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## Influencer Marketing to Youth: The Impact of Instagram Influencer on Healthy Food Choices Among Youth

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### ABSTRACT

Healthy food choices have become a trend among youth as they are more concerned about their health. The increasing role of social media in affecting the behavioural change of today's society can be seen as social media has become an integral part of most people worldwide. The rise of influencer marketing on social media platforms is affecting the consumer's eating behaviour. However, previous studies have shown contradictory results regarding influencers' impact on youth's healthy eating behaviour. Scholars suggest that Instagram has a definitive effect in encouraging healthy eating behaviour among youth, but there is a lack of research that mainly focuses on Instagram's influencer marketing and its impact on eating behaviour. This study aims to focus on the roles of influencer marketing on Instagram in influencing youth's healthy eating behaviour. The Healthy Food Promotion Model is reviewed to explain the underlying mechanism of healthy food promotion. A qualitative research method was applied to collect the data. Intensive interviews were conducted with six Instagram users in Malaysia via Zoom Meeting. The study concludes that Instagram influencer marketing plays a vital role in influencing the healthy eating behaviour of youth. Future researchers are advised to conduct longitudinal studies on this research to adapt it to the continuous evolution of social media platforms. It is also to explore other possibilities of social media influencer marketing in influencing youth's healthy eating behaviour.

**Keywords:** healthy eating behaviour, healthy food promotion, influencer marketing, Instagram, social media marketing

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### Introduction

Healthy food choices have become a trend among youth due to the growing health and wellness consciousness due to the COVID-19 pandemic. People are changing the way they eat to strengthen their health. The pandemic-related quarantine can be categorised as a stressful event and can influence one's eating habits (Sidor & Rzymiski, 2020, p. 2). The attitudes towards health have changed as people tend to become more concerned about their health, and there is a shift towards healthier diets to control their weight (Sidor & Rzymiski, 2020). The millennials pay greater attention to healthy food than other generations and are willing to pay extra for healthy food (Nguyen, 2019).

Social media plays a vital role in promoting healthy eating habits among millennials, and Instagram influencers are deployed to promote healthy food. The 'eat and tweet' phenomenon is now commonplace, where users share photos and videos of their meals on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram. People can track the comments on Instagram feeds about healthy food shared by the influencers and interact with others to get a better understanding of healthy eating. The food photos posted on Instagram help Instagram users with healthy eating. Many influencers share photos of their healthy meals on Instagram, and people gain inspiration and motivation to eat healthier from them (Raggatt et al., 2018).

Social media influencers (SMIs) who share their healthy eating experiences have obtained enormous followings. When Instagram influencers have established credibility with their audience, they generally encourage people to maintain healthy eating habits. Hence, Instagram influencers are utilised by advertisers to promote healthy food products. Studies are being carried out to examine the relationship between SMIs and healthy eating habits. According to Byrne et al. (2017), influencer marketing plays a fundamental role in public health. Their study discovered that influencers strongly influence food choices and can motivate individuals to consume a healthier diet.

A study on the impact of social media on nutritional behaviour and purchase intention revealed that millennials do not rely on social media as a source of information for food products from both SMIs and peers (Almoussa et al., 2020, p. 89). However, another study on healthy food and Twitter showed that the "Influencer" community, focusing on influencer marketing, was the second-largest community and had a significant impact on customer behaviour (Pilar et al., 2021). The public's interest in healthy food is strongly influenced by influencers. As the results are contradictory, and the previous studies did not focus on Instagram influencers, the current study will concentrate on the influencers on Instagram and find out their impact on healthy food choices among youth.

Besides, healthy food choices are usually inspired and motivated by Instagram influencers with a healthy and athletic lifestyle. SMIs promote healthy eating with an overall healthy and aspirational lifestyle that encourages the healthy food choices of the users more effectively, especially the young audience. People mainly associate healthy food with a healthy lifestyle, and healthy food choices are more likely to be influenced by influencers with an aspirational, active and healthy lifestyle. For instance, fit influencers who share their active, healthy lifestyle on their profile, such as images of fitness and exercise, motivate individuals to eat healthily (Raggatt et al., 2018). Therefore, the lifestyle of an influencer is identified as a significant element in the field of healthy eating behaviour. Jans et al. (2021, p. 5), in a study on digital food marketing and healthy food choices, claimed that in terms of promoting a snack high in nutritional value, no significant differences were found between an athletic versus a sedentary influencer. This indicates that the healthy lifestyle of an influencer did not lead the children to choose the snack high in nutritional value. The findings of these studies are contradictory with each other, and no research has been carried out based on Instagram influencers and focusing on the target group of youth.

Therefore, the current study aims to find out to what extent Instagram influencers are effective in stimulating healthy food choices; to identify the type of influencer marketing on Instagram that is effective in promoting healthy food choices among youth; to find out to what extent the lifestyle of an Instagram influencer is a significant factor in influencing youth's healthy food choices; to investigate whether the healthy and athletic lifestyle of an Instagram influencer can affect youth's healthy food choices more efficiently.

Throughout the research, Instagram users, especially the youth, will be more conscious of the power of Instagram influencer marketing in affecting their healthy eating behaviour. Moreover, youth can identify Instagram influencer marketing campaigns on healthy food that are more reliable and credible. Youth can utilise Instagram as a platform to obtain information in order to strengthen their health by eating healthier. Besides, it could raise awareness and understanding of the importance of practising a healthy lifestyle in order to achieve the goal of improving health.

### **Research Objective**

RO1: To examine the roles of influencer marketing on Instagram towards youth's healthy eating behaviour.

