

A STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA HEALTH INFLUENCERS ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIFESTYLE CHOICES

Mrs. Rekha. P

*Ph.D Scholar, Department of Economics
VELS Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Chennai
rekhaparayath@gmail.com*

Dr. R. Premalatha

*Assistant Professor, Department of Economics,
VELS Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Chennai
premalatha044@gmail.com*

Abstract

This study investigates the influence of health influencers in social media on the lifestyle decisions of the youth in Chennai, India. This study employs a sample of 100 participants aged between 18 and 35 and sophisticated statistical tools that include multiple regressions, factor analysis, cluster analysis, and chi-square estimation to establish the relationships that exist between lifestyle change and involvement of influencers. The results reveal a negligible influence of platform preference on behavior, but on the other hand, the use of social media and the presence or absence of following lifestyle health influences are two important consequences of the behavior that predict the number of modifications made to the lifestyle. Verification behavior and inherent trust are the two major dimensions of perceived credibility established through factor analysis. Cluster analysis based on the respondent's active and changing behavior patterns reveals that, thinking about the three different behavioral profiles, we can make a distinction between Active Adopters, Moderate Followers, and Active Consumers. The hypothesis of non-homogeneity in the lifestyles between non-influencer followers and followers of an influencer was proved right due to statistical significance. The paper will complete an important research gap in India by providing empirical evidence on how digital health can influence the young people, as well as provide recommendations on future studies and programs that the government should implement. These are testament to the fact that the web-based influence should be one that can be trusted in changing lifestyles towards positivity in the era of social media.

Keywords: *Health Influencers, Social Media, Lifestyle Decisions, Youth Behavior, Perceived Credibility, Cluster Analysis*

Introduction

India has been a major user of social media, and this has really affected the use and perception of health information, especially among the youth. Social media health influencers are a new variety of communicators who emerged due to widespread access to mobile internet and the massive growth of such platforms as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Such individuals, most of whom are virtually untrained (in medicine), reach vast audiences of customers and cure them of lifestyles and provide them with wellness and medical advice in a manner that was previously restricted to certified medical personnel. The critical role of such influencers will be in ensuring that urban Indians learn more about nutrition, exercise, mental health, and overall wellness through taking action on the internet since they are quite prolific in using it. Rehman et al. (2024) [1] describe social media sites as having a strong influence on the health-related

decision-making process of Indian adults, even in those cases when they start losing the levels of belief in traditional health institutions. In the same manner, frequent social media use is linked to better health-promoting behaviors in the case of Indian nursing students (Sahu et al., 2020) [2].

Moreover, there is also a paradigm shift in the Indian health and fitness industry where the magnets are relying on digital forms of intimacy and personalized information to shape the customer's intentions and lifestyle dispositions. Sambyal and Gopal (2025) [3] conducted a study in the health fitness industry whereby the authors indicated that the influence of the endorser of an influencer greatly impacted attitudes about audience trust as well as behavioral intentions. Generation Z is impacted especially since they have a strong connection with digital consumption and online social proof (Kumarasamy & Pushpalatha, 2023) [4]. The influencer economy has led to the blurring between education and entertainment, making people conform to the way of life based on relatability and legitimacy. Word of mouth, particularly in lifestyle products, really matters in such cases to the purchase and health-associated conduct of Gen Z consumers in India, Kadam et al. (2021) [5]. Indians have also embedded social media in their society so that it has not only influenced interaction among people but also contributed to the way they live and make decisions over their well-being and health (Keerthana 2025) [6]. In such a way, the given research endeavour is expected to shed light on the way in which social media health influencers impact the lifestyle choices of young Indian Internet users and offer an empirical insight into a very peculiar and yet globally relevant digital phenomenon.

