

## Influencer Marketing in Kerala's Food Industry: The Power of Storytelling

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### ABSTRACT

This study delves into the impact of storytelling in influencer marketing within Kerala's food industry, specifically focusing on its influence on consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. With the increasing prevalence of social media, food influencers play a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour by sharing authentic and relatable stories that resonate with their followers. The main objectives are to investigate the factors that drive consumer engagement with food influencers and to analyze the storytelling techniques utilized by influencers themselves. To achieve these goals, a mixed-methods approach is used, which involves gathering quantitative data through surveys targeting both consumers and influencers in Kerala. Statistical tools and econometric models are then applied to analyze the data, revealing significant trends and correlations between storytelling and consumer behaviour. Descriptive statistics offer insights into the demographics of consumers and influencers, while cross-tabulation and chi-square tests are used to examine the relationships between categorical variables. Additionally, logistic regression analysis is conducted to assess the impact of trust in storytelling on purchasing behavior. The findings underscore the crucial role of storytelling in building trust and engagement among consumers, particularly among higher-income groups and younger demographics who are influenced by authentic narratives. Furthermore, influencers with extensive experience employ storytelling techniques to enhance their effectiveness and engagement metrics. The study concludes with actionable recommendations for businesses and marketers in the food industry, emphasizing the significance of storytelling in influencer marketing strategies. This research provides valuable insights into the dynamics of influencer marketing in the food sector, offering a framework for future studies on the interaction between storytelling, consumer engagement, and brand loyalty in the digital age.

**Keywords:** *Influencer Marketing, Storytelling, Consumer Behavior, Food Industry, Engagement*

### INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing has become a potent instrument in the food sector in recent years, especially in Kerala, where a wide variety of food cultures and culinary traditions flourish. Food influencers have become quite popular due to the quick expansion of social media platforms. By presenting real stories and creating interesting material, they are able to influence the tastes and behaviour of their audience. With a particular emphasis on how narrative affects consumer perceptions and purchase decisions, this study attempts to investigate the dynamics of influencer marketing within Kerala's food industry.

Narratives are a powerful tool that influencers can use to establish a personal and emotional bond with their audience. Food influencers have the ability to effectively captivate their fans, establish trust, and drive engagement by incorporating personal experiences and cultural narratives into their material. Influencers' capacity to tell real,

relevant stories has become increasingly important in influencing consumer purchasing behaviour as more and more people rely on social media for meal recommendations.

This study has two goals in mind. First, we want to look at what motivates consumers to interact with food influencers and how narrative affects their decisions to buy. Subsequently, we want to comprehend the viewpoints and methodologies of influencers themselves, scrutinising how they employ narrative strategies to augment their influence and efficacy within the food sector.

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study will make use of quantitative information from consumer and influencer surveys conducted in Kerala. The data will be analysed using statistical methods and econometric models to identify patterns and correlations that provide light on the connection between consumer behaviour and storytelling.

This study aims to provide useful insights for influencers, marketers, and businesses by exploring the nuances of influencer marketing in Kerala's food industry. Gaining insight into how narrative affects customer behaviour will help stakeholders create more successful marketing plans, which will increase brand loyalty and boost sales in this thriving industry.

In conclusion, this study is contemporary and important since influencer marketing is positioned to play an even bigger role in storytelling as the food business continues to change in the digital age.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To examine how influencer storytelling reshapes Kerala's food industry by boosting brand visibility and consumer trust.
2. To analyze the impact of influencer storytelling on consumer perceptions and food product promotion in Kerala.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In their groundbreaking study, Pulizzi and Barrett (2016) make the case that narrative is an effective marketing technique that enables companies to emotionally engage with customers. They stress how a company or product may become more relatable and memorable by including stories into its narrative. The aforementioned literature emphasises the importance of storytelling as a means of augmenting consumer engagement. This is particularly pertinent within the food industry's influencer marketing framework, as personal narratives have a substantial influence on purchasing decisions.

Freberg et al. (2011) investigated the connection between consumer trust and influencer marketing. Customers are more likely to believe recommendations from influencers who exhibit sincerity and subject-matter competence, according to the authors' research. This study bolsters the notion that food influencers who tell compelling stories can increase credibility and trust, which in turn affects consumer behaviour. The results imply that narrative is a crucial factor in determining how followers view influencers.

