

Bad influence: Study shows social media is unreliable for nutrition advice

February 21 2024



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Relying on social media for dietary advice and nutritional information could prove to be an unhealthy strategy, as a national audit of influencer posts revealed nearly half contained inaccurate information.

Researchers at Deakin University's Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN) looked at nearly 700 Instagram posts by influencers and brands with more than 100,000 followers and found 45% contained inaccurate nutrition information.

The [study](#), published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, also found that 9 out of 10 posts were of low quality when factors such as the author's professional qualifications, the evidence base of the information, advertising and commercial interests were considered.

Study lead and IPAN Ph.D. candidate, Emily Denniss, said nutrition was a widely discussed topic on [social media](#) and there had been concerns about the quality and accuracy of nutrition information shared on social media for some time.

"This is the first study to measure the quality and accuracy of nutrition information on Instagram and our findings suggest it is not always a reliable source of nutrition information," she said.

The study found brand accounts (such as supplement companies and subscription services for online programs and meal plans) provided the least accurate and lowest quality information, and information about [dietary supplements](#) was also mostly inaccurate.

The most accurate and high-quality information was provided by nutritionists and dietitians.

"What we eat has a significant impact on our health and many people use Instagram and other social media platforms for information about diet and meal preparation. Our findings may help people think twice before they make decisions based on the information they have found on Instagram and hopefully look to dietitians and nutritionists for advice

instead of influencers or brands."

Some of the worst advice included:

- Posts advising parents that liver was a suitable first food for babies which could put children at risk of consuming toxic levels of vitamin A.
- Posts claiming supplements can "boost immunity" as supplements are a costly alternative to a healthy diet.

Examples of the best advice included:

- Dietitians and nutritionists posting about the benefits of eating more [plant food](#) such as fruit, vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds, and the importance of a variety of plant-based foods for gut health and overall health. This is in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines and current research.

Denniss said it was important for social media users to be wary of brands or influencers trying to sell something.

"It is worth checking the qualifications of people providing information. Dietitians and registered nutritionists are qualified to provide information about nutrition. And be cautious of anyone who says that there is one right way to eat. There are many ways to eat a healthy balanced diet.

"If in doubt, talk to a dietitian, registered nutritionist or your doctor before making major decisions related to diet."

More information: Emily Denniss et al, #Fail: the quality and accuracy of nutrition-related information by influential Australian Instagram accounts, *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and*

Physical Activity (2024). [DOI: 10.1186/s12966-024-01565-y](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-024-01565-y)

Provided by Deakin University

Citation: Bad influence: Study shows social media is unreliable for nutrition advice (2024, February 21) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-02-bad-social-media-unreliable-nutrition.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.