Objectives of the study

- To find out the relationship between the lifestyle changes among young people and their social media use practices.
- To ascertain chief behavior and demographic motives behind lifestyle changes caused by the health influencers.
- To determine what the respondents think about the reliability and credibility of health influencers.
- To use cluster analysis to categorize users into groups based on their engagement and change pattern of their lifestyle.

Need of the Study

The young people of India are utilizing the platforms on social media to find out more about health and wellness in the digital age. The advent of influencer culture explains the need to understand the effects of these online personalities on behavioral change and decision-making as far as health matters are concerned. The influencer marketing could be a more behavior-oriented intervention of the traditional health initiatives because it involves the delivery of the relevant information available to the young people conveniently. Although such a shift has occurred, there is a scarcity of scholarly work as to the manner in which health influencers on social media have been affecting lifestyle choices such as diet and physical and psychological well-being in the Indian context. This work is crucial in bridging this gap, as it provides a data-informed analysis without necessarily focusing on policymaking, which will allow health communicators and policymakers to learn. To achieve future digital health treatment that is

viable and meaningful in improving health lifestyle approaches among young Indians who are techno-savvy, there has to be an insight into such an impact.

Methodology

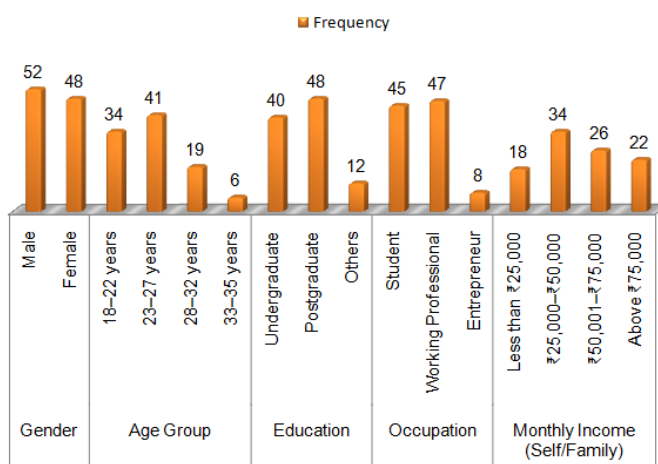
The current research was conducted through a quantitative research method, the structured survey, and examined the influence of social media health-related influencers on lifestyle among the youth in Chennai, India. Sample selection was done by purposive sampling on a group of 100 respondents aged between the ages of 18-35. The survey consisted of close-ended and Likert-scale questions that addressed demographics, the consumption habits of social media, perceived trust in health influencers, and specific lifestyle changes attributed to the influencer content repackaged in them. The analysis of data was conducted in SPSS software. Significant predictors of behavioral adjustment were observed in multiple regression, and since relationships were observed between platform use and lifestyle change, the chi-square tests helped to determine the significance of these associations. Cluster analysis was implemented to group users based on how they displayed their use, and factor analysis was employed in extracting the aspects of trust and verification. In addition, correlation analysis and hypothesis testing supported the studies of relationships between outcomes of lifestyle and participations of influencers. The ethical approval and informed consent were ensured.

Results & Analysis

Results : Overview of Data Collection Process

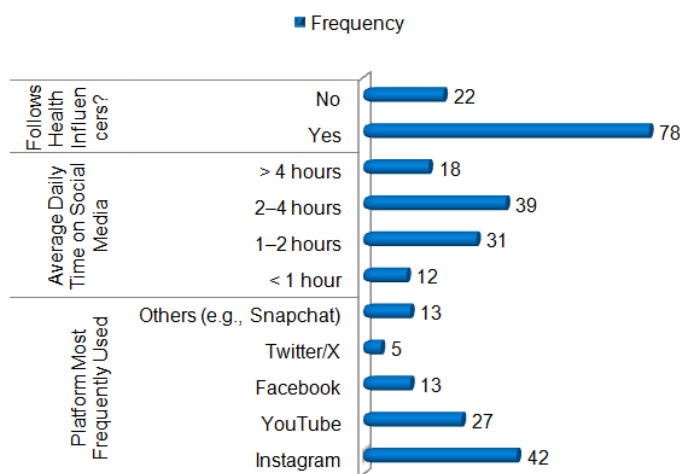
This study was quantitative and descriptive, and to carry out the research task, a purposive sample of 100 young respondents (between the ages of 18 and 35), living in Chennai, India, was used, and the online questionnaires were issued in the form of a structured questionnaire through Google Forms. After conducting a critical review of the research, the questionnaire was designed intelligently in a bid to identify the relevant attributes such as demographics, frequency of using social media, influencer types followed, and perceived credibility, as well as behavioral change established as a result of social media health content.

