



THE INFLUENCE OF POPULAR HEALTH TRENDS ON PUBLIC WELL-BEING AND BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, popular health trends have emerged as a significant influence on public health behaviors, shaping both individual lifestyle choices and societal health norms. These trends, driven by social media, celebrity endorsements, and marketing campaigns, have generated widespread awareness about wellness and health issues. However, the impact of such trends on long-term health outcomes remains a topic of debate within the scientific community. This study examines the role of popular health trends, including diet fads, exercise regimes, and mental health practices, in shaping public health behaviors. By analyzing available literature and conducting a survey on public health awareness and behavior, this paper explores how these trends influence attitudes toward well-being and health care choices. The findings suggest that while popular health trends can motivate positive behavior changes, they may also promote unproven or harmful practices. The study highlights the need for a balanced approach in promoting health trends and providing accurate information to the public. Keywords: health trends, public health, wellness, behavior, social media.

Keywords: Popular health, public health, Wellness trends, Behavior change, social media influence.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the field of health and wellness has experienced a dramatic transformation, driven in large part by the rise of popular health trends. These trends, ranging from dietary fads and exercise regimens to mental health practices and wellness ideologies, have gained immense popularity through social media platforms, celebrity endorsements, and widespread media coverage. What once might have been niche practices have now evolved into mainstream movements, influencing millions globally. The term "popular health" refers to these health trends that often go viral, creating substantial shifts in how people approach their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

The rapid spread of popular health trends can be largely attributed to the pervasive influence of social media. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become powerful tools for

health influencers, fitness gurus, and wellness experts to promote lifestyle changes and health behaviors to their ever-growing audiences. As people turn to these platforms for information on diet, fitness, and mental health, the lines between scientifically backed health advice and trendy, often unproven, practices become increasingly blurred. These trends shape public perception of what it means to be "healthy," often prompting individuals to modify their daily routines in pursuit of a perceived ideal of wellness.

While the influx of health trends presents opportunities for positive change, such as encouraging individuals to be more mindful of their health and adopt healthier habits, there are also significant risks. Many of these trends lack robust scientific evidence supporting their long-term benefits, and some even pose health risks when followed without proper guidance or understanding. The pressure to conform to these trends can lead



to behaviors that prioritize short-term results over sustainable, evidence-based practices. In some cases, individuals may become vulnerable to misleading health claims or fall victim to marketing tactics that promote quick fixes and unsustainable solutions.

This paper seeks to explore the intersection of popular health trends and public well-being, focusing on their impact on health behaviors and attitudes. The following sections will examine the historical context of health trends, how they have evolved in the digital age, and the potential benefits and drawbacks they present. A critical review of literature will highlight the underlying drivers of these trends and assess their scientific validity. Through a survey and analysis of social media content, this paper aims to better understand the influence of popular health trends on individuals and society as a whole. Finally, it will explore the ethical considerations and implications of promoting these trends to the public, emphasizing the need for responsible health communication and informed decision-making.

Health trends are not a modern phenomenon, although the nature and scope of these trends have evolved significantly over time. Ancient civilizations were some of the first to create systems for improving health, ranging from dietary restrictions to physical fitness routines. The Hippocratic Oath, for instance, established foundational principles for medical ethics, and the Greek emphasis on physical fitness gave rise to the Olympic Games, which remain an enduring symbol of health and wellness. Similarly, practices like fasting, herbal medicine, and meditation have been integral to various cultures for centuries, evolving over time as part of broader health philosophies.

However, the concept of popular health, as we understand it today, is a product of the last century. The advent of mass media in the 20th century—through radio, television, and print media—brought health trends into the public eye on a much larger scale. In the post-World War II era, diet culture exploded, with popular diets like the Atkins Diet and the South Beach Diet becoming household names. Fitness regimens like aerobics, Pilates, and, later, CrossFit, gained widespread attention, influencing generations to adopt new ways of exercising and living. These trends often reflected the prevailing social attitudes towards body image, health, and wellness, intertwining public health initiatives with the pursuit of aesthetic ideals.

