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An Appetite For Social Media: The Circulation Of Food On Multi-media Platform

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Publication Date

2023-06-16

AN APPETITE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CIRCULATION OF FOOD ON MULTI-MEDIA
PLATFORMS

By

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

May 12, 2023

University Honors
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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ABSTRACT

Social media has taken the world by storm. Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Yelp, etc. all have an influence on people's perception, food being a notable category. This essay evaluates the significant role social media has and questions what attracts individuals to certain foods over others. Taking members of the University of California, Riverside student body as my informants, I conducted a sample research study in which surveys were used. In these surveys, students were given images and videos that they will rate from a scale of 1 to 10 how likely they want to try it. Additionally, they will be asked what caught their attention. With these responses, I recorded which images and videos were most wanted as well as which words most students used in their explanations. I also utilized a literature review to examine what methods have been used in prior work. Understanding the significance social media has in food will allow us to figure out the mindset behind wanting certain foods and what qualities of social media potentially changes the way we eat. The hypothesis of the study is that social media does play a role; individuals are attracted to aesthetic presentation of food through pictures/videos on social media. This attraction compels an inclination to sample the foods shown.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Dr. Ricky for his guidance and mentorship throughout this research study.

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Introduction

As one goes about their day in the 21st century, many check their social media platforms. On these multi-media platforms, a diverse array of posts are shown. For some, old high school classmates accomplishing a milestone, the new movie theater opening up in town, the makeup hack influencers are raving about, but quite popularly videos and pictures of foods. With social media's endless opportunities and access to many all over the world, this essay questions how social media plays a role in what attracts individuals to certain foods over others. This study will be conducted at the University of California, Riverside in which any attending student will rate how likely they would want to try 10 different foods and describe what caught their attention from each. These 10 different foods include Lobster Noodles, Pineapple Garlic Shrimp, Mac Salad, & Rice, Baby Bottle Agua Frescas, Sushi Platter, Taiwanese Hot Pot, Korean Barbeque, Birria Tacos, Mini Pancakes & Strawberries, Brown Sugar Honey Boba Soft Serve, and Pork Soup Dumplings. With these different food posts, this study will help further the understanding and importance of social media in how it affects our mindset behind wanting certain foods and what qualities of social media potentially changes the way we eat. The hypothesis of the study is that social media does play a role; individuals are attracted to aesthetic presentation of food through pictures/videos on social media and this attraction causes many to have an inclination to sample the foods shown.

Literature Review

In a study conducted by Klaseen, Karen Michelle et al (2018), the researchers analyzed the social media strategies used by health focused organizations to find what causes positive or negative engagement from users. It was found that different strategies worked better for one social media platform over another. For example, posts with "relatable content" did not do well

on Facebook while it did have higher engagement on Instagram. Overall, the results found gave insight to health focused businesses on how to attract more people to visit their social media postings and potentially buy their products. This information goes to show that social media does play a role in people's decision making, more specifically from a business perspective. The image that a business creates on their social media platforms is essential; this is because it encourages customers to want to try their foods or not.

In another study, the author discussed the complexities and impact food posts have on social media. The purpose of this study was to bring awareness to food and how social media has caused it to become a bigger part of people's lives—not just consumption, but also how it may affect their identities. The author emphasized the significance of Youtube and how the ability for ordinary people to share their food creations influences this rise of both consumption and production (Lewis, 2018). This is significant because it highlights how individuals may be more likely to consume and produce certain foods because of what they see on media, specifically Youtube in this case. In addition, these individuals are able to see non celebrities showcase their dishes; this may bring Youtube watchers a sense of belonging and that they can also cook the same dishes.

In “Fetishizing Food in Digital Age: #foodporn Around The World,” Yelena Mejova and her collaborators discuss the background and relevance of the hashtag “food porn.” The purpose of their study was to find out whether or not food posts, specifically on Instagram, promoted healthy eating. In their results, they found out that many people are attracted to sweets, but that there is also a market for people interested in healthy eating. This was proven when they found that there were more followers for healthy eating profiles compared to unhealthy (Mejova, Yelena, et al., 2016). This study proves that social media does seem to have an influence on

people's eating habits as people physically chose to click the follow button for certain profiles over others. When they click the follow button, individuals are not only supporting the account, but also asking to receive more posts from the same account on their for you page.