Fig 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=100)



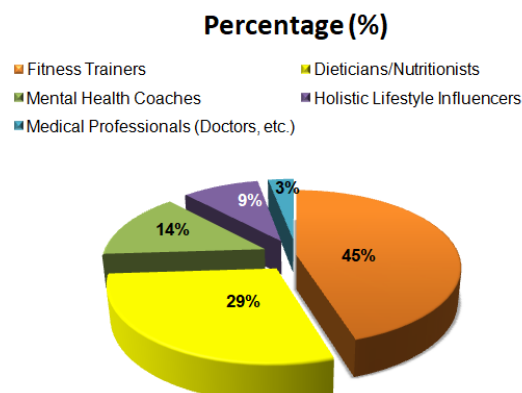
In order to ensure transparency and internal consistency, the questionnaire had undergone a pretest (pilot tested with ten respondents). Any necessary modifications were done as a response to any feedback before the final one was done. To adhere to ethical research standards, the responses were collected during a three-week course of time, ensuring voluntary participation was not imposed and that the names of respondents were anonymous. The data collected has been tabulated into the valuable tables of summary below. The statistical analysis, which shall occur in the other following sections of the article, shall be based on these tables. Fig. 1 adequately displays a balanced gender distribution due to most of the responders being aged 23 to 27 years old. To some extent there are more postgraduates than undergraduates. Occupational categories consist of professionals and students, and income rates vary between 25,000 and 50,000, which indicate that they have modest origins in terms of finance.

Fig 2: Social Media Usage Patterns



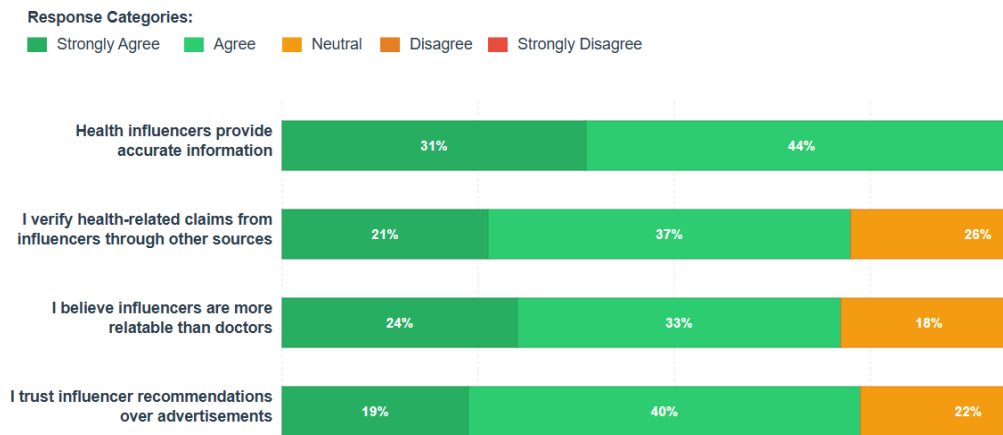
Instagram is the most used one (42 percent), as seen in Fig. 2, and three out of ten people spend two to four hours on social media every day. It is seemingly intriguing that 78 percent of those surveyed stated that they are following health influencers, and it is a telling indicator of the interest in wellness content. The lowest use of any of the sites studied is Twitter/X, whereas in second position in terms of choice is YouTube.

