

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: A STUDY ON FOOD PRODUCT PURCHASES

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Abstract

This article explores the impact of social media content on consumer purchasing behavior, particularly within the food industry. It investigates how different types of food-related content, such as influencer recommendations, product reviews, advertisements, and special offers, influence consumer decisions. The study draws on recent literature that highlights the growing role of social media in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing habits. By analyzing consumer reactions to various forms of food advertising and promotional content, the research aims to provide insights into how brands can effectively leverage social media to enhance engagement and drive sales. Social media plays an important role in shaping food purchasing decisions, with various types of content (such as influencer recommendations, product images, reviews, and special offers) influencing consumers to different extents. Influencers, discounts, and food-related content like recipes or giveaways are moderately to frequently influential for a significant portion of respondents. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of factors such as price, product quality, and packaging in influencing consumer choices. The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on digital marketing and consumer behavior in the age of social media.

Key words: consumer behavior, food marketing, influencers, purchasing decisions social media.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has revolutionized consumer behavior, particularly in the food industry, by serving as a platform for brands to reach large and diverse audiences. As digital spaces become central to marketing strategies, the role of social media in influencing consumer decision-making has grown significantly. Studies have shown that online content, including food advertisements, influencer endorsements, reviews, and interactive posts, can significantly impact consumer choices (Kotler, 2017; Kotler et al., 2017; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Defta et al., 2023, 2024; Popa et al., 2024).

Food-related content on social media offers unique opportunities for businesses to create direct connections with consumers through targeted advertising and user-generated content. According to a report by Nielsen (2020), 60% of consumers are influenced by online reviews, while 70% trust brand recommendations from social media influencers. This growing reliance on social media as a source of information has changed how consumers perceive and interact

with food products, making it essential for businesses to understand these dynamics.

The current study seeks to explore how different forms of food-related content - such as influencer recommendations, product reviews, special offers, and advertisements - affect purchasing behavior on social media platforms. By analyzing consumer responses to these various content types, this research aims to provide valuable insights into how brands can effectively use social media to shape consumer preferences and drive purchasing decisions in the food sector. This study also highlights the significant role that price, product quality, packaging, and delivery speed play in shaping consumers' perceptions of food products promoted online, aligning with the findings of previous studies on consumer decision-making and digital marketing strategies (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2009, 2019; Solomon, 2020). Understanding the specific elements that resonate most with consumers can help brands tailor their marketing efforts for greater engagement and higher conversion rates (Ryan, 2016; Grapă et al., 2022; Ilieva et al., 2023, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of digital marketing, especially social media content, on consumer behavior in terms of purchasing food products. The study aims to identify the types of content that most influence purchasing decisions, the psychological mechanisms involved and the degree of trust of consumers in online promotions.

The specific objectives for this study were:

O₁ - Analysis of consumer preferences towards various types of content on social media;

O₂ - Identification of factors influencing purchasing decisions;

O₃ - Evaluation of the level of trust in information sources on social media;

O₄ - Study of consumer behavior in the digital environment;

O₅ - Identification of differences between the categories of sociodemographic factors and the frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media food media.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

In the study from which the analyzed data were extracted, 132 respondents were included, both

female (72.7%) and male (27.3%). As for the residence, 84.1% of the respondents were from urban areas, and 15.9% from rural areas.

For the socio-demographic factor, the following categories were: 18-30 years old (55.3%), 31-40 years old (9.1%), 41-50 years old (17.4%), 51-60 years old (15.9%) and over 60 years old (2.3%).

Additionally, the level of education represents an influential factor in assessing our consumers' profiles.

For this item, we had six response options: middle school educations (2.3%) ongoing/completed high school education (16.7%), ongoing/completed post-secondary education (9.8%), ongoing university education (31.3%), completed university education (29.5%) ongoing or completed postgraduate education (10.6%).

Regarding household monthly net income categories they were as follows: under 1500 RON (18, 13.6%), between 1501 and 3000 RON (42, 31.8%), between 3001 and 5000 RON (28, 21.2%), between 5001 and 8000 RON (34, 25.8%) and over 8000 RON (10, 7.6%).

