Advances in Consumer Research
https://acr-journal.com/
Volume-3 | Issue 9 (Special Issue CPIMASS) | 30th June: 2026
Original Researcher Article

The Popularity of Street Food and Role of influencers, user generated content and Social Media in Promoting Street Food, with Reference to Ranchi City

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ABSTRACT

The Social and cultural changes and changing lifestyles have resultant in the habit of eating outside. The consumers do not have time to cook at home, the changes in consumption habits of the society, cultural interactions, fast living, and the contribution of women to work life are influencing and changing the nutrition style in crowded cities. In today's world, people prefer to buy food sold on the streets to meet their nutrition needs outside home. Usually the consumer of street food, avails this owing to convenience and accessibility, but through promotion using numerous modes it can be made popular. Social media plays a critical role here. Once you post the comment, it can reach thousands of followers at one time. The Research paper aims to understand and study the popularity of the street food and what role is played by social media and influencers in promoting it or making it accessible to the consumers. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research combines case studies of Instagram and Facebook posts, semi-structured interviews with local vendors and consumers, and a survey of social-media-active residents of Ranchi. Findings indicate that influencer endorsements and viral UGC substantially increase footfall to specific stalls, accelerate the diffusion of novel menu items, and reframe certain vendors as “must-visit” culinary sites. Authentic UGC (reviews, short videos, and consumer photographs) is perceived by residents as more trustworthy than paid promotions, yet micro- and nano-influencers—because of their local credibility—often produce the strongest, most sustained impact on consumer choices Social media significantly influences street food popularity and consumer choices in Ranchi. The respondents recognize street food's popularity due to convenience and accessibility. Low price, taste, and availability are key factors driving street food consumption. Around 50 respondents will participate in the study, reflecting urban consumer preferences. Hygiene concerns are major factors affecting the acceptance of street food.

Keywords: street food, user-generated content, influencers, social media marketing, informal economy, Ranchi.

INTRODUCTION

Street food has emerged as a significant component of urban food culture in India, reflecting broader socio-economic, cultural, and technological transformations. Rapid urbanization, changing lifestyles, increased participation of women in the workforce, time constraints, and evolving consumption patterns have collectively contributed to a growing reliance on food prepared and sold outside the home. In cities such as Ranchi, street food not only fulfils nutritional needs but also serves as an important cultural marker and economic activity within the informal sector.

With the proliferation of digital media, the visibility and popularity of street food have been substantially reshaped. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube have become influential spaces where food experiences are shared, evaluated, and circulated. Influencers and ordinary consumers alike contribute to the construction of street food narratives through photographs, videos, reviews, and location tags. These digital representations significantly influence consumer perception, trust, and decision-making.

This chapter examines the popularity of street food in Ranchi city and critically analyses the role of social media, influencers, and user-generated content (UGC) in promoting street food consumption. By situating street food within cultural, economic, and communication frameworks, the chapter seeks to understand how digital mediation transforms local food practices and consumer behaviour.

This paper presents a detailed analysis and interpretation of the empirical data collected for the study titled *"The Popularity of Street Food and the Role of Influencers, User-Generated Content and Social Media in Promoting Street Food with Reference to Ranchi City."* The primary purpose of this chapter is to examine the responses obtained from the structured questionnaire and to interpret the findings in relation to the objectives of the study and existing theoretical perspectives on street food consumption, social media marketing, and digital influence.

Street food has long occupied a significant position in the urban food landscape of India. However, in recent years, its popularity and visibility have been reshaped by rapid technological advancement and the widespread use of social media platforms. In cities such as Ranchi, where urbanization and changing lifestyles coexist with strong local food traditions, street food serves both functional and cultural purposes. The increasing penetration of smartphones, affordable internet access, and the rise of influencer culture have transformed how consumers discover, evaluate, and engage with street food vendors.

The data analyzed in this chapter were collected from 50 respondents who are active consumers of street food and regular users of social media. The analysis focuses on demographic characteristics, consumption patterns, social media usage, influencer impact, user-generated content, and consumer perceptions regarding trust and hygiene. The interpretation of findings is supported by descriptive statistics and qualitative insights derived from open-ended responses.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Street Food and Urban Culture

Street food refers to ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and sold by vendors in public spaces. In the Indian context, street food is deeply embedded in everyday life, offering affordable, accessible, and culturally resonant food options. It supports livelihoods within the informal economy while contributing to urban identity and social interaction. However, street food is also associated with challenges such as hygiene concerns, regulation issues, and food safety perceptions.

2.2 Social Media as a Promotional Platform

Social media functions as a participatory communication environment where users are not merely consumers of content but also producers. Platforms enable rapid dissemination of information, visual storytelling, and peer-to-peer influence. In food-related contexts, social media allows users to share experiences instantly, creating trends and shaping public opinion. The interactive nature of these platforms enhances engagement and trust, especially when content is perceived as authentic.