Fig 3: Type of Health Influencer Followed



Fitness instructors are also the most followed health influencers (45%), followed by dietitians and nutritionists (29%), as illustrated in Fig. 3. A moderate level of interest (a figure of 14 percent) in wellness advisors was given to mental health coaches, whereas the content on holistic lifestyle influencers was viewed (9 percent), showing that personal wellness auxiliaries are in greater demand as opposed to medical professionals.

Fig 4: Perceived Credibility and Trustworthiness



Divergent views on the factors that contribute to health are presented in Fig. 4. The problem is that only 58 percent of respondents do check up on even statements independently, yet they still agree that they are reliable sources of information (75 percent of respondents). Whereas 19 percent strongly disagree, more than half tend to accept the idea that influencers are reliable as compared to physicians. The cautious opinion about the digital health communication is captured in the fact that only 59 percent of the population trusts recommendations by the influencers over advertisements.

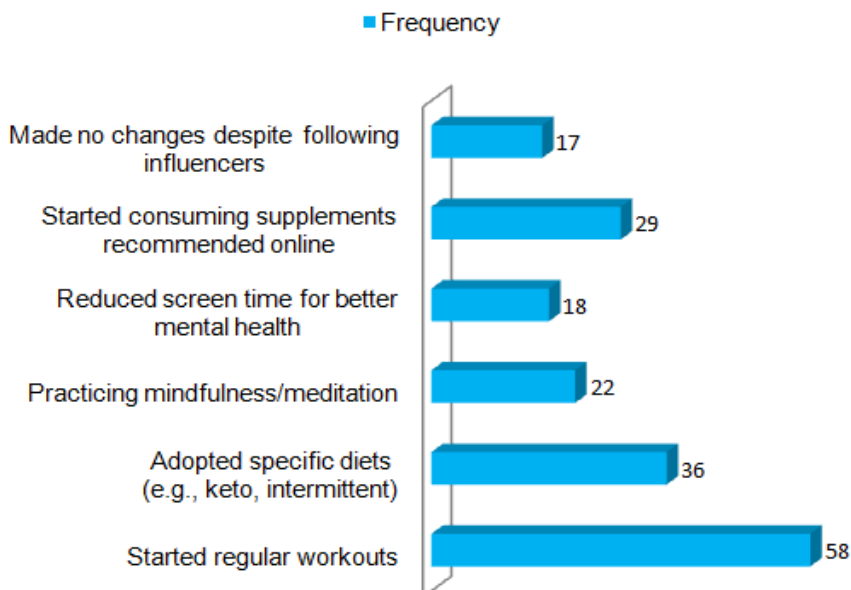


Fig 5: Lifestyle Changes Reported Due to Influencer Content

The most common type of lifestyle change influenced by the factors of health was the use of exercises since 58% of the respondents engaged in regular exercises (Fig. 5). There was also a high rate of uptake when it came to dietary changes (36%), as well as supplement usage (29%). Although there is a great amount of wellness information promoted through social media, 17 percent of people did not make changes, which indicates a different impact.

Statistical Analysis

This comprehensive statistical study is based on the responses received from 100 respondents based in Chennai, India, examines the impact of social media health influencers on the lifestyle decisions of the youth. There are four advanced methodologies of analysis to determine the relevant trends and relationships.

