

The Growth of Culinary and Food Related Content on Visual and Social Media

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Abstract: Food is not only seen as a basic necessity but also as a lifestyle. It is now not only made and eaten, but also watched. This study attempts to understand the reasons behind the viewership and production of food/culinary related content. The study also analyses the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on food media. The researcher adopted descriptive research design by applying both quantitative and qualitative methods. The results provide indication of why people have been watching food media increasingly and identifies the exact set of population who consume food media the most. The research also further examines the presence of food in the industries of film, social media, reality TV shows and OTT (Over the top) platforms. The study proves that there is an increase in the food and culinary related content consumption as well as production.

Keywords: Culinary media, COVID-19 pandemic, Foodies, Food porn, Food media, Social media, Visual media.

1. Introduction

When almost the whole world was confined to their little spaces in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the potential of visual media to empower any type of content and make it a part of itself has been achieved with food too. This research is an attempt to find out the reasons as to why food is consumed so much more on the internet than from the plate. Who are the people that are consuming food related content and why are they consuming? Are the productions of food related content increased in number as well as value during the pandemic?

2. Review of Literature

A. History of Food Media

Food's enduring presence on television has been iterative yet diverse, ranging from segmented on-air cooking demos and educational "how-to" programs to celebrity-infused food competitions and narrowcasting lifestyle television for the foodie niche. A meteoric rise in contemporary food television is attributed to the rich history of programming by cable channels like 'Food Network' in the United States, debuted in 1993. Its acquisition by E.W. Scripps Company in 1997, and the subsequent rise in popularity, is widely regarded as one of the catalysts for a renewed and concentrated investment in food

programming. Although it began in the niche cable and broadcasting markets in the mid-to-late 1990s, an increased emphasis on food has made televisuality pervasive in the first decade of the twenty-first century (Murray, 2013).

A scene related to eating is depicted in one of the Lumière brothers' first moving pictures, taken in their family garden in the spring of 1895 (i.e., before the cinematograph was introduced to the public). Aside from the nature of the meal, the film unquestionably focuses on food. As a result, the subject of eating made its way onto the big screen. Another pivotal point in the history of cinematic food representations occurred in the 1980s, with the advent of the genre of food films. These films lay emphasis on the importance of food in defining the relationship between the central characters of the film and how it can play a role in the narrativization of the entire plot (Etnograficzne, 2015).

The Second World War was a watershed moment for many advancements in food media. Even though recipes and nutritional advice existed since a long time, the decades after war saw the presence of food media booming exponentially. Despite the fact that magazines had been printing recipes for housewives for many years, it is not surprising that people were more interested in food during and after the war, given its scarcity during those years (Kelly, 2017).

Scholars have used various components of foodways to view films and illuminate cultural complexities in films from the silent period to the Hollywood studio era, foreign art cinema, and contemporary mainstream film. They have considered narrative developments involving the design and preservation of the recipes, food supplies and food. Food clean-up was analyzed to show that experience can establish a connection between personalities, often noticeably absent in mainstream Hollywood movies (Baron, 2006).

Food Network has evolved culinary television from the instructional demonstrations of PBS's 'The French Chef' with Julia Child to interactive programming about the relationship between food and culture, international travel, adventure, homemaking, and entertainment lead to instilling a belief that cooking is cool and can also be a hobby (Rousseau, 2012). The

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first food blog with the name Chowhound was created and published in the USA in 1997. This was an online bulletin board where people could share suggestions for the best places to eat in New York (Scelzi & Fortuna, 2015).

