Taking and sharing photographs of restaurant food via social media and the blurring of online-offline consumer leisure experiences

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Taking and sharing photographs of restaurant food via social media

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Consumer-generated images of food across social media sites

- Noted increase in activity of sharing of photographs of food across social media
  - Bloomberg survey (cited in Vines, 2016) - many chefs and restaurants welcoming the use of cameras to show off dishes on social media - linked to 'cuisine as a feast for the eyes' and 'emotion-sharing through social media' (Vines, 2016)
  - KFC/Snapchat partnership - specific campaign making use of geofilters and encouraging consumers to take photographs within their restaurants to share online (Stewart, 2015)

- Dominant themes observable in previous published research:
  - 'social uses of image sharing'
  - 'online image sharing in relation to experiences of restaurants'
Dominant themes observable in previous published research

social use of image-sharing
  – creating and maintaining social relationships
  – self-presentation
  – socially constructed realities

image-sharing in relation to experiences of restaurants
  – part of the eating out experience
  – tool to reduce uncertainties in consumer choice process
  – potential shift in balance of power between production and consumption
Research study

- Research questions arising from review of literature / existing studies:
  - Why do consumers take photographs of restaurant food and share these online via social media? (motivations)
  - What are the perceived impacts of this on restaurant businesses?

- Methodology
  - views and perceptions of restaurant consumers and restaurant managers (casual dining restaurant businesses)
  - online semi-structured questionnaire survey administered via Facebook - 67 international respondents of mixed genders and age groups
  - face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 6 restaurant managers in Sheffield, UK
  - descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of responses

- Limitations
  - exploratory study
  - sampling limitations
Issues explored in relation to the research questions of study

- Own use of social media
- Factors that motivate people to take photographs of their food when eating out
- Own behaviour/observed behaviour of others sharing photographs of restaurant food
- Own behaviour in terms of eating out
- Own behaviour/observed behaviour of others taking photographs of food when eating out
- Perceived social media photo impacts for consumer dining decisions and experiences and for restaurant managers.
Headline results from online survey
(base: 67 unless stated otherwise)

- 87% use Facebook daily, 9% weekly - followed by Snapchat and Instagram in terms of most frequently used social media sites
- 54% reported that they eat in restaurants weekly, 27% monthly, 16% fortnightly and 1% less often
- 78% reported that they had photographed their food when eating out in a restaurant and 79% had observed other diners taking photographs of food in a restaurant. 100% reported that the amount of people photographing restaurant food has increased in the past 5 years.
- 33 (54%) reported that they rarely share photographs of food on social media, 13 (21%) frequently, 12 (20%) occasionally and 3 (5%) 'every time I eat out' (base: 61)
- 82% had seen people posting photographs of restaurant food on social media. 76% had commented on people's photographs of food on social media, 95% noted mostly positive comments received on photographs of food seen on social media
- 59% reported that they had visited a restaurant after seeing user-generated photographs of its food on social media (base: 63)
- 16% reported that they had avoided a restaurant after seeing user-generated photographs of its food on social media (base: 63)
Why do consumers take photographs of restaurant food and share these online via social media? (1)

• 'Bad' food presentation:
  – '...it can show how dissatisfied you are with what is presented before you and you photograph it to make other people aware and not to use the restaurant'

• 'Good' food presentation:
  – 'Some people appreciate the design of food.'
  – '...because they are happy with the appearance of the food and it looks great...'
  – '...I only post the things I find special or interesting...'
  – 'I rarely take a photo of my food from a restaurant but if it looks super unique or crazy I might...'
  – '...I see people of all ages take pictures of food they feel is impressive looking. Much as they would do with a piece of art or moment in nature.'

