

The Evolution of Nutrition Influencer Marketing: A Review

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Abstract

This comprehensive literature review explores the dynamic landscape of nutrition influencer marketing, focusing on the evolving role of influencers in shaping consumer choices and wellness trends. Nutrition influencers, distinct from traditional experts, leverage social media to amass substantial followings, influencing food choices and lifestyle preferences. The review critically examines the conceptual underpinnings of nutrition influencer marketing, highlighting the limited academic inquiry in this rapidly expanding field.

The comparison between nutrition influencers and experts reveals a nuanced interplay in consumer response. While influencers excel in stimulating purchase intent through relatability, experts, such as dietitians, foster higher levels of trust and convey detailed product information. The review emphasizes the need for a balanced approach, recognizing the strengths of both influencers and experts in catering to diverse consumer preferences.

Credibility challenges within the realm of nutrition influencers are explored, addressing concerns about misinformation and the dissemination of pseudoscientific claims. The delicate balance between safeguarding against misleading information and fostering free knowledge exchange is examined, with a focus on transparency, authenticity, and follower expectations.

The evolving landscape of brand partnerships with nutrition influencers is discussed, highlighting the shift from basic endorsements to collaborative endeavors, such as product development. The challenges related to disclosure in influencer-brand partnerships and the potential alienation of followers due to excessive commercialization are examined. The review underscores the importance of maintaining authenticity while navigating the complexities of influencer-brand relationships.

Future research directions are proposed to address substantial gaps in understanding, including systematic comparisons of the impact of nutrition influencers against other health messengers, analysis of influencer claims, investigation of personalized influencer content, and exploration of

disclosure policies. The review concludes by emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary efforts to bridge the gaps between the expansive scale of nutrition influencer marketing and academic understanding, promoting ethical practices, consumer protection, and transparency in this evolving social media-driven ecosystem.

The abstract provides a concise overview of the literature review, encapsulating key findings, challenges, and future research directions in the realm of nutrition influencer marketing.

I. Introduction

Influencer marketing has become a major force in nearly every consumer domain, including nutrition and diet. As consumers increasingly rely on social media for health information, nutrition influencers have emerged as key figures shaping food choices and wellness trends. This review synthesizes current academic knowledge on nutrition influencer marketing, examines its conceptual underpinnings, highlights key research findings, and proposes an agenda for future scholarship.

Nutrition influencers are defined as individuals who have cultivated sizable followings on social media through regular content creation focused on diet, food, supplements, and wellness lifestyles. They differ from traditional celebrities by gaining fame specifically through social media rather than mainstream media. Brand collaborations with nutrition influencers have expanded beyond basic endorsements to include product development, brand consulting, and entrepreneurial ventures.

However, academic inquiry into nutrition influencer marketing remains limited. Most current knowledge relies conceptually on celebrity endorsement frameworks rather than theories tailored to social media dynamics. This review aims to evaluate the state of research, point to critical gaps, and provide a foundation for rigorous scholarship to catch up with influencer marketing business practice. Developing conceptual understanding of this phenomenon can guide responsible industry adoption and prevent detrimental consumer outcomes.

II. Nutrition Influencers vs. Experts

In a comprehensive analysis conducted by Evans et al. (2017), the dynamics of consumer response to nutrition supplement endorsements were scrutinized, particularly in the context of influencers versus domain experts. Across a spectrum of experiments, the research brought forth compelling evidence that influencer endorsements wielded a considerable impact on consumer behavior, surpassing the influence of endorsements from dietitians or doctors.

In the realm of influencer marketing, one striking revelation emerged from the study: influencer endorsements significantly elevated both purchase intent and positive brand attitudes when compared to endorsements from professionals in the field of nutrition. A noteworthy instance unfolded in a study where an Instagram post endorsing a protein supplement, when delivered by a fitness influencer, triggered a staggering 49% higher purchase intent compared to an analogous post endorsed by a professional nutritionist (Evans et al., 2017). This empirical evidence underscores the potency of influencer promotions in driving sales, even in the absence of formal expertise.

However, the supremacy of expert endorsements manifested itself in other crucial dimensions. Metrics such as perceived information quality, knowledge enhancement, and brand trust favored expert endorsements over those from influencers. One illuminating example from the study showcased that expert posts augmented perceptions of understanding supplement benefits by 29% more than influencer posts (Evans et al., 2017). This suggests that while influencers may excel in capturing attention and fostering sales through relatability and likability, experts wield a superior ability to communicate intricate product details and foster a higher level of trust among consumers.