With the onset of the digital age, the reach of popular health trends expanded exponentially. Social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube provided new avenues for health influencers and wellness brands to spread their messages. The viral nature of these platforms allowed trends to gain momentum rapidly, often bypassing traditional health experts in favor of user-generated content and celebrity endorsements. For instance, the rise of the keto diet, intermittent fasting, and detox cleanses have all been propelled by influencers and celebrities promoting their effectiveness. The democratization of information through social media means that anyone with a smartphone can become a health authority, regardless of their qualifications.

The role of social media in shaping health trends cannot be overstated. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are not just spaces for personal expression; they are powerful marketing tools where individuals can promote various aspects of wellness,



from fitness and nutrition to mental health and self-care. In recent years, social media influencers have become central to the dissemination of health trends, often shaping the behavior of millions with just one post or video.

The relationship between influencers and their audiences is built on trust, which has been cultivated through relatable content and authentic personal stories. This connection fosters a sense of community, where followers feel encouraged to adopt similar health practices and behaviors. However, the trust placed in influencers also raises concerns, particularly when it comes to the accuracy of the health information being shared. Influencers may not always be qualified health experts, and the advice they offer can be based on personal experience rather than scientific evidence. This phenomenon is particularly concerning when it comes to health trends that are marketed as "miracle cures" or "quick fixes," which may not only be ineffective but potentially harmful.

One prominent example of social media-driven health trends is the rise of body positivity movements, which aim to challenge traditional beauty standards and promote self-acceptance. While these movements have led to positive changes in how society views body image, they have also been hijacked by certain influencers to promote unhealthy or unrealistic health practices, such as extreme dieting and excessive exercise, all in the name of body transformation. As a result, followers may feel pressured to conform to body ideals that are not sustainable or conducive to long-term well-being.

The influence of social media is not limited to fitness and nutrition. Mental health

trends, such as mindfulness, meditation, and mental health awareness campaigns, have also gained immense traction online. Apps like Headspace and Calm have transformed the way people approach mental well-being, offering guided meditation and mindfulness exercises to help individuals cope with stress and anxiety. While these trends have been shown to offer legitimate benefits for mental health, their commercialization has led to concerns about their potential for oversimplification. The idea that a few minutes of meditation a day can solve deep-seated mental health issues may be appealing, but it doesn't address the complexity of mental health conditions that require long-term, professional intervention.

The rise of popular health trends has significant implications for public health. On the one hand, these trends can motivate individuals to engage in healthier behaviors, such as eating better, exercising more, and practicing mindfulness. Health trends that emphasize the importance of sleep, mental wellness, and preventive care can encourage individuals to take a more active role in their health, potentially reducing the burden on healthcare systems and improving quality of life.

On the other hand, the promotion of health trends without sufficient evidence or proper guidance can be detrimental. The glorification of extreme dieting or excessive exercise may encourage individuals to pursue unrealistic goals that can lead to physical harm, disordered eating, or mental health challenges. Furthermore, misinformation about health trends can undermine public trust in scientific research and medical professionals. As health trends proliferate in the digital space, it becomes crucial to assess



their validity and communicate reliable, evidence-based information to the public.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Influence of Social Media and Health Influencers

One of the most significant factors driving the popularity of health trends is the rise of social media and the increasing influence of digital health influencers. Studies have shown that social media platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, play a pivotal role in spreading health-related content, which has a profound impact on users' health decisions (Chae et al., 2020). Social media has transformed the way health information is shared, with influencers using personal stories, endorsements, and content to promote various health practices. These influencers, who may or may not be health experts, have the power to shape public perception and behavior. According to a study by Verhoeven et al. (2021), influencer culture has led to the democratization of health information, but also to the spread of unverified health claims.

The trust that users place in influencers can be linked to the authenticity and relatability of their content. Research by Martinez and Summers (2022) suggests that followers are more likely to adopt health trends promoted by influencers whom they perceive as trustworthy and relatable. However, this trust can be problematic when the health advice being shared is not evidence-based. Many health trends that gain popularity on social media, such as extreme diets or unregulated supplements, lack scientific backing, leading to potential harm (Peck & Fullerton, 2021).

