consumers' behaviors (Wang et al. 2017).

Hypothesis 4 (Hedonic Motivation - Visual Appeal):

H4: Visually appealing food positively affects the perceived enjoyment of the Influencer's social media content.

Parboteeah suggests that the social media content can either instill a pleased or disgusted mood among the users and visually appealing food content brings in the perceived feeling of enjoyment and pleasure among the audience (Parboteeah et al., 2009). The great quality pictures act as a visual treat in the eyes of the consumers and influencers benefits from the user's voyeuristic tendencies and happiness that a follower gets on surfing through such content. Hence, the influencers who post content that is pleasing to the eye tend to capture the user's attention for a long period, hence form a base for the higher engagement with influencers and their content. This engagement results in a parasocial bond that eventually influences the consumer's purchase behavior (Xiang, 2016).

Hypothesis 5 (Expertise):

H5: Expertise of the influencer positively impacts the consumer's purchase decision.

Many scholars have asserted the positive impact of the expertise of the endorser, in this case, SMI on consumer purchase behavior. The previous literature suggested that SMIs with a high degree of expertise in their particular field have a higher tendency of understanding the pros and cons of the product/service and can make an informed decision and thus, guide the audience in a much better fashion. These influencers can be termed as entrepreneurs who are visionaries and their domain expertise tends to reflect their integrative capabilities. Scholars have pointed out that even though the influencer's functional domain knowledge would not be too in-depth in correspondence to the technical field, but their previous experience presents much more valuable content for the users, thereby building such strong connections with them (Yuan et al., 2016).

Hypothesis 6 (Physical Attractiveness):

H6: Physical attractiveness of the social media influencer positively impacts their parasocial relationship with the consumer.

The endorser's physical attractiveness corresponds to their physical attributes and characteristics that play a significant role in driving the attention of the consumers towards their content. Hence, SMIs with amazing appearances are perceived as much more captivating and are found to be more convincing in influencing the consumer's attitude (Till and Busler, 2000).

Hypothesis 7 (Gender):

H7: Gender of the social media influencer positively impacts the parasocial relationship of the consumer and the influencer.

In the study of physics, the law of attraction states that opposites attract and the same can be applied to males and females. This implies that for certain products/services male individuals are influenced by the female SMIs and the female individuals are influenced by the male SMIs. Hence, it can be deduced that considering a female SMI, the extent to which males are influenced by the content would be greater than that of the females (Jain et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 8 (Negative Reviews):

H8: Negative food reviews from social media influencers discourage the purchase decision of the consumers.

Social cognitive theory touches on the negative influence of SMI's on the food purchase behavior of the consumers and how it can turn into a consumer's regret (Shao and Shao, 2011). The negative reviews of the influencers negatively impact the consumer's satisfaction levels of the product/service in question and increase the chances of their brand switching intentions (Bui et al., 2011). Clark argues that it's very unfair how consumers get swayed by the negative reviews of the food bloggers without giving a fair chance to that product/service or the brand themselves (Clark et al. 2001).

Hypothesis 9 (Utilitarian Motivation):

H9: Utilitarian motivations impact the repeat purchase intentions of the consumers.

Utilitarian motivations are associated with the perceived usefulness, relevance of the product/service to the associated influencer, and the informativeness factor of the content. Previous literature suggests that the consumers establish the continuance intention after perceiving satisfaction from the use of the product/service. Hence, the satisfaction received from utilitarian motivations influences the consumer's attitude and creates a re-purchase intention (Jain et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 10 (Social Media Platform):

H10: Features of the Social Media Platform positively affect the influence of food bloggers on the consumers.

Scholars proposed that the service quality of the social media platform and the user-friendliness offers much more significantly psychological positive outcomes on the influencer-consumer parasocial relationships. The platform that tends to provide a much more intimate experience can harness the emotional attachments and thus helps in the formation of a much more stable influencer-consumer parasocial relationship. The theory of social identity affirms that influencers who exhibit pride and loyalty over a particular social media platform have a positive influence on their associated audience. The qualities of the social media channel reflect the professionalism, convenience, and familiarity factor onto the audience and influencers almost become advocates of the social media channels and thereby having parasocial interactions with them. These parasocial interactions lead to influencing the consumers with their choice of products/services (Gallagher et al., 2017).

Hypothesis 11 (Paid Promotions):

H11: Paid promotions by the brands impact negatively on the consumer's purchase intentions.

Marwick defined the SMIs as miniaturized scale celebrities, the term he uses for people who have received fame from the internet. Endorsement of products/services using these celebrities is a showcasing strategy that has been running successfully for many years now. Since food advertising on Instagram is still a controversial issue wherein consumers demand disclosure of paid promotions, the author investigated how consumers truly perceive this disclosure of paid sponsorships and are willing to purchase the endorsed products/services (Marwick, 2011).

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The problem behind this research was to assess the impact of SMIs on the purchase intention and buying behavior of the Indian millennials. Thus, this research is of utmost importance from a marketer, consumer, and brand's perspective to examine the impact of parasocial relationships on social media and how they influence the food consumption behavior within the youth. India has a rich heritage of varying cuisines and diverse population and has seen exponential growth in its e-commerce industry and the growing obesity trends in India have surely brought the food consumption behavior of Millennials under scrutiny. The food industry in India is heavily relying on paid sponsorships through SMIs over the past few years and catering to both unhealthy and healthy food audiences. Although, significant research has been already done on examining the influence of social media on children's dietary behaviors and the parasocial relationships formed between fashion bloggers and consumers. Hence, this research aims at identifying the gaps in the previous literature and putting forth a compelling conceptual framework to analyze the determinants of these influencer-consumer para social relationships and how much impact do they have on consumer's food purchase intentions. Given the current Indian food system's adverse effects on the environment and one's health, encouraging the Millennials to adopt a healthy lifestyle holds great significance. The study also provides marketers with a good learning opportunity to identify the key parameters which help them strike a chord with the audiences.

4.2 Research Design

Cross-sectional research was conducted using an online survey with a sample size of 543 Indian millennials aged between 23 to 40 where the majority used social media daily. Multivariate regression model theories were used to examine the associations of the consumer with the SMI, trending food brand awareness, and the impact of socio-demographic attributes of the influencer on the consumer's purchase intentions.

The survey was administered using QuestionPro online software and was distributed to the respondents via social media channels such as Instagram and WhatsApp. Participants could

answer only in English. Before data collection, a cognitive test was carried out by the researcher with a convenient sample of 5 millennials (aged from 23-40) to ensure the understanding of all the questions and an expected completion time to be an average of 4 minutes. No changes were required after the testing. This is depicted in the flowchart shown in Figure 8

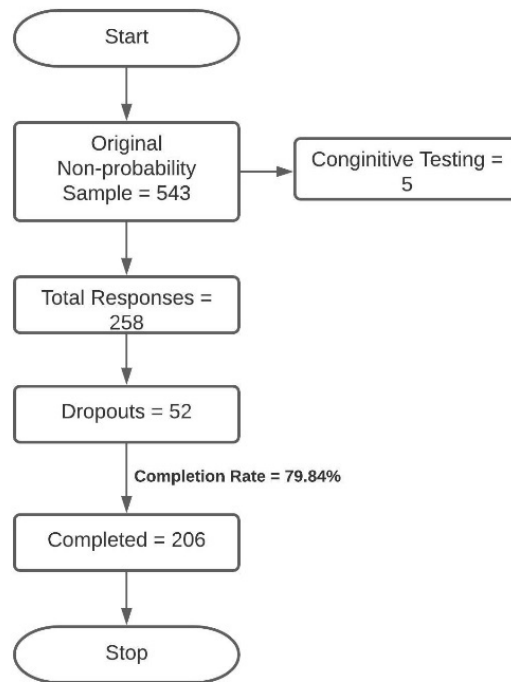


Figure 8: Data Collection Flow Diagram

4.3 Sampling and Population

Of the original non-probability (convenient) sample of 543 participants, 79.84% completed the survey with 52 people who dropped out or did not complete the survey, and 26 faced validation errors due to non-submission of mandatory questions. The final data set included 206 respondents with a sample of 40.69% of females and 59.31% of males, as shown in Figure 9.

| Characteristic | Items | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 121 | 59.31 |
| | Female | 83 | 40.69 |
| Age | Under 25 | 59 | 28.92 |
| | 25 to 30 | 122 | 59.8 |
| | 30 to 35 | 17 | 8.33 |
| | 35 to 40 | 6 | 2.94 |

Figure 9: Social Demographics of the Sample (QuestionPro, 2021)

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Before taking the survey, consent was taken from the respondents which mentioned the following points:

1. It is the researcher's responsibility to adhere to ethical guidelines in their dealings with participants and the collection and handling of data.
2. If they have any concerns about their participation, they understand that they may refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage.
3. Since participation in this survey is voluntary. They could opt to exit from the survey at any given point and their responses would not be recorded.
4. Since cognitive testing was carried out before the survey was rolled out to all the participants, hence there were no known expected discomforts or risks associated with participation.
5. It was ensured to them that all data from the study will be treated confidentially. The data from all participants will be compiled, analyzed, and submitted in a report to the School of Business at the National College of Ireland. No participant's data will be identified by name at any stage of the data analysis or in the final report. No individual response will be presented or discussed after the time frame as per the guidelines of the National College of Ireland.

6. All the responses are stored in the password-protected file and will be accessed only by the researcher and their supervisor.
7. It was ensured that the participants understand that they may withdraw from the study at any time and may withdraw the data at any point during their participation. They were intimated beforehand that once their participation has ended, they cannot withdraw their data as it will be fully anonymized.

4.5 Research Measures

The online questionnaire was segregated into two parts, the first one captured the demographic information of the respondents, and the remaining questionnaire dealt with questions concerning the consumer's perception of the SMIs and how it impacts their parasocial relationship and eventually influences the consumer's purchase behavior. It was a multiple-choice-question survey in which the majority of the questions having close-ended options as answers. Most of the questions were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'Always' to 'Never' or from 'Extremely' to 'Not at all' or 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' or 'Muh Higher' to 'Much Lower'. For a very few questions, we have used the dichotomous scale having just two options 'yes' or 'no'. To process the data we gathered from the questionnaire, we coded the options of answers such as 'yes' became 1 and 'no' became 2. Upon data collection, the relationship between different dependent and independent variables was tested using Annova (One-way analysis), Descriptive analysis.

Participants first reported their age and gender to be able to screen for eligibility. They then answered general questions which examined their social media engagement in a day and their choice of social media platforms. Additional questions were asked to assess consumer's parasocial bond with the influencers and their impact on the former's food consumption behavior. Socio-demographic attributes of the influencer were assessed at the end of the survey and the ultimate criteria for a repeat purchase intention. General questions which are asked at the beginning of the survey include age, gender, time spent on social media. Details are provided in Questionnaire appendix. These parameters will be used to analyze the hypothesis used by the author in the remaining questions and to examine the influence SMIs have on the food consumption behavior of their followers.

4.6 Data Analysis

The gathered input dataset is statistically analyzed in IBM SPSS software tool using various hypothesis testing techniques such as Independent Sample T-test, Mann Whitney Test, Chi-square, and Factorial ANOVA. Various parameters are chosen from the filtered dataset to determine the interaction and impact on the overall consumer purchase behavior. The detailed analysis and results of these tests are explained in Section 5.2 Statistical Analysis & Key Findings.

4.7 Integration of Conceptual Framework

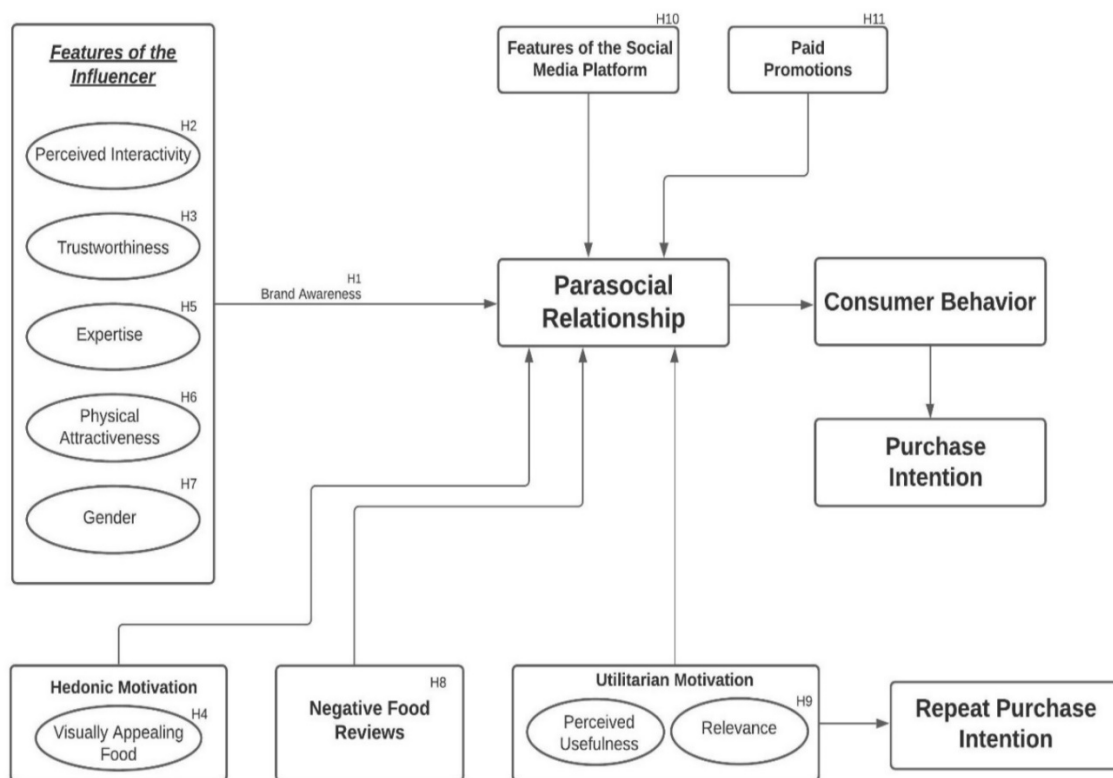


Figure 10: Integrated Conceptual Framework

In this research, the author has combined elements from various theories and conceptual models from previous literature on a similar topic. The following framework is used as a basis for which the hypothesis outlined above has been tested. The proposed conceptual framework, shown in Figure 10, uses elements from varied academic theories published in the past and

brings forth an amalgamation of the most relevant determinants that haven't been done before. This framework also takes into account the gaps the author has found in the existing literature such as the negative influence of parasocial relationships on the consumer's attitude and eventually their food consumption behavior. Repeat purchase intention is also one of the areas which have remained under-researched in the past and hence, the author analyses from the gathered primary data the various factors that impact a consumer's purchase intention and does an influencer-consumer para-social relationship have any role to play in it.