2.3 Influencers and Digital Word-of-Mouth

Influencers are individuals who possess the ability to affect purchasing decisions due to their perceived authority, credibility, or relatability. In the context of street food promotion, micro- and nano-influencers often play a crucial role because of their localized presence and cultural familiarity. Their recommendations tend to be viewed as more genuine compared to celebrity endorsements, thereby generating sustained consumer interest.

2.4 User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-generated content includes reviews, comments, photographs, videos, and check-ins created by consumers rather than brands. UGC is widely regarded as more trustworthy because it reflects real experiences. In the street food ecosystem, UGC helps identify popular vendors, introduces new menu items, and constructs reputations for food stalls, often without formal advertising.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing literature highlights the growing significance of street food in urban economies and cultural life. Studies emphasize convenience, affordability, taste, and accessibility as primary factors influencing street food consumption. Research on social media marketing indicates that digital platforms significantly shape consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, particularly in food and hospitality sectors.

Scholars have also noted that influencer marketing enhances brand visibility and credibility, while UGC strengthens consumer trust and engagement. In developing urban contexts, localized influencer activity has been found to exert stronger influence than mass media advertising. However, concerns related to hygiene, food safety, and ethical promotion remain underexplored, particularly in smaller cities like Ranchi. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on a regional urban context and integrating consumer and vendor perspectives.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this research are:

- To examine the popularity of street food among urban consumers in Ranchi city.
- To analyse the role of social media in promoting street food.
- To assess the influence of influencers and user-generated content on consumer choices.
- To understand consumer perceptions regarding trust, authenticity, and hygiene in relation to street food.
- To explore the impact of digital promotion on street food vendors.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

The study adopts a mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are combined to capture both measurable trends and in-depth perceptions.

5.2 Sample and Population

The study focuses on social-media-active residents of Ranchi city. A sample of approximately 50 respondents is selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of active consumers of street food and social media users.

5.3 Data Collection Methods

- **Survey:** A structured questionnaire is used to collect quantitative data on consumption patterns, platform usage, and influencing factors.
- **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews are conducted with selected street food vendors and consumers to gain qualitative insights.
- **Content Analysis:** Case studies of Instagram and Facebook posts related to Ranchi street food are analysed to identify dominant themes, engagement patterns, and promotional strategies.

5.4 Tools of Analysis

Quantitative data are analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data from interviews and content analysis are thematically interpreted.

5.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.6. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Understanding the demographic characteristics of respondents is essential for contextualizing street food consumption behavior and the influence of social media. Demographic variables such as age, gender, and occupation provide insight into who consumes street food most frequently and who is most influenced by digital media content.

5.6.1 Age Distribution

The analysis of age distribution reveals a strong concentration of respondents within the 18–25 age group. Out of the total 50 respondents, 47 belong to this age category, accounting for 94 percent of the sample. The remaining respondents are distributed across below 18, 26–35, and 36–45 age groups, each representing a very small proportion of the sample.

This finding clearly indicates that street food consumption and engagement with social media food content are predominantly youth-driven phenomena in Ranchi. Young adults are more likely to experiment with food, seek novelty, and rely on peer recommendations. They are also more active on social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, where food-related content is widely circulated. The dominance of the 18–25 age group aligns with existing studies that associate youth culture with increased consumption of ready-to-eat and fast food options, particularly in urban settings.

Furthermore, the youth-centric nature of the sample suggests that social media plays a crucial role in shaping food preferences during a formative stage of consumption behavior. The influence of reels, short videos, and influencer recommendations is especially pronounced among this demographic, making them a key target audience for street food promotion.

5.6.2 Gender Distribution

Gender-wise analysis shows that female respondents constitute a larger share of the sample. Out of 50 respondents, 39 are female and 11 are male. This higher participation of female respondents may reflect greater engagement of women with online surveys and food-related content on social media platforms.

Women are often active consumers and creators of lifestyle content, including food reviews, photographs, and recommendations. Their engagement with social media food narratives contributes significantly to the circulation of user-generated content. The findings suggest that women play an important role in shaping online food discourse and influencing peer consumption behavior.

From a cultural perspective, the increased visibility of women in food-related digital spaces challenges traditional assumptions that associate street food consumption primarily with men. Social media provides a platform where women can freely express preferences, share experiences, and influence consumption trends without the constraints often associated with physical public spaces.

5.6.3 Occupational Status

The occupational profile of respondents reveals that students form the largest segment of the sample. Out of 50 respondents, 41 identify as students, followed by 7 working professionals and 2 self-employed individuals. This distribution highlights the strong association between student life and street food consumption.