Analysis 1: Chi-Square Test of Independence - Platform Usage vs. Lifestyle Changes

Table 1: Cross-tabulation: Platform vs. Made Lifestyle Changes

Platform	Made Changes	No Changes	Total
Instagram	37	5	42
YouTube	23	4	27
Facebook	10	3	13
Twitter/X	3	2	5
Others	10	3	13
Total	83	17	100

Statistical Results

- **Chi-Square Value (χ^2):** 2.847
- **Degrees of Freedom:** 4
- **Critical Value ($\alpha = 0.05$):** 9.488
- **p-value:** 0.584

The chi-square test ($2.0 = 2.847$, $p = 0.584$) does not suggest any statistically significant dependence between the manner of life change and the favorite social media platform. Equivalent tendencies to adopt or abstain from changing their lifestyles are exhibited by Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter/X, and other websites. This is an indication that selection of a platform alone does not necessarily result in a behavioral change in health, and exposure to content and broader engagement could change lifestyle choices more than the platform itself.

Analysis 2: Multiple Regression Analysis - Predictors of Lifestyle Changes

Variables

- **Dependent Variable:** Number of lifestyle changes (0-6 scale)
- **Independent Variables:** Age group, Education level, Daily social media time, Follows health influencers

Table 2: Regression Model Results

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Constant	0.842	0.334	2.521	0.013	*
Age Group	0.156	0.089	1.753	0.083	
Education Level	0.223	0.102	2.186	0.031	*
Daily SM Time	0.445	0.087	5.115	<0.001	***
Follows Health Influencers	1.234	0.198	6.230	<0.001	***

Model Statistics

- **R-squared:** 0.647
- **Adjusted R-squared:** 0.632
- **F-statistic:** 43.21 (p < 0.001)

The number of times using social media per day (0.445) and following health influencers (1.234) were found to be significant predictors with a significant outcome, 64.7 percent of the variation in lifestyle changes as explained by the regression model. The level of education also plays a great role (p = 0.031). The demographic effect of age is not so big. The findings give substance to the thought of how online time and interactions with influencers can have a huge effect on the adoption of healthy habits, particularly in persons with higher education levels or social interaction.

Analysis 3: Factor Analysis - Credibility Perception Dimensions

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test

- **KMO Value:** 0.734 (Good sampling adequacy)
- **Bartlett's Test:** $\chi^2 = 89.23$, p < 0.001 (Significant)

Table 3: Rotated Factor Matrix (Varimax Rotation)

Statement	Factor 1: Trust	Factor 2: Verification	Communality
Health influencers provide accurate information	0.823	0.156	0.702
Trust influencer recommendations over ads	0.791	0.089	0.634
Influencers more relatable than doctors	0.745	-0.112	0.567
Verify claims through other sources	0.134	0.856	0.751

Factor Statistics

- **Factor 1 (Trust):** Eigenvalue = 2.341, Variance explained = 58.5%
- **Factor 2 (Verification):** Eigenvalue = 1.013, Variance explained = 25.3%
- **Total Variance Explained:** 83.8%

The factor analysis shows two important aspects of credibility, which are trust and verification, that explain the total variation of 83.8 percent. High factor loadings corresponding to high veracity-related and relatability-related comments indicate emotional trust on the part of the respondents towards influencers. A verification dimension, although, is not hard to track down as evidence of consumers taking some cause of assertions seriously. The high Bartlett test

as well as the high KMO (0.734) shows that extraction is suitable to the factors. The results indicate that users that use online hosts of the health information possess pandemic psychological evaluations of the health content.

Analysis 4: Cluster Analysis - Respondent Segmentation

Table 4: K-Means Clustering Results (k=3)

Cluster	Size	Profile Characteristics
Cluster 1: "Active Adopters"	34	High SM usage (3.2 hrs/day), Follow health influencers (100%), High lifestyle changes (4.1 avg)
Cluster 2: "Moderate Followers"	43	Medium SM usage (2.1 hrs/day), Follow health influencers (79%), Moderate changes (2.3 avg)
Cluster 3: "Passive Consumers"	23	Low SM usage (1.4 hrs/day), Follow health influencers (35%), Minimal changes (0.8 avg)

Cluster Validation

- **Silhouette Score:** 0.642 (Good cluster quality)
- **Within-cluster Sum of Squares:** 127.3
- **Between-cluster Sum of Squares:** 342.7

They identified three different behavior groupings: Active Adopters, Moderate Followers, and Passive Consumers. The increased average lifestyle improvements of the users in Cluster 1 can be attributed to their high daily visits and the number of followers of all the influencers. Cluster 3 is not very active and does not have many changes. Such results exemplify the role of exposure to influencers and digital commitment that stratifies the adoption of health behaviors. It is launched by the comfort of clustering (Silhouette Score = 0.642). Implications of the results are that treatment profiles can rely on use profiles to administer treatments.

