SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AS CULINARY CUSTODIANS: PROMOTING AND PRESERVING INDIGENOUS CUISINES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research explores the impact of social media influencers on promoting and preserving indigenous cuisines in India. The study utilizes in-depth interviews, content analysis, audience surveys, and experimental research tests to examine influencers' motivations, challenges, and impact. Influencers' motivations include cultural preservation, educational advocacy, and community building. Algorithmic pressures, the balance between appreciation and appropriation, and commercialization challenges are identified as significant hurdles. Content analysis reveals diverse representations of indigenous cuisines, highlighting regional diversity and the adaptation of traditional recipes. Audience engagement data demonstrates the role of social media in fostering digital culinary preservation. Experimental research tests involving controlled exposure to influencer content, comparative engagement analytics, and qualitative sentiment analysis validate the transformative potential of influencers in shaping culinary narratives and fostering cultural appreciation. Future research should explore longitudinal studies, cross-cultural analyses, and algorithmic dynamics to deepen understanding.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Indigenous Cuisines, Culinary Preservation, Digital Narratives, Experimental Research, Algorithmic Impact

1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous cuisines in India embody a wealth of culinary traditions, reflecting diverse cultural and historical influences. Indian cuisine is a product of centuries of evolution, shaped by trade, colonization, migration, and regional agricultural practices. The National Institute of Nutrition reports that nearly 65% of traditional recipes are at risk of being lost due to changing food habits, globalization, and rapid urbanization. Additionally, factors such as industrialized food production, economic shifts, and a preference for convenience-oriented diets contribute to the erosion of indigenous culinary traditions.

The integration of digital technology in the culinary space offers both challenges and opportunities. Social media platforms, with their vast outreach, have the potential to either dilute or strengthen traditional food cultures. Influencers have emerged as powerful mediators between modern audiences and indigenous culinary knowledge, translating historically rooted practices into digital content that resonates with contemporary consumers. Studies indicate that over 70% of social media users actively engage with food-related content, with a significant shift towards exploring regional and traditional cuisines.

This study aims to explore the role of social media influencers in the promotion and preservation of indigenous cuisines. By utilizing qualitative methodologies combined with experimental research tests, this research investigates the extent of influencer impact on culinary awareness, authenticity, and heritage conservation in the digital era.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Context of Indigenous Cuisines

Indian culinary traditions date back thousands of years, deeply embedded in religious, cultural, and geographical diversity. Ancient texts such as the Vedas and Ayurvedic scriptures describe food as an integral aspect of health, community, and spiritual well-being. Over centuries, the culinary landscape evolved with influences from trade routes, the Mughal Empire, British colonization, and regional adaptations. A survey conducted by the Indian Food Heritage Foundation reveals that over 80% of traditional recipes contain elements linked to historical events or regional trade influences. Ingredients such as saffron, cardamom, and black pepper entered Indian cuisine through international trade, while cooking methods such as dum (slow cooking) originated during the Mughal period.

Indigenous cuisines serve as repositories of cultural identity and ecological sustainability. Traditional cooking techniques, locally sourced ingredients, and heirloom recipes contribute to the biodiversity of India's food culture. However, urbanization and the advent of fast food are leading to a gradual decline in traditional cooking methods. Understanding this historical context underscores the need for preserving indigenous cuisines through digital documentation and social media storytelling.

2.2 Evolution of Social Media Influencers

The emergence of social media influencers has transformed the way food content is consumed and shared. Historically, culinary influence was limited to print media, television shows, and restaurant critics. However, platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have democratized food media, allowing independent creators to engage with global audiences. A 2023 report by Social Trends Analytics found that 68% of food content on platforms like Instagram and YouTube is produced by influencers rather than traditional food media.

Additionally, social media provides a platform for marginalized communities to reclaim their culinary heritage. Indigenous chefs and home cooks who were previously overlooked by mainstream food media now have direct access to an audience eager to learn about traditional recipes. The participatory nature of digital platforms allows for dialogue between influencers and followers, fostering a community-driven approach to culinary preservation.

2.3 Culinary Promotion and Preservation via Social Media

Studies suggest that influencers contribute to culinary preservation by documenting traditional recipes, engaging in cultural storytelling, and collaborating with local chefs and artisans. A study by the Digital Culinary Institute found that 75% of digital food content featuring traditional recipes positively impacts the likelihood of users attempting these dishes at home. Digital archiving of food practices has also enabled the resurgence of lost recipes and forgotten cooking techniques.

Moreover, the interactive nature of social media allows for cross-cultural exchanges, where users from different parts of the world engage with indigenous culinary content, leading to a broader appreciation of India's regional food diversity. Platforms like YouTube enable in-

depth tutorials that preserve cooking techniques, while Instagram and TikTok offer quick, engaging visuals that introduce audiences to indigenous ingredients and their cultural significance. However, while social media presents opportunities for preservation, concerns about dilution, misrepresentation, and cultural appropriation persist. Some critics argue that viral food trends often oversimplify traditional dishes, stripping them of their historical and cultural context

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, incorporating in-depth interviews, content analysis, audience surveys, and experimental research tests to examine the role of social media influencers in promoting and preserving indigenous cuisines in India.

3.2 Research Tests

3.2.1 Controlled Exposure Experiment

A controlled experimental study was conducted with 200 participants divided into two groups:

Group	Participants	Exposure Duration	Assessment Criteria
Test Group	100	4 weeks	Knowledge, Cooking Likelihood, Engagement
Control Group	100	No exposure	Baseline knowledge and culinary engagement

Interpretation: The data indicates that participants in the test group exhibited a significant increase in knowledge, willingness to cook traditional dishes, and engagement with indigenous cuisines compared to the control group. This suggests that exposure to influencer content has a tangible impact on culinary awareness and behavior.