The Rise of Diet Trends and Nutritional Fads

Dietary trends are among the most prominent and enduring categories of popular health trends. Over the past decade, several diets have gained widespread popularity, each promising various health benefits, from weight loss to enhanced cognitive function. Some of the most notable examples include the ketogenic (keto) diet, intermittent fasting, and plant-based diets. A review by Smith and Lee (2020) highlighted the rapid rise of the keto diet, which advocates for high-fat, low-carbohydrate eating as a way to promote weight loss and improve metabolic health. While some studies have shown short-term benefits of the keto diet, such as weight loss and improved blood sugar regulation, there are concerns about its long-term health effects. Critics argue that the restrictive nature of the diet can lead to nutrient deficiencies and may increase the risk of heart disease (Patel et al., 2019).

Intermittent fasting, another popular diet trend, has gained attention for its potential to improve metabolic health and promote weight loss. Research by Johnson et al. (2020) suggests that intermittent fasting can lead to weight loss and improve markers of cardiovascular health, but more studies are needed to determine its long-term effects. While intermittent fasting may benefit some individuals, it is not universally applicable, particularly for those with underlying health conditions or disordered eating patterns (Harris et al., 2021). Furthermore, the promotion of these diets on social media often fails to include important disclaimers, such as the need for medical supervision when adopting extreme eating patterns, further exacerbating potential risks.

Plant-based diets have also become increasingly popular, with proponents claiming benefits ranging from weight loss to improved heart health and reduced cancer



risk. Studies have consistently shown that plant-based diets, which emphasize whole grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruits, can lead to improved cardiovascular health and lower rates of chronic disease (Clarys et al., 2014). However, the widespread promotion of plant-based eating on social media can sometimes oversimplify the complexity of nutritional science, leading individuals to adopt restrictive eating patterns that may not meet all their nutritional needs. As with other dietary trends, it is important to approach plant-based diets with an understanding of balanced nutrition and the potential risks of nutrient deficiencies (Fulgoni et al., 2020).

Fitness Trends and the Evolution of Exercise Regimens

Alongside diet trends, fitness trends have also played a significant role in shaping popular health movements. The evolution of fitness regimens, from aerobics in the 1980s to CrossFit in the early 2000s, has been influenced by both cultural shifts and technological advancements. A review by Hill and White (2021) examined the role of social media in the promotion of fitness-related content, noting that platforms like Instagram and YouTube have enabled fitness professionals to build massive followings and sell fitness programs to a global audience. However, the accessibility of fitness content online has created a double-edged sword. While it has made fitness more accessible to individuals at all fitness levels, it has also led to the proliferation of "quick fix" programs and unregulated fitness advice.

CrossFit, for instance, is a high-intensity workout program that has grown immensely popular in recent years. Its focus on intense, varied workouts has led to its adoption by individuals seeking rapid fitness

results. However, research by Nguyen et al. (2019) has shown that while CrossFit can lead to improvements in cardiovascular health and muscle strength, it also carries a higher risk of injury compared to traditional exercise regimens. The aggressive marketing of CrossFit, often through social media channels, can downplay these risks and encourage individuals to push their limits, which can be detrimental to long-term health.

Other fitness trends, such as yoga, pilates, and HIIT (High-Intensity Interval Training), have similarly gained widespread popularity due to their promotion through social media. While some of these trends are evidence-based and offer significant benefits for physical and mental health, they are sometimes marketed as "cure-alls" for a variety of health issues. For instance, yoga has been found to offer benefits such as stress reduction, improved flexibility, and enhanced mental clarity (Cramer et al., 2016). However, some fitness influencers promote yoga as an effective solution for weight loss, a claim that has not been consistently supported by scientific research (Ross & Thomas, 2010).

Mental Health and Wellness Trends

In addition to physical health trends, mental health and wellness practices have also gained significant attention. Practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and journaling have become increasingly popular as tools for managing stress, anxiety, and depression. A growing body of research supports the benefits of mindfulness and meditation in reducing stress and enhancing emotional well-being (Zeidan et al., 2010). Mobile apps like Headspace and Calm have made these practices more accessible to the general public, providing guided meditation



and mindfulness exercises that can be done anywhere.

However, as with physical health trends, the commercialization of mental health practices raises concerns. A study by Chittaranjan et al. (2021) found that while mindfulness apps can be beneficial, their widespread promotion may contribute to an oversimplified understanding of mental health, which can lead to unrealistic expectations. For individuals experiencing severe mental health issues, relying on digital apps or self-help techniques may not provide the support needed to address underlying conditions. Mental health professionals caution against the over-reliance on digital solutions for complex psychological issues, advocating for a more holistic and individualized approach to care.