In another study, researchers were trying to figure out whether or not adolescents and children are highly marketed by unhealthy food companies. This study was significant because they were trying to put into numbers how many children are exposed to unhealthy foods in the media. In their results, they found that there was, in fact, a very large amount of unhealthy food products being marketed to children and adolescents. Due to this, they believe the United States should restrict such behavior similar to other countries in hopes that unhealthy eating will be more discouraged (Potvin Kent, Monique, et al., 2019). Similar to other studies, this paper provides further insight into how media influences what individuals may want to eat over other options; however, this particular study goes as far to say what the United States could potentially censor in media to help influence healthy eating habits.

Methods

Online surveys were conducted in which University of California, Riverside (UCR) students were the only population answering the surveys. These surveys were conducted using Qualtrics. Students would hear about the survey through word of mouth and/or shown advertisements on the researcher's social media including Instagram and Discord. In these surveys, students were given a total of 10 food images or videos. Each image or video was intentionally chosen by the researcher to be different from the typical foods individuals see. For each image or video, students were asked to rate from a scale of 1 to 10 how likely they would want to try it. In this Likert scale, 1 meant extremely unlikely and 10 meant extremely likely. In addition to a rating question, respondents were also asked to describe in words what caught their

attention. With these responses, which food items were most wanted as well as which words most students used in their explanations were recorded as data.

Each survey should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes maximum to finish and the goal was to have at least 50 survey responses. The survey is entirely voluntary and no compensation or reimbursement is provided for taking it. The data was stored in the researcher's Qualtrics account in which privacy was protected by the collection of no IP addresses and Qualtrics' encrypted system. Only the researcher and faculty mentor had access to the data stored on Qualtrics. Additionally, a literature review was utilized to examine what methods have been used in prior work.

Data & Results

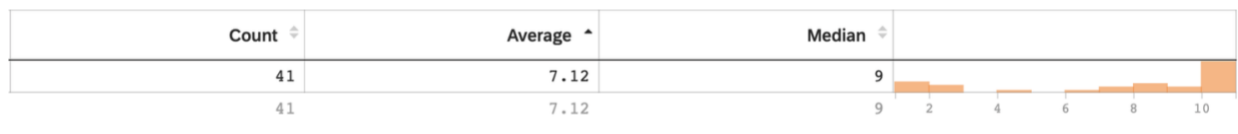
There were a total of 41 respondents at the end of the survey collection. Below is an image showing each food item, a table showing words most commonly used for each food item, and a bar graph visualizing students' ratings of how likely they would be willing to try each item. Qualtrics, the website students took the survey on, automatically categorized and organized which words were mostly used.



Figure 1: The first food item respondents saw was a video of Korean barbeque meat being grilled.

	Count	Percent
Meat, beef, eat beef, corn, texture, freshness	28	68%
Cheesy, sauce, bbq, meaty, steak, succulence, unappetizing, cheese, flavor, grill	21	51%
Part, Notice, Satisfy, Eye, Finish, Taste, Experience	7	17%

Table 1: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 1. 28 respondents used the words “meat, beef, eat beef, corn, texture, freshness” making 68% of the total words used. 21 respondents used the words “cheesy, sauce, bbq, meaty, steak, succulence, unappetizing, cheese, flavor, grill” making 51% of the total words used. 7 respondents used the words “Part, Notice, Satisfy, Eye, Finish, Taste, Experience” making 17% of the total words used.



Bar Graph 1: This bar graph shows how likely respondents’ overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 1. The rating findings were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 7.12, median = 9, standard deviation = 3.51, and variance = 12.30.



Figure 2: The second food item respondents saw was mini pancakes and cut strawberries.

	Count	Percent
Candy, dessert, ice cream syrup, waffle, dish, pancake, almond, carbs, item	20	49%
Whip, food, dessert, yayayaya	7	17%
Frost, succulent, cream, veg	6	15%

Table 2: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 2. 20 respondents used “Candy, dessert, ice cream syrup, waffle, dish, pancake, almond, carbs, item” making 49% of the total words used. 7 respondents used “whip, food, dessert, yayayaya” making 17% of the total words used. 6 respondents used “frost, succulent, cream, veg” making 15% of the total words used.



Bar Graph 2: This bar graph shows how likely respondents’ overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 2. The rating findings were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 7.44, median = 8, standard deviation = 2.33, and variance = 5.42.



Figure 3: The third food item respondents saw was garlic shrimp, mac salad, and rice over a pineapple bowl.