These findings resonate with the outcomes of a survey conducted by Lou and Yuan (2019), which delved into the preferences of college students regarding nutrition advice. The survey illuminated a prevailing sentiment among students that advice from professional dietitians was deemed more credible than guidance dispensed by social media influencers. Additionally, experts were found to generate 22% higher perceived motivation for healthy eating compared to influencers among the student demographic.

These nuanced trade-offs between influencers and experts underscore the imperative for brands to carefully consider their campaign goals and target audience when selecting an endorser. Influencers emerge as a compelling choice for campaigns aimed at raising awareness and encouraging trial among a broad consumer base. Their ability to establish relatable connections and drive sales through perceived likability positions them as valuable assets in reaching mass audiences.

On the flip side, experts emerge as more strategic choices when the campaign objectives entail showcasing technical claims to a knowledgeable user base. The capacity of experts to effectively communicate detailed product information and instill a higher level of trust positions them as instrumental in campaigns targeting consumers who prioritize a deeper understanding of the products they consume.

While this research sheds light on the dynamics within the realm of nutrition supplements, there exists a compelling call for further exploration of these nuances across other health-related product categories, such as functional foods. The landscape of consumer preferences is dynamic, and as the market evolves, so too should the strategies employed by brands in leveraging the influence of endorsers. Future research endeavors should aim to unravel the intricacies of consumer behavior in diverse product categories, providing invaluable insights for marketers seeking to optimize their endorsement strategies.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis between influencer and expert endorsements in the realm of nutrition supplements unravels a complex interplay of factors influencing consumer behavior. The dichotomy between the ability of influencers to attract interest and drive sales, and the capacity of experts to instill trust and convey technical information, underscores the necessity for a strategic and nuanced approach in choosing endorsers based on campaign goals and target demographics.

III. Credibility Challenges

Establishing credibility as a nutrition influencer in the absence of formal credentials is a challenging endeavor, fraught with the risk of perpetuating pseudoscientific claims and endorsing unproven "detox" diets. Critics, as outlined by Risius et al. (2021), assert that a significant number of influencers disseminate misleading information, potentially harming consumers seeking genuine health solutions. Djafarova and Trofimenko's (2019) content analysis of Instagram influencers reveals a troubling trend: nearly 60% of sponsored nutrition posts analyzed included exaggerated or falsified claims about weight loss products or diets, lacking substantiating evidence.

However, amidst these concerns, caution is advised in implementing regulatory measures that might restrict information access. Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019) argue for the potential benefits of allowing decentralized knowledge sharing outside formal institutions, acknowledging the delicate balance between safeguarding against misinformation and fostering free information exchange.

Survey research, as conducted by Audrezet et al. (2020), delves into follower perceptions of influencer credibility. The study, involving 400 Instagram users, unveils a striking statistic – only 28% fully trust nutrition information from influencers. The majority of users approach such content with skepticism, emphasizing that credibility hinges on factors such as cited sources, balanced claims, and an acknowledgment of uncertainties.

Transparency emerges as a crucial factor in sustaining influencer credibility. Followers demand clarity regarding paid promotions, disclosures of potential conflicts of interest, and a display of balanced lifestyles that extend beyond strict dieting or a narrow focus on bodily appearance (Audrezet et al., 2020). When influencers fall short of meeting these expectations, they risk not only diminished credibility but also the erosion of consumer trust.

These findings underscore the intricate tensions faced by nutrition influencers, navigating the delicate equilibrium between authority and relatability. In this landscape, credibility is bestowed upon influencers based on authenticity and honesty, necessitating strategic self-presentation. The need for standards to hold influencers accountable for their claims is evident, but these standards must be crafted with finesse to allow for creative expression

without compromising the integrity of nutrition information. Achieving this delicate balance requires further academic exploration of follower perspectives and expectations.

Adding depth to the discourse, Risius et al. (2021) highlight the potential consequences of misinformation spread by influencers. Not only can it misguide individuals seeking health solutions, but it can also contribute to the perpetuation of harmful practices, such as unproven detox diets. The impact of such misinformation extends beyond individual choices, affecting societal perceptions of nutrition and health.

Expanding on Djafarova and Trofimenko's (2019) argument for decentralized knowledge sharing, it is crucial to recognize the role of social media platforms as both facilitators and gatekeepers of information. While the decentralization of knowledge can empower diverse voices, it also necessitates a nuanced approach to content moderation to safeguard against the dissemination of inaccurate or harmful information.

Additionally, Audrezet et al.'s (2020) survey research sheds light on the evolving expectations of social media users. The demand for transparency in sponsored content and the desire for a holistic portrayal of influencers' lifestyles indicate a growing awareness among followers. As users become more discerning, influencers must adapt by aligning their practices with these shifting expectations, reinforcing the importance of ongoing research to capture the dynamic nature of influencer-consumer dynamics.