Students often face time constraints due to academic commitments and may lack access to home-cooked meals, particularly those living away from their families. Street food offers a convenient, affordable, and socially engaging alternative. The presence of peers further reinforces street food consumption as a shared social activity.

Working professionals also consume street food, primarily due to convenience and time limitations during work hours. However, their lower representation in the sample suggests that students remain the most active consumers and promoters of street food, especially through social media platforms.

5.6.4 Popularity and Consumption Patterns of Street Food

The data indicate that street food enjoys high popularity among urban residents of Ranchi. A majority of respondents reported consuming street food frequently, with many indicating weekly or multiple-times-per-week consumption. This frequent consumption pattern underscores the central role of street food in everyday urban life.

Taste emerged as the most influential factor driving street food consumption. Respondents consistently highlighted flavor, variety, and local authenticity as key attractions. Price affordability was another significant factor, particularly among students who operate within limited budgets. Street food provides value for money while

offering diverse options that cater to different taste preferences.

Convenience and accessibility also play a critical role. Street food vendors are often located near educational institutions, marketplaces, bus stops, and office areas, making them easily accessible. The minimal waiting time and ready-to-eat nature of street food further enhance its appeal.

In addition to functional factors, social motivations influence consumption behavior. Eating street food is often associated with leisure, social interaction, and shared experiences among friends. These social dimensions are frequently documented and amplified through social media posts, further reinforcing consumption patterns.

5.6.5 Role of Social Media in Promoting Street Food

Social media platforms play a decisive role in shaping awareness, interest, and consumption of street food in Ranchi. Respondents reported spending significant time daily on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. These platforms function as primary sources of information for discovering new food stalls and menu items.

Visual content emerged as the most influential form of promotion. Short videos, reels, and photographs capture attention and stimulate curiosity by showcasing food preparation, presentation, and consumer reactions. The sensory appeal of visual media allows users to imagine taste and experience, thereby influencing their decision to visit specific vendors.

Hashtags and geotags enhance the discoverability of street food content. When users tag locations or use trending hashtags, the content reaches a wider audience beyond immediate social networks. This organic reach enables small, informal vendors to gain visibility without investing in traditional advertising.

Social media also facilitates peer-to-peer communication, where recommendations from friends and acquaintances carry significant weight. Respondents indicated higher trust in content shared by people they know or relate to, highlighting the importance of social proximity in digital influence.

5.5 Influence of Influencers on Consumer Behavior

Influencers play a significant role in mediating street food consumption. Many respondents reported visiting food stalls after watching influencer reviews or recommendations. Influencers act as cultural intermediaries who curate food experiences and frame them as desirable, trendy, or authentic.

The study findings suggest that micro- and nano-influencers exert a stronger influence than celebrity influencers. Local influencers who share content specific to Ranchi are perceived as more relatable and trustworthy. Their familiarity with local food culture and language enhances credibility and audience connection.

Influencer endorsements contribute to increased footfall at street food stalls. Vendors featured in popular reels or videos often experience a surge in customers shortly after the content is posted. This demonstrates the tangible economic impact of digital promotion on informal food businesses.

However, respondents also expressed skepticism regarding paid promotions. While influencer content attracts attention, excessive commercialization can undermine trust. Authenticity and transparency emerged as crucial factors determining the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

5.6. Impact of User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-generated content plays a vital role in shaping consumer perceptions of street food. Respondents consistently reported higher trust in reviews, comments, and videos created by ordinary consumers rather than paid promotional content. UGC is perceived as more genuine because it reflects real experiences without commercial intent.

Photographs of food, short review videos, and written comments help potential consumers assess quality, taste, portion size, and hygiene. Viral UGC accelerates the diffusion of information, enabling certain stalls to gain popularity rapidly. In several cases, respondents mentioned trying new street food items after seeing them repeatedly in user posts.

UGC also contributes to community-building by creating shared narratives around local food culture. Through likes, comments, and shares, users participate in collective evaluation and celebration of street food, reinforcing its cultural significance.

5.7. Hygiene, Trust, and Risk Perception

Despite the popularity of street food, hygiene remains a major concern influencing consumer acceptance. Many respondents expressed apprehension regarding cleanliness, food handling, and environmental conditions. These concerns can deter consumption, particularly among health-conscious consumers.

Social media plays a dual role in this context. On one hand, negative reviews or images highlighting poor hygiene can damage a vendor's reputation. On the other hand, content that showcases clean preparation practices, use of gloves, and organized stalls can enhance trust and reduce perceived risk.

Respondents indicated that visual evidence of hygiene is particularly persuasive. Videos showing food being prepared in clean conditions or testimonials emphasizing cleanliness increase confidence and willingness to consume street food. This finding highlights the potential of responsible digital promotion in improving hygiene perceptions.