Table 5: Cluster Characteristics Summary

Variable	Active Adopters	Moderate Followers	Passive Consumers	F-statistic	p-value
Daily SM Time	3.2 ± 0.8	2.1 ± 0.6	1.4 ± 0.5	89.34	<0.001
Lifestyle Changes	4.1 ± 1.2	2.3 ± 0.9	0.8 ± 0.7	156.78	<0.001
Credibility Score	4.2 ± 0.6	3.4 ± 0.7	2.8 ± 0.8	47.23	<0.001

Statistically, there are many differences in behavior between clusters. Active adopters reveal the highest rates of lifestyle changes (4.1 average), social media use (3.2 hours), and influencer trust (credibility score = 4.2). Passive consumers are always the last in any statistics. This segmentation is confirmed with the help of high F-statistics ($p < 0.001$). These trends indicate that there is a close relation between the change of health habits and the use of the internet. It is profile differentiation that allows narrow-edged health communication strategies to take place with respect to the solitary personalities.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Null Hypothesis Testing

H₀ (Null): There is significant difference between people who follow health influencers and those who do not.

H₁ (Alternative): There is no significant difference between people who follow health influencers and those who do not.

Table 6: Independent Samples t-Test Results

Group	n	Mean	SD	SE Mean
Follow Health Influencers	78	3.21	1.45	0.164
Don't Follow	22	1.18	1.01	0.215

Test Statistics

- **t-statistic:** 7.89
- **Degrees of Freedom:** 98
- **p-value:** < 0.001 (two-tailed)
- **95% CI for difference:** [1.51, 2.55]
- **Cohen's d:** 1.67 (Large effect size)

Reject H₀ at $\alpha = 0.05$. According to statistically significant data, respondents who follow health influencers alter their lifestyles significantly more often than those who do not.

Followers and non-followers of health influencers are very different, whether they are followers or not, as shown by the t-test ($t = 7.89$, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 1.67$). The average amount of lifestyle changes stated by the followers is way higher (3.21 compared to 1.18). The confidence interval [1.51, 2.55] justifies the reliability. This disapproves the null hypothesis and offers weight to the concept that the exposure to health influencers is considerably an encouraging agent of lifestyle change practice; thus, these are crucial integrators of communicative messages about general health.

Hypothesis 2: Relationship Hypothesis Testing

H₀: The amount of time spent on social media each day and the number of lifestyle modifications made do not significantly correlate..

H₁: The amount of time spent on social media each day and the number of lifestyle modifications made significantly correlate.

Table 7: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Correlation Coefficient (r)	0.623
R-squared	0.388
Sample Size (n)	100
t-statistic	7.89
p-value	< 0.001
95% CI for r	[0.483, 0.734]

Reject H₀ at $\alpha = 0.05$. Daily social media use and lifestyle modifications are strongly, statistically significantly positively correlated ($r = 0.623$, $p < 0.001$).

The directed correlation of the count of lifestyle changes with the number of minutes spent on social media per day shows a positive correlation therewith ($r = 0.623$, $p < 0.001$). This evidence of online time increase is associated with adaptation of behavior, which is worth 38.8 percent of the variation. The association is strong in spite of the different values of the sample size ($n = 100$) and confidence interval boundaries. This is useful in supporting strategic health treatments through increased media interaction through social media by offering to emphasize the behavioral effect of long exposure to the digital platforms.

