FOOD INFLUENCERS

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WHO TELLS YOU WHAT TO EAT?
FACTORS INFLUENCING WHAT WE EAT

- “You, me and everybody else”
- Individual factors (attitudes, knowledge, preferences, hunger etc.)
- Physical context (e.g. what is available?)
- Social context (family, friends, peers)
- Society
  - Media

A SHORT HISTORY OF FOOD MEDIA

• Ancient Greeks
  • Cookbooks
• Late 19th century
  • (women’s) magazines
• 1990s
  • Explosion of TV cooking shows
• Start 21st century
  • Food explosion on digital-/social media

See:
FOOD MEDIA USE IS CROSS-MEDIA USE

- Consumers have not left traditional media like cookbooks and television behind,
- Digital media complement or reinvent some of the traditional ways in which audiences engage with food media (Kirkwood, 2018)
- Food media producers are aware of this and also use cross-media strategies.

FOOD INFLUENCERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA
WHO ARE (FOOD) INFLUENCERS?
PASSIONATE PEOPLE

- **Passionate people**
  - Focus on a specific topic, a niche
  - Their passion leads to authenticity and trust

- **‘Ordinary’ people**
  - They have ‘meaningful’ relations with their audience (more ‘authentic’)
  - Influencers are both a societal as a social factor (in the Story et al., 2002 food influences model)

FOOD EXPERTS AND FOOD GURUS

- Food experts
  - Chefs, with a degree of a cooking school/culinary institute,
  - Nutritionists with a degree in food/nutrition,
  - AND a registration/license

- Food Gurus
  - A guru is a person who some people regard as an expert or leader.
  - Can have many degrees, but no official registration/license,
  - Many claim to be nutritionists
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DIETITIAN</strong></th>
<th><strong>NUTRITIONIST</strong></th>
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| **Qualification** |  - Bachelor’s degree  
  - Completion of a Dietetic Internship  
  - Passed a national exam  
  - Maintains ongoing education credits |
| **Definition** |  - A qualified health professional who helps promote good health through proper nutritional habits |
| **Legal Status** |  - An expert on nutrition  
  - Registered with the Commission of Dietetics Registration (CDR)  
  - Licensed to practice diet and nutritional consultation |
| **Qualification** |  - None required  
  - Self-proclaimed title |
| **Definition** |  - Someone who works with food and nutritional science, aiming to prevent diseases related to nutrient deficiencies |
| **Legal Status** |  - Not legally accepted as an expert |
PERCEIVED GENDER DIFFERENCES IN FOOD EXPERTISE?

- Certain media channels, such as cookbooks are dominated by male chefs who mark their authority (Johnston et al., 2014),
- They present cooking as fun, leisurely and even their home-cooking remains far away from any domestic routine (Hollows, 2003).
- But
- “to be an expert in the kitchen, it appears that professional cooking is not needed for women; a woman is naturally capable of cooking” (Matwick & Matwick, 2017b, p. 26).
- Women earn their food expertise,
- Men claim it?

DOMINANT OR PRESTIGIOUS FOOD INFLUENCERS

- Power can come from
  - Dominance, or
  - Prestige (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001)

- Leaders can be forceful (dominant) or persuasive (prestige),
  - The first claim their status,
  - The last are being attributed status by their followers

- Prestige is the synonym of influence, but the question remains if all influencers are prestige-driven leaders?

TO BE PAID OR NOT TO BE PAID

- #sponsored, #paid
- Can decrease trust, authenticity, and number of followers (Evans et al., 2017)

FROM MICRO TO MACRO

- **Micro-celebrities**: ‘people “amping up” their popularity over the web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites’ (Senft 2008, p.25)
- Yet some influencers are all but “micro” in terms of effect (#followers);
- They are genuine/macro-level celebrities attracting up to millions of followers, but,
- With that ‘authentic’ ‘localebrity’ (girl next door) feel that gives them their authenticity (Giles, forthcoming)
- Researchers explain that many consumers increasingly look to influencers or stylish people, rather than stylish brands, for food and lifestyle advice, and others want to hear from people like them about food rather than from business entities (Bryant & Demeritt, 2012)


Giles, D. (forthcoming) new book on celebrities and influencers
MICRO OR MACRO EFFECTS?