4.8 Quantitative Application of Proposed Conceptual Framework

The author has taken a sample size of 543 participants from varying backgrounds, economic status, education, and taste to collect a diverse data set. Out of which, 206 respondents completed the survey without any duplicate entries and this data was used to test the various hypothesis (Figure 11) proposed by the author in the conceptual framework. The usage of data against a set of variables helped the author to take a pragmatic approach towards capturing key insights from the questionnaire. The quantitative technique of rolling out a survey has been adopted by several previous studies which are descriptive and thus, make it easier for the author to draw economical conclusions based on a large amount of varied data and the constraints of time (Saunders et.al 2009).

| Hypothesis # | Research Focus | Theories Used | References |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| H1 | Brand Awareness | Social Cognitive Theory | Sharifi & Esfidani, 2013; Bandura, 2000; Alejandro et al., 2011; |
| H2 | Perceived Interactivity | Dual Process Theory | Yuan, 2020; Chung and Cho, 2017; Lagomarsino et al., 2018; Motro et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2019; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; |
| H3 | Trustworthiness | Dual Process Theory, Social Cogni | 2000; Yuan, 2020; Chung and Cho, 2017; Lagomarsino et al., 2018; Motro et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2019; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Sharifi & Esfidani, 2013; Bandura, |
| H4 | Visually Appealing Food | PSI Theory, | Thorson & Rodgers, 2006; Parboteeah et al., 2009; Labrecque, 2014; Ballantine & Martin, 2005; Xiang et al, 2016; You et al., 2020 |
| H5 | Expertise | Dual Process Theory, PSI Theory | Yuan, 2020; Chung and Cho, 2017; Lagomarsino et al., 2018; Motro et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2019; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; Thorson & Rodgers, 2006; Parboteeah et al., 2009; Labrecque, 2014; Ballantine & Martin, 2005; Xiang et al, 2016; You et al., 2020 |
| H6 | Physical Attractiveness | Dual Process Theory, Social Learn | Yuan, 2020; Chung and Cho, 2017; Lagomarsino et al., 2018; Motro et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2019; Evans & Stanovich, 2013; |
| H7 | Gender | Social Learning Theory, Dual Proc | Lim et al., 2017; Flint et al., 2011; |
| H8 | Negative Food Reviews | Social Cognitive Theory | Bui et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2011; Sharifi & Esfidani, 2013; Bandura, 2000; Alejandro et al., 2011; |
| H9 | Perceived Usefulness | PSI Theory, TPB Theory, Social Co | 2019; Thorson & Rodgers, 2006; Parboteeah et al., 2009; Labrecque, 2014; Ballantine & Martin, 2005; Xiang et al, 2016; You et al., 2020; Ajzen, 1991; Popovic et al., |
| H10 | Features of Social Media Platform | Dual Process Theory | Yuan, 2020; Liang et al., 2019; Chung & Cho, 2017; Lagomarsino et al., 2018; |
| H11 | Paid Promotions | Social Learning Theory | Till & Busler, 2000; Bandura, 2000; Palmatier et al., 2007; |

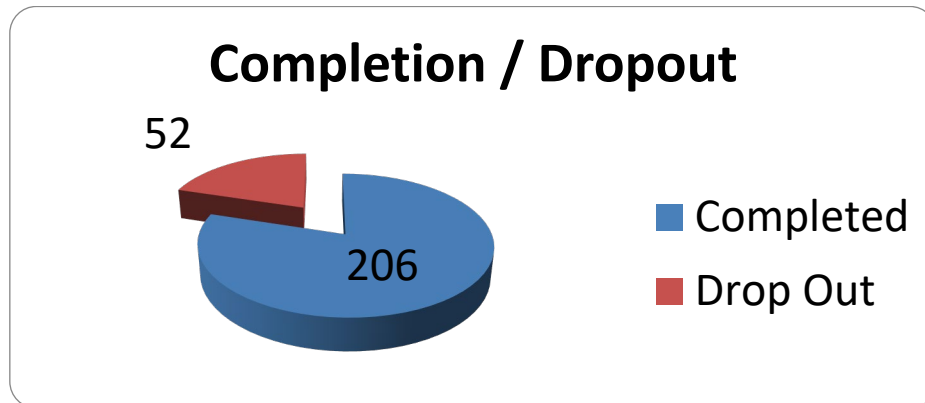
Figure 11: Measurement Items

4.9 Limitations

Even though at the start of the research, the author had planned of using both Qualitative and Quantitative methods to assess and measure the impact of influencer-consumer parasocial relationships and their impact on consumer purchase behavior for a broader perspective. But due to the constraint of time allocated to this research and the difficulty of reaching out to people in these tough times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the author deemed carrying out only a cross-sectional quantitative methodology as appropriate and effective. Although a sample of 206 offers a 99% confidence level with a 6.83% confidence interval given the Indian youth population accounts for 426 million, a larger sample size could have been used for studies with a larger timespan to garner a much realistic analysis of the data that reflects a huge amount of the original population size. Since the author has proposed an integrated conceptual framework for this research, combining 5 different theories, hence the questions for the questionnaire have been selected from multiple academic sources, and thus, the questionnaire hasn't been validated entirely as a whole despite using all the varied measurements/hypothesis from multiple peer-reviewed journals.

Chapter 5 Findings and Results

5.1 Empirical Evidence



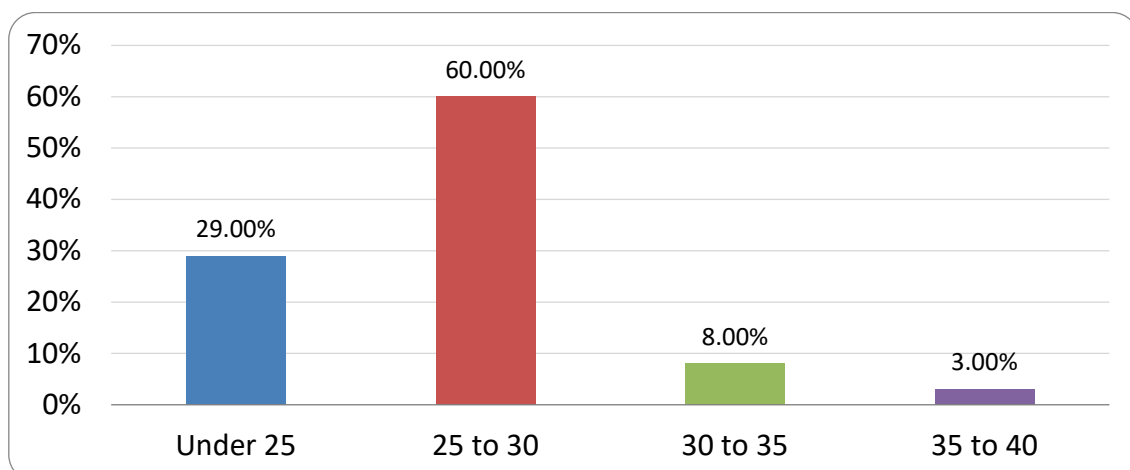
| Viewed | Started | Completed | Completion Rate | Drop Outs (After Starting) | Average Time to Complete Survey |
|--------|---------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 543 | 258 | 206 | 79.84% | 52 | 4 minutes |

Figure 12: Input Samples Collected (QuestionPro, 2021)

This section of the research is the most significant and crucial aspect of this study as it provides key insights into the data collected as part of a survey (Figure 12).

Demographic Questions

Q1. What is your age?



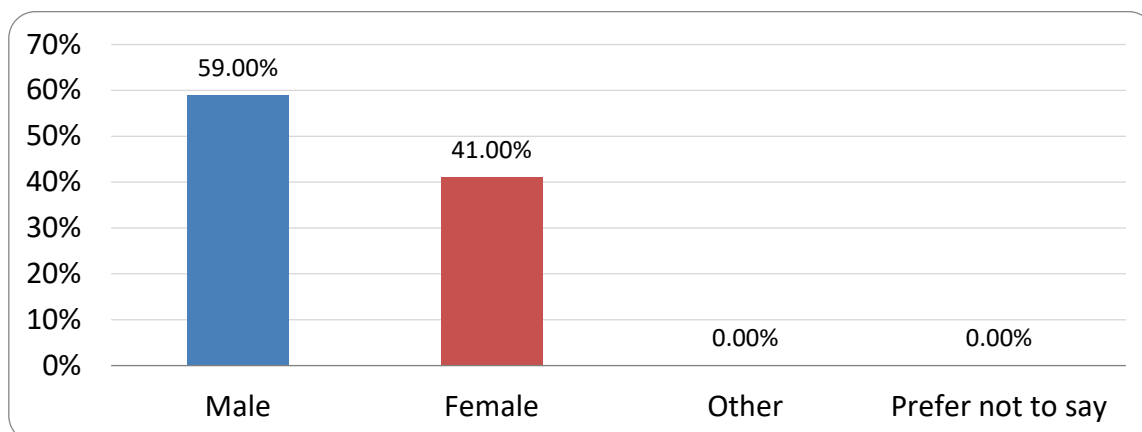
| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|----------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Under 25 | 59 | 28.92% |
| 2. | 25 to 30 | 122 | 59.80% |
| 3. | 30 to 35 | 17 | 8.33% |
| 4. | 35 to 40 | 6 | 2.94% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 1.853 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [1.759 - 1.947] | Standard Deviation : 0.686 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.048 | |

Figure 13: Input Dataset (Age)

*For sake of simplicity, the percentages shown in the bar graphs have been rounded off to the nearest integer value. The exact percentages are reflected in the subsequent tables.

The above bar diagram (Figure 13) represents the group of respondents who participated in the survey segregating them into various categories of millennial age in India. The graph illustrates that most of the respondents i.e., 59.80% are falling in the age group 25 to 30 which is the peak millennial age in India. This indicates that this age group is more prone to using social media channels and is more welcoming in taking surveys. A recent survey suggests that almost one in four millennials refuse to step on the scale and are not bothered if they get an unhealthy obsession with their weight (Independent, 2019). Hence this research holds much significance in curbing adiposity among Indian millennials. The least involved age group is that of 35 to 40 with 2.94% and depicts their lack of interest in taking such surveys. The interest usually corresponds to the relevance of the topic and this age group of 35 to 40 is on the outskirts of the millennials' range and therefore probably do not find this research study relevant or of use to them in any way.

Q2. What is your gender?



| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|-------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Male | 121 | 59.31% |
| 2. | Female | 83 | 40.69% |
| 3. | Other | 0 | 0.00% |
| 4. | Prefer not to say | 0 | 0.00% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 1.407 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [1.339 - 1.474] | Standard Deviation : 0.492 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.034 | |

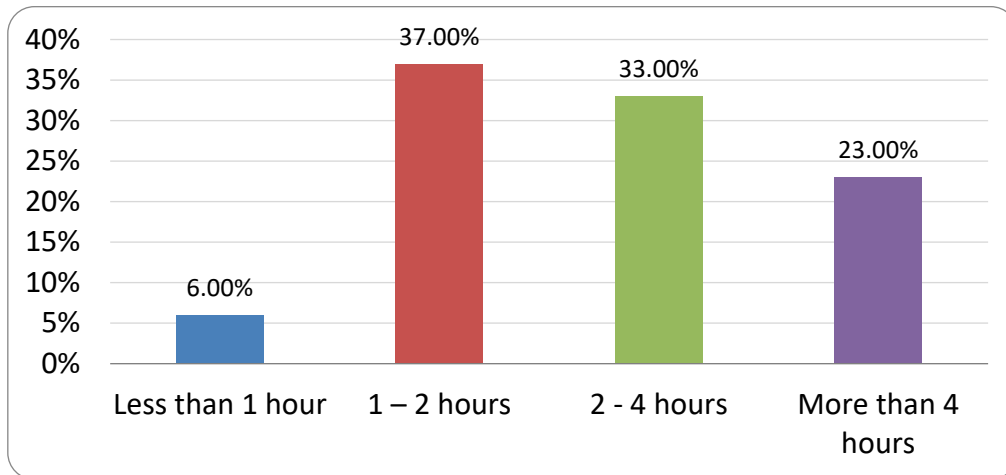
Figure 14: Input Dataset (Gender)

The above bar diagram (Figure 14) represents the group of respondents as per the gender demographics. It is illustrated in the graph that 59.31% of the participants identify as Male and 40.69% of participants identify as men. The data suggest that the male respondents were more than the females and were showed more interest in filling out the survey. As per the law of attraction in physics, opposites attract each other, and the same theory applies to males and females. Jain points out that the content posted by a female influencer is far more likely to receive greater response and influence by the males and vice-versa (Jain et al., 2019). Hence, it shows that given the gender of the author is female, more males showed interest in completing the survey as compared to the females. Interestingly, statistics reveal that out of the total Instagram users, males account for 51% of them (Forbes, 2019). And given that most of the respondents have chosen Instagram as their most influential social media platform, it all adds up.