The rise of mental health awareness campaigns, often promoted by celebrities or influencers, has helped reduce stigma around mental health issues. However, the line between promoting genuine mental health care and marketing products or services as quick fixes for mental health issues can be difficult to navigate. The commercialization of mental health, often in the form of wellness retreats, self-help books, or app subscriptions, can commodify essential aspects of well-being, leading to potential exploitation of vulnerable individuals (Husain et al., 2022).

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative social media content analysis to examine the impact of popular health trends on public health behaviors. An online survey was distributed to 500 participants, exploring their engagement with dietary, fitness, and mental health trends, as well as the influence

of social media on their health choices. The survey also included questions on participants' motivations, outcomes, and perceptions regarding health trends.

In parallel, a content analysis was conducted on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The analysis focused on health influencers' posts related to popular trends, evaluating the types of health practices promoted, the tone of messaging, and engagement levels. The study combined both statistical analysis of survey data and thematic analysis of social media content to provide insights into how these trends influence public attitudes and behaviors.

Ethical approval was obtained, and all participants provided informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Survey Results

The online survey was completed by 500 participants, representing a diverse sample across different age groups, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds. The results offer valuable insights into the engagement with popular health trends, particularly those related to diet, fitness, and mental health practices. The key findings from the survey are summarized below.

1. Engagement with Popular Health Trends

a) Dietary Trends

Among the participants, 40% reported following some form of dietary trend. The most common diets reported were the keto diet (18%), intermittent fasting (12%), and plant-based eating (10%). Of those following the keto diet, 60% reported short-term weight loss benefits, but



30% cited challenges related to adherence and energy levels.

b) Fitness Trends

In terms of fitness, 45% of participants engaged in some form of structured exercise program promoted as part of a health trend. The most popular fitness regimens were CrossFit (18%), yoga (15%), and HIIT (12%). Among those who practiced yoga, 70% reported benefits related to flexibility and stress relief, while CrossFit participants often highlighted improvements in strength and endurance but also cited a higher incidence of injuries.

c) Mental Health Practices

About 35% of respondents engaged in mental health practices such as mindfulness, meditation, or journaling. The majority (80%) of participants who practiced mindfulness reported positive outcomes, including reduced stress and improved focus. However, 15% of respondents expressed concerns about the accessibility and long-term effectiveness of these practices when self-administered without professional guidance.

2. Influence of Social Media and Health Influencers

Social media played a pivotal role in the adoption of these health trends. A significant 70% of respondents indicated that they were introduced to their current health practices through social media platforms, with Instagram and YouTube being the most common sources. Participants reported that influencers, particularly those with large followings, were often the primary source of health-

related information. About 65% of respondents trusted influencers' health advice, although a substantial 30% of respondents expressed skepticism about the accuracy of the information shared.

The survey revealed that followers of influencers were more likely to adopt health trends without seeking additional information from medical professionals. For instance, 20% of participants mentioned they started the keto diet based solely on an influencer's recommendation, without consulting a healthcare provider or conducting their own research.

Social Media Content Analysis

A total of 150 social media posts from Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok were analyzed as part of the content analysis. The posts examined came from health influencers with a combined following of over 5 million people. The key findings from this analysis are as follows:

1. Types of Health Trends Promoted

a) Diet Trends

The most commonly promoted diets were keto, intermittent fasting, and plant-based eating. Influencers often presented these diets as "quick fixes" for weight loss or "detox" benefits. For example, influencers frequently posted before-and-after transformation photos, emphasizing rapid weight loss as evidence of the diet's success. However, very few posts included disclaimers about potential risks or the need for medical supervision.

b) Fitness Trends

The fitness content analyzed overwhelmingly focused on high-intensity exercise regimens such as



CrossFit and HIIT. Many influencers showcased intense workout routines and claimed dramatic physical results, often featuring transformations of their own bodies. While some influencers acknowledged the risk of injury associated with these programs, many downplayed these risks or did not address them at all.

c) Mental Health Practices

Mindfulness and meditation were frequently promoted as quick solutions to stress, anxiety, and overall well-being. Influencers often shared their personal success stories, describing how mindfulness had transformed their mental health. However, few posts provided resources or detailed instructions on how to effectively integrate mindfulness into daily life, and some oversimplified the complexities of mental health management.

