

How Does Food Related Content On Social Media
Affect The Ability For People To Be Creative
With Regards To Food Habits And Choices?



Baranow, Dima. "Funny Breakfast for Kids." Depositphotos.com, May 23, 2017,
<https://depositphotos.com/photo/funny-breakfast-for-child-1542556>

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Table of Contents

Research Proposal	pg. 1
Introduction	pg. 3
Philosophical Introduction	pg. 4
Research Question	pg. 8
Data Collection	pg. 8
- Demographic Profiles	pg. 8
- Interview Questions and Responses	pg. 9
Analysis	pg. 12
- Recommendations For Better Social Media Use	pg. 16
Conclusion	pg. 16
Bibliography	pg. 19
Resume	pg. 20

Research Proposal

The focus of the Essay:

I understand for this section I must provide a question; however, at this stage, I feel it would be more beneficial to provide a few questions that will guide my research towards a refined question in my final essay.

- Does social media affect people's decision-making when it comes to choosing healthy foods to eat?
- Does social media promote a positive relationship with food or a negative one?
- What aspects of social media prove to be most relevant in how they affect people's food habits and choices?

Alignment with the theme of HCOM:

The class Food For Thought explores the concept of food in many different aspects. It highlights the diversity in the ways that humans interact with food in a personal way, a consumer way, or even a competitive way in some cases. I will explore the ways in which food is seen on social media by users in numerous different contexts. There is so much information regarding food and dieting, for example, that I think it is fair to argue that it may make it difficult for people to focus on their own diet and what works for them without comparing them to others.

Purpose:

I want the purpose of this essay and research to greater my knowledge and understanding of social media and its relation to our decision-making. I would also like to better understand how

this affects human decision-making when it comes to food because food is a huge part of popular social media apps like Instagram and TikTok.

Original title:

Social media and food's role is a large part of its content.

Working Summary:

My paper will begin with an analysis of imagination through the perspective of the philosopher Immanuel Kant. This section will explore how Kant believed the imagination to be a crucial part of human cognition. A big part of his perspectives on the imagination revolves around the idea that our imagination depends on and cannot function without empirical content. Empirical content is day-to-day experiences for Kant. I would like to further analyze how this perspective may be relevant for thinking about how social media affects people and their food choices because food-related content is present on social media. Social media and technology like phones and laptops have become integral parts of almost everyone's life in some way changing the empirical content in everyone's lives. If imagination depends on empirical content, then this must imply there must be a change in people's ability to imagine due to the growing popularity of social media. This change may be for better and maybe for worse. Kant's idea of imagination also highlights that imagination is an active and creative process that we are constantly engaging with which is relevant to food because food allows people to be creative in numerous ways. The second section of my paper will apply the concepts of creative imagination and how food-related content on social media affects people's food choices and food habits.

Introduction

Food is a big part of everyone's life for an obvious reason: we eat it to survive. Next to water, it is the most essential thing humans need to survive. However, food is also a very powerful thing in other ways and can do lots of simple yet, important things like bringing people together, a way of identifying and celebrating culture, or simply just making us happy sometimes. However, food also proves to be powerful in negative ways sadly. This relationship with food can have a severe impact on other aspects of life like productivity in work, school, or arguably most importantly mental health. "Research has shown that young adults who use social media are three times as likely to suffer from depression, putting a large portion of the population at risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors" (The University Of Utah Health). For these reasons, food is a very personal thing for every individual. Everybody has a different relationship with food and this affects people's lives in profound ways. Everyone's diet is different, the time they eat is different, what they like to eat is different, and most notably everyone's body is different. All of these aspects and nuances of food habits greatly affect the way a person consumes food.

The importance and relevance of social media as an aspect of this relationship stands out due to it providing a space for people to engage with information about food in numerous ways. Separate from food, social media is a huge part of people's lives proven by a study done by The University of Maine as of 2023: "There are 4.8 billion social media users worldwide, representing 59.9% of the global population and 92.7% of all internet users. The average time spent on social media daily is 2 hours and 24 minutes" (The University Of Maine). People are spending a large chunk of their days on social media and upwards of ten hours a week on social media proving its relevance as an integral part of people's daily lives.

