

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
COLLEGE OF BASIC AND APPLIED SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES



**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN THE DIETARY CHOICES OF
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA STUDENTS**

BY
SHARON NAA ATSWEI MENSAH
(11008031)

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF
PHILOSOPHY IN NUTRITION**

DEPARTMENT OF NUTRITION AND FOOD SCIENCE

NOVEMBER 2024

DECLARATION

I, Mensah Sharon Naa Atswei, hereby declare that, except for the references cited in this work which have been duly acknowledged, the work presented here was conducted by Mensah Sharon Naa Atswei through research under the supervision of Professor Matilda Steiner-Asiedu and Professor Seth Adu-Afarwuah of the Department of Nutrition and Food Science, University of Ghana, Legon.

Sharon Naa Atswei Mensah

(11008031)



Signature

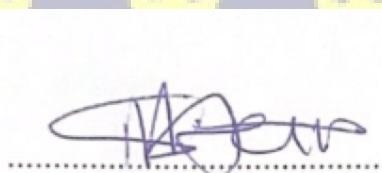
.....15/10/2025.....

Date

STUDENT

Prof. Matilda Steiner-Asiedu

Supervisor



Signature

.....15/10/2025.....

Date

Prof. Seth Adu-Afarwua

Co-Supervisor



Signature

.....15/10/2025.....

Date



ABSTRACT

Background: As social media influencers become increasingly prominent in shaping food and dietary trends, understanding their influence on students' dietary choices is essential. This research aimed to determine the role of social media influencers in the dietary choices of University of Ghana students.

Methods: This was a mixed-methods cross-sectional study involving 348 undergraduate students aged 17-25 years from the University of Ghana. Kobo Collect software was used to collect information on socio-demographic characteristics, social media usage, the influence of social media influencers on dietary content, and dietary choices. There were ten dietary choices questions, and they were measured as good or poor dietary choices and coded as good=1 and poor=0. Data on selected foods consumed by participants were collected using a food frequency questionnaire. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (version 26). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: Participants were aged between 17 and 25 years and included 201 (58%) females and 147 (42%) males. Selected foods reportedly consumed daily by participants included cereals (34% of participants), meat (44%), egg (56%), and fish (55%). Percentage of participants who reported low influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on their dietary choices was 64%, whereas 32% reported a medium influence, and 4% reported a high influence. The percentage of participants classified as having good dietary choices was 80%. Participants' sex was associated with having good dietary choices; males were more likely to have good dietary choices than females (adjusted OR (95% CI: 3.2 (2.0, 5.2); $P < 0.001$). The role of SMIs in influencing the dietary choices of participants was modified by participants' age (P-Interaction = 0.04), number of SMI followed (P-Interaction = 0.05) and verified SMI followed (P-Interaction = 0.02). For example, among young participants (aged 17-19 years) the likelihood of having good dietary choices was nearly four times greater in those with high SMIs role

compared with those with low SMI role (adjusted OR (95% CI): 3.7 (1.3, 10.6); $P = 0.04$). In older participants, however, the likelihood of having good dietary choices was only two times greater in those with high SMI role compared with those with low SMI role (adjusted OR (95% CI): 1.8 (0.7, 5.0); $P = 0.05$). Focus group discussions highlighted additional influences, including cost, peer influence and time constraints, with students expressing skepticism toward influencers' advice. Both results indicate that while SMIs have some influence, other factors play a larger role in students' dietary decisions.

Conclusion: Social media influencers play a role in influencing University of Ghana students' dietary choices, but their influence is limited by various factors



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God for His protection, guidance, strength, wisdom and knowledge, skills and for giving me a healthy life which equipped me to successfully complete this work.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The completion of this study could not have been possible without the expertise and guidance of Professor Matilda Steiner-Asiedu and Professor Seth Adu-Afarwuah, my beloved project supervisors for the assistance, advice, support, and patience they exercised in reviewing my work.

Finally, my sincere gratitude to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Mensah, my siblings Mr. Micheal Mensah and Miss. Beatrice-Joy Mensah who shared their words of advice and encouragement to finish this study. I want to say a big thank you and God bless you all. A big thank you to the department for training and equipping me to be able to see this project to be completed.



TABLE OF CONTENT

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
Background.....	ii
Methods:	ii
Results.....	ii
Conclusion:	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
TABLE OF CONTENT	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
APPENDIX.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE	1
1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Rationale	2
1.3 Main Objective.....	4
1.4 Specific Objectives	4
CHAPTER TWO	5
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW	5
2.1 Dietary Choices in the Use of Social Media.....	5
2.2 Social Media Influencers	6
2.3 Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Social Media Influencers	8
2.3.1 Attractiveness.....	8
2.3.2 Expertise	9
2.3.3 Engagement.....	9
2.4 Dietary Choices Among University Students	10
2.5 Factors that Influence Dietary Choices Among University Students	11
2.5.1 Socioeconomic Status	11
2.5.2 Peer Influence and Social Environment.....	12
2.5.3 Cultural and Ethnic Background.....	13
2.5.4 Gender Differences	15
2.5.5 Nutritional Knowledge and Awareness	16

2.6 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	17
CHAPTER THREE	19
3.0 METHODOLOGY	19
3.1 Research Design.....	19
3.2 Research Site.....	19
3.3 Study Population.....	19
3.3.1 Inclusion Criteria	19
3.3.2 Exclusion Criteria	20
3.4 Sample Size Calculation	20
3.5 Sampling Technique	20
3.6 Data Collection	20
3.6.1 Questionnaire Administration.....	21
3.6.2 Focus Group Discussion	22
3.7 Data Analyses	22
3.8 Quality Control	24
3.9 Ethical Consideration.....	24
CHAPTER FOUR.....	26
4.0 RESULTS	26
4.1 Background Characteristics of Participants	26
4.2 Frequency of Selected Foods Consumed.....	24
4.3 Social Media Usage	25
4.4 Participants Who Follow Social Media Influencers across Various Platforms.	26
4.5 Identities of Social Media Influencers Who Provide Dietary Information.....	27
4.6 Participant Recipe Trials driven by Social Media Influencer Influence.....	28
4.7 Participant Incorporation of Social Media Influencer Recommendations into Dietary Choices.....	29
4.8 Reported Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of Participants.....	30
4.9 Predictors that Influence the Role of Social Media Influencers in Dietary Choices of Participants.....	31
4.10 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Focus Group Discussion Participants	33
4.11 Focus Group Discussion	34
CHAPTER FIVE	38
5.0 DISCUSSION	38
5.1 Dietary Intake.....	38
5.2 Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of the Participants	40
5.2.1 Low Influence of Social Media Influencers in their Dietary Choices	40

5.2.2 Medium Influence of Social Media Influencers in their Dietary Choices	41
5.2.3 High Influence of Social Media Influencers in their Dietary Choices.....	41
5.3 Modifying Predictors that Influence the Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of Study Participants.	42
5.3.1 Sex and Social Media Influencers' Influence on Dietary Choices.....	42
5.3.2 Age as a Modifier in Social Media Influencers' Influence on Dietary Choices.....	42
5.3.3 Impact of Following Numerous Social Media Influencers on Dietary Choices.....	43
5.3.4 Influence of Verified Social Media Influencers on Dietary Choices.....	43
5.4 Factors other than SMIs which Influence the Dietary Choices of University of Ghana Students.....	43
5.4.1 Cost Considerations	44
5.4.2 Peer Influences.....	44
5.4.3 Taste and Preferences	45
5.4.4 Time Constraints.....	45
5.4.5 Health and Nutrition Awareness.....	45
5.5 Opinions of University of Ghana Students Regarding the Role of Social Media Influencers in their Dietary Choices.	46
5.5.1 The Extent of Social Media Influencers' Influence on their Dietary Choices.....	46
5.5.2 Recalling Specific Instances of Dietary Changes due to Social Media Influencers	46
5.5.3 Perceptions of the Credibility of Dietary Advice from Social Media Influencers .	47
5.5.4 Responsibility of Social Media Influencers in Promoting Healthy Dietary Choices	47
5.5.5 Pressure to Conform to Specific Diets or Foods Trends Promoted by Social Media Influencers.....	47
5.5.6 Accuracy of Social Media Influencers' Representation of Dietary Choices and Creation of Unrealistic Expectations	48
CHAPTER SIX.....	49
6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION.....	49
6.1 Conclusion	49
6.2 Recommendations for Research	50
6.3 Recommendations for Policy.....	50
REFERENCES	51

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=348)	26
Table 4.2 Frequency of Selected Foods Consumed in a Week by Participants (N=348).....	24
Table 4.3 Social Media use of Participants (N=348).....	25
Table 4.4 Predictors that Influence the Role of Social Media Influencers in Dietary Choices of Participants (N=348).....	31
Table 4.5 Stratified Analysis of the Association between the Role of Social Media Influencers Dietary Choices of Participants	32
Table 4.6 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Focus Group Discussion Participants (N=24)	33



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Theoretical-Conceptual Framework of this Study.....	17
Figure 4.1 Percentage of Participants Following Social Media Influencers on Different Social Media Platforms.....	26
Figure 4.2 Percentage of Participants Following Social Media Influencers with these Identities for Dietary Information.....	27
Figure 4.3 Participants Response to Trying a Recipe	28
Figure 4.4 Percentage of Participants who Incorporate Recommendations from Social Media Influencers into their Dietary Choice.....	29
Figure 4.5 Percentage of the Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of.....	30
Participants (N=348).....	30



APPENDIX

Appendix 1: INFORMED CONSENT	60
Appendix 2a SELF-REPORTED QUESTIONNAIRE	63
Appendix 2b - FOCUS GROUP GUIDE.....	71
Appendix 3 - ETHICAL CLEARANCE	73



CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the impact of social media on many aspects of human behavior. Among the vast amounts of information available on social media platforms, dietary choices and food-related content have gained a lot of attention, particularly among students. Social media influencers, who have significant followings on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, routinely broadcast content about food, nutrition, and lifestyle, influencing their audiences' dietary choices (Byrd-Bredbenner, 2022; Turner, Lefevre, & Mishra, 2021). The extent to which these influences influence food decisions, particularly among university students who are developing lifelong habits, is an area that warrants further investigation (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

University students are a unique group that usually have more freedom and make decisions that impact their health and well-being. According to Turel and Qahri-Saremi (2018), they spend many hours per day on various social media platforms. The content consumed on these platforms, particularly from influencers, can have a significant impact on their food choices, leading to both positive and negative health effects (Vasiljevic et al., 2018). While some influencers encourage healthy eating habits and balanced diets, others may promote fad diets or dangerous food products, leading to poor nutritional choices (Carrotte et al., 2019; Bozzola et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Coates et al. (2019) argue that social media influencers can effectively influence their followers' food choices by promoting specific diets or products, often by leveraging their

perceived authenticity and trustworthiness (Freberg et al., 2011). This effect can be beneficial and destructive, as influencers may support healthy eating habits or, conversely, embrace diets that are not evidence-based or even dangerous (Vadeboncoeur, Townsend, & Foster, 2015). Given the critical time of life at which university students are building long-term lifestyle habits, the impact of social media influencers on their eating choices is a major cause of concern.

Evidence in Ghana and Sub-Saharan Africa is currently scarce, but recent research suggests that social media is progressively affecting consumer culture, especially food-related behaviors (Boateng & Amankwah, 2021; Ofosu-Asare, Agyemang, & Appiah, 2022). University students' decisions are influenced not just by their friends and socioeconomic level, but also by the emergence of influencer-driven trends that may promote both healthy and unhealthy behaviors (Ogum Alangea, Aryeetey, and Ohemeng, 2018; Adams & Stanton, 2019). Understanding this influence is crucial for designing measures to promote healthier eating habits among students.

1.2 Rationale

The influence of social media on people's daily lives, particularly university students, is rapidly expanding, with food decisions being one of many elements influenced by online platforms. Social media influencers (SMIs), who frequently have enormous followings and significant influence over their audiences, play a crucial role in shaping trends, particularly those related to food and nutrition (Turner, Lefevre, & Kelly, 2021). Previous study has demonstrated that social media can influence dietary decisions in both positive and bad ways, depending on the

type of information read and the credibility of the source (Byrd-Bredbenner, Johnson, Quick, Walsh, & Greene, 2021; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

However, it is unclear if SMIs influence dietary choices among university students in Ghana and Sub-Saharan Africa. This is critical because university students are at a crossroads in their lives, when they are often accountable for their own nutrition, which may be influenced by external factors such as social media (VanKim, Larson, & Laska, 2012). Existing research indicates that influencers, particularly those perceived as authentic or relatable, can have a significant impact on their followers' nutritional choices (Cunningham & Johnson, 2020; Bozzola, Spina, Ruggiero, Vecchio, & Caruso, 2022). Social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok are overrun with diet, fitness, and wellness content, and influencers frequently promote nutritional methods that may not be evidence-based (Vasiljevic, Cartwright, & Pechey, 2018).

Despite this, it is unclear whether the role of SMIs is influenced by age, gender, the number of influencers followed, and the number of verified influencers. Some research imply that younger students are more vulnerable to social media diet trends (Wilson & Black, 2022), whilst others demonstrate gender variations in response to online health content (Smith, Brown, & Lee, 2021). According to research, exposure to many influencers might dilute influence due to contradictory messages (Turner & Graham, 2021), and verified accounts may raise suspicion due to apparent commercial interests (Nguyen, 2021). However, these findings have not been thoroughly investigated in Ghana or Sub-Saharan Africa, resulting in a significant gap.

There is relatively little information on the factors that influence the food choices of University of Ghana students other than SMIs. Previous study in Ghana has demonstrated that dietary choices are influenced by financial restrictions, cultural norms, and peer pressure (Adams & Stanton, 2019). There has been less research on the role of SMIs, particularly among young adults in Ghana. Addressing this gap, while also taking into account potential modifying factors, is critical for establishing locally relevant interventions and nutrition education programs (Ofosu-Asare, Boatemaa, & Tandoh, 2022).

1.3 Main Objective

To determine the role of social media influencers in the dietary choices of University of Ghana Students

1.4 Specific Objectives

1. To determine the frequency of consumption of certain foods by University of Ghana students
2. To determine whether social media influencers (SMI) play a role in the dietary choices of University of Ghana students.
3. To determine whether the role of SMI in the dietary choices of University of Ghana students is modified by factors including the students' age, students' sex, number of SMI students follows, and verified SMIs students follow.
4. To identify factors other than SMIs which influence the dietary choices of University of Ghana students.
5. To explore the opinions of University of Ghana students regarding the role of SMI in the dietary choices of University of Ghana students.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Dietary Choices in the Use of Social Media

Social media platforms have had a tremendous impact on dietary choices, affecting the food preferences and eating habits of millions of individuals worldwide. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube's visual elements allow users to upload and discover food-related content ranging from recipes and meal prep tips to food trends and nutritional advice. Research indicates that regular exposure to such information may have a significant impact on people's eating patterns (Kemp, 2021). For instance, food bloggers or chefs who are influencers frequently advocate certain diets or foods, which might persuade followers to change their own eating habits to reflect those they like.

Furthermore, social media can influence both favorable and harmful dietary choices. On the one hand, it may encourage good eating habits by sharing knowledge on nutritious foods and recipes. On the other side, it might promote bad eating habits by normalizing the consumption of high-calorie, low-nutrient meals, which are frequently included in visually appealing postings (Vasiljevic, 2018). The phenomena of "food porn" involves visually enticing photographs of rich meals that can drive hunger and desires, often leading to overeating or bad nutritional choices.

Holland and Tiggeman (2016) found continuous positive connections between social media use, disordered eating, and body dissatisfaction, indicating that social media has a negative impact on people's body image and diets. The term 'insta-norm' was developed to emphasize social media's effect on nutrition practices on Instagram, and the norm around Instagram is the concept of 'ethno-nutritionism', which Atkinson (2011) characterized as excessive food habits.

According to Holland and Tiggeman's (2016) research, social media platforms depicted popular diet-related 'insta-norms' that pushed young people to engage in such severe diets, resulting in negative health consequences. Their study suggested that interventions are required because social media promotes poor dietary choices and eating behaviors in teenagers, as well as the importance of improving social media literacy among young adults.

Klassen et al. (2018) claimed that social media can assist young individuals make healthier dietary choices. The findings demonstrated that using social media to promote healthy eating choices among young adults need careful and precise experimental designs, as social media can contribute to poor dietary choices among young adults. Klassen et al. (2018) indicated that further study is needed to explore the role of social media in encouraging healthier eating choices among young adults.

2.2 Social Media Influencers

In contrast to traditional superstars who rose to fame through TV series and movies, Jin et al. (2018) claim that as social media platforms gained popularity, the digital world created a new term: "social media influencers," who rose to fame via their digital content on social media. According to Freberg (2011), social media influencers are well-known content providers who have a large following and who promote goods and services to motivate others. Social media influencers are people or brands who have made a name for themselves by promoting themselves on social media, according to Lokithasan et al. (2019).