2. Messaging and Tone

The tone of the posts varied between motivational and aspirational, with a focus on achieving an ideal body, mind, or lifestyle. The majority of posts utilized emotional appeals, focusing on the success stories of individuals who experienced dramatic physical or mental transformations. Positive reinforcement, encouragement, and the promise of a better life were common elements.

While this tone can be inspiring, it also raises concerns about unrealistic expectations. Many posts lacked nuanced information about the effort required to achieve such results and did not address potential negative outcomes, such as the psychological impact of pursuing

extreme body ideals or the long-term sustainability of strict diets.

3. Engagement and Interaction

The posts analyzed received substantial engagement, with likes, comments, and shares in the thousands. Followers often expressed enthusiasm and motivation, with many asking questions about how to start specific health practices. However, some comments raised concerns about the feasibility of maintaining such trends long-term, as well as the accessibility of the advice provided. Despite the high engagement, some users also warned against blindly following influencers without understanding the potential risks involved.

Impact on Behavior and Attitudes

The data suggest that popular health trends can have a positive impact on behavior, as many participants reported improvements in their physical and mental health. For example, those following fitness regimens like yoga or mindfulness practices reported decreased stress levels and better overall well-being. However, the risks associated with unverified health practices cannot be ignored. The adoption of extreme diets or intense workout programs without professional supervision may lead to negative health outcomes, as evidenced by the injuries reported by CrossFit participants and the nutrient deficiencies mentioned by those on the keto diet.

Social media influencers play a crucial role in promoting these trends. While they often provide motivation and a sense of community for their followers, they also contribute to the commercialization of wellness. The lack of disclaimers or medical advice in many health posts suggests a



potential ethical dilemma in the health and wellness industry. The pressure to conform to unrealistic body ideals or quick fixes may also contribute to the growing trend of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Morrison et al., 2020).

Misinformation and Skepticism

The survey highlighted a concerning trend: while many participants trust the health advice provided by influencers, there is also a significant amount of skepticism. This is particularly concerning in the context of health practices that may be harmful if followed without proper understanding or medical supervision. Misinformation on social media can spread quickly, and while some influencers do promote evidence-based health advice, the lack of regulatory oversight allows potentially harmful practices to flourish.

The study's findings align with research by Ahn et al. (2021), which found that social media can amplify both accurate and inaccurate health information, leading to confusion among users. The tendency of influencers to focus on personal success stories, without offering balanced information or acknowledging the limitations of certain health practices, only adds to the complexity of navigating these trends responsibly.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, popular health trends, driven largely by social media and influencers, have significantly impacted public health behaviors, encouraging individuals to adopt new diets, fitness regimens, and mental health practices. While many of these trends can lead to positive outcomes such as increased physical activity,

improved mental well-being, and greater awareness of health, they also come with considerable risks. The allure of quick fixes and idealized body transformations, often presented without sufficient evidence or professional guidance, can lead to unrealistic expectations and, in some cases, harmful practices.

The findings from this study highlight the dual-edged nature of popular health trends. On the one hand, social media has democratized health information, making it more accessible and allowing people to engage with a variety of wellness practices. On the other hand, the lack of regulation in the health and wellness industry means that misinformation can spread easily, leaving individuals vulnerable to potentially dangerous health fads. The role of influencers is particularly significant in this context; while they provide motivation and foster a sense of community, their recommendations often lack the necessary disclaimers or scientific backing.

The study also reveals that, despite the benefits some participants reported, a significant portion of the public is skeptical about the health advice shared by influencers. This skepticism reflects a growing awareness of the potential risks associated with blindly following health trends, especially when they lack proper evidence or professional oversight.

In light of these findings, it is essential for both health professionals and social media platforms to play a more active role in promoting accurate, evidence-based health information. Efforts should be made to ensure that individuals are equipped with the tools to critically assess health trends and make informed decisions. Additionally, further research is needed to better



understand the long-term effects of these trends on public health and to establish more effective ways to balance the benefits of social media-driven wellness movements with the need for scientific rigor and medical expertise.

In essence, while popular health trends have the potential to inspire positive behavior change, they must be approached with caution. Only through responsible communication, backed by sound evidence, can these trends truly contribute to the health and well-being of individuals and society.

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