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
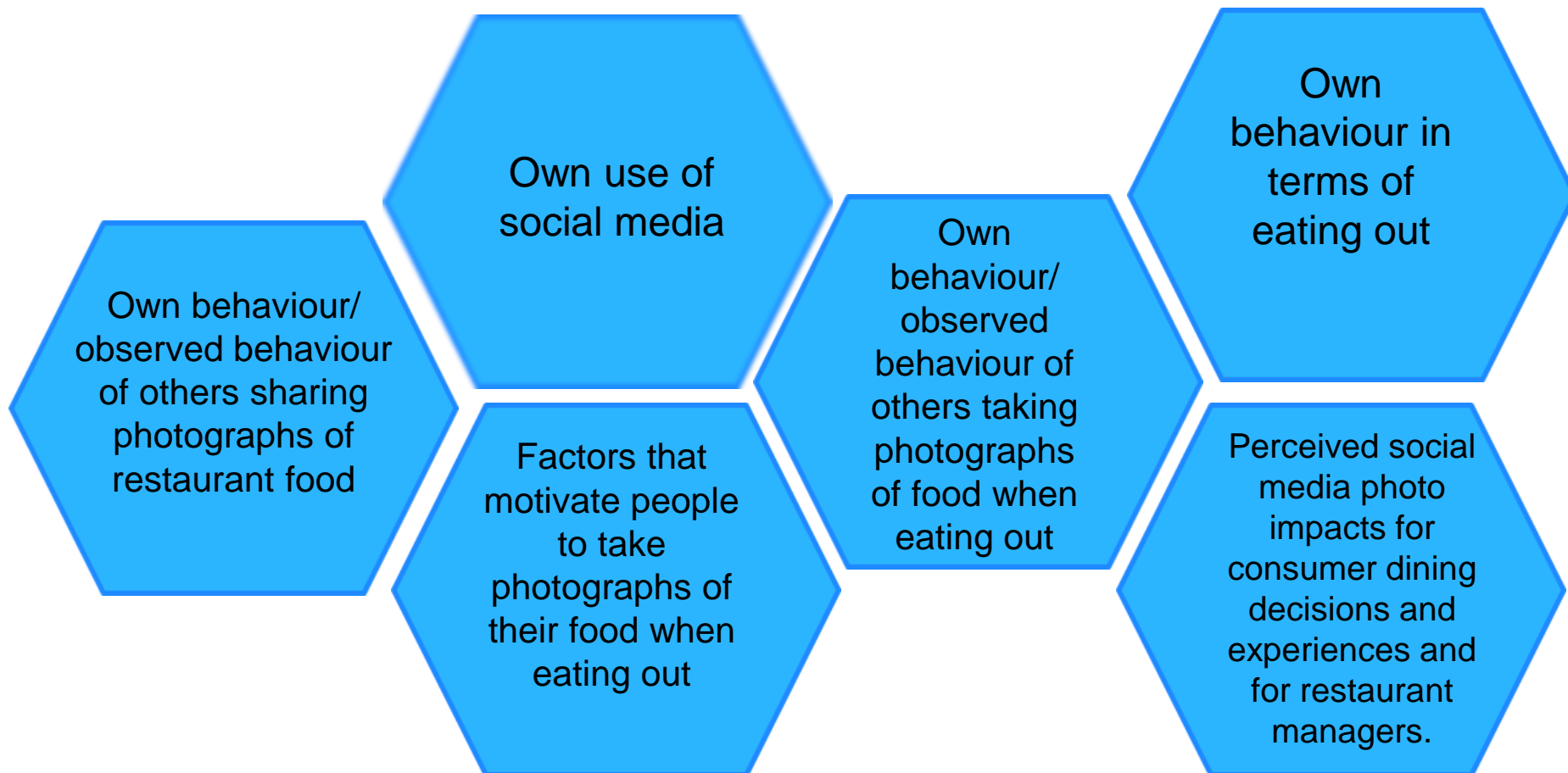- self-presentation
- socially constructed realities

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 behaviour/ observed behaviour of others sharing photographs of restaurant food

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.

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

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

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?

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