A social media influencer, also known as a micro-celebrity or social media star (Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2020), is a third-party individual with high social standing who has acquired the

abilities of a powerful social impact (Lu et al., 2012). Through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and others, social media influencers represent the modern version of the unorthodox third-party endorser with the ability to affect people's lifestyles (Freberg et al., 2011). Influencers in social media, according to Freberg (2011), are fresh, independent outside advocates who use tweets, blogs, and articles to sway audience behavior.

In Ghana, food influencers like Sweet Adjeley and Telande World have become household names, giving cooking lessons and innovative methods to prepare both traditional and modern cuisine. Their material encourages followers to emulate these meals, which influences dietary habits. Similarly, lifestyle influencers such as Berla Mundi and Nana Aba Anamoah may offer food-related endorsements or advocate healthy lifestyle choices, influencing their followers' opinions of healthy eating. These local cases are consistent with international findings, which reveal that influencers influence dietary choices by promoting both good and bad dietary practices (Klassen et al., 2018).

The strength of social media influencers lies not only in their reach, but also in the parasocial ties that followers form with them, which make viewers feel personally linked and hence more open to their recommendations. This makes them effective avenues for nutrition teaching and marketing, but it also raises concerns regarding the promotion of high-energy, low-nutrient foods (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

2.3 Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Social Media Influencers

2.3.1 Attractiveness

Visual appeal is essential for social media influencers to gain credibility and engage their audiences. According to Erdogan (1999), physical attractiveness is only one part of attractiveness; other factors such as personality and athletic aptitude are also considered. Overall, appearance is only "a stereotype of positive associations to a person." The most common definition of an influencer's attractiveness may simply be their enticing physical characteristics. According to a 2009 study by Van Der Waldt et al., endorsers who are perceived as beautiful are more likely to drive customer purchase intentions.

Consequently, organizations that utilize beautiful individuals to promote their brands and products have a better chance of increasing customer awareness and purchase intent. For example, most Ghanaian fashion influencers are gorgeous. They utilize this to market their brands to viewers and followers. According to Kirwan (2018), ordinary people have climbed the social media ladder to gain hundreds, thousands, or even millions of followers via their charm, wit, and subject-matter expertise.

In addition to physical attractiveness, other attributes such as personality may help social media influencers capture the attention of their audience. Personal ideas and lifestyles, for example, are appealing to their target consumers. These talents and personal characteristics can help social media influencers flourish since viewers will find them more appealing, increasing their credibility and loyalty.

2.3.2 Expertise

One of the most important benefits of using social media influencers as a marketing strategy is that certain social media influencers obtain followers because of their skill set or experience in a specific area. This is what contributes to the credibility of social media influencers, and it is in this regard that they outperform traditional celebrity marketing. According to Duchscher (2018), social media influencers have more experience than superstars, and viewers may regard them as more genuine and approachable. When celebrities support a clothing brand, they are chosen as ambassadors because they are well-known in the public.

In contrast, influencer marketing is effective mostly because the social media influencer is informed about the products or services they are recommending, and since they are acknowledged leaders in their professions, consumers regard their recommendations as trustworthy and relevant (Barker, 2023). Therefore, their audience will begin to assess their knowledge when evaluating their credibility.

2.3.3 Engagement

Engagement is another strategy for persuasion that may help develop credibility. When an influencer is communicative and responsive to their audience's needs, the audience feels more connected to them. According to Barker (2023), the main difference between influencer marketing and celebrity endorsements is that the former is more likely to be a one-way communication. As a result, engagement helps social media influencers gain trustworthiness. By giving relevant content and opinions, each influencer caters to a certain audience and builds trust. If they advocate a certain product or service, their followers will most likely be interested

(Duchscher, 2018). The engagement rate between social media influencers and their followers will help to establish personality and mutual understanding in the connection, eventually increasing the influencer's reputation.

2.4 Dietary Choices Among University Students

University students are in a unique life stage where they have more freedom in selecting food choices, yet they are frequently bound by limited funds, academic pressures, and peer impact. Several studies have found that students' dietary patterns are frequently characterized by irregular meals, frequent snacking, and increased intake of fast foods and sugar-sweetened beverages, all of which have a detrimental impact on nutritional quality (Pengpid and Peltzer, 2015).

Students are very receptive to external influences, thus exposure to food marketing and dietary trends via social media complicates their decisions even more. According to international evidence, students frequently mimic dietary behaviors pushed by peers and influencers online, resulting in higher consumption of energy-dense and nutrient-poor foods (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Klassen et al., 2018).

In Ghana, comparable trends have been noticed. According to Ogum Alangea et al. (2018), Ghanaian university students frequently consume insufficient amounts of fruits and vegetables and rely heavily on energy-dense foods. Convenience, cost, and peer influence were revealed as significant drivers of individual eating preferences. Furthermore, Asante et al. (2020) stated that while some students try to adopt healthier dietary patterns, obstacles such as restricted access to healthful foods on campus and time constraints owing to academic schedules typically

undermine these efforts. These findings are consistent with worldwide literature, but they also highlight the importance of contextual, Ghana-specific variables.

Overall, university students' dietary choices reflect both global trends and local circumstances. While more autonomy allows for more freedom in dietary choices, it also predisposes students to poor eating habits. The interaction of social media exposure and contextual factors such as the price and availability of nutritious foods makes this population more sensitive to poor dietary outcomes (Turner et al., 2022; Barr & Chapman, 2023; Gligoric et al., 2023).

2.5 Factors that Influence Dietary Choices Among University Students

2.5.1 Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) has a major influence on dietary choices, with financial restrictions being particularly important. Individuals with limited financial means frequently choose less expensive, calorie-dense, and nutrient-poor diets over healthier alternatives. This economic pressure can lead to diets heavy in processed foods, sweets, and unhealthy fats, which are frequently less expensive and more easily accessible than fresh fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008). Jones et al stated that university students from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds may encounter extra obstacles as they manage tuition, housing, and other expenditures, leaving less money for healthy meals.

SES also has an important influence on access to healthy dietary choices. On-campus food services may provide limited nutritious options, particularly for students on limited finances. Off-campus food deserts—areas with inadequate access to inexpensive and healthy food. Convenience stores and fast-food restaurants outnumber supermarkets that sell fresh vegetables

in these locations. This lack of availability makes it more difficult to maintain a balanced diet, especially for individuals who do not have dependable transportation to better food shops (Larsen and Gilliland, 2008).

The influence of socioeconomic status on food quality is significant. Research repeatedly reveals that those with lower socioeconomic status have inferior nutritional quality than their higher socioeconomic status peers (Giskes et al., 2010). They eat less fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, yet consume more sugary beverages and high-fat, processed meals. This discrepancy is partially due to economic restrictions, but it also refers to poorer levels of nutrition knowledge and education, which are frequently connected with SES. (Parmenter et al. 2000). Educational interventions and policies aimed at increasing access to inexpensive, healthy food alternatives are critical for resolving these disparities and encouraging healthier dietary choice across all socioeconomic levels.

2.5.2 Peer Influence and Social Environment

Social circles and peer pressure have a considerable influence on university students' eating choices. Peers can affect eating habits through modelling, motivation, and shared eating experiences. For example, if a student's peers frequently eat fast food or skip meals, the student may follow suit to fit in (Lloyd-Richardson et al., 2012). Peer pressure can contribute to harmful eating habits, such as overeating or selecting fewer nutritional foods, since people value social approval above dietary quality (Lai Yeung, 2010). Positive peer effects, such as encouraging healthy eating or participating in group cooking, can promote improved dietary habits.

Also, shared environments, such as shared rooms or flats, have a significant impact on students' eating habits. Food choices in these situations are often influenced by the preferences and habits of roommates or housemates. Shared meals and food preparation can lead to better balanced diets if the group prioritizes healthy eating, but it can also result in inadequate choices if convenience and cost take precedence over nutrition (Bruening et al., 2018). The communal living setting can develop a feeling of community and shared responsibility, perhaps leading to healthier eating habits via collaborative effort and support.

Crockett et al said that social events and activities have a major influence on university students' eating patterns. Parties, sports gatherings, and study groups frequently include high-calorie, fat, and sugary foods and beverages. These events can lead to irregular eating habits and overconsumption since the social setting encourages indulgence and less conscious eating. Furthermore, the provision of free or low-cost unhealthy food at social occasions might be especially enticing to financially aware students, promoting bad eating patterns (Silliman et al., 2004). Understanding the influence of social dynamics in food choices is critical for creating methods to encourage better eating conditions at the university level.

2.5.3 Cultural and Ethnic Background

Cultural traditions and practices have a profound influence on diet, affecting food preferences, cooking methods, and eating habits. These habits frequently influence what foods are deemed acceptable or desirable, the timing and frequency of meals, and the social circumstances in which eating happens (Kittler & Sucher, 2017). Mediterranean cultures, for example, place a premium on fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and olive oil, all of which contribute to a diet rich in health benefits (Trichopoulou et al., 2014).

Conversely, societies that value high-fat, high-sugar diets may experience differing health consequences, highlighting the importance of cultural dietary norms (Popkin, 2015). Diverse dietary preferences provide distinct obstacles for overseas students who must navigate unfamiliar dining contexts while adhering to their customary diets. These students frequently struggle to locate ingredients for their local cuisines and may have restricted selections for culturally acceptable dishes in dining facilities (Alakaam et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the stress of adjusting to a new academic and social environment might cause changes in eating habits, such as increased intake of fast food for convenience and accessibility (Amos & Lordly, 2014). This change can have an impact on their general health and well-being, emphasizing the importance of support in maintaining balanced meals while studying abroad. The adjustment of traditional diets to a new context entail combining the need to retain cultural identity with the practicality of available dietary alternatives. Some students may try to reproduce traditional meals using local ingredients, which might lead to changed nutritional content and potential health consequences (Kapinos et al., 2017).

Also, others may incorporate parts of the region's food into their diets, resulting in a fusion of cultural dietary traditions. This adaptation process is complicated and varies widely among people, depending on factors such as availability to traditional foods, cooking facilities, and social support networks (Etinger & Neuhouser, 2019). Universities may help with this transformation by providing various choices for eating, and promoting an inclusive workplace that values and encourages nutritional diversity.

2.5.4 Gender Differences

The differences in dietary choices and habits between male and female students are extensively established. Female students are more likely to adopt better eating habits, such as eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, than male students (Wardle et al., 2004). Male students tend to favor energy-dense diets heavy in fats and carbohydrates, and they are more prone to skip meals or eat convenience foods. These distinctions can be linked to a variety of variables, including body image issues, health awareness, and societal pressures. Females are more attentive of their nutritional consumption because they place a larger value on body weight and looks, which can lead to healthier eating habits (Davy et al., 2006).

Gender-specific nutritional demands and preferences can influence food patterns. Women, for example, often require more iron owing to menstrual blood loss, so they may prioritize iron-rich diets like leafy greens and lean meats (Haider et al., 2019). Men, on the other hand, have higher caloric and protein requirements due to their larger muscle mass and metabolic rates, resulting in a predilection for protein-dense meals such as meat and dairy (Trumbo et al., 2019). These nutritional requirements influence food selection and meal planning, which affects total dietary choices.

Societal customs and standards have a considerable influence on dietary habits and gender inequalities in food choices. Cultural stereotypes frequently portray women as more health-conscious and men as more decadent eaters, supporting gender-specific dietary practices (Lupton, 2013). The media's representation of ideal body types can put pressure on women to follow restricted diets to obtain a slender figure, while males may feel driven to consume huge amounts of food to increase muscular mass (Hesse-Biber et al. 2006). These sociocultural effects can reinforce harmful eating patterns, such as disordered eating in women and excessive

protein consumption in males, emphasising the importance of gender-sensitive nutritional education and treatments.

2.5.5 Nutritional Knowledge and Awareness

The level of nutritional knowledge among university students varies greatly but is often determined to be inadequate. Many students start university with no formal nutrition education, depending instead on information from friends, family, and the media, which can be inconsistent and occasionally inaccurate (Betts et al., 2021). Research by Vadeboncoeur et al. (2015) discovered that a large majority of university students were unable to recognize basic nutritional concepts, such as the recommended daily intake of fruits and vegetables or the advantages of whole grain consumption. This lack of awareness can have major consequences for their dietary choices and general health.

There is a well-established link between nutritional awareness and good eating habits. Higher levels of nutritional awareness relate to better dietary choices, such as eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and consuming less sugary snacks and drinks (Wardle et al., 2000). Knowledgeable students are more likely to recognize the significance of balanced meals and the long-term advantages of a healthy diet, resulting in improved eating habits (Spronk et al., 2014). However, knowledge alone is not always enough to influence behavior; motivation and self-efficacy are also important (Kolodinsky et al., 2007).

Interventions targeted at increasing nutritional awareness have demonstrated potential in encouraging healthy eating habits among university students. Interactive components, such as culinary demos, seminars, and individualized nutrition recommendations, are very helpful

(Brown et al., 2017). For example, nutrition education programs integrated into university curricula can help students comprehend and apply healthy eating concepts (Clifford et al., 2014). In addition, using digital tools like applications and online platforms can improve accessibility and engagement by providing students with useful information and assistance (Deliens et al., 2016). These initiatives demonstrate the ability of systematic education to close the nutritional knowledge gap and promote healthier lives.

2.6 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is based on two complimentary behavioral theories: Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). SCT holds that human behavior is molded by the reciprocal interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental elements, with observational learning and modeling functioning as fundamental mechanisms (Bandura, 1986). Influencers act as environmental agents on social media, modeling nutritional practices that students can follow through observation, perceived legitimacy, and reinforcement. The TPB increases explanatory power by stressing that behavior is determined by intention, which is impacted by attitudes toward the conduct, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Social media influencers can affect students' perspectives by positively depicting healthy meals, creating new social norms through widespread follower involvement, and increasing perceived control by showing accessible dietary behaviors.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the integrated theoretical-conceptual framework for this study. The framework explains how exposure to social media influencers (environmental modeling) interacts with cognitive determinants (attitudes, norms, and control) to influence intentions and, ultimately, dietary choices. To account for differences in influence, moderating variables (age,

sex, number of influencers followed, and number of verified influencers) are combined with contextual factors (such as cost, peers, time, taste preferences, nutrition awareness, and food availability).

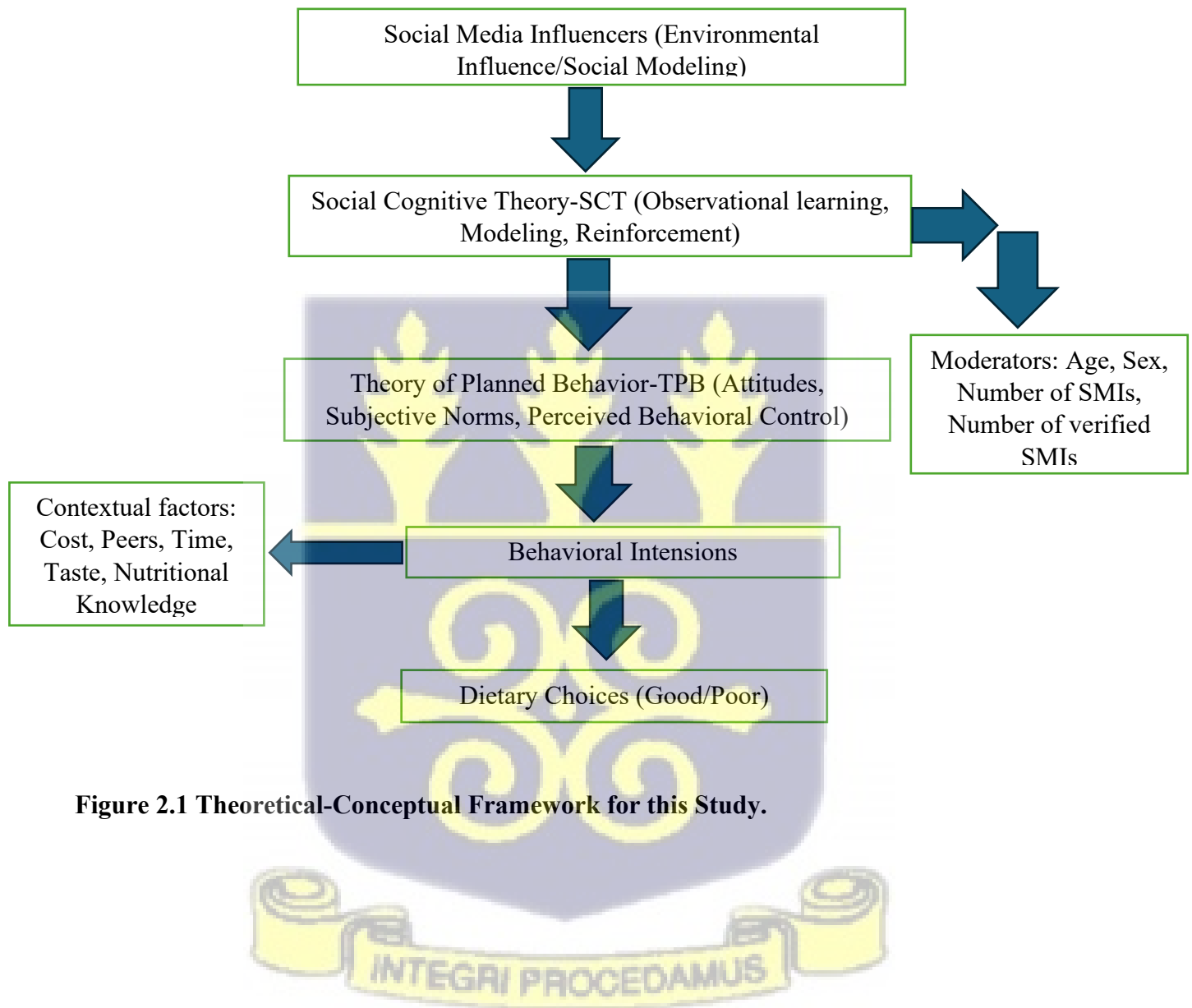


Figure 2.1 Theoretical-Conceptual Framework for this Study.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This was a cross-sectional study employing mixed methods thus combining both quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

3.2 Research Site

This project was conducted at the University of Ghana, Legon campus. The target population consisted of students living in residential halls. These residential halls were categorized into three groups: traditional halls, SSNIT hostels, and diaspora halls. A four-step sampling method was used to select representative halls from these groups for the study site. The halls selected randomly were Hilla Limann and Alexander Kwapong for diaspora halls, Mensah-Sabarh Hall and Legon hall for traditional halls and for SSNIT hostels, African Union Hall (Pent) and James Top Nelson Yankah Hall (TF) were selected.