	Count	Percent
Shrimp, seafood, meat, chicken, rice, fish, pineapple, veg, savory, crisp	29	71%
Dish, flavor, lemon, mixture, slice, bowl, plate, freshness, food	16	39%
Skin, cancer, color	8	20%
Presentation, display, caption	7	17%
Big fan, fan, type, fact, huge fan	4	10%

Table 3: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 3. 29 respondents used “Shrimp, seafood, meat, chicken, rice, fish, pineapple, veg, savory, crisp” making 71% of the total words used. 16 respondents used “Dish, flavor, lemon, mixture, slice, bowl, plate, freshness, food” making 39% of the total words used. 8 respondents used “Skin, cancer, color” making 20% of the total words used. 7 respondents used “Presentation, display, caption” making 17% of the total words used. 4 respondents used “Big fan, fan, type, fact, huge fan” of the total words used.



Bar Graph 3: This bar graph shows how likely respondents’ overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 3. The rating finds were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 6.00, median = 7, standard deviation = 2.78, and variance = 7.71.

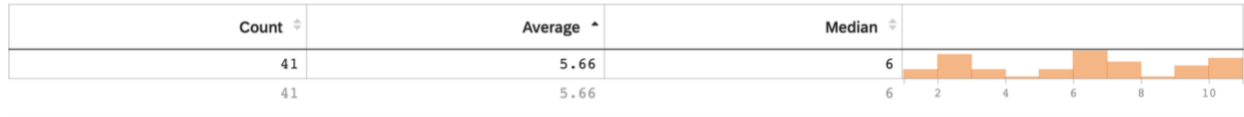


Figure 4: The fourth food item respondents saw was a picture of lobster noodles.

	Count	Percent
Seafood, pasta, meat, lobster, dish, noodle, crab, sauce, veg, spaghetti	34	83%
Crunchy, texture, grill, bottom right, color, chef, kiss	7	17%
Piece, lack, quality, fan, intrigue, leg	6	15%
Picture, image, photo, caption, background	5	12%
Claw, others, deal	3	7%

Table 4: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 4. 34 respondents used “Seafood, pasta, meat, lobster, dish, noodle, crab, sauce, veg, spaghetti” making 83% of the total words used. 7 respondents used “Crunchy, texture, grill, bottom right, color, chef, kiss” making 17% of the total words used. 6 respondents used “Piece, lack, quality, fan, intrigue, leg” making 15% of the total words

used. 5 respondents used “Picture, image, photo, caption, background” making 12% of the total words used. 3 respondents used “claw, others, deal” making 7% of the total words used.



Bar Graph 4: This bar graph shows how likely respondents’ overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 4. The rating findings were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 5.66, median = 6, standard deviation = 2.95, and variance = 8.71.



Figure 5: The fifth food item respondents saw was a video of agua frescas being poured into a giant baby bottle.

	Count	Percent
Bottle, cup, container, ice	28	68%
Color, flash, flicker, visuals, fruity, info, video, baby, caption, juice	21	51%
Design, concept, customer, appeal, support, presentation, attention, movement	7	17%
Bit, refreshing, shape, perspective	6	15%

Table 5: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 5. 28 respondents used the words “bottle, cup, container, ice” making 68% of the total words used. 21 respondents used the words “Color, flash, flicker, visuals, fruity, info, video, baby, caption, juice” making 51% of the total words used. 7 respondents used the words “Design, concept, customer, appeal, support, presentation, attention, movement” making 17% of the total words used. 6 respondents used the words “Bit, refreshing, shape, perspective” making 15% of the total words used.



Bar Graph 5: This bar graph shows how likely respondents’ overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 5. The rating findings were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 6.46, median = 7, standard deviation = 2.65, and variance 7.03.



Figure 6: The sixth food item respondents saw was a video of birria tacos being grilled.

	Count	Percent
Heat, grill, dip, grease, chicken, greasy, sauce, water, freshness, juice	10	24%
Color, brightness, colour, tone, contrast, video, attention, caption	7	17%

Table 6: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 6. 10 respondents used the words “heat, grill, dip, grease, chicken, greasy, sauce, water, freshness, juice” making 24% of the total words used. 7 respondents used the words “color, brightness, colour, tone, contrast, video, attention, caption” making 17% of the total words used.



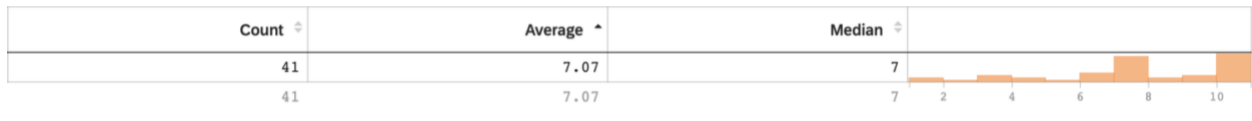
Bar Graph 6: This bar graph shows how likely respondents' overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 6. The rating findings were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 7.34, median = 8, standard deviation = 2.94, and variance 8.66.



