International Journal of Consumer Studies

WILEY

International Journal of Consumer Studies

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

From "For You" to Fork: TikTok's Influence on Young Consumers' Food Behaviors

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Received: 12 November 2025 | **Revised:** 19 December 2025 | **Accepted:** 2 January 2026

Keywords: consumer behavior | culinary trends | food behaviors | influencer | social media | TikTok

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of the TikTok platform on shaping the dietary preferences of young people. The research focused on analyzing the mechanisms through which social media influence consumer behavior in the area of nutrition, which is a particularly important issue in the context of the growing popularity of digital platforms and their effect on everyday decision-making. The study employed an individual model of technology acceptance and use that included eight analytical dimensions: perceived usefulness, entertainment content, virality, influencer review, social influence, subjective bond, attitude, and food behaviors. Data were collected through an online survey conducted in 2025 among 406 active TikTok users. The analysis was carried out using SmartPLS4 and structural equation modeling. The results confirm that TikTok functions as a powerful tool for shaping consumer behavior, utilizing algorithmic mechanisms, social influence, and users' emotional engagement. The most influential external factors are entertainment content, followed by subjective bond and perceived usefulness. Based on the estimation, the variance of attitude towards culinary trends was explained in 68.8% and food behaviors was explained in 54.5%. The platform affects dietary preferences through various channels of influence, ranging from culinary inspiration to the development of bonds with content creators.

1 | Introduction

Digital transformation has brought about a wide array of changes influencing consumers (Jain et al. 2021; Paul et al. 2024; Sharma et al. 2025). The development of social media has significantly transformed the ways people communicate, exchange information, and consume digital content (Haq and Chiu 2024; Paul et al. 2021). The combination of multiple functions—such as access to news, entertainment, and logistical services—with ease of use has made social media a central hub for users, providing everything conveniently in one place. As a result, the use of these platforms has become deeply ingrained in daily routines, making it difficult to imagine life without them (Roosen and Hobbs 2022).

Social media platforms differ in how they are used. Some are designed for sharing opinions, others for making friends, communicating, collaborating, or sharing various types of content (Patil et al. 2025; Raman and Paul 2025). Therefore, social media serve two main purposes: First, they help users acquire knowledge, learn, and share information online. Second, they enable the building of relationships with others in the digital space. Due to the easy accessibility of modern technologies, social media have become an integral part of everyday life, particularly for young people (Krupa-Kotara et al. 2023).

With the dynamic development of social media, their use brings both benefits and risks. Social media can lead to addiction among individuals susceptible to such behaviors, causing them

to neglect their daily responsibilities. Moreover, uncontrolled use of these platforms may result in the acquisition of negative behaviors that can harm others. These adverse effects represent a significant challenge that requires attention and appropriate solutions (Afdilah et al. 2020).

When users perceive tangible benefits from an application—such as completing tasks more quickly or managing time more effectively—they are more inclined to use it. The belief that technology genuinely facilitates daily responsibilities and enhances quality of life becomes a key motivator for its regular use. Ultimately, it comes down to personal perception: if someone believes that a tool will improve their work efficiency or simplify everyday activities, they are likely to consider it an essential part of their life. In this way, the belief in the practical value of technology translates into concrete actions and habitual behavior (Mohd Azman and Mustaffa 2023).

TikTok influences consumer attitudes and behaviors through its addictive, algorithm-driven short videos, leveraging influencers, user-generated content, emotional connection, and viral trends to build trust, drive immediate impulse buys, and foster purchase intentions, especially among young people. By tailoring content to individual user preferences, social media platforms effectively blur the line between traditional marketing activities and authentic recommendations. This phenomenon significantly amplifies their influence on consumer choices and habits, creating an environment in which persuasive messaging becomes almost seamlessly integrated into users' everyday experiences.

The motivation behind this study is observable, a quick development of short video platforms and culinary trends. There is a lack of current studies in contemporary literature on how consumers, especially young, are influenced by watching short videos and incorporate them into their food behaviors (FB). The research question is:

RQ. How and to what extent content and reviews presented on TikTok influence food behaviors of young consumers?

To find an answer to this question, we propose a quantitative study among active TikTok users, who are engaged in culinary content. The findings confirmed that Attitude is the strongest predictor of FB. The theoretical contribution is a unique adaptation of TAM model to TikTok's specific features.

2 | Literature Review

2.1 | Capturing Attention and Subjective Bond With User

The mechanisms that attract users and the addictive potential of social media vary across different platforms (Rozgonjuk et al. 2021). Due to their specific nature, social media provide a space for implementing subtle and personalized persuasive techniques. These methods combine elements of entertainment with emotional engagement, creating interactive formats that encourage users to share content within their own networks (van der Bend et al. 2022).

Unlike traditional social networking sites that replicate and strengthen real-life relationships by transferring them into the digital environment, short-form videos provide a space for self-expression that is primarily self-centered. Taking into account these differences is important for analyzing the impact of social media on users' psychology and social functioning (Chao et al. 2023).

By sharing photos, videos, and other visual content, social media users can more easily understand the emotions, interests, and daily lives of others, leading to improved emotional communication and fostering a positive online atmosphere. By sharing fragments of their lives, both joyful moments and personal challenges, users build closer relationships, strengthen mutual trust, and reinforce their sense of identity. These emotional bonds and cohesion form the foundation for creating communities characterized by unity and harmony, where members experience a strong sense of belonging and identification with their group (Wang 2024).

In environments centered around short-video platforms, user activity is defined by interactions with content. Indicators of such engagement include reactions such as likes, shares, and comments. However, it is worth noting that previous research has paid relatively little attention to the multidimensional structure of video content, despite the fact that metadata parameters, such as titles, tags, and thumbnails, are important characteristics influencing the popularity of videos (Lu et al. 2023). Based on this, we define "subjective bond" as one of the independent variables in the study.

2.2 | The Role of Algorithm

Recommendation algorithms aim to enhance user interaction with the system by drawing on their previous activities. Using the data collected, these systems attempt to deliver content that aligns with users' interests and expectations. Even in their simplest form, recommendation systems function as comparative tools that analyze one user's preferences in relation to another's. As a result, users receive suggestions for topics similar to those that interest other individuals (Koç 2023).

The primary function of content recommendation systems on social media platforms is to facilitate user access to materials that match their preferences. However, an equally important objective is to inspire users to transition from passive consumers to active creators, thereby enhancing their engagement. These algorithms also seek to extend the amount of time users spend on platforms by fostering connections between users and content creators with whom they can identify. In this way, they not only personalize user experiences but also help build communities based on shared interests and active participation (Koç 2023).