3.3 Study Population

This study involved undergraduate students 17-25 years who reside in the selected hall of residence on Legon campus.

3.3.1 Inclusion Criteria

Participants must be a University of Ghana undergraduate students 17-25 years residing on Legon campus.

3.3.2 Exclusion Criteria

Participants who have health issues and are on medication.

3.4 Sample Size Calculation

The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula (1977). Using a prevalence of 32.7% from social media use in Ghana, a confidence level of 95% and a level of precision at 5%, the total sample size for the study was estimated to be 348 undergraduate students 17-25 years.

3.5 Sampling Technique

I used a four-step sampling technique for this study. I selected 6 residential halls randomly. After, I selected 3 blocks within each hall randomly. I then selected the rooms systematically (every third from the starting point). Finally, I selected up to two students randomly per room.

3.6 Data Collection

The study used a questionnaire that was created by me (the researcher) and was influenced by previous research on young adults' food habits and the impact of social media (Freberg, 2011; Klassen et al., 2018; Ogum Alangea et al., 2018). There were

The questionnaire consisted of Likert scale questions (e.g., Always to Never), multiple-choice items, and a few open-ended questions that allowed respondents to elaborate on their dietary choices. The full questionnaire is attached in Appendix 2a and 2b.

Data was collected through face-to-face. The data collection period spanned two months with each interview lasting approximately 20–30 minutes.

3.6.1 Questionnaire Administration

Data was collected from participants in the various halls that were selected using a questionnaire which was administered using Kobo Collect. The questionnaire consisted of the following key sections as detailed below:

Background and Socio-demographic Characteristics

Information on sex, age, ethnicity, academic level, religious affiliations and hall of residence, monthly stipend was collected participants.

Social Media Usage

Information on social media use such as “are you a member of any social media platform”, “which social media platforms do you use” the frequency of social media usage among others were collected.

Social Media Influencers and Dietary Choices

Information on the frequency of incorporating recommendations from social media influencers into your dietary choices, number of social media influencers one followers among others were collected.

Dietary Intake

A food frequency questionnaire was used to collect information on the frequency with which individuals consumed specific foods over the course of a week. Cereals, legumes, fruits, and vegetables were among the options. These items were chosen because they are frequent staple meals in Ghanaian diets and are good sources of macronutrients and micronutrients that

university students need. The FFQ enables us to estimate habitual intake and identify dietary changes in this sample.

3.6.2 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussions were held to investigate factors other than social media influencers that influence University of Ghana students' dietary choices, as well as to learn about students' opinions of the importance of social media influencers in their dietary decisions. Four focus groups were organized, each with six undergraduate students aged 17-25 years, for a total of 24 participants (12 females and 12 males).

Purposive sampling was used to ensure a varied representation of students from various faculties and years of study, as well as to capture gender views. Both male and female students were included. The selection criteria included a desire to engage, frequent use of social media, and a variety of dietary preferences. Thematic analysis was used, with open-ended questions meant to elicit both the factors influencing dietary choices and students' opinions on the roles of social media influencers in shaping these choices.

3.7 Data Analyses

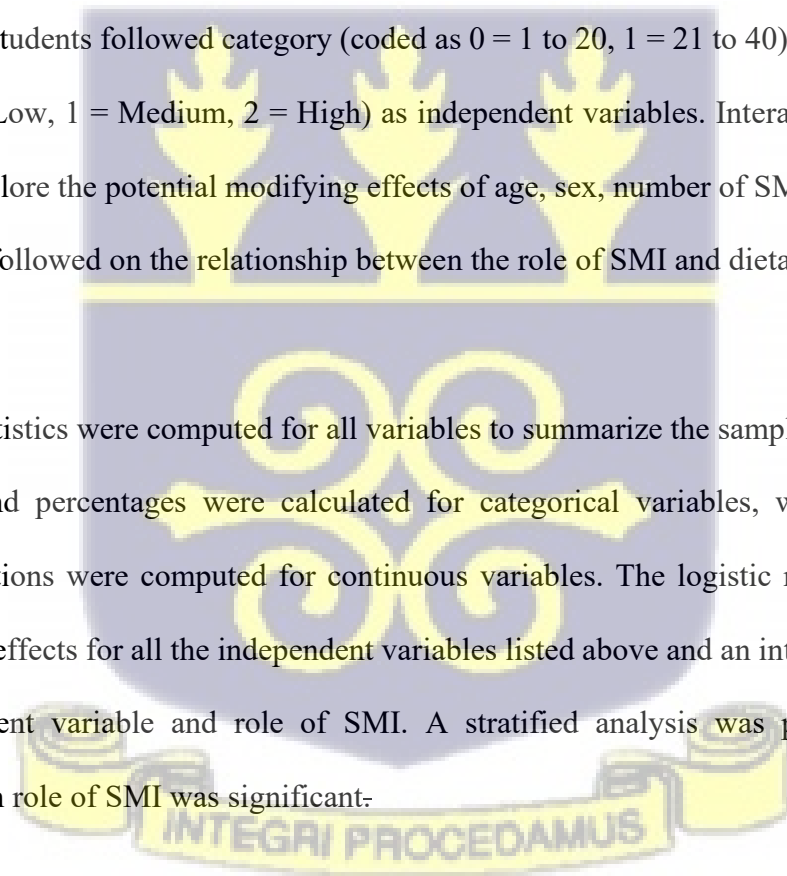
Quantitative Analyses

The data was collected using Kobo Collect software. Microsoft Excel was used for data cleaning. It provided various tools for data cleaning such as removing duplicates, handling missing data etc. This was done to improve data quality. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for Window, version 26 (SPSS Inc. Chicago, IL, USA). The frequency of foods consumed by participants in the week was summarized as frequencies

and percentages. With regards to whether social media influencers played a role in the dietary choices of study participants, low role, medium role, and high role scores were assigned.

With regards to whether the role of social media influencers in the dietary choices of University of Ghana students was modified by sex, age, the number of influencers followed, and the number of verified influencers followed, a logistic regression analysis was performed. The variables included were dietary choice (dependent variable) which consisted of ten dietary choice questions and was measured as good or poor dietary choice and coded as 1 = good, 0 = poor. Age category (coded as 0 = younger(17-19), 1 = older(20-25)), sex (coded as 0 = female, 1 = male), number of SMIs students followed category (coded as 0 = 1 to 20, 1 = 21 to 50), verified SMIs students followed category (coded as 0 = 1 to 20, 1 = 21 to 40), and role of SMI (coded as 0 = Low, 1 = Medium, 2 = High) as independent variables. Interaction terms were included to explore the potential modifying effects of age, sex, number of SMIs followed, and verified SMIs followed on the relationship between the role of SMI and dietary choice.

Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables to summarize the sample characteristics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for categorical variables, while means and standard deviations were computed for continuous variables. The logistic regression model included main effects for all the independent variables listed above and an interaction term for each independent variable and role of SMI. A stratified analysis was performed if the interaction with role of SMI was significant.



Qualitative Analyses

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data from focus group discussions. Each session's audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure that the participants' comments were accurately captured. Each participant was given a unique letter identification, which they used to provide their responses, allowing me (the researcher) to maintain anonymity while tracking individual contributions. The transcripts were manually coded by carefully reading the text and finding relevant bits. Similar replies were classified into categories, which were then developed into larger topics. The data were published on both the factors other than social media influencers that influence dietary choices of University of Ghana students, and the University of Ghana students' opinions regarding the role of social media influencers in their dietary choices.

3.8 Quality Control

To assess the accuracy and time needed to complete the questionnaire, it was pre-tested using 10 students who were selected from halls which were not part for sampling for the study. This was done to prevent contamination of data. The completed questionnaires were checked daily after data was collected to detect and correct any mistakes immediately. Required amendments were made to the questionnaire before administering for final data collection. The management of data collection was done using Kobo-collect.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval (ECBAS 027/23-24) was obtained from the University of Ghana's College of Basic and Applied Science Ethical Committee. Participation was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw from this study if they wish to. A consent form was given to participants

to sign. Participants were provided assurances of privacy, and their privacy would not be invaded.



CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Background Characteristics of Participants

Table 4.1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the 348 students who participated in the study. The majority of the participants were females recording a frequency and percentage of 201 and 58% respectively. The level of study consisted of more of level 300s as compared to level 100s, 200s and 400s. The majority of the participants were Akan (40%) of Christian faith (89%). Nearly all (99%) of the participants were Ghanaians.

Table 4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=348)

Characteristics	n (%)
Age	
17-19	101 (29)
20-22	184 (53)
23-25	63 (18)
Sex	
Male	147 (42)
Female	201 (58)
Level of study	
100	54 (16)
200	79 (23)
300	117 (34)
400	98 (27)
Ethnicity	
Akan	140 (40)
Ga/Ga-Adangbe	80 (23)
Ewe	78 (22)
Others	50 (14)
Religion	
Christian	311 (89)
Muslim	33 (10)
Others	4 (1)

4.2 Frequency of Selected Foods Consumed.

Table 4.2 revealed that 34% of participants consumed cereals daily, while meat, egg and fish were also consumed daily by 44%, 56% and 55% respectively. Vegetables, fruits and milk were consumed once a week by 51%, 70% and 50% respectively. Starchy roots were not consumed at all by 57% of the participants, and legumes were consumed 2-3 times a week by 41% of the participants.

Table 4.2 Frequency of Selected Foods Consumed in a Week by Participants (N=348)

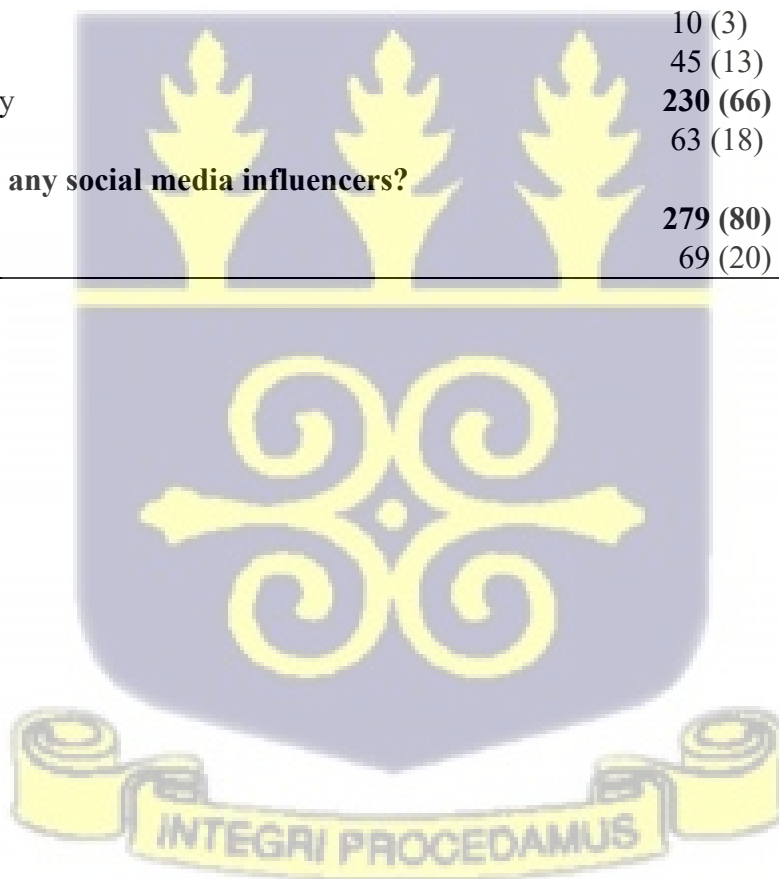
Food	Not at all n (%)	Once a week n (%)	2-3 times a week n (%)	4-5 times a week n (%)	Daily n (%)
Cereals	12 (3)	28 (8)	101 (29)	89 (26)	118 (34)
Starchy Roots	198 (57)	51 (15)	45 (13)	35 (10)	19 (5)
Vegetables	4 (1)	178 (51)	84 (24)	32 (9)	50 (14)
Fruits	9 (3)	243 (70)	23 (7)	34 (10)	39 (10)
Legumes	47 (14)	49 (14)	144 (41)	40 (11)	71 (20)
Meat	4 (1)	60 (17)	99 (28)	31 (9)	154 (44)
Egg	17 (5)	67 (19)	34 (10)	35 (10)	195 (56)
Fish	31 (9)	47 (13)	28 (8)	51 (15)	191 (55)
Milk	43 (12)	175 (50)	50 (14)	13 (5)	67 (19)

4.3 Social Media Usage

Table 4.3 revealed that all participants (100%) were members of a social media platform. In terms of usage frequency, 66% reported using social media frequently, 18% very frequently, 13% occasionally, and 3% rarely. Additionally, 80% of participants said they followed social media influencers, while 20% did not.

Table 4.3 Social Media use of Participants (N=348)

Variables	n (%)
Are you a member of a social media platform?	
Yes	
No	348 (100) 0 (0)
How often do you use social media platforms?	
Rarely	
Occasionally	10 (3)
Frequently	45 (13)
Very frequently	230 (66) 63 (18)
Do you follow any social media influencers?	
Yes	279 (80)
No	69 (20)



4.4 Participants Who Follow Social Media Influencers across Various Platforms.

As shown in **Figure 4.1**, a bar chart distribution displays the frequencies of various social media platforms used for dietary information. Most participants followed social media influencers across platforms like Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok, X, and Snapchat. However, Instagram was the most frequently used platform for subscribing to dietary advice.

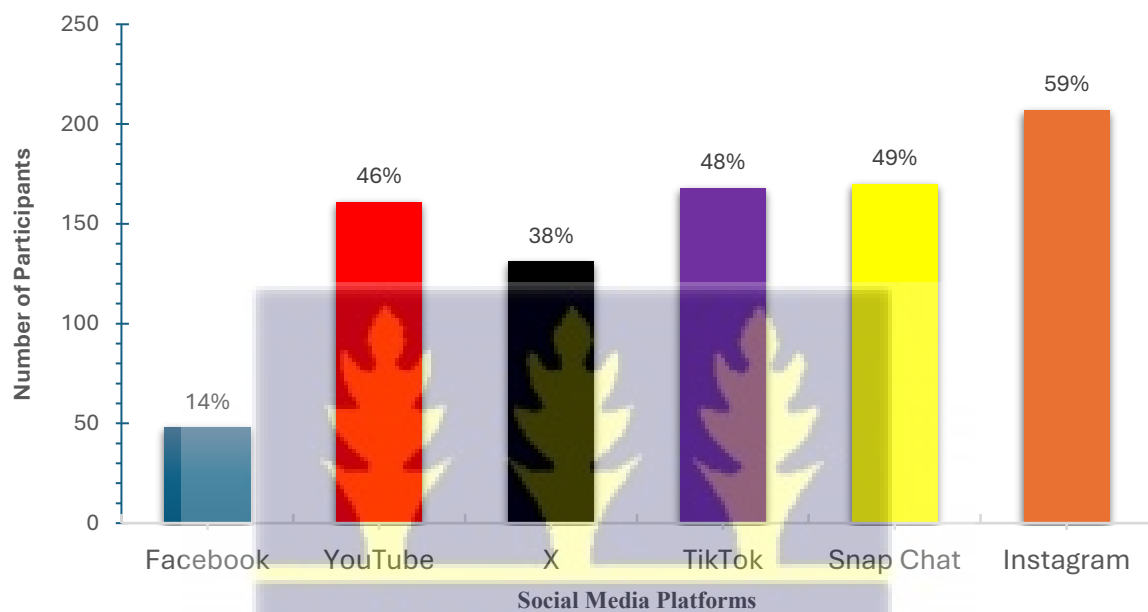


Figure 4.1 Percentage of Participants Following Social Media Influencers on Different Social Media Platforms



4.5 Identities of Social Media Influencers Who Provide Dietary Information

A bar chart distribution, shown in **Figure 4.2**, illustrates the frequencies of social media influencers who present themselves as sources of dietary information. Most participants followed influencers posing as nutritionists or dietitians, fitness coaches, beauty influencers, and chef/food bloggers. However, many influencers providing dietary advice were chefs or food bloggers.