The respondent's socio-demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The sample structure

Characteristics	Share in the Sample	N	Ratio
Gender	Female	96	72.7
	Male	36	27.3
Age (years)	18-30	73	55.3
	31-40	12	9.1
	41-50	23	17.4
	51-60	21	15.9
	over 60	3	2.3
Residence	Urban	111	84.1
	Rural	21	15.9
Education level	middle school education	3	2.3
	ongoing/completed high school education	22	16.7
	ongoing/completed post-secondary education	13	9.8
	ongoing university education	41	31.1
	completed university education	39	29.5
	ongoing or completed postgraduate education	14	10.6
Household monthly net income (RON)	under 1500	18	13.6
	1501-3000	42	31.8
	3001-5000	28	21.2
	5501-8000	34	25.8
	over 8000	10	7.6

Methods and data processing methodology

The research tool utilized for this study was the questionnaire. The research instrument consists of 19 items divided into 4 sections: socio-demographic data (5 items), social media usage (2 items), the impact of digital marketing on

food products (9 items), and consumer behaviour regarding food products (2 items).

For objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4, descriptive statistical tools were used, involving the presentation of data in both numerical and graphical forms.

To achieve objective 5, a non-parametric test (chi square Pearson) was employed to determine whether there are significant differences between the categories of socio-demographic factors regarding social media content for food products. The calculated χ^2 value was determined based on the calculation relationship:

$$\chi^2_{[GL]} = \sum \frac{(O-A)^2}{A}$$

where:

O - observed values;

A - expected values;

GL - degrees of freedom.

To achieve this objective, hypotheses were formulated:

H₁ - The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the gender variable

H₂ - The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the age variable

H₃ - The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the variable level of education

H₄ - The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the net monthly income variable

H₅ - The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the residence variable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

O1 - Analysis of consumer preferences towards various types of content on social media.

For this objective, item: *What social media platforms do you use?*

The usage of Facebook among respondents shows varying engagement levels: while a small minority (11 respondents) *never* use it, suggesting irrelevance for them, a comparable

number (36 respondents) use it *rarely*, indicating limited interest. A moderate group (38 respondents) accesses it *occasionally*, showing casual engagement, while the largest segment (47 respondents) are *frequent* users, highlighting the platform's popularity and active usage among a significant portion of respondents.

The majority of respondents (93 respondents, combining *sometimes* and *frequently*) use Instagram at least occasionally, demonstrating that the platform is well-integrated into users' daily lives. However, a significant segment (39 respondents, combining *rarely* and *never*) uses the platform little or not at all, suggesting the presence of a group that is not active on Instagram.

Twitter is used *rarely* or not at all by the vast majority of respondents (124 out of 132 people, or 93.9%). This result indicates a general lack of interest in the platform or a preference for other social media channels. Only 8 people (6.1%) access Twitter more frequently (*rarely*, *sometimes*, *frequently*), showing the platform's almost marginal use.

The majority of respondents (82 people, 61.4%) use TikTok at least *occasionally* (*sometimes*, *frequently*), highlighting the significant impact of this platform among active social media users.

However, a segment of 38 respondents (28.8%) *does not use* TikTok at all, which may indicate audience segmentation or a preference for other platforms.

Pinterest is used at least occasionally (*sometimes*, *frequently*) by 60 respondents (about 45.5% of the total), indicating that nearly half of the respondents are active or occasional users on the platform.

However, almost half of the respondents (42 people, or about 31.8%) *do not use* Pinterest at all, suggesting that it is not a top platform for this group of respondents (Figure 1).

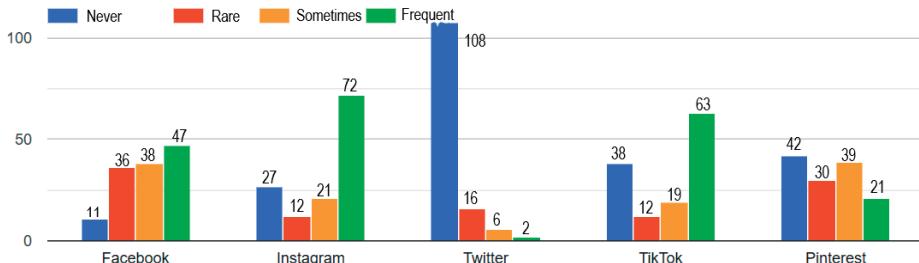


Figure 1. Frequency of access to social media platforms

O₂ - Identification of factors influencing purchasing decisions.