Social media platforms differ in the mechanisms they use to attract audiences—for example, Facebook relies on algorithms that promote the creation and development of user communities (Ruhyat and Wahidin 2024). In contrast to its competitors, TikTok operates in an unprecedented way, relying heavily on algorithmic mechanisms that shape the user experience. While other platforms employ similar solutions, TikTok's "For You"

algorithm plays a dominant role; research shows that it transparently and decisively determines the content displayed to users, shaping their interactions with the platform. This system not only recommends content but also constructs the entire space of digital activity, making the algorithm the primary narrator of users' social experiences (Bhandari and Bimo 2022). The TikTok recommendation algorithm analyzes user behaviors such as likes, views, and reactions to fine-tune suggested content. It also takes into account viewing history, followed accounts, used hashtags, thematic preferences, and device or account settings such as language and location (Chen and Shi 2022). Based on this, we define "perceived usefulness" from TAM model as one of independent variables in the study.

With the growing popularity of TikTok, concerns have emerged regarding the influence of its algorithm on how users select and consume content. This algorithm can create what is known as a "filter bubble," in which users are primarily exposed to content that aligns with their existing preferences and views. Such a phenomenon may lead to informational isolation, reduced exposure to diverse perspectives and, consequently, the reinforcement of social polarization (Ruhyat and Wahidin 2024). Like other social media platforms, TikTok faces the challenge of spreading unverified information and misleading content among its users (Zenone et al. 2021). Additionally, algorithms may unintentionally promote harmful materials, such as unhealthy eating patterns or unrealistic beauty standards—particularly when such content gains popularity and drives engagement (Pierce 2022).

2.3 | TikTok as an Entertainment Platform

TikTok, which debuted on the market in 2016 under its original name Musical.ly, has maintained its position as one of the most downloaded mobile applications since 2020 (Cheng and Li 2024). The platform's success is evidenced by its impressive user base exceeding 1.6 billion, with a significant share, approximately 14%, being underage users (Munro et al. 2024).

The phenomenon of TikTok lies in its versatility in delivering diverse types of content. Users of the platform can explore the latest music trends, access up-to-date information, and obtain practical advice across various areas of life. The platform offers a wide range of educational materials, from dance tutorials and painting lessons to tips on healthy lifestyles and physical exercise. This diversity of content allows TikTok to effectively attract audiences of all ages by providing valuable content tailored to individual interests (Wang 2020).

By promoting short-form videos, TikTok enables users to quickly engage with large amounts of content. Its built-in editor facilitates the creation and sharing of original materials. Thanks to algorithms that rapidly learn user preferences, discovering interesting content on TikTok is easier than on other social media platforms (Wang et al. 2022). When compared to Instagram, both platforms allow users to create and share videos; however, a key difference lies in video length: TikTok videos can last up to 10 min, while Instagram limits them to 90 s (de Waele 2024).

Research on TikTok user behavior has revealed captivating relationships in the context of platform satisfaction. The analysis identified four key factors: self-expression, access to valuable information, social bonding, and keeping up with current trends as the main foundations of user satisfaction with the application. Interestingly, emotional aspects and the amount of time spent on the app show no significant relationship with satisfaction levels. Most notably, when users feel satisfied with their TikTok experience, a natural desire emerges to further explore the platform's possibilities (Sharabati et al. 2022). Based on this, we define "entertainment content" as one of the independent variables in the study.

2.4 | TikTok in Shaping Food Behaviors

From grocery haul videos to mesmerizing mukbangs, social media platforms are flooded with culinary content. What we see in the media significantly influences our dietary preferences and the food choices we make every day (Winzer et al. 2022).

TikTok has gained particular popularity as a platform for creative culinary content, where especially young people create and consume visually appealing and innovative food-related materials, contributing to the emergence of a dynamic food culture (Wang et al. 2024). Teenagers report that exposure to food-related content on the platform encourages them to make more conscious dietary choices, reflecting this age group's belief in TikTok's positive role in promoting sustainable eating habits (Davis et al. 2023).

Creative culinary content on TikTok is characterized by high aesthetic value and innovative presentation techniques. Through visually appealing tutorials and participation in food-related challenges, the platform fosters a community engaged in discovering new flavors and dietary solutions, while simultaneously strengthening the sense of belonging through shared participation in trends (Wang et al. 2022).

Food-related content on TikTok carries both positive and negative implications for users. On the one hand, the platform serves as a source of social support and easy access to information, encouraging culinary experimentation and more conscious dietary decisions. On the other hand, research indicates a significant relationship between user activity and the occurrence of negative phenomena such as obsessive body comparison, fear of weight gain, and lowered self-esteem (Wang et al. 2022). However, it should be emphasized that mere participation in social media is not a direct cause of eating disorders; their development requires the coexistence of biological, psychosocial, and environmental factors (Arjona et al. 2024). An important issue remains TikTok's algorithmic system, which, by adjusting displayed content to users' browsing history, may inadvertently promote harmful behavioral patterns. This is particularly relevant in the promotion of restrictive diets and unattainable beauty standards, which can consequently intensify tendencies toward body image distortion (Minadeo and Pope 2022). Based on this, "food behaviors" is defined as the main variable measured in this study.

2.5 | The Role of Influencers and Content Creators

The process of forming dietary preferences during childhood is determined by multiple factors, including genetic predispositions, individual sensory preferences, and processes of nutritional socialization. Environmental factors also are important in forming these preferences, such as the family's socioeconomic status, local food availability, and socio-cultural consumption norms. Today, these mechanisms are undergoing a dynamic transformation due to digital platforms, where content created by food influencers serves as a behavioral model for the younger generation (Munro et al. 2024). It is worth noting that, according to children's accounts, online creators (influencers) are perceived as more "authentic" and "relatable" than other forms of media communication (Potvin Kent et al. 2024).

Influencers can exert a significant impact on their followers through the process of abstract modeling. In this process, young people observe influencers' behaviors, develop corresponding thoughts and behavioral patterns, and subsequently reproduce them in practice. There is a high likelihood that young individuals imitate influencers because they perceive them as peers and often form strong emotional connections with them. As a result, influencers' promotion of specific food products can have a substantial effect on the dietary preferences, food choices, and eating habits of young adults (Loonen 2023).

