

It's hard to avoid social media these days – it's on the news, in newspapers and our everyday conversations. It can be a free-for-all with endless 'hacks' and 'discoveries' that are often not as new as the author might believe.

Last year, some of the biggest hashtags were #guthealth and #guttock as influencers, experts, nutritionists and GPs featured ways to keep your gut healthy – simple diet hacks like 'how to eat more veg' through to more extreme ideas of drinking brightly coloured concoctions, with everything in between including building the gut microbiome with friendly flora and making kimchi.

How do consumers tell the good from the outright dangerous? TikTok trends include dry scooping – the challenge of eating protein or superfood powders without mixing, or eating only one food type – cottage cheese, lettuce, animal protein. These are not going to be without risks, especially if taken to extremes.

Recently it was #sleepmaxxing, ways of getting a good night's sleep especially to boost your looks. No one would argue against the importance of a restful sleep but people went to extremes. Mouth taping, excessive magnesium, loading up on kiwi fruit, not eating or drinking so many hours before sleep, and freezing cold bedrooms were just a few ideas that at the end of 2024 had 98.6 million posts using the hashtag.

This year we have fibermaxxing, the concept of getting more fibre in your diet. With the increase of weight loss jabs such as Ozempic and Mounjaro and diets high in ultra-processed foods, it is well documented that the consumption of fibre is down. Maybe for once, this is a trend that can have a positive benefit, encouraging people to add more fibre in their diet especially via plant-based foods. Of course, there is always the chance someone will go over the top and consume too much, but on the whole, this trend could be one that could bring new consumers into stores and an opportunity for brands to take a look at their products and assess the fibre content.

With the trends comes the urge to be involved and consider whether a business could be missing out if not taking part. This is where it is vital to think carefully about how you promote. Social posts are effectively an advert and are seen by bodies such as the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) as coming under their remit. In recent months, posts have been picked up for using



SOCIAL MEDIA – PLAY BY THE RULES



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hashtags that the ASA perceives to be a claim, for example #immune or text on the screen making a claim about a product having benefits such as 'boosting energy' or 'helps me sleep.'

If what you are about to say would not be legal on a label or a print advert, it could be time to think before posting. The same applies when you are working with an influencer. If you are supplying product or payment, it must be made clear to the reader that it is a sponsored post. You also don't want them making claims that you wouldn't.

Working with influencers can be a positive way of getting your message to your target audience, but you and they do have to be aware of the rules. CLEAR CHECK®, the regulatory arm of the HFMA, can help with more than just labels – they can offer advice on social posts, blogs and podcasts. This is available to members and non-members.

To further help members, we are holding online coffee mornings with Bríd Clesham, CLEAR CHECK® Associate Regulatory Adviser, entitled 'Working with Influencers: Making Claims & Keeping it Legal'. Members can register via the HFMA website.

Social media can be fun, effective and informative so make the most of it, watch the trends and see where it can help you maximise your business. But let's maintain the integrity of the industry and work at keeping it safe and legal.



More info about the HFMA and membership, www.hfma.co.uk, tel. 0208 481 7100