RO2: To identify which type of influencer marketing on Instagram can affect youth the most on their healthy eating behaviour.

RO3: To investigate whether an Instagram influencer's healthy and athletic lifestyle can affect youth's healthy food choices more efficiently.

RO4: To find out to what extent the lifestyle of an Instagram influencer is a significant factor in affecting youth's healthy food choices.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent has influencer marketing on Instagram affected youth's healthy food choices?
2. What type of influencer marketing on Instagram is effective in changing youth's healthy eating behaviour?
3. What types of Instagram influencers do Malaysian youths prefer when it comes to healthy food content?
4. Which type of lifestyle (an athletic and healthy lifestyle versus a sedentary lifestyle) portrayed by Instagram influencers positively impacts healthy eating behaviour among youth?

### **Significance of The Study**

Throughout the research, the results will contribute a great benefit to the advertising industry. The advertisers are able to understand the role and the power of influencer marketing on Instagram in promoting healthy food choices among youth. The findings of this research will allow advertisers to understand the effectiveness of different types of influencer marketing in influencing the healthy food choices of youth. Therefore, advertisers can utilise the impact of influencer marketing by creating content that is compatible with the audiences' preferences. In addition, this research will provide them with information regarding which type of lifestyle the Instagram influencers promote is more effective in promoting healthy food choices among youth. With the findings, the advertisers can identify and contact the corresponding social media influencers, thus advertising their products effectively.

Besides, the findings of this research will contribute to the social media marketing sector. This research will provide results, including the impact of influencer marketing and influencers on Instagram, enabling social media marketers to understand the effectiveness of Instagram as a marketing tool. The results of this study also allow marketers to identify which formats are more effective in promoting healthy food products. Hence, marketers are able to select the appropriate influencer marketing strategies for better results in promoting healthy food products. In general, this research can act as a reference or guideline for advertisers and social media marketers to use Instagram influencers to promote healthy eating habits and healthy food products through influencer marketing.

### **Literature Review**

The level of social media consumption is continually increasing. There is an apparent phenomenon where the utilisation of social media in marketing increased with a continuous and highly dynamic increase in expenditure on online promotional activities. Wielki (2020, p. 2) indicates that Generation Z requires an entirely different marketing strategy since it is ceasing to pay attention to traditional advertising forms. As they spend a great amount of time on social media, they are willing to trust and follow the people present on social media, known as influencers. Therefore, to adapt to this new market circumstance, organisations have found alternative ways of promoting their products, services or brands. One of the most significant trends is the use of influencer marketing. Influencer marketing has become the fastest-growing trend regarding communication with consumers, and the number of campaigns and posts has increased since 2015 (Wielki, 2020, p. 2).

Nielsen's study (cited in Wielki 2020, p. 5) indicates that 92 per cent of worldwide consumers think that user-generated content and word-of-mouth recommendations are more credible compared to advertising, which contributes to the rise of influencer marketing. The main criteria for the effectiveness of influencer marketing are the trustworthiness of a particular person as an authority, the credibility of the message, and the connection between the message and a particular receiver (Wielki, 2020). Influencer marketing provides credibility that traditional marketing communications will find difficult to achieve (Jarrar et al., 2020, pp. 50-51). Influencer marketing has become so pervasive that users can hardly scroll through Instagram without coming across this kind of marketing.

According to Lee and Kim (2020, p. 234), as a visual-oriented platform, Instagram has become influencers' most favoured media platform. Influencers utilise Instagram to generate word-of-mouth advertising that allows their followers to view, tag, like and share the promotional postings. They add value to the particular brand, product or service; therefore, their credibility has been considered the most significant antecedent to the effectiveness of advertising. Influencers integrate detailed descriptions of their reviews and personal experiences with the product or service to influence their followers' buying decisions. Sternthal et al. (as cited in Lee & Kim, 2020, p. 233) claim that using influencers with high credibility will lead to a higher probability of success in constructing positive attitudes among consumers towards a brand, product or service, even if in a situation where consumers acknowledge the intention of the promotional post in advertising and resist the persuasion.

People generally perceive promotional postings by Instagram influencers as authentic and credible, which results in a positive attitude towards the brand and higher buying intention. The Instagram profiles of celebrities are among the most-followed Instagram accounts, frequently used by brands to promote their products or services to their enormous followers. Influencer marketing has become so pervasive that users can hardly scroll through Instagram without coming across this kind of marketing. Instagram stands out for its importance for influencer marketing with the young user base. It affects the consumer segments susceptible to this form of marketing communication (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 10). The researchers also mention that Instagram influencers can bring a huge impact when utilised effectively. In 2019, Gucci, the Italian fashion house, collaborated with 23 artists on Instagram to create highly creative content for the launch of their new fragrance line, Gucci Bloom. The campaign was hugely successful, reaching nearly 750,000 followers (Haenlein et al., 2020, p. 6).

Instagram influencer marketing has a high potential in promoting healthier food choices among young people. People who were exposed to Instagram influencers, such as popular real-fit influencers, had a positive attitude towards healthy food items (Folkvord et al., 2020, p. 9). Food influencers utilise Instagram functions such as hashtags and comments to interact with and affect users' consumption behaviour. Product placement on Instagram is an effective tool for marketing as users perceive the sponsored posts as product reviews or recommendations (Reagan et al., 2020, p. 5). For the food industry, social media influencers, especially on Instagram, have changed consumer perceptions of food advertising. Instagram influencers convince their followers that consuming the promoted food products enhances or maintains their health by posting photos and videos of their physical bodies as proof. This could build a connection between the promoted food products and the health of the influencers. Findings have shown that in order to promote a healthy food product effectively, it is crucial for influencers to establish connections and relationships with their followers (Folkvord et al., 2020, p. 8). High parasocial interaction with the followers helps influencers generate higher purchasing intention towards healthy foods among the followers. Social media users consider influencers highly trustworthy, leading them to simply follow the recommendations of influencers and purchase the products they promote (Folkvord et al., 2020, p. 9).

