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Aesthetics of Food: The Role of Visual Framing Strategies for Influence Building on Instagram

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by

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Abstract

This thesis employs quantitative content analysis to investigate how social media influencers use aesthetic image design to engage followers. The study investigates the ten most-followed food influencers on Instagram in the United States. The study looks at the effectiveness of visual framing strategies, focusing on the images ($N = 120$) of influencers which have received more than 10,000 likes in 2017. Results show that food influencers prefer to post images about cooked food, without any decorations, using high contrast colors and close-up shots. Raw food images were found to be associated with cluttered composition and far away shoots, whereas cooked food images were associated with high contrast and close-up, especially the top-down camera angle. An instructive perspective emphasizes the importance of considering how food can be accommodated within the framework of a meal, and it regards taste as an approach to describing aesthetic norms. Concerning the presentation, the gestures, and the presentation of the meal, food provides a new way that helps people to think and constitute social relations. The author offers a theoretical account of food influencers' strategies to summarize how the exercise of taste marks a significant omission in our understanding of visual analysis regarding social capital and aesthetic discrimination. This study represents a step toward a more cogent and digital-focused aspect of visual framing. The results imply benefits that would accrue to companies with interesting

approaches to develop communication strategies linked to food. The effects of image-based

dietary communication provide implications for visual communication to replicate and expand

upon the successes of the influencers in the public interest. The results also have implications for

advertising and the use of social media within marketing.

Keywords: Instagram, images, social media, content analysis, visual framing, food

influencer

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The aesthetics of food consumption can be traced back to Epicureanism, an individualistic and communal philosophy that emphasizes that one's pleasure is the only thing that is valuable once we cast off the corrupting influences of superstition and society. Anything else only is valuable as it helps one obtain pleasure for oneself. Aesthetic images posted online are sources of enjoyment while the consumer was supposedly in need of education (Cappellini & Parsons, 2014). New terms such as civilization of desire and hyperconsumption from Lipovetsky (2005) are inherently connected to the capitalist matrix. And the emergence of consumer capitalism has replaced the preceding production-based economic systems. Orthorexic society refers to a phenomenon in which everyone, everywhere is constantly speaking about food (Calefato, La Fortuna, & Scelzi, 2016). Food is now the central part of defining who we are as an individual, as well as shaping our identity collectively (Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Shultz, & Stanton, 2007). Indeed, eating habits and routine remains in a tech-society regarding a highly individualized social context.

With the use of social media, food is an important part of everyday lives which is now being shared online. In other words, social media is revolutionizing the world of gastronomy and food (Allué, 2013). It produces a megaphone effect that enables a mass audience potentially available to ordinary consumers (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). To understand influence building, analyzing images posted on social media is essential to connect visual consumption to taste consumption (Bourdieu, 1984), which explains why some influencers grab the megaphone and advance their position within specific fields. Food-related contents are continually attracting the eyeballs of people in a cluttered internet environment. In posting and distributing food photos, a commensal experience is created online, and a real sense of community is fostered

through the sharing of images on social media (Bouvier, 2018). Among these platforms, Instagram is specializing in efficiently distributing visual rhetoric on a personal or global scale to its 500 million daily active users (Statista, 2018). As most of the social media is interpersonal communication on a global scale, Instagram was designed as a "quick and enjoyable way to share experiences through a series of pictures" (Collard, 2012, p. 47). It is important to consider the user-central idea regarding the function of Instagram, where the widespread sharing of photos is a vital part of the platform.

Instagram has given rise to hundreds of influencers, whose images convey visual information on their Instagram sites. The innovativeness of influencers' image posts on Instagram has some visible traits that can be coded and analyzed. In addition to the influencers, some research indicates that there is another group who enjoys observing what the influencers are posting, and more than 35% of them never upload a single picture but instead use Instagram to follow other users (Moore, 2011). The personal touches of posting food images not only add social depth to the influencer-follower relationship but also reveal some of the influencer's personality.