To set the tone for the questionnaire, some general questions were asked to the respondent such as their daily usage of social media among others to let the respondent ease into the agenda behind the survey with a comprehensive approach. These general questions also reflect the respondent's thinking pattern, hence provide the author with a good understanding of their thought process.

General Questions:

Q3. How many hours do you spend on social media daily?

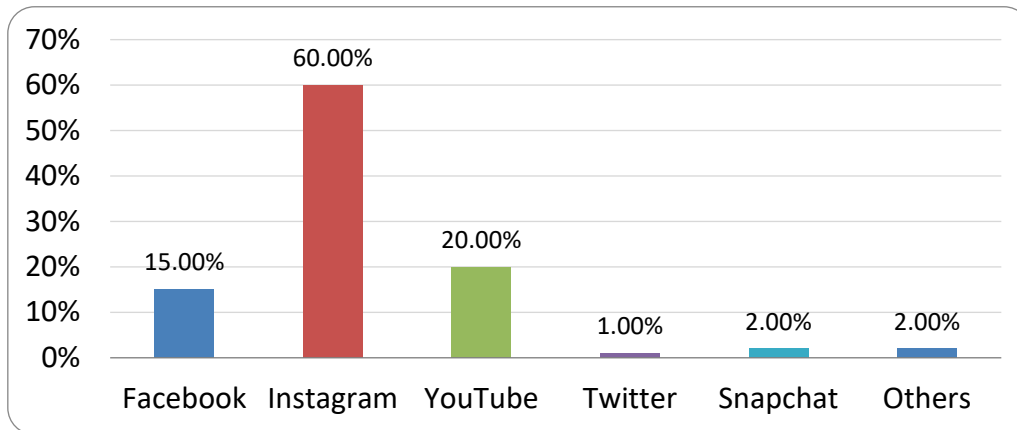


| | Answer | Count | Percent | |
|--------------|-------------------|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Less than 1 hour | 13 | 6.37% | |
| 2. | 1 - 2 hours | 76 | 37.25% | |
| 3. | 2 - 4 hours | 68 | 33.33% | |
| 4. | More than 4 hours | 47 | 23.04% | |
| | Total | 204 | 100% | |
| Mean : 2.730 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.608 - 2.852] | Standard Deviation : 0.888 | Standard Error : 0.062 |

Figure 15: Input Dataset (Time Spent on Social Media)

The above bar diagram (Figure 15) asserts the author's approach that social media is becoming an integral part of millennial's lives. The results depict that the majority of the millennials fall into the 1-2 hours category with 37.25% and the 2-4 hour category is not far behind with 33.33% of the respondents. This indicates that the count for highly active users is significantly more than the count for the least active people on social media. It can be implied that most of the respondents who fall in the 25-30 age group are active users of social media and thus are highly likely the influence certain SMIs who may or may not be impacting their purchase behavior.

Q4. Which social media channel has the biggest influence on you?

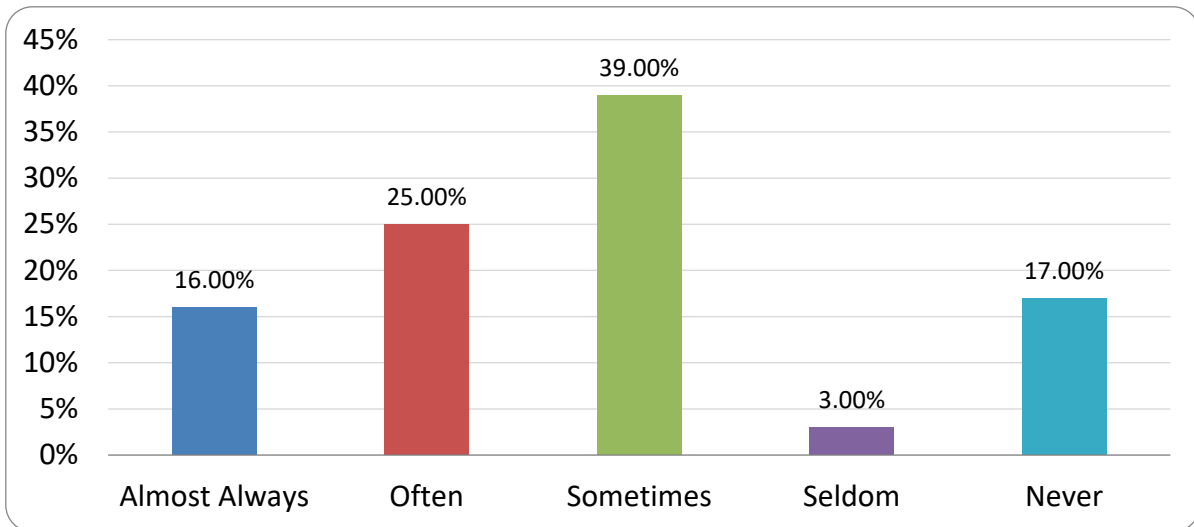


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Facebook | 30 | 14.71% |
| 2. | Instagram | 123 | 60.29% |
| 3. | YouTube | 40 | 19.61% |
| 4. | Twitter | 2 | 0.98% |
| 5. | Snapchat | 4 | 1.96% |
| 6. | Others | 5 | 2.45% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 2.225 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.095 - 2.356] | Standard Deviation : 0.951 |
| | | | Standard Error : 0.067 |

Figure 16: Input Dataset (Social Media Platform)

The above data (Figure 16) shows Instagram has the biggest influence on the respondents with 60.29% and Twitter has the least influence on the respondents with 0.98%. The selection of the social media platforms has been made looking at the popularity of these platforms in India and thus the author has provided a diverse set of options for the respondent to choose from. It can thus be deduced that Instagram is the most popular social media platform among the Indian millennials. Twitter on the other hand is not the right platform for Food Bloggers to make an impact as Visually appealing pictures and videos keep the audience engaged with the influencer much more than just regular text.

Q5. How often do social media influencers increase new food brands' awareness in your life?

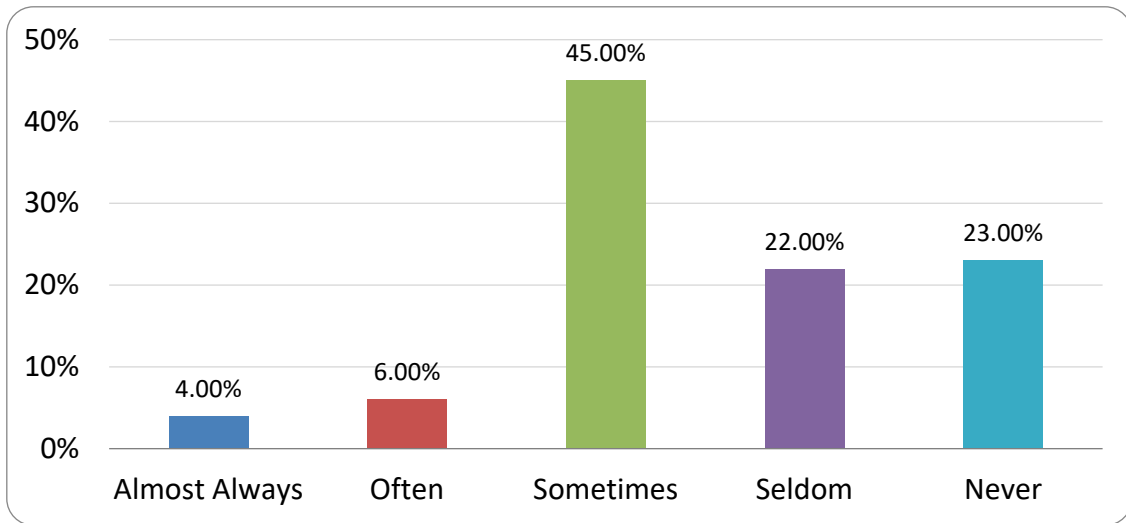


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|---------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Almost Always | 8 | 15.69% |
| 2. | Often | 32 | 25.00% |
| 3. | Sometimes | 51 | 38.73% |
| 4. | Seldom | 79 | 3.91% |
| 5. | Never | 34 | 16.67% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 3.485 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [3.339 - 3.632] | Standard Deviation : 1.067 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.075 | |

Figure 17: Input Dataset (Brand Awareness)

The above data (Figure 17) depicts that most of the respondents voted as ‘Sometimes’ with 38.73% and the least count by driven by ‘Seldom’ with 3.91%. Since, most of the respondents have responded under the ‘Almost always’, ‘Often’ and ‘Sometimes’ category, it can be concluded that SMIs do increase the brand's awareness in their lives. The data is further asserted by the statistics from Forbes stating that 70% of the users turn to Instagram to look up a brand, while 60% of the users turn to Instagram to learn more about new products/services (Forbes, 2019).

Q6. How often do food bloggers influence your brand choice or E-shopping behavior?

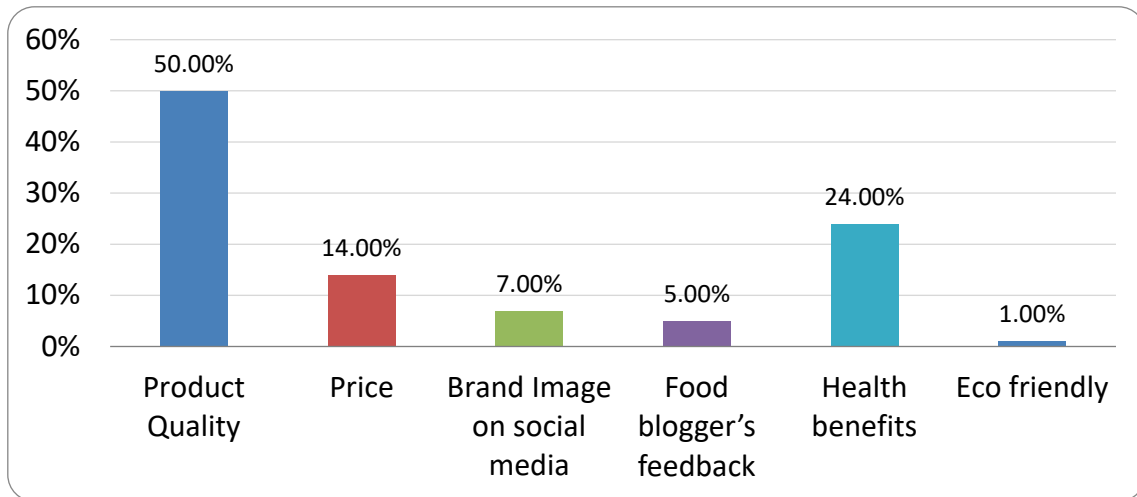


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|---------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Almost Always | 7 | 3.43% |
| 2. | Often | 13 | 6.37% |
| 3. | Sometimes | 45 | 45.10% |
| 4. | Seldom | 92 | 22.06% |
| 5. | Never | 47 | 23.04% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 3.779 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [3.644 - 3.915] | Standard Deviation : 0.985 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.069 | |

Figure 18: Input Dataset (E-shopping Behavior)

This question holds a lot of importance in this research as it encapsulates the foundation of the study as to whether the SMIs impact consumer’s brand choice and E-shopping behavior. The data (Figure 18) illustrates that most of the respondents voted as ‘Sometimes’ with 45.10% and the least count with 3.43% was allocated to ‘Almost always’. It can be inferred from the gathered data, that food bloggers do influence the consumer’s brand choice or their E-shopping behavior. But it also implies that the consumers have a discerning eye and are wise enough to judge and perceive whether the product/brand is of any use to them without blindly falling for any traps.

Q7. Which is the most important factor for you when making a purchase decision regarding food products?