The younger generation has become more concerned about their food consumption and their personal health (Willers & Schmidt, 2017). Millennials are increasingly consuming more organic foods. They are the largest group of organic food buyers. They are more knowledgeable about organic foods, have higher trust in organic labelling and are willing to pay premium prices for organic and healthy food (Molinillo et al., 2020, p. 2). Shipman (2020) states that millennials are effective users of social media; they are the ones who set new trends and follow the opinions of other users on social media. They mainly search for recipes and foods on social media as they have been integrated with technology.

Shipman (2020) claims that millennials following others' opinions and sharing views or experiences on social media not only shapes their values and beliefs but also change their food choices and purchasing decisions. Leslie's study (as cited in Shipman, 2020) suggests that due to the tendency of millennials to search and engage in social media communications, they would develop values on certain foods and components based on the current trend on social media. For example, sugar has been promoted as unhealthy on social media, which caused millennials to have more interest in alternatives for sweet drinks such as Kombucha, vinegar, sugar-free drinks and traditional tonics (Shipman, 2020, p. 52).

Food-related posts on social media influence millennials' food choices and appetites (Chik et al., 2019, p. 24). There are a million Instagram posts using the hashtag #foodporn that are affecting people's food decisions, such as their food intake patterns and nutritional requirements. Millennials are more likely to come across influencer posts and be influenced by the tempting pictures and videos (Nair & L, 2021, p. 9327). The researchers also claim that the use of vlogs by social media influencers to promote food products is attractive and effective for audiences. Most youths prefer to try out the food suggested in the vlogs posted by influencers on Instagram (Nair & L, 2021). Millennials would prefer Instagram as a source to obtain health advice, including what kinds of food they should be eating (Chatzopoulou et al., 2020). Health, nutrition and food are common topics shared on social media by food and wellness influencers, health organisations and regular social media users (Klassen et al., 2018). Millennials are being bombarded with food content by other users and sponsored messages from food industry organisations on social media. Influencers usually post photos of their healthy meals, sharing healthy food recipes and healthy food brand recommendations to inspire their followers to perform a healthier lifestyle through consuming healthier foods.

### ***Healthy Food Promotion Model***

The Healthy Food Promotion Model aims to gain insight into the underlying mechanism of healthy food promotion. This model consists of five foundational assumptions. The first assumption is that we will increase attention to the value of healthy foods, such as liking and wanting, through food promotion. The food cues in advertising will enhance the attention of youth towards the value of healthy foods, which will be reinforced and lead to the second assumption. The second assumption of the model is a reciprocal relation to dietary intake. Healthy food promotional activity on social media will inspire and motivate the youth to consume healthier foods, giving rise to the third assumption. The third assumption is that the model assumes that it will cause an increased intake of healthy foods and, as a result, lead to a habit of information regarding the intake of the particular food or food groups. As soon as this habit increasingly influences the youth and they consume healthier foods more frequently for a longer period, it will cause the fourth assumption (Folkvord & Hermans, 2020). The fourth assumption of the model is that the habits will improve health states as indicated by physiological and psychological improvements. Examples of physiological improvement are blood lipids, blood pressure, insulin sensitivity, inflammation levels, neurological activity, and weight, which are all for psychological improvement, such as hunger, craving, and mental well-being. Lastly, as the distinctive susceptibility to media effects, the Healthy Food Promotion Model assumes that individual and societal factors significantly determine susceptibility to the promotion of healthy food. This indicates that an influencer's characteristics might be crucial in encouraging youth in their choice of healthy foods. Individuals have different individual and societal characteristics, such as gender, body mass index, socioeconomic status, impulsivity, food fussiness and parental feeding style. This will lead to a different effect on youth when they expose themselves to healthy food promotional posts on social media (Folkvord & Hermans, 2020). Therefore, the Healthy Food Promotion Model provides a framework that combines existing empirical evidence regarding how techniques in promoting food influence eating behaviour.

### **Methods**

The study aims to examine the roles of influencer marketing on Instagram towards youth's healthy eating behaviour. The qualitative research method is applied, and intensive interviews will be conducted to gain access to the opinions and perceptions of the respondents. Non-probability sampling and purposive samples are adopted in this research. Respondents are selected for certain characteristics or qualities, and those who fail to meet these criteria will be eliminated. The criteria for selecting

respondents are Malaysians aged 15 to 34, active Instagram users, followed Instagram influencers and consumed healthier food at least once in a while.

The interview questions will be designed as open-ended questions to generate a full and meaningful answer from the respondents. The intensive interviews will be conducted online using Zoom, a video conferencing software. The interview sessions will be recorded in audio and video format. The intensive interviews will be conducted respectively under the respondents' agreement on the time through video conferencing software. Before the intensive interview starts, there will be a brief introduction to the research topic, the institution and course of the researcher, and the purpose of conducting the interview. The respondents will be asked all the questions designed to convey the research objective. The interview sessions will be recorded, and the respondent's answers will be jotted down and transformed into transcripts.