Overwhelming freedom provided by the post-modern consumer society accelerates the needs of online audiences to search for the guidance of "cultural specialists." Social and cultural values are reflected in food practices (Neely, Walton, & Stephens, 2014). Food images sharing is a complex event that is rich in relational, social, and cultural significance (Bouvier, 2018). As Lippmann (1922) stated, the importance of "recognizing the triangular relationship between the scene of action, the human picture of that scene, and the human response to that picture" (p. 11). It is crucial to evaluate the implication of images posted by the most popular influencers in a digital age; both individuals and organizations could gain inspirations from the study results.

Moreover, to discuss the communication strategy they used through visual framing theory in an academic approach.

Management research is often inspired by the visual framing concept, and the performative and rhetorical power of visuals in public media (Messaris & Abraham, 2001). Despite how they show food-related messages, or the good impression they choose to represent, the communication outcome of the role they play as a medium or interaction is unintentional (Holmberg, Chaplin, Hillman, & Berg, 2016). Furthermore, online interactive communication with less commercial intentions produced by influencers brings the mindset of consumers more directly to marketers. In a world that the most shared image is backed by huge corporations such as Coca Cola, smaller or newer food brands can take the route of influencer marketing to reach a bigger audience. The Internet offers adequate opportunities to help brands and individuals conduct food marketing, as websites of cable television channels and food companies are seeking innovative and efficient ways to attract viewers. In favor of gaining a better understanding of what food means to the social platform audiences, a study of the implication of how food images are presented and the visual communication strategy the influencers used is beneficial.

However, in the scholarly endeavors of research fields, especially when it comes to the integration of the corporation into visual data, the visual dimension is often understudied. In other words, working on an integrated research project within the domain of the food industry using visual framing theory has seldom been explored. Given that "due to a lack of integrative efforts, we are in danger of constantly 'reinventing knowledge' about the visual and its workings" (Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & Van Leeuwen, 2013, p. 491). First, those studies mainly focus on the verbal text (Davison & Warren, 2009). Second, prior studies primarily focused on the relations between social media and politics (Parmelee, Perkins, & Sayre, 2006), environment

(Hua, Lingling, & Guang-Xin, 2015), terrorism (Fahmy, 2010), and war (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Ojala, Pantti, & Kangas, 2017; Parry, 2010). Third, in contrast to online media like websites, previous researchers mainly analyze food communication on shared images by using tags (Sharma & Choudhury, 2015) or likes instead of how food is presented visually on Instagram. Despite the various efforts scholars have made in their empirical research, the visual field is fragmented and explorative, and this research seeks to address this gap.

The purpose of this study was to test the theory of visual framing to identify framing strategies that could increase audience engagement on social media. The research questions this paper proposed were the content posted by the top ten most-followed food on their channel's accounts, as well as the framing strategies they used to represent food posts visually attractive. By analyzing food images posted on Instagram by the top ten influencers in 2017, this study tried to understand which visual framing strategies were used most frequently and what relationship these strategies have with each other.

The author offers a theoretical account of food influencers' strategies to summarize how the exercise of taste marks a significant omission in our understanding of visual analysis regarding social capital and aesthetic discrimination. This study represents a step towards a more cogent and digital-focused aspect of visual framing. The results imply benefits that would accrue to companies with interesting approaches to developing communication strategies linked to food. The effects of image-based dietary communication provide implications for visual communication to replicate and expand upon the successes of the influencers in the public interest. The results also have implications for advertising and the use of social media within marketing.

Literature Review

We are living in a "visually saturated" culture and experiencing an "ocularcentric" movement while digital communication permits the simultaneous experience of verbal and visual data (Spencer, 2010). Various visual content is bringing about profound changes to human social systems in which meanings flow through different modes of communication. Concerning the presentation, the gestures, and the presentation of the meal, food provides a new way to help people to think rather than simply eat it. The behavior of highlighting certain facets and concealing other reality is the central tenet of the framing theory, and it is affecting the way audiences interpret and react to the message. This theory helped to explain the various independent variables selected in the study, reflecting the focus of influencers on the selection of framing strategies.

Eating and Visualization

Framing theory. Entman (1993) defined a frame as selecting "some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). In the experiment done by Kahneman and Tversky (2013), they found that the process of framing entails increasing awareness of certain issues while directing attention away from other issues.