Online creators are active across multiple social media platforms, using a variety of communication channels, from YouTube and Snapchat to Instagram and TikTok, to build relationships with their audiences. Owing to their large follower bases, they have become key tools in consumer engagement strategies, enabling companies to reach diverse target groups through authentic interactions and personalized content (Roosen and Hobbs 2022). In their materials, creators typically focus on detailed descriptions of the taste qualities of dishes, the characteristics of the menu served, and the location of restaurants, thereby providing viewers with comprehensive information that facilitates consumer decision-making (Aini et al. 2024). Based on this, we define "influencers' reviews" as one of the independent variables in the study.

2.6 | Virality of Culinary Trends

Attractive visualizations can significantly influence the perception of a product's quality and value. Unique and creative presentation methods not only increase visibility on social media but also evoke strong emotions among viewers, greatly enhancing the likelihood of achieving viral success (Aini et al. 2024). Contrary to the popular belief that media are dominated by negative content, research shows that positive messages more often gain popularity and go viral. Such content typically evokes specific emotions, such as happiness, surprise, or even anger (Chao et al. 2023).

Creative content on social media acts like a magnet; it captures consumers' attention and encourages interaction. What is unique and inventive inspires imitation and strengthens users' willingness to engage with shared content. The most valuable outcome occurs when users spontaneously participate in the life of the online community. A moderate level of engagement involves positive reactions and active participation in discussions, while the lowest level is characterized by passive content consumption without personal contribution (Chee and Hassan 2024).

TikTok has revolutionized the way people discover and share culinary recipes. A key aspect of this phenomenon is giving dishes original and attention-grabbing names that convey cultural and flavor-rich meanings. The power of a well-chosen name lies in its ability to attract attention and communicate cultural significance. Unconventional names not only identify a dish but also highlight its character, ingredients, or cultural origins, making them carriers of engaging stories (Firrizqa 2024).

In the pursuit of virality, creators often replicate popular formats, for instance by presenting similar, unconventional dishes. As a result, social media becomes flooded with comparable content that differs only in presentation style. In this context, algorithms are important in determining which materials reach a wider audience (Aini et al. 2024). Among the dominant culinary trends on TikTok is the "What I eat in a day" format, tagged with #WhatIEatInADay. These videos document the course of a user's daily diet, showcasing a sequence of meals and snacks consumed throughout the day. This trend serves both a documentary and inspirational purpose, aiming to present individual eating habits within the context of a full-day menu (Davis et al. 2023). Based on this, we define "virality" as one of the independent variables in the study.

2.7 | Psychological Aspects of Platform Addiction

By offering users the ability to capture special moments and create short videos, TikTok has become not only a source of entertainment but also a new and concerning form of social media addiction. Although the platform is highly engaging, it carries the risk of excessive involvement, which may lead to negative consequences (Smith and Short 2022).

Fear of missing out (FOMO) is a key psychological factor underlying herd behavior. In situations of uncertainty about their own preferences, individuals tend to rely on the decisions of others, imitating their choices and desires (Mu'awiyah and Jurana 2024). Research reveals a troubling link between FOMO and excessive attachment to smartphones. Moreover, individuals often experience reduced psychological well-being, their thinking becomes one-dimensional, and their relationships lose depth. This vicious cycle can lead to physical exhaustion and emotional disturbances that affect both body and mind. In extreme cases, life begins to resemble a struggle against one's own habits and the fear of exclusion (Afdilah et al. 2020).

The TikTok platform, which utilizes a short-video format, offers users a range of innovative technological solutions, from personalized content to advanced recommendation algorithms. These features provide high-quality entertainment and create mechanisms that foster addictive behaviors. The combination of external stimuli (such as engaging app features) and individual user responses (such as the pursuit of instant gratification) leads to specific behavioral patterns that researchers associate with excessive engagement on the platform (Qin et al. 2022). Based

on this, we define "attitude" as one of the independent variables in the study.

2.8 | Hypotheses Development

2.8.1 | Perceived Usefulness

Perceived usefulness of TikTok in the culinary context refers to the extent to which users consider the platform helpful for gaining culinary inspiration, learning new recipes, or discovering cooking techniques. TikTok users report that the platform assists them not only in finding ideas for quick and easy meals but also in developing culinary skills and exploring cuisines from around the world (Wang et al. 2022). Accordingly, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H1. *Perceived usefulness of TikTok positively influences attitudes.*

2.8.2 | Entertainment Content

Entertainment content on TikTok is one of the key factors attracting users to culinary trends. Short, dynamic videos—often incorporating elements of humor or music—make cooking practical and also enjoyable. This phenomenon is particularly evident in popular culinary challenges or recipes presented as entertaining, easy-to-follow tutorials. For many users, watching and recreating such videos serves as a form of entertainment that encourages experimentation in the kitchen and sharing results with others (Wang et al. 2022). Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. *Entertainment content on TikTok positively influences attitudes.*

2.8.3 | Virality

The virality of culinary recipes on TikTok refers to the rapid spread of trends; some recipes become global phenomena within days, with stores reporting increased sales of specific ingredients. Examples include recipes that have gained millions of views and inspired thousands of users to try them. The mechanism of virality is driven by TikTok's algorithm, which promotes highly engaging content, and by the hashtag culture that allows users to quickly discover and replicate the latest trends (Matwick and Matwick 2025). Based on this, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H3. *The virality of culinary recipes positively influences attitudes.*

2.8.4 | Influencers' Reviews of Dining Venues

Reviews and recommendations of restaurants or other dining places shared by influencers on TikTok often affect where users decide to eat. It is not uncommon for someone to visit a recommended venue after watching such a review. Influencers' evaluations can change a restaurant's popularity almost overnight, and their authentic recommendations are often perceived as more credible than traditional advertising (Lee et al. 2021). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H4. *The influencers' reviews of dining venues positively affects attitudes.*

2.8.5 | Social Influence

Social influence is a variable that reflects the extent to which the behaviors and opinions of people in one's environment (family, friends, coworkers) affect a user's food-related decisions influenced by TikTok. This may include encouragement to try a new trend, discussions about recipes, or observing that others are also drawing culinary inspiration from TikTok. Motivation to experiment often increases when individuals see others doing the same (Venkatesh et al. 2003). Based on this, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H5. *Social influence positively affects food behaviors.*

2.8.6 | Subjective Bond

Trust in culinary creators on TikTok is important in how their content is received. When an influencer appears authentic and shares a similar approach to cooking, users are more likely to identify with their style and try the recommended recipes. This bond—based on affinity, shared tastes, or simply regular viewing—makes the creator's recommendations feel like advice from a friend rather than random online content (Chung et al. 2023). Based on this, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H6. *A subjective bond with the content creator positively affects food behaviors.*