## **Results**

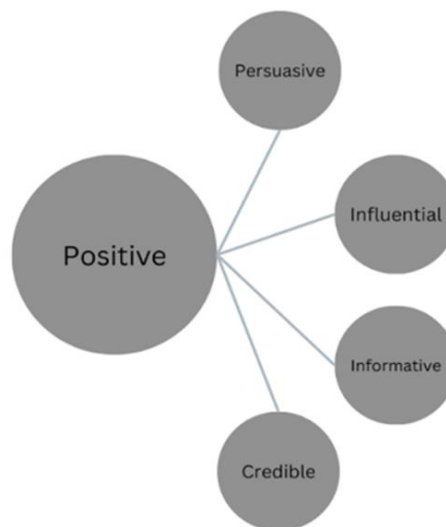
This section presents the main findings of the study as derived from the intensive interview data with six respondents who have fulfilled the requirements. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the qualitative data collected.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

RO: To identify how influencer marketing on Instagram can stimulate healthy eating behaviour among Malaysian youth.

## **Figure 1**

*To identify how influencer marketing on Instagram can stimulate healthy eating behaviour among Malaysian youth*



The positive theme is discovered in the analysis of how influencer marketing on Instagram can stimulate healthy eating behaviour among Malaysian youth. From the data collected, the respondents have responded positively that Instagram influencer marketing can stimulate healthy eating behaviour. Persuasion is the subtheme the respondents found about the reviews on healthy food products shared by Instagram influencers. Instagram influencers are able to persuade respondents to purchase and try healthy food products with persuasive reviews such as the products are full of vitamins and some other nutrients that are beneficial to their bodies. Therefore, the reviews increase their interest towards healthy foods, which corresponds to the first assumption of the Healthy Food Promotion Model.

Influential is the subtheme discovered. Healthy food promotional posts on Instagram are powerful in influencing healthy food choices. The posts are able to attract the respondents' attention and increase awareness of healthy eating behaviour as they realise the existence of the products through exposure to the posts. The posts also encourage them to change their menu, research to understand more about healthy eating behaviour, and explore healthy food stores, recipes, and new healthy food products. This corresponds to the study of Shipman (2020), which suggests that millennials mainly search for recipes and foods on social media. Besides, engaging with influencers on healthy food promotional posts is influential as it enables the respondents to relate to healthy foods, which would trigger their desire to consume similar healthy food products. This could reduce the intake of unhealthy food when the desire to consume healthy food is higher. Engagement, such as sharing posts with others, allows better interaction and communication between respondents and their friends. Respondents can understand more about healthy food in a more interactive way. Therefore, high engagement may increase their healthy eating behaviour.

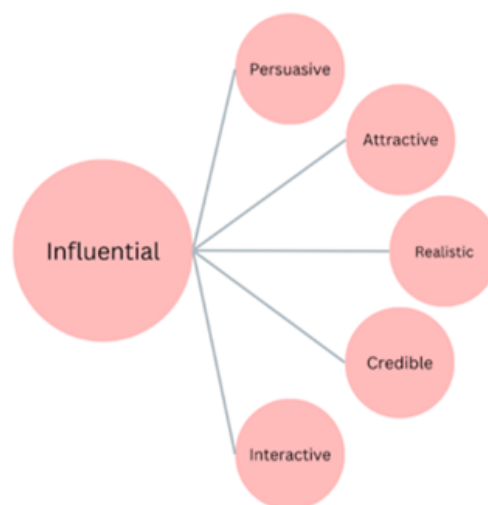
The subtheme informative is found in the respondents when they explain how healthy food promotional posts could influence their healthy food choices. The healthy food promotional posts on Instagram provide relevant information to the respondents, which affects their food preferences. The posts inform them about the benefits and importance of healthy eating behaviour, which enables them to know whether healthy food is helpful for them in order to have a healthier or stronger body. The ways to prepare healthy food could be significant information in helping them to explore more healthy foods.

Credible is the subtheme discovered when respondents explain how influencer marketing on Instagram can stimulate healthy eating behaviour among Malaysian youth. Credibility is one of the important elements when it comes to reviews of a certain product from Instagram influencers, as respondents are able to build trust and confidence towards certain healthy food brands or products from the reviews. This corresponds to the findings of Lee and Kim (2020) that people usually perceive promotional postings by Instagram influencers as authentic and credible. The reviews are credible and trustworthy because of the influencers' honest feedback, opinions and thoughts. Respondents are more likely to trust the reviews if the reviews are from favourite influencers and when more information about the product is provided.

RO2: To identify which type of influencer marketing on Instagram can affect youth the most on their healthy eating behaviour.

**Figure 2**

*To identify which type of influencer marketing on Instagram can affect Malaysian youth the most on their healthy eating behaviour*



The theme of influence is discovered in the analysis of which type of influencer marketing on Instagram can affect youth the most in terms of their healthy eating behaviour. From the data collected, the respondents have responded that product reviews are their preferred influencer marketing campaign. Besides, respondents claimed that Instagram influencer marketing in the forms of Instagram reel (IG reel) and Instagram story (IG story) is more effective in affecting their healthy food choices.

The subtheme, persuasive, is discovered from respondents in this research when they explain why they would prefer the mentioned influencer marketing campaign. It is more convincing and attractive to respondents when Instagram influencers review the product by including its good and bad sides. Respondents are more likely to be attracted to the healthy food product if its brand ambassador is a famous influencer. Moreover, respondents think that content collaboration is more convincing because the influencers promote healthy food products that are related to their content, which helps them to identify whether the products are helpful.

