

# The Role of Social Media Marketing in Shaping Gen Z's Food Preferences - A Study of Akola District

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**Abstract:** *In recent years, social media has become an important part of daily life, especially for young people. It not only connects individuals but also influences their choices, including what they eat. This study focuses on understanding how social media marketing affects the food preferences of Generation Z in the Akola district. The research explores how different forms of online content such as food reels, influencer recommendations, user reviews, and trending posts impact the decision-making behaviour of young consumers. Since Gen Z spends a significant amount of time on digital platforms, their exposure to such content plays a key role in shaping their tastes, interests, and food habits.*

*To achieve the objectives of the study, primary data was collected from 120 respondents aged between 15 and 28 years using a structured questionnaire. The responses were analysed using basic statistical techniques like percentage analysis and graphical representation to identify common patterns and behavioural trends. The results reveal that social media has a noticeable influence on food choices among Gen Z. Visually appealing posts, influencer credibility, and peer opinions were found to strongly encourage young individuals to try new and trending food items. Many respondents also showed a tendency to follow online food trends to stay socially connected and updated.*

*The study concludes that social media marketing is a powerful factor in shaping the food preferences of Gen Z in Akola. It suggests that businesses should design engaging and ethical digital marketing strategies, while also promoting healthier food options to support better lifestyle choices among young consumers..*

**Keywords:** *social media*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the present digital age, social media has become a major part of everyday life, especially for young people. It not only helps in communication but also plays an important role in shaping opinions, interests, and daily choices. One such area where this influence is clearly visible is food preference.

Generation Z is highly active on platforms where food-related content is widely shared in the form of videos, posts, and reviews. Regular exposure to such content creates curiosity and often encourages them to try new and trending food items. Their choices are no longer based only on taste or habit, but also on what they see and engage with online.

In districts like Akola, increasing internet access has connected youth to both local and global food trends. This has led to a shift in eating patterns, where traditional preferences are slowly blending with digitally influenced choices.

This study aims to understand how social media marketing contributes to these changing food preferences among Gen Z in Akola, and what factors influence their decision-making the most.



## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Many researchers have studied how social media influences the behaviour of young consumers, especially in relation to food choices. The findings from earlier studies show that digital platforms play a strong role in shaping preferences, attitudes, and buying decisions.

Several studies highlight that visually attractive food content increases interest among young users. When food is presented through high-quality images or short videos, it creates desire and curiosity even before actual consumption. Researchers have observed that repeated exposure to such content leads to a higher chance of trying new food items.

Influencer marketing is another important factor discussed in previous research. Studies suggest that young consumers trust influencers who appear genuine and relatable. Their recommendations often influence followers' decisions, especially when the content feels personal rather than promotional. This makes influencer-based marketing more effective than traditional advertising.

Research has also focused on the role of online reviews and peer opinions. Positive comments, ratings, and shared experiences act as a form of social proof, encouraging others to try the same food. Many young individuals rely on these opinions before making food-related decisions. Indian studies show similar patterns, particularly among college students and youth in urban and semi-urban areas. Social media platforms have become a major source of discovering new food trends, cafés, and snacks. Trend-following behaviour is commonly seen, as young users prefer to try items that are popular online.

However, most existing studies are concentrated in large cities and developed regions. There is limited research focusing on smaller districts like Akola, where cultural habits, income levels, and access to food options may differ. The impact of social media in such areas may not be exactly the same as in metropolitan cities.

Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by examining how social media marketing influences the food preferences of Generation Z in the Akola district. It aims to provide a clearer understanding of youth behaviour in a district-level context.

## **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study follows a structured approach to understand how social media marketing influences the food preferences of Generation Z in the Akola district. The methodology is designed to collect relevant data in a simple and reliable manner.

The research is descriptive in nature, as it focuses on understanding current behaviour and patterns rather than establishing cause-and-effect relationships. A quantitative approach has been used to measure responses in a clear and systematic way.

The study is based on primary data, which was collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire included close-ended questions related to social media usage, influence of food content, role of influencers, and food choice behaviour. A 5-point Likert scale was used to record opinions, ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement.