2.8.7 | Attitude

This construct measures the overall user attitude toward culinary trends (ATT) appearing on TikTok. It includes openness to novelty, willingness to experiment in the kitchen, and the perception of these trends as interesting, inspiring, and modern. Users with a positive attitude are more likely to try new recipes and show greater openness to changes in their cooking habits (Shoukat et al. 2023). Based on this, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H7. *Attitude toward culinary trends on TikTok positively influences food behaviors shaped by TikTok.*

2.8.8 | Food Behaviors

FB can be defined as individual preferences related to the selection of specific food products, methods of meal preparation, and consumption habits (Munro et al. 2024). In the context of social media—particularly the TikTok platform—dietary preferences

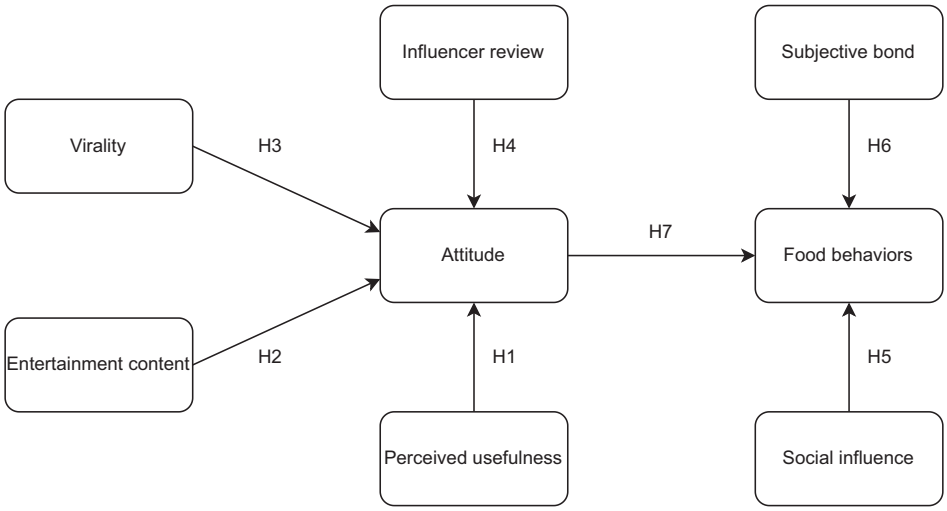

FIGURE 1 | Structural SEM model.

are dynamically shaped by the content users are exposed to (Qutteina et al. 2021). It is important to note that food choices are influenced by multiple factors, including the popularity of a given recipe, its perceived usefulness, the extent to which other users provide inspiration, and whether the content serves as a form of entertainment.

By analyzing the factors that influence our food choices under the impact of TikTok, it becomes possible to better understand what makes us more inclined to choose certain dishes while rejecting others. Such knowledge can be highly valuable in designing educational or marketing campaigns aimed at promoting healthy eating and encouraging people to make positive dietary changes. Therefore, studying the influence of TikTok on dietary preferences is important, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the needs and expectations of individuals who use the platform and are interested in food-related topics and healthy lifestyles.

2.9 | Model

The study developed a model comprising eight variables that are essential for understanding the influence of the TikTok platform on users' food choices. The model was estimated based on 33 measurement variables that had been previously identified and described. A graphical representation of the model was created using the online tool diagrams.net and is presented in Figure 1.

The aim of this study is to determine how the TikTok platform influences its users' FB. The research procedure employed some elements from the model of technology acceptance and use, encompassing eight dimensions. Each of these dimensions was examined in the context of its impact on users' dietary preferences and their openness to adopting new culinary trends inspired by TikTok. To achieve this objective, a structural model incorporating the proposed variables was developed, followed by the preparation of a research questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using the SmartPLS4 software.

3 | Method

The study employed the SmartPLS4 software, which enables structural equation modeling to be conducted in an organized and transparent manner. The model analysis followed the current guidelines of scientific literature. The first stage focused on assessing the quality of variable measurement within the model, while the subsequent step involved a detailed verification of the hypotheses concerning the relationships within the structural model.

3.1 | Measurement Instrument

Table 1 presents the variables used in the model to examine the constructs. The observable variables are specific indicators that make it possible to measure characteristics and behaviors that are difficult to capture directly. The "Question" column contains the survey items presented to respondents, who answered using a five-point Likert scale (where 1 indicates *strongly disagree* and 5 indicates *strongly agree*).

The user survey was conducted in April 2025 using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed exclusively through the TikTok application, as the target group consisted of active TikTok users. The instrument presented food-related questions to ensure that respondents had used TikTok to explore food-related content. The following questions were used: Do you follow culinary creators on TikTok? How often do you watch culinary content on TikTok? Have you ever tried a recipe from TikTok? Have you visited a restaurant after seeing a review on TikTok? The study received approval from the Research Ethics Committee involving human participants at the University of Economics in Katowice, Poland.

To evaluate the possibility of common method bias (CMB), Harman's single-factor test was conducted in accordance with the guidelines provided by Podsakoff et al. (2003). The results indicated that the first factor explained 42.27% of the total variance, remaining below the 50% threshold proposed by

TABLE 1 | Measurement instrument.

Variable	Abbr.	Question
Perceived usefulness (adapted from Grabowska et al. 2025)	PU1	TikTok provides me with valuable information about nutrition and culinary recipes.
	PU2	Thanks to TikTok, I know which dishes or products are worth trying.
	PU3	Cooking videos on TikTok help me make better dietary decisions.
	PU4	Using TikTok makes it easier for me to plan my daily meals.
	PU5	TikTok helps me avoid poor food choices.
Entertainment content (adapted from Venkatesh et al. 2012) based on Hedonic Motivation	EC1	Watching culinary videos on TikTok gives me pleasure.
	EC2	Culinary content on TikTok is attractive and engaging.
	EC3	Food videos on TikTok are entertaining and help me pass the time.
	EC4	TikTok combines enjoyment with learning about food.
Virality (adapted from Park and Hoffner 2024)	VIR1	I often see recipes on TikTok that become highly popular.
	VIR2	I feel inclined to try recipes that appear on many different creators' profiles.
	VIR3	The popularity of a recipe on TikTok increases my motivation to try it.
	VIR4	I follow culinary recipes that have gone viral among TikTok users.
Influencer review (adapted from Lee and Eastin 2021)	IR1	Restaurant and dining recommendations on TikTok influence my decisions about where to eat.
	IR2	I sometimes visit a dining venue after watching its review on TikTok.
	IR3	Opinions of well-known creators on TikTok encourage me to discover new culinary places.
	IR4	Trust in an influencer's restaurant review makes me more willing to visit that place.
Social influence (adapted from Venkatesh et al. 2003)	SI1	People around me encourage me to try culinary trends from TikTok.
	SI2	I often talk with friends about food or recipes from TikTok.
	SI3	I feel that my friends follow culinary trends from TikTok.
	SI4	I feel more motivated to try a new recipe when I see others doing it.
Subjective bond (adapted from Leite and Baptista 2022)	SB1	I feel that the culinary creators I follow on TikTok share a similar taste to mine.
	SB2	Trust in a creator makes me more willing to try the dishes they recommend.
	SB3	Content from my favorite culinary creators is more convincing to me.
Attitude (adapted from Grabowska et al. 2025)	ATT1	I believe that culinary trends from TikTok are worth trying.
	ATT2	TikTok inspires me to experiment in the kitchen.
	ATT3	I perceive TikTok recipes as interesting and modern.
	ATT4	I have a positive opinion of what TikTok users present in the context of food.
Food behaviors (adapted from Venkatesh et al. 2003)	FB1	I sometimes change my eating habits under the influence of TikTok content.
	FB2	TikTok has influenced my decisions regarding food products.
	FB3	I have tried dishes that I discovered thanks to TikTok.
	FB4	TikTok has affected my preferences regarding what I eat daily.
	FB5	I feel that TikTok has broadened my culinary horizons.

MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012). Consequently, CMB was not deemed a major issue in this study.

In the statistical analysis process, the analytical tool SmartPLS4 was used, enabling the implementation of structural equation modeling (SEM) using the PLS method and the execution of comprehensive path analysis along with a series of statistical tests (Ringle et al. 2022). The study was conducted using a questionnaire completed by a sample of 406 respondents. Participants were asked to respond to a set of questions regarding their dietary preferences in the context of TikTok use, with answers provided on a five-point Likert scale.

3.2 | Sample Characteristics

A total of 406 respondents participated in the study, with a clear balance between women (204 participants, 50.24%) and men (202 participants, 49.76%) is presented in Table 2.

The respondents' ages varied, although young individuals predominated. In terms of education, the largest proportion of participants held a secondary education (as already completed). Regarding occupational status, approximately one-third of respondents were non-working students. The participants' places of residence were relatively evenly distributed.

The analysis of the collected data revealed that the largest group of respondents, accounting for 44.8% (182 individuals), spends more than 2 h per day on the platform. The second-largest group (33.5%, 136 respondents) reported using TikTok for one to 2 h daily. A considerably smaller portion of users (15.3%, 61 individuals) spends between 30 min and 1 h on the app, while the smallest group (6.4%, 26 respondents) uses TikTok for less than 30 min per day.

TABLE 2 | Description of the study participants.

	N	Percentage
Gender		
Female	204	50.24%
Male	202	49.76%
Age		
18–24	186	45.8%
25–34	125	30.2%
35–44	75	18.4%
45–54	14	3.5%
55+	6	1.5%
Education		
Vocational	52	12.8%
Secondary	190	46.8%
Tertiary (bachelor)	109	26.8%
Tertiary (master)	39	9.7%
PhD	16	3.9%
Professional status		
Student	150	36.9%
Student employed in full time	36	8.9%
Student employed in part-time	88	21.7%
Full-time employee	91	22.5%
Part-time employee	29	7.1%
Not working now	12	2.9%
Place of living		
Village	106	26.1%
City up to 50 k inhabitants	93	22.9%
City up to 100 k inhabitants	59	14.6%
City up to 200 k inhabitants	36	8.9%
City with over 200 k inhabitants	112	27.60%

It is noteworthy that as many as 78.3% of respondents spend at least 1 h a day on TikTok, indicating a high level of engagement with the content offered by the platform. This may be attributed to TikTok's recommendation algorithm, which effectively tailors displayed content to user preferences, thereby increasing both engagement and time spent on the app.

A significant majority of respondents (73.9%, 300 individuals) stated that they follow culinary creators on TikTok, which highlights the popularity of this type of content among users. Only 26.1% (106 individuals) reported no interest in following culinary-related accounts. The high percentage of users engaging with culinary creators suggests a growing popularity of food-related content on social media, as well as the effectiveness of short-form video formats in presenting recipes and culinary inspiration.

The largest group of respondents (45.8%, 186 individuals) reported watching culinary content several times a week, while nearly as many (42.4%, 172 individuals) stated that they do so daily. A smaller group (10.8%, 44 individuals) watches such content less than once a week, and only 1% (4 individuals) reported never watching food-related videos on TikTok. In total, 88.2% of respondents watch culinary content at least several times a week, demonstrating a high level of interest in this topic.

One of the most striking findings of the study is that as many as 97% of respondents (394 individuals) reported having tried a culinary recipe found on TikTok. This exceptionally high percentage indicates a tangible translation of the content viewed on the platform into users' real-life behaviors. Only 3% (12 individuals) stated that they had never prepared a dish based on a TikTok recipe.

Another important indicator of TikTok's impact on consumer behavior is the percentage of respondents who visited a restaurant after seeing its review on the platform. More than half (55.7%, 226 individuals) reported having made such a decision influenced by TikTok content. A smaller group (23.2%, 94 individuals) stated that they had never visited a venue after seeing it reviewed on the app, while 21.2% (86 individuals) could not recall whether they had done so.

4 | Results

4.1 | Variables Estimation

In the initial phase of the analysis, the SmartPLS4 software was used to verify the validity of the applied variables. The results for the loading values of the reflective indicators and their corresponding constructs are presented in Table 3.

Most of the indicators for all constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating that the measurement model is well

TABLE 3 | Loading values for observable variable indicators.

Perceived usefulness	PU1	0.862
	PU2	0.867
	PU3	0.910
	PU4	0.866
	PU5	0.858
Entertainment content	EC1	0.849
	EC2	0.791
	EC3	0.713
	EC4	0.692
Virality	VIR1	0.788
	VIR2	0.797
	VIR3	0.769
	VIR4	0.824
Influencer review	IR1	0.759
	IR2	0.808
	IR3	0.887
	IR4	0.903
Social influence	SI1	0.799
	SI2	0.864
	SI3	0.790
	SI4	0.798
Subjective bond	SB1	0.861
	SB2	0.902
	SB3	0.910
Attitude	ATT1	0.796
	ATT2	0.910
	ATT3	0.894
	ATT4	0.851
Food behaviors	FB1	0.837
	FB2	0.824
	FB3	0.818
	FB4	0.860
	FB5	0.791

constructed and that the variables are correctly assigned to their respective constructs. An exception is EC4 (0.692), which lies at the threshold of acceptability. In practice, such values are often tolerated, especially when their removal does not significantly improve the model's overall quality.