To introduce how social media and its correlation to food will be analyzed, Immanuel Kant's theory of imagination will provide an appropriate starting point for the possible effects of social media with regard to food-related content. *The Critique of Pure Reason* by Immanuel Kant brings to light a possible connection between Kant's idea of creative imagination (which will be further explained) and the effect social media has on its users. From simply choosing what food to buy at the grocery store, making a meal at home you have never made before, or trying a new restaurant that you have never tried before. Food allows people the freedom to try new things and be creative in decision-making processes regarding food. Sadly, however, many things can get in the way of this ability to be creative regarding food like economic status, where you live, or, in the case of this paper, possibly social media. However, the point of this paper is not to highlight the negatives of social media and people's relationships with food, but rather to observe this new virtual environment where people are spending a lot of time where many things can be seen and shared regarding food. Through gathering data and interviewing real people and how social media affects their relationship with food, the desired outcome is to present aspects of social media that may be harmful to fostering creativity regarding food and some aspects that may be positive.

Philosophical Introduction

Immanuel Kant's concept of imagination provides an idea of imagination that will add value in analyzing how food, social media, and creativity all interact with each other. Imagination, for Kant, can play different roles in the process of cognition. For that reason, its significance in regard to creativity makes it especially interesting in an analysis of social media and the effect on people's food habits it may have. Food habits often involve creative decision making which further makes this analysis relevant and worth analyzing.

When introducing Kant's idea of imagination and its relevance to creativity it is important to start with what Kant sees as the two different types of imagination: reproductive imagination and productive imagination. Reproductive imagination refers to the mind's ability to remember and reproduce past empirical experiences. An empirical experience is just a fancy way Kant refers to life experience, which involves the engagement of our senses and emotions. It involves the mind reproducing experiences, previously encountered, without changing them or combining things from those experiences. Reproductive imagination plays a crucial role in memory and the ability to recognize familiar objects or events. In this way, imagination is resourceful because it uses previous experiences to make future experiences relevant. Without memories, present and future, our separate experiences would have no relevance or context to each other. In this process, the mind brings back past experiences the way they happened, which does not involve creativity compared to productive imagination. Productive imagination, on the other hand, goes beyond remembering experiences for the sake of memory. This process allows the mind to combine these memories in a way that enables the mind to be creative and original. Productive imagination is essential for the thinking of concepts and understanding the world around us. It allows the mind to create new forms of ideas and thought by combining elements from different experiences to generate new perceptions and ideas. This active and creative cognitive process is a key aspect of Kant's idea of how knowledge is structured and how the mind engages with the external world.

To continue the introduction of Kant's concept of creative imagination, it is imperative to emphasize the necessary and inevitable relationship between imagination and empirical experience. The idea that the outside world, contributing to our empirical experiences, plays a crucial role in facilitating the creative process of imagination is essential. Empirical experience is

where imagination draws its resources and without it, the imagination would have nothing to creatively combine into new ideas. Kant's philosophical perspective, emphasizing the active and creative role of the mind in creating new ideas from empirical experiences, involves the crucial role of empirical experience itself. Imagination becomes not only a product of the external world but also a way to engage with it and better understand it. Without empirical content and experience, the mind would lack the content necessary to make new and creative ideas. Without it, the imaginative process would never be able to unfold coherently. As emphasized by Kant: "For without our empirical experience our imagination would never get to do anything suitable to its capacity, and would thus remain hidden in the interior of the mind" (Kant 101). This points out that imagination needs empirical experience because empirical experience is the very substance of what our imagination draws upon to function to its fullest potential. The empirical world, or simply the world around us, brings out the human ability to imagine.

Social media brings the relationship of empirical experience and imagination into a further and interesting analysis especially when ultimately applied to food habits. While social media has become an extremely common aspect of contemporary empirical experience, it prompts the question of whether it enhances or hinders the creative aspects of imagination. This analysis adds a practical dimension to the considerations of how social media may affect the ability of people to engage with their creative imagination in a context related to food because food makes up a large part of the content presented on social media.