Credible is the subtheme found from respondents in this research. Respondents have a higher level of credibility towards product reviews and brand ambassadors. Instagram influencers' product reviews on healthy food products are considered credible because they have tried the products themselves before sharing their personal opinions, feelings and thoughts. Respondents would trust reviews that are realistic. This corresponds with the findings of Lee and Kim (2020) that influencers integrate detailed descriptions of reviews and personal experiences with the product or service to influence followers' buying decision behaviour. Besides, if the Instagram influencers are the brand ambassadors, respondents will trust them more because they believe that the influencers are able to provide accurate information and be responsible for what they say. Therefore, credibility is an essential factor for an effective influencer marketing campaign on healthy food products.

Interactive is the subtheme discovered in this research. The interaction between Instagram influencers and respondents could increase their interest in healthy food products. Respondents participate in the giveaway campaign for healthy food products to get a prize. Therefore, a high interaction with the influencers increases the effectiveness of influencer marketing in affecting healthy eating behaviour.

Attractive is the subtheme discovered in this research when respondents share their opinion on which form of Instagram influencer marketing is more effective in affecting their healthy food choices. IG reels and IG stories are considered attractive and could catch their attention compared to IG posts. IG reel is attractive as respondents are more likely to watch videos that present the content through interesting visuals, sounds and good editing effects. For the IG story, respondents would spend much time watching it because of its attractiveness.

Realism is another theme found by the respondents in this research. An IG story is considered more realistic than an IG post and an IG reel as it involves the daily life events of Instagram influencers. Instagram influencers who promote healthy foods on IG stories in a casual and natural way are more likely to increase their followers' engagement with the content. Besides, the IG reel is considered realistic because Instagram influencers will provide their views towards healthy foods from their own perspective. Therefore, the content of influencer marketing should be realistic in order to increase its effectiveness.

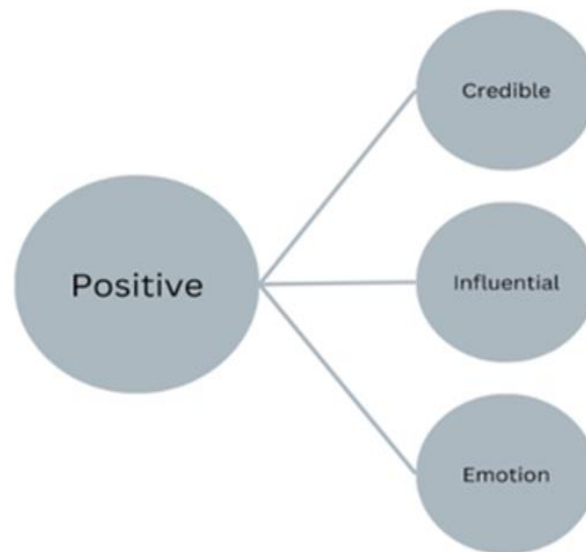
RO3: To investigate whether an Instagram influencer's healthy and athletic lifestyle can affect youth's healthy food choices more efficiently.

The theme positive is discovered in respondents' responses on whether an Instagram influencer's healthy and athletic lifestyle can affect youth's healthy food choices more efficiently. Credible is the subtheme discovered in this research when respondents explain why a healthy lifestyle Instagram influencer will be more persuasive for them to consume healthy food. Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles are more knowledgeable in health as they try to build and maintain a healthy lifestyle with healthy food. Respondents are more likely to believe that healthy food improves their health by looking at the healthy lifestyles that are being portrayed by the influencers. Therefore, it is more trustable for respondents to follow the healthy eating behaviour of influencers with healthy lifestyles.



**Figure 3**

*To investigate whether the healthy and athletic lifestyle of an Instagram influencer can affect Malaysian youths' healthy food choices more efficiently*



Influential is the subtheme discovered in this research. The healthy lifestyles presented by Instagram influencers are powerful in changing one's eating behaviour. It tends to remind respondents to avoid unhealthy habits and attract them to try healthy food. Therefore, the healthy lifestyle of an Instagram influencer is more persuasive than a sedentary lifestyle when it comes to promoting healthy eating behaviour.

Emotion is another subtheme found from respondents in this research. The healthy lifestyles of the Instagram influencers affect the emotions of respondents, who are motivated to practice the same lifestyle in order to become healthier. Respondents tend to feel the urge to consume healthy food as a result of being influenced by the healthy lifestyles of Instagram influencers. Therefore, the healthy lifestyles portrayed by Instagram influencers are able to modify the emotions of the respondents, which leads them to eat in a healthier way.

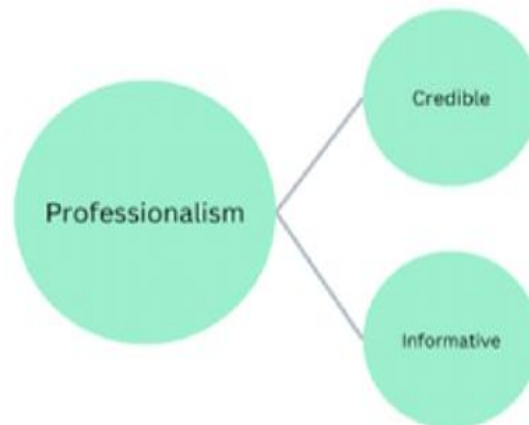
RO4: To find out to what extent the lifestyle of an Instagram influencer is a significant factor in affecting youth's healthy food choices.

