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

MERSON, Jennifer and PALMER, Nicola <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7916-139X>

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Taking and sharing photographs of restaurant food via social media

Dr. Nicola Palmer & Jennifer Merson

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 taking photographs of food when eating out
- Own behaviour in terms of eating out
- Perceived social media photo impacts for consumer dining decisions and experiences and for restaurant managers.
- Own behaviour/observed behaviour of others sharing photographs of restaurant food.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Headline results from online survey</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(base: 67 unless stated otherwise)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>87% use Facebook daily, 9% weekly -</strong></td>
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<td><strong>followed by Snapchat and Instagram</strong></td>
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<td><strong>in terms of most frequently used</strong></td>
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<td><strong>social media sites</strong></td>
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<td><strong>54% reported that they eat in</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>restaurants weekly, 27% monthly,</strong></td>
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<td><strong>16% fortnightly and 1% less often</strong></td>
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<td><strong>78% reported that they had</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>photographed their food when eating</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>out in a restaurant and 79% had</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>observed other diners taking</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>photographs of food in a restaurant.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100% reported that the amount of</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>people photographing restaurant food</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>has increased in the past 5 years.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>33 (54%) reported that they rarely</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>share photographs of food on social</strong></td>
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<td><strong>media, 13 (21%) frequently, 12 (20%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>occasionally and 3 (5%) 'every time I</strong></td>
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<td><strong>eat out' (base: 61)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>82% had seen people posting</strong></td>
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<td><strong>photographs of restaurant food on</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>social media. 76% had commented</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>on people's photographs of food on</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>social media, 95% noted mostly</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>positive comments received on</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>photographs of food seen on social</strong></td>
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<td><strong>media</strong></td>
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<td><strong>59% reported that they had visited a</strong></td>
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<td><strong>restaurant after seeing user-</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>generated photographs of its food on</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>social media (base: 63)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>16% reported that they had avoided a</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>restaurant after seeing user-</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>generated photographs of its food on</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>social media (base: 63)</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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

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

- 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?
- Relative power of online communities vis-a-vis offline communities & presentation of self?
- Extent to which online behaviour drives and conditions offline choices?
References