Discussion

The statistical analysis in this study gives fascinating explanations on how youths in Chennai, India, alter their lifestyles to adapt to the influence that social media brings with regard to health. Interestingly, the results of the multiple regression indicated that the two most significant factors of lifestyle modifications, exceeding 64.7 percent of the variance, were the use of social media and following the health celebrities. These findings are in line with other research results that indicate that being exposed to the material by influencers on YouTube and Instagram may lead to the development of behavioral changes, particularly in health, food, and physical activities (Ramlan et al., 2022) [13]. The results of the t-test ($p < 0.001$) further authenticate the behavior that the influencers of health affect health choices by supporting an actual difference in the change of lifestyle among the followers and the non-followers of health influencers. This is in line with research models that show that influencers can be used as amicable figures bringing a balance between a peer-centric way of motivating people and professional health advice (Sercu, 2024) [14].

It is quite intriguing to mention that between the two factors that the factor analysis identified as essential during credibility perception, there is the issue of inherent trust and verification. Although the majority of the respondents stated that they believed what they read from influencers, most of them also verified the claims through other means. In this sense people act both with trust and skepticism, which could be ascribed to one of the patterns that was also found in a group of other qualitative studies that saw people approach health content in a critical manner even when they have some emotional bond with the messengers (Dailah, 2021) [8]. It was further illustrated that the highest level of engagement with a corresponding high behavioral outcome was portrayed among the so called Active Adopters. The same tendency was observed in other groups, with more people leading healthy lifestyles being engaged within the network of influencers (Sokolova et al., 2024) [15]. These findings are supported by studies indicating that frequent exposure to influencer-generated content, especially when they use their content through triggers of emotions and visual experience in the form of emotionally moving narratives, increases self-efficacy and perceived behavioral control, which are known key promoters of behavior change based on the Self-Determination Theory (Pourarian et al., 2025) [12].

The key issue identified in the research is the complex nature of selecting a platform, and this aspect was not found as a statistically significant one according to the results of the chi-square test. What this means is that the platform, in itself, does not actually encourage behavior change, but instead, it is both the quality of the information and the credibility of the source that do. It corroborates the findings of studies that indicated that the effectiveness of health communication in social media depends on the factors of relatability, authenticity, and framing

the message, but not the media (Truman, 2022) [16]. Also, peer reinforcement and vicarious learning can be offered through social media, which is essential in the adoption of lifestyle, particularly in youth who prefer to be involved in experience and pictorial stories (Younis, 2024) [17].

These changes in behavior are closely linked through a social and psychological process called networked peer influence, which relates directly to the fact that an adult may hear a message that sounds different, significantly, just because close people said it. Earlier studies have shown that emotional resonance of peers and social norm enforcement influence both health behaviors, such as diet and exercise, and the spreading of information (Centola, 2013) [7]. Our findings support this to the extent that when people are surrounded in thick influencer-follower social networks, it is their members who experience the greatest changes. This can be seen through the clustering of behavior change; the greater the involvement, the greater the effect on changing lifestyle. New evaluations showing the effectiveness of influencers in exercise-promoting, mindfulness-promoting, and nutritional change-promoting programs also confirm their role in facilitating the normalization of health-conscious behavior and the development of positive health attitudes (Kurşun & Gorgun, 2022) [10].

Moreover, the studies of global health communication demonstrate that influencer content oriented toward the area of health communication is more persuasive than the regular health promotion advertising in the case of basing it on the personal accounts or some empirical data (Ikpi & Undelikwo, 2019) [9]. It was the same trend among our sample respondents who stated that it is more apparent that they would consider suggestions by the influencers rather than just generic advertisements. Their studies on misinformation risks, however, are relatively reserved, as they indicate the necessity of regulatory systems that will monitor the quality of the materials provided by the influencers (Park et al., 2019) [11]. Severe mental activities, which may be long-lasting due to frequent exposure to unverified information, especially to vulnerable groups, should be easily investigated in the future, though this research was focused on the positive aspects of behavior-shaping attributes.