Professionalism is the theme discovered in this research when respondents describe their preferred Instagram influencers regarding healthy food content. The career of Instagram influencers is one of the elements that respondents would consider because they are more likely to trust and follow people who are professionals when it comes to healthy food content, for instance, fitness trainers, qualified dietitians, and chefs. This corresponds to the fifth assumption of the Healthy Food Promotion Model, where an influencer's characteristics might be crucial in encouraging youth in their choice of healthy foods.

The subtheme is credible. Respondents look into the credibility of Instagram influencers, which comes from their professionalism in the field. Respondents claim that Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles can influence them. This group of influencers is knowledgeable on health-related issues, including healthy food, and they are more concerned about the nutritional values of food ingredients to maintain their health. Therefore, respondents believe in their reviews and recommendations, which would affect and increase their practice of healthy eating behaviour.

**Figure 4**

*Influence of Instagram Lifestyle on Malaysian Youths' Healthy Food Choices*



Informative is another subtheme analysed. The practice of healthy lifestyles by Instagram influencers tends to provide information to respondents, such as the nutritional value of food. Respondents obtain opinions and suggestions about healthy eating behaviour from the influencers. This information or suggestions will be taken as the references when respondents select the food items and thus increase the intake of healthy food. This corresponds to the findings of Klassen et al. (2018) that millennials are interested in learning information about nutrition through social media.

## **Discussion**

The findings show that the impact of Instagram influencers on healthy food choices among respondents is resulting in a positive way. The majority of the respondents agree that healthy food promotional posts on Instagram influence their healthy food choices. We can analyse whether respondents' eating behaviour is affected by healthy food promotional content by Instagram influencers. The themes derived from the responses are credible, influential, informative, and persuasive when respondents comment on the impact of Instagram influencers on their healthy food choices.

“The posts allow me to explore more different kinds of healthy food stores, recipes and products. I can understand more about healthy food, the benefits, and the ways of preparing healthy food by myself.” (Respondent 5)

“Yes, it will increase not just interest but credibility and trust towards certain brands of healthy food if I saw some of my favourite Influencers promote on their Instagram story or posts.” (Respondent 1)

“Yes. I tend to eat more healthy food because the more I engage with them, I will be exposed to more healthy food related content which will trigger me to have the desire to eat healthier.” (Respondent 4)

The respondents' responses correspond to the five Healthy Food Promotion Model assumptions. A successful influencer marketing should be able to manipulate eating behaviour towards healthy eating. As a result, Instagram influencers shall enhance their credibility by providing accurate information and expanding knowledge on health. This is because the findings indicate that credibility is one of the important elements when it comes to reviews on healthy food products, as respondents are able to build trust and confidence towards certain healthy food brands or products from the reviews. Besides, the findings suggest that informative content can increase the respondent's purchase intention.

“Yes. Usually the reviews are real feedback, opinions and thoughts after they have tried the products, so I think it is more trustworthy. And positive reviews will let me feel more confident towards the products which will lead me to know more about it.” (Respondent 4)

“The reviews normally come with detailed information of the products, then from there I can understand more about the products or even purchase them.” (Respondent 3)

Instagram influencers could use product reviews when promoting healthy food products, as youth are more likely to be attracted to trustworthy reviews from Instagram influencers. Among the Instagram influencer marketing campaigns, most respondents claim that product reviews interest them the most. The findings indicate that product reviews have higher credibility and are more persuasive in convincing the respondents to try the product.

“Product reviews, normally is after they tried it everything, what they said and they will try it themselves and they will personally give their opinions, share out their feelings, their thoughts about this product which is we can say that it is much more realistic, much more real, so it is actually able to trust them.” (Respondent 6)

“Product reviews, as I take credibility as the most important reason for me to buy a product.” (Respondent 5)

Besides, Instagram influencers need to produce attractive content in order to maximise their influence on healthy eating behaviour among youth. This could be done by utilising the variety of formats on Instagram. Among IG posts, IG stories and IG reels, respondents think that IG reels and IG stories have greater effectiveness in affecting their healthy food choices.

“I think (it) is IG reels. Because reels really reach quite a large audience base on social media, especially Instagram. There are more interests and have higher chances to seek people's attention through interesting visuals, sounds and effects editing and also content.” (Respondent 1)

“IG story, because I expose myself more to IG story and sometimes it is unavoidable to view their story. And the content of IG stories are usually more casual, natural. When influencers connect the products with their daily life events, I will easily relate myself with the content.” (Respondent 3)

Moreover, if influencer marketing involves Instagram influencers who are practising healthy lifestyles, it will increase the effectiveness in influencing youth's healthy eating behaviour. Healthy eating behaviour is associated with a healthy lifestyle, as mentioned by the respondents. Respondents believe that Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles are more credible, and respondents are more likely to follow their suggestions, which would lead to an increasing practice of healthy eating behaviour.

“Yes, because they will share more healthy food compared to those who did not have a healthy lifestyle because I believe that a person with a healthy lifestyle will consume healthy food that is really beneficial for our body. And also they are more credible, because they are more expert and have more knowledge about health.” (Respondent 3)

“Healthy lifestyle. I feel that I can become healthy like them. It is more persuasive that healthy food will improve my health by looking at their healthy lifestyle.” (Respondent 4)

In general, the current study's findings show that Instagram influencer marketing greatly influences youth's healthy food choices. By applying the Healthy Promotion Food Model, the findings suggest a few techniques for promoting healthy food to affect youth's healthy eating behaviour. One of the techniques is to increase the attention of youth on the value of healthy food through healthy food promotion, such as providing detailed and accurate information about healthy foods. This could be done through various influencer marketing campaigns on Instagram, where Instagram influencers are able to convey information and raise awareness about the importance of eating healthy to youth. Another technique is to inspire and motivate youth to consume healthy foods, such as the promotion of new healthy food products on Instagram that encourage youth to try the particular healthy food. This affects

youth's healthy eating behaviour and thus improves their health states physiologically and psychologically.