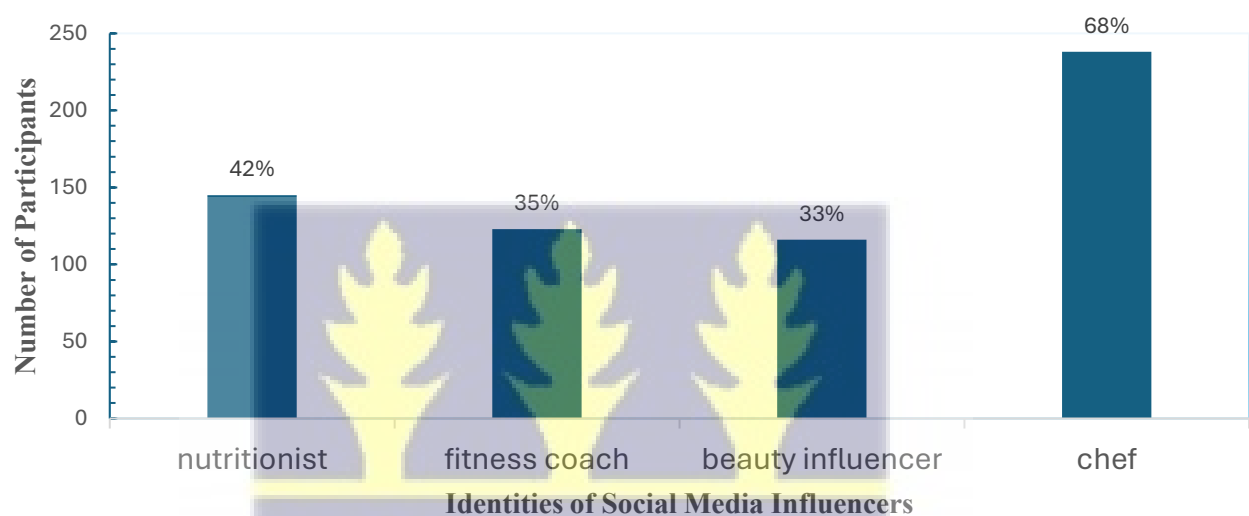


Figure 4.2 Percentage of Participants Following Social Media Influencers with these Identities for Dietary Information.



4.6 Participant Recipe Trials driven by Social Media Influencer Influence

As shown in **Figure 4.3**, 94% of participants have tried a recipe due to the influence of a social media influencer, while 6% stated they have not. This finding suggests that influencers are able to spark initial interest and experimentation among participants, even if such influence does not necessarily translate into long-term dietary change.

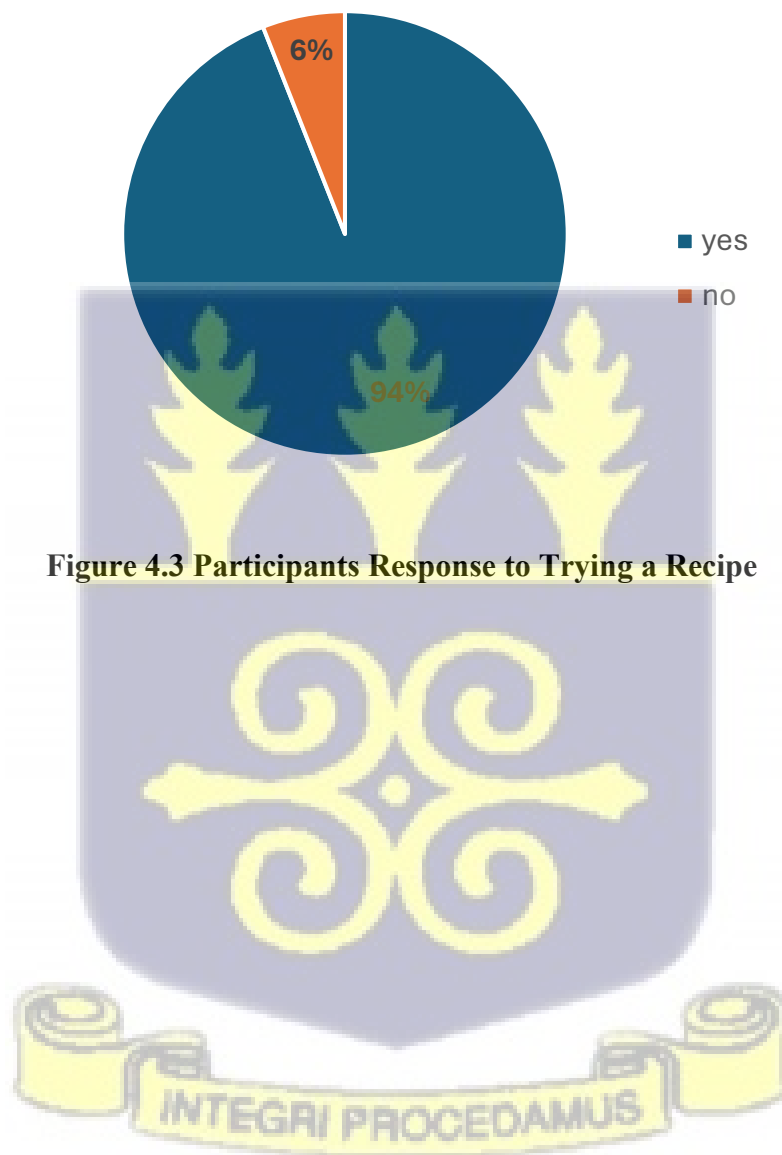


Figure 4.3 Participants Response to Trying a Recipe

4.7 Participant Incorporation of Social Media Influencer Recommendations into Dietary Choices

Despite the high percentage of participants who had tried recipes at least once (figure 4.3), the frequency of sustained incorporation of influencer recommendations into everyday dietary choices was relatively low. As illustrated in Figure 4.4, 32% of participants reported rarely following such recommendations, 30% never did, 28% occasionally did, while only 8% often and 2% always incorporated them. This finding highlights a distinction between occasional trials prompted by curiosity and consistent integration into routine diets.

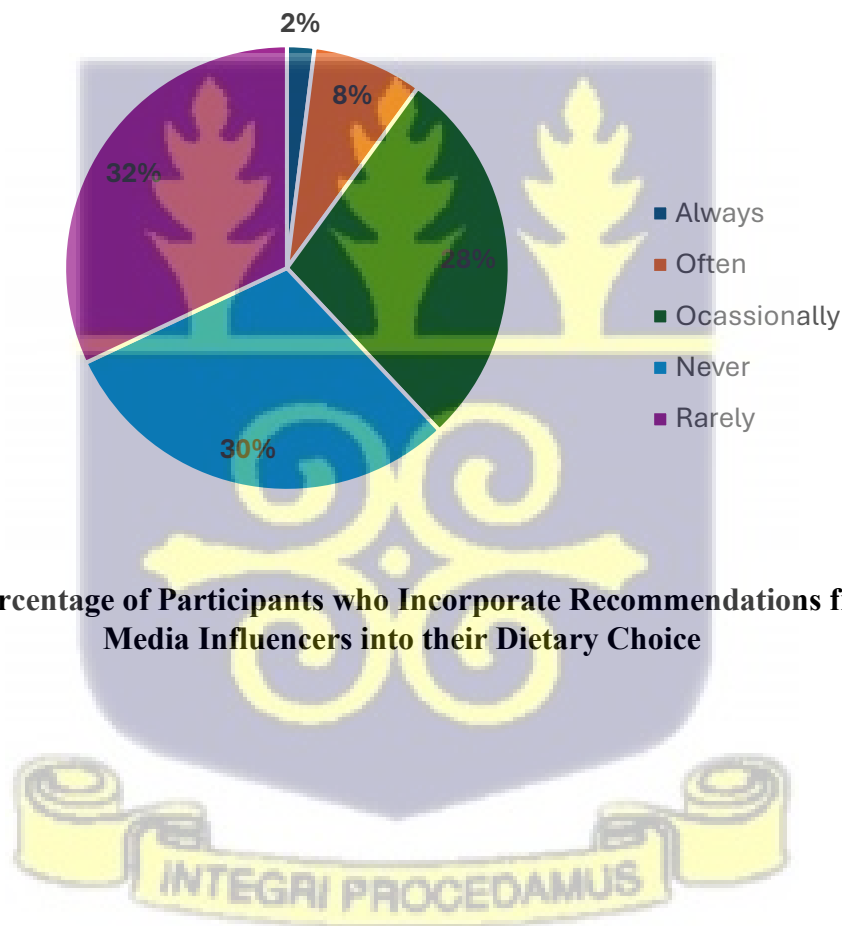


Figure 4.4 Percentage of Participants who Incorporate Recommendations from Social Media Influencers into their Dietary Choice

4.8 Reported Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of Participants

When asked to assess the overall role of social media influencers in shaping their dietary practices, most students perceived this influence as limited. Specifically, 64% reported a low role, 32% a medium role, and only 4% a high role (Figure 4.5). Taken together, Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4 indicate that while social media influencers are effective in stimulating dietary experimentation, they are less influential in sustaining long-term adoption of dietary practices. Consequently, participants generally viewed the role of influencers in their dietary choices as modest.

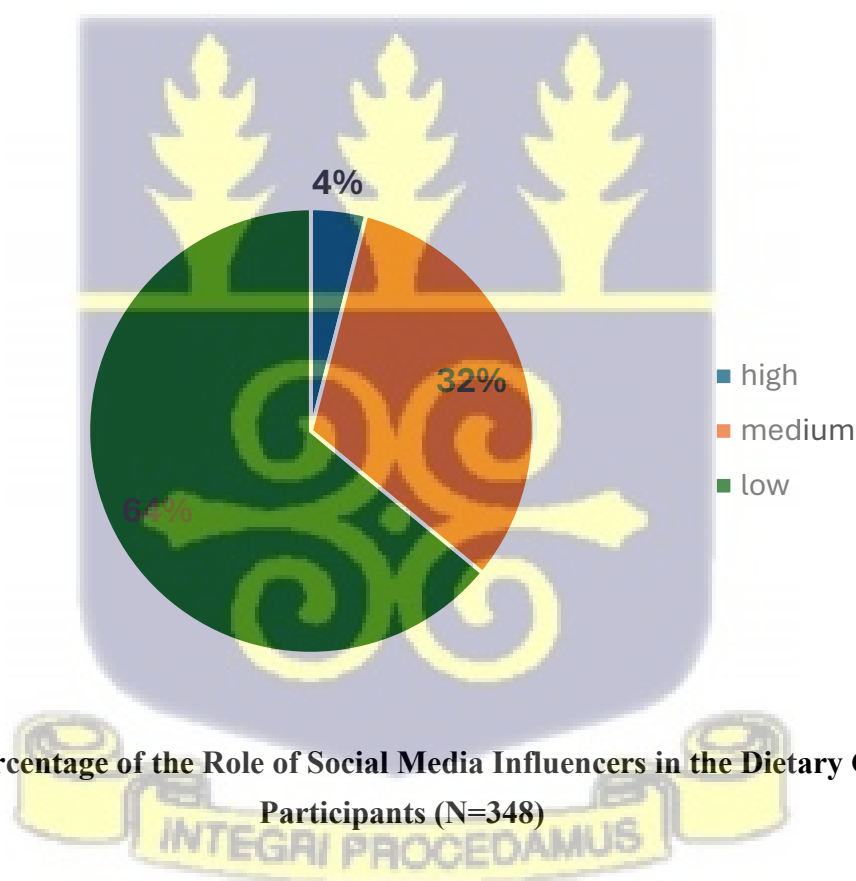


Figure 4.5 Percentage of the Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of Participants (N=348)

4.9 Predictors that Influence the Role of Social Media Influencers in Dietary Choices of Participants

Logistic regression analysis (Table 4.4) shows the predictors that modified the role social of social media influencers in the dietary choices of university of Ghana students were age (OR = 2.94, $p = 0.04$), the number of social media influencers a student followed (OR = 0.43, $p = 0.05$), and the number of verified influencers students followed (OR = 0.22, $p = 0.02$). However, sex was seen to not be a significant modifying factor (OR = 0.59, $p = 0.24$)

Table 4.4 Factors Influencing the Role of Social Media Influencers in Dietary Choices of Participants (N=348)

Variable	Odds Ratio	95% CI	P-value
Age category			
0 (Young 17-19)	1 (Ref)		
1 (Older 20-25)	0.70	(0.40,1.22)	0.25
Sex			
0 (Females)	1 (Ref)		
1 (Males)	3.23	(2.02,5.16)	<0.001
SMI followed category			
0 (1 to 20 followed)	1 (Ref)		
1 (21 to 50 followed)	1.77	(0.94,3.33)	0.08
Verified SMIs followed category			
0 (1 to 20 followed)	1 (Ref)		
1 (21 to 50 followed)	1.62	(0.76,3.47)	0.20
Role of SMI			
0 (low)	1 (Ref)		
1 (medium)	0.89	(0.37,2.13)	0.83
2 (high)	0.22	(-2.76, -0.27)	0.02
Role of SMI*Age category	2.94	(1.03,8.41)	0.04
Role of SMI*Sex	0.59	(0.23,1.51)	0.24
Role of SMI*Number of SMIs followed category	0.43	(0.19,0.99)	0.05
Role of SMI*Verified SMIs followed category	0.22	(0.07-0.73)	0.02

Abbreviation: SMI, Social Media Influencer.

Statistically significant at p -value <0.05

The (Table 4.5) shows the stratified analysis results on the role of social media influencers in the dietary choices of university of Ghana students. Medium influence significantly increased the odds of dietary changes among younger participants (OR=2.94, $p=0.04$), while high influence showed a negative association for older participants (OR=0.22, $p=0.02$). These trends were consistent among those following 21-50 and verified social media influencers

Table 4.5 Stratified Analysis of the Association between the Role of Social Media Influencers Dietary Choices of Participants

Variables	P-Interaction	Odds Ratio	95% CI	P-value
Age category	0.04			
0 (Young 17-19)				
0 (Low)		1 (Ref)		
1 (Medium)		2.34	1.10, 5.02	0.08
2 (High)		3.74	1.32, 10.58	0.040
1 (Older 20-25)				
0 (Low)		1 (Ref)		
1 (Medium)		1.13	0.57, 2.25	0.20
2 (High)		1.79	0.65, 4.97	0.020
SMI followed category	0.05			
0 (1 to 20 followed)				
0 (Low)		1 (Ref)		
1 (Medium)		1.95	1.00, 3.87	0.08
2 (High)		3.29	1.33, 8.14	0.050
1 (21 to 50 followed)				
0 (Low)		1 (Ref)		
1 (Medium)		0.80	0.38, 1.70	0.08
2 (High)		1.50	0.67, 3.36	0.050
Verified SMIs followed category	0.02			
0 (1 to 20 followed)				
0 (Low)		1 (Ref)		
1 (Medium)		2.50	1.19, 5.24	0.20
2 (High)		4.65	1.82, 11.89	0.020
1 (21 to 50 followed)				
0 (Low)		1 (Ref)		
1 (Medium)		1.05	0.40, 2.73	0.90
2 (High)		1.44	0.43, 4.89	0.56

4.10 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Focus Group Discussion Participants

Table 4.5 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the 24 students who participated in the focus group discussion. There was an equal number of males and females (50% each). There was also an equal number of levels of study among students (25% each from level 100-level 400). Majority of participants were Akan (67%), Christian faith (92%). All participants were Ghanaians.

Table 4.6 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Focus Group Discussion Participants (N=24)

Variables	n (%)
Age	
17-19	6 (25)
20-22	10 (42)
23-25	8 (33)
Sex	
Male	12 (50)
Female	12 (50)
Nationality	
Ghanaian	24 (100)
Others	0 (0)
Ethnicity	
Akan	16 (67)
Ga-Adangbe	6 (25)
Ewe	2 (8)
Dagomba	0 (0)
Others	0 (0)
Religion	
Christian	22 (92)
Muslim	2 (8)
Others	0 (0)
Level of study	
100	6 (25)
200	6 (25)
300	6 (25)
400	6 (25)
College	
Bachelor of Science	14 (58)
Bachelor of Arts	5 (21)
Business	5 (21)

4.11 Focus Group Discussion

Factors Other Than Social Media Influencers that Influence the Dietary Choices of University Students

During the focus group discussion, several key factors emerged that influenced the dietary decisions of university students beyond social media influencers. The main themes identified were:

Cost Consideration:

Participants stressed that budget restrictions have a substantial influence on their dietary choices. A student commented: "I always look for the cheapest food available on campus, especially the beans and kenkey." Someone else said, "Eating healthy is important, but the money is not there; healthy foods are very expensive on campus."