Before talking about social media in regards to the imagination and food content on social media it is important to mention that social media is not exclusively or inherently a bad thing. It has many positive qualities like the accessibility to connecting with friends, sharing some art, sharing music that you made, or in this case sharing a recipe that you have, for

example. However, certain aspects of social media itself seem to encourage certain habits. Some of these habits will prove to be negative for human cognition, especially regarding creative imagination and people's food choices and habits. Some of these habits will also be positive.

Kant's concept of productive imagination involves the mind's ability to generate new and creative ideas and concepts. In the context of social media platforms like Instagram, which consist of content that gives people the ability to share their opinions, these apps actually agree with Kant's idea of imagination due to social media providing individuals with access to engaging with other people's opinions and sharing their own. Users also have the tools to share these opinions in creative ways like photography, writing, culinary creation, and more to contribute actively to the online sphere. This brings together a diverse pool of creative ideas and opinions that also further proves the correlation between social media and its possible effect on human creativity. This form of communication and the level of accessibility to this communication have never been seen before. However, even though some aspects seem to make social media a space that fosters creativity, it also introduces challenges that warrant some analysis.

The data collected serves to evaluate how people interact with social media and the food content they consume on social media, and further if they're utilizing it in a negative or positive way. The data will further emphasize how information and media about food are presented to viewers and whether this has negative or positive effects on how people engage with their creative imagination in the context of food.

Research Question

Humans are constantly being creative through engaging with their creative imagination and this extends into the realm of food. With social media being extremely relevant, due to it being a constant part of people's empirical experience, how does food content play a part in the experience for social media users? The data results highlight that food is a large part of the content on social media which prompts analysis of whether this engagement with social media provides inspiration for creativity or whether these apps take away from this ability. In what ways does social media content that involves food promote the engagement of people's creative imagination regarding food choices, food ideas, or food advice? On the other hand, what negatives does social media present?

Data Collection

Personal interviews were the main way data was collected for this project. The questions in these interviews started by evaluating people's general usage of social media: which apps they use, how much time they spend on these apps, and what they look at most on these apps. The questions then transition to a focus surrounding food and how they consume media and information about food on these social media apps. This proves to be interesting because most interviewees brought up food as an integral part of social media when simply asked about the positives and negatives of social media with no mention of food at all.

Interviewee Demographic profiles:

George Albert: a 22-year-old white male who lives in Santa Cruz. He is a student at UCSC and works part-time.

Ella Lapouz: 19-year-old Filipino American female who lives in Marina. She is a student at CSUMB and does not work.

Tessa Nafouse: a 23-year-old white female who lives in Santa Cruz. She works full-time.

Tayvaun Gilliam: 20-year-old African American male who lives in Marina. He is a student at MPC and works part-time

Jeff Preston: a 26-year-old white male who lives in Mission Viejo California. He works full-time.

Interview Questions and Responses:

Below are the questions that highlight the most relevant information regarding social media and its effects on the human ability to be creative regarding food. The similarities and differences in each interviewee's answers highlight negative and positive trends regarding people's ability to engage with their creative minds and how food content on social media may affect this ability.

Do you have social media? If yes, what apps?

George: "Yes, I have Instagram."

Ella Lapouz: "Yes, I have Instagram and Tiktok."

Tessa Nafouse: "Yes, I have Instagram."

Tayvaun: "Yes, I have Instagram and TikTok."

Jeff: "Yes, I have Instagram."

How much time do you spend on these apps per day?

George: "1 to 2 hours a day"

Ella: "2 to 3 hours per day"

Tessa: "1 to 2 hours per day"

Tayvaun: "3 to 4 hours per day.

Jeff: "1 to 2 hours per day but usually less on the weekends"

Do you wish you spent less time on social media? Why?

George: "Yes I do, because most times I go on social media I spend more time on it than I was expecting or wanted to."

Ella: "Not really, however sometimes it can get in the way of my productivity."