B. Growth of Food Media

The food media industry is about much more than entertainment and the enjoyment of food through others. Our mucked relationship with food takes the form of an addiction to its representation; we can't get enough of it. Food is a byproduct of modern media culture and a symbol of cosmopolitan ideals (Rousseau, 2012). Electronic devices, web content, and information and communication technology have quietly colonized the world of food in recent years. Media content has also undergone significant changes (Lewis & Phillipov, 2018). Food is a modern medium in a social and cultural context that is becoming increasingly orthorexic, creating a new relationship between man and food, and converting it into a true new religion or simulacrum. Steven Poole in this 2012 article to 'The Guardian', titled 'Let's start the foodie backlash', writes; "We are living in the age of food. Cookery programs bloat the television schedules, cookbooks strain the bookshop tables, celebrity chefs hawk their own brands in the supermarket, and cook in super-expensive restaurants from Chicago to Copenhagen are the subject of hagiographic profiles in serious magazines and newspapers" (Scelzi & Fortuna, 2015). E.W. Scripps Company owned food programming reached an estimated 99 million US households in 2013 and continues to be popular with young affluent consumers who are interested in arts and leisure but most importantly, have access to disposable income.

Food programming has even taken the place of popular soap operas and talk shows on daytime network television. Today, nearly every major network has a food-related program, ranging from Fox's 'Hell's Kitchen' to Bravo's 'Top Chef' and Spike's 'Bar Rescue' to Netflix's 'Chef's Table'. With so much enthusiasm for culinary culture, it is remarkable that Americans' cooking time has decreased over the last fifty years. Nonetheless, the amount of time Americans spend watching food media is increasing. Our interactions with food have become more vicarious as it has become more mediated. As a result, there is an experiential estrangement from food, which fuels the need for more food media and food personalities, some of whom assume the role of new authorities on how to live. According to the 'Food Network channel' - which is available in 155 countries worldwide reaches 89 million homes in the United States, and its website receives 6 million unique visitors per month (Kelly, 2017). With these figures, food channels have become the ideal platforms to produce celebrity chefs and transform food into a spectator sport. As food and cooking knowledge became more important in American culture, producers of cooking shows saw an opportunity to create more interesting programs (Wei, 2012).

Food and cooking came to be associated with a sense of self. Food's role evolved from a mere necessity to a means of self-expression and a visible lifestyle accessory (Collins, 2009). Indeed, food media has become so important in expressing

mainstream food politics that it now influences media and food industry practices, as well as marketing strategies for both 'alternative' and 'conventional' food items (Phillipov, 2017).

C. Food in Films

An extraordinary phenomenon happened in movie theatres around the country in the 1980s. A new star was born, but not the kind of movie star that Hollywood used to make in the 1930s and 1940s. This star was completely unique, with its own distinct style. Finally, movies realized the visual and artistic appeal of food, and started to produce films in which food played a central part, resulting in the birth of a new genre; food films (Weiss & Zimmerman, 2005).

(Bower, 2004) describes the commonly accepted properties of films categorized under the food film genre. To begin with, whether the main characters are cooks (professional or domestic) or not; food must take center stage. This means that the camera will frequently focus on food preparation and presentation, so that food fills the screen in closeups or panning shots. The restaurant kitchen, a home's dining room and/or kitchen, tables within a restaurant, and a shop where food is made and/or sold are all examples of central settings. The narrative line of the film will depict characters negotiating questions of identity, power, culture, class, spirituality, or relationship through food on a consistent basis. Food images and representations of food behaviors have been studied to shed light on characters' inner experiences, dramatic conflicts, narrative developments, a story's social circumstances, and the underlying mood or point of view of a film. Food and film writing reveals that scenes involving food consumption are especially useful for determining power dynamics between characters. (Baron, 2006) argues that food performances are frequently used to mark important stages in character dynamics. Images of food and, food behaviour are woven into the mise-en-scene and narrative design of films in ways that shape viewers' understanding and interpretation of characters and their interactions, the social dynamics explored in a narrative, and the ideological perspectives conveyed by a film. Culinary issues in films frequently have a metaphorical and symbolic potential, becoming a carrier of information about the cultural and sociopolitical context in which the film was made (Etnograficzne, 2015).