Visuals are an effective mechanism within framing (Holiday, Lewis, & LaBaugh, 2015), as they are capable of overwhelming facts as well as obscuring issues (Wischmann, 1987). It should be noted that the existence of visual competition is pervasiveness. Scholars have used the label of "visual framing" (Messaris & Abraham's, 2001) to emphasize that the messages "are received more readily in visual form" (Rodrıguez & Dimitrova, 2011, p. 53). In the business

world, there is a contest of social meaning which is increasingly fought through the use of visual

media and rhetoric (Hill & Helmers, 2004). Corporations not only respond but also participate in

a visual discourse on the local, and even global, level. On the one hand, visual framing sheds

light on the communication management, legitimacy defense, and competitive position

reinforcement (Meyer et al., 2013).

   Visual frames. Verbal and visual are the two modes of a complex system of symbolic

signs in which they also resemble each other (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). A linear and

sequentially arranged information is the fundamental feature of verbal signs, whereas prevalence

of holistic and immediate information plays a significant role in visual signs. However, visuals

have the ability of facticity and it can prescribe much more abstract realities. Visual effects are

sometimes more convincing than text. Throughout the last century, there has been a dramatic

shift of the plethora of scholarly publications from verbal to visual in the communication and

media studies fields, especially the modern society, pays close attention to the usage of "visual

language" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 3).

   Language is not the only dominant sign system of human society (Meyer, 2008); in the

previous studies, five typical approaches were included in the visual analysis (Meyer et al.,

2013): (a) the archeological approach, (b) the practice approach, (c) the strategic approach, (d)

the dialogical approach, and (e) the documenting approach. These approaches focus

independently on two main aspects, the manifestation of culture and the process of information.

For the culture manifestation aspect, it`s meaning, relevance, and use are socially constructed by

a particular community or society. An elaborated and innovative visual design provides the

fundamental insights on the institutionalization of visual cues and a particular "global visual

language" (Machin, 2004).

Visualization may uncover new insights with easier accessible data, improved efficiency, and increased customer satisfaction (Lurie & Mason, 2007). Both the unprecedented use and the undeniable omnipresence of visuals in the individual's everyday life have contributed to an increasing awareness of the "visual mode" of discourse and meaning construction (Meyer et al., 2013). The visuals and visual discourse modes provide an ample potential with its specific performativity, as the crucial elements of "mirroring" and constructing the reality. They present themselves to the observer instantaneously, which constitutes the immediacy effect (Raab, 2008). They also persuasively transport specific normative ideas behind a veil of seemingly objective representation.

The framing effect of an image depends on its unique characteristics. It is necessary to observe an intentional style used by these influencers and to discover the uniqueness and characteristic traits of these images. This style can be perceived as strategic imagery, which refers to images that "persuade, promote, or perform strategic intentions." It also inspires a range of aesthetic, emotional, and cognitive effects to advance a vision of a brand's identity (Schroeder, 2013). Visual framing is the inspiration for organization and management research, enabled and supported by the performative and rhetorical power of visuals in the public media. Image is neither a transmitter of the information nor the means of communication; it becomes an elementary mode which promotes the process of constructing, maintaining, and transforming the meaning (Raab, 2008).

Eating Rituals on Instagram

Scholars concluded some myths related to people and food helped to explain the structured meanings and categories people used to make sense of their lives (Levy, 1981). The behavior of eating not only mirrors but constitutes social relations. The Internet has a unique

ability to create memetic images that can travel freely across linguistic and cultural borders

(Clancy & Clancy, 2016, p. 279). Images seen on the Internet are readily remembered because

they give the first impression of a story, and they are less intrusive than words and require less

cognition to interpret them. The purpose of visuals is to capture the essence of an event

graphically. By taking advantages of various rhetorical tools like symbols, metaphors, and

depictions, visuals can operate as a framing device (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). Specifically,

"food is full of symbolism and meaning" (Bouvier, 2018, p. 158), individuals behind the posts

may express their personality and identity with their audiences.