• To show friends/family:
  – '...maybe they are taking someone on a journey with them through food'
  – '...more so to share the experience rather than the food itself.'
Why do consumers take photographs of restaurant food and share these online via social media? (2)

- 'Showing off'
  - 'People like other people to know what they're doing. Eating out is a 'trendy' thing to do and those who eat out want others to know about it';
  - '...it reflects the perception of the life they want their social media friends to have of them. It's superficial.'
  - 'The longer you spend time taking photos the more likely the food will be cold, it's a bit rude, narcissistic and adds to a culture of an unhealthy obsession with food, what you eat and how you look...'

- Influenced by type of restaurants
  - 'Certain restaurants reflect a perceived image based on their prices and standard of food.'
  - '...restaurant choices reflect lifestyles...'

Photographs of restaurant food posted on social media were perceived to:
- reflect people's lifestyle;
- act as tools to maintain social relationships and facilitate the sharing of personal experiences;
- contribute to the 'presentation of self'
Perceived impacts for restaurant businesses? (1)

Online survey responses

• 'People eat with their eyes. If you see a picture of someone's food, and it looks good, you will find out where they went. Go there. Order it. Take a picture. Post it. It's a repetitive cycle. It will build the industry.'

• 'I think if they are negative they are more likely to have an impact on the restaurant than if they are positive as bad news travels face on social media'

• 'I enjoy taking pictures of my food when I eat out because I want to share and support local businesses that I appreciate. I am a foodie and I love the enjoyment I get from food and the whole restaurant experience.'

• 'I would never do it. A photo doesn't show food quality. It can't show taste, either good or bad. It doesn't show restaurant service, which I think is very important.'

Impacts for restaurant businesses of taking and sharing photographs online of restaurant food were perceived to:

• potentially influence custom;
• affect attempts to control brand image representation;
• question the relative importance of food in the overall restaurant experience.
Perceived impacts for restaurant businesses? (2)

Key issues emerging from interviews with restaurant managers

- management of social media activity - often controlled by Head Office;
- not all encourage geotagging - often focused on specific Head Office promotional campaigns;
- notable observed trend (taking and sharing photos of restaurant food);
- little understanding of why - official processes to manage bloggers (serious leisure) dedicated Head Office teams;
- little scope to interact with (e.g. comment on) photographs of food taken at their restaurants.

- Questions potential of businesses to influence custom;
- Suggests active concerns over controlling brand image representation
Building on dominant themes observable in previous published research

**social use of image-sharing**
- creating and maintaining social relationships - 'to show friends or family' - 'taking someone on a journey'
- self-presentation - 'showing off' - 'narcissistic'
- socially constructed realities - 'reflects the perception of the life they want their social media friends to have of them'
- Nature of electronic selves in relation to the 'presentation of self'
  - Stone (1991); Miller (1995); Schau & Gilly (2003) - Goffman

**image-sharing in relation to experiences of restaurants**
- part of the eating out experience - 'influenced by types of restaurant'
- tool to reduce uncertainties in consumer choice process - 'bad food presentation', 'good food presentation'
- potential shift in balance of power between production and consumption - 'bad news travels face on social media'
- Reconceptualisation of the 'lived experience' re. (leisure) consumption - Elliott & Wattanasuwan (1998); Escalas & Bettman, (2005) - Denzin
Conclusions

• Why do consumers take photographs of restaurant food and share these online via social media? (motivations)
  – range of conscious or deliberate actions?

• What are the perceived impacts of this on restaurant businesses?
  – positive intended impacts
  – impacts frustrated due to lack of local influence and control by restaurant businesses

• Issues of Power, influence and control
Future research agenda

Taking and sharing photographs of restaurant food: motivations and impacts

- Extent to which photographs are intended to support businesses?
- Extent to which photographs of food represent one dimension of restaurant experience or multi-dimensional?
- Extent to which online behaviour impact on or potentially distort offline experiences?
- Lived experience & how experiences are shaped by subjective factors of identity?
- Extent to which online behaviour drives and conditions offline choices?
- Relative power of online communities vis-a-vis offline communities & presentation of self?

Power, influence and control in relation to online-offline representation of eating out leisure experiences
References