For this objective, the following items were analyzed:

a. To what extent is your decision to purchase food influenced by the recommendation?

The extent to which friends' recommendations influence food purchasing decisions varies significantly: while a substantial group is highly influenced (*very much* - 29 and *much* - 39 respondents), the majority are moderately or slightly influenced (*moderately* - 43 and *a bit* - 17), with only a small minority (*not at all* - 4) showing no influence, indicating that social connections play an important but variable role in decision-making (Figure 2).

The influence of work/study colleagues' recommendations on food purchasing decisions is generally moderate but less impactful

compared to friends: a small group is highly influenced (*very much* - 11 and *much* - 33), while the majority report a moderate influence (*moderately* - 62). A smaller portion is only slightly influenced (*a bit* - 21), and very few (*not at all* - 5) are not influenced at all, indicating that colleagues' input holds some relevance but is not a decisive factor for most respondents (Figure 2). Social media influencers have a varying degree of impact on food purchasing decisions: a very small group is strongly influenced (*very much* - 5 and *much* - 9), while a notable proportion reports a moderate influence (*moderately* - 50). A considerable segment is only slightly influenced (*a bit* - 40), and a significant portion (*not at all* - 28) is entirely unaffected, highlighting that influencers play a role for some but are not a decisive factor for many respondents (Figure 2).

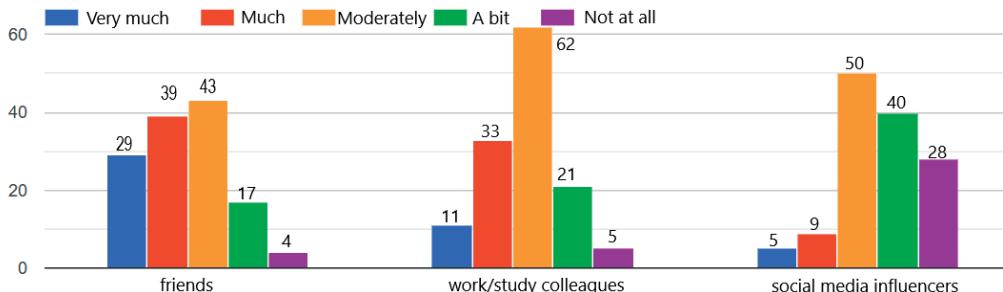


Figure 2. Impact of recommendations from friends, colleagues, and influencers on food purchasing decisions

b. Which of the following types of food-related content influences you to buy a product?

Video ads have a varying impact on food purchasing decisions: while a portion of respondents is not influenced at all (*never* - 32 people) or only occasionally (*rarely* - 42 people), a larger group is moderately influenced (*sometimes* - 45 people), with a smaller segment experiencing frequent (*frequently* - 10 people) or constant (*always* - 3 people) influence.

Product image posts influence food purchasing decisions to varying degrees: a small portion of respondents is not influenced at all (*never* - 21 people) or only occasionally (*rarely* - 46 people), while a larger group reports moderate influence (*sometimes* - 49 people). A smaller segment is frequently influenced (*frequently* - 14 people), and a very small group is consistently influenced by product images (*always* - 2 people).

Reviews or testimonials from influencers have varying influence on food purchasing decisions: a significant portion of respondents is not influenced at all (*never* - 41 people) or only occasionally (*rarely* - 42 people), while a moderate group reports some influence (*sometimes* - 36 people). Fewer respondents are frequently influenced (*frequently* - 11 people), and a very small minority is consistently influenced by influencer reviews (*always* - 2 people).

Live cooking or recipe demonstrations have a varying impact on food purchasing decisions: a small group is not influenced at all (*never* - 28 people) or only occasionally (*rarely* - 30 people), while a moderate group reports a moderate influence (*sometimes* - 43 people). A smaller portion is frequently influenced (*frequently* - 25 people), and a very small segment is constantly influenced by these demonstrations (*always* - 6 people).

Contests or giveaways on social media have varying levels of influence on food purchasing decisions: a significant portion of respondents is not influenced at all (*never* - 59 people) or only occasionally (*rarely* - 38 people), while a smaller group is moderately influenced

(*sometimes* - 27 people). Fewer respondents are frequently influenced (*frequently* - 6 people), and a very small number is constantly influenced by this type of content (*always* - 2 people) (Table 2).

