# UK food influencer faces criticism over undisclosed paid restaurant reviews



A prominent UK food influencer has come under scrutiny for posting positive reviews of restaurants without disclosing payments or free meals received, in a practice that may contravene UK advertising regulations. Matthew Davies-Binge, known as Matt and operating under the moniker Food Review Club, has been reported to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) amid concerns that his promotional posts fail to make clear the commercial arrangements behind his visits.

Davies-Binge, who describes himself as the "UK's top food reviewer," has shared glowing reviews of various eateries across Cornwall and Devon, including well-known venues such as Herd and Thomas Daniell in Truro, and Cluck N Chuck in St Austell. However, CornwallLive’s investigation revealed that many of these posts did not disclose whether he was paid for his endorsements or offered free products, raising questions about transparency.

According to CornwallLive, emails from Zodiac Global Ltd, a talent management company based in Dubai and London that manages Food Review Club, show that businesses were offered promotion packages ranging from £750 to £1,250—discounted from a standard £1,500 rate—to secure a visit and a positive review. Businesses declining payment were not granted visits. Lisa Bennett, owner of Mega Shakes The Alternative Dessert Shop in Truro, recounted refusing such an offer after discovering the costs involved. She expressed frustration, stating, "He’s making out that he is visiting these places off his own back as a surprise and doesn't make any money but actually that’s not the case.” She described his approach as "disingenuous" and “phony,” criticising the lack of clarity around paid advertising.

Similarly, Loey Buiskool, proprietor of Wing Yard at Prow Park in Newquay, revealed that she was offered a promotional package for approximately £1,200 last year but decided against proceeding due to ethical concerns. She disclosed that attempts to highlight the paid nature of his visits in the comments section on social media resulted in her being blocked by Food Review Club. "It’s just hard to see and I keep commenting on things, a little bit bitter, just saying these are paid-for ads," she said.

Under the UK’s Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) Code, all paid promotional content or free product endorsements must be clearly identified as advertising. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) emphasises that failure to disclose such arrangements can mislead consumers and breach consumer protection law. The CMA states: "If you’ve been incentivised in any way to promote a brand, or product in your social media content... it’s important that all this content is clearly identifiable as an ad."

The ASA has confirmed receiving four complaints regarding Food Review Club’s disclosures but has not launched a full investigation. A spokesperson said, "One of these cases was closed because the complaint was outside of our remit. The other three were closed with no additional investigation as we assessed them against our prioritisation principles and made the decision that they weren’t a priority for us to look into at the time." These principles consider the potential harm, impact of action, and the resources required.

Ed Senior, a compliance executive at the ASA, speaking to BBC News NI on similar matters, highlighted the importance of clear disclosure: "For us, that’s why it’s exceptionally important that actually when it is advertising that it’s absolutely clear that it’s disclosed as such. If a brand asks a creator to make content and pays them either with money or with a free or discounted meal, then it should be classified as advertising."

Neither Matthew Davies-Binge nor Zodiac Global have provided comments in response to these allegations.

The Food Review Club has amassed a substantial digital following, approaching one million on platforms including TikTok, where viewers regularly engage with his content. Meanwhile, local business owners and regulators alike are calling attention to the need for transparency in influencer marketing within the food industry.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.cornwalllive.com/news/cornwall-news/cornwall-food-influencer-accused-hiding-8089898> - This article reports on the scrutiny faced by UK food influencer Matthew Davies-Binge (Food Review Club) over failure to disclose payments or free meals in his positive restaurant reviews, corroborating the main controversy described.
* <https://www.asa.org.uk/news/asa-calls-for-more-transparency-in-influencer-marketing.html> - The Advertising Standards Authority emphasizes the requirement for clear disclosures about paid promotions in influencer marketing, supporting the claims about advertising regulations relevant to Food Review Club's posts.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-caps-code> - The UK’s Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) Code outlines the rules that all paid or free product endorsements must be clearly identified as advertising, directly backing the regulatory framework mentioned.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/influencers-and-advertising-rules-guidance-from-the-competition-and-markets-authority> - The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance states that influencers must disclose any incentives like payments or free products, corroborating the CMA's role and warnings cited in the article.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60609097> - An interview with an ASA compliance executive explains the importance of influencers clearly disclosing advertising content, aligning with the quoted statements from Ed Senior in the article.