D. Food in Reality TV Shows

For a variety of reasons, the true breakthrough in culinary imagery in films occurred only in the 1960s with the advancement of new technologies that provided increasingly better opportunities for representing reality. Not to be overlooked was the cultural and social context, particularly the growing interest in cuisine. Julia Child deserves credit for this shift because she decided to turn her passion for cooking into a way of life. In 1963, the Boston-based public television station WGBH began airing her cooking show, 'The French Chef'. Despite the passage of time, Julia Child continues to inspire and fascinate, as she was one of the absolute icons of American pop-culture in the early 1960s. It began to appear more frequently on screen and more importantly, took on a meaning other than

that of a prop or stage design element.

International food media programs, such as 'MasterChef', have broken ratings records in Australia, while successful formats, such as 'My Kitchen Rules' have been franchised globally. Indeed, Australia has been experiencing a 'foodie boom' since the 1990s, with both commercial and public broadcasters emphasizing primetime food programming (Phillipov, 2017). According to Geoffrey Drummond, the founder of America's Test Kitchen, food television has become as critical as sports or anything else. In the United States, James Beard made an appearance on NBC's 'For You and Yours'. Beard's personality was central to his soon to be iconic status, which lives on today in the James Beard Foundation, a non-profit organization that annually recognizes culinary excellence, James Beard Awards. Beard's remark that "food is very much theatre" encapsulates the importance of performance in modern food television (Kelly, 2017). Since Julia Child's show 'The French Chef' debuted on television in 1963, food programming has grown rapidly. 'No Reservations', 'Man v. Food', and 'Oliver's Twist' are just a few examples of famous TV food shows. People who want to learn more about cooking and cuisine are watching food TV, which at the same time entertains and teaches the audience (Wei, 2012).

E. Food in Social Media

While food programming and reality TV celebrities continue to have cultural leverage, many of their offerings converge and compete with a massive and growing amount of online food content, ranging from the 'serious amateurs' and 'ordinary experts' of YouTube food advice channels to the micro-celebrities and media influencers of foodie lifestyle blogs and the high-end aesthetics of Instagram (Lewis & Phillipov, 2018). From a sociosemiotic standpoint, the need to share food photos is observed with the widespread usage of social media, resulting in being entangled into "virtual solitude". Food photography often portray discourses around the creation, consumption, and reproduction of food photographs on social media platforms (Scelzi & Fortuna, 2015). Representation of food on social media has divulged awareness about different cuisines, including its consumption and distribution. Food photography websites and blogs have also sprung up as a result of pop culture's obsession with food's aesthetics, as well as its social and cultural construction (Ranteallo & Andilolo, 2017).

A whopping 46% of the nearly 10 million Instagram posts referencing #foodporn gathered were geo-located, outnumbering a similar set of Twitter posts (which had only 5.8 percent with available geo-location data). 72 countries showed a wide variety of culinary integration with foreign cuisine. The #foodporn conversation is dominated by chocolate, cookies, and other heavy foods. All posts with the hashtag #food-porn was gathered, resulting in a series of 9,378,193 posts from all over the world spanning from November 6, 2014 to April 6, 2015. Two additional datasets for a smaller overlapping time span were collected, one to compare to a general food-related discussion, with hashtag #food, to place it in comparison with other common streams (consisting of 1,460,226 posts) (Mejova, 2016).

An insatiable social appetite for food-related subjects can lead to the success and popularity of digital food photos, with a growing variety of culinary programs ranging from food-blogging courses to the advent of professional culinary photography. The need to capture a moment is so intense that many people find it difficult to fully appreciate a meal without the added assurance that the mouth-watering anticipation of the first bite can be re-lived by the Instagrammer later and elicit "likes" from friends and strangers alike (Herman, 2017). Food-related organizations quickly joined social media as a result of peoples' shared passion for food with members from all sectors of the food industry, including large and small retailers, politicians, educators, food institutions, manufacturers, and food lovers (Whitworth, 2013).

3. Methodology

The researcher adopted descriptive research design by applying both quantitative and qualitative methods. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to gather relevant data from 375 respondents from Bengaluru, India who belonged to 13+ years of age. A structured questionnaire created on Google forms that contained both open ended and closed ended questions was administered to the selected respondents via WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Instagram. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions and the data thus collected was statistically analyzed. Tables and charts were used to ensure that data could be interpreted quickly and easily. A word cloud format was drawn in order to visually understand the words most used in the open-ended questions.