Peer Influence:

The influence of friends and roommates was frequently emphasized. One participant said, "I often eat with my friends after class," while another said, "My roommates and I frequently cook and eat together."

Taste and Personal Preferences:

Many students stated that their meal choices are influenced by taste and personal preferences. One person stated, "I choose meals based on what I like to eat," while another added, "If the food tastes good, why not?"

Time Constraints:

Due to tight schedules, many students prefer quick and uncomplicated lunch alternatives. As one student put it, "I often grab something quick between classes." "I usually put extra snacks into my bag so that I can eat after each lecture", another student mentioned.

Health and Nutrition Awareness:

Some individuals stated that their health goals influence their dietary decisions. One student said, "I avoid junk food because I am trying to eat healthier," while another said, "I try as much as possible to choose foods that are good for my health."

Opinions of University of Ghana students regarding the role of social media influencers in their dietary choices.

The second segment of the conversation focused on the opinions of students regarding the role of social media influences in their dietary choices. The discourse revolved around six guiding questions.

Extent of Social Media Influencers' influence on their Dietary Choices

The responses differed among individuals. Some agreed that social media influencers have an important influence on their dietary habits, particularly when introducing new foods or trends. A respondent said: "I definitely think social media influencers influence my diet choices because I see them trying out new recipes, and it makes me curious." Others disagreed, noting that while they see the information, it has no major impact on their real eating choices. One student stated, "I am scarcely impacted by them. I depend heavily on scientific sources and my own research."

Recalling Specific Instances of Dietary Changes due to Social Media Influencers

Many students described how they embraced certain diets or foods after being exposed to social media influencers. Someone said, "I started drinking matcha lattes after seeing multiple influencers rave about its health benefits," whilst another replied, "I tried a vegan diet for a month because a popular influencer was promoting it."

Perceptions of the Credibility of Dietary Advice from Social Media Influencers

A lot of participants questioned the credibility of influencer-provided nutritional recommendations. One person commented, "I take their advice with a grain of salt," while another said, "I am skeptical of their advice unless they provide evidence."

Responsibility of Social Media Influencers in Promoting Healthy Dietary Choices

Opinions on this issue were divided. Some participants said that influencers should be held accountable due to their large following and ability to positively impact public health. As one student stated, "Yes, because they have a large following and can positively impact public health." Others argued that accountability depended on individuals. One participant stated, "They should be responsible, but ultimately, it's up to individuals to make their own choices."

Pressure to Conform to Specific Diets or Foods Trends Promoted by Social Media Influencers

Many students acknowledged feeling pressured to follow the newest diets or trends. One participant stated, "Seeing so many people rave about keto made me feel like I had to try it to fit in." However, several students stated that they stayed firm in their own decisions, with one saying, "Not really. I stick with what works for me, regardless of trends."

Accuracy of Social Media Influencers' Representation of Dietary Choices and Creation of Unrealistic Expectations

Most participants said that influencers typically presented an idealized version of their eating habits. A student commented, *"They show the perfect meals, but they don't show the reality of eating unhealthy sometimes or not being able to afford certain foods."* Another individual remarked, *"It gives this pressure to live up to an unrealistic standard, especially when influencers make it seem like they are eating well 24/7."*



CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 DISCUSSION

5.1 Dietary Intake

Cereals were shown to be an important part of the participants' diets, with 34% consuming cereal on a daily basis. The most often consumed grains were rice, millet, and oats. This finding is consistent with previous research that shows cereals as staple foods in many Ghanaian diets (Ogum Alangea, Aryeetey, & Ohemeng, 2018). Cereals are popular among university students because they are inexpensive, easy to prepare, and convenient. Ali, Khoja, and Taha (2020) discovered similar results in research of Saudi university students, indicating that ready-to-eat cereals were tempting due to their hectic schedules. However, a diet heavy on grains with insufficient variety may result in nutritional deficiencies (FAO, 2020).

Starchy roots and tubers were less common in individuals' diets, with 57% reporting no intake. Similar trends have been noticed among Kenyan university students, where traditional staples like yam and cassava are being replaced by fast manufactured foods (Muthuri, Oti, Lilford, and Oyebo, 2016). Although these foods are essential sources of energy, insufficient consumption may contribute to decreased dietary diversity. Demetriou, Höner, and Pigeot (2020) found a reduction in traditional staple consumption among European students, which they attributed to shifting eating choices.

Vegetable consumption was reported by 51% of participants, with the greatest frequency of once per week. This is well below the WHO's (2022) recommended daily intake of at least 400 g (five meals). Similar low vegetable intake has been documented among Ghanaian university

students, owing to expense and limited availability (Ogum Alangea et al., 2018). Garcia and Thompson (2019) discovered that in a UK student sample, vegetable consumption increased when preparation was made convenient and appealing, implying that practical interventions could boost intake in Ghana.

Fruits were consumed by 70% of participants, primarily oranges, bananas, melons, and pineapple. However, the majority only ate fruits once a week, which is below dietary standards. Using national data from England, Oyebode, Gordon-Dseagu, Walker, and Mindell (2014) discovered a substantial connection between fruit consumption and lower risk of mortality, emphasizing the importance of daily intake. Clark, Abraham, and Greaves (2021) noted that students frequently replace fruit with processed snacks for convenience, which is consistent with these findings.

Legumes were ingested 2-3 times per week by 41% of participants, with beans ("gob3") being most popular. Legumes are good sources of protein, fiber, and micronutrients. Singh and Patel (2019) discovered that legumes were popular in Indian universities due to their low cost. However, given their protective effect in reducing diet-related chronic diseases, the frequency of consumption in this study was lower than optimal (Mäkinen, Wanhalinna, Zannini, & Arendt, 2016).

Many individuals consume animal protein sources every day, including eggs (56%), meat (44%), and fish (55%). This shows that protein-rich foods are easily accessible. However, half

of the individuals drank milk (50%) only once a week. This is congruent with findings from African cultures where lactose intolerance is widespread and plant-based alternatives are gaining popularity (Singh & Patel, 2019). In contrast, in a European study, El Ansari, Stock, and Mikolajczyk (2012) found that students consumed more dairy, indicating cultural dietary disparities. The significantly low milk consumption among Ghanaian students could indicate calcium and vitamin D deficiencies.

5.2 Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of the Participants

According to this study, social media influencers have little influence on University of Ghana students' nutritional choices. Specifically, 64% of participants said social media influencers had a modest effect on their dietary choices, 32% a medium role, and only 4% a big role. This study found that, while social media is pervasive in the lives of young adults, its influence on dietary choices is not as significant as one might think.

5.2.1 Low Influence of Social Media Influencers in their Dietary Choices

Most participants (64%) reported that social media influencers have a minimal effect on their food choices. This research suggests that, whereas influencers are ubiquitous in the digital arena, their direct effect on dietary choices may be low among University of Ghana students. This low influence might be attributed to several conditions:

Instead of relying on internet recommendations, university students usually make nutritional decisions based on practical considerations such as cost, convenience, and availability. Munt,

Partridge, and Allman-Farinelli (2017) discovered that time constraints, cost, and food availability are the most critical factors influencing university students' eating habits, often taking precedence over social media trends. Deliens et al. (2014) also concur that students' dietary choices are frequently influenced by practical issues such as food affordability and availability.

5.2.2 Medium Influence of Social Media Influencers in their Dietary Choices

The fact that 32% of participants identified social media influencers as having a medium role implies that these influencers have some clout among a sizable fraction of students. This might be related to the growth of health and wellness gurus, who frequently give accessible, relatable information that students find engaging. Influencers can inspire and educate people about dietary changes by sharing engaging stories and visually attractive information (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016).

5.2.3 High Influence of Social Media Influencers in their Dietary Choices

The small percentage (4%) showing a large role emphasizes that, while influencers can have a significant impact, it is restricted to a certain group. These students may be more active in health and wellness forums on social media or place a high weight on the opinions of influencers. The customization and emotional connection that influencers may provide may resonate more with this demographic, making them more vulnerable to dietary modifications recommended by these online personalities (Veum & Vitak, 2017).

5.3 Modifying Predictors that Influence the Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of Study Participants.

5.3.1 Sex and Social Media Influencers' Influence on Dietary Choices

The study discovered that the influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on dietary choices was not significantly affected by gender. This is in contrast to previous research, which found gender differences. For example, Smith et al. (2021) found that female undergraduates were more receptive to body image-related dietary messaging on social media than males.

However, recent research suggests that algorithms on sites like Instagram and TikTok show content based on user involvement rather than demographic considerations (Jones & Garcia, 2023). This could diminish conventional gender inequalities in exposure. Similar findings were reported in Korea, where Kim (2022) observed that influencers frequently develop content that appeals to a wide range of consumers, thereby negating sex inequalities.

5.3.2 Age as a Modifier in Social Media Influencers' Influence on Dietary Choices

Age was revealed as a significant determinant, with younger students being more vulnerable to influencer-driven dietary recommendations than older students. Younger demographics are more active online and may lack the critical evaluation skills required to identify genuine content (Wilson & Black, 2022). In contrast, Johnson (2023) found that senior university students in the United Kingdom relied more on professional help and peer discussions than social media. These data indicate that social media dietary messaging may have a bigger impact on first- and second-year undergraduates than on older students.

5.3.3 Impact of Following Numerous Social Media Influencers on Dietary Choices

The study found that students who followed multiple influencers were less influenced by them. This is consistent with Turner and Graham's (2021) findings that exposure to multiple, and sometimes conflicting, dietary instructions among Canadian students lowered the likelihood of adopting any particular guideline. Miller (2022) also referred to this as "information overload," in which excessive exposure reduces individual influencer impact. These findings imply that following multiple influencers can promote critical thinking and selective information acquisition.

5.3.4 Influence of Verified Social Media Influencers on Dietary Choices

Interestingly, students who followed more verified influencers reported having less impact than those who followed fewer. This could be attributed to the professionalized, brand-oriented nature of verified accounts, which reduces personal connections with followers (Baker & Larson, 2022). Khan (2023) revealed similar findings in Pakistan, where students preferred niche micro-influencers to verified accounts. Furthermore, Nguyen (2021) observed that commercial endorsements by certified influencers frequently generated questions about authenticity, limiting their influence on young people's eating preferences.

5.4 Factors other than SMIs which Influence the Dietary Choices of University of Ghana Students

University students' dietary choices are influenced by a variety of factors including time constraints, cost considerations, taste preferences, peer influence, and health and nutrition

awareness. This discussion explores these factors in detail, drawing on insights from a focus group discussion and relevant literature.

5.4.1 Cost Considerations

Cost was identified as an important predictor of food choice among students, indicating the financial constraints that exist in university communities. Many participants favored inexpensive items like beans and kenkey. This is congruent with Deshpande, Basil, and Basil (2009), who discovered that cost is the most important factor of diet among Canadian students. In Ghana, Alhassan, Maposhere, and Boateng (2019) found that price had a substantial impact on campus food purchases, frequently at the expense of nutritional quality.

5.4.2 Peer Influences

Peer influence was another important aspect in eating decisions. Roommates or friends frequently determined eating patterns, which is similar with Larson, Story, Eisenberg, and Neumark-Sztainer (2006), who discovered that social networks had a major influence on the nutritional habits of adolescents in the United States. In South Africa, Steyn, Nel, Parker, Ayah, and Mbithe (2011) found that peer and societal norms influenced student meal choices significantly. These findings emphasize the value of peer-led programs for improving campus nutrition.

5.4.3 Taste and Preferences

Taste emerged as a key consideration in meal selection. Students frequently emphasized flavor above nutritional quality. This conclusion is extensively corroborated; Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Perry, and Story (2003) discovered that flavor was the most prevalent factor influencing meal choice among Minnesota adolescents. Similarly, Musaiger et al. (2014) found that students in 14 Arab nations consistently prioritized taste over health while selecting meals. Thus, boosting the palatability of nutritious foods may be critical to changing students' diets.

5.4.4 Time Constraints

Time constraints were commonly highlighted, with students choosing quick and easy meals between classes. In a study of college undergraduates in the United States, Racette, Deusinger, Strube, Highstein, and Deusinger (2005) discovered that time constraints led to reliance on fast food and meal skipping. Similar patterns were observed in Nigeria, where Ajani et al. (2017) discovered that extended lecture hours and campus schedules limited healthy meal preparation. These findings highlight the importance of structural factors, such as campus food service availability, in determining nutrition.

5.4.5 Health and Nutrition Awareness

Although some students reported actively choosing healthier foods, understanding did not necessarily lead to behaviour. Wardle, Haase, Steptoe, Nillapun, Jonwutiwes, and Bellisie (2004) discovered considerable knowledge-behaviour gaps in nutrition in a cross-national study of university students. Yahia et al. (2016) discovered that even though university students

have more nutrition knowledge, their fat consumption remains suboptimal. Similarly, in Lebanon, Jabbour et al. (2025) discovered that, while many students are aware of food-disease links, their total diet quality remained below recommended levels. These findings indicate that awareness alone is frequently insufficient, and that structural, environmental, and affordability concerns must also be addressed.

5.5 Opinions of University of Ghana Students Regarding the Role of Social Media Influencers in their Dietary Choices.

5.5.1 The Extent of Social Media Influencers' Influence on their Dietary Choices

Students had different feelings about the level of influence exerted by SMIs. While some admitted to being motivated to try new recipes, others said they relied on personal or scientific study before making dietary adjustments. This variety illustrates the complexities of social media influence, which is frequently regulated by personal characteristics such as prior knowledge and financial capacity. Bozzola, Spina, Ruggiero, Vecchio, and Caruso (2022) discovered similar results in an Italian adolescent sample, revealing that social media exposure influenced curiosity about new foods but did not always lead to long-term dietary change.

5.5.2 Recalling Specific Instances of Dietary Changes due to Social Media Influencers

Several students reported embracing dietary fads, such as matcha lattes and plant-based diets, after being exposed to influencers. However, the majority of these modifications were just transitory, and students soon returned to their regular diets. In a US college sample, Williams, Hamm, and Lucas-Thompson (2020) discovered that diet-related changes driven by social media were frequently short-lived, which is consistent with the current findings. This shows

that SMIs may promote dietary exploration but are less successful at maintaining behavior change.

5.5.3 Perceptions of the Credibility of Dietary Advice from Social Media Influencers

Many students questioned the authenticity of influencer dietary advice, citing a lack of professional nutrition training and perceived business interests. Byrne, Kearney, and MacEvilly (2017) discovered in an Irish context that young adults were wary of nutrition information supplied by influencers, preferring certified specialists. This emphasizes the importance of collaboration between nutrition experts and influencers in order to increase credibility.

5.5.4 Responsibility of Social Media Influencers in Promoting Healthy Dietary Choices

Given their broad reach, the majority of students thought that influencers carry some responsibility for encouraging healthy behaviors. Others saw them primarily as performers. Cohen, Irwin, Newton-John, and Slater (2020) stressed the need of ethical responsibility in health-related content, pointing out that disinformation shared by influencers can have major public health repercussions.

5.5.5 Pressure to Conform to Specific Diets or Foods Trends Promoted by Social Media Influencers

Some students reported to feeling compelled to try diets like keto or vegan trends due to ubiquitous online promotion. Others resisted the temptation, citing personal choices or budgetary limits. Turner, Lefevre, and Kelly (2021) found comparable results among UK

adolescents, with social media causing both normative pressure and resistance, depending on individual resilience. This suggests that students' responses to influencer content are not consistent, but are influenced by socioeconomic and personal factors.

5.5.6 Accuracy of Social Media Influencers' Representation of Dietary Choices and Creation of Unrealistic Expectations

Students chastised influencers for giving too idealized depictions of food habits, which were frequently sponsored, causing unreasonable expectations. These tales occasionally caused frustration and body image issues. In an Australian study, Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) found that curated social media messages increased body dissatisfaction among young women. This is consistent with the concept that influencer content can influence not only eating decisions but also psychological well-being.



CHAPTER SIX

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1 Conclusion

Based on the objectives and the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

- Cereals, meat, egg and fish are consumed daily by participants
- This study provides a clear understanding that, while social media influencers have a presence in University of Ghana Students' lives, their role in the dietary choices of the students remains limited.
- Sex did not modify the influence of social media influencers. Age modifies the influence of social media influencers (SMIs). The influence of SMIs decreases as the number of SMIs followed by students increases. Students following more verified SMIs are less influenced by SMIs in their dietary choices compared to those following fewer verified SMIs
- Multiple factors influence dietary choices of University of Ghana students such as cost considerations, peer influence, time constraints, taste and preferences.
- Students view social media influencers advice with skepticism. Students feel divided on their responsibility to promote healthy dietary choices. Students experienced varied levels of pressure to conform to trends and believe influencers often create unrealistic expectations about their dietary choices.