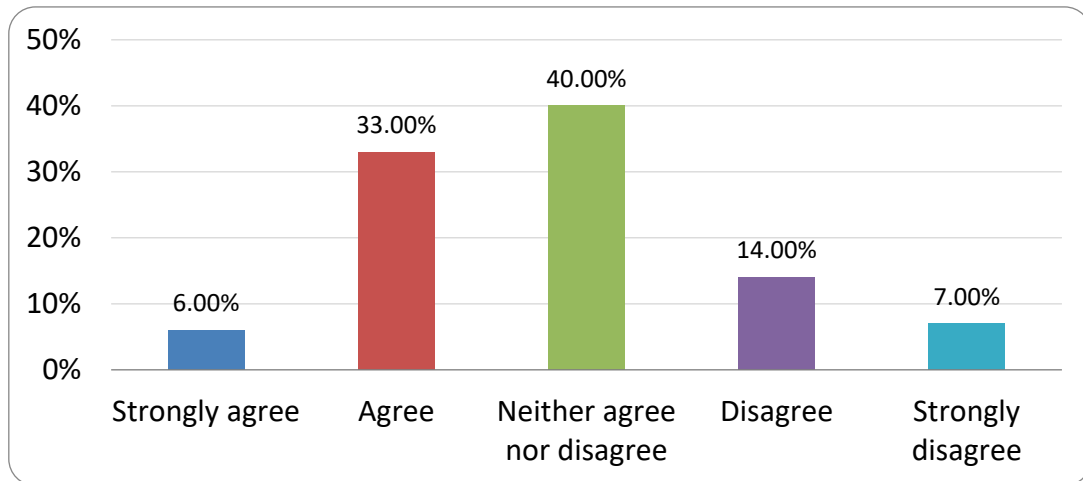
| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|-----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Product Quality | 101 | 49.51% |
| 2. | Price | 29 | 14.22% |
| 3. | Brand Image on social media | 14 | 6.86% |
| 4. | Food blogger's feedback | 10 | 4.90% |
| 5. | Health benefits | 48 | 23.53% |
| 6. | Eco friendly | 2 | 0.98% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 2.417 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.184 - 2.649] | Standard Deviation : 1.696 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.119 | |

Figure 19: Input Dataset (Main Factor during Purchase)

This question holds a lot of importance in studies like this which aim to measure the influence of social media on the consumer's attitude and purchase intentions. It is therefore vital for the author to understand what factor precedes everything for the consumers while making a purchase decision regarding food products. The above bar diagram (Figure 19) illustrates that most of the respondents (49.51%) chose 'Product quality as the most important factor for them, while the least voted option (0.98%) turned out to be 'Eco-friendly' nature of the product. This implies that consumers can get influenced by the SMIs but in the end, they base their purchase decision upon the product quality. Interestingly, the food blogger's feedback received 4.90% which is significantly low as compared to the parameter of Health benefits that got 23.53% response from the participants. Hence, it can be inferred that consumers base their final

purchase decision on the quality of the product than merely buying impulsively based on the influencer’s feedback.

Q8. As a millennial, Food Trends on social media matter to me.



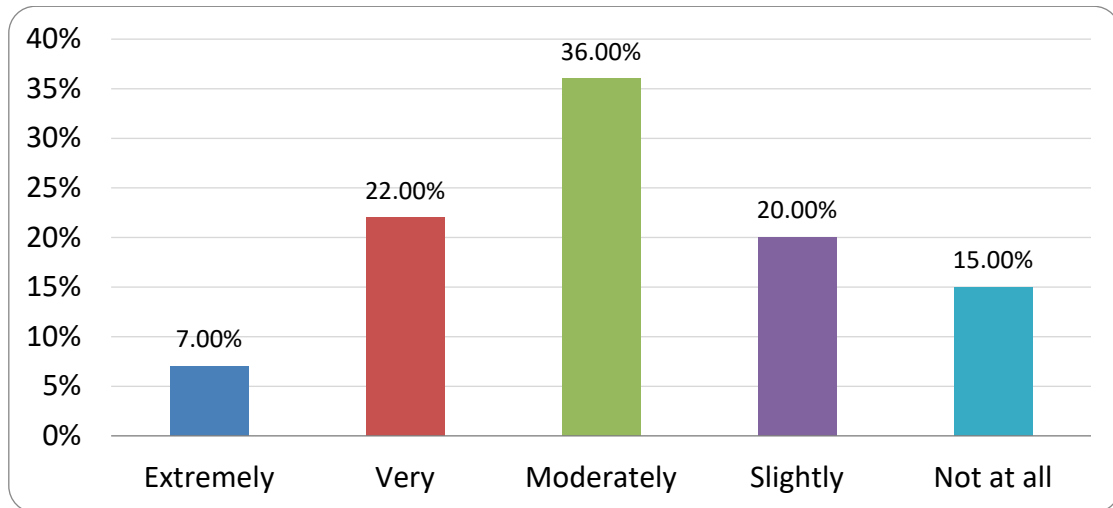
| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Strongly agree | 12 | 5.88% |
| 2. | Agree | 67 | 32.84% |
| 3. | Neither agree nor disagree | 82 | 40.20% |
| 4. | Disagree | 29 | 14.22% |
| 5. | Strongly disagree | 14 | 6.86% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 2.833 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.699 - 2.968] | Standard Deviation : 0.978 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.069 | |

Figure 20: Input Dataset (Food Trends)

The above bar diagram (Figure 20) illustrates that most of the respondents (40%) said they neither agree nor disagree with the statement which is a substantive response, and more investigation can be done upon this. It can either imply that the respondents are neutral and are not much aware of the trends as such on social media or they fall somewhere in the middle of agreeing and disagreeing with the statement. Thus, it can be deduced that most of the respondents do not have a strong opinion on this matter and hence can't find a better answer that suits their choice. It is safe to say that the percentage of people who agree to the statement is higher than the percentage who disagree, hence, we can infer that Food Trends on social

media do matter to consumers but there is the scope of further investigation with alternative methods of research.

Q11. How likely are you to follow a food blogger if they are highly active and interact frequently with their followers on social media?

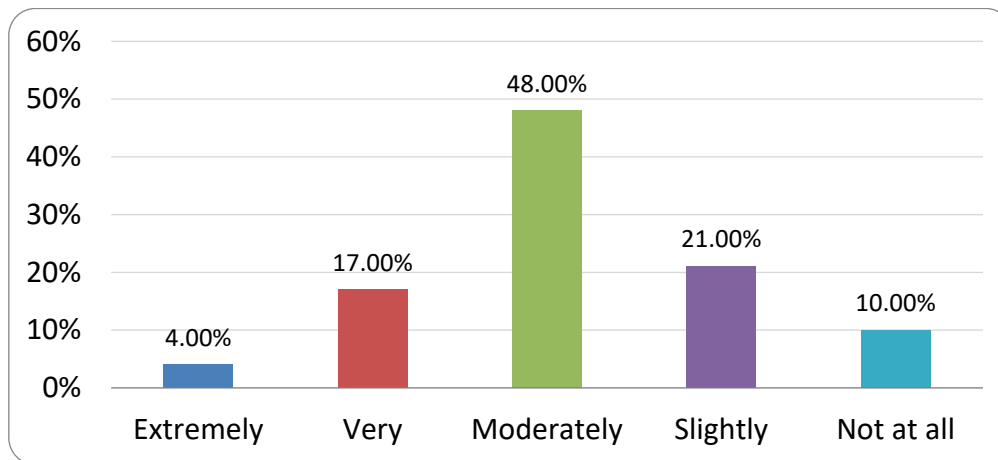


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Extremely | 15 | 7.35% |
| 2. | Very | 45 | 22.06% |
| 3. | Moderately | 74 | 36.27% |
| 4. | Slightly | 40 | 19.61% |
| 5. | Not at all | 30 | 14.71% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 3.123 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.967 - 3.278] | Standard Deviation : 1.136 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.080 | |

Figure 21: Input Dataset (Perceived Interactivity)

The above bar diagram (Figure 21) depicts that most of the respondents (36.27%) said that they would ‘moderately’ follow a food blogger based on the perceived interactivity. Hence, it can be deduced that consumers are likely to follow a food blogger on their perceived interactivity, but the frequency may vary as the respondents have not reacted strongly on this question. Therefore, alternate methods should be adopted to comprehend this further and confirm the results.

Q12. How trustworthy are Food Bloggers?

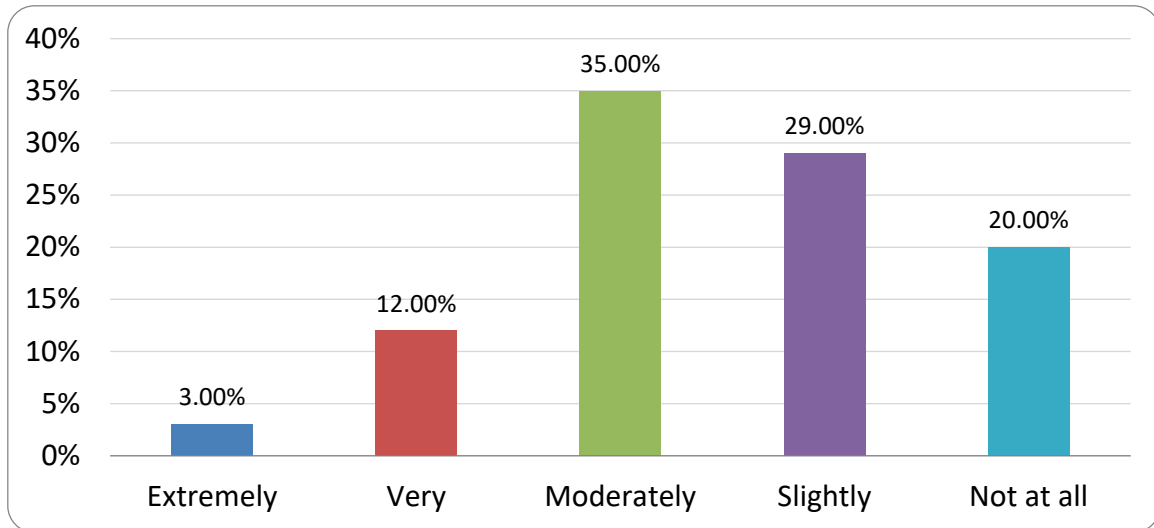


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Extremely | 8 | 3.92% |
| 2. | Very | 34 | 16.67% |
| 3. | Moderately | 98 | 48.04% |
| 4. | Slightly | 43 | 21.08% |
| 5. | Not at all | 21 | 10.29% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 3.172 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [3.040 - 3.303] | Standard Deviation : 0.960 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.067 | |

Figure 22: Input Dataset (Trustworthiness)

The above bar diagram (Figure 22) illustrates that most of the respondents (48.04%) said they find food bloggers moderately trustworthy, and the least number of respondents (3.92%) said they find food bloggers extremely trustworthy. It can be implied that there is an impact of influencer credibility on the consumers which is likely to induce trust between the consumer and the influencer and most of the respondents do find food bloggers as trustworthy.

Q13. How likely are you to experiment food products being endorsed under paid sponsorships by social media influencers?

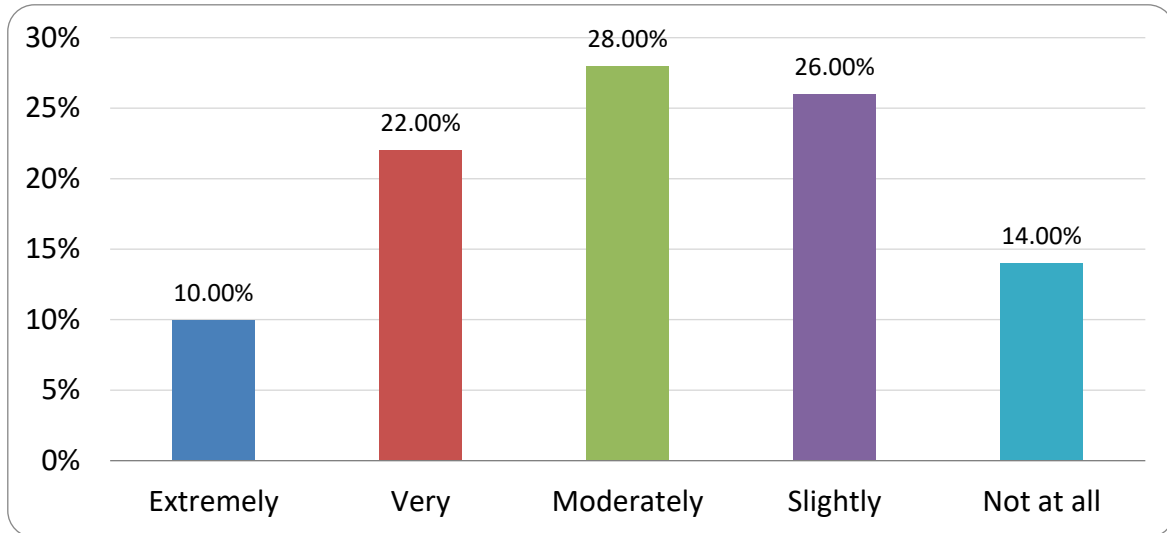


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Extremely | 7 | 3.43% |
| 2. | Very | 24 | 11.76% |
| 3. | Moderately | 72 | 35.29% |
| 4. | Slightly | 60 | 29.41% |
| 5. | Not at all | 41 | 20.10% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 3.510 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [3.366 - 3.654] | Standard Deviation : 1.048 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.073 | |

Figure 23: Input Dataset (Paid Promotions)

The demand for consumers’ paid sponsorship disclosure has been a controversy for some years now. Endorsing products via brand ambassadors through paid sponsorships is an excellent marketing strategy (McCormick, 2016). Therefore, the author needs to see how consumers perceive these paid sponsorships. The above bar diagram (Figure 23) depicts that most of the respondents (35.29%) said they would moderately experiment with food products under paid promotions and the least number of respondents (3.43%) said they would extremely do the same. It can be thus, inferred that the consumers are likely to experiment food products endorsed under paid sponsorships.

Q14. How much important is the expertise of the food blogger while making a purchase decision?