Table 4 presents the results related to internal consistency reliability and the average variance extracted (AVE), which allow for verification of the reliability of the measurement scales used in the study.

The assessment of internal consistency and construct reliability confirmed that all analyzed constructs demonstrated reliability levels within the recommended range—none fell below 0.65 or exceeded 0.95. The obtained results are consistent with previous observations regarding variable validity. Moreover, the AVE values for each examined dimension exceeded the 0.5 threshold, providing evidence of high construct reliability.

When verifying the validity of reflective variables, the final step involves analyzing the HTMT coefficient, which is used to determine whether two variables measure the same construct (Henseler et al. 2015). The results are presented in Table 5.

The assessment of the HTMT indicator confirmed that the vast majority of the analyzed constructs exhibit clear discriminant validity, as the coefficient values do not exceed the accepted threshold of 0.85.

4.2 | Structural Model Estimation

Based on the analysis of variables and constructs, the research model was developed using the SmartPLS4 tool. Figure 2 presents both the strength and validity of the loadings as well as the path coefficient values between individual variables. Additionally, this illustration allows for the visualization of the results obtained for each analyzed construct, enabling the assessment of the model's structure and relationships.

The analysis of the developed model indicates that the relationship between the entertainment content and ATT exhibits the strongest effect among all examined relationships. In contrast, the influencer review of dining venues on attitude is noticeably weaker.

In the next stage of the analysis, the focus was placed on verifying the research hypotheses based on the results of the path coefficient estimations within the model. A detailed summary of these results is presented in Table 6.

Based on the presented results, it can be clearly concluded that all seven proposed research hypotheses were empirically confirmed. Each of the analyzed paths in the structural model demonstrated statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level. The final stage of the structural model estimation process involved presenting the R^2 coefficient in Table 7, which reflects the level of determination.

The obtained R^2 determination coefficient values can be considered satisfactory, indicating a moderate level of model fit to the empirical data. Although other statistical measures may provide a more comprehensive confirmation of the model's adequacy, the importance of the R^2 coefficient should not be overlooked, as it represents a key element in assessing the overall quality of the study.

4.3 | Control Variables and Confounding Effect

Since the study relied on self-reported data from TikTok users, and the endogenous variables include ATT and FB, the extended model incorporated a set of control variables that could act as potential confounders affecting the theoretical relationships. The

TABLE 4 | Variable reliability analysis.

	Cronbach's alpha	Reliability coefficient (Rho_A)	Composite reliability (Rho_C)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Attitude	0.900	0.904	0.930	0.768
Perceived usefulness	0.845	0.879	0.887	0.614
Food behaviors	0.848	0.852	0.891	0.620
Subjective bond	0.833	0.835	0.901	0.752
Virality	0.830	0.837	0.887	0.662
Social influence	0.890	0.897	0.924	0.754
Entertainment content	0.897	0.905	0.928	0.763
Social influence	0.842	0.844	0.894	0.678

TABLE 5 | HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) coefficients matrix.

	Attitude	Attitude	Food behaviors	Subjective bond	Virality	Social influence	Entertainment content	Social influence
Attitude		0.771	0.743	0.647	0.806	0.534	0.842	0.673
Perceived usefulness	0.771		0.850	0.559	0.758	0.467	0.749	0.597
Food behaviors	0.743	0.850		0.714	0.716	0.553	0.837	0.680
Subjective bond	0.647	0.559	0.714		0.690	0.671	0.553	0.725
Virality	0.806	0.758	0.716	0.690		0.522	0.773	0.718
Social influence	0.534	0.467	0.553	0.671	0.522		0.454	0.614
Entertainment content	0.842	0.749	0.837	0.553	0.773	0.454		0.573
Social influence	0.673	0.597	0.680	0.725	0.718	0.614	0.573	

purpose of including these controls was to isolate the effects of the key predictors (PU, EC, VIR, IR, SI, SB) from the influences resulting from demographic differences and varying levels of platform engagement. The starting point was the verified baseline model, which demonstrated significant paths (H1–H7) and satisfactory fit (R^2_ATT = 0.688; R^2_FB = 0.545).

Based on the characteristics of the sample, the following control variables were included: age, as well as indicators of TikTok usage intensity related to culinary content (declared daily time spent on the app, frequency of watching culinary content, and visiting venues recommended by influencers). These variables may affect both perception and attitude as well as FB, thus representing typical confounders.

In SmartPLS4, paths from all control variables to both endogenous constructs (ATT and FB) were added. Prior to estimation, collinearity (VIF) was tested for all predictors; in cases where VIF exceeded recommended thresholds, variable recoding or category reduction was applied to maintain estimation stability.

The extended model was estimated using the same bootstrap (BCa) procedure as the baseline model (5000 subsamples, one-tailed), applying identical default settings in SmartPLS4 to ensure comparability of results. The main criteria reported included: path coefficients for theoretical predictors, overall R^2 values for ATT and FB, and for the control variables—signs, effect sizes, and significance levels. The results of the baseline model served as a reference point, as illustrated in Figure 2 and Table 6, which present the H1–H7 paths and R^2 values.

The results section presents the effects of theoretical predictors, while complete tables for the control variables are provided in Appendix A. Robustness verification confirmed that the inclusion of control variables did not alter the directions of the key H1–H7 paths and did not lead to qualitative changes in theoretical conclusions. Any observed differences concerned only effect magnitudes and significance margins. Therefore, the hypothesis results remain consistent with the baseline model, and the estimates for ATT and FB remain at levels consistent with expectations for a model with moderate fit.

