

# The Role of Influencer Marketing and Social Influencers in Public Health

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Influencer marketing is the digital equivalent of word-of-mouth marketing. It is defined as ‘a type of marketing that focuses on using key leaders to drive a brand’s message to the larger market’<sup>(1)</sup>. Today social media and technology are flooding the internet, with over 200 million pieces of content a minute<sup>(2)</sup>. The rise and expansion of social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter or Facebook, has led to an increase in the number of social influencers sharing food recipes and nutritional advice online. As a result, the role of social influencers to change individual behaviour around food choices and diet is growing each day. The objectives of this study were to explore influencer marketing in Public Health, its role in influencing individual’s diet and food choices and the potential risks and benefits that it has for individuals. The project was divided into two phases. Firstly, data was collected by means of an online questionnaire developed through the software Survey Monkey and statistical analysis was calculated. A total of 232 (n = 232) participants completed the survey. The sample included individuals from each gender (65 % females: 35 % males) and from all age groups from a general population. The second phase was to track social influencers conversations around particular topics (e.g. sugar) using social media listening software.

	% (n)
<b>Participants who followed social influencers</b>	
Yes	59 (137)
No	41 (95)
<b>Motivated by social influencers to make healthier food choices</b>	
Yes	32 (74)
No	27 (63)
Sometimes	41 (95)
<b>Individuals reported as having the highest influence on food choice</b>	
Family	34 (79)
Peers	25 (58)
Health care professionals	26 (60)
Social influencers	10 (23)
Work colleagues	5 (12)
<b>Factors reported as having a high influence on food choice</b>	
Word-of-mouth recommendations	49 (114)
In-store promotions	27 (63)
Social media posts	20 (46)
Social influencers	16 (37)
TV adverts	1 (2)
Outdoor adverts	0 (0)

Influencer marketing plays a fundamental role in public health; 59 % of the survey participants followed social influencers on social media platforms and 16 % of participants reported influencers as having a high influence in determining their food choices. 32 % of participants stated that social influencers motivated them to make healthier food choices and 41 % said they motivated them sometimes. Social influencers can help motivate individuals to eat a healthier diet. Many influencers are not registered dietitians or qualified nutritionists and often share false or misleading nutritional information with no scientific evidence; this can negatively impact diet and health. A vast number of social influencers advocate gluten-free, dairy-free or vegan diets. Individuals may perceive these ‘fad diets’ to be the healthier option. Yet, these diets are not necessary unless advised by a health care professional as eliminating whole food categories may lead to an increased risk of nutritional deficiencies. Registered dietitians and qualified nutritionists are the best source of credible, accurate nutrition information; thus it is pertinent that they share their scientific-based information to the public.

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1. What is influencer marketing? Tap Influence. 2017.
2. Rob Farrell Talks Influencer Marketing. (2016). Digital Marketing Institute: Rob Farrell.