Table 2. Influence of different types of food-related content on purchasing decisions

Characteristic	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently		Always	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Video ads	32	24.24	42	31.82	45	34.09	10	7.58	3	2.27
Product image posts	21	15.91	46	34.85	49	37.12	14	10.61	2	1.52
Reviews or testimonials from influencers	41	31.06	42	31.82	36	27.27	11	8.33	2	1.52
Live cooking or recipe demonstrations	28	21.21	30	22.73	43	32.58	25	18.94	6	4.55
Contests or giveaways on social media	59	44.70	38	28.79	27	20.45	6	4.55	2	1.52

c. *How much does the presence of a discount code or special offer in food ads on social media influence your purchasing decision?*

The presence of a discount code or special offer in food ads on social media has varying degrees of influence on purchasing decisions among consumers: about one-quarter (23.5%) are strongly influenced (*very much*), roughly one-fifth (22%) are significantly influenced (*much*),

and nearly one-third (31.8%) experience a moderate impact (*moderately*). A smaller group (13.6%) is only slightly influenced (*a little*), while around 9.1% are not influenced at all by these promotions. This data suggests that while discount codes and special offers can be effective in driving sales, their impact varies across different consumer segments (Figure 3).

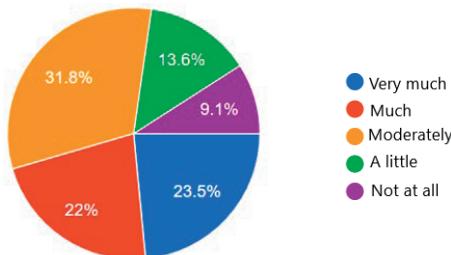


Figure 3. Influence of discount codes and special offers in food ads on social media on purchasing decisions

d. *What factors lead you to buy a food product after seeing it advertised on social media?*

The factors that influence food purchasing decisions after seeing products advertised on social media vary across different types of content: *influencer recommendations* are occasionally influential for most respondents, with a small group consistently relying on them; *discounts or special offers* have a moderate to significant impact for a majority, with some being strongly influenced by them; *positive*

reviews moderately influence many, though a smaller portion is consistently swayed; the *product's appearance* in posts moderately affects most respondents, with a few finding it decisive; *well-known brands* influence purchasing decisions for a significant portion, although some remain indifferent; and the *novelty of a product* has a moderate influence for many, with a smaller group being strongly influenced by a product's newness (Table 3).

Table 3. Factors influencing food purchasing decisions after seeing social media advertisements

Characteristic	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently		Always	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Recommending an influencer I trust	42	31.82	47	35.61	34	25.76	8	6.06	1	0.76
Discounts or special offers	14	10.61	28	21.21	51	38.64	32	24.24	7	5.30
Positive reviews	9	6.82	21	15.91	46	34.85	43	32.58	13	9.85
Product appearance in post	19	14.39	26	19.70	48	36.36	30	22.73	9	6.82
The well-known brand	9	6.82	22	16.67	47	35.61	43	32.58	11	8.33
The fact that it is a new product on the market	20	15.15	40	30.30	48	36.36	16	12.12	8	6.06

O₃ - Evaluation of the level of trust in information sources on social media.

For this objective, the following items were analyzed:

a. *What is your reaction to food advertisements seen on social media?*

The reactions to food advertisements on social media vary significantly: nearly a quarter of respondents (27.3%) actively engage with these

ads, showing positive interest; over half (50.8%) ignore them, suggesting indifference or ad fatigue; 16.7% are influenced by the ads to make a purchase, highlighting their effectiveness for some consumers; while a small group (5.3%) finds them bothersome, indicating that a minority of respondents have a negative reaction (Figure 4).

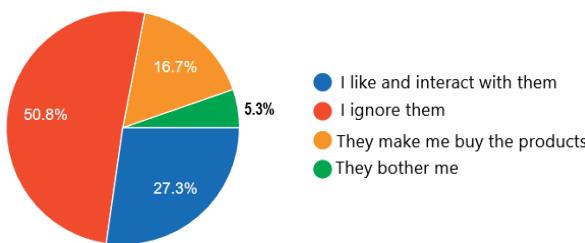


Figure 4. Consumer reactions to food advertisements on social media

b. *How important is it to you that a food product has positive reviews on social media before you buy it?*

The majority of respondents (65.9%) consider positive reviews on social media either *very important* or *important* when making food purchase decisions, indicating a high level of

reliance on reviews. A smaller group (17.4%) views them as *moderately important*, suggesting some influence but not a decisive factor. Only 16.7% of respondents place *little importance* or *no importance* on positive reviews, showing that a minority is not significantly affected by social media reviews (Figure 5).