Tessa: “Yes, I find that I am spending more time on social media than I used to. Especially with the way social media has changed. Most of the content I look at is short videos that the app will play one after the other. It is easy to just keep scrolling and looking at videos.”

Tayvaun: “Yes, it is really easy to get sucked into social media sometimes.”

Jeff: “No, social media is mainly something I use to relax at the end of the day. Similar to watching TV or something.”

What positives does social media bring to the table for you or others?

George: “I see a lot of small businesses and restaurants promote what they have on social media. This is a positive for me and small businesses because I get to try new good food in my area and local businesses get to put their name out there for more people to see than simply posting signs around town or something. It also doesn’t cost money to post your small business on social media.”

Ella: “I enjoy learning and practicing sustainable living habits. Social media is a great way for me to see how other people practice sustainability and to apply those ideas to my own practice.”

Tessa: “I find a lot of recipes on social media and other general food-related stuff. Especially when I was a student, social media helped me a lot with making good and healthy things for dinner or lunch even when I was really busy and tired.”

Tayvaun: “I see a lot of videos on social media that teach me about healthy eating and I also see a lot of fitness influencers cause I like to work out.”

Jeff: “I watch a lot of motorcycle videos and how to fix them and stuff. I also see a lot of local restaurants on social media. I saw a taco place on Instagram and then I went to it and it was good.”

What negative effects does social media have on you or others?

George: “I feel like I use it too much sometimes and sometimes when I see food on Instagram and then go to the place the food looks a lot worse in person than on the app. People also do this with their own personal accounts trying to make their lives look more exciting or cool.”

Ella: "I think social media makes a lot of people compare themselves to others and in that way causes a lot of negative mental health issues like depression and eating disorders.”

Tessa: “Reels, which are the short videos on Instagram, make me use the app longer than I want sometimes and I definitely think it makes people addicted to it a little.”

Tayvaun: “It’s really distracting for me sometimes but it's just nice when I am tired and get home. I'll just scroll through reels and see funny videos and workout videos.”

Jeff: “It’s not something I really need and it does distract me sometimes. It’s just nice to have when you're bored.”

What format does most of the information you interact with?

George: "I probably use Instagram reels the most which are the short videos that you can just scroll through."

Ella: "When I am on Instagram I look at people's posts and reels a little bit. When I am on Tiktok it's all short videos."

Tessa: "I would say it is about 50/50 between looking at pictures and videos my friends have to post and Instagram reels."

Tayvaun: "I spend a lot of time scrolling on Tiktok which is all short videos."

Jeff: "I mostly look at pictures and videos my friends post and motorcycle brands I like but I go on reels sometimes."

How do you think this short video-style content affects the way you engage with food content?

George: "I constantly compare choices for what to eat and it's hard to choose a lot of the time because there's so many choices and there's always the next best trend. It's often shortened videos in a sensationalized way that puts an unrealistic expectation on me when making something. I think it's there to make people hungry."

Ella: "I see people who post a lot of cool healthy food content that helps me eat healthier. However, in the short videos, people exaggerate stuff sometimes because it's only a short video and they need to get your attention."

Tessa: "It definitely sensationalizes how food looks and the process of making it sometimes because of the short videos."

Tayvaun: "I get a lot of ideas about healthy eating but I see a lot of other stuff when I go on social media so I forget stuff I see a lot of the time."

Jeff: "I do it to relax so I don't really mind if it sucks me in a little bit. I definitely don't take advice from Instagram reels about what to eat and stuff. It's not exactly a reliable source all the time. Anyone can say anything really which can be a good thing, but not in this sense."

How much of the content you see on social media would you say is related to food?

George: "My whole explore page on Instagram right now is all food that people have made and a lot of my Reels are these types of videos too."

Ella: "It makes up some of the content on my social media but I see lots of other stuff, I definitely see food most times I go on social media."

Tessa: "A lot of what I look at on social media is stuff like recipes, how to cook better, or what cook equipment to use and how to take care of it."