Figure 7: The seventh food item respondents saw was a video of individual Taiwanese hot pots being rolled out on a cart.

	Count	Percent
Fish, shrimp, pot, meat, succulent, raw meat, ramen, veg, food, restaurant	25	61%
Platter, bowls, bowl, soup, cake, chopstick, broth, tofu, hotpot, kitchen	21	51%
Video, view, music, presentation, scene, song, attention	8	20%
Combination, amount, portion, combo, add ons, nature	6	15%
Love, type, fan, variety, idea, touch, taste	6	15%
Lift, strip, appeal	3	7%
Place, friend, transition, process	3	7%

Table 7: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 7. 25 respondents used “Fish, shrimp, pot, meat, succulent, raw meat, ramen, veg, food, restaurant” making 61% of the total words used. 21 respondents used “Platter, bowls, bowl, soup, cake, chopstick, broth, tofu, hotpot, kitchen” making 51% of the total words used. 8 respondents used “Video, view, music, presentation, scene, song, attention” making 20% of the total words used. 6 respondents used “Combination, amount, portion, combo, add ons, nature” making 15% of the total words used. 6 respondents used “love, type, fan, variety, idea, touch, taste” making 15% of the total words used. 3 respondents used the words “lift, strip, appeal” making 7% of the total words used. 3 respondents used the words “place, friend, transition, process” making 7% of the total words used.



Bar Graph 7: This bar graph shows how likely respondents’ overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 7. The rating findings were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 7.07, median = 7, standard deviation = 2.67, and variance 7.14.



Figure 8: The eighth food item respondents saw was a video of soft serve being made with honey boba and brown sugar syrup being drizzled on top.

	Count	Percent
Vanilla ice cream, sauce, vanilla, chocolate, boba, sundae, cream, marshmallow, ice cream, syrup	27	66%
Cone, quality, Instagram, swirl, music, drip, video, curve, lover	10	24%
Touch, outer layer, color, honey, drizzle, toast, skin	6	15%
Ice cream, bean, dairy	6	7%
Things, eye, post	3	7%

Table 8: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 8. 27 respondents used the words “Vanilla ice cream, sauce, vanilla, chocolate, boba, sundae, cream, marshmallow, ice cream, syrup” making 66% of the total words used. 10 respondents used “Cone, quality, Instagram, swirl, music, drip, video,

curve, lover” making 24% of the total words used. 6 respondents used “Touch, outer layer, color, honey, drizzle, toast, skin” making 15% of the total words used. 6 respondents used “ice cream, bean, dairy” making 7% of the total words used. 3 respondents used “things, eye, post” in their response making 7% of the total words used.



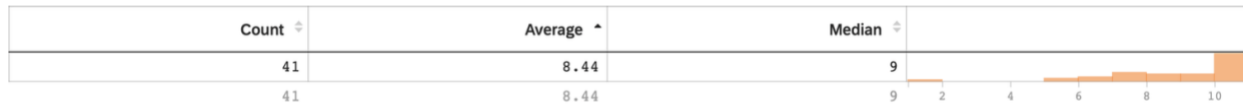
Bar Graph 8: This bar graph shows how likely respondents’ overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 8. The rating findings were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 8.02, median = 9, standard deviation = 2.28, and variance = 5.19.



Figure 9: The ninth food item respondents saw was a video of pork soup dumplings being made and prepared to be eaten.

	Count	Percent
Xiao, dumplings, noodle, soy sauce, soup, broth, sauce, ginger, meal meat	22	54%
Juiciness, texture, taste, food, restaurant, love, cinematography	11	27%
Chop, dip, post, stuff, incline, things	8	20%
Question, attention, satisfy, quality, appeal, professionalism	8	20%
Wish, work, shape, day, camera, memory, peak, video	8	20%
Knowledge, contrast, interaction, detail, view	5	12%
Pace, process, place, times	5	12%
Caption, sticker, sum, name	4	10%
Mouth, throat, spoon	2	5%

Table 9: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 9. 22 respondents used the words “Xiao, dumplings, noodle, soy sauce, soup, broth, sauce, ginger, meal meat” in their response making 54% of the total words used. 11 respondents used the words “Juiciness, texture, taste, food, restaurant, love, cinematography” in their response making 27% of the total words used. 8 respondents used the words “Chop, dip, post, stuff, incline, things” making 20% of the total words used. 8 respondents used the words “Question, attention, satisfy, quality, appeal, professionalism” making 20% of the total words used. 8 respondents used the words “Wish, work, shape, day, camera, memory, peak, video” making 20% of the total words used. 5 respondents used the words “Knowledge, contrast, interaction, detail, view” making 12% of the total words used. 5 respondents used the words “pace, process, place, times” in their response making 12% of the total words used. 4 respondents used the words “caption, sticker, sum, name” in their response making 10% of the total words used. 2 respondents used the words “mouth, throat, spoon” in their response making 5% of the total words used.