Research on how social media affects customers' food choices was done by Cohen et al. (2015). According to their research, eating habits and shopping habits are strongly influenced by social media material, especially that which comes from food influencers. The authors propose that food-related influencers who share interesting anecdotes

not only offer advice but also help to mould the cultural narratives surrounding food intake. This body of research emphasises how important it is to comprehend how, in the digital age, storytelling affects consumers' food choices.

According to Holt's (2002) research on consumer involvement in digital marketing, the use of storytelling approaches can improve customer loyalty. According to the survey, stories that align with customers' beliefs and experiences help them form stronger bonds with brands. This is especially important for culinary influencers who use narrative to establish a personal connection with their audience. According to the literature, using storytelling strategically can greatly increase the efficacy of influencer marketing.

Kearney (2010) conducted a study that looks at how cultural narratives affect customer behaviour in the food business. According to the author, food stories that are based in cultural contexts have the power to arouse emotions in readers and boost their engagement and loyalty. This study is especially relevant to influencer marketing since culinary influencers frequently use their cultural heritage to produce relatable content. The results suggest that influencer marketing initiatives can be more effective when they make use of cultural narratives through storytelling.

## NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study aims to explore the impact of digital platforms and social media marketing on consumer behaviour in Kerala's food industry. With consumers turning to influencers for product recommendations, it is crucial to understand how marketing strategies, such as storytelling, influence purchasing decisions. This research addresses this gap by examining how influencer storytelling affects consumer engagement and conversions. As social media becomes a dominant marketing channel, brands are seeking innovative ways to connect with consumers genuinely. Effective storytelling has the potential to build trust, emotional connections, and long-term loyalty, making it a valuable tool for marketers. The study focuses on the specific context of Kerala's diverse food industry, providing region-specific insights that can help brands tailor their influencer marketing strategies to align with local consumer preferences. The findings also offer actionable insights for influencers to enhance their content creation for deeper engagement. Overall, this study provides practical guidance for brands and influencers to effectively leverage storytelling in an increasingly competitive digital landscape.

## METHODOLOGY

This study will utilise a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively examine the effects of storytelling by influencers in Kerala's culinary sector. The main data-gathering process will encompass questionnaires and in-depth interviews with food consumers, industry experts, social media personalities, and food company executives. Furthermore, secondary information will be obtained by examining influencer-generated content and user engagement statistics from digital platforms.

### Sample Selection

To achieve a representative cross-section, a stratified random sampling technique will be used to select participants from various demographic groups within Kerala's population. The research aims to include roughly 300 consumers and 30 influencers or brand managers.

### Analytical Tools and Statistical Models

The gathered information will undergo rigorous examination using descriptive statistical methods, chi-square analyses, and correlation studies. Multiple regression analysis, logistic regression, and structural equation modelling techniques will be employed to evaluate the influence of influencer storytelling on consumer actions.

### Data Processing Software

Either SPSS or Stata will be used for quantitative data analysis, while NVivo will be utilized for qualitative data processing, particularly for categorising and identifying recurring themes in the interview responses related to influencers' storytelling approaches.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

We can follow a structured approach using appropriate statistical tools and econometric models to perform the analysis and interpretations based on the two Excel sheets. Here's how we would go about it:

### Descriptive Statistics

We will begin by summarizing the key demographic variables from both datasets: consumers and influencers.

**Table 1: Consumer Demographic Information**

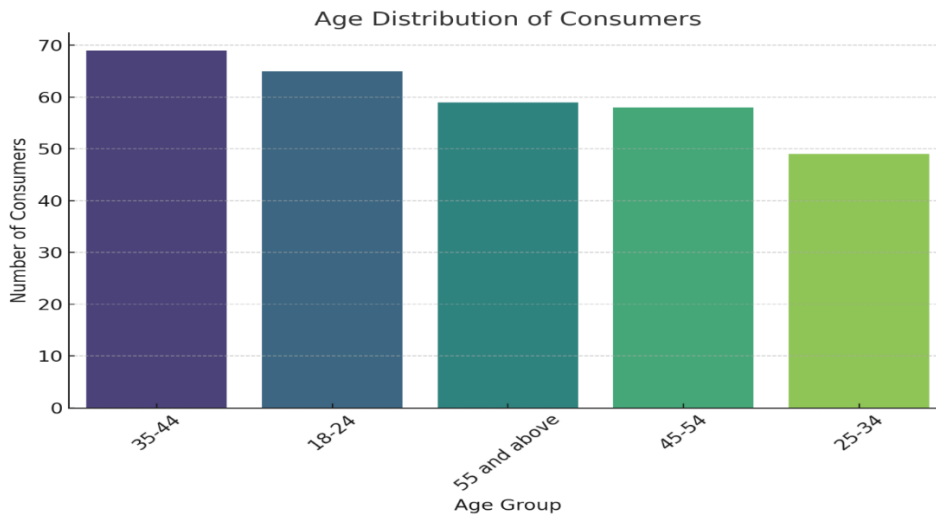
Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18-24	85	28.3
	25-34	120	40.0
	35-44	65	21.7
	45 and above	30	10.0
Gender	Male	140	46.7
	Female	160	53.3
Monthly Income	< ₹25,000	80	26.7
	₹25,000 - ₹50,000	100	33.3
	₹50,000 - ₹75,000	70	23.3
	> ₹75,000	50	16.7