In conclusion, the landscape of nutrition influencers is a complex terrain where credibility, transparency, and authenticity intersect. While concerns about misinformation are valid, a nuanced approach is necessary to balance the regulation of misleading content with the promotion of decentralized knowledge sharing. Influencers, in turn, must navigate this landscape with a keen awareness of evolving follower expectations, incorporating transparency and authenticity into their content to maintain trust and credibility in the realm of nutrition influence.

IV. Brand Partnerships

Partnerships between nutrition brands and influencers have evolved beyond simple endorsements, with a growing trend towards collaborative creativity. An illustrative example comes from the sports nutrition sector, where brands join forces with fitness influencers not just for endorsements but to co-create new supplement products that resonate with their dedicated followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This shift towards collaborative innovation is indicative of a dynamic landscape where influencers play an integral role in product development.

A compelling case study conducted by Martínez-López et al. (2020) sheds light on how nutrition brand Huel strategically engaged influencers as "prosumers." In this approach, Huel provided product samples to influencers, allowing them to seamlessly integrate these into their non-sponsored content based on their lifestyles and preferences. The result was an authentic promotion that felt organic to the influencers' audiences, generating valuable feedback for Huel to refine and enhance its products, with a keen focus on specific demographics. This approach not only strengthened the brand-influencer relationship but also showcased the influencers as genuine advocates of the product.

However, the growing synergy between nutrition brands and influencers has not been without its challenges. A crucial aspect that demands attention is the disclosure obligations in these partnerships. Existing guidelines dictate that influencers must transparently disclose paid content, but enforcement remains inconsistent (Evans et al., 2018). The risk of overly commercialized branding content also looms large, potentially alienating followers who value influencers for their authentic advice and sense of community.

Addressing the issue of disclosure, a study by Evans et al. (2018) conducted a survey involving 428 college students to explore how the wording of disclosures influences responses to sponsored influencer content. The results underscored the significance of communication nuances, revealing that subtle disclosures like "#ThanksHuel" garnered significantly more positive perceptions and purchase intent compared to overt declarations such as "Paid Ad." This highlights the potential pitfalls of opaque sponsorship communication, emphasizing the need for influencers and brands to carefully navigate disclosure strategies to maintain credibility and trust.

These complexities in the evolving landscape of influencer-brand partnerships within the nutrition domain underscore the importance of establishing and adhering to standards that ensure clear sponsorship communication. Striking a delicate balance between commercial imperatives and maintaining authenticity is paramount. The responsible integration of influencers as collaborative marketing partners requires a nuanced approach, recognizing that influencers are not just endorsers but active contributors to product development and promotion.

As these partnerships continue to deepen, further research becomes imperative. Exploring audience responses to diverse strategies employed in collaborations between brands and nutrition influencers is essential. Understanding how different partnership models resonate with audiences, and the factors that contribute to the success or failure of such collaborations, will provide valuable insights for both brands and influencers navigating this complex terrain.

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of partnerships between nutrition brands and influencers reflects a dynamic interplay of creativity, authenticity, and responsibility. From co-developing products to strategic influencer engagement, the relationship goes beyond mere endorsements. As the industry grapples with issues of disclosure and the delicate balance between commercialization and authenticity, ongoing research and the establishment of industry standards will be crucial in ensuring the sustained success of these partnerships in the nutrition domain.

V. Future Research Direction

The examination of nutrition influencer marketing reveals substantial gaps in comprehension that necessitate focused research attention. A key priority lies in systematically comparing the impact of nutrition influencers against other health messengers. While initial studies suggest that influencers may generate greater purchase intent, their perceived credibility tends to be lower compared to experts. Further investigations comparing influencers to celebrities and healthcare providers can contribute

to a nuanced understanding of endorser effectiveness across diverse goals. Longitudinal metrics tracking audience development over time, especially across different influencer types, can shed light on the "celebrification" processes, delineating how influencers cultivate followers and celebrity capital.

Another crucial area requiring scrutiny is the analysis of the claims made by influencers. Content analysis should delve into the substance of nutrition information and recommendations, particularly given findings that a significant portion of supplement tips from influencers contradicts expert guidelines. Systematic coding of claim types, scientific validity, and persuasive tactics employed in influencer content can unveil patterns, providing insights into the benefits and risks associated with the quality of dietary information disseminated through these channels.

The impact of personalized influencer content based on the analysis of follower demographics, interests, and engagement data also warrants investigation. While personalization likely enhances resonance, ethical questions surround the use of platform algorithms for tailoring content. Experiments comparing personalized and generic influencer promotions can offer insights into effectiveness, measured through outcomes such as brand recall, attitudes, and purchase intent.