Bar Graph 9: This bar graph shows how likely respondents' overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 9. The rating findings were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 8.44, median = 9, standard deviation = 1.96, and variance = 3.86.



Figure 10: The tenth food item respondents saw was a platter of sushi with an array of different nigiri and rolls.

	Count	Percent
Fish, meat, veg, salmon, bug, seed, dish, nigiri, freshness, bowl	20	49%
Side, bottom, layout, corner, orientation, presentation	10	24%
Color, picture, display, photo, succulent	9	22%
Platter, plate, food	8	20%
Option, group, combination, organization, tool, board, arrangement	8	20%
Tune, overshadow, roll, appeal, love	6	15%
Ways, fan, people, others, attention	6	15%
Abundance, variety, quantity	4	10%
Amount, portion, size, quality	5	12%

Table 10: This table shows words most commonly in their response to the question of “describe what caught your attention” for figure 10. 20 respondents used the words “Fish, meat, veg,

salmon, bug, seed, dish, nigiri, freshness, bowl” in their response making 49% of the total words used. 10 respondents used the words “Side, bottom, layout, corner, orientation, presentation” in their response making 24% of the total words used. 9 respondents used the words “Color, picture, display, photo, succulent” making 22% of the total words used. 8 respondents used the words “platter, plate, food” in their response making 20% of the total words used. 8 respondents used the words “Option, group, combination, organization, tool, board, arrangement” in their response making 20% of the total words used. 6 respondents used “tune, overshadow, roll, appeal, love” in their response making 15% of the total words used. 6 respondents used the words “ways, fan, people, others, attention” making 15% of the total words used. 4 respondents used the words “abundance, variety, quantity” in their response making 10% of the total words used. 5 respondents used the words “amount, portion, size, quality” in their response making 12% of the total words used.



Bar Graph 10: This bar graph shows how likely respondents’ overall were willing to try the food item indicated in figure 10. The rating findings were minimum = 1.00, maximum = 10.00, mean = 6.78, median = 7, standard deviation = 2.98, and variance = 8.85.

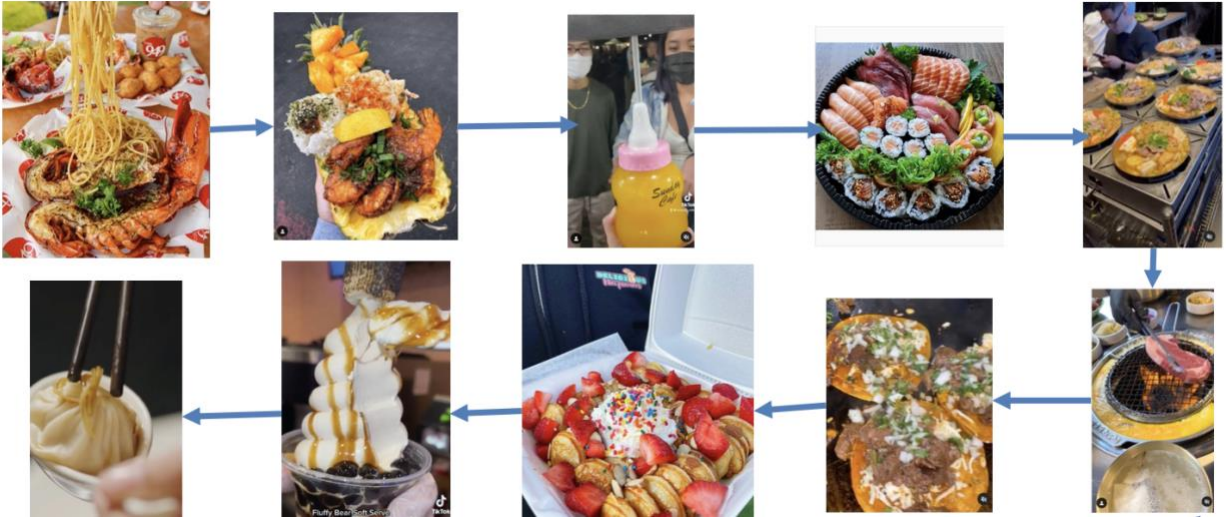


Figure 11: In order from least to greatest mean were the “Lobster Noodles,” “Pineapple Garlic Shrimp, Mac Salad, & Rice,” “Baby Bottle Agua Frescas,” “Sushi Platter,” “Taiwanese Hot Pot,” “Korean Barbeque,” “Birria Tacos,” “Mini Pancakes & Strawberries,” “Brown Sugar Honey Boba Soft Serve,” and the “Pork Soup Dumplings.”

