

Chapter 57

My Little Joy in Life: Posting Food on Instagram

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ABSTRACT

To post food on social media has become a frequent source of fun and joy in life for many mobile users. In investigating such a common scene on Instagram among its young users, the authors of this chapter investigated the relationship between social activity, personal traits like narcissism and shyness, and uses and gratifications from posting food photos on Instagram. Uses of Instagram for posting selfies were also examined for comparison. Results showed that while posting food photos were associated with social activity, posting selfies were associated with shyness. Narcissists were more likely to involve in posting both food photos and selfies. Implications of the results in explaining the generation of visual contents on social media are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Food, as an important part of daily life, is likely to be universally welcomed by everyone. The joy from food not only comes with its taste, but with its visual appeal as well. With the development of technology in recent years, the joy from the appearance of food can be visually recorded and shared anytime, anywhere. One of the important apps for photo sharing is Instagram, which was launched in October 2010, and has become popular since then for its visual components and the hands-on creative features. Instagram is particularly popular among young adults. As of October 2018, 31% of the global Instagram users were aged 18-24, compared with 27% of the global Facebook users in the same age group (Statista, 2018). The gender distribution of young adult Instagram users aged 18-24 was more balanced than Facebook: 15% of the global Instagram users were female and 16% were male, versus 11% of the

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global Facebook users were female and 16% were male. It shows that Instagram were popular among both female and male young adults.

Among various categories of photos on Instagram, food was identified as one of the top eight popular photo categories (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). Over 30% of the users in Hu et al.'s (2014) study posted more than two photos about food in their accounts. As of November 2018, there have been more than 300 million posts using the hashtag #food on Instagram, and more than 180 million posts using the hashtag #foodporn, indicating the popularity of sharing food photos on Instagram.

Instagram's focus on visual arts and the App-embedded filters makes it a suitable and convenient platform for photo sharing. Comparing to other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, Instagram has lowered the requirements in artistic and photography skills, so almost anyone can enjoy producing attractive photos via Instagram. Verbal descriptions on how visual and gustatory attractive the food is might be difficult, but showing a photo of the food is a more convenient way to convey the same messages.

Although posting food photos has been popular for years (Hu et al., 2014), little is known about how people could gratify from posting food and why they would especially like to post food on social media. In view of the popularity of Instagram among young adults, the purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate young adults' gratifications from posting food photos (photos with food as the main theme) on Instagram, and how these gratifications are related to the use of Instagram for posting food photos. Also, how young adults' social activity and personal traits including narcissism and shyness are associated with posting food photos on Instagram is examined.

This study provides significant findings in indicating how the ubiquitous use of visual images of food for communication can satisfy young adult users. In other words, food consumption, is no longer only about nutritional needs, but the visual aspects of food can serve as a communication tool with Instagram as a platform. A number of studies have been conducted about Instagram selfie uploaders, (e.g., Al-Kandari, Melkote & Sharif, 2016; Williams & Marquez, 2015; Dhir et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016), but not much have been done studying the motives of a large amount of Instagram users who have posted food photos. This study fills the research gap by investigating how young Instagram users satisfy their needs through posting food, an important aspect of everyday life.

Past research suggested that common Instagram users who focus more on posting food photos still like to post other categories of photos as well, which is quite different from the "selfies-lovers" who prefer posting self-portraits on Instagram exclusively (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). While both food photos and selfies can be easily posted anytime, anywhere, the two types of visual contents differ greatly by their levels of self-disclosure. In view of this, we also investigate young adults' use of Instagram for posting selfies (a self-portrait photo taken by oneself, which can include an individual alone or an individual with any other persons) on Instagram to see how the differences in visual appeals lead to different Instagram use. By comparing the use of Instagram in posting food photos and selfies among narcissistic and shy individuals, this study provides important implications on the relationship between the visual contents and individual characteristics.

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