Tayvaun: “A pretty decent amount of my feed and reels is food but it changes based on what I am into looking at at that specific time.”

Jeff: “I don’t really care about food-related posts that much unless it’s like a local restaurant but it definitely comes up anyway.”

Analysis

Many interesting trends were presented in the data collected regarding how social media may affect people's relationship with food in relation to their creative imagination. To format these trends in a structured way, the trends will be presented in sections that consist of perceived themes gathered from the data. Some presented a positive impact in regard to people's relationship with food and creative imagination while some presented a possible negative impact. When referring to social media in this analysis and conclusion, this will pertain to Instagram and TikTok because these were the main apps mentioned. “Instagram Reels” is also a term worth knowing. As defined by Instagram: “Reels are short videos you can easily create and enjoy watching on Instagram. They are a fun way to connect with your community over entertaining videos that inspire anyone to join in” (Instagram).

Theme 1: The amount of access to food-related information

A huge part of the way people interact with social media is through food content. This is proven in the Interviews. When asked simply about the perceived positive impacts of social media on themselves and others unrelated to food content, four out of the five interviewees mentioned food-related content as a positive aspect. Every person interviewed talked about or mentioned in some way that social media provides a wealth of information and easy accessibility to this information. Whether it be recipe ideas, healthier living and eating ideas, or local restaurant suggestions this promotes people's ability to engage with their creative imagination in

the context of food. Having ideas for what to make can be hard and social media provides a lot of inspiration. Especially, to provide a practical example, people who work and attend school spend a lot of their time at work, or at school, and even when at home there is also homework that needs to be done. This does not leave a lot of time for thinking about what to eat for lunch the next day before a test, for example. Having a lot of time to think about what to make is not a luxury a lot of people have and social media provides a space for quick information.

In relation to creative imagination, social media provides a huge pool of information to browse through providing people with inspiration for new recipes, new local restaurants, or advice on how to eat healthier. Social media provides a wealth of information adding to users' knowledge about food and other things they may be interested in. This aspect of people's empirical experience gives their productive imagination more content to work with when combining and creating new ideas. This not only allows and helps people to be creative with food-related habits and choices, but also allows the creative imagination to work to its fullest potential.

Theme 2: Small businesses and eating locally

Food is an integral part of social media it seems, and this benefits the user in many ways. Small businesses are a group of these users. Social media greatly benefits small restaurants, food trucks, local grocery stores, and just about anything local and food-related you can think of. It provides an opportunity for advertisement that was not previously there and arguably reaches more people. This new form of advertisement also allows the freedom of creative imagination for small businesses through the production of the advertisement itself. It also allows businesses

to connect with their customers in new ways, which is a big part of keeping people coming back to said businesses.

Another major positive effect of this aspect of social media on the creative mind is that it encourages people to get involved in their local community in different ways, which inspires creative imagination in many different ways. Going out to eat is a creative process because you have to think of what type of food you want, whether they will have the type of drinks you will like, or what kind of “vibe” you are looking for. Going out to local food establishments also pushes people into different communities which often leads people to meet others they have never met before. Meeting new people inspires hearing new perspectives, talking about things you have in common, talking about things you are interested in, etc. All things that add to people's empirical experience and ultimately add to the content that creative imagination has to draw upon. While this does not directly relate to food, the community surrounding a certain restaurant or food-related store is often just as important as the food itself

Theme 3: Short video-style content

A large part of the way people engage with social media is through short video-style content as proven in the interviews with four out of the five interviewees saying they interact with this style of content the most while on social media. While there is content on social media that provides people with food-related ideas like recipes and healthier food options, users don't seem to use social media exclusively for finding food information. Instead, they often use it as a platform for entertainment, socializing, and staying updated with trends across various topics. This highlights a theme in people's usage, while food-related content may play a role in users' social media consumption, it is just one aspect of their overall experience. It is also worth

mentioning that people don't seem to seek out this content exclusively however, they will go on social media to unwind after a long day for example, and food just so happens to be on these apps.