Besides, Instagram influencer marketing on healthy food should select Instagram influencers that practice a healthy lifestyle, as individual characteristics are crucial elements to consider. Youth associate healthy food with a healthy lifestyle; therefore, promoting healthy food by an Instagram influencer who practices a healthy lifestyle will increase youth's susceptibility towards healthy food promotion. Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles are experienced and more knowledgeable about eating healthy, and youth have a higher level of trust in them compared to those with unhealthy lifestyles. Therefore, Instagram influencer marketing on healthy food could be more impactful when the Instagram influencer practices a healthy lifestyle.

## **Discussion**

Healthy food promotional posts influence youths' healthy food choices by providing information to them. The posts attract the attention of youth and influence them by causing them to explore more healthy food stores, recipes, and products and making them more likely to try new healthy foods, hence changing their menu. Reviews on healthy food products are perceived as credible, informative and persuasive and could simulate youth's healthy eating behaviour. Attractive and informative recommendations in Instagram influencer marketing encourage youth to purchase healthy food products. Instagram influencer marketing plays its role in reminding and raising awareness about healthy eating behaviour among youth, which increases their healthy eating behaviour. Besides, engagement between youth and healthy food promotional posts by Instagram influencers stimulates youth's healthy eating behaviour. Engagement increases youth's connection to healthy foods; thus, their healthy food intake will increase.

The most effective type of Instagram influencer marketing in affecting youth's healthy eating behaviour is through product reviews. Product review is most effective because it provides youth with a sense of credibility as it contains realistic and honest reviews from influencers, including the good and bad sides of the product. Youths take credibility as the most crucial element to influence their behaviour. The forms of Instagram influencer marketing that effectively affect youth's healthy food choices are IG reels and IG stories. Youth prefer IG reels in video format rather than IG posts that are usually associated with lengthy captions. IG reels and stories are perceived as more attractive and realistic.

The healthy lifestyle of an Instagram influencer is more effective in persuading youth to consume healthy food. Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles are perceived as more credible, influential, and powerful in affecting youths' emotions. They are more credible because they are more knowledgeable in maintaining their health with healthy food than those with a sedentary lifestyle. Instagram influencers with healthy lifestyles increase youth's susceptibility to healthy food promotion. These influencers share and recommend more healthy foods that are beneficial for health. They are more credible as they are experts in consuming healthy diets and have more health knowledge. This increases the interest and confidence of youth towards healthy eating behaviour.

Youth associate healthy food with a healthy lifestyle, meaning individuals who practice healthy eating behaviour will practice a healthy lifestyle and vice versa. Therefore, Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles are more persuasive in promoting healthy eating behaviour. Youth prefer Instagram influencers who are professional and knowledgeable in health and diet, such as a fitness trainer, qualified dietitian, chef and workout influencer. These influencers are more credible with their professional knowledge and experience in their respective field. Instagram influencers with healthy lifestyles encourage youth to practice healthy eating when they share the healthy foods they consume. Besides, these influencers provide informative messages to youth, such as the nutritional values of healthy foods and youth are willing to learn from them. Therefore, the lifestyle of an Instagram influencer is a significant factor in influencing youth's healthy eating behaviour.

### ***Theoretical Implications of Results***

The purpose of studying the Healthy Food Promotion Model is to examine whether this model is able to support the outcome of objectives, which will be discussed in this section. This model consists of five foundational assumptions and explains how techniques in promoting food affect eating behaviour.

By applying this model to this research, the five assumptions are being fulfilled. The first assumption of this model is that food promotion will increase youth's attention to the value of healthy foods (Folkvord & Hermans, 2020). From the findings of this research, healthy food promotion by Instagram influencers provides respondents with detailed information, such as the nutritional value and the benefits of eating healthy foods. It increases respondents' awareness of healthy eating behaviour, leading them to pay more attention to their food selection. Product reviews, content collaboration, or any other form of healthy food promotion help respondents understand the importance of consuming healthy food and how healthy food could help improve their health.

The second assumption suggests that healthy food promotional activity on social media will inspire and motivate youth to consume healthier food (Folkvord & Hermans, 2020). The findings of this research indicate that social media is a motivational platform that motivates respondents to consume healthier food. Instagram's healthy food promotional activity motivates youth to try healthy food products and cook healthy and balanced diets. Therefore, youth will consume healthier food due to Instagram's healthy food promotional activity.