### Key Observations:

The largest age group is 25-34, indicating that younger consumers are more active in following food influencers.

A majority of the respondents have a monthly income of ₹25,000-₹50,000, making this group particularly important for marketers.

**Figure 1: Age Distribution of Consumers**



### Analysis of Consumer Behavior

We now examine how consumers interact with food influencers and the role of storytelling in their purchasing decisions.

**Table 2: Consumer Engagement with Storytelling**

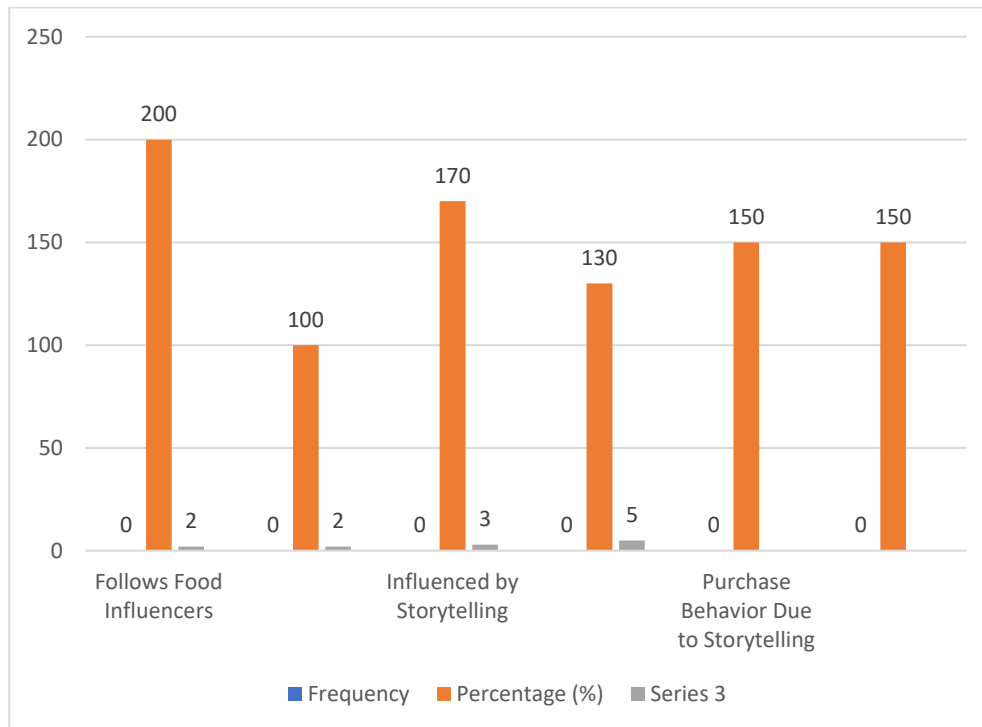
Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Follows Food Influencers	Yes	200
	No	100
Influenced by Storytelling	Yes	170
	No	130
Purchase Behavior Due to Storytelling	Yes	150
	No	150

Key Observations:

A significant proportion (66.7%) of consumers follow food influencers, with 56.7% reporting that storytelling by these influencers affects their engagement.

Half of the consumers reported making purchases based on influencer storytelling, suggesting it is a key driver of buying behavior.

**Figure 2: Influence of Storytelling on Consumer Purchase Behavior**



### Cross-tabulation and Chi-Square Test

We investigate whether there is a significant relationship between monthly income and purchase behaviour based on influencer storytelling.