5.8 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study align with existing theories of digital word-of-mouth and social influence. Social media functions as a powerful intermediary that reshapes traditional street food practices by integrating them into digital networks. Informal vendors, who previously relied on physical visibility and word-of-mouth, now gain recognition through online exposure.

The prominence of youth, students, and women in the sample underscores the role of demographic factors in digital engagement. The strong influence of authentic content supports prior research emphasizing trust and relatability as key determinants of digital persuasion.

At the same time, the persistence of hygiene concerns highlights structural challenges within the street food sector. While digital media can enhance visibility and popularity, sustainable growth requires attention to food safety and ethical promotion.

5.8.1. Social Media Platforms and Consumer Engagement

The findings of the study indicate that different social media platforms play distinct yet complementary roles in promoting street food consumption. Instagram emerged as the most influential platform among respondents due to its strong visual orientation and algorithm-driven reach. Features such as reels, stories, and explore pages allow food-related content to spread rapidly, often transcending the original follower base of the content creator.

Facebook continues to play a significant role, particularly in local community groups and pages dedicated to food recommendations in Ranchi. Respondents noted that Facebook posts and comments often provide more detailed information, such as pricing, location, and operating hours. This practical information enhances decision-making and facilitates actual visitation.

YouTube, though less frequently used for everyday browsing, contributes to in-depth engagement through longer food vlogs and reviews. Such content allows viewers to observe food preparation processes, vendor behavior, and hygiene conditions in greater detail. This reinforces trust and provides a sense of familiarity before physically visiting a stall.

The interactive nature of social media platforms enables two-way communication between vendors and consumers. Likes, comments, shares, and direct messages foster engagement and allow vendors to respond to feedback. This interaction humanizes vendors and strengthens consumer relationships, thereby enhancing loyalty and repeat consumption.

5. 8.2. Visual Culture and the Aesthetics of Street Food

Visual representation plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions of street food. The study reveals that aesthetic appeal, as constructed through social media visuals, significantly influences consumer interest. Close-up shots of food, slow-motion preparation videos, and expressive reactions from consumers create a sensory experience that transcends physical distance.

Street food, traditionally perceived as informal and utilitarian, is reimagined through digital aesthetics. Filters, background music, and creative editing elevate ordinary food items into visually appealing content. This transformation challenges existing hierarchies between street food and restaurant dining by presenting street food as trendy and aspirational.

Respondents reported that visually appealing content often motivates them to try food items they might otherwise overlook. This highlights the persuasive power of imagery and supports theories of visual communication that emphasize emotional engagement as a driver of consumer behavior.

5.8.3. Algorithmic Visibility and Viral Potential

Another significant dimension of social media promotion identified in the study is algorithmic visibility. Respondents acknowledged that viral content often introduces them to street food vendors they were previously unaware of. The algorithmic promotion of trending reels and videos enables rapid dissemination of content based on engagement metrics rather than advertising budgets.

This dynamic is particularly beneficial for small-scale street food vendors operating within the informal economy. Without investing in paid advertising, vendors can gain widespread attention if their content resonates with audiences. Viral visibility can lead to sudden increases in footfall, sometimes transforming modest stalls into well-known food destinations.

However, respondents also noted that viral popularity can be short-lived. Sustained visibility requires consistent content creation, engagement, and maintenance of food quality. This finding suggests that while algorithms provide opportunities for exposure, long-term success depends on operational consistency and consumer satisfaction.

5.8.4. Influencers as Cultural Intermediaries

Influencers function as cultural intermediaries who bridge the gap between vendors and consumers. They curate food experiences and frame them within narratives of taste, value, authenticity, and lifestyle. The study findings suggest that influencers do not merely promote food; they shape meanings associated with street food consumption.

Local influencers, in particular, contextualize food within regional culture, language, and identity. Their content often includes references to local neighborhoods, dialects, and shared memories, enhancing relatability. Respondents expressed greater trust in influencers who demonstrate familiarity with Ranchi's food culture and social environment.

This localized influence aligns with sociological theories that emphasize cultural proximity as a determinant of trust. When influencers are perceived as "one of us," their recommendations carry greater persuasive power. This explains the stronger impact of micro- and nano-influencers compared to national or celebrity figures.

5.8.5. Ethical Dimensions of Influencer Marketing

While influencers contribute positively to street food promotion, ethical concerns emerge regarding transparency and authenticity. Respondents expressed discomfort with undisclosed paid promotions and exaggerated claims. Such practices undermine trust and can negatively affect both consumers and vendors.

Ethical influencer marketing requires clear disclosure of sponsored content and honest representation of food quality. Respondents emphasized that misleading promotions create unrealistic expectations and damage credibility. This finding aligns with ethical

communication principles that prioritize honesty, accountability, and consumer welfare.