Theme 4: The amount of content combined with the format of social media content

The first theme points out the positive aspects of how having access to so much information can promote creative imagination regarding food in a few ways. However, there could be negative implications of this aspect that are definitely worth understanding and considering if you use social media. Having access to so much information all at once could have its downsides. If you want to make one thing for dinner and you look on social media for 10 minutes and now you've seen 50 different recipe ideas for how to make a certain dish is this really a positive? This highlights the idea that, while access to information on social media may provide people with a vast array of food-related information, the way this info is presented to the user through social media may prove to be negative. The abundance of choices and information can potentially overload people in making a simple decision. Moreover, the short video style format, like Instagram Reels, seems to promote a curated, sensationalized, or exaggerated nature of social media content. This is emphasized by two of the interviewee responses, hinting that short video-style posts relating to food often emphasize visual appeal and trendiness over practicality or nutritional value, potentially promoting unrealistic expectations or food habits. Thus, while social media offers a wealth of food-related inspiration, users should approach it critically and consciously to ensure a positive and balanced relationship with food and information consumption.

Recommendations For Social Media Use

As a further analysis, it is appropriate and important to provide recommendations for creating a positive relationship with social media that fosters creative imagination. Social media can be a tool in many different ways, however, the way a person engages with social media dictates how effective this tool is. Firstly, it is important to be aware that a main aspect of social media apps, like Instagram and TikTok is short video-style content. This format offers the opportunity to see lots of information about food in a small amount of time. However, this format also seems to keep people engaged and spending longer amounts of time on social media than they want to sometimes. “The more you look at your phone, the more it will send compelling content to keep your eyes from looking away. It’s hard to break habits of checking TikTok or Instagram and constantly refreshing to see more, but it’s important to take time away for our mental and physical health” (University Of Utah Health). With that being said, try to have a goal in mind when going on social media for information and stick to that goal. For example, if you are going on social media to find a recipe for dinner, maybe search a specific page on Instagram that only has this type of content so you won’t get sucked into unrelated content. Also, stray away from short video-style content like Instagram Reels and Tiktok when looking for information because you may often find yourself more distracted and sucked in than really looking for information. However, unrelated to food, when looking to unwind or just relax Instagram Reels and TikTok can be a great option.

Conclusion

In the vein of the introduction, food offers us so much more than simply eating to survive. It offers us the ability to engage with our creative imagination in a host of ways. The

influence of social media on people's relationship with food and the information they receive about food is ever-present and undeniable. Social Media apps like Instagram and TikTok offer both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to how these virtual spaces engage with users and their ability to use their creative imagination in regard to food choices and habits.

Social media serves as a vast bank of food-related knowledge and information with every interviewee saying they engage with food-related content in some way on a daily basis and some saying they use information they find on social media in their own lives. Through examples like finding inspiration for recipes, cooking techniques, advertisements for local restaurants, and possibly providing information for eating healthier, social media provides people with many different avenues towards engaging with food in ways that inspire creative imagination. However, although there is an abundance of food-related content on social media that provides people with a plethora of positive information, there seem to be downsides to the way this content is presented to users. The sheer amount of information can be overwhelming when it comes to decision making which can ultimately affect creativity and productivity in relation to sustaining a healthy diet or making decisions on what to eat for meals for example. The lack of reliability and the potential for sensationalized content also highlight a necessity for being cautious as a user as to what information you implement into your own life.

In conclusion, when going on social media, it is important to be conscious of the negative and positives it provides so that the most positive results can be obtained from one's social media usage. The data and analysis provide a guide and a good starting point for thinking about people's social media usage in relation to food and whether these habits inspire or hinder the ability to engage with creative imagination in the context of food-related content.

Implications and further research

For future research, it would be relevant and important to analyze the implications of social media's effects on people's habits surrounding healthy eating and dieting. Providing information to people about things like dieting requires proper education and knowledge about nutrition and what foods are good for the human body. A need for reliability when talking about this subject is essential. With that being said, social media has a slightly gray area in the field of reliability, highlighted in the data through the themes of sensationalization due to the short video style content which prompts further analysis.

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