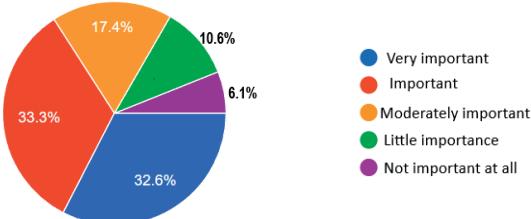


Figure 5. Importance of positive social media reviews in food purchasing decisions

O₄ - Study of consumer behavior in the digital environment.

For this objective, the following item was taken into study: *To what extent do the following aspects related to food products promoted on social media matter to you?*

This analysis indicates that *price, product quality, and speed of delivery/availability in stores* are the most influential factors, while *product packaging* and *natural or organic ingredients* hold more moderate or secondary importance for many consumers.

Price: The majority of respondents (81%) consider price to be either very important or important in their purchasing decision. Only 19% give it moderate or low importance.

Product Quality: A large proportion (89%) sees product quality as very important or important.

A small minority (around 10%) assigns it moderate or little importance.

Natural or Organic Ingredients: About 70% of respondents consider natural or organic ingredients very important or important. Around 30% find this factor of moderate or little importance.

Product Packaging: While 39% find packaging very important or important, a larger group (37%) sees it as moderately important. Around 24% consider it of little or no importance.

Speed of Delivery/Availability in Stores: A significant portion (68%) views speed of delivery and product availability as very important or important, with 22% considering it moderately important. Only 10% deem it of little or no importance (Table 4).

Table 4. Importance of different factors in food product purchases via social media

Characteristic	Very important		Important		Moderately important		Little importance		Not important at all	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Price	58	43.94	40	30.30	25	18.94	6	4.55	3	2.27
Product quality	91	68.94	28	21.21	9	6.82	2	1.52	2	1.52
Natural or organic ingredients	45	34.09	47	35.61	27	20.45	8	6.06	5	3.79
Product packaging	13	9.85	38	28.79	49	37.12	24	18.18	8	6.06
Speed of delivery / Availability in stores	39	29.55	51	38.64	29	21.97	6	4.55	7	5.30

O₅ - Identification of differences between the categories of sociodemographic factors and the frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media food media.

H₁ - *The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the gender variable* is not supported by the results ($\chi^2_{[4]} = 5.558$ and $p = 0.235$, Cramer's V effect size = 0.205). In this situation, the null

hypothesis is accepted, as there is no statistically significant association between the two variables. From the analysis of the contingency table 2 (gender) x 5 (frequency of purchase of food promoted on social media) it is observed that the largest proportion is represented by the category of people who mentioned that they only occasionally purchase food products promoted on social media. The situation is similar for both men and women (Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media in relation to gen

Gen	Frequency of purchase of food products					Total Lines
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very often	
Female	4	30	47	13	2	96
Male	5	11	15	3	2	39
Total lines	9	41	62	16	4	132

H₂ - *The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the age variable*. Testing the significance in terms of the association between age and the purchase of food products promoted on social

media showed that the two variables are independent ($\chi^2_{[16]} = 13.938$ and $p = 0.603$, Cramer's V effect size = 0.162). The high value for the p-value (0.603) indicates that the data are

compatible with the null hypothesis. For the 18-30 and 41-50 age groups, most people said that

they only occasionally purchase food products promoted on social media (Table 6).

Table 6. Frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media in relation to age

Age (years)	Frequency of purchase of food products					Total Lines
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very often	
18-30	7	19	36	8	3	73
31-40	1	5	5	0	1	12
41-50	0	6	12	5	0	23
51-60	1	10	8	2	0	21
over 60	0	1	1	1	0	3
Total lines	9	41	62	16	4	132

H₃ - The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the variable level of education. Testing the significance of the differences between the categories of the level of education variable regarding the purchase of food products

promoted on social media led to the conclusion that the null hypothesis is accepted ($\chi^2_{[20]} = 19.953$ and $p = 0.461$, Cramer's V effect size = 0.194) (Table 7).