Discussion

Based on the tables of words most used, I noticed that the most commonly used words for all the food items were mainly the ingredients of the food. For example, 66% of the total words used for the Brown Sugar Honey Boba Soft Serve item were “vanilla ice cream, sauce, vanilla, chocolate, boba, sundae, cream, marshmallow, ice cream, syrup.” Similarly, 71% of the total words used for the Pineapple Garlic Shrimp, Mac Salad, & Rice were “shrimp, seafood, meat, chicken, rice, fish, pineapple, veg, savory, crisp.” Likewise, 83% of the total words used for the Lobster Noodle were “Seafood, pasta, meat, lobster, dish, noodle, crab, sauce, veg, spaghetti.” Clearly, the center of most respondents’ attention seemed to be the food item itself.

However, there was one exception which was the Baby Bottle Agua Fresca in which a unique container, a baby bottle, was used as seen in figure 5 and table 5. In this post, a customer chooses their agua fresca flavor from a table full of different kinds and the worker pours it into

the plastic baby bottle container with a flashing ice cube. The most commonly used words for this food item was “bottle, cup, container, ice” followed by “color, flash, flicker, visuals, fruity, info, video, baby, caption, juice” and “design, concept, customer, appeal, support, presentation, attention, movement.” This seems to indicate that presentation and novelty can come before what the food item entails if it is impactful enough or different enough from what respondents normally see. One respondent even commented “The baby bottle is very cute and caught my attention because it is a unique concept with the additional flashing lights in them. The drinks also look very refreshing.” Not only did the unique container capture the respondent’s attention, but they also noticed the flashing ice cube put inside the bottle. It seems that the originality of the drink’s presentation truly influenced them to have a positive perception. Likewise, another respondent said “the baby bottle makes it fun plus the flashing lights in the drink enhances the visuals.”

However, the Baby Bottle Agua Fresca still ranked the third least wanted to try despite the fascination of its appearance by respondents. One respondent stated, “The fun shape of the bottle caught my attention, but the drink doesn’t look like anything special.” Similarly, a different respondent remarked that the baby bottle “looks interesting but is a bit too gimmicky for me.” Perhaps, presentation plays an important role, but can also seem like overkill to some individuals to the point that they do not want to try the item. This also goes to show that no matter how appealing something may be or seem, one can not please everyone.

Furthermore, words mentioning the surroundings of the ingredients were generally the second most commonly used words. For example, 24% of the total words used for the sushi platter were “side, bottom, layout, corner, orientation, presentation.” Likewise, 51% of the total words used for the Taiwanese Hot Pot were “platter, bowls, bowl, soup, cake, chopstick, broth,

tofu, hotpot, kitchen.” Based on these results, it seems that respondents were generally drawn to the food item themselves and then observed what was around it and its overall display. This goes to show that the food item itself holds its own importance, but presentation can drastically affect its potential to be even more appealing. What may seem like miniscule and insignificant details can actually crucially affect the aesthetic and marketing of the food item. In regards to the Taiwanese Hot Pot post, one respondent even said what caught their attention was “the way the video showcases the hotpot by transitioning between different pots is good to show the variety of the types of soups as well as the types of add ons.” This respondent seemed to feel that the camerawork and editing made the hot pot look more appealing and interested them in trying it more.

Additionally, it appears captions and comments may make people more inclined to try foods as well. For example, a respondent said for the Lobster Noodle post that, “the caption offers a deal if you come in to try their food.” This statement highlights what more social media has to offer for both viewers and the producers making the content. With discounts and promotions, it seems viewers would be more inclined to go out of their way and try the food. This is also advantageous for businesses as they are gaining potential new customers and restaurant patrons. Another respondent said for the Pork Soup Dumpling post that, “The caption is a question so that they get more interaction on their post to give them more views.” The restaurant seems to be using social media to their advantage by formatting their caption as a question so they can perhaps get more views from Instagram’s algorithm. With more interaction, Instagram may recommend the post to more people as it is analyzed as something very popular. Moreover, this may be potentially good marketing for the restaurant.

