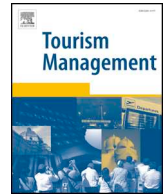




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Foodstagramming in the travel encounter

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates a new phenomenon – foodstagramming, in which tourists embark on capturing and sharing food photos – using a mixed-methods approach in three studies. Study 1 assesses how foodstagramming experiences are phenomenologically constructed in a field inquiry. Studies 2 and 3 undergo a rigorous scale development process by setting forth a foodstagramming benefit scale, which measures tourist perceived value in capturing and sharing of food photos in social media. These two studies further test its nomological network via a relationship leading from impression management to travel satisfaction through foodstagramming benefits. Results address the conundrum in the literature, which conjectures why self-expression, enrichment of dining experience, social connection, virtual community engagement, and special occasion memory underpin the foodstagramming phenomenon and how they could reap favorable travel outcomes. This research further contributes to the hospitality and tourism industry with insights on technology mediated dining and travel experiences.

1. Introduction

We have the technology that enables us to bridge the gap between our dining experiences and shared lives. (Connolly, 2015, p. 1, p. 1)

Capturing photographs of food and posting them on social networking sites has become a ubiquitous social phenomenon. This phenomenon is coined *foodstagramming* (Atanasova, 2016; Blanchette, 2013; International Business Times, 2013) which occurs when diners disseminate their food selfies through social media. According to a recent National Dining Trends Survey on food and social media in the USA (Zagat, 2016), sixty percent of diners reported that they take food photos and share them on social media (i.e., “first camera, then fork,” Murphy, 2010). In other words, diners are keen to satiate themselves with gourmet experiences first through technology-mediated visual perceptions (Spence, Okajima, Cheok, Petit, & Michel, 2016). This technology-mediated phenomenon is particularly salient during travel, as tourists continuously experience new encounters in destinations (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Urry, 1990; Yu, Anaya, Miao, Lehto, & Wong, 2018).

Gourmet dining has always been part of the travel experience and a key travel motivator (Karim & Chi, 2010; Tse & Crofts, 2005). Gastronomy tourism research has accrued a strong body of knowledge about culinary related motives and consumption processes that render tourist destination perceptions and experiences (Ji, Wong, Eves, & Scarles, 2016; Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Cognitive psychology is replete with evidence suggesting that our sensory experience could be enhanced through digital food imagery (Delwiche, 2012; Spence et al., 2016), while tourism studies have gained traction in exploring how photographs and technology impact one's travel experience (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Lo, Mc Kercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011; Wang, Xiang, & Fesenmaier, 2016; Yu et al., 2017). Yet, there exists a gap in the extant literature among these research streams, with limited understanding about the phenomenological structure and socio-psychological process of foodstagramming in the tourism setting. As a picture worth a thousand words, food photo capturing and sharing is becoming a new trend in the dining and travel encounter (Blanchette, 2013). With increasing pace of information sharing via mobile devices, more tourists are accessing and uploading visual and textual messages

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during their trips as glimpses of destinations (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Lo & McKercher, 2015; Lyu, 2016). Technology has become a travel experience generator rather than a mere mediator of such experience (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Food selfies and food porn (i.e., proliferating food pictures online) have become a lifestyle (Cao, 2016, pp. 158–159) and an addiction, as anecdotal evidence from practitioner journals report (Victor, 2015).

Despite the saliency and prevalence of foodstagramming, this social phenomenon is heavily under-studied, with little if any academic literature reporting on it to date. The scant literature calls for a need to explore the reasons why diners share food photos on social media during their trips. The current research aims to fill this literature void by undertaking three empirical studies and addressing the following research questions: (1) What are the benefits of foodstagramming in the dining and travel encounters? and (2) What are the antecedents and consequences of foodstagramming?

Drawing upon research streams on tourism photography and tourist behaviors (e.g., Chalfen, 1979; Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016; Lo & McKercher, 2015), user-generated content, social informatics (e.g., Erickson & Kellogg, 2000; Lamb & Kling, 2003), interpersonal and computer-mediated communications (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976; Walther, 2008), as well as general cognitive (Spence et al., 2016; Stebrnberg, 1996) and social psychology (Nord, 1969; Schlenker, 1980; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), this research seeks to explicate the conceptual underpinnings of foodstagramming in dining establishments through a phenomenological stance in a field inquiry, while developing a scale with psychometric properties that assess its core dimensions and nomological network through two survey studies. Because the research was conducted in China, results might manifest connotative meanings that are culturally bounded. Notwithstanding this limitation, the current research sets the foundation and agenda for foodstagramming research. It offers the genesis of a new research stream that links photography, social media usage, computer-mediated communication, restaurants, and tourism into an integrated framework of foodstagramming and travel.

