

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

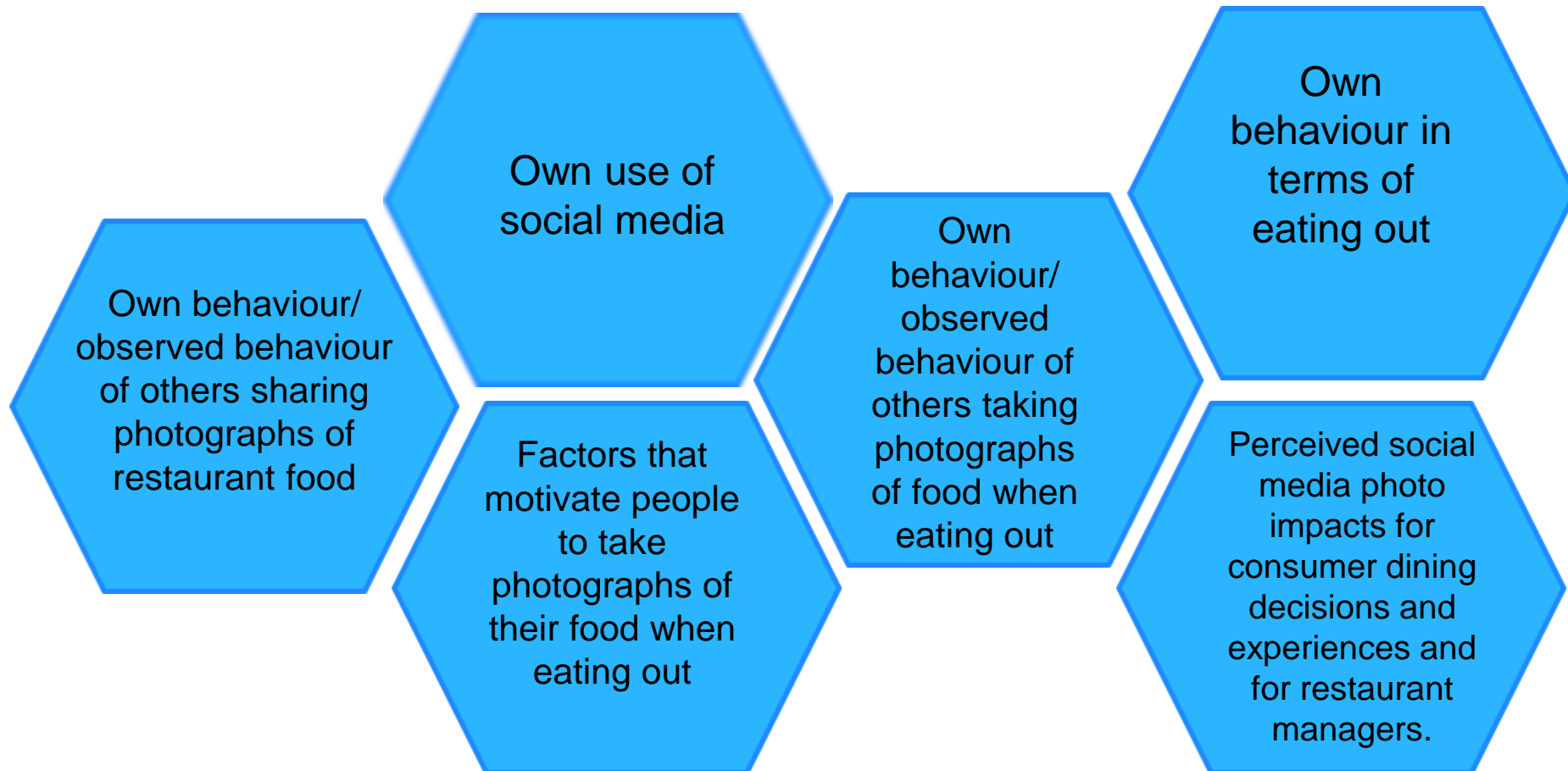
image-sharing in relation to experiences of restaurants

- 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



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 faster 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 fast 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



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