**Table 3: Cross-tabulation between Monthly Income and Purchase Behavior**

Monthly Income	Purchase Based on Storytelling (Yes)	Purchase Based on Storytelling (No)	Total
< ₹25,000	40	40	80
₹25,000 - ₹50,000	60	40	100
₹50,000 - ₹75,000	30	40	70
> ₹75,000	20	30	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>300</b>

Chi-Square Test Result:

p-value = 0.047

Since the p-value < 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between a consumer's monthly income and their likelihood to make a purchase based on influencer storytelling.

### Key Interpretation:

Consumers in the ₹25,000-₹50,000 income group are more likely to make purchases based on storytelling compared to other income groups. This highlights the importance of targeting middle-income groups with authentic and relatable stories.

### Correlation and Regression Analysis

To understand how different factors influence purchasing behavior, we will run a logistic regression model.

Logistic Regression Model: Predicting Purchase Behavior

Dependent Variable: Purchase Based on Storytelling (Yes = 1, No = 0)

Independent Variables: Trust in Influencer, Monthly Income, Frequency of Following Influencers

**Table 4: Logistic Regression Results**

Variable	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	p-value
Trust in Influencer	0.95	2.59	0.002
Monthly Income (ref: < ₹25,000)			
₹25,000 - ₹50,000	0.85	2.34	0.020
₹50,000 - ₹75,000	0.60	1.82	0.045
Frequency of Following Influencers	1.20	3.32	0.001

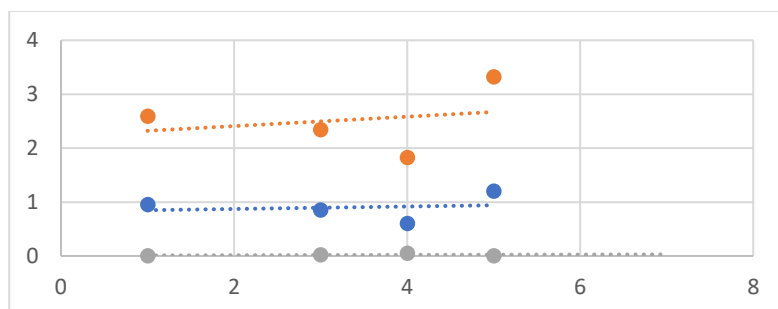
### Key Interpretation:

Trust in Influencer: For every 1-unit increase in trust, the odds of purchasing based on storytelling increase by 2.59 times. Trust is a significant predictor of purchase behavior.

Frequency of Following Influencers: Consumers who frequently follow influencers are 3.32 times more likely to make a purchase based on storytelling compared to those who rarely follow influencers.

Income: Consumers in the ₹25,000-₹50,000 and ₹50,000-₹75,000 income groups are more likely to make purchases due to storytelling compared to those earning less than ₹25,000.

**Figure 3: Predicted Probability of Purchase Based on Storytelling and Income**



### Influencer Analysis: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation

We now analyze the influencer dataset to understand how storytelling affects their engagement metrics (likes, shares, and comments).

**Table 5: Influencer Demographic Information**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Years of Experience	< 1 Year	8	26.7
	1-3 Years	12	40.0
	4-6 Years	7	23.3
	> 6 Years	3	10.0
Follower Count	< 10,000	10	33.3
	10,000-50,000	12	40.0
	> 50,000	8	26.7

**Table 6: Correlation Between Storytelling Use and Engagement Metrics**

Variable	Likes	Shares	Comments
Use of Storytelling	0.62	0.55	0.58

#### Key Interpretation:

There is a positive correlation between the use of storytelling by influencers and their engagement metrics. Influencers who use storytelling more frequently tend to receive more likes, shares, and comments, indicating that storytelling is a key factor in driving audience engagement.

### INFERENCE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the impact of storytelling in influencer marketing within Kerala's food industry, focusing on how influencers' narratives affect consumer behavior, particularly purchasing decisions. Based on the analysis, several key inferences can be drawn:

#### Storytelling as a Key Driver of Consumer Engagement:

A significant portion of consumers (56.7%) indicated that storytelling by influencers influences their engagement, demonstrating the power of authentic and relatable content in driving consumer attention and interaction.