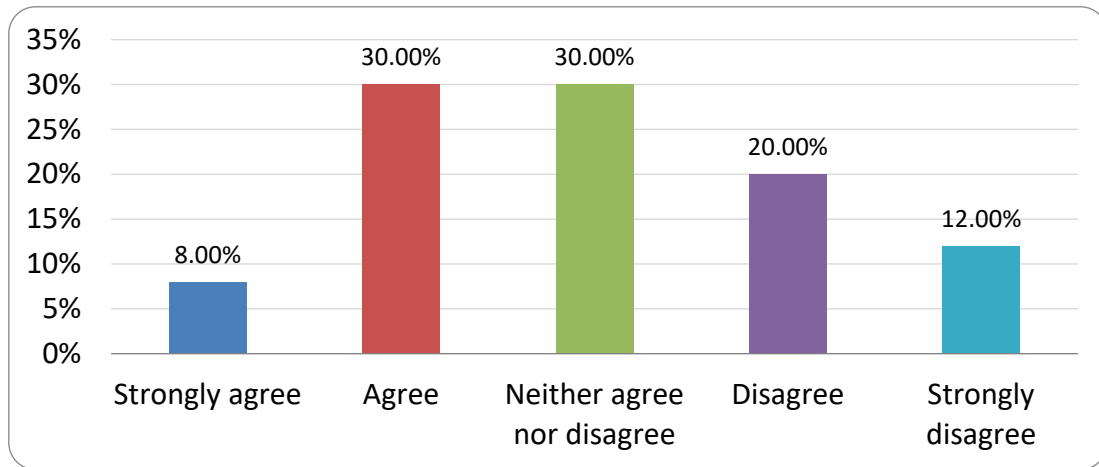


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Extremely | 20 | 9.80% |
| 2. | Very | 45 | 22.06% |
| 3. | Moderately | 57 | 27.94% |
| 4. | Slightly | 53 | 25.98% |
| 5. | Not at all | 29 | 14.22% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 3.127 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.963 - 3.292] | Standard Deviation : 1.197 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.084 | |

Figure 24: Input Dataset (Expertise)

Yuan has suggested in their study that an influencer’s domain expertise has a positive outcome on the consumer’s attitude (Yuan et al., 2016). Hence, the author needs to understand how much expertise contributes to the parasocial relation and influences the consumer’s purchase behavior. The above bar diagram (Figure 24) shows for most of the respondents (28%), influencer’s expertise is moderately important while making a purchase decision. It is thus, safe to say that it is somewhat important for the consumers that the influencer is an expert in their domain so they can trust their product reviews and make a purchase based on the influencer’s feedback.

Q15. Do you agree popularity of a food blogger depends upon their physical attractiveness?

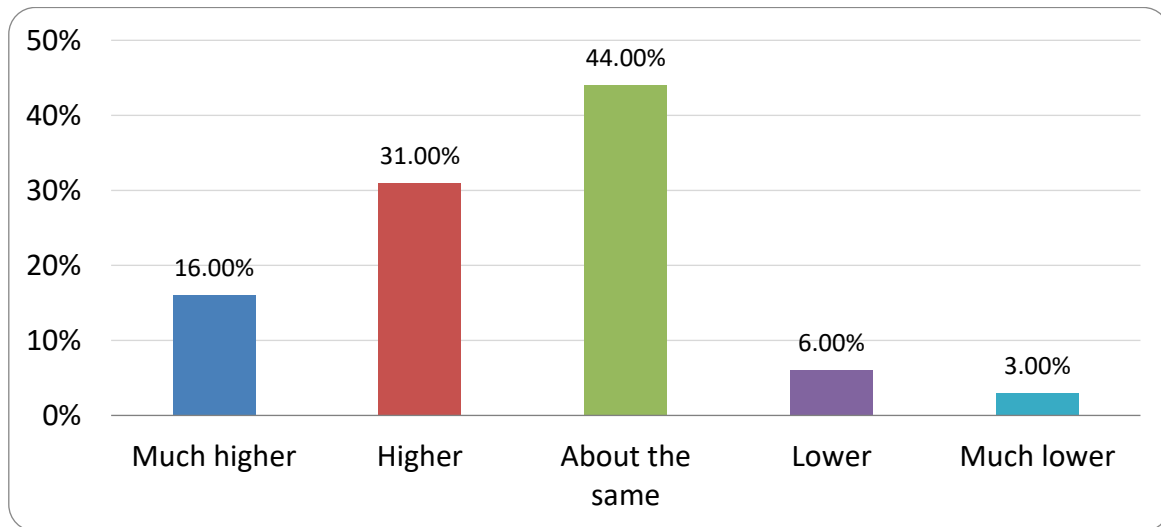


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Strongly agree | 16 | 7.84% |
| 2. | Agree | 61 | 29.90% |
| 3. | Neither agree nor disagree | 62 | 30.39% |
| 4. | Disagree | 40 | 19.61% |
| 5. | Strongly disagree | 25 | 12.25% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 2.985 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.829 - 3.142] | Standard Deviation : 1.142 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.080 | |

Figure 25: Input Dataset (Physical Attractiveness)

It is of great significance for the author to understand if physical attractiveness contributes to an influencer’s popularity on social media and has positive effects on consumer’s attitudes. Scholars suggest that physically attractive food bloggers can captivate the consumer’s attention and therefore increases influencer’s content views and are thus, able to form a strong connect with the audiences (Till and Busler, 2000). The data from the diagram in Figure 25 depicts that most of the respondents (30.39%) have said they agree with this statement. Hence, the results from this question confirm Till and Busler’s framework and it can be deduced that physical attractiveness is also a contributing factor to an influencer’s popularity.

Q16. How much engaging are female influencers than male influencers?

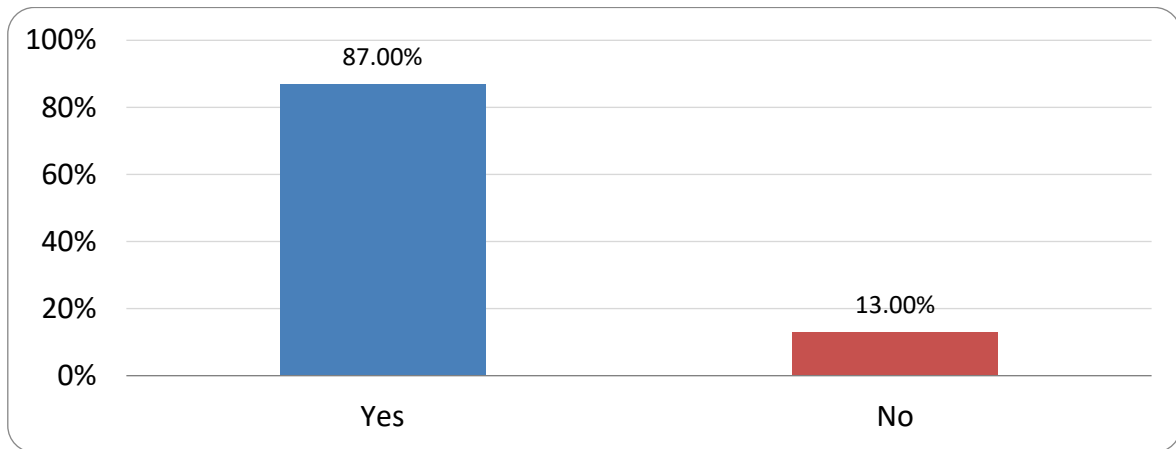


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|----------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Much higher | 32 | 15.69% |
| 2. | Higher | 63 | 30.88% |
| 3. | About the same | 90 | 44.12% |
| 4. | Lower | 13 | 6.37% |
| 5. | Much lower | 6 | 2.94% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 2.500 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.372 - 2.628] | Standard Deviation : 0.934 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.065 | |

Figure 26: Input Dataset (Gender of Influencer)

The above data (Figure 26) negates Jain’s ideology which believes that physics law of attraction applies to males and females and opposite genders attract to each other (Jain et al., 2019). Most of the respondents (44.12%) said they feel female influencers are just as engaging as male influencers. Hence, this hypothesis doesn’t hold true, and respondents believe gender of the influencer has no contribution to play in amount of social media engagement received from the consumers or eventually on the parasocial relationships.

Q18. Do you find visually appealing food content more influential?

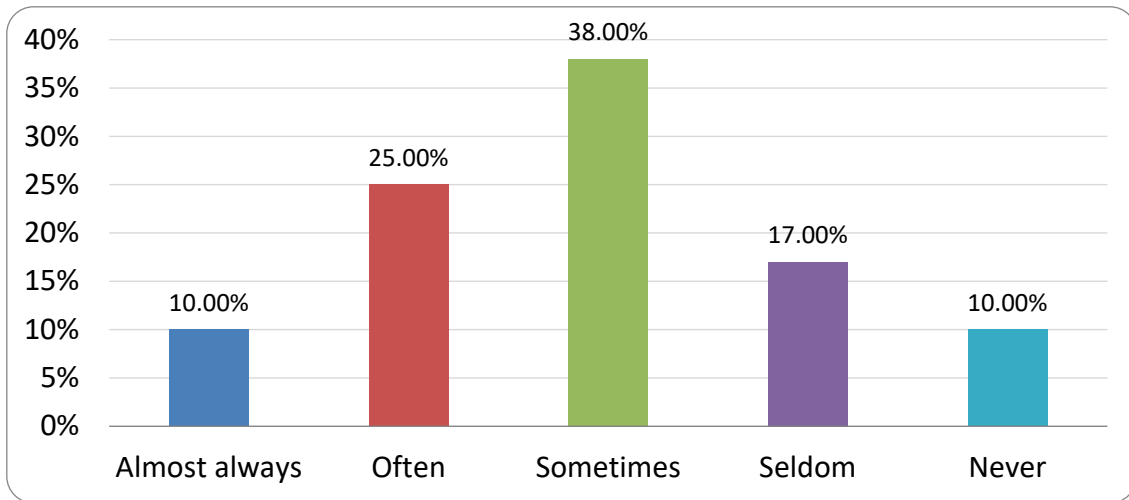


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|--------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Yes | 177 | 86.76% |
| 2. | No | 27 | 13.24% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 1.132 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [1.086 - 1.179] | Standard Deviation : 0.340 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.024 | |

Figure 27: Input Dataset (Visual Appeal)

This question lays the foundation of a parasocial interaction as visually appealing food acts as a stimulus to it. The data from the bar diagram in Figure 27 illustrates that most of the respondents (86.76%) find visually appealing food more influential. Hence the research findings correspond to Parboteeah’s ideology that the happiness and enjoyment that a consumer perceives through visually appealing food gathers more engagement on social media, hence establishing a strong connection with the influencer’s post and the person, thereby influencing the consumer’s impulse buying behavior owing to such hedonistic motivations (Parboteeah et al., 2009).

Q18. How often does Positive product reviews and comments from influencers encourage your purchase decision?

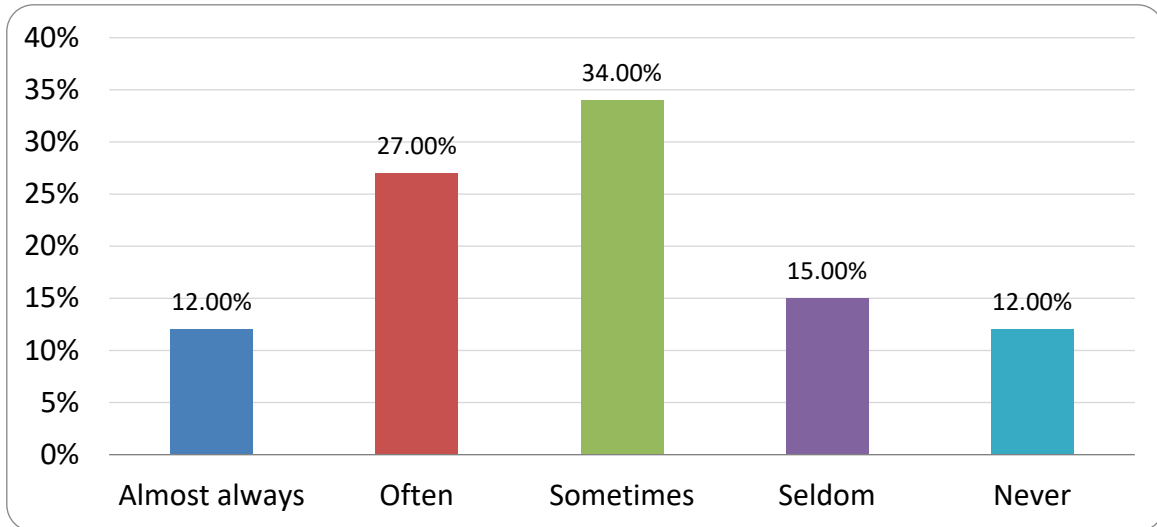


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|---------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Almost always | 20 | 9.80% |
| 2. | Often | 52 | 25.49% |
| 3. | Sometimes | 78 | 38.24% |
| 4. | Seldom | 34 | 16.67% |
| 5. | Never | 20 | 9.80% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 2.912 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.761 - 3.062] | Standard Deviation : 1.097 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.077 | |

Figure 28: Input Dataset (Positive Reviews)

The author needs to understand whether the influencer’s positive electronic word of mouth i.e., the positive reviews of products/services on social media encourage the consumer’s purchase decision. The above data depicts (Figure 28) that most of the respondents (38.24%) said ‘sometimes’ Hence, results reflect an inclination towards the positive encouragement from the positive feedback on social media.

Q19. How often does Negative product reviews and comments from influencers discourage your purchase decision?