Table 7. Frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media in relation to education level

Education level	Frequency of purchase of food products					Total Lines
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very often	
middle school education	0	0	2	1	0	3
ongoing/completed high school education	2	7	8	4	1	22
ongoing/completed post-secondary education	1	6	5	0	1	13
ongoing university education	5	9	21	6	0	41
completed university education	0	17	18	3	1	39
ongoing/completed postgraduate education	1	2	8	2	1	14
Total lines	9	41	62	16	4	132

H₄ - The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the net monthly income variable. The association between the frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media and the monthly net income is not statistically significant ($\chi^2_{[16]} = 17.126$ and $p = 0.377$,

Cramer's V effect size = 0.180). From the contingency table 5 (net income) x 5 (frequency of purchase of food promoted on social media) it follows that most respondents only occasionally or rarely purchase food products promoted on social media (Table 8).

Table 8. Frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media in relation to income

Household monthly net income (RON)	Frequency of purchase of food products					Total Lines
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very often	
under 1500	0	6	9	3	0	18
1501-3000	3	13	17	6	3	42
3001-5000	2	4	18	4	0	28
5501-8000	4	14	14	1	1	34
over 8000	0	4	4	2	0	10
Total lines	9	41	62	16	4	132

H₅ - The frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media is not influenced by the residence variable is not supported by the results ($\chi^2_{[4]} = 2.990$ and $p = 0.559$, Cramer's V

effect size = 0.150). From the contingency table 2 (residence) x 5 (frequency of purchase of food promoted on social media) it can be seen that about 50% of respondents said that they only occasionally purchase products promoted on

social media (48% of those in rural areas and 47% of those in urban areas). Of those in urban

areas, only 11% mentioned that they buy food products promoted on social media (Table 9).

Table 9. Frequency of purchase of food products promoted on social media in relation to residence

Residence	Frequency of purchase of food products					Total Lines
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very often	
Urban	9	35	52	12	3	111
Rural	0	6	10	4	1	21
Total lines	9	41	62	16	4	132

Understanding the factors that influence consumer behavior when choosing food products is critical for businesses aiming to optimize their marketing strategies. By analyzing consumer preferences, habits, and decision-making processes, companies can tailor their campaigns to meet specific needs and expectations. This is particularly relevant when promotional pricing is involved, as such discounts or offers can significantly sway purchasing decisions (Nicolae et al., 2016; Bahaciu et al., 2019; Barbu et al., 2023, Defta (Osman) et al., 2024, Defta et al., 2025).

For example, identifying the psychological impact of price reductions, such as the perception of value or urgency created by limited-time offers, can help businesses craft more effective campaigns. In addition, understanding the demographic and cultural factors that influence food preferences allows for a more personalized approach, which increases the likelihood of consumer engagement and loyalty.

Consumers show a strong preference for natural food products, as ingredients and product quality are key factors influencing purchasing decisions, often outweighing branding or promotional strategies on social media (Hodoşan et al., 2023; Defta et al., 2025).

Marketing strategies could leverage insights into consumer behavior to highlight product benefits, emphasize the quality-to-price ratio, or associate products with certain lifestyles or values. Such targeted campaigns not only attract price-sensitive consumers but also build brand awareness and customer satisfaction in competitive markets.

CONCLUSIONS

Social media has a significant influence on consumer decisions regarding food purchases, shaping preferences through various types of

content, including influencer endorsements, product reviews, video ads, and special offers. While influencers play a role in guiding purchasing behavior, most consumers remain only moderately influenced, relying instead on trusted figures for recommendations. Reviews and discounts emerge as key factors, as many consumers seek positive feedback before making a purchase.

Engagement with video ads, live cooking demonstrations, and giveaways varies, with some consumers responding actively while others ignore such content. Social media advertisements generally do not provoke strong negative reactions, but their ability to drive direct sales remains limited. At the core of purchasing decisions, price and product quality hold the greatest weight, surpassing the influence of branding or product novelty. Although aspects such as natural ingredients, packaging, and availability contribute to consumer interest, they are secondary considerations compared to fundamental product attributes.

While social media marketing, particularly through influencer promotions, product reviews, and discounts, plays a considerable role in shaping consumer behavior, purchasing decisions ultimately depend on essential factors such as price, quality, and availability.

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