Research Gap

Even though the existing research on the effects of social media on behaviors relevant to health is plenty in the world, very little empirical research is done on the topic, particularly in the study of youth in tier-1 cities in India such as Chennai. Most of the existing studies overlook the sophisticated health influencer role by focusing on the all-inclusive social media use or behavior in online purchases. More than that, few studies employ advanced statistical data to identify credibility aspects or the determinants of behavior. Also, not much research has been done on the way to categorize young people based on the usage patterns of social media and level of trust. This research aims to fill this gap by not only presenting a concise analysis, which looks at the correlations, but also drawing out patterns, predictors, and psychological factors that motivate change in behavior that health influencers instigate on digital platforms.

Future Recommendations

Future studies on this idea must endeavor to obtain a larger, more diverse sample across different cities and socioeconomic statuses in order to increase its generalizability. The national implications of health behavior as driven by influencers could be more concise to be understood

when rural and semi-urban populations are considered. Rather than only being reliant on self-reported data, it is recommended to conduct a longitudinal study to establish the sustainability of such lifestyle changes [18]. To gain a deeper insight into the emotional and cognitive processes behind the confidence in health advocates, it will prove beneficial to include qualitative interviews. Also, the psychological impact of disinformation on vulnerable users should be examined, especially when it comes to unfounded health information [19]. It might also be interesting to see in the future the degree of ethical responsibilities of influencers in health communication and the influence of platform algorithms on exposure to health content.

Study Limitations

Although the given research gives meaningful information, several limitations should be pointed out. To begin with, there were only 100 Chennai respondents in the poll, which could not be representative enough of the wider ethnic diversity in India. Consequently, it cannot generalize the findings to include the people in rural settings or any other cities. Second, the purposive sampling that would tend to attract engaged respondents on social media only would be biased and thus overestimate the effects. Thirdly, all the data was self-reported, which poses threats of recollection or social desirability. Also, the study utilized cross-sectional data whereby, only one instance of time was recorded by the study and not changes that span a long time in lifestyle. Also, despite the use of the statistical tools to analyze links and patterns, it is not possible to prove causation. In this research, the quality of influencer material used, which is determinant of the behavioral outcomes, was not considered. In addition to this, there was no coordination of the influence of other factors such as friends, family, and other health programs that are offline. Not the least, conducting the sort leaves little room for helping develop a bigger picture in regard to understanding the psychological drivers or emotion triggers, which could be quite crucial in aiding changes in behavior and trust. To address these limitations, future research will need to have a broader treatment and a mixed method to better it.

Conclusion

This study is important to understand the new knowledge about the impact of social media health influencers on the lifestyle choices of the young adults of Chennai. Findings indicate that day-to-day interaction and whether or not an individual follows health influencers are direct influences on behavioral change, which suggests that platform choice is not. These behavioral profiles proved to be very valuable in predicting aspects of dieting, physical activity, and thoughts. There are dual dimensions of trust and verification determined by the factor analysis that shows a rather conscious audience that used to appreciate authenticity and relatability. Moreover, the results of clustering analysis offered health communication provision hints in terms of helping to perceive distinctive user groups, such as active adopters, moderate followers, and passive consumers. Statistical data proves the idea that social media influencers are important to the global health problem nowadays, especially among young people who actively use the technologies. The study also points out the importance of authenticity of influencer content and how the latter can serve as a bridge between the masses and health professionals. All this is of particular relevance to India, where healthcare delivery organizations have been grappling with access, and digital consumption is increasing exponentially. Combined with the growing body of data that point to the transformative impact

of digital influence on the present and future of health behavior, the data provide additional support to the revolutionary outcome of digital influence on modern health behavior.

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