



# Celebrity chef adoption and implementation of social media, particularly pinterest: A diffusion of innovations approach

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 17 March 2016

Received in revised form 30 May 2016

Accepted 14 June 2016

Available online 4 July 2016

### Keywords:

Celebrity chefs

Diffusion of innovations

Pinterest

Social media

## ABSTRACT

Pinterest research is beginning to emerge, in part due to the importance of visually stimulating photos within hospitality and tourism. Photos are popular with many chefs for marketing, with some actively using Pinterest and other social media. Some of the world's top celebrity chefs are a growing phenomenon as influential leaders of their personal brand as well as other goods, services, and causes. This research reports on a pilot study of how celebrity chefs have adopted and implemented social media, especially Pinterest, using the Diffusion of Innovations as a theoretical framework. The study found that of the top 48 chefs, all adopted Facebook, closely followed by 47 adopting Twitter; just 17 adopted Pinterest. The chefs' social media and Pinterest implementation varied widely. This study sheds insights about social media, particularly Pinterest, extends innovation diffusion research, and serves as a base for future research of both celebrity chefs and social media.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Celebrity chefs

Celebrity chefs, high-profile mass media personalities (Giles, 2000), rarely need the qualifier *chef* as they truly are star celebrities (Abend, 2010) and entertainers (Caraher et al., 2000). Food TV is immensely popular among consumers (Adema, 2000) and entertainment is often the primary reason why consumers watch celebrity chefs on TV (Lane and Fisher, 2015). In addition to being versed in the art of cooking, celebrity chefs should be leaders in environmental and social issues (McDonald 2015). To gain a competitive advantage, such chefs actively seek positive publicity to differentiate themselves from other chefs and maintain their celebrity status (Scapp and Seitz, 1998). Without strong media attention, audience response, or distinct contributions to society and culture, celebrity chefs may lose their visibility and distinguished status as inspirations, teachers, and leaders (Babilonia, 2011).

A growing trend for some upscale restaurants is inviting guest chefs to provide out of the ordinary cuisine (Chen et al., 2016). Such chefs understand which tools and strategies may enhance

their position within a competitive marketplace (Ottenbacher and Harrington, 2009). These popular personalities foster an intimate relationship with consumers, strengthened by presenting styles, sharing their personal lives and using emerging mass media, including social media such as Facebook and Twitter (Abbots, 2015; Henderson, 2011). Pinterest, a recent social medium, is also popular with some celebrity chefs (Antonio, 2013). For example, Alton Brown created a 2016 Super Bowl 'Healthy Hacks' Pinterest board [[pinterest.com/altonbrown/healthy-hacks-for-game-day/](http://pinterest.com/altonbrown/healthy-hacks-for-game-day/)] to share game-day recipes for protein-rich snacks.

Based on a history of famous chefs, Hansen (2008) contends that the celebrity chef concept has evolved due to mass media, social media, and reality TV; there is no longer a correlation between a chef's celebrity status and cooking skills. Other critics contend that talented chefs should remain in their true workplace, hot kitchens with spatulas in their hands, and not perform under a media schedule (Bayley, 2001) and reflect on why their recipes may be less nutritious than supermarket ready-made meals (Howard et al., 2014).

Despite these criticisms, celebrity chefs' continued growth as entertainment icons, brands, and product endorsers have sparked broad calls for academic research about celebrity chefs in modern society (Abbots, 2015; Chen et al., 2016; Hansen, 2008; Henderson, 2011; Lane and Fisher, 2015; Pope et al., 2015). Yet to the authors' knowledge, no study has focused on a growing source of celebrity chef influence, social media.

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## 1.2. Social media

With an estimated 77% of Internet users worldwide predicted to use at least one social network in 2016, social networks continue to grow at an incredible rate (eMarketer, 2013). In hospitality and tourism, social media has become an important marketing strategy element (Aluri et al., 2015; Melián-González et al., 2013; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). For example, a review of 44 hospitality and tourism social media articles from 2007 to 2011 underscored the strategic importance of social media and called for, among other things, analyzing social media diffusion in hospitality and tourism (Leung et al., 2013).

Two years later, a study of embedded social media on hotel websites reported at least 70 social media articles in hospitality and tourism from 2011 to 2014 (Aluri et al., 2015). Despite the interest and growth of such studies, many focused on Facebook, Twitter, and online review sites such as Trip Advisor. Kwok and Yu (2013) called for hospitality and tourism researchers to broaden the scope by including social media tools beyond Facebook.

## 1.3. Pinterest

Pinterest, a social and visual bookmarking tool launched in 2010, is the second fastest growing social network with over 70 million users (Smith, 2015), 85% of which are female (Rowett, 2015). An image-based social network, Pinterest users 'pin' images to 'boards' that represent user-defined interest categories (Chang et al., 2014). Within a user's profile, boards resemble a collection of digital scrapbooks. Users can 'like' other's pins and link pins to web pages. Pinterest, relatively simple to adopt, is an ongoing effort to implement. Apart from a couple of hours of labor, there is no monetary cost to create a Pinterest profile and follow other profiles. Managing and marketing that profile, the implementation, could range from a few hours weekly to a full time employee.