4. Data Analysis

A. Growth of Food Media

The main aim of this research was to showcase the fact that the food media industry has grown tremendously over the years due to the increased interest in the same. The data gathered from the survey circulated among 375 respondents proves the same. According to the survey, a strong majority of 34.7% consume food media frequently, this number along with the 11.7% of people who watch such content all the time show that together they make a significant amount of impact on the consumption of this type of content, which in turn creates a tough majority.

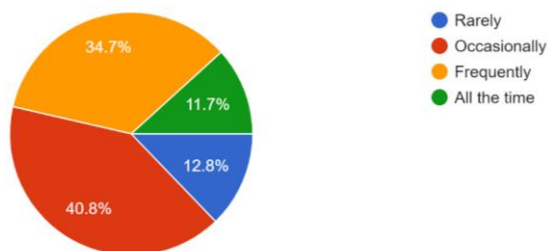


Fig. 1. Consumption of food media

A whopping 61.3% of the respondents agreed to the consumption of food related content being vastly increased over the years. This clearly shows that food media has indeed grown immensely over the decades in terms of the viewership and the

amount of food related content being produced. The statement is supported by the survey as a winning margin of 88% believes that there has been an increase in the number of productions related to food and culinary.

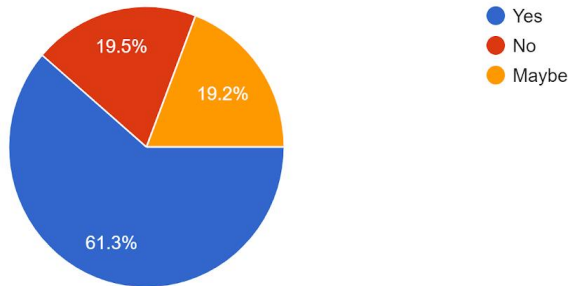


Fig. 2. Consumption of food media over the years

B. Reasons for Increased Consumption of Food Media

After analysing the data obtained from the respondents of the study, there are mainly four reasons that led to the increase in the consumption of food media. The most common ones being that watching food and culinary videos being satisfying, and aesthetically pleasing which in turn fulfils one’s cravings for a certain dish. Many respondents agreed that watching such content lightens one’s mood and gives a sense of calmness and relaxation. The second most common reason is the practical aspect of it. People consume food media in order to apply what they watch into their lives like learning how to cook, trying out new recipes, learning new skills and techniques. Another reason was to watch for exploration and knowledge purposes. One can learn endlessly about different aspects of food, starting from learning the cultural significance of different cuisines to the best place to eat a certain dish. The final reason to answer why people have been increasingly consuming more food media is that people have the urge to live through others. They want to experience what they cannot in real life through a screen in order to feed their cravings.



Fig. 3. Reasons for increased consumption of food media

C. Impact of the Pandemic on Food Media

People started consuming more food media during the pandemic as everyone was locked up in their houses unable to go out to the restaurants. People started bringing the world home by using the internet to get recipes of dishes they normally ate outside to make them inside. A large part of the population also started trying out various food trends on the internet. People also lived vicariously by watching tempting videos of food before the pandemic. According to the survey

conducted, a majority of around 60% of the respondents agreed to watching more food/culinary videos than usual during the pandemic.

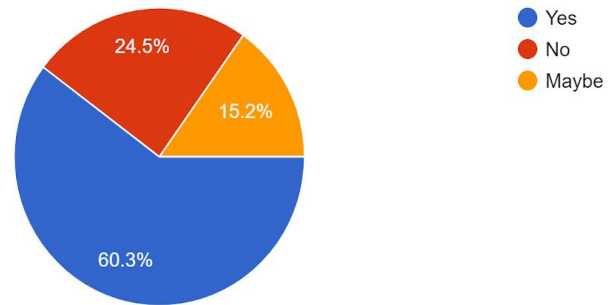


Fig. 4. Consumption of food media during the pandemic

D. Demography Most Sensitive to Food Media

This study also wanted to find out which part of the population consumes the most food media in order to understand, which demography of people are the most sensitive to food media. It was found that there are four sections of the population who watch food and culinary related content the most; females, 13-30 age group, students and foodies. It can be assumed that the female population consumes more food media than that of the male population because females are usually the ones cooking in the common patriarchal Indian society which leads to them taking help of the internet to search for recipes.