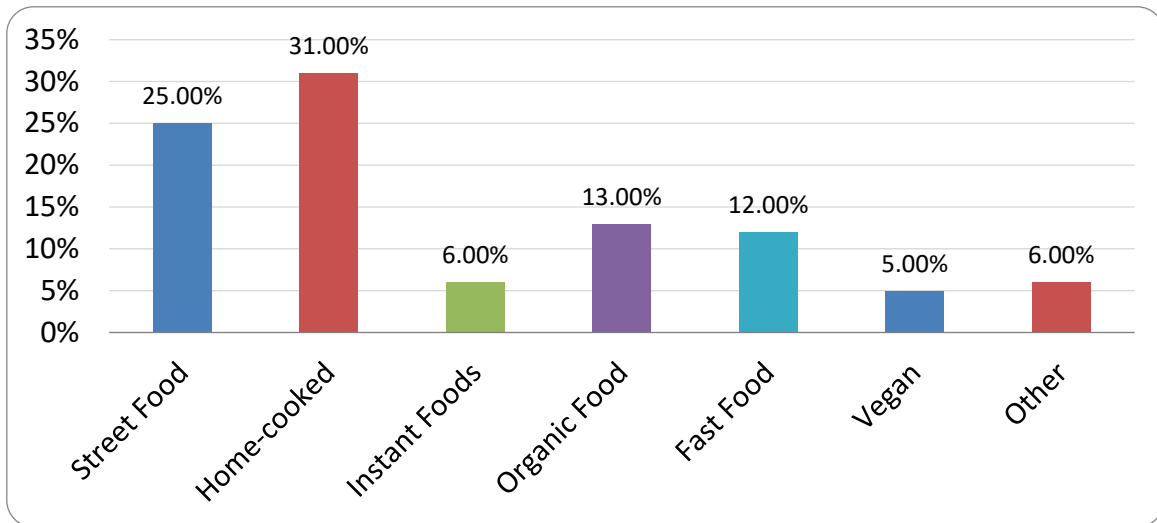


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|---------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Almost always | 24 | 11.76% |
| 2. | Often | 55 | 26.96% |
| 3. | Sometimes | 69 | 33.82% |
| 4. | Seldom | 31 | 15.20% |
| 5. | Never | 25 | 12.25% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 2.892 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.731 - 3.053] | Standard Deviation : 1.174 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.082 | |

Figure 29: Input Dataset (Negative Reviews)

This question addresses the gaps in the previous literature where the impact of negative product reviews has not been researched much, hence the findings from this question hold significant importance to this research to assess whether consumers get discouraged upon receiving negative feedback of the products/services on social media. The above data (Figure 29) reflects that most of the respondents (33.82%) said ‘Sometimes’. Hence, we can conclude that Negative reviews do influence the consumer’s purchase decision and discourage them from buying the product.

Q20. Which food choice have you adopted as a result of social media influence?

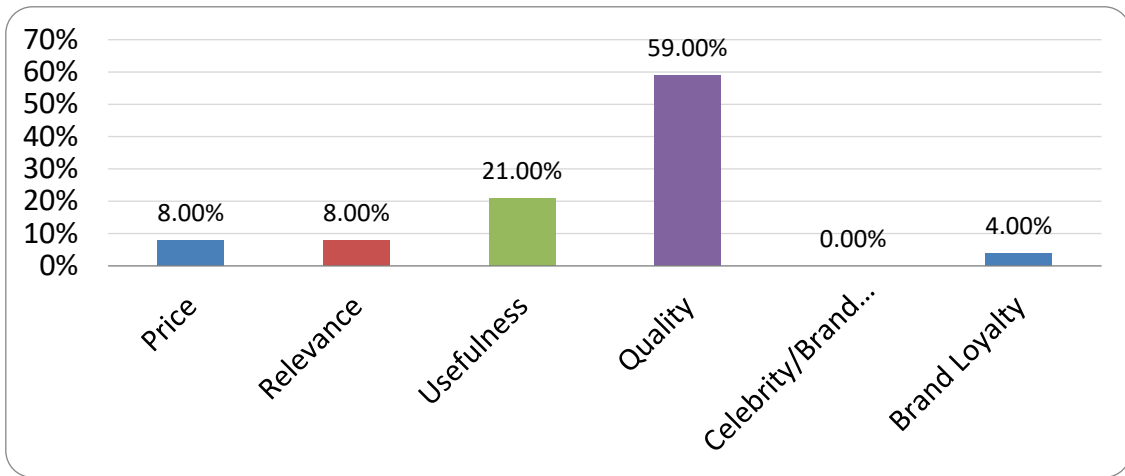


| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|---------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Street Food | 51 | 25.00% |
| 2. | Home-cooked | 64 | 31.37% |
| 3. | Instant Foods | 13 | 6.37% |
| 4. | Organic Food | 27 | 13.24% |
| 5. | Fast Food | 25 | 12.25% |
| 6. | Vegan | 11 | 5.39% |
| 7. | Other | 13 | 6.37% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 2.980 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [2.725 - 3.236] | Standard Deviation : 1.860 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.130 | |

Figure 30: Input Dataset (Food Choice')

The author seeks to understand the respondents thought process and attitude change from this question. The data collected from this question is of great importance to the food marketers and the influencers to see what the Indian millennials like going forward and thus, can revolve their future content in the same direction. The above data depicts (Figure 30) that most of the respondents (31.37%) have turned to Home-cooked food due to lockdown in the pandemic. And hence, using this data marketers can further focus on the needs of the most powerful consumers in the world (Financial Times, 2018).

Q21. What is the most important aspect that makes me purchase the product again?



| | Answer | Count | Percent |
|--------------|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 1. | Price | 16 | 7.84% |
| 2. | Relevance | 16 | 7.84% |
| 3. | Usefulness | 42 | 20.59% |
| 4. | Quality | 120 | 58.82% |
| 5. | Celebrity/Brand ambassador | 1 | 0.49% |
| 6. | Brand Loyalty | 9 | 4.41% |
| | Total | 204 | 100% |
| Mean : 3.495 | | Confidence Interval @ 95% : [3.347 - 3.643] | Standard Deviation : 1.076 |
| | | Standard Error : 0.075 | |

Figure 31: Input Dataset (Repeat Purchase Intention)

This is also one of the literature gaps which the author has addressed in this study. Many scholarly journals have been published around consumer’s purchase intentions, but the subject of repeat-purchase intention is still untapped. Hedonistic motivations can result in a one-time influence on the consumer’s impulse buying behavior, but the repeat purchase occurs only upon receiving perceived value from the product i.e., the utilitarian motivation based on knowledge and conscious buying decision. The above data illustrates (Figure 31) the underlined theory aptly where most of the respondents (58.82%) have voted for ‘Product quality’ while the least number of people (0.49%) have voted for ‘celebrity/brand ambassador’. Hence, it can be concluded that the parasocial relationships impact consumer’s purchase intention but have no role in their repeat purchase behavior.

5.2 Statistical Analysis & Key Findings

5.2.1 One-Sample T-Test

One of the simple statistics is that we measured 204 samples, and the average influence of 3.78 is observed amongst the brand choices of Indian millennials during the e-shopping (Figure 32). Here, we tend to look at the p-value or the significance value. So, a significance value for the 2-tailed test, shows that the probability in a sample of 204, we will get a sample which creates an influence on the consumer behavior is 0.000. This value is not equal to zero, but a very small one (Figure 33).

| One-Sample Statistics | | | | |
|------------------------------|-----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
| InfluenceOfSMI | 204 | 3.78 | .985 | .069 |

Figure 32: One-Sample Statistics

| One-Sample Test | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|---|-------|
| Test Value = 0 | | | | | | |
| | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| InfluenceOfSMI | 54.786 | 203 | .000 | 3.779 | 3.64 | 3.92 |

Figure 33: One-Sample T-Test

5.2.2 Independent Sample T-Test

In this type of hypothesis testing technique, we determine the statistical difference between the associated population mean values for two independent groups. Independent samples T-test is another variant of parametric tests. Here, the two independent parameters being evaluated are the gender of the consumers and the influence of food bloggers on their choice of brands when shopping online.

Problem Statement:

Is there a statistically significant difference between the influence of social media food bloggers on the purchase choices and the gender of the consumers?

In this scenario, we are conducting tests to determine if the brand choices of one gender are more impacted by SMIs compared to the other i.e., is there a statistically significant difference in the influence on the two groups based on gender.

Null Hypothesis (H₀):

It is assumed that brand choices of the two genders are independent of the social media food blogger's influence.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_A):

It states that the influence of SMI is dependent on the consumer's gender.

Significance Level (α): 5%

| Group Statistics | | | | | |
|------------------|--------|-----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
| InfluenceOfSMI | Male | 121 | 3.87 | .991 | .090 |
| | Female | 83 | 3.65 | .968 | .106 |

Figure 34: Group Statistics for Independent Samples T-Test

Result's Analysis:

From Figure 34, we observe that a total of 121 males and 83 females have recorded their response to our survey. Further, the average influence of SMIs on the male population of Indian millennials who participated in the survey is 3.87 whereas for females the average value is 3.65. This implies that from the sample data gathered, males are more influenced by food bloggers compared to females. It is evident from the table that there is a significant difference between the influence on males and the influence on females.

| | | Independent Samples Test | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|-------|
| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| InfluenceOfSMI | Equal variances assumed | .429 | .513 | 1.552 | 202 | .122 | .217 | .140 | -.059 | .493 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.559 | 179.043 | .121 | .217 | .139 | -.058 | .492 |

Figure 35: Levene's Test for Independent Samples

Now, using the data in the above table (Figure 35), we check whether the variance of the results is the same or different between the two cohorts. To evaluate this, a test to determine the difference in the variability is performed on the input dataset. The null hypothesis (H_0) in this case assumes an equal variance between the two groups. This assumption can be validated using Levene's test.

From Levene's test, we obtain the data shown in Figure 35. At a 5% significance level, the p-value obtained for our dataset is 0.513 which is greater than the significance value ($\alpha = 0.05$). Thus, we fail to reject the null hypothesis of equal variances and we proceed with the same.

With equal variance, we consider row #1 of the above table. The test statistics, in this case, is 1.552 and the p-value corresponding to this is 0.122 which is greater than the significance level of 0.05 as calculated using the SPSS software. The null hypothesis stated earlier defines the status quo that there is no difference in the influence on the two genders. Since the p-value obtained here is greater than the significance level we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

If we were to show that there is more impact on one of the genders, we would have to obtain the p-value less than 0.05 for it to be significant at the 5% significance level.

5.2.3 Mann-Whitney U Test

Mann-Whitney U test is the equivalent non-parametric test to the independent samples T-test. In this type of testing technique, two variables are analyzed one of which categorizes the dataset into two cohorts. For our analysis, we have taken the gender of the consumers and the effect of positive and negative reviews of the influencers.

Problem Statement:

- a. *Is there a difference in the influence of positive reviews by influencers on male and female consumers?*
- b. *Is there a difference in the influence of negative reviews by influencers on male and female consumers?*

Null Hypothesis (H₀):

It assumes that there is no difference between the influence on males and females.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_A):

There is a significant difference between male and female consumers.

Significance Level (α): 5%

Results' Interpretation:

The results obtained from SPSS software upon running the Mann-Whitney U test as described further (Figure 36). From a total of 204 respondents, 121 males and 83 females follow SMIs. The average influence on both the genders is compared by the Mann-Whitney U test. Thus, the average ranking for both the groups is compared in this case, instead of comparing the mean values. From the results obtained in the below table, it is observed that males are ranked higher compared to females.

| Ranks | | | | |
|----------------------|--------|-----|-----------|--------------|
| | Gender | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
| PositiveReviewImpact | Male | 121 | 104.96 | 12700.50 |
| | Female | 83 | 98.91 | 8209.50 |
| | Total | 204 | | |

Figure 36: Ranks based on Gender for Mann-Whitney Test

| Test Statistics ^a | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| | PositiveReviewImpact |
| Mann-Whitney U | 4723.500 |
| Wilcoxon W | 8209.500 |
| Z | -.750 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .453 |
| a. Grouping Variable: Gender | |

Figure 37: Test Statistics Scenario a (Mann-Whitney Test)

From the above table (Figure 37), it can be clearly observed that the p-value for the influence of positive reviews on the consumers is 0.453 which is greater than the assumed significance level of 5%. Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, and therefore there is no difference in the influence of positive reviews by influencers, on the two genders. In other words, positive reviews by food bloggers influence both males and females equally.

Next, we perform this test on the two cohorts but at this time, we are determining the influence of negative comments on the consumers.

| Ranks | | | | |
|----------------------|--------|-----|-----------|--------------|
| | Gender | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
| NegativeReviewImpact | Male | 121 | 106.11 | 12839.50 |
| | Female | 83 | 97.23 | 8070.50 |
| | Total | 204 | | |

Figure 38: Ranks for Scenario b (Mann-Whitney Test)

| Test Statistics ^a | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| | NegativeReviewImpact |
| Mann-Whitney U | 4584.500 |
| Wilcoxon W | 8070.500 |
| Z | -1.091 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .275 |
| a. Grouping Variable: Gender | |

Figure 39: Test Statistics Scenario b (Mann-Whitney Test)

Similarly, from a total of 204 respondents, 121 males and 83 females recorded their responses, and it is observed that males are ranked higher with a mean rank value of 106.11 (Figure 38). From the test statistics shown in figure #, we obtain a p-value of 0.275 which is greater than $\alpha=0.05$ (Figure 39). Thus, we again fail to reject the null hypothesis in this test run. It means that the influence of negative reviews on males is not significantly different from that on females. This implies that from the gathered dataset, males and females are equally influenced by the reviews of the social media food bloggers.