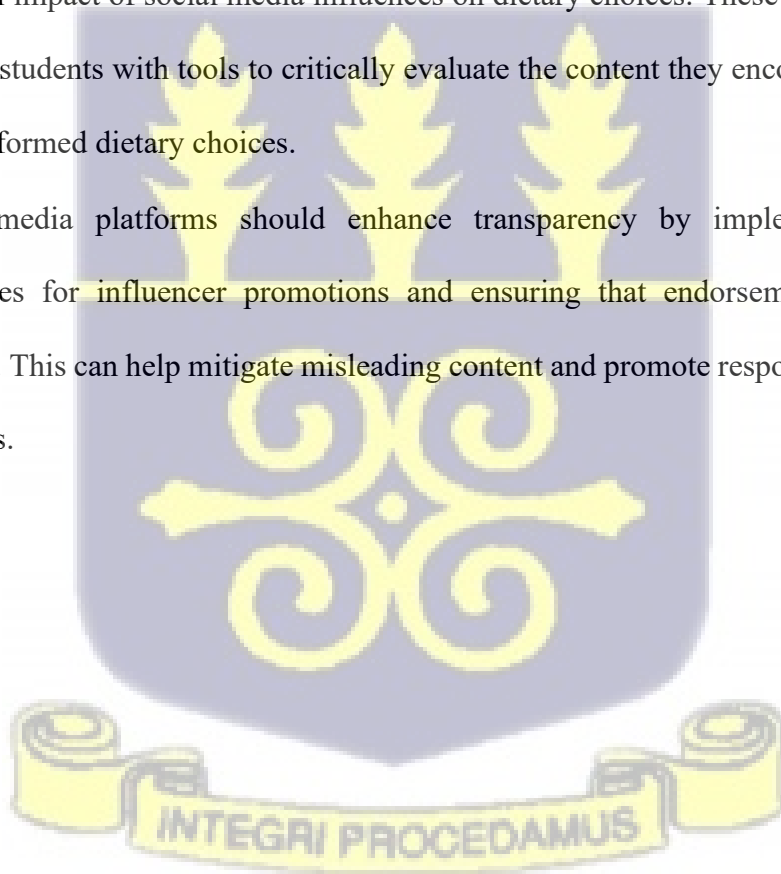
Social media influencers play a role in influencing University of Ghana students' dietary choices, but their influence is limited by various factors

6.2 Recommendations for Research

- Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effect of social media on dietary choices and health outcomes among university students.
- Further studies should investigate the impact of different types of influencers, including those specializing in nutrition versus lifestyle, to understand how various influencer categories affect dietary choices.

6.3 Recommendations for Policy

- Universities should implement educational programs to raise awareness about the potential impact of social media influences on dietary choices. These programs should provide students with tools to critically evaluate the content they encounter online and make informed dietary choices.
- Social media platforms should enhance transparency by implementing clearer guidelines for influencer promotions and ensuring that endorsements are clearly labelled. This can help mitigate misleading content and promote responsible marketing practices.



REFERENCES

- Adams, J., & Stanton, R. (2019). Peer influence on dietary behaviors of university students. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 51(3), 294-299.
- Ajani, S. R., Akinyele, I. O., & Oguntona, C. R. (2017). Barriers to healthy eating among Nigerian university students. *African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development*, 17(4), 12549–12565. <https://doi.org/10.18697/ajfand.80.16304>
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Alakaam, A., Castellanos, D. C., Bodzio, J., & Harrison, L. (2015). The factors that influence dietary habits among international students in the United States. *Journal of International Students*, 5(2), 104-120.
- Ali, A., Khoja, S., & Taha, A. Z. (2020). Dietary habits and lifestyle among Saudi university students. *Journal of Family & Community Medicine*, 27(2), 123–130. https://doi.org/10.4103/jfcm.JFCM_151_19
- Alhassan, R. K., Maposhere, C., & Boateng, D. (2019). Determinants of healthy food choices among Ghanaian university students. *BMC Nutrition*, 5(1), 41. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40795-019-0308-1>
- Amos, M., & Lordly, D. (2014). Impact of social influence on dietary behavior and food choices of university students. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*, 75(3), 157-161.
- Asante, M., Addo, J., & Safo, E. (2020). Dietary habits and health challenges among university students in Ghana. *BMC Nutrition*, 6(1), 1–9.
- Atkinson, M. (2011). Ethno-Nutritionism and Excessive Food Habits: A Sociological Examination. *Food, Culture & Society*, 14(2), 221-233.
- Baker, J., & Larson, E. (2022). The Role of Verified Influencers in Shaping Consumer Behavior. *Digital Marketing Insights*, 25(4), 102-118.
- Baker, S. A., & Larson, H. J. (2022). Credibility and trust of verified influencers in health communication. *Digital Health*, 8, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20552076221104124>
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Barker, S. (2023). Why is Influencer Marketing Better than Celebrity Endorsement?
- Barr, A., & Chapman, G. (2023). Barriers and enablers of healthy eating among university students: A qualitative study. *Nutrients*, 17(7), 1263. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu17071263>.
- Betts, N. M., Amos, R. J., Keim, K. S., & Peters, P. (2021). Sources of nutrition information among university students and the perceived reliability of these sources. *Journal of American College Health*, 69(5), 586-592.

- Boateng, R., & Amankwah, J. (2021). Social media use and consumer behavior in Ghana: Implications for health communication. *African Journal of Information Systems*, 13(2), 123–140.
- Bozzola, E., Spina, G., Russo, R., Bozzola, M., Corsello, G., & Villani, A. (2022). Social media use to improve communication on children and adolescents' health: the role of the pediatrician. *Italian Journal of Pediatrics*, 48(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13052-022-01253-w>.
- Bozzola, E., Spina, G., Ruggiero, M., Vecchio, D., & Caruso, C. (2022). The impact of social media on food choices among adolescents and young adults: A narrative review. *Italian Journal of Pediatrics*, 48(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13052-022-01296-6>
- Brown, L. B., Dresen, R. K., & Eggett, D. L. (2017). College students can benefit by participating in a prepaid meal plan. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 117(2), 239-244.
- Bruening, M., van Woerden, I., Todd, M., & Laska, M. N. (2018). Influences on and outcomes of eating behaviors among homeless youth in the United States: A qualitative study. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 118(11), 2019-2026.
- Byrne, E., Kearney, J., & MacEvilly, C. (2017). The role of influencer marketing and social influencers in public health. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 76(OCE3), E103. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0029665117001768>.
- Byrd-Bredbenner, C., Quick, V., & Koenings, M. (2021). The Impact of Social Media on the Dietary Choices of College Students: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 53(2), 155-161.
- Byrd-Bredbenner, C. (2022). Social media's impact on young adults' nutrition choices. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 54(2), 95–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2021.11.004>
- Byrd-Bredbenner, C. (2022). The pervasive power of social media influencers in shaping dietary behavior. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 54(5), 395-406.
- Carrotte, E., Prichard, I., & Lim, M. S. (2019). "Fitspiration" on social media: A content analysis of gendered images. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 21(3), e11030.
- Clark, L. F., Abraham, C., & Greaves, C. J. (2021). Barriers and facilitators to fruit and vegetable consumption among university students. *Appetite*, 162, 105178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2021.105178>
- Clifford, D., Anderson, J., Auld, G., & Champ, J. (2014). Good Grubbin': Impact of a TV cooking show for college students living off campus. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 46(4), 324-328.

- Coates, A. E., Hardman, C. A., Halford, J. C. G., Christiansen, P., & Boyland, E. J. (2019). Social media influencer marketing and children's food intake: A randomized trial. *Pediatrics*, 143(4), e20182554.
- Cohen, R., Irwin, L., Newton-John, T., & Slater, A. (2020). #Bodypositivity: A content analysis of body positive accounts on Instagram. *Body Image*, 33, 10–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.02.009>
- Crockett, R. A., Jebb, S. A., Hankins, M., & Marteau, T. M. (2019). The impact of larger portions on energy intake among children and adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 149(9), 1742-1756.
- Cunningham, S., & Johnson, M. (2020). Influencer credibility and its effect on consumer trust and diet choices. *International Journal of Advertising*, 39(4), 509–531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1702266>
- Darmon, N., & Drewnowski, A. (2008). Does social class predict diet quality? *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 87(5), 1107-1117.
- Davy, S. R., Benes, B. A., & Driskell, J. A. (2006). Sex differences in dieting trends, eating habits, and nutrition beliefs of a group of midwestern college students. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 106(10), 1673-1677.
- Deliens, T., Clarys, P., De Bourdeaudhuij, I., & Deforche, B. (2014). Determinants of eating behavior in university students: a qualitative study using focus group discussions. *BMC Public Health*, 14(1), 53.
- Demetriou, Y., Höner, O., & Pigeot, I. (2020). Dietary trends and preferences among European university students. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 74(3), 467–475. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41430-020-0569-y>
- Deshpande, S., Basil, M. D., & Basil, D. Z. (2009). Factors influencing healthy eating habits among college students: An application of the health belief model. *Health Marketing Quarterly*, 26(2), 145-164.
- Duchsher, R. (2018). Why Influencer Marketing Is Better Than Celebrity Marketing. *Medium*.
- El Ansari, W., Stock, C., & Mikolajczyk, R. T. (2012). Relationships between food consumption and living arrangements among university students in four European countries—A cross-sectional study. *Nutrition Journal*, 11, 28. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2891-11-28>
- Erdogan, B. Zafer. (1999). Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review. *Journal of Marketing Management*. 15. 291-314. 10.1362/026725799784870379.
- Etinger, A. E., & Neuhouser, M. L. (2019). Culturally relevant strategies for promoting healthy eating among diverse populations. *Annual Review of Nutrition*, 39, 307-326.
- FAO. (2020). The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2020. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

- Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2016). Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 9, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.09.005>
- Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. *Public Relations Review*, 37(1), 90-92. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.11.001>
- Garcia, M. L., & Thompson, J. D. (2019). "The Role of Taste and Texture in University Students' Vegetable Consumption." *Food Preferences Journal*, 18(3), 198-210.
- Garcia, C., & Thompson, C. (2019). Food choice motivations among UK university students: A qualitative analysis. *Appetite*, 138, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2019.03.004>
- Giskes, K., van Lenthe, F. J., Avendano-Pabon, M., & Brug, J. (2010). A systematic review of environmental factors and obesogenic dietary intakes among adults: Are we getting closer to understanding obesogenic environments? *Obesity Reviews*, 11(6), 539
- Gligoric, K., Chiolero, A., Kıcıman, E., White, R. W., & West, R. (2023). Food choice mimicry on a large university campus. arXiv preprint. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2308.16095>
- Haider, L. M., Schwingshackl, L., Hoffman, G., & Ekmekcioglu, C. (2019). The effect of vegetarian diets on iron status in adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition*, 59(7), 1153-1167.
- Hesse-Biber, S., Leavy, P., Quinn, C. E., & Zoino, J. (2006). The mass marketing of disordered eating and eating disorders: The social psychology of women, thinness, and culture. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29(2), 208-224.
- Holland, G., & Tiggemann, M. (2016). "Strong beats skinny every time": Disordered eating and compulsive exercise in women who post fitspiration on Instagram. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 50(1), 76-79.
- Holland, G., & Tiggemann, M. (2016). A systematic review of the impact of social networking sites on body image and eating outcomes. *Body Image*, 17, 100–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2016.02.008>
- Jabbour, J., Dandache, R., Al Slaybe, M., Mattar, L. H., & Rizk, R. (2025). Suboptimal dietary knowledge predicts lower diet quality for cancer prevention among university students in Beirut. *PLoS ONE*, 20(1): e0315911.
- Jin S. V., Muqaddam A, Ryu E. (2018). Instafamous and social media influencers marketing. *Market Intell Plan*, 37: 567-579.
- Johnson, M. (2023). Social Media and Critical Thinking Skills in Adolescents. *Youth and Media Review*, 30(4), 102-115.
- Jones, A., McMahon, J., & Williams, K. (2014). The impact of financial stress on the diet and health of university students. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 46(6), 479-486.

- Jones, T., & Brown, R. (2020). Financial constraints and dietary habits among university students. *Public Health Nutrition*, 23(4), 776-785.
- Jones, A., & Garcia, T. (2023). Algorithmic Influence on Social Media Consumption: Gender Neutrality in Modern Platforms. *Journal of Media Studies*, 45(3), 321-345.
- Kapinos, K. A., Weathers, R., & Lerman, A. (2017). Impact of cultural and dietary acculturation on weight and diet quality among Mexican American women. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 49(2), 171-178.
- Kemp, S. (2021). Digital 2021: Global Overview Report. DataReportal.
- Khan, M. (2023). Engagement and Relatability in Social Media Influence. *Online Influence Journal*, 34(3), 67-82.
- Kim, H. (2022). Social Media Influencers and Audience Reach. *Digital Influence*, 12(1), 56-78.
- Kim, H. (2022). Gender neutrality in influencer communication: Evidence from Korean university students. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 60, 57–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2022.03.004>
- Kittler, P. G., & Sucher, K. P. (2017). *Food and Culture*. Cengage Learning.
- Klassen, K. M., Borleis, E. S., Brennan, L., Reid, M., McCaffrey, T. A., & Lim, M. S. (2018). What people “like”: Analysis of social media strategies used by food industry brands, lifestyle brands, and health promotion organizations on Facebook and Instagram. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 20(6), e10227.
- Klassen, K. M., Douglass, C. H., Brennan, L., Truby, H., & Lim, M. S. C. (2018). Social media use for nutrition outcomes in young adults: A mixed-methods systematic review. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 15(1), 70. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-018-0696-y>
- Kolodinsky, J., Harvey-Berino, J. R., Berlin, L., Johnson, R. K., & Reynolds, T. W. (2007). Knowledge of current dietary guidelines and food choice by college students: Better eaters have higher knowledge of dietary guidance. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 107(8), 1409-1413.
- Lai Yeung, W. T. (2010). The impact of the food environment on college students’ dietary behaviors. *College Student Journal*, 44(2), 252-263.
- Larson, N. I., Story, M., Eisenberg, M. E., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2006). Food preparation and purchasing roles among adolescents: Associations with sociodemographic characteristics and diet quality. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 106(2), 211–218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2005.10.029>
- Larsen, K., & Gilliland, J. (2008). Mapping the evolution of ‘food deserts’ in a Canadian city: Supermarket accessibility in London, Ontario, 1961–2005. *International Journal of Health Geographics*, 7(1), 16.
- Larson, N. I., Neumark-Sztainer, D., Story, M., van den Berg, P., & Hannan, P. J. (2008).

- Identifying correlates of young adults' weight behavior: Survey findings from Project EAT-II. *American Journal of Health Behavior*, 32(5), 487-497.
- Larson, N., Laska, M. N., Story, M., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2012). Predictors of fruit and vegetable intake in young adulthood. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 112, 1216e1222.
- Larson, N., Neumark-Sztainer, D., & Story, M. (2018). Adolescent nutrition and the transition to adulthood. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 107(4), 540-547.
- Lloyd-Richardson, E. E., Lucero, M. L., DiBello, J. R., Jacobson, A. E., & Wing, R. R. (2012). The relationship between alcohol use, eating habits and weight change in college freshmen. *Eating Behaviors*, 9(1), 90-93.
- Lokithasan, K., Simon, S., Jasmin, N. Z., & Othman, N. A. (2019). Male And Female Social Media Influencers: The Impact of Gender on Emerging Adults. *International Journal of Modern Trends in Social Sciences*, 2(9), 21-30.
- Lupton, D. (2013). *Food, the Body and the Self*. SAGE Publications.
- Lu, D., Li, Q., & Liao, S. S. (2012). A graph-based action network framework to identify prestigious members through member's prestige evolution.
- Mäkinen, O. E., Wanhalinna, V., Zannini, E., & Arendt, E. K. (2016). Foods for special dietary needs: Non-dairy plant-based milk substitutes and fermented dairy-type products. *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition*, 56(3), 339–349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10408398.2012.761950>
- Mensah, S. N. A. (2024). *The role of social media influencers in the dietary choices of University of Ghana students (Master's thesis)*. University of Ghana.
- Miller, J. (2022). Cognitive Overload in the Age of Social Media. *Cognitive Science Journal*, 29(3), 45-62.
- Munt, A. E., Partridge, S. R., & Allman-Farinelli, M. (2017). The barriers and enablers of healthy eating among young adults: A critical review. *Appetite*, 108, 1-9.
- Musaiger, A. O., Al-Khalifa, F., Al-Mannai, M., et al. (2014). Perceived barriers to healthy eating and physical activity among adolescents in 14 Arab countries. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 26(3), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijamh-2013-0510>
- Muthuri, S. K., Oti, S. O., Lilford, R. J., & Oyeboode, O. (2016). Diet and physical activity in urban informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya: Do they offer opportunities for prevention of non-communicable diseases? *Globalization and Health*, 12(1), 26. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-016-0164-6>
- Neumark-Sztainer, D., Wall, M., Larson, N. I., Eisenberg, M. E., & Loth, K. (2019). Sex Differences in Influences on Dietary Intake. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 25(6), 614-620.
- Nguyen, T. (2021). Commercialization of Social Media and Its Impact on Audience Trust. *Media Studies Quarterly*, 59(5), 321-340.