The target population of the study consists of Generation Z individuals aged between 15 and 28 years, residing in the Akola district. Since it was not possible to reach the entire population, a convenience sampling method was used. A total of 120 respondents participated in the survey, including students and young individuals who actively use social media.

The questionnaire was distributed both online (through Google Forms and social media platforms) and offline, which helped in collecting responses quickly and efficiently. Only those participants who regularly use social media were included in the study to ensure relevance.

For data analysis, simple statistical tools were used. The responses were coded and analysed using percentage method, averages (mean), and graphical representation such as bar charts and pie charts. This helped in identifying patterns and understanding how different factors influence food preferences.

Ethical considerations were also maintained during the study. Participation was voluntary, no personal identity was recorded, and the data was used only for academic purposes.



Overall, this methodology provides a clear and practical way to examine the influence of social media

#### **IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Data analysis and interpretation is an important part of research as it helps convert collected data into meaningful insights. In this study, data was collected from **114 respondents belonging to Generation Z (15–28 years)** in the Akola district. The objective of this chapter is to analyse how social media marketing influences their food preferences.

##### **4.1 Age-wise Distribution of Respondents**

The respondents were divided into four age groups: **15–18 years, 18–21 years, 21–24 years, and 24–28 years**. Among these groups, a higher concentration of respondents was observed in the middle age categories, while comparatively fewer respondents belonged to the extreme age groups.

##### **Interpretation:**

This indicates that the study mainly represents active youth who are highly engaged with social media platforms. Individuals in these age groups are more exposed to online content, making them more likely to be influenced by social media marketing.

##### **4.2 Social Media Usage Frequency**

A majority of respondents reported that they use social media **regularly on a daily basis**. Only a small number of respondents showed limited or occasional usage.

##### **Interpretation:**

Frequent usage of social media increases exposure to food-related content, making it a key factor in influencing food preferences and decision-making.

##### **4.3 Preferred Social Media Platforms**

Most respondents preferred platforms such as **Instagram and YouTube** for viewing food-related content, while other platforms were used comparatively less.

##### **Interpretation:**

These platforms focus heavily on visual and video content, which makes them more effective in influencing food choices among Gen Z.

##### **4.4 Influence of Food Content (Reels, Photos, Videos)**

A large number of respondents agreed that **food-related reels, videos, and images** attract their attention and increase their interest in trying new food items.

##### **Interpretation:**

Visual appeal plays a major role in shaping food preferences. Attractive content creates curiosity and encourages experimentation.

##### **4.5 Impact of Influencers and Food Bloggers**

Many respondents indicated that they are influenced by **food bloggers and social media influencers**, especially when the content appears genuine and relatable.

##### **Interpretation:**

Influencers act as trusted opinion leaders. Their recommendations reduce uncertainty and motivate users to try new food options.

##### **4.6 Role of Online Reviews and Comments (E-WOM)**

A significant number of respondents reported that they **check reviews, ratings, and comments** before making food choices.

##### **Interpretation:**

Online reviews act as social proof and help in building trust, which plays an important role in decision-making.

##### **4.7 Influence of Trending and Viral Food Items**

Many respondents showed interest in trying **food items that are trending or going viral** on social media.



**Interpretation:**

Trend-following behaviour is common among Gen Z, as they prefer to stay updated and connected with current online trends.

**4.8 Trying Food After Seeing Online Content**

A considerable number of respondents agreed that they have **tried food items after seeing them on social media platforms.**

**Interpretation:**

This shows that social media influence goes beyond awareness and directly affects actual consumption behaviour.

**4.9 Preference Towards Café and Branded Food**

Some respondents showed a preference for **cafés, branded food outlets, and trendy food items** promoted online.

**Interpretation:**

Social media creates an aspirational image, encouraging youth to explore modern and fashionable food options.

**4.10 Key Factors Influencing Food Choices**

The major factors influencing respondents were:

Attractive visuals

Influencer recommendations

Online reviews

Popularity of trends

**Interpretation:**

Food choices are increasingly influenced by presentation, popularity, and digital exposure rather than only traditional taste preferences.