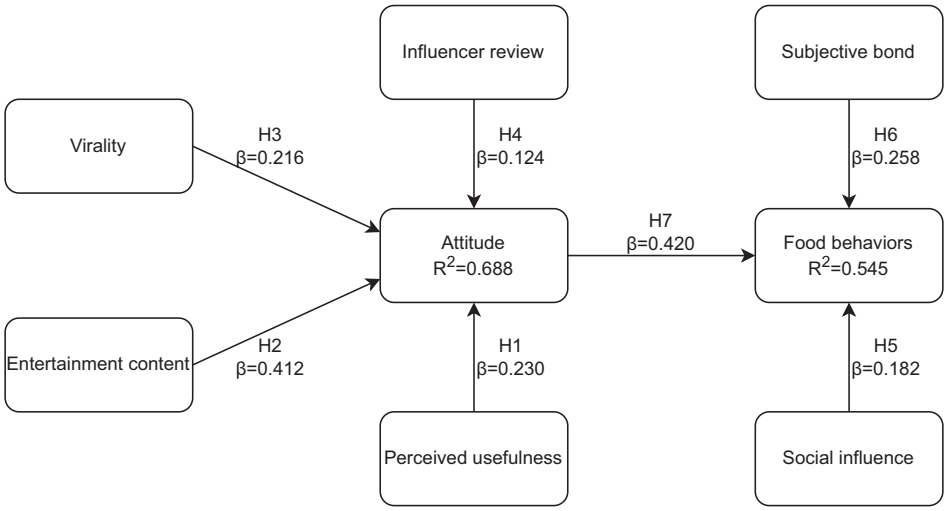

FIGURE 2 | Structural model with analysis results.

TABLE 6 | Path analysis: Coefficients, statistics, and significance levels for the hypotheses.

Hypothesis	Path	Path coeff.	Sample mean	Standard dev.	*T* stat	*p* value ($p < 0.05$)
1	PU → ATT	0.230	0.230	0.061	3.760	0.000
2	EC → ATT	0.412	0.409	0.058	7.132	0.000
3	VIR → ATT	0.216	0.217	0.065	3.306	0.001
4	IR → ATT	0.124	0.126	0.048	2.565	0.010
5	SI → FB	0.182	0.183	0.064	2.816	0.005
6	SB → FB	0.258	0.261	0.064	4.036	0.000
7	ATT → FB	0.420	0.418	0.069	6.075	0.000

TABLE 7 | *R*-square values.

Variable	R^2
Food behaviors	0.545
Attitude	0.688

5 | Discussion

The analysis of the collected data indicates that TikTok significantly influences the dietary choices of young people. Through algorithms that tailor content to individual users and short, dynamic videos, the platform effectively captures attention and encourages users to try new recipes and culinary trends.

The confirmation of all hypotheses supports the validity of the theoretical assumptions of the research model and suggests that perceived usefulness of TikTok indeed affects attitudes toward culinary trends on the platform (H1); the entertainment value of content significantly shapes attitudes toward TikTok culinary trends (H2); the virality of culinary recipes has a meaningful impact on attitudes toward culinary trends (H3); influencers' reviews of dining venues influence users' attitudes toward culinary trends (H4); social influence significantly shapes FB under the impact of TikTok (H5); a subjective bond with the content creator affects users' FB (H6); and attitudes toward TikTok culinary trends translate into actual FB (H7).

The confirmation of all hypotheses strengthens the credibility of the entire research model and suggests that the identified factors indeed play an important role in shaping TikTok users' dietary preferences. A closer examination of the obtained results allows for several key conclusions to be drawn.

Perceived usefulness of TikTok, understood as users' belief in the platform's practical value for gaining culinary inspiration and knowledge about food, significantly influences their positive ATT. Respondents who perceive TikTok as a valuable source of information on recipes and healthy eating are more open to experimenting with new dishes and more willing to adopt trends emerging on the platform. Similar relationships were identified in the studies by Wang et al. (2022), which found that TikTok functions as a tool for acquiring culinary knowledge and practical skills, as well as in the analysis by Mohd Azman and Mustaffa (2023), which emphasized that the perceived usefulness of technology translates into real behavioral change.

Short, dynamic, and visually appealing videos make users view cooking not only as a necessity but also as a form of entertainment. This mechanism is particularly evident in popular

culinary challenges and tutorials that encourage experimentation in the kitchen and sharing results with others. These findings are consistent with those of Winzer et al. (2022), who highlighted the role of visually attractive content in shaping dietary preferences.

Virality, the ability of recipes to spread rapidly among users, proved to be another significant factor influencing attitudes toward culinary trends. Recipes that gain popularity and are replicated by multiple creators become more credible and appealing. The concept of virality is widely applicable on TikTok and helps explain why emotionally engaging content, particularly positive emotions associated with culinary experiences, is rewarded by the platform's algorithmic logic. Virality represents a defining trend on TikTok across various content categories, from marketing and political campaigns to misinformation, confirming the importance of this variable. The present study aligns with previous literature, confirming that the virality of culinary content significantly affects young consumers' attitudes toward food trends.

Authentic reviews and recommendations from trusted creators often translate into users' decisions to visit specific venues or try new food products. This phenomenon is also confirmed by Roosen and Hobbs (2022), who emphasized the growing role of influencers as opinion leaders in the food and hospitality industry.

Social influence, understood as the impact of peers, family, and the broader social environment, also emerged as a significant factor shaping food preferences under the influence of TikTok. Respondents admitted that they are more likely to try a new recipe or trend when they see others around them doing the same. Qutteina et al. (2021) similarly noted that more than half of young TikTok users are influenced by food trends presented by peers and the online community.

The subjective bond with a content creator, built on trust, identification, and a sense of closeness, has a clear effect on users' dietary preferences. Respondents declared that they are more willing to try recipes and products recommended by creators whose cooking styles and approaches to food they identify with. Potvin Kent et al. (2024) stressed that young audiences perceive influencers as more authentic and relatable than other forms of media communication, which enhances their impact on food-related decisions.

Individuals who are open to novelty and interested in culinary experimentation are more likely to modify their habits, try new products and dishes, and adopt innovative solutions in their daily nutrition. Exposure to culinary content on TikTok motivates young people to make more conscious dietary choices and to experiment with their diet.

The use of constructs such as perceived usefulness and attitude represents a well-established component of theoretical models, particularly within Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). While it is difficult today to identify entirely new applications of these variables, they remain indispensable when adapting proven concepts to new research contexts. In this case, the new domain is the TikTok platform and the way young people consume content and make informed decisions based on it, specifically their culinary choices.

Building on this foundation, several variables were developed that are closely related to TikTok's characteristics and its dynamic growth. These include, in particular, the virality of content, the emotional bond with online creators, and the recommendation of dining venues. Thus, this study does not aim to significantly extend the existing TAM model but rather to demonstrate that the proposed model is uniquely adapted to TikTok's specific features, illustrating how technology influences consumer behavior.

Since all hypotheses were confirmed, it is worth focusing on the strongest variables that influenced the model. Entertainment content proved to be the most influential factor, as it relates directly to the type of content presented to users and had the strongest effect on attitude toward culinary content on TikTok. This finding suggests that the greatest responsibility for shaping opinions lies in TikTok's algorithmic content delivery. In other words, users of this short-video platform tend to find exactly what they want to watch, and the abundance of available material satisfies their needs to such an extent that it most strongly shapes their attitudes toward specific behaviors.