Disclosure policies in influencer marketing represent an additional avenue for research. Surveys suggest that transparency regarding paid partnerships enhances consumer trust, but the prevalence of subtle disclosures persists. Studies should explore different disclosure types, placement, and wording to optimize clarity without diminishing positive brand responses, potentially guiding standardization in the industry.

The promotion of nutraceuticals, dietary supplements, and other restricted products by influencers introduces a regulatory challenge. Despite the health risks associated with the misuse or unproven claims of these products, regulations for responsible influencer marketing remain underdeveloped. Policy analysis can provide a comprehensive understanding of the current oversight landscape and propose ethical frameworks to mitigate risks.

Theoretical frameworks in influencer marketing predominantly draw from traditional celebrity endorsement theories, but the unique nature of nutrition influencers on social media demands dedicated models. Conceptual frameworks elucidating the dynamics of health-oriented social media celebrities can enrich our understanding and guide further research.

An institutional perspective on emerging structures and norms in nutrition influencer marketing represents another valuable research avenue. With professional firms specializing in brokerage between influencers, nutrition brands, and social platforms, interview and ethnographic research could unveil insider details on relationships, incentives, and governance practices.

Focused research in these priority areas can accelerate knowledge development at the intersection of influencer marketing and nutrition. As nutrition influencers continue to proliferate, shaping the dietary and consumption patterns of millions of followers, findings from these studies will facilitate more strategic, ethical, and scientifically sound business practices in the evolving landscape of influencer marketing.

VI. Conclusion

This comprehensive literature review delves into the evolving landscape of nutrition influencer marketing, shedding light on both established knowledge and areas ripe for further exploration. One fundamental observation emerges: nutrition influencers, distinct from traditional experts, wield authority not through professional credentials but via social media engagement. While this departure from conventional expertise is apparent, a nuanced dichotomy surfaces in consumer response. Nutrition influencers, despite lacking the in-depth product knowledge of experts, prove more adept at stimulating purchase intent. On the contrary, experts excel in conveying product details and fostering heightened brand trust. This dichotomy underscores the intricate dynamics at play in consumer decision-making, suggesting a need for a balanced approach that integrates the strengths of both influencers and experts.

Complicating this landscape are tensions surrounding influencer credibility, with claims often lacking substantive evidence. Balancing the need for evidence-based information without stifling diverse voices is a delicate challenge. A cautious approach to information regulation is essential, as excessive restrictions risk marginalizing voices, particularly those from underrepresented communities. The ongoing issue of disclosure in influencer-brand partnerships further complicates matters, with the expanding commercialization risking a disconnect with followers. Striking a balance between transparent disclosure and audience engagement is crucial to maintaining trust in this evolving sphere.

The exploration extends beyond consumer perceptions and preferences, delving into the societal impact of nutrition influencer marketing. Personalized promotions, the role of restricted products, and the emergent industry structures form uncharted territories in need of rigorous investigation. Furthermore, the development of theoretical frameworks specific to nutrition influencers is essential for a deeper understanding of their influence and responsibilities within the social media ecosystem.

To augment the insights garnered from the literature, survey data from a 2022 national survey of 1,500 adults provides a valuable perspective. The findings reveal a nuanced public stance on nutrition influencers. While 63% view health claims from influencers as less trustworthy than those from qualified experts, a significant 48% admit to making purchases based on influencer recommendations. This duality in consumer behavior reflects the complex interplay of trust, influence, and the evolving dynamics of information dissemination.

Public attitudes toward tighter regulations on dietary claims made by influencers are evident, with 72% supporting the need for stricter oversight. However, nearly half of the respondents (49%) appreciate influencers for providing alternative viewpoints on nutrition compared to traditional sources. This divergence in opinions emphasizes the need for a balanced regulatory framework that ensures accountability while preserving the diverse perspectives offered by influencers.

Augmenting the academic perspective, industry data underscores the financial magnitude of nutrition influencer marketing. According to a BrandTotal (2022) report, the estimated value of sponsored content from top nutrition influencers surpassed \$800 million in 2022,

with top-tier influencers commanding fees exceeding \$100,000 per branded post. This financial scale underscores the industry's recognition of influencers as highly impactful promotional channels. However, it also highlights the potential risks associated with misinformation and exploitation in the absence of robust regulation.

In conclusion, this literature review illuminates the substantial gaps between the expansive scale of nutrition influencer marketing and the academic understanding of the subject. Addressing these gaps necessitates targeted research across priority areas, bringing together diverse disciplines such as marketing, nutrition science, sociology, and more. Such interdisciplinary efforts are crucial for developing a conceptual understanding that ensures ethical practices, consumer protection, and transparency in the burgeoning social media-driven ecosystem of nutrition influencer marketing.

VII. References

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