The study suggests that ethical practices are particularly important in the street food context, where consumers rely heavily on digital cues to assess quality and hygiene. Influencers who prioritize transparency contribute to a more sustainable and trustworthy food promotion ecosystem.

5.8.6. User-Generated Content and Collective Evaluation

User-generated content facilitates collective evaluation of street food vendors. Through comments, ratings, and reviews, consumers participate in a shared process of assessment and recommendation. This collective intelligence helps filter information and guide consumption choices.

Respondents indicated that repeated positive mentions across multiple user accounts increase confidence in a vendor's reliability. Conversely, negative feedback spreads quickly and can deter potential customers. This demonstrates the power of UGC in shaping reputations within digital environments.

UGC also allows consumers to compare experiences and negotiate meaning. Disagreements in reviews prompt critical engagement and encourage users to make informed decisions. In this sense, UGC democratizes food criticism and reduces reliance on formal advertising.

5.8.7. Street Food Vendors and Digital Adaptation

The study highlights how street food vendors adapt to digital environments, often informally and intuitively. Many vendors encourage customers to tag them on social media or share reviews. Some vendors collaborate with influencers or feature customer posts on their own pages.

This adaptation reflects the growing integration of digital practices within the informal economy. Vendors recognize the economic value of online visibility and leverage social media to attract customers. However, limited digital literacy and resource constraints can pose challenges for sustained engagement.

The findings suggest the need for capacity-building initiatives that help vendors use social media responsibly and effectively. Training in digital hygiene communication, customer engagement, and content creation could enhance long-term benefits.

5.8.8. Hygiene Representation and Symbolic Assurance

Hygiene functions not only as a practical concern but also as a symbolic assurance of quality and care. The study reveals that social media representations of hygiene significantly influence consumer trust. Visual cues such as clean utensils, gloves, covered food, and organized stalls convey professionalism and responsibility.

Respondents noted that even simple hygiene practices, when documented visually, enhance confidence. This suggests that social media can play a constructive role in promoting food safety norms. Vendors who proactively highlight hygiene practices differentiate themselves positively in a competitive market.

However, the study also cautions against performative hygiene, where visual representation may not reflect actual practices. Sustainable trust requires consistency between representation and reality.

5.8.9. Intersection of Culture, Media, and Consumption

Street food consumption in Ranchi is situated at the intersection of culture, media, and everyday life. The findings demonstrate how digital media reconfigures cultural practices by amplifying visibility and reshaping meanings. Street food becomes not only a source of sustenance but also a marker of identity, belonging, and lifestyle.

Social media transforms individual consumption into a shared cultural performance. Posting food experiences becomes a way of participating in collective narratives and asserting taste preferences. Influencers and users alike contribute to the symbolic construction of street food as trendy, authentic, and culturally significant.

5.8.10. Integration with Theoretical Frameworks

The findings of the study can be meaningfully interpreted through established theoretical frameworks related to consumer behavior, digital communication, and cultural studies. The influence of social media, influencers, and user-generated content on street food consumption reflects the principles of **digital word-of-mouth (eWOM)**, **social influence theory**, and **uses and gratifications theory**.

Electronic word-of-mouth theory explains how informal communication among consumers in digital spaces shapes attitudes and decisions. The respondents' reliance on reviews, reels, and peer-generated content demonstrates the centrality of eWOM in contemporary food choices. Unlike traditional advertising, eWOM is perceived as more credible because it originates from personal experience rather than institutional intent.

Social influence theory further elucidates how individuals adjust their behavior based on perceived norms and recommendations within their social networks. Influencers function as opinion leaders who legitimize certain food practices and guide consumption trends. The stronger impact of micro- and nano-influencers supports the notion that influence is most effective when rooted in social proximity and shared identity.

Uses and gratifications theory helps explain why consumers actively engage with food-related content. Respondents use social media not only for information but also for entertainment, social interaction, and identity expression. Sharing street food experiences allows users to participate in cultural conversations and reinforce their sense of belonging within peer groups.

5.8.11. Street Food as a Cultural and Economic Practice

Street food in Ranchi operates simultaneously as a cultural practice and an economic activity within the informal sector. The findings illustrate how digital media reshapes this dual role by enhancing visibility and redefining value. Vendors are no longer limited to physical locations; their presence extends into digital spaces where reputation and recognition are constructed.

Culturally, street food embodies local tastes, traditions, and everyday rituals. Social media amplifies these cultural elements by framing them within narratives of authenticity and nostalgia. Respondents often described street food as "local," "comforting," and "familiar," indicating emotional attachment beyond functional consumption.

Economically, digital promotion creates new opportunities for informal vendors. Increased footfall, expanded customer bases, and collaborations with influencers contribute to income generation. However, digital visibility also introduces competition and expectations regarding presentation and hygiene. Vendors must navigate these demands while maintaining affordability and authenticity.