5.2.4 Chi-Square Test

For the Chi-Square test for independence, we consider two variables. These two variables should be categorical as the Chi-Square test cannot be run on continuous scale parameters. Here, we take into account whether the visual appeal of the food matters to consumers and the Likert-scale measurement of the influence of SMIs on the brand choice of these consumers.

Problem Statement:

Whether the food bloggers' influence is dependent upon the visual appeal of the food or not.

Null Hypothesis (H_0):

It is assumed here that the SMIs' influence on consumers is independent of the visual appeal of the food.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_A):

It assumes that the visual appeal of the food plays a part in the influence of the food bloggers.

Significance Level (α): 5%

Results' Analysis:

It is observed that a total of 206 participants, we have 204 valid answers and 2 missing or invalid entries. For performing the Chi-square test of independence, firstly, a contingency table is created with the help of the SPSS software tool (Figure 41).

The results of the chi-square test shown in Figure 42, depict that 5.156 is the test statistic value with a 4 degree of freedom. The p-value, in this case, is observed to be 0.272. This p-value is greater than the assumed significance level of 5% i.e., significance value of 0.05, therefore we fail to reject the null hypothesis in this case. Hence, it can be concluded that at a 5% significance level, we fail to reject that the influence of bloggers is independent of the visual appeal of the food.

| Case Processing Summary | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|---------|---------------|---------|-------|---------|
| | Valid | | Cases Missing | | Total | |
| | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| VisualAppeal * InfluenceOfSMI | 204 | 99.0% | 2 | 1.0% | 206 | 100.0% |

Figure 40: Cross tabulation for Chi-Square

| VisualAppeal * InfluenceOfSMI Crosstabulation | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----|----------------|----------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | | | InfluenceOfSMI | | | | | Total |
| | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| VisualAppeal | Yes | Count | 5 | 13 | 40 | 81 | 38 | 177 |
| | | Expected Count | 6.1 | 11.3 | 39.0 | 79.8 | 40.8 | 177.0 |
| | No | Count | 2 | 0 | 5 | 11 | 9 | 27 |
| | | Expected Count | .9 | 1.7 | 6.0 | 12.2 | 6.2 | 27.0 |
| Total | | Count | 7 | 13 | 45 | 92 | 47 | 204 |
| | | Expected Count | 7.0 | 13.0 | 45.0 | 92.0 | 47.0 | 204.0 |

Figure 41: CrossTabs

| Chi-Square Tests | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| | Value | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 5.156 ^a | 4 | .272 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 6.428 | 4 | .169 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .688 | 1 | .407 |
| N of Valid Cases | 204 | | |

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .93.

Figure 42: Chi-Square Test Results

5.2.5 One-Way ANOVA

Problem statement:

Is there a statistically significant interaction between the gender of the influence and the gender of the consumers.

| ANOVA | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|------|
| GenderOfBlogger | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Between Groups | .127 | 1 | .127 | .145 | .704 |
| Within Groups | 176.873 | 202 | .876 | | |
| Total | 177.000 | 203 | | | |

Figure 43: One-way ANOVA

Null Hypothesis (H₀):

It is assumed that the mean influence of female influencers is the same on both males and female consumers.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_A):

It states that the mean influence of female bloggers is more than one gender of the consumers.

Significance Level (α): 5%

Results' Analysis:

From the values obtained on performing a One-way ANOVA on the input dataset, a p-value of 0.704 is obtained (Figure 43). This value is greater than the significance level of 5% (0.05) and hence we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Thus, from the input dataset, we are saying that the mean values are the same for both genders i.e., the influence of female influencers is the same on both male and female consumers.

5.2.6 Two-Way ANOVA

Problem statement:

Is there a statistically significant interaction between the positive reviews by the bloggers and the visual appeal of the food in effecting the repeat purchase intent of the millennials.

Null Hypothesis (H₀):

It is assumed here that there is no interaction between the positive reviews by influencers and the visual appeal of the food while impacting the repeat purchase behavior of the Indian millennials.

Alternate Hypothesis (H_A):

It states that there is a statistically significant interaction between the visual appeal of the food and positive reviews by influencers.

Significance Level (α): 5%

Results' Analysis:

Performing the factorial ANOVA with the gathered dataset, the below ANOVA table is obtained. There is no interaction between these two parameters as the p-value obtained here is 0.577 which is greater than the assumed significance level of 5% (Figure 45).

Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we can say that positive reviews influence consumer behavior without subjecting it to the visual appeal of the food. Also, since the p-values for the visual appeal of the food and positive reviews are both greater than 0.05 individually, therefore, it can be concluded that these two factors equally influence consumer behavior. There would not be a difference in the influence of these parameters separately on the repeat purchase intention. We can see that there is not a statistically significant difference in the influence created on the consumers based on positive reviews or visual appeal of the food on the repeat purchase intention.

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | |
|--|--------------|------|----------------|-----|
| Dependent Variable: RepeatPurchaseIntent | | | | |
| PositiveReviewImpact | VisualAppeal | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
| Almost Always | Yes | 3.16 | 1.167 | 19 |
| | No | 4.00 | . | 1 |
| | Total | 3.20 | 1.152 | 20 |
| Often | Yes | 3.53 | 1.014 | 45 |
| | No | 2.86 | 1.464 | 7 |
| | Total | 3.44 | 1.092 | 52 |
| Sometimes | Yes | 3.45 | 1.026 | 66 |
| | No | 3.50 | 1.000 | 12 |
| | Total | 3.46 | 1.015 | 78 |
| Seldom | Yes | 3.55 | 1.175 | 33 |
| | No | 4.00 | . | 1 |
| | Total | 3.56 | 1.160 | 34 |
| Never | Yes | 4.00 | 1.177 | 14 |
| | No | 3.83 | .408 | 6 |
| | Total | 3.95 | .999 | 20 |
| Total | Yes | 3.50 | 1.083 | 177 |
| | No | 3.44 | 1.050 | 27 |
| | Total | 3.50 | 1.076 | 204 |

Figure 44: Descriptive Statistics for Factorial ANOVA

| Tests of Between-Subjects Effects | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-----|-------------|---------|------|
| Dependent Variable: RepeatPurchaseIntent | | | | | |
| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| Corrected Model | 10.033 ^a | 9 | 1.115 | .961 | .473 |
| Intercept | 498.143 | 1 | 498.143 | 429.582 | .000 |
| PositiveReviewImpact | 5.501 | 4 | 1.375 | 1.186 | .318 |
| VisualAppeal | .096 | 1 | .096 | .083 | .773 |
| PositiveReviewImpact * VisualAppeal | 3.353 | 4 | .838 | .723 | .577 |
| Error | 224.962 | 194 | 1.160 | | |
| Total | 2727.000 | 204 | | | |
| Corrected Total | 234.995 | 203 | | | |

a. R Squared = .043 (Adjusted R Squared = -.002)

Figure 45: Factorial ANOVA Results



Figure 46: Two-way ANOVA Interaction Plot

The plot in Figure 46 shows the means of different values. From the above plot and the p-value obtained, we can say that there is no significant interaction between the two factors on the repeat purchase intention of the consumers.

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Significance of Findings

This section will link the findings of this research with the underlining theories from previous literature and make conclusions based on that. It will assess which hypothesis holds true while assessing Indian millennial's parasocial relationships over social media and their impact on their food purchase behavior.

H1: Social Media Influencers significantly increase the new brand's awareness in consumer's lives.

This research is heavily linked to the food blogging industry. Hence the author seeks to gather data from the people to understand how often food bloggers increase the new brand's awareness in their lives. The focus of this study revolves around the parasocial relationships that indulge

between an SMI, a food blogger in this case and a consumer and how much impact do they have on the consumer's food purchase behavior while introducing them to trending food products in the market. Forbes further confirms this statement since 80% of the user accounts on Instagram follow at least one brand/business profile and 200 million Instagram users visit a business profile/brand daily (Forbes, 2019). Thus, 70% of consumers visit social media platforms with the intent to learn about new products/services. The gathered primary data also suggests that the majority (38.73%) responded as 'sometimes' and 25% (next frequent data) as 'often', Hence, the hypothesis incurred by the author stands true in its stance.

H2: Perceived interactivity on social media directly and positively affects the parasocial relationship of the consumer and the influencer.

This question focuses on the hypothesis that perceived interactivity between the SMI and the consumer plays an important aspect in establishing a parasocial relation between the two. It can be in the form of messages or posts which instill a feeling of closeness and intimacy through continuous interactions. The higher the perceived interactiveness, the higher the consumers feel safer around the SMIs (Tsai and Men, 2013). It can be either a one-sided parasocial interaction as guided by the Dual Process theory or a two-way relationship as suggested by the Parasocial Interaction (PSI) theory, but in both ways, the imaginary friendship considerably impacts the consumer's purchase behavior. The collected data also illustrates that the majority (36.27%) responded as 'Sometimes' and 22.06% (next frequent data) responded as 'Often'. Hence, it is safe to say that Social media engagement via influencers i.e. perceived interactivity influences consumer's purchase behavior.

H3: Trustworthiness directly and positively impacts the parasocial relationship of the consumer and the influencer.

Trust is a significant aspect that lays the foundation for a parasocial relationship. The credibility of the food blogger is emphatically connected to the way they honestly review the products/services and hence can gain the trust of the consumer. Hence, all the five theories used in this research consider the trustworthiness and credibility of the influencer of great importance as, it helps you gain the trust of the consumers, establishing a parasocial interaction, and eventually becoming loyal customers of the endorsed brand. Since, 48.04%, i.e., majority

of the respondents says 'Sometimes' and a very low percentage (10%) of people voted as 'Not at all', thus it is true that trustworthiness impacts the parasocial relationships.

H4: Visually appealing food positively affects the perceived enjoyment of the Influencer's social media content.

This hedonistic motivation is increasingly turning into a yardstick that urges consumers to shift to impulse buying. Hedonistic consumption is usually associated with the multi-sensory and emotive characteristics of a product/service being endorsed by the influencer on social media and impart a feeling of pleasure among the consumers. There is a huge section of the millennials who are attracted to the hedonistic benefits of the food, especially the trending products/services on social media. Thus, market practitioners are always on the lookout for such influencers who can engage all consumer senses and thus form a deeper connection with the consumers. The hedonistic motivation can also be associated with gratification for oneself and thus Homer's study affirms that these stimulation values have a strong effect on consumer's attitudes towards nutritional products. Hence, the brands offer both variants of hedonistic motivations to their consumers through the SMIs, one is an amazing flavor or the other is a perceived feeling of making a smart choice. Since the influence of hedonic motivation related to visually appealing food is still under-researched, the author has put light on that perspective. This was a no-brainer and there was a huge majority of respondents (86.76%) who said 'Yes'. Therefore, this hypothesis stands true to its stance.

H5: Expertise of the influencer positively impacts the consumer's purchase decision.

Previous literature shows two contrasting opinions from scholars, Matthyssens suggests that domain expertise, i.e., in-depth technical knowledge on the subject is necessary for a food blogger to make a positive impact on the consumer (Matthyssens, 2011). On the other hand, Buyl points out that having extensive experience in the industry can compensate for the technical knowledge of the field as long as the influencer can gain the trust of the consumers and form a parasocial bond (Buyl et al., 2011). The majority of the respondents (27.94%) said 'Moderately' and a very few percentage says 'not at all', hence the gathered data provided empirical evidence that the expertise of the influencer positively impacts consumer's purchase decision.

H6: Physical attractiveness of the social media influencer positively impacts their parasocial relationship with the consumer.

The gathered data suggested 30.39% voted as they neither agree nor disagree with the statement which implies they do not have many strong opinions on this matter. Although the closest vote count (29.90) is for 'Agree' which infers that the physical attractiveness of the influencer helps captivate the consumers' attention for a long time and thus impacts positively over parasocial interactions.

H7: Gender of the social media influencer positively impacts the parasocial relationship of the consumer and the influencer.

Jain argues that the law of physics is applicable for males and females. A lot of statistical analysis has been carried using the gender of the influencer as the independent variable (Jain et al., 2019). Even for this research, given the author is a female, it was easier to get the survey filled out by males as compared to females. The analyzed data of respondents don't have any strong opinions as the majority says it's just about the same. Hence, it can be deduced that the gender of the influencer doesn't have much impact on the consumer's purchase behavior as respondents find the males and females equally impactful on the consumer.

H8: Negative food reviews from social media influencers discourage the purchase decision of the consumers.

This hypothesis is part of the previous literature gap which the author has addressed in the proposed conceptual framework. Many scholars have published their work regarding the positive influence of positive food reviews on social media and how it encourages consumer's purchase behavior but the discouragement that causes due to negative food reviews has been under-researched. Shao argues that consumers reach a state of regret due to unsatisfying levels upon purchasing products that had negative feedback on social media (Shao and Shao, 2011). The social cognitive theory had mentioned that it urges them to switch their brands very quickly (Bui et al., 2011). From the gathered data, it can be analyzed that since the respondents didn't showcase any strong feelings about the discouragement in their purchase behavior, hence, it is safe to conclude, negative feedback might or might not have a negative influence on the consumer.

H9: Utilitarian motivations impact the repeat purchase intentions of the consumers.