Based on the least to greatest mean, the sweeter foods had a higher attraction level for respondents. In response to the question of “Describe what caught your attention,” a respondent said “I would try this food because the texture and overall components are something I am familiar with,” on the boba soft serve and a different respondent said “the colors on the dessert are very bright. It looks yummy and the tiny pancakes look cute, so the entire dish is pleasing to look at” on the mini pancakes. It seems that due to the unique presentation and familiarity of soft serve, the respondent gave it such high praise and willingness to try. Similarly, the other respondent seemed to react positively to the mini pancakes due to what is normally a larger sized pancake’s different presentation. They are adorably small in this case and may offer some fun novelty to the respondent making them want it to try so much.

Since the sweeter foods have a higher attraction level, it brings up the question that maybe people, at least from UCR, prefer sweet over savory. As only a very small sample responded to the survey, it is not statistically significant enough to make this claim. Due to the positive reaction of the mini pancakes and brown sugar honey boba soft serve, it also brings up the question that perhaps people are more willing to try foods they have seen before; therefore, familiarity may play an important role in food preferences.

On the flip side, it seemed the seafood options had the lowest attraction level for the respondents. In response to the question of “describe what caught your attention,” one respondent said “looks expensive ngl (not gonna lie)” on the Lobster Noodle and another said “not a fan of lobster.” Upon seeing the Sushi Platter, one respondent said “Raw fish! It’s a no for me!” As for the Pineapple Garlic Shrimp, Mac Salad, and Rice, a respondent described “I’m not a fan of shrimp and the dish looks a little too oily.” Based on these responses, it seems that seafood is an acquired taste for many individuals. Raw fish is a delicacy that many may not be

accustomed to or brought up to eat. In addition, seafood tends to be a delicacy that some may not be able to eat often or have access to as easily in their community; therefore, some may see it as something out of their price range and not willing to try it.

Similar to the idea of seafood being a delicacy and unfamiliar, it seems some individuals also felt negatively towards raw beef shown in the Taiwanese Hot Pot post. A respondent said that what caught their attention was “the uncooked meat in the hotpot.” Perhaps the respondent is used to seeing meat being visually cooked when prepared for them, but in some cultures they are prepared raw on top to be mixed into the hot boiling broth. This Taiwanese Hot Pot restaurant is having their customers do just that.

Of the 10 food items, the Pork Soup Dumplings had the highest mean of 8.44. In this post, the camera is focused on the pork soup dumplings and the person behind the camera is demonstrating how to properly prepare it to be eaten. Unlike the regular dumpling, the pork soup dumpling has soup inside like the name suggests. Instead of being eaten plain or with only soy sauce, it is shown in the post that the dumpling is delicate and broken with a chopstick. This allows the soup to flow out onto the spoon. Then it is topped with a few pieces of shredded ginger and dipped in a combination of soy sauce and vinegar. Altogether, this whole process allows for the perfect bite of the dumpling with the hot steamy soup ready to be slurped afterwards.

The high rating of wanting to try the Pork Soup Dumplings seems to have come from the camerawork and preparation of the food item. One respondent stated that “The professionalism from the video is very attention grabbing because you can see a lot of detail in the food due to how clear the camera is. The food looks so delicious.” Another respondent appreciated the “attention to detail. I also like how the ad is more slow paced compared to other posts I’ve seen.”

Both respondents noted factors related to the cinematography. Perhaps another significant factor that may have contributed to the high rating is the restaurant name being shown and its well knownness. A respondent even commented “this is a restaurant I have been wanting to try, the restaurant name caught my attention.” Likewise, a different respondent stated “I have never eaten at this restaurant but I am aware of it and this inclines me to want to eat it more and the overall texture looks soft and nice to eat.” It seems that many have heard of the restaurant name before and are aware of its specialty in pork soup dumplings; due to the presentation of the post and the restaurant name, it seems that they are more inclined to try it.

Of the 41 respondents, a few students seemed to have some dietary restrictions. Due to this, there were a few who commented that they cannot eat the food item shown on the survey. On the Birria Taco post, a respondent expressed “I’ve always wanted to try Birria but I wish chicken was used in it. I do not eat pork or beef.” On the Taiwanese Hot Post post, another respondent commented “Not vegetarian.” On the Brown Sugar Honey Boba Soft Serve post, a respondent simply said what caught their attention was that it was “Dairy.” On the Korean Barbeque post, a different respondent said in disgust that “I don’t eat beef so this video was very unappetizing to me.” Understandably, those with dietary restrictions seemed to respond mostly negatively to whichever food items they could not partake in.