- Ofori-Asare, K., Agyemang, C., & Appiah, D. (2022). Social media and youth food choices in Ghana: Emerging evidence for public health. *BMC Public Health*, 22, 1125. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13286-9>
- Ogum Alangea, D., Aryeetey, R. N., Gray, H. L., Laar, A. K., & Adanu, R. M. K. (2018). Dietary patterns and associated risk factors among school age children in urban Ghana. *BMC Nutrition*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40795-018-0230-2>,
- Ogum Alangea, D., Aryeetey, R., & Ohemeng, A. (2018). Dietary practices and nutritional status of Ghanaian university students. *BMC Nutrition*, 4(1), 32. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40795-018-0232-4>
- Ogum Alangea, D., Aryeetey, R., & Ohemeng, A. (2018). Dietary patterns and risk of obesity among Ghanaian university students. *Nutrition & Health*, 24(3), 151–159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0260106018786390>
- Okorie, N. (2021). Social media use and its influence on university students' eating behavior in Nigeria. *African Journal of Communication*, 7(2), 85–102.
- Oyebode, O., Gordon-Dseagu, V., Walker, A., & Mindell, J. S. (2014). Fruit and vegetable consumption and all-cause, cancer and CVD mortality: Analysis of Health Survey for England data. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 68(9), 856–862. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2013-203500>
- Parmenter, K., Waller, J., & Wardle, J. (2000). Demographic variation in nutrition knowledge in England. *Health Education Research*, 15(2), 163-174.
- Pengpid, S., & Peltzer, K. (2015). Prevalence of overweight/obesity and central obesity and its associated factors among a sample of university students in India. *Obesity Research & Clinical Practice*, 9(4), 349–357.
- Popkin, B. M. (2015). Nutrition transition and the global diabetes epidemic. *Current Diabetes Reports*, 15(9), 64.
- Racette, S. B., Deusinger, S. S., Strube, M. J., Highstein, G. R., & Deusinger, R. H. (2005). Weight changes, exercise, and dietary patterns during freshman and sophomore years of college. *Journal of American College Health*, 53(6), 245-251.
- Silliman, K., Rodas-Fortier, K., & Neyman, M. (2004). A survey of dietary and exercise habits and perceived barriers to following a healthy lifestyle in a college population. *California Journal of Health Promotion*, 2(2), 10-19.
- Singh, A., & Patel, R. (2019). "Lactose Intolerance and Changing Dietary Trends: A Study on Milk Consumption Among University Students." *Journal of Nutritional Trends*, 15(4), 188-195.
- Singh, R., & Patel, S. R. (2019). Dietary choices among Indian university students: Preferences and nutritional concerns. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine*, 44(3), 235–241. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijcm.IJCM_97_19
- Smith, A., Brown, T., & Lee, C. (2021). Gender differences in diet-related social media

- influence among U.S. college students. *Health Communication*, 36(12), 1536–1545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2020.1775445>
- Smith, C., Murphy, M., & Davis, S. (2021). Dietary habits and challenges faced by university students. *Journal of American College Health*, 69(5), 578-586.
- Smith, A., Jacobson, J., & Parker, S. (2022). Age Differences in Social Media Use and Dietary Choices Among College Students. *Health Education Research*, 37(1), 50-58.
- Smith, A. (2023). Desensitization to Social Media Influencers' Content. *Social Media and Society*, 33(2), 87-104.
- Spronk, I., Kullen, C., Burdon, C., & O'Connor, H. (2014). Relationship between nutrition knowledge and dietary intake. *British Journal*.
- Steyn, N. P., Nel, J. H., Parker, W., Ayah, R., & Mbithe, D. (2011). Dietary, social, and environmental determinants of obesity in Kenyan and South African adolescents. *Public Health Nutrition*, 14(11), 1956–1964. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980011001233>
- Trichopoulou, A., Costacou, T., Bamia, C., & Trichopoulos, D. (2014). Adherence to a Mediterranean diet and survival in a Greek population. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 348(26), 2599-2608.
- Trumbo, P. R., Schlicker, S., Yates, A. A., & Poos, M. (2019). Dietary reference intakes for energy, carbohydrate, fiber, fat, fatty acids, cholesterol, protein and amino acids . *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 102(11), 1621-1630.
- Turner, P. G., Lefevre, C. E., & Mishra, G. (2021). Social media influences on health behaviors. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 42, 56-62. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.05.004>
- Turner, D., & Graham, R. (2021). Social Media Consumption and Critical Thinking. *Journal of Behavioral Studies*, 58(6), 212-227.
- Turner, L. M., Ferguson, S., & O'Connor, E. (2022). How does the university food environment impact student dietary decisions? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(9), 5612.
- Turel, O., & Qahri-Saremi, H. (2018). Explaining social media use in young adults: The role of habit and self-control. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 78, 15–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.09.004>
- Turel, O., & Qahri-Saremi, H. (2018). Problematic use of social networking sites: Antecedents and consequences from a dual-system theory perspective. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 35(4), 1432-1454.
- Vadeboncoeur, C., Townsend, N., & Foster, C. (2015). Evidence for a nutrition transition in university students: A cross-sectional study of dietary patterns in a sample of university students from low-, middle- and high-income countries. *Globalization and Health*, 11(1), 1-11.

- Van Der Waldd, D., Van Loggerenberg, M., & Wehmeyer, L. (2009), Celebrity Endorsements versus Created Spokespersons in Advertising: A Survey among Students. *SAJEMS*, 12(1), 110-114.
- VanKim, N.A.; Larson, N.; Laska, M.N. Emerging adulthood: A critical age for preventing excess weight gain? *Adolesc. Med. State Art Rev.* 2012, 23, 571–588.
- Vasiljevic, M., et al. (2018). Effects of Food Advertising and Media Exposure on Food Consumption. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 23(4), 386-395.
- Veum, M. S., & Vitak, J. (2017). The effects of social media use on self-esteem, body image, and diet behaviors in university students. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 20(9), 573-579.
- Wardle, J., Parmenter, K., & Waller, J. (2000). Nutrition knowledge and food intake . *Appetite*, 34(3), 269-275.
- Wardle, J., Haase, A. M., Steptoe, A., Nillapun, M., Jonwutiwes, K., & Bellisle, F. (2000). Gender differences in food choice: The contribution of health beliefs and dieting. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 22(4), 341-349.
- Wardle, J., Haase, A. M., Steptoe, A., Nillapun, M., Jonwutiwes, K., & Bellisle, F. (2004). Gender differences in food choice: The contribution of health beliefs and dieting. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 27(2), 107-116.
- Williams, S. L., Germain, N., & Scott, S. D. (2020). Social Media Influencers and Their Role in Public Health Promotion. *Journal of Public Health Research*, 9(2), 183-190. <https://doi.org/10.4081/jphr.2020.183>
- Wilson, T., & Black, R. (2022). Age differences in evaluating health information on social media. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 25(4), 238–245. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2021.0189>
- WHO. (2022). Healthy diet: Fact sheet. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/healthy-diet>
- Yahia, N., Brown, C., Rapley, M., & Dey, R. (2016). Level of nutrition knowledge and its association with fat consumption among college students. *BMC Public Health*, 16, 1047.



APPENDICIES

Appendix 1: INFORMED CONSENT

STUDY TITLE: The Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of University of Ghana Students.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Sharon Naa Atswei Mensah

ADDRESS: Department of Nutrition and Food Science, University of Ghana, Legon.

General Information about Research

Dear Participant,

You have been selected to participate in a research study titled **“The Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of University of Ghana Students.**

The aim of this study is to determine the role of social media influencers in the dietary choices of University of Ghana Students. Upon agreement to participate in the study, you will be required to complete a questionnaire which may last 10-15 minutes. The questions include information on socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, level etc.), dietary choices and social media usage (social media influencers). This study seeks to contribute to existing literature and provide vulnerable insights for both policymakers and individuals seeking to promote nutrition, healthier dietary choices and eating habits among university students.

Benefits of the Study

Participation in this study will not only provide valuable information for research purposes, but it may also benefit you by increasing your awareness on the role of social media influencers in the dietary choices of University of Ghana Students.

Risks of Study

There will be no risk in this study. However, the inconvenience may be on the part of the time you would spend completing the questionnaire.

Confidentiality

All your records will be kept safe and none of the information will identify you by your name. This will only be used for academic purposes.

Compensation

Students who participate in the focus group discussion will receive incentives.

Withdrawal from Study

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If you decide to withdraw from the study, your data will not be included in the final analysis. We assure you that your decision to withdraw will not affect you in any way.

Contact for Additional Information

Please take time to decide to partake in the study and do not hesitate to make any enquiries. For more information, please contact my supervisor Professor Matilda Steiner-Asiedu (Department of Nutrition and Food Science) on +233-5412-60704 or tillysteiner@gmail.com or contact Sharon Naa Atswei Mensah on 0203587683 or snaamensah92@gmail.com

Administrator, Ethics Committee for Basic and Applied Sciences

College of Basic and Applied Sciences

University of Ghana

P. O. Box LG 68 Legon – Accra

IP No.: 3014

Email: ethicscbas@ug.edu.gh



VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

"I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and I am willing to give consent for me, my child/ward to participate in this study. I have not waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my personal records."

Name of Volunteer

Signature or mark of volunteer

Date

If volunteers cannot read the form themselves, a witness must sign here:

I was present while the benefits, risks and procedures were read to the volunteer. All questions were answered, and the volunteer has agreed to take part in the research.

Name of witness

Signature of witness

Date

I certify that the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research have been explained to the above individual.

Name of Person who obtained Consent

Signature of Person who obtained Consent

Date

2: Questionnaire Administration

Appendix 2a SELF-REPORTED QUESTIONNAIRE

Date of Interview []

Interviewer ID []

Topic: The Role of Social Media Influencers in the Dietary Choices of University of Ghana Students.

Please provide answers to the questions below. Please tick where options are provided and write in the spaces provided where necessary

1. Age

17-19 []

20-22 []

23-25 []

2. Sex: Male []

Female []

3. Nationality of student

Ghanaian []

Others(please specify)

4.Ethnicity

Akan []

Ga-Adangbe []

Ewe []

Dagomba []

Others (specify).....

5. Religion

Christian []

Muslim[]

Others (please specify).....

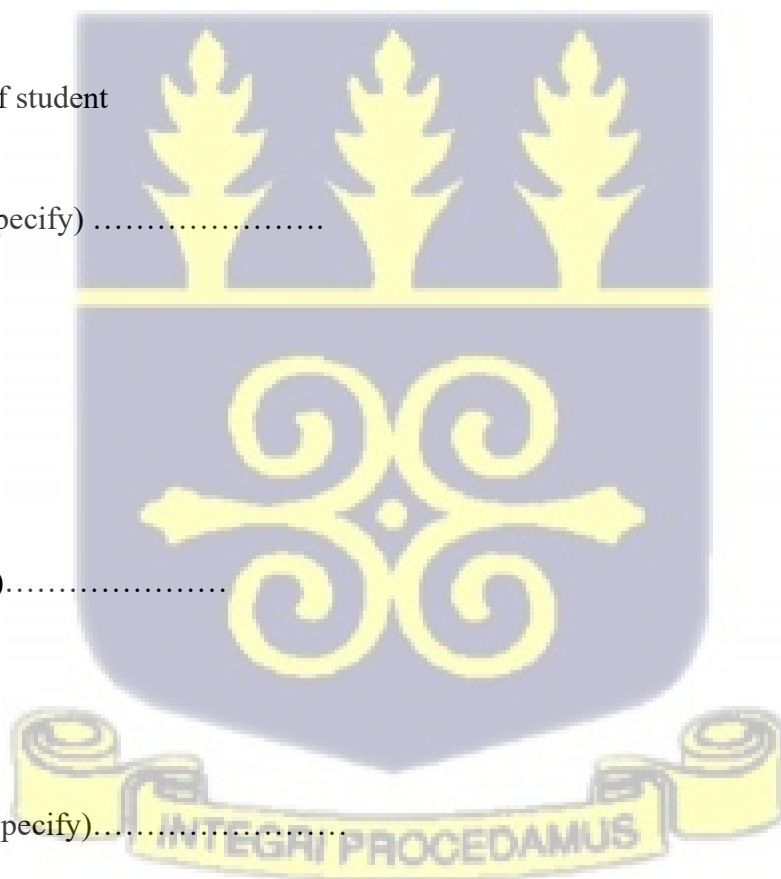
6. Level of study

100 []

200[]

300[]

400[]



7. College

Bachelor of Science []

Bachelor of Arts []

Business []

Others(please specify).....

8. Hall of residence

Hilla Limann []

Alexander Kwabong []

Mensah-Sarbah []

Legon hall []

African Union Hall []

Topp Nelson Yankah []

9. What is your main source of income?

Parent or Guardians []

Self-supporting []

Scholarship []

SSNIT loan scheme

[] Others (please specify).....

10. What is your estimated monthly stipend?

< GHC 300 []

GHC 300-600 []

GHC 601-900 []

GHC 901-1200 []

GHC 1201-1500 []

GHC 1501-1800 []

GHC 1801-2100 []

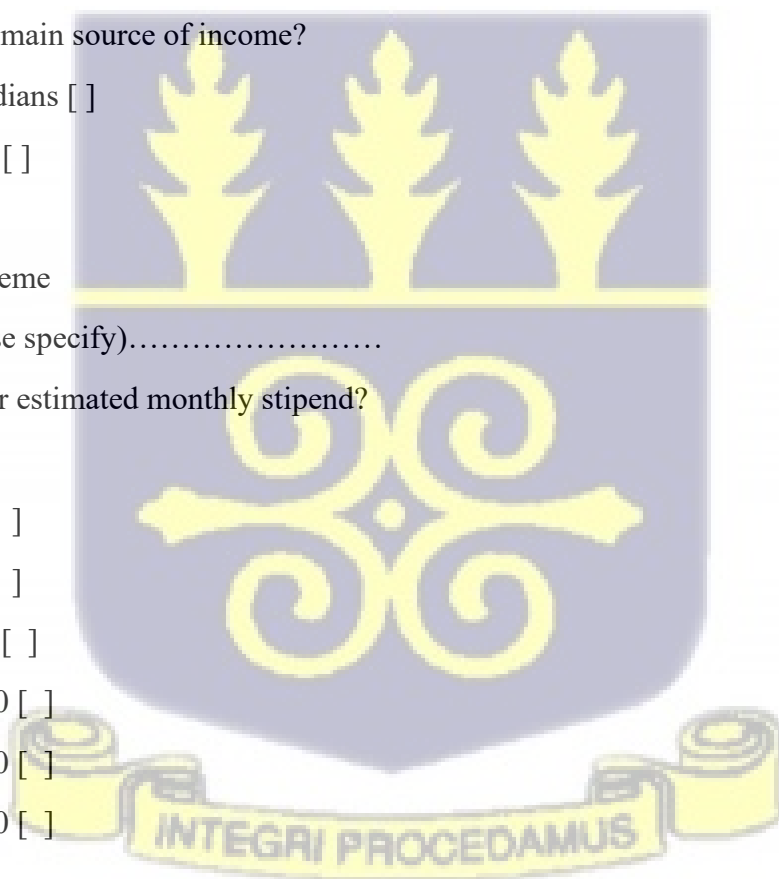
>GHC 2100 []

11. How much, on average, of the amount do you spend on food per month?

< GHC 300 []

GHC 300-600 []

GHC 601-900 []



GHC 901-1200 []

GHC 1201-1500 []

GHC 1501-1800 []

GHC 1801-2100 []

>GHC 2100 []

SECTION B: SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Please provide answers to the questions below. Please tick where options are provided and write in the spaces provided where necessary

12. Are you a member of a social media platform?

Yes []

No []

13. How often do you use social media platforms?

Rarely []

Occasionally []

Frequently []

Very frequently []

14. Do you follow any social media influencers?

Yes []

No []

15. On which social media platforms are you on?

Facebook []

YouTube []