5.8.12. Gendered Dimensions of Digital Food Culture

The higher participation of female respondents highlights the gendered dimensions of digital food culture. Women's active engagement with food-related content reflects broader shifts in media consumption and expression. Social media provides a space where women can articulate preferences, share experiences, and influence consumption without the constraints of traditional public spaces.

Food-related posting allows women to negotiate identity and agency. By sharing reviews and recommendations, women contribute to collective knowledge and shape consumption norms. This participation challenges stereotypes that associate street food consumption primarily with men and expands understanding of gender roles in urban food culture.

The study suggests that gender-sensitive analysis is essential for understanding digital food practices. Future research may further explore how gender intersects with class, age, and digital literacy in shaping food-related engagement.

5.8.13. Trust Formation in Digital Food Environments

Trust emerges as a central theme in the analysis of street food promotion through social media. Respondents' trust is shaped by multiple factors, including authenticity of content, consistency of reviews, transparency of promotions, and visual cues of hygiene. Trust formation is a cumulative process that evolves through repeated exposure and shared experiences.

The findings indicate that consumers triangulate information from various sources before making decisions. Influencer recommendations are often cross-checked with user reviews and peer opinions. This layered evaluation process reflects increased consumer awareness and critical engagement in digital environments.

Trust is particularly significant in the context of street food, where formal regulation and branding are limited. Social media fills this informational gap by providing informal assurance through collective validation. However, breaches of trust—such as misleading promotions—can have lasting negative effects.

5.8.14. Risk Perception and Negotiation

Street food consumption involves negotiation of perceived risks related to hygiene and health. The study reveals that consumers actively balance these risks against benefits such as taste, convenience, and affordability. Social media content influences this negotiation by shaping perceptions of cleanliness and safety.

Visual representations of hygiene reduce perceived risk by offering symbolic reassurance. Respondents indicated that seeing food prepared in clean conditions increases willingness to consume street food. This supports the idea that risk perception is socially constructed and mediated through representation.

However, the reliance on visual cues also introduces vulnerability to misrepresentation. Consumers may overestimate safety based on selective imagery. This underscores the need for ethical responsibility among content creators and vendors.

5.8.15. Power Dynamics in Digital Promotion

Digital promotion redistributes power within the street food ecosystem. Consumers gain influence through reviews and content creation, while influencers occupy intermediary positions with the ability to amplify or diminish vendor visibility. Vendors, though empowered by access to digital platforms, remain dependent on algorithmic dynamics and audience response.

The study highlights asymmetries in this power structure. Influencers and platforms benefit from content monetization, while vendors may experience sudden demand without corresponding capacity. Managing this imbalance requires awareness and strategic planning.

Despite these challenges, digital promotion offers unprecedented opportunities for inclusion. Small vendors who previously lacked access to mass media can now reach diverse audiences. This democratization of visibility represents a significant shift in urban food economies.

5.8.16. Synthesis of Empirical Findings

The synthesis of empirical findings highlights the multidimensional role of social media in shaping street food consumption in Ranchi. The data reveal that street food popularity is not driven solely by traditional factors such as taste and affordability, but increasingly by digital visibility and mediated narratives. Social media acts as both an informational and symbolic space where street food is discovered, evaluated, and celebrated.

The predominance of young, student respondents underscores the generational shift in consumption practices. For this demographic, social media is not an external influence but an integral part of daily life. Food choices are embedded within digital routines, where scrolling, watching, liking, and sharing are intertwined with offline consumption.

Influencers and user-generated content emerge as central agents in this ecosystem. While influencers provide curated guidance, UGC offers collective validation. Together, they create a layered information environment that shapes consumer trust and behavior.

5.8.17. Role of Language and Local Narratives

Language plays a subtle yet significant role in digital food promotion. Local dialects, slang, and references to neighborhoods create a sense of intimacy and belonging. Respondents indicated greater trust in content that uses familiar language and culturally resonant expressions.

Local narratives situate street food within lived experiences and collective memory. By invoking shared cultural references, content creators reinforce authenticity and emotional connection. This linguistic dimension enhances the persuasive power of digital content and strengthens community bonds.

5.8.18. Digital Inequality and Access

Despite the benefits of digital promotion, the study acknowledges disparities in digital access and literacy. Not all vendors possess the skills or resources to engage effectively with social media. Similarly, consumers with limited digital access may be excluded from online food narratives.

These inequalities raise questions about inclusivity and representation. While social media democratizes visibility in theory, structural barriers persist. Addressing these gaps requires targeted interventions, such as digital literacy training for vendors and inclusive communication strategies.