Difficulties

One of the biggest difficulties of this study was trying to reach the goal of at least 50 respondents. Unfortunately, with no incentive, many students were not inclined to fill out the survey on their own free will; therefore, constant mass messaging and promotion were done on media platforms including Discord and Instagram to help spread the word. On these platforms,

potential respondents were asked politely if they could spare a few minutes to fill out the survey. Moreover, word of mouth was utilized along with referrals to secure more respondents.

Another difficulty of this study was the high possibility of results becoming skewed. Given UCR students are the only population being surveyed, it was possible that there may be some sort of biased trend with the results. The results are limited in that most UCR students are of a similar age group between 18 to 21 years old as most are undergraduates; it is also most likely they use social media more than other age groups given they come from a similar technological generation. Therefore, they may have already seen certain food items more or less. This could potentially change how much they want to try it, making the results not the most reliable.

In addition, UCR is renowned for being one of the most diverse campuses with a large array of races and ethnicities. This may potentially cause more openness to trying new foods as students are exposed and surrounded by many backgrounds in the classroom; therefore, results can be inflated. For the Birria Tacos post, one respondent even said “I have a Mexican ireresistance to tacos. I can’t help it.” This response suggests that they personally cannot ever pass on tacos due to their Mexican heritage. It seems that it may be a comfort food to this respondent. However, with no personal information specifically asked of respondents, it is not possible to tell if race related to their ratings for certain.

Special Requirements/Approval

The study required an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and approval, specifically the socio-behavioral form. An Institutional Review Board application was needed for this study as surveys were utilized and human beings are the subject. The Institutional Review Board is important because it makes sure everyone is protected and that surveys are up to code.

Once everything was correctly filled out and checked, Dr. Rodriguez signed it and the study waited for the Institutional Review Board's approval before distributing surveys and collecting data. No other special requirements and/or approval was needed. The study received Institutional Review Board approval on June 14th, 2022 and survey distribution began in September 2022.

Conclusion

Individuals definitely seemed to be influenced by what they saw on social media in their willingness to try food. Presentation, colorfulness, camerawork, and making the food item look unique were all components respondents seemed to react strongly to. However, respondents' past personal experience and preferences also affected their willingness to try foods. My hypothesis was proven partly wrong. While respondents did react positively to the more aesthetic, unique food items, their personal preferences came into play and affected their rating responses. This goes to show that while social media is a very powerful tool, an individual's background and the way they were brought up can also affect their food preferences and how willing they are to try.

Future Experiments & Improvements

With regards to future experiments, I would like to gather more personal information from respondents instead of it being completely anonymous. With personal information such as race, location, and dietary restrictions, I would like to see if there is any correlation or trends in the data. For example, I would like to see if race is a factor in how individuals respond to how willing they are to try certain foods that may closely resemble their cultural food. I would also like to see if respondents from hometowns that are renowned melting pots have more willingness to try different foods as they are most likely exposed to an array of cultural foods. As for dietary restrictions, I would like to see if respondents with certain restrictions such as being vegan, vegetarian, or keto have an impact on their willingness even if they may not be able to eat it on

their own free will. In my study, there were a few respondents who mentioned their dietary restrictions and how they would not try the food item at hand which understandably makes sense; however, I would be interested to see if there are individuals who still positively describe the dish or are willing to go out of their comfort zone if possible to try it.

Alongside personal information from respondents, I think conducting interviews would prove very beneficial to the research study. Through thoughtfully curated interview questions, I would like to see if there is more to the quantitative data and if there are possibly other factors and qualities of the food items that made them give such ratings and responses. The advantage of interviews is that I could also ask follow up questions to their rating responses and try to get the bottomline of their thought process when viewing the different foods.

Speaking of thought process, I think it would also be very helpful to go about this study from a more scientific perspective as well. I think there is potential for a neuroscience study and to understand which hormones are secreted or employed when individuals want to or do not want to try the food item. While it is not the main goal of this study, I think any scientific data found could further our knowledge and possibly help individuals who struggle with eating disorders or better understand what goes on in one's head for those who diet.

As for improvement, I think there is definitely room for it for my research study. For starters, having a bigger sample size. With more respondents, there would be a more reliable data set to support any claims. In order to persuade more individuals to be part of this study, I would try to offer an incentive or compensation of some sort. For example, if I were to conduct this study at a university again, I would speak with a professor and ask if students could be given extra credit. Another improvement would be including more food items. With a larger amount of food items for respondents to go through, I could better analyze and observe any correlations in

their responses. Moreover, with more food items, I could try picking purposely less aesthetically pleasing dishes to see if it creates any particular reaction. Similarly, I could also try picking controversial food items that many are not accustomed to and see how the data turns out, possibly very polarized.

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