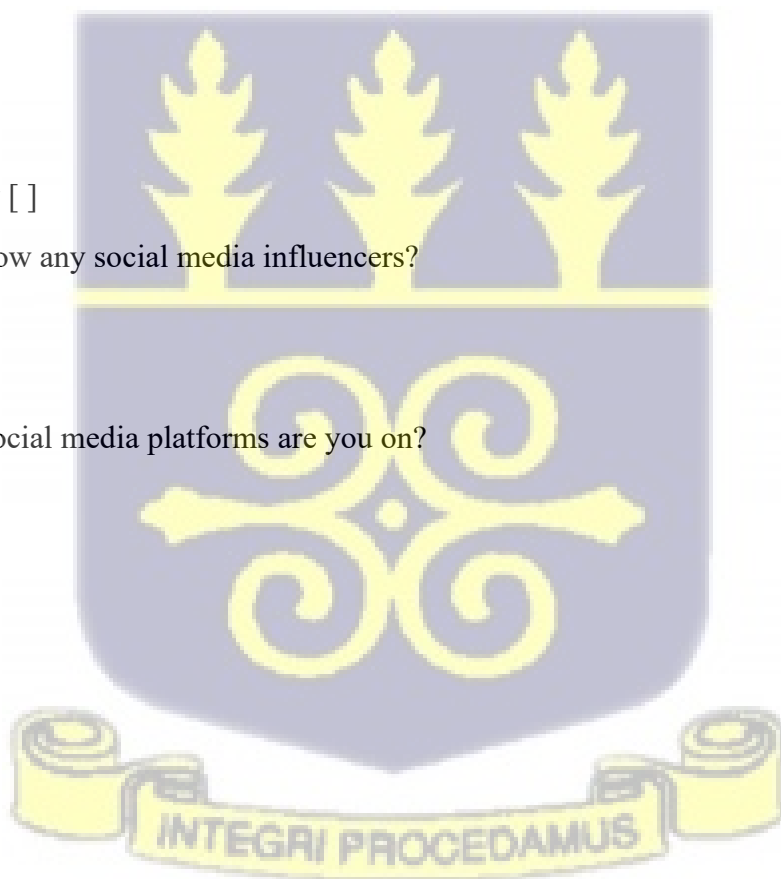
X []

Tiktok []

Snap chat []

Instagram []

WhatsApp []



SECTION C: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND DIETARY CHOICES

Please provide answers to the questions below. Please tick where options are provided and write in the spaces provided where necessary

16. On which social media platforms do you follow influencers who share dietary advice?

Facebook []

YouTube []

X []

Tiktok []

Snap chat []

Instagram []

17. Are you influenced by social media influencers in making dietary choices?

Yes []

No []

Sometimes []

18. If yes, please specify the types of dietary choices influenced by social media influencers

Meal preferences []

Snacking habits []

Dietary restrictions []

19. How frequently do you incorporate recommendations from social media influencers into your dietary choices

Always []

Often []

Occasionally []

Rarely []

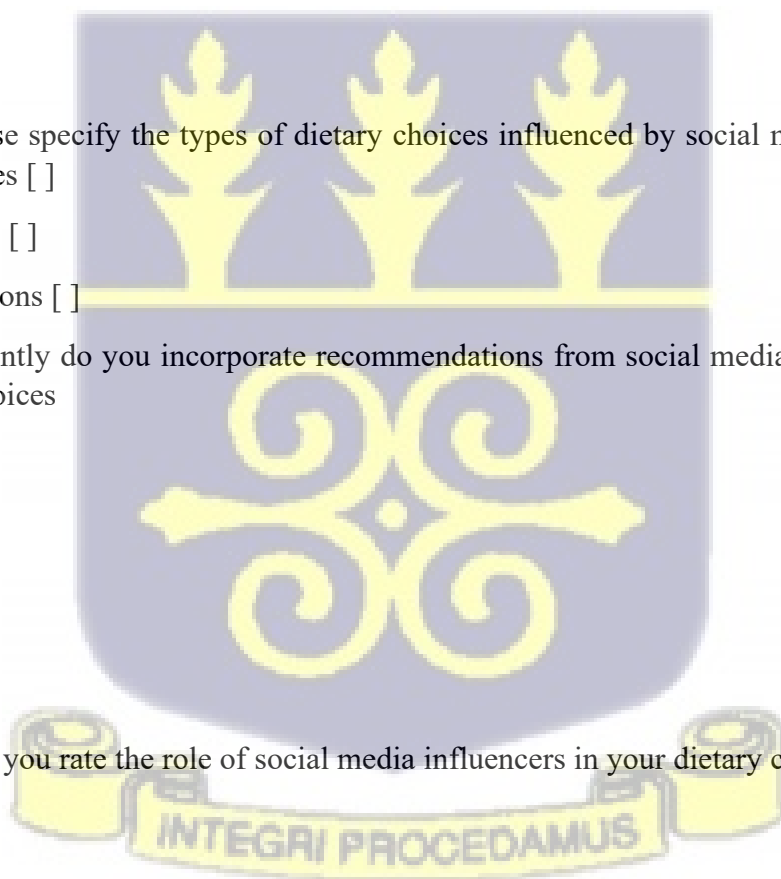
Never []

20. How would you rate the role of social media influencers in your dietary choices?

Low []

Medium []

High []



SECTION D: FACTORS MODIFYING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN DIETARY CHOICES

Please provide answers to the questions below. Please tick where options are provided and write in the spaces provided where necessary

21. Do you believe your age affects the influence of social media influencers on your dietary choices?

Yes []

No []

Not sure []

22. How many social media influencers do you follow?

1 -10 []

11-20 []

21-30 []

31-40 []

41-50 []

23. What do these social media influencers pose as?

Nutritionist/Dieticians []

Fitness coach []

Beauty influencers []

Chef/Food bloggers []

24. How many social media influencers you follow are verified on any of the social media platforms?

1-10 []

11-20 []

21-30 []

31-40 []

41-50 []

SECTION E: DIETARY CHOICE

Please provide answers to the questions below. Please tick where options are provided and write in the spaces provided where necessary

25. On a scale of 1-5, how frequently do you include fruits and vegetables in your daily meals?

Never []

Rarely []

Occasionally []

Frequently []

Always []

26. Please rate your typical breakfast choices for nutritional value.

Excellent []

Good []

Fairly []

Poor []

Very poor []

27. How will you rate your daily water consumption?

Very high []

High []

Moderate []

Low []

Very low []

28. On a scale of 1-5, how often do you choose fast food over home-cooked meals?

Never []

Rarely []

Occasionally []

Frequently []

Always []

29. Rate your awareness of protein sources in your diet.

Completely aware []

Mostly aware []

Neutral []

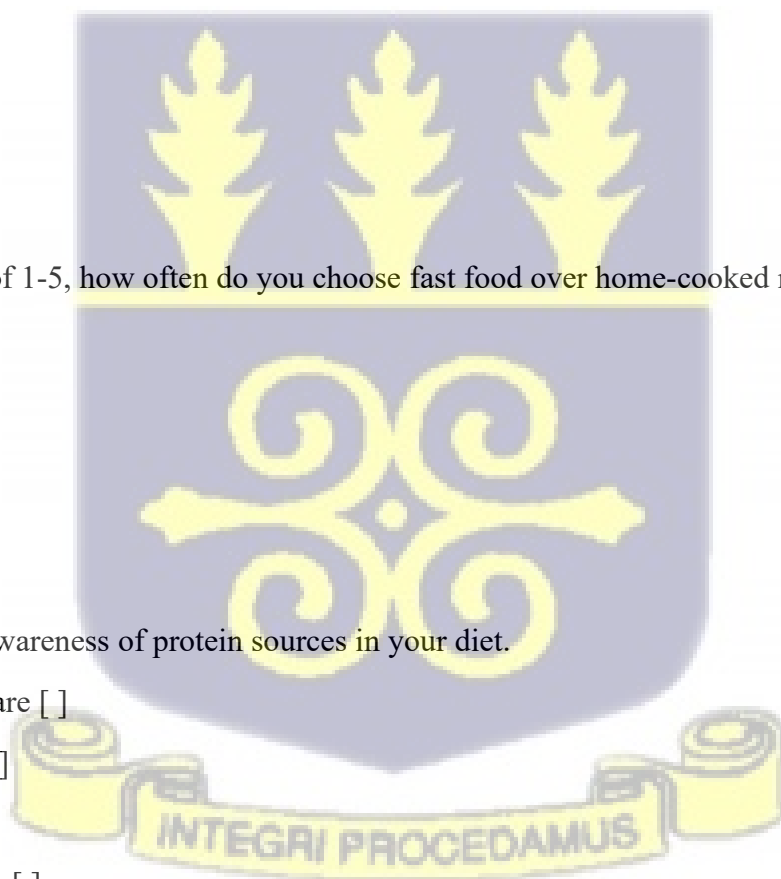
Mostly unaware []

Completely unaware []

30. How healthy do you consider your snack choices between meals?

Very healthy []

Healthy []



Neutral []

Unhealthy

Very unhealthy []

31. On a scale of 1-5, how frequently do you consume sugary beverages or energy drinks?

Never []

Rarely []

Occasionally []

Frequently []

Always []

32. Rate your attention to portion size when eating

Very attentive []

Moderately attentive []

Neutral []

Slightly not attentive []

Not attentive at all []

33. How conscious are you of your overall calorie intake?

Very conscious []

Moderately conscious []

Neutral []

Slightly not conscious []

Not conscious at all []

34. How healthy do you consider your desserts and sweets?

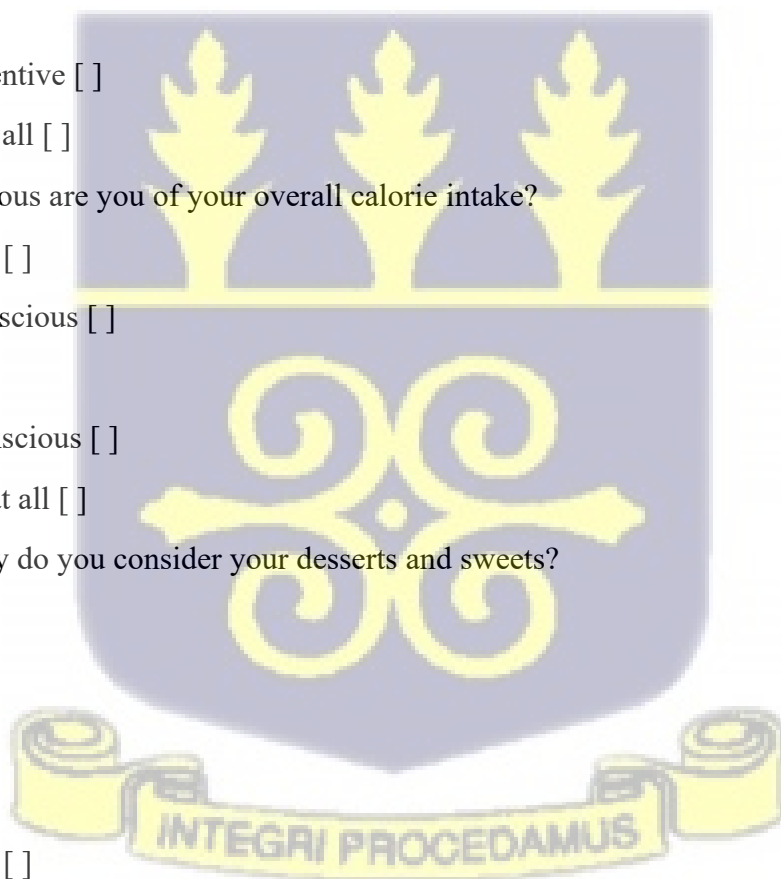
Very healthy []

Healthy []

Neutral []

Unhealthy

Very unhealthy []



SECTION F: FOOD FREQUENCY QUESTIONNAIRE

Instruction for Interviewer: Ask the participant if he/she has consumed any of the foods on average within a week

	Not at all	Once a week	2-3 times a week	4-5 times a week	>6 a week
Cereals Rice, maize, millet, macaroni, sorghum, wheat, oats etc					
Starchy roots and tubers Plantain, yam, cassava, potato, cocoyam etc					
Legumes Beans, cowpea, pigeon, pea, soya beans etc					
Vegetables French beans, carrot, bell pepper, chili, cassava leaves, okra, spinach, pumpkin leaves, tomato, onion, ayoyo, bitter leaf etc.					
Fruits Orange, pineapple, pawpaw, coconut, sugar cane etc					
Meat and poultry Beef, goat, mutton, lamb, pork, chicken, turkey, guinea fowl, game etc					
Egg					
Fish Catfish, Tilapia, mackerel, sardine etc					
Milk and milk products Cow milk, goat milk, coconut milk, soya milk etc					



Appendix 2b - FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

The purpose of this focus group discussion is to identify factors influencing dietary choices of University of Ghana students beyond social media influencers and explore the opinions of University of Ghana students regarding social media influencers in the dietary choices of students in University of Ghana.

SECTION A: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Please provide answers to the questions below. Please tick where options are provided and write in the spaces provided where necessary

1.Age

17-19 []

20-22 []

23-25 []

2.Sex

Male []

Female []

3.Nationality of Student

Ghanaian []

Other []

4.Ethnicity

Akan []

Ga-Adangbe []

Ewe []

Dagomba []

Others []

5.Religion

Christian []

Muslim []

Others []

6.Level of study

100 []

200 []

300 []

400 []

7. College

Bachelor of Science []

Bachelor of Arts []

Business []



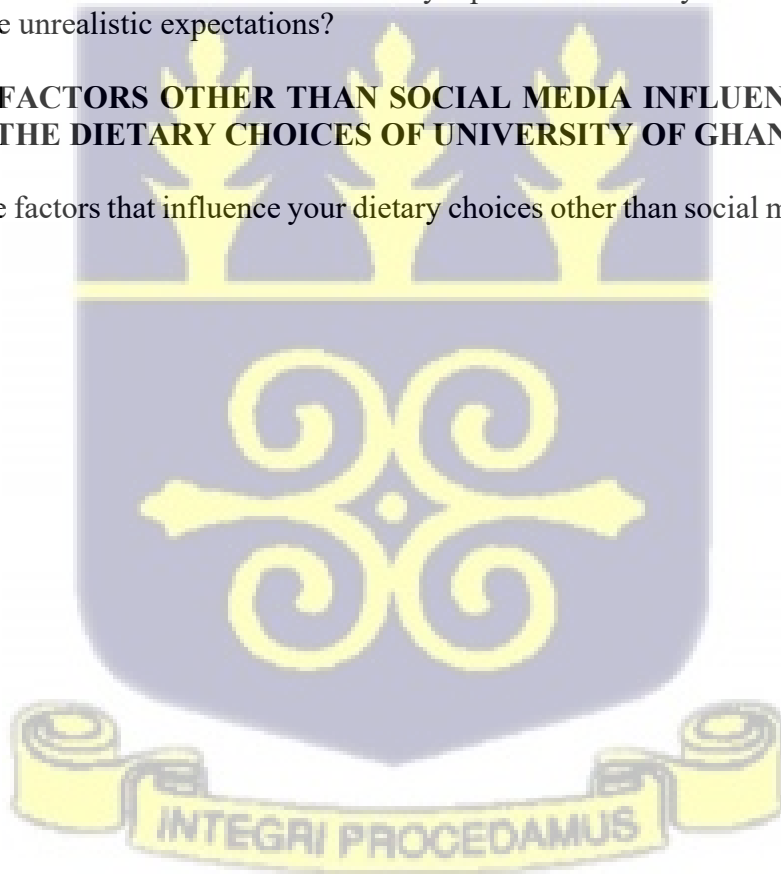
Others (please specify).....

SECTION B: OPINIONS OF UNIVERSITY OF GHANA STUDENTS REGARDING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN THEIR DIETARY CHOICES

- 1.To what extent do you think social media influencers influence your dietary choices?
- 2.Can you recall specific instances where you tried food or adopted a dietary choice because of a social media influencer?
- 3.How do you perceive the credibility of dietary advice provided by social media influencers?
- 4.Do you think social media influencers have a responsibility to promote healthy dietary choices? Why or why not?
- 5.Have you ever felt pressured to conform to a specific diet or food trend promoted by social media influencers?
- 6.Do you think social media influencers accurately represent the reality of their dietary choices, or do they create unrealistic expectations?

SECTION C: FACTORS OTHER THAN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS WHICH INFLUENCE THE DIETARY CHOICES OF UNIVERSITY OF GHANA STUDENTS

Let's discuss the factors that influence your dietary choices other than social media influencers.



Appendix 3 - ETHICAL CLEARANCE



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR BASIC AND APPLIED SCIENCES (ECBAS)
P. O. Box LG 1195, Legon, Accra, Ghana

Ref. No: ECBAS 027/23-24

1st March, 2024

Sharon Naa Atswei Mensah
Department of Nutrition & Food Science
University of Ghana
Legon, Accra

Dear Ms. Mensah,

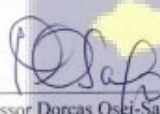
ECBAS 027/23-24: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN THE DIETARY CHOICES OF UNIVERSITY OF GHANA STUDENTS

This is to inform you that the above referenced study has been presented to the Ethics Committee for Basic and Applied Sciences for a full board review and the following actions taken subject to the conditions and explanation provided below:

Expiry Date:	17/02/2025
On Agenda for:	Initial Submission
Date of Submission:	18/12/2023
ECBAS Action:	Approved
Reporting:	Annually

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dorcas Osei-Safo
ECBAS Chairperson