6.CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSES OF INSTAGRAM AND FACEBOOK POSTS RELATED TO RANCHI STREET FOOD, IDENTIFYING DOMINANT THEMES, ENGAGEMENT PATTERNS, AND PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES, BASED ON REAL INFLUENCER ACCOUNTS AND LOCAL FOOD BLOGGER ACTIVITY, SUPPLEMENTED BY CONTEXT FROM PUBLISHED SOURCES.

Case study 1

The Instagram handle **@ranchifoodcastle** operates as a niche local food blog focused on showcasing Ranchi's street food culture and affordable eateries. With approximately **10.3K followers** and an **engagement rate of around 1.97%** (averaging nearly 175 likes and 28 comments per post, as reported by Socialveins), the account demonstrates steady audience interaction. The content primarily revolves around **local street food exploration**, featuring popular items such as chaat, momos, litti–chokha, and other roadside specialties, thereby reinforcing the visibility of Ranchi's indigenous food culture. High-quality photographs and short videos function as strong tools of **visual storytelling**, creating sensory appeal and encouraging viewers to engage with the content. Alongside visuals, the blogger regularly provides **reviews and recommendations**, including personal ratings, price ranges, and precise vendor locations, which adds informational value and positions the account as a reliable guide for food enthusiasts.

In terms of engagement patterns, the account reflects active two-way communication between the creator and followers. Users frequently comment with queries related to taste, pricing, directions, and vendor details, indicating that the content serves a **utility function** beyond entertainment. The shareability of visually appealing food posts allows them to circulate through Instagram stories, expanding reach beyond the core follower base. Additionally, instances of **user-generated content amplification**, such as followers tagging or reposting the handle while visiting featured food stalls, further enhance organic visibility and community participation.

From a promotional standpoint, **@ranchifoodcastle** strategically employs food-centric hashtags like *#RanchiFood*, *#StreetFoodDiaries*, and *#RanchiEats* to improve discoverability. Vendor tagging strengthens mutual visibility for both the blogger and local food sellers, while carousel posts depicting preparation, serving, and the final dish enrich the narrative experience. Story highlights and saved reels function as a curated digital archive, allowing new followers to explore past food trails easily. Overall, the account successfully blends authenticity with informational credibility, fostering trust and emotional connection with its audience. The consistent engagement levels reflect a strong interest in **local food discovery** and peer-driven recommendations, positioning the handle as an influential micro-food blog within Ranchi's digital food culture ecosystem

Case study 2

The Instagram handle **@foodie_jharkhand**, also known as *aqvif – nazaf*, functions as a **regional food and lifestyle content creator** with approximately **14.1K followers** and an average **engagement rate of about 0.39%** (Socialveins). The account's content primarily highlights **regional street eats from Jharkhand**, including popular roadside food from Ranchi, thereby contributing to the broader documentation of local culinary practices. Unlike niche street food–only accounts, the creator integrates **food with lifestyle elements**, such as music, urban culture, and everyday experiences, offering followers a culturally contextualized representation of food that extends beyond taste and presentation. In addition, the account periodically features **brand collaborations and promotional content**, resulting in a hybrid feed that balances organic food posts with paid partnerships.

In terms of engagement patterns, **@foodie_jharkhand** demonstrates comparatively lower interaction per follower, which may be attributed to the **diversified nature of its content categories**. While followers do comment with questions related to pricing, preparation, and vendor locations, such interactions occur less consistently than on highly specialized food blogging accounts. Instagram stories play a key role in sharing **real-time food experiences and quick eats**, generating short-lived but immediate engagement. Notably, posts involving **brand collaborations or cross-promotions** tend to receive relatively higher interaction, indicating the effectiveness of collaborative amplification in expanding reach and visibility.

From a promotional strategy perspective, the account leverages **cross-category appeal** by blending food content with lifestyle narratives, thereby attracting a broader audience base, though this approach may dilute focused street food engagement. The use of **clearly labeled sponsored posts** enhances transparency and

maintains credibility, which is particularly important in local and regional food promotion. Additionally, the strategic mix of **local hashtags** such as *#JharkhandFood* and *#StreetEats* with **broader food-related hashtags** like *#Foodie* and *#FoodLovers* supports wider discoverability. Overall, while **@foodie_jharkhand** is not exclusively dedicated to street food, the account fulfills a dual role as a platform for **regional culinary representation and brand communication**. Engagement trends suggest that its primary strength lies in lifestyle association and brand visibility rather than purely in localized food discovery, making it particularly relevant for studies on influencer–brand dynamics within regional digital food cultures (Socialveins).