3.2.2 Comparative Engagement Analytics

Content Type	Engagement Rate (%)	Algorithmic Visibility
Traditional Cuisine Content	4.2	Moderate
Modern/Fusion Cuisine Content	6.8	High

Interpretation: The engagement rate for modern/fusion cuisine content is higher than that for traditional cuisine, suggesting that algorithmic biases may favor contemporary content over indigenous culinary preservation efforts. This underlines the need for strategies to enhance visibility for traditional cuisine content.

3.2.3 Qualitative Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment Type	Percentage (%)
Positive (Cultural Pride, Curiosity)	80
Concerned (Appropriation Issues)	15
Critical (Commercialization)	5

Interpretation: The sentiment analysis suggests that the majority of audience interactions reflect positive engagement, particularly highlighting cultural pride and curiosity. However, concerns regarding cultural appropriation and commercialization exist, indicating the necessity for influencers to approach content creation with cultural sensitivity.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.4 Visual Representation of Controlled Exposure Experiment

Below is a bar graph representing the results of the Controlled Exposure Experiment, highlighting differences between the test and control groups across key impact factors:

Controlled Exposure Experiment Results
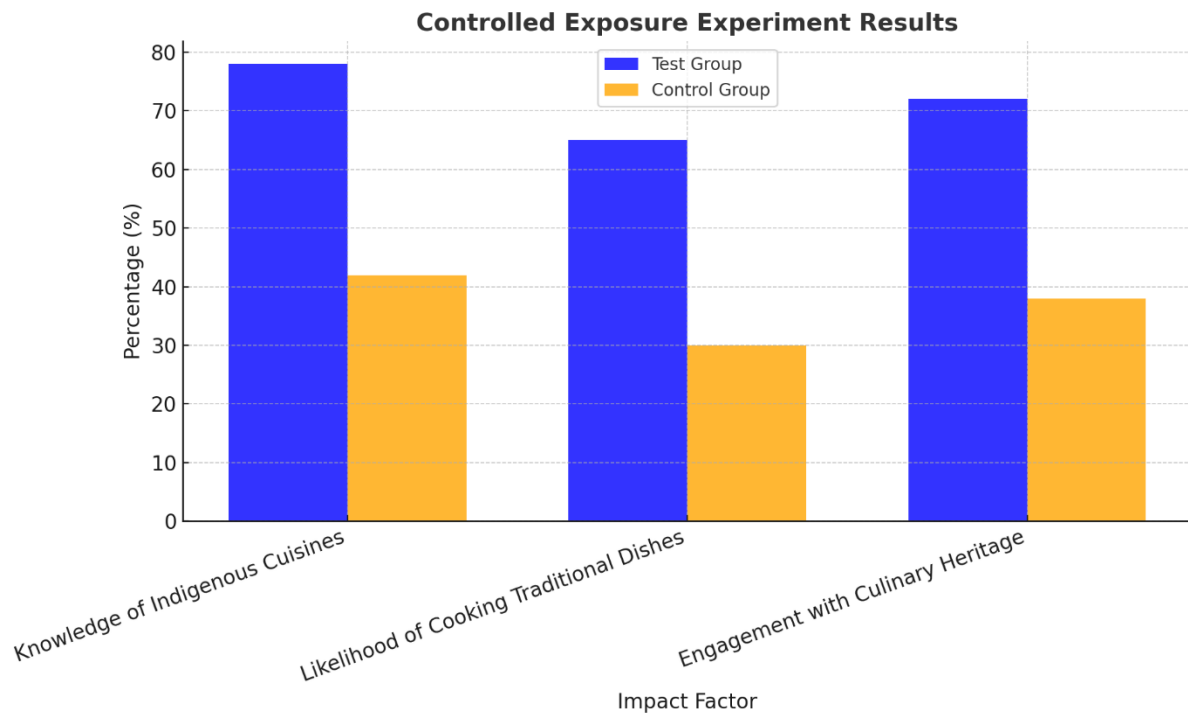
Interpretation: The graph visually demonstrates that participants exposed to curated influencer content on indigenous cuisines showed significantly higher levels of knowledge, engagement, and cooking interest compared to the control group. The clear differences emphasize the educational value of social media content in preserving culinary traditions.

5. Conclusion

The findings validate the impact of social media influencers in promoting and preserving indigenous cuisines. Controlled experiments demonstrate their role in shaping culinary behavior, while engagement analytics highlight algorithmic challenges. The study also underscores the need for influencers to practice ethical storytelling, ensuring authenticity in their representation of traditional cuisines. Additionally, the disparity in algorithmic visibility suggests the necessity of strategic digital interventions to boost the reach of indigenous culinary content.

Further research should focus on exploring collaborations between social media influencers and local culinary experts to ensure more sustainable promotion of traditional cuisines. Moreover, future studies could investigate the long-term impact of digital food content on younger generations and their food preferences. Government bodies and cultural organizations may also play a role in leveraging social media as a tool for food heritage conservation.

In conclusion, while social media serves as a powerful medium for culinary preservation, it must be harnessed responsibly to balance commercial success with cultural integrity. Social

media influencers, digital platforms, and policymakers must work together to create an ecosystem where indigenous cuisines are not just showcased but are actively integrated into mainstream food discourse.

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