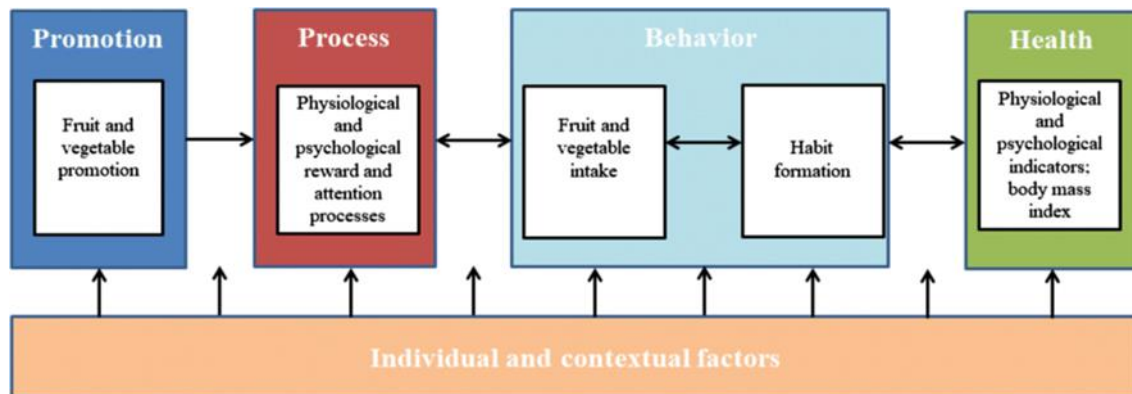
The third assumption is that youth will continue increasing their healthy food intake, leading to a habit of information regarding the intake of healthy foods (Folkvord & Hermans, 2020). According to the findings, most respondents have increased their healthy food intake after viewing the healthy food promotional posts on Instagram. Respondents also put more effort into doing research on healthy food products in order to have a better understanding of healthy foods. Therefore, it fulfils the third assumption.

The fourth assumption suggests that healthy eating habits will improve health, as indicated by physiological and psychological improvements (Folkvord & Hermans, 2020). The findings of this research indicate that respondents experience psychological improvements such as craving healthy food and having a desire to eat healthier after being exposed to healthy food promotional activity from Instagram influencers because they want to be as healthy as the influencers. This indicates that respondents believe that practising healthy eating behaviour will improve their health. Besides, respondents have physiological improvements by practising healthy eating, such as maintaining body shape and weight. Respondents agree that healthy eating helps prevent high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

The fifth assumption suggests that individual and societal factors significantly determine susceptibility to the promotion of healthy food (Folkvord & Hermans, 2020). In this assumption, the model assumes that the characteristics of an influencer might be crucial in encouraging youth to select healthy foods. The findings indicate that respondents associate healthy food with a healthy lifestyle and prefer Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles regarding healthy food content. Respondents perceive Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles as more credible, influential, and persuasive in conveying information about healthy food. Besides, respondents prefer to view healthy food content from Instagram influencers who are professionals, such as fitness trainers, qualified dietitians, chefs, and workout influencers. This is because they are more likely to trust influencers who have experience and knowledge in nutrition and health. Therefore, the characteristics of an influencer, including lifestyle and career, are crucial in affecting youth's healthy food choices.

**Figure 5**

*Healthy Promotion Food Model*



The single arrows pointing at the concepts indicate that we expect a direct effect on these concepts. The double arrows indicate a reciprocal relation between the concepts and motivations related to food intake. Overall, by applying the model to this research, the researcher finds out the techniques for promoting healthy food to affect youth's healthy eating behaviour. One of the techniques is to increase the attention of youth on the value of healthy food through healthy food promotion, such as providing detailed and accurate information about healthy foods. This could be done through various influencer marketing campaigns on Instagram, where Instagram influencers are able to convey information and raise awareness about the importance of eating healthy to youth. Another technique is inspiring and motivating youth to consume healthy foods, such as promoting new healthy food products on Instagram that encourage youth to try the particular healthy food. This affects youth's healthy eating behaviour and thus improves their health states physiologically and psychologically.

Besides, Instagram influencer marketing on healthy food should select Instagram influencers that practice a healthy lifestyle, as individual characteristics are crucial elements to consider. Youth associate healthy food with a healthy lifestyle; therefore, promoting healthy food by an Instagram influencer who practices a healthy lifestyle will increase youth's susceptibility towards healthy food promotion. Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles are experienced and more knowledgeable about eating healthy, and youth have a higher level of trust in them compared to those with unhealthy lifestyles. Therefore, Instagram influencer marketing on healthy food could be more impactful when the Instagram influencer practices a healthy lifestyle.

***Suggestions For Future Research***

Future researchers can conduct longitudinal studies to account for the continuous evolution of Instagram and other social media platforms. They could explore the influence of emerging social media platforms like TikTok, Douyin, Xiaohongshu, Clubhouse, and others on youth's healthy food choices. These platforms have gained substantial popularity, as evidenced by their high number of active users. This suggests their potential impact on youth's behaviour. By focusing on these trending social media platforms, researchers can investigate whether they influence youth's healthy eating behaviour similarly to Instagram.

***Conclusion***

This study attempted to examine the roles of influencer marketing on Instagram towards the healthy eating behaviour of youth. It is important for advertisers and social media marketers to understand the impact of Instagram influencer marketing to ensure that they can utilise social media to promote healthy eating habits and healthy food products. Youths practice healthy eating because they become more concerned about their health, and healthy eating behaviour has become a trend in social media. Instagram influencer marketing can stimulate healthy eating behaviour among youth by providing

credible information, honest reviews and the involvement of youth in engaging with Instagram influencers. Product review is the most effective type of Instagram influencer marketing in affecting youth's healthy eating behaviour. Instagram influencers can use IG reels and IG stories to promote healthy food products because they are attractive and effective for youth. Youth are interested in learning information about nutrition, and they mainly obtain it from Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles, such as fitness and exercise influencers. Therefore, the lifestyle of an Instagram influencer is a significant factor to consider in healthy food influencer marketing, as Instagram influencers who practice healthy lifestyles can affect youth's healthy food choices more efficiently. However, the continuous evolution of social media platforms might cause the findings to be inapplicable in the future. Therefore, a longitudinal study on this research needs to be conducted to explore the potential of social media influencer marketing in influencing youth's healthy eating behaviour.

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The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

### **Author Contribution Statement**

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The article adheres to the ethical standards set by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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