Utilitarian motivations do not occur unconsciously or without prior knowledge. The consumer judges and makes an informed decision of whether the product will be of any benefit to them, unlike the hedonic motivations which usually result in impulse buying. Hence, it instills a sense of repeat purchase intention amongst the consumers upon receiving satisfying perceived value from it (Chen et al., 2019). It can be seen from the results of this research that 58.82% (majority) said that product quality is the most important factor they consider while purchasing a product again, while the least number of people (0.49%) voted for the Brand ambassador/celebrity. Thus, it is safe to conclude that parasocial relationships over social media impact consumer's initial purchase behavior, but the repeat intentions are caused only due to utilitarian motivations.

H10: Features of the Social Media Platform positively affect the influence of food bloggers on the consumers.

It has been studied in the past that the social media platform that provides a more intimate feel can successfully garner the follower's emotional connect towards the influencers and thus provide a much more stable parasocial interaction. The theory of Social identity suggests that SMIs who reflect a sense of pride and loyalty towards a particular platform, tend to have a positive impact on their followers. The social media platforms tend to offer a sense of convenience and familiarity to the audience which is advocated by the influencers. These features of the platform hence impact the consumer attitude by establishing an influencer-consumer parasocial relationship which impacts the consumer's food purchase behavior. Hence, the result from this research shows, Instagram is a clear winner here and it is safe to say that it has the biggest influence on social media users in this digital age (Gallagher et al., 2017).

H11: Paid promotions by the brands impact negatively on the consumer's purchase intentions.

Previous literature has shown that sponsorship disclosure leads to resistance towards the persuasive approach and results in reverse psychology in the attitude of the consumers. Thus, negatively impact the consumer's purchase behavior. Jain also suggests that disclosure of paid sponsorships can also impact the effectiveness of the post and can be perceived as extremely business. Even the previously published scholarly journals have had mixed reviews on this

topic and Jain points out that paid sponsorships can be perceived as too business centric. Hence, it is safe to say consumers would experiment with paid sponsored products, but the frequency would differ on various occasions (Jain et al., 2019).

6.2 Limitations of this Study

Though previous literature shows significant research on consumer purchase behavior in the fields of fashion and lifestyle, the food industry remains relatively under-researched. No prior research on the Parasocial relationships on social media has been carried out on Indian Millennials to measure its impact on their food purchase behavior. Owing to the time constraint of this study, a longitudinal study was not feasible and hence, a cross-sectional study was deemed appropriate. Ideally, both Qualitative and Quantitative methodology should have been deployed wherein interviews could assess the determinants of parasocial relationships either from the influencers or the consumer's perspective. But due to the limited time frame allocated to this dissertation and considering the difficulty of reaching out to people because of the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic in India, only a quantitative methodology has been used. Hence, a limited sample size of 540 was taken, out of which 206 completed the entire survey without any errors. Although the results were taken as per 99% confidence level with a 6.83% confidence interval considering the Indian millennial population to be 426 million and the researcher deployed the best of her abilities to garner relevant and quality data through the questionnaire, larger sample size can be taken for studies with a larger timeframe. Even though the sample of the study isn't too large, the findings put up great insight into the impact of parasocial relationships on the Indian millennial's food purchase behavior. The questionnaire used for the study has not been validated entirely as a whole as the questions were individually chosen from multiple academic sources.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Summary

The main aim of this research is to measure the impact of influencer-consumer parasocial relationships over social media on the food purchase behavior of Indian millennials. Upon collecting the primary data with 206 responses, statistical analysis is carried out to examine the

relationships between the proposed hypothesis. Five different theories are integrated to bring forth an integrated conceptual framework that includes all the relevant determinants to establish a parasocial interaction and also includes the identified gaps from previous literature, including negative influence on purchase behavior and repeat purchase intentions. The results of this research have produced various interesting insights into consumer purchase behavior and their parasocial bonds with the influencer. A few of the findings have already been touched upon by scholars, but several new insights came to light due to the social demographics used in this research of Indian millennials. The food purchase behavior concerning parasocial relationship has not been explored in much detail in the past, hence some key contradictions were observed with its effects in the apparel industry which highly involves hedonic motivations, unlike the utilitarian motivations which become significant in context of food and its repeat purchase intentions. Thus, the research objectives are fulfilled by measuring the impact of parasocial relationships on Indian millennial's food purchase behavior and the factors that influenced the parasocial interactions emerged as the features of the SMI and the social media platform. The analysis also revealed that hedonic motivations contribute to consumer's initial purchase behavior using visually appealing content, but utilitarian motivations are the key factors that influencer consumer's repeat purchase intentions.

7.2 Future Recommendations

While this research produced some insightful results, there is always scope for future work. This study was focused more on the consumer's perspective; therefore, it is suggested to incorporate social media influencer's perspectives as an extension to this study in the future. Secondly, the cross-sectional research design has its limitations in rendering inferences, hence, future studies should adopt qualitative methods to test the proposed conceptual framework and confirm the findings of this research. Hence, a longitudinal study could be designed to examine any fluctuations in consumer behavior over a given period. Also, social media usage and its popularity may be different in other countries as opposed to India, which lays the foundation of a parasocial relationship. Thus, future work should include cross-cultural measurements to uplift the generality of the findings. Previous literature has posed limitations to the Likert scale and how consumers tend to choose the safest neutral answer for the questions, hence a dichotomous approach of the questionnaire can be used for a quantitative study to gather a more comprehensive understanding of consumer's behavior. Since a wider range of millennials has been taken in this research to incorporate respondents from different income backgrounds,

therefore, to produce highly extensive results for a niche generation such as Gen Z would help achieve more credible findings of the key millennials age.

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Appendix

Consent Form

Dear Respondent,

I am *Tarleen Kaur*, a Master's student at the **National College of Ireland** and I am conducting a research study for my dissertation project that aims to assess social media influencers' (SMI) or food blogger's impact on the consumer's food purchase behavior. Hence, I would like to ask for your collaboration in answering this questionnaire with your honest opinion. There are 20 questions and it will take approximately 3-5 minutes to complete. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and decide whether or not to take part in this survey.

1. It is the aforementioned student's responsibility to adhere to ethical guidelines in their dealings with participants and the collection and handling of data.
2. If I have any concerns about participation, I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage.
3. Participation in this survey is voluntary. You can opt to exit from this survey at any given point and your responses will not be recorded.
4. There are no known expected discomforts or risks associated with participation.
5. All data from the study will be treated confidentially. The data from all participants will be compiled, analyzed, and submitted in a report to the School of Business at the National College of Ireland. No participant's data will be identified by name at any stage of the data analysis or in the final report. No individual response will be presented or discussed after the time frame as per the guidelines of the National College of Ireland.
6. All the responses are stored in the password-protected file and will be accessed only by my dissertation supervisor and myself.
7. I may withdraw from this study at any time and may withdraw my data at any point during my participation. I understand that once my participation has ended, that I cannot withdraw my data as it will be fully anonymized.

Thank you very much for your time and support. Please start with the survey now by clicking on the Next button below.

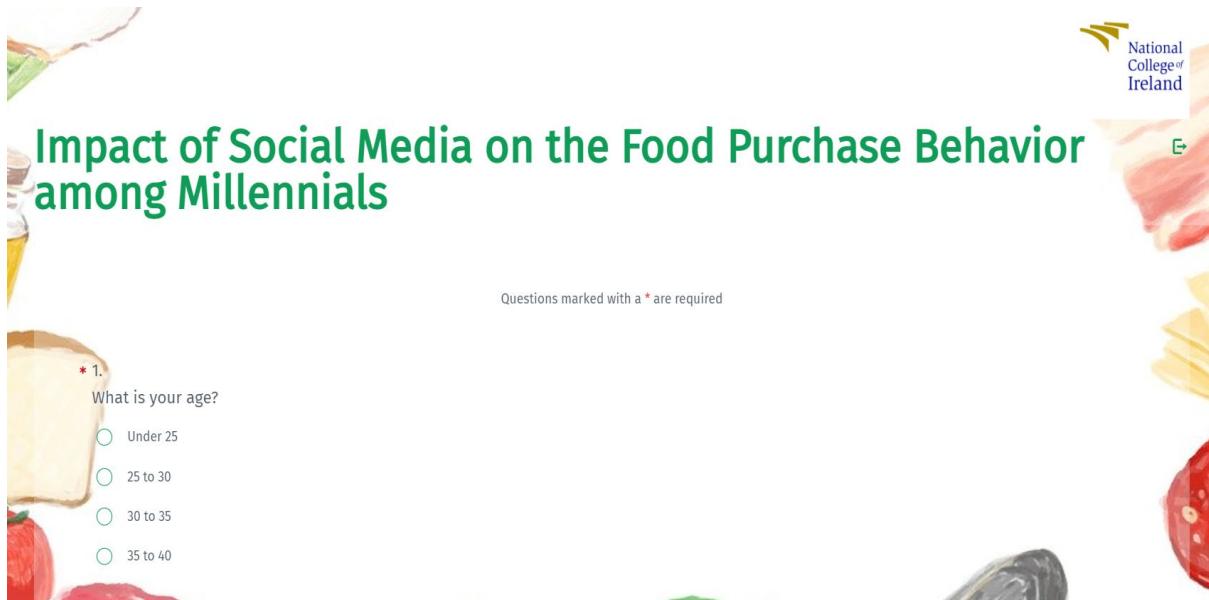
I Consent

Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire is available online at the below URL.

<https://www.questionpro.com/a/TakeSurvey?tt=3qisLrfgXli5RCNGxslbHA%3D%3D&lcfpn=false>

The questions are also listed below:



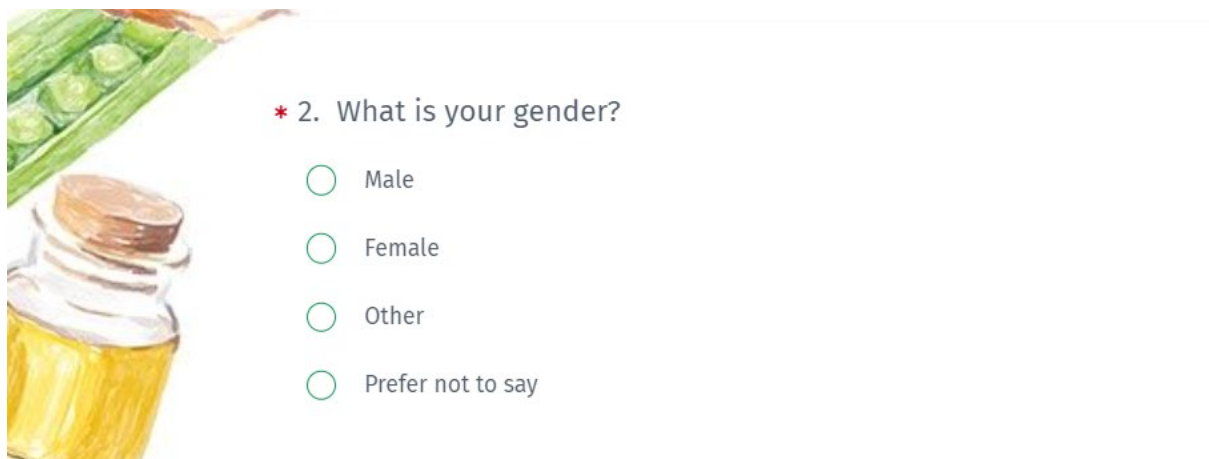
National College of Ireland

Impact of Social Media on the Food Purchase Behavior among Millennials

Questions marked with a * are required

* 1. What is your age?

- Under 25
- 25 to 30
- 30 to 35
- 35 to 40



* 2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say



* 3. How many hours do you spend on social media daily?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1 - 2 hours
- 2 - 4 hours
- More than 4 hours



* 4. Which social media channel has the biggest influence on you?

- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Snapchat
- Others



* 5. How often do you follow a food blogger on social media?

- Almost
- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom Never



* 6. How often do social media influencers increase new food brands' awareness in your life?

- Almost Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never



* 7. How often do food bloggers influence your brand choice or E- shopping behaviour?

- Almost Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never



* 8. Which is the most important factor for you when making a purchase decision regarding food products?

- Product Quality
- Price
- Brand Image on social media
- Food blogger's feedback
- Health benefits
- Eco friendly



* 9. As a millennial, Food Trends on social media matter to me.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree



* 10. How likely are you to follow a food blogger if they are highly active and interact frequently with their followers on social media?

- Extremely
- Very
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all



* 11. How trustworthy are Food Bloggers?

- Extremely
- Very
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all



* 12. How likely are you to experiment food products being endorsed under paid sponsorships by social media influencers?

- Extremely
- Very
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all



* 13. How much important is the expertise of the food blogger while making a purchase decision?

- Extremely
- Very
- Moderately
- Slightly
- Not at all



* 14. Do you agree popularity of a food blogger depends upon their physical attractiveness?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree



* 15. How much engaging are female influencers than male influencers?

- Much higher
- Higher
- About the same
- Lower
- Much lower



* 16. Do you find visually appealing food content more influential?

- Yes
- No



* 17. How often does Positive product reviews and comments from influencers encourage your purchase decision?

- Almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never



* 18. How often does Negative product reviews and comments from influencers discourage your purchase decision?

- Almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never



* 19. Which food choice have you adopted as a result of social media influence?

- Street Food
- Home-cooked
- Instant Foods
- Organic Food
- Fast Food
- Vegan
- Other



* 20. What is the most important aspect that makes me purchase the product again?

- Price
- Relevance
- Usefulness
- Quality
- Celebrity/Brand ambassador
- Brand Loyalty



Done