When it comes to the 13-30 age group, this is the age group that is most in tune with internet trends and good enough health to eat unhealthy food while the older age groups see food as a basic necessity and not something to make a big fuss about. Students are seen watching more food/culinary videos over the employed and unemployed population. The reason can be that students are mostly from the 13-30 age group and that the employed population does not have enough time to watch food media. It comes as no surprise that foodies tend to watch more food/culinary related content as they have a genuine love and interest in food and are more invested in spending more time in watching food media than those who are not foodies.

Table 1
Consumption of food media across different gender

Gender	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	All the time
Female	11.3%	36.4%	39%	13.4%
Male	15.3%	47.9%	27.8%	9%

Table 2
Consumption of food media across different occupations

Occupation	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	All the time
Student	12.8%	35.3%	35.3%	16.5%
Employed	13.4%	52.7%	29.5%	4.5%
Unemployed	11.1%	37.8%	44.4%	6.7%

Table 3
Consumption of food media among different age groups

Age	Rarely	Occasionally	Frequently	All the time
13-30	13.1%	34.5%	36.7%	15.6%
31-50	7.5%	62.5%	30%	0%
50+	15%	55%	28.3%	1.7%

E. Food in the Films

Food in movies plays a major role in symbolism, character

definition and also as a plot device. Food images and representations of food behaviors have been studied to shed light on characters' inner experiences, dramatic conflicts, narrative developments, story's social circumstances, and the underlying mood or point of view of a film. However, when it comes to people turning to watching feature films related to food, only around 3% of the respondents do so.

F. Food in the Reality TV Shows

The food shows in today's reality TV show industry have grown. Instead of a mundane show, where a chef would come and cook and go with a recipe, there are many types which have come into being. There is food related travel shows, food game shows, food reality shows, cooking shows, shows related to the food industry and hotel businesses. A large portion of the older population still turn to their Television sets to watch food related shows. According to the survey, around 40% of the respondents consume their food media on Television which makes it the second most used medium after social media.

G. Food on Social Media

The widespread use of social networks leading to "virtual solitude" and then huge potential market for food related content on social media sites like YouTube and Instagram drove food-related organizations into joining social media. According to the survey the highest majority of around 82% of the respondents use social media to consume food and culinary related content.

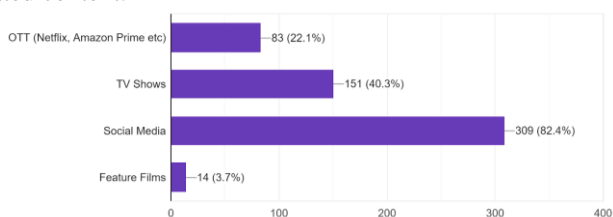


Fig. 5. Platforms preferred to watch food related content

H. Food in the OTT Platforms

OTT platforms serves as the platform where you can watch your favorite food shows continuously without having to wait for the next weeks or the next day's telecast on TV. Today's OTT platforms have almost everything that TV broadcasts. An increasing number of people have been switching to OTT platforms as they can watch anything at any time. 22% of the respondents of this study agree to watching food/culinary related content on OTT platforms which is significant considering the number of years that Television has been around.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, there has been a significant growth in the consumption of food media, especially with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Food has had a huge impact on the visual and social media market with the younger population (13-30 years of age) consuming the most of food and culinary related content comparing to other age groups. The reasons for them getting addicted to watching food videos include satisfaction, the hopefulness to apply what they watch into their lives and urge to live through others.

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