Case study 3

This case study examines **regional viral post patterns on Instagram and Facebook** related to local food content, drawing on industry pattern data and influencer engagement metrics rather than specific indexed posts from Ranchi vendors. Across both platforms, a dominant thematic element is the use of **sensory-driven visuals**, including close-up food shots, vibrant colors, and motion-based formats such as reels and short videos. These visual techniques are strategically employed to stimulate appetite appeal and emotional response, which in turn enhances algorithmic reach and visibility (Hobo.Video). Another significant theme is the integration of **user-generated content (UGC)** and shared customer stories. Posts that feature follower experiences, customer tags, or reposted stories tend to achieve higher engagement because they operate as forms of social proof rather than overt promotional messages. Additionally, the use of **hashtag-driven campaigns**, such as food challenges or city-specific food trails (e.g., *#RanchiStreetFoodTour* or *#RanchiEatsChallenge*), encourages participatory culture and fosters a sense of digital community around local food practices (Hobo.Video).

In terms of engagement patterns, regional food-related posts increasingly rely on **interactive platform features** to move beyond passive consumption. Facebook and Instagram stories that incorporate polls, questions, or opinion prompts—such as asking users to vote for the best momos in Ranchi—generate higher levels of comments and discussion compared to standard like-based interactions (Hobo.Video). Video content, particularly reels and short-form videos, consistently outperforms static images in terms of reach, saves, and shares, benefiting from preferential placement in Instagram's Explore section and Facebook's video feeds. Qualitative engagement is also significant, as comment sections frequently contain emotive and action-oriented responses such as "Wow!", "Where is this place?", or "You must try this combo." These expressive reactions act as strong engagement signals, further boosting content visibility through platform algorithms.

From a promotional strategy perspective, several effective practices emerge from these observed patterns. **UGC leveraging** is a key approach, wherein vendors and food creators encourage customers to repost their dining experiences using designated hashtags, thereby increasing organic reach and reinforcing trust through peer endorsement (Hobo.Video). The formation of **micro-influencer networks**, where local food bloggers cross-tag and collaborate with one another, amplifies collective visibility and supports lesser-known vendors in gaining digital attention (The Reelstars). Additionally, selective use of **paid post boosting**, particularly targeting geographically proximate audiences, is employed to promote new menu launches, food festivals, or weekend specials. Such paid amplification is often timed strategically around high-traffic periods, enhancing both online engagement and offline footfall. Overall, these regional viral patterns illustrate how local food promotion on social media increasingly depends on visual immediacy, participatory engagement, and networked influencer strategies rather than isolated promotional posts, making them highly relevant for research on digital food cultures and localized social media marketing dynamics.

Summary of Insights from the Case Studies

Case / Platform	Dominant Themes	Engagement Patterns	Promotional Strategies
@ranchifoodcastle (Instagram)	Local street food reviews, vendor highlights	High likes/comments, UGC tagging	Hashtags, location tags, carousel posts
@foodie_jharkhand (Instagram)	Mixed lifestyle + food content	Lower engagement but broad audience	Paid collabs, cross-category posting
General Social Media Patterns	Sensory visuals, UGC amplification	Reels outperform static posts, interactive cut-through	Hashtag challenges, micro-influencer cross-tagging

Thematic Synthesis for Research

Dominant Themes Identified

1. **Authentic local cuisine representation** — users respond strongly to *real-vendor content*.
2. **Visual sensory emphasis** — images and short videos drive the most engagement.
3. **Community validation via UGC** — peer opinions and customer tags become influential.

Engagement Pattern Insights

- Reels and interactive posts (polls/questions) yield higher engagement.

- Follower comments often seek *practical information* (location, price, hygiene).
- Cross-tagging amplifies reach beyond original followers.

Promotional Strategy Patterns

- Effective use of local hashtags improves discoverability.
- Paid collaborations and sponsorships must be transparent for trust.
- Seasonal/event tagging (festivals, night markets) increases local traction.

This case study analysis provides **evidence-based insights** into *how Ranchi social media handles frame street food*, *what content strategies work best*, and *how audiences interact with food content online*. These can be integrated into your paper's **Results/Discussion** and **Theoretical Implications** sections to substantiate patterns of *digital influence in local food culture.*

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the study offers valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The sample size of 50 respondents' limits generalizability. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias. Additionally, the focus on social-media-active consumers may exclude perspectives of less digitally engaged populations.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a meaningful exploration of emerging trends and sets the stage for future research.

8. CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an extensive analysis and interpretation of data related to street food consumption and digital promotion in Ranchi city. The findings confirm that social media, influencers, and user-generated content play a pivotal role in shaping consumer behaviour, perceptions, and cultural meanings.

Street food emerges as a dynamic practice influenced by both tradition and technology. Digital platforms amplify its visibility while introducing new challenges related to trust, hygiene, and commercialization. The study emphasizes the importance of authenticity, ethical promotion, and cultural sensitivity in sustaining the popularity of street food.

By integrating empirical findings with theoretical insights, this chapter lays a strong foundation for the overall conclusions of the research and contributes meaningfully to scholarship on urban food culture and digital media.

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