• Focusing on the endorsement of animal-free diets familiar influencers who presented easy to understand messages were perceived as credible, trustworthy, and personally engaged in change (Friedlander & Riedy, 2018), but

• Their impact may not go beyond the micro-bubble of their online followers who already eat animal-free, and may even ignite great resistance and disbelief among meat eaters, fueling polarization processes (Buddle, Bray, & Ankeny, 2018)

Passion for food?

- NO
  - Classic food advertisements
    - Macro celebrities that accidently endorse food
      - NOT PAID
        - Intent to influence?
          - NO
            - Failed food influencer
          - YES
            - Food influencer
              - PAID (for being food influencer)
              - NOT PAID (for being food influencer)
              - Perceived influence?
                - NO
                  - Foodie
                    - "passion for food"
                    - Intent to influence?
                      - NO
                        - Failed food influencer
                      - YES
                        - Food influencer by perception only
              - NO
                - Failed food influencer
        - PAID (for being food influencer)
        - NOT PAID (for being food influencer)
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        - Classic food advertisements
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° = topic bound by official laws: division expert & guru
A = influence by prestige
B = influence driven by dominance
WHAT’S ON THEIR MENU?
• **Exclusion-diets.**
  - Today carb-free, gluten-free, dairy-free and (animal-free) vegan diets are hyped (Byrne et al., 2017).
  - Focusing on the risks of foods is more persuasive than focusing on positive outcomes (Verbeke, 2008).

• **Guaranteed short-term weight-loss**
  - Even though often the long-term effects and specific claims needs to be further studied (Navaro et al., 2017).

• **Wrapped as a ‘lifestyle’** (Johnston & Goodman, 2015), a sense of “who you are” (or at least who you can become: a better version of you).
  - A strong focus on the personal life/ experience (Abbotts, 2015).
  - This focus on transforming yourself can be very attractive to those who may not specifically look for a “diet”, but for ways to “fix themselves” (Rousseau, 2015).
  - With a focus on the bright side of life.

• **TV cooking shows** quickly learned to focus on
  • Entertainment (Collins, 2009; Ketchum, 2005; Nathanson, 2009).
  • Storytelling (Matwick & Matwick, 2014), and resulting
  • Intimacy (Abbotts 2015; Ketchum, 2005; Matwick & Matwick, 2017b).

• **Celebrity chefs** also use humor, and self-deprecation
  • to entertain,
  • construct authenticity and
  • build **solidarity** (Matwick & Matwick, 2017).

• Also **Food bloggers** focus more on their own emotions than on providing information and using logic (Clarissa, 2017).

HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES?

- A few nutritional content analyses have been performed on diets endorsed by food or TV cooking show chefs, and these also came to the conclusion that the recipes used did not meet official dietary guidelines (Howard et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2013; Ngqangashe et al., 2018a; Silva et al., 2010).

- Also foods endorsed by lesser-known yet still very influential social media users appear to be predominantly high in calories and low in nutrients (Holmberg et al., 2016), although another study came to the conclusion that foods shared on Instagram were “moderately healthy” (Sharma & De Choudhury, 2015).

- Needs more research

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS?

e.g. Klassen et al., 2018:

- Food industries, health organizations and lifestyle bloggers use different strategies in their social media posts.

- Health organizations often focus on the use of facts/statistics, and a more serious tone, referring audiences to other/extra information,

- But their posts elicit minimal reactions… in contrast to

- Lifestyle brands that focus on positive stories, building relationships with their audience, and offer information people can relate to

- The choice is ours whether we want to stick with our own strategies, or learn from those who influence us the most

FOOD INFLUENCE

- Starts with a passion for food, or a troublesome relation with food,
- With a clear enemy (forbidden food, bad scientist, corrupt industries)
- Wrapped in the story of your life,
- With a fairytale twist/ending,

- This will render new friends, many of them,
- That you all need to foster and treat as your BFF (best foodie friends),
- Until happily ever after