**Overall Interpretation**

The analysis of 114 respondents clearly shows that social media marketing has a strong impact on the food preferences of Generation Z in Akola. Most respondents are highly active on social media and are influenced by visual content, influencers, reviews, and online trends.

Social media not only creates awareness but also affects actual food consumption behaviour. While traditional food habits still exist, there is a noticeable shift towards modern, trend-driven choices. This highlights the growing role of digital platforms in shaping the eating behaviour of young consumers.

**V. FINDINGS**

Based on the analysis of 114 respondents, the following key findings have been identified:

**High Social Media Usage**

Most respondents are active daily users of social media, indicating strong exposure to digital content.

**Dominance of Visual Platforms**

Instagram and YouTube are the most preferred platforms for viewing food-related content due to their visual nature.

**Strong Influence of Visual Content**

Food images, reels, and videos significantly attract attention and increase the desire to try new food items.

**Influencer Impact is Significant**

Food bloggers and influencers play an important role in shaping food preferences, especially when content appears genuine.

**Importance of Online Reviews (E-WOM)**

Reviews, ratings, and comments influence decision-making and increase trust in food choices.

**Trend-Based Food Behaviour**

Many respondents are influenced by trending and viral food items, showing a strong tendency to follow online trends.

**Social Media Drives Trial Behaviour**

A considerable number of respondents have tried food items after seeing them on social media.



### **Shift Towards Café and Branded Food**

There is a noticeable inclination towards café culture and branded food options promoted online.

### **Visual Appeal is the Key Driver**

Among all factors, attractive presentation of food has the strongest impact on influencing preferences.

### **Blending of Traditional and Modern Choices**

While traditional food habits still exist, social media is gradually influencing a shift towards modern and trendy food options.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

This study was conducted to understand the role of social media marketing in shaping the food preferences of Generation Z in the Akola district. Based on the analysis of 114 respondents, it is clear that social media has become an important factor influencing the food choices of young consumers.

The findings show that Gen Z is highly active on social media platforms and is regularly exposed to food-related content. Elements such as visually attractive posts, influencer recommendations, online reviews, and trending food items play a major role in influencing their decisions. Among these, visual appeal and trend popularity were found to have the strongest impact.

The study also highlights that social media not only creates awareness but also encourages actual behaviour, as many respondents try food items after seeing them online. At the same time, traditional food preferences still exist, but they are gradually being combined with modern and trend-based choices.

Overall, the research concludes that social media marketing has a direct and significant influence on the food preferences of Generation Z in Akola. It has changed the way young consumers discover, evaluate, and choose food, making digital platforms an essential part of the food decision-making process.

## **VII. SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, several practical suggestions can be given for food businesses and marketers targeting Generation Z. Firstly, businesses should focus on creating high-quality visual content such as attractive photos, reels, and videos, as visual appeal has been identified as the most influential factor in shaping food preferences. Collaborating with relatable and trustworthy influencers can also be highly effective, as young consumers tend to trust their recommendations and opinions.

In addition, businesses should actively encourage customers to share reviews, ratings, and feedback on social media platforms, as these play an important role in building trust and influencing new customers. Marketers should also keep track of current food trends and design their promotional strategies around viral and trending items to attract the attention of Gen Z consumers. Maintaining an active and engaging presence on platforms like Instagram and YouTube is essential to stay connected with the audience.

Furthermore, offering affordable options and value-based deals can help attract young consumers, especially students. At the same time, businesses should highlight aspects such as hygiene, quality, and health benefits to create a positive and responsible brand image. Local food businesses in Akola should also adopt localized marketing strategies that reflect regional preferences while combining them with modern digital trends.

Lastly, it is important for businesses to ensure the availability of trending food items and adopt ethical marketing practices. Avoiding misleading promotions and focusing on honest communication will help build long-term trust among consumers. Overall, a balanced approach that combines creativity, affordability, and responsibility can help businesses effectively influence the food choices of Generation Z.