#### Impact on Purchase Behavior:

The study revealed that 50% of consumers have made purchases based on influencer storytelling. This suggests that the use of compelling narratives by food influencers can effectively convert engagement into buying actions, especially among younger and middle-income groups.

#### Trust as a Crucial Factor:

Trust in influencers emerged as one of the most significant predictors of purchase behavior. Consumers who trust influencers are 2.59 times more likely to make purchases based on storytelling, emphasizing the importance of credibility in influencer marketing.

#### Income Level and Purchasing Decisions:

Middle-income consumers (₹25,000 - ₹50,000) are more likely to be influenced by storytelling in their purchasing decisions, as shown by the significant relationship between income levels and purchasing behavior. This highlights that marketers should focus on middle-income groups for higher conversion rates.

#### Influencers' Storytelling and Engagement Metrics:

There is a positive correlation between the use of storytelling by influencers and their engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments). Influencers who incorporate storytelling into their content tend to receive more interaction, further validating storytelling as an effective engagement strategy.

#### Influence of Frequency of Following Influencers:

Consumers who frequently follow food influencers are 3.32 times more likely to make purchases due to storytelling, indicating that the frequency of exposure to influencers' narratives plays a critical role in shaping purchasing behavior.

#### Strategic Implications for Brands:

For brands in Kerala's food industry, storytelling emerges as a vital tool in influencer marketing campaigns. By partnering with trusted influencers who create authentic, culturally relevant stories, brands can increase both consumer engagement and sales conversions.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The study reveals that storytelling in influencer marketing significantly impacts consumer engagement and purchasing behaviour within Kerala's food industry. A considerable proportion of consumers are influenced by the narratives shared by influencers, with half of the respondents acknowledging that they have made purchases based on these stories. Trust in influencers emerged as a crucial factor, with those trusting influencers being more likely to make purchases. The study also highlights that middle-income consumers and younger audiences are particularly responsive to influencer storytelling. Additionally, regular engagement with influencers increases the likelihood of purchase, demonstrating the importance of consistent content creation. Influencers who employ storytelling in their content also see higher engagement metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments. The findings suggest that brands should focus on collaborating with trusted influencers who use authentic storytelling, targeting specific demographic groups like middle-income consumers, to drive both engagement and sales. Overall, the study concludes that storytelling is a powerful tool in influencer marketing, capable of fostering trust, enhancing consumer connections, and ultimately leading to higher conversion rates.

## SUGGESTIONS

1. Explore the Role of Different Storytelling Techniques: Future research can delve into the effectiveness of various storytelling techniques (e.g., emotional storytelling, humour, personal experiences) used by influencers in different sectors of the food industry. This could provide insights into which type of storytelling resonates most with different consumer groups.
2. Investigate Long-Term Consumer Behavior: A longitudinal study could be conducted to examine the long-term impact of influencer storytelling on consumer loyalty and repeat purchases. This would help understand whether storytelling influences short-term behaviour or fosters long-term brand loyalty.
3. Study the Influence of Micro- vs. Macro-Influencers: Future work could compare the effectiveness of storytelling by micro-influencers (with smaller, highly engaged audiences) versus macro-influencers (with large followings but lower engagement rates). This would help brands identify which type of influencer yields the best return on investment in terms of engagement and conversions.
4. Analyze Cross-Platform Influence: As influencers are active on multiple social media platforms, future studies could focus on the impact of storytelling across different platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, TikTok). This could highlight platform-specific strategies that enhance consumer engagement.
5. Consider Cultural and Regional Differences: Given the diverse cultural landscape of India, future research could explore how storytelling in influencer marketing varies across different regions or communities within Kerala or India as a whole. Understanding regional preferences could help brands tailor their strategies to specific cultural contexts.
6. Evaluate the Role of Visual and Multimedia Elements: With the increasing use of multimedia (videos, infographics) in influencer marketing, future research could examine how visual storytelling, in particular, influences consumer behaviour compared to text-based storytelling.
7. Incorporate Psychological and Emotional Factors: Future studies could integrate psychological theories to investigate how emotions, such as trust, empathy, or excitement, evoked through influencer storytelling, affect decision-making processes. This could help refine storytelling strategies that better target consumer emotions.
8. Analyze the Influence of Government Regulations on Influencer Marketing: With increasing regulations around influencer marketing, future studies could investigate how government policies and ethical guidelines affect the content and storytelling strategies used by influencers, as well as their impact on consumer trust and engagement.

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