2. Theoretical background

This research is grounded by prior works germane to research streams across multiple disciplines, including information technology, communications, socio-psychology, and tourism studies, as detailed below. We conceptualize foodstagramming as a process in which an individual captures food photos and posts them onto social media that specializes in visual content sharing such as Instagram and Facebook. The premise of foodstagramming entails theoretical underpinnings in explaining this social phenomenon through the lens of computer-mediated communication (CMC) to engage in social discourse and information processing, social penetration and self-presentation, interpersonal communications, virtual community engagement and affiliation building, and online photography and user-generated content in the dining and tourism contexts. Under many of these theoretical stances, human perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors are learned propositions situated within the social context that actors ascribe to (Lamb & Kling, 2003; Miller & Dollard, 1941). In this research, such social setting pertains to destinations, restaurants, and the virtual community tourists are embedded within and shaped by. In particular, the current research adheres to the social constructionism paradigm addressing the social usage of information technology (Bijker, Huges, & Pinch, 1987; Fulk, 1993), in that food selfie discourse through social media is socially laden with meaning and significance to tourists and their virtual community. Because the central focus of this research rests on travel photography and user-generated content, tourist behaviors, and technology-mediated social discourse that are manifested through social media, the following areas deserve further elaboration in the sections

below. This literature review first discusses food tourism, travel experience, and online photography; it then reviews the literature on tourist online photography and user generate content in general, as well as social informatics and computer-mediated communications that lay the foundation of foodstagramming. Finally, it develops hypotheses linking impression management, foodstagramming, and travel satisfaction.

2.1. Food tourism, tourism experiences, and online food photography

Culinary tourism is often defined as a way of experiencing other cultures through food (Long, 2004). Dining experiences of local cuisine enable tourists to appreciate the socio-cultural characteristics of a destination. From a tourist perspective, food, like other tourism products such as accommodation and transportation, is an indispensable part of a trip (Croce & Perri, 2010; Telfer & Wall, 1996). The body of literature has reported an intricate relationship between cuisine and tourism because eating activates metabolism in the brain (Spence et al., 2016) and casts positive valence to create a sense of enjoyment and satiation (Quan & Wang, 2004). From the tourism operator perspective, food is a pivotal component in destination marketing and product mix because it enhances destination image and choice due to its impact on trip satisfaction through a constellation of food-related benefits that tourists always crave (Chi, Chua, Othman, & Karim, 2013; Ji et al., 2016). As a result, tourists often find themselves having an affinity for the food they consume, associated with the destination where the food is presented (Ji, Wong, Eves, & Leong, 2018; Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

The emergence of gastronomy/culinary tourism (Croce & Perri, 2010; Long, 2004) and ubiquitous use of smartphones during travel (Wang et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2017) have given rise to greater attention given to how tourist travel motives, perceptions, and behaviors are being shaped. With the advancement of photographic devices and social media, tourists and tourism operators are taking advantage of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to share food photos online (Blanchette, 2013; Zagat, 2016). For tourism operators, food could be rendered as advertisement themes that symbolize quality of life, destination authenticity, cultural identify and status (Pan, Lee, & Tsai, 2014). By presenting photographic and textual materials through social media, operators are able “to reach, convince, attract potential tourists, and to shape tourists' experiences” (Cheng, Wong, Wearing, & McDonald, 2016, p. 416). Food photographs and food porn, on the other hand, underpin the needs of tourists for entertainment, personal identity, and social interactions (Liu, Norman, Backman, Cuneo, & Condrasky, 2012), thus creating better dining and travel experiences (Spence et al., 2016). In turn, these very needs intrinsically motivate tourists to seek out diverse food-related travel experiences through an elevated involvement level in pre-trip planning; while posting food pictures manifests a greater degree of online engagement and a means to manage one's image in the virtual world (French & Read, 2013; Lo & McKercher, 2015). The importance, functions, and social usage of online tourists' photography is further discussed in the section that follows.

2.2. User-generated content and tourist online photography

The popularity of Internet and mobile technologies, which have permeated through Web 2.0 and social media, has accelerated the prevalence of user-generated content (UGC). UGC refers to creative work that is published on publicly accessible online platforms and created without a direct link to monetary profit or commercial interest (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2007). UGC application in tourism and hospitality is germane to texts (e.g., tourist online reviews) and visual forms (e.g., travel photos and videos). Recently, UGC containing photos and pictorial information has gained

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