The second strongest variable is subjective bond, referring to the relationship that develops between viewers and content creators. Although this bond is one-sided, it highlights the important role of creators, who to a large extent shape users' subsequent behaviors—particularly, in this study, behaviors related to culinary trends. The results emphasize that TikTok exerts a strong influence both through the content it delivers and through the creators who produce that content. A clear conclusion emerges: if the goal is to shape consumer behavior via TikTok, it is essential to design content appropriately and to take into account the characteristics and credibility of the content creators involved.

5.1 | Practical Implications

The primary stakeholders who can benefit from the findings of this study include dietitians, educators, and public health institutions. The main practical contribution of this research is the development of a conceptual framework that integrates TikTok-specific mechanisms and explains how they may shape consumer behavior in the context of culinary choices. The framework explicitly accounts for both the content itself and the role of content creators, as well as users' perceptions and the ways in which viewers respond to culinary content on TikTok. This leads to the recommendation that the virality of videos, the short-form video format, and the perceived authenticity of creators can be leveraged to steer specific culinary behaviors (Cogo 2024).

More detailed recommendations for these stakeholders include the design of informational campaigns in collaboration with popular content creators focused on healthy eating and responsible dietary practices. In addition, culinary challenges can be developed and disseminated through short-form videos created by credible and trustworthy creators in an engaging and accessible format. These initiatives may take the form of targeted

campaigns, such as those related to seasonal dishes or seasonal products available only during specific periods. It is also advisable to use trending hashtags to reach younger generations who engage with digital information and respond rapidly to novelty. Such approaches can support the promotion and adoption of behaviors associated with healthy eating habits.

5.2 | Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study concerns the nature of the selected sample. The analysis was conducted on a group of 406 respondents, predominantly consisting of young individuals. This sample structure means that the obtained results cannot be directly generalized to the entire population of TikTok users. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with consideration of this group's specific characteristics, acknowledging that the preferences and behaviors of other user segments, particularly older individuals, may differ significantly from the observed trends.

Another important limitation is the high dynamism of trends on TikTok. The platform is characterized by the rapid emergence and disappearance of new culinary fashions, which means that the findings may lose their relevance relatively quickly. Recommendation algorithms and user preferences are constantly evolving, further complicating the assessment of TikTok's long-term impact on dietary choices.

A final limitation is the lack of a detailed qualitative analysis of the content published on TikTok. The study primarily focused on user perception and the influence of materials, without evaluating the substantive quality of the presented content or the potential risks associated with misinformation. Given the increasing presence of unverified dietary advice and the promotion of unhealthy practices, a more in-depth qualitative analysis could provide valuable insights into the potential risks of using the platform.

5.3 | Future Research

Future research on TikTok could focus on how communities are formed on the platform and how they interact with one another. In this study, the examined community was centered around food preparation, culinary recipes, and eating habits. However, there are undoubtedly many other communities on TikTok whose internal dynamics and mutual influences merit exploration. Investigating how these communities interact could provide valuable insights into the mechanisms of social engagement and the diffusion of trends on the platform.

Another important direction for future research on TikTok is the examination of disinformation and misinformation flows. TikTok is a tool that reaches audiences extremely quickly, yet the accuracy of the information behind the presented content is not always verified. For example, in the case of culinary recipes, users often rely on what creators demonstrate without independently checking whether the results are reproducible or accurate until they attempt the recipe themselves. Further research in this area could help identify strategies to promote credible information and counteract misinformation in fast-paced digital environments.

6 | Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of the TikTok platform on shaping the dietary preferences of young people. The research addressed the complex mechanisms through which social media influence consumer behavior in the area of nutrition, which is a particularly important issue in the context of the growing popularity of digital platforms and their influence on the everyday decisions of the young generation.

The theoretical part of the paper discussed the evolution of social media and the specific characteristics of TikTok as a leading tool shaping youth behavior. It presented the algorithmic mechanisms responsible for delivering content to users, with particular emphasis on the "For You" algorithm, which unprecedentedly directs user experiences. Subsequent sections explored the role of influencers and content creators in shaping culinary preferences, the mechanisms of viral dissemination of food trends, and the psychological aspects of platform addiction.

The empirical study tested seven research hypotheses using an individual model of technology acceptance and use. All hypotheses were confirmed at the significance level of $p < 0.05$, supporting the theoretical assumptions of the research model. The findings confirm that TikTok exerts a significant and multidimensional influence on the dietary preferences of young users. The platform functions as a powerful tool for shaping consumer behavior by leveraging algorithmic mechanisms, social influence, and users' emotional engagement.

Author Contributions

O.M.: writing – original draft, data curation, formal analysis, validation. **A.S.:** writing – review and editing, supervision, project administration.

Funding

The authors have nothing to report.

Ethics Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the University of Economics in Katowice; Approval code: 145048. Approval date: 2 July 2025. All procedures performed in this study involving adult human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments.

Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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Appendix A

Path Coefficients With Control Variables

	Original sample (*O*)	Sample mean (*M*)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	*T* statistics (|O/STDEV|)	*p*
Age → Attitude	0.043	0.044	0.042	1024	0.153
Age → Food behaviors	−0.107	−0.106	0.058	1843	0.033
Attitude → Food behaviors	0.386	0.384	0.070	5560	0.000
Entertainment content → Attitude	0.414	0.411	0.058	7166	0.000
Frequency → Attitude	−0.003	−0.004	0.048	0.059	0.477
Frequency → Food behaviors	0.125	0.125	0.048	2590	0.005
Influencer review → Attitude	0.110	0.109	0.059	1860	0.031
Visits → Attitude	0.023	0.025	0.051	0.453	0.325
Visits → Food behaviors	0.093	0.094	0.051	1837	0.033
Perceived usefulness → Attitude	0.247	0.248	0.066	3727	0.000
Social influence → Food behaviors	0.160	0.159	0.063	2551	0.005
Subjective bond → Food behaviors	0.217	0.220	0.064	3387	0.000
Time → Attitude	−0.056	−0.057	0.046	1222	0.111
Time → Food behaviors	0.017	0.017	0.049	0.350	0.363
Virality → Attitude	0.229	0.232	0.069	3313	0.000

R-Square With Control Variables

	Original sample (*O*)	Sample mean (*M*)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	*T* statistics (|O/STDEV|)	*p*
Attitude	0.694	0.708	0.042	16.451	0.000
Food behaviors	0.575	0.591	0.048	11.917	0.000