

The influence of fake food

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Digitisation and globalization mean that today, a large proportion of the world can access content and opinion in an instant and conversely share their own content and opinions just as quickly. The search engines and the social media apps, are the tools with which real news and fake news can spread quickly often in a viral manner. This ubiquitous and always-on stream of information and disinformation has led to the rise of so-called influencers, people who by wit or wisdom have found themselves

to be hubs within the network. Nodes that have many, many inbound connections from the world at large over any of whom they might offer a guiding word, for good or bad.

Álvaro Lopes Dias of the Universidade Lusófona in Lisbon, Portugal, and colleagues have looked at one area of influence that can have a direct impact on the health and wealth of those being influenced—diet trends. Nutritional advice and the various guidelines we are spoon-fed by governments and [food companies](#) may or may not be valid scientifically, it is almost impossible to discern for any given individual, we can only generalize through statistical data. Nevertheless, influencers with an agenda, or worse, with a sponsorship deal may well push certain advice in the name of selling a particular product, whether that's a new supplement or superfood. Any specific piece of advice or finding will not apply to everyone but only to the average and may well be harmful to some individuals in the long run if adhered to without professional medical guidance.

One might hope that the [influencers](#) would be promoting the healthy option, whatever that might be, but Lopes Dias and colleagues suggest that this is not the case. Moreover, the team suggests that regulations should be put in place to control the spread of fake food [news](#), pointless diets and supplements, and to allow only qualified nutritional scientists to have any real influence on dietary guidance, rather than the latest micro-celebrity or health "guru" to gobble up a large following on social media.

More information: Catarina Vasconcelos et al. Online influencers: healthy food or fake news, *International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising* (2021). [DOI: 10.1504/IJIMA.2021.114334](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJIMA.2021.114334)

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