Study shows Pinterest users pin healthy recipes, are more likely to make unhealthy ones

May 18 2021

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When it comes sharing recipes on social media, what users post, and what they cook may be two entirely different things. That's the

conclusion of a recent study from George Mason University's College of Health and Human Services, published in April in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (*JMIR*), a leading journal for digital medicine and health research. The study led by Hong Xue, Ph.D. analyzed hundreds of Pinterest Users and Pinterest Influencers, and found users liked and pinned posts that were healthy, featuring more poultry, fish and vegetables, but users more heavily engaged off-line with recipes that were high in fat, sugar, and total calories—indicating that users were more like to actually cook the less healthy recipes.

"It's an interesting discrepancy between what pinners posted/liked and how users actually consumed the information," Xue said. "Pinners are more likely to post recipes that are socially rewarded with likes and repins. They are more likely to adhere to an elite social norm set by celebrities and influencers promoting healthier, low-calorie, clean eating. But when it comes to the recipes users are more interested in making food high in fat, sugar, and high calories. We see a very different picture. They're commenting on and posting finished dish photos of the less healthy recipes."

The disconnect between popularity and engagement is an important one, Xue noted, because users aren't taking the additional step from interest to action. And that could have significant implications for anyone attempting to increase healthy eating behaviors through social media campaigns. Specifically, the study found:

- Engagement (commenting, sharing photos of finished dishes) increased as the amount of fat, sugar, total calories increased in a recipe
- Popularity (reposting, liking) of a recipe increased as the number of poultry andseafood went up in a recipe
- Comment mining on recipe posts revealed that users were more likely to comment on the way a recipe tasted

- Users were far less likely to comment on a recipe's difficulty level (less than 8 percent) or its health attributes (less than 3 percent).

With 18 percent of the adult U.S. population using Pinterest, and [recipe](#) sharing being one of its most popular interest areas, the platform represents an unprecedented opportunity to reinforce healthy eating habits, Xue said, if Pinterest influencers posting recipes used some different strategies.

"If users are engaging with more unhealthy recipes, then perhaps influencers should offer options for lowering the fat in them, as part of those recipes. There's definitely a role for healthcare organizations and fitness experts to provide healthier recipes that are big on flavor, as this appears to be an area where [users](#) find the recipes lacking. To change perceptions, public health experts need to make healthy food the treat, and not the other way around. There's tremendous opportunities in [social media](#) to influence healthy behavior," he said. "We're only beginning to understand it's potential and pitfalls."

Provided by George Mason University