Hospitality and tourism organizations and individuals use Pinterest to communicate with consumers. Examples of individuals and organizations with a strong, growing Pinterest presence and corresponding Pinterest followers as of May 2016 include Ree Drummond (642k), Paula Deen (277k), Disney (267k), Jamie Oliver (142k), Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts (50k), Expedia (47.2k), Southwest Airlines (21k) and Carnival Cruise Line (26k).

Pinterest users also tend to pin organizations and their respective hospitality and tourism products. That is, Pinterest users create and share website images by pinning them to their personal boards. Food/drink and travel are among the top 15 categories of pinned content (Lee, 2014).

As it expands, Pinterest seems a promising social network for a range of industries. For example TripAdvisor's Pinterest board [[pinterest.com/tripadvisorus](http://pinterest.com/tripadvisorus)]-8k pins and 111k followers as of May 2016—suggests a strong social media strategy. TripAdvisor uses 85 Pinterest boards to communicate information to a large hospitality and tourism consumer market. Recent 'Pinterest for Business' additions include brand pages with analytics, sponsored and buyable pins, and Marketing Developer Partners tools to help businesses scale their Pinterest presence (Turban et al., 2016) and revised policies to allow pinners to monetize content by using affiliate links within pins (Kmet, 2016). Pinterest's recent emergence, however, accounts for little academic research despite Pinterest's positive influence on consumer decisions (Maurer and Hinterdorfer, 2013; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014).

## 1.4. Diffusion of innovations

The Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) is a popular theory for studying communication technologies such as social media and Pinterest, as well as innovations such as celebrity chefs. A key DOI distinction

is the level of innovation diffusion, individual versus organizational. A second DOI distinction is innovation adoption versus innovation implementation. While diffusion research is clear on characteristics related to hospitality and tourism organizations' adoption of social media, the research on characteristics related to implementing such innovations is less clear (Hashim et al., 2014; Ismail et al., 2012).

Two relevant hospitality and tourism research calls are for examining the diffusion of social media (Leung et al., 2013) and broadening the scope beyond Facebook (Kwok and Yu, 2013). Further, the hospitality and tourism industry needs technology research in segments beyond hotels (O'Connor and Murphy, 2004). To expand this academic inquiry, the present study examines a highly influential group of individuals—celebrity chefs—and social media, particularly Pinterest. The paper includes a review of social media, Pinterest, celebrity chefs, and DOI as well as research questions, pilot study results, and discussion of celebrity chefs' social media adoption and implementation. The paper closes with limitations and a future research agenda of celebrity chefs and social media diffusion.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Social media

Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, provide two-way online interaction between consumers and companies. Academic researchers and business practitioners are increasingly interested in effective brand management within the emerging social network landscape (Boyd et al., 2014). In hospitality and tourism, social media sites have become an important marketing strategy element and continue to grow in importance and diversity (Hvass and Munar, 2012; Leung and Bai, 2013; Leung et al., 2013; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). Social media are also useful for marketing research, with crowd-sourced information serving as a reliable proxy for visitation to tourism and recreation areas (Wood et al., 2013).

Social media adoption statistics can be staggering. Spisak (2015) reports over two billion active users worldwide, 30% of the world, with Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest, and Instagram, respectively, the top six social media. The U.S. has 186 million social media users led by Facebook with 161 million, followed by 89 million Instagram users, 58 million Twitter users, and 51 million on Pinterest (eMarketer, 2013, 2015).

Concerning social media implementation, users engage in social networks for over 46 min each day (Sparks, 2015) and second only to Facebook, Pinterest users average 98 min per session (Ottoni et al., 2013). Seventy percent of Facebook users log in daily; 43% multiple times per day (Spisak, 2015). Social media platforms report varying days and times to interact with their users. According to Neidlinger (2015), Saturdays are best to reach Pinterest users, 2–3pm and 8–9pm are the best times to post Instagram photos, tweets after 5:00pm on weekdays are best for Twitter, and Tuesdays between 7:30am–8:30am and 5:00pm–6:00pm are best for LinkedIn posts.

Although celebrity chefs primarily use TV to represent their brand (Scholes 2011), social media provide unique opportunities for chefs to expand their presence beyond kitchen advice. For instance, Jamie Oliver used social media to start, using his own words, "a revolution" about children's school lunch food choices through his Jamie Oliver Food Foundation [[jamieoliverfoodfoundation.org](http://jamieoliverfoodfoundation.org)]. Anthony Bourdain uses Twitter and Facebook heavily to share pictures of food from around the world through what he calls 'food porn'. He claims to do all posts himself rather than rely on a staff of social media experts to post

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