    During the twentieth century, food marketing has shifted from nutrition appeals to more

hedonic taste appeals, an emphasis that reflects a general trend in advertising (Belk & Richard,

1985). Taste is influenced by the mind, and not only direct biological input (Allen, Gupta, &

Monnier, 2008). Social perspectives regard taste as an approach to describing aesthetic norms.

We pay less attention to "ordinary food" (Marshall, 2005, p. 79) because we are obsessed with a

ritual at the expense of convention. From an instructive perspective, it is important to consider

how food can be accommodated within the framework of a meal rather than to consider simply

what to eat. Nowadays, Instagram is not merely a tool but rather an application or artifact which

needs to be regarded as rhetoric (Bardzell, 2009). It has "an unintrusive capability for framing

and presenting images in a rhetorical style which has not yet been explored" (Holiday et al.,

2015, p. 5). As one of the most popular social media platforms, Instagram has the potential for

industry development and research study by using image analysis.

    Social media provides opportunities for individuals to interact on diverse media

platforms, shortening the distance and time spent in the dissemination of different images.

Considering the user-central idea regarding the Instagram's function was needed, where users

consciously produce images with ideas of reception and exchange within the social media

network (McCune, 2011). McCune also found that one-fourth of Instagram users identify

themselves as mediation, which can possess a personal worldview by photography. Viewers read

images as proof (Dauber, 2001), and the images displayed on Instagram can be strongly

associated with the novel potential in visual representation and identity.

Individualistic Eating and Collective Foodism

Traditional communication refers to an intimate connection among peoples like friends,

colleagues, neighbors, and so forth. Online influencers have played a decisive role in creating

opinion; food communication has been affected by the shift from traditional one-way media to

two-way digital profile (Allué, 2013). Messages and information delivered from trusted sources

have a profound effect on what we allow to influence our behaviors. The individual's influencing

degree is oriented towards how many connections it has, aside from community and group;

influencers in various media platforms have personal influence over others, making them an

opinion leader (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

Calefato, La Fortuna, and Scelzi (2016) found that foodism is a social phenomenon, it

includes both an individual practice meant to be self-expression and a new art form. Accelerated

by the viral use of photography through social networks, foodism originates from the new media

and provide its semiotics and socio-semiotics meanings. "Food preparation and consumption is

not only a matter of gathering and having fun but a strong, deep-rooted way of expressing,

communicating, and renewing profound values and beliefs among family members" (Finol &

Pérez, 2016, p. 271). What is done before, during, and after cooking is beneficial to the semiotics

of food, same to food consumption. Poor, Duhachek, and Krishnan (2013) further found that

tastes perception increased when the audiences saw consummatory images of unhealthy foods. Cooked foods were often associated with unhealthy compared to raw foods.

A research study confirms that 13.4% of U.S. adults online create 80% of the content that influences people, and 6.2% of these web users are responsible for 80% of social media influence (Mohr, 2014). These users are being regarded as "A new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media embody social media influencers (SMIs)" (Freberg, 2011, p. 90). Hence, it is necessary to investigate the image content they generate in a certain area and how they attract the attention of their audiences. The consumer becomes a co-producer who is actively involved in the process of production that is not passive anymore. As a typical group represents the Web Society, Influencers are linked together by a collective way of communicating in which they are reflecting the desire of a large community. Combing the interactive dialogue established by Instagram and visual parts of the pictures of food posted by influencers, researchers can decrypt the message from their image posts to analyze how influencers generate "the sharing economy" that applies to restaurants and goods for redistribution optimization (Piergiorgio, 2014).

The online visuals are getting unprecedented access for transmission based on the Internet industry. Previous studies found that the timeframe for agenda-setting effects can be as little as one to seven days in terms of online media relating to issues of high personal salience (Roberts, Wanta, & Dzwo, 2002), whereas the standard timeframe ranges anywhere from four weeks to two months in the offline cases (Salwen, 1988). On the other hand, social media content that goes viral has the potential to change public discourse; wartime imagery complicates public deliberation for their ambiguous authorship (Smith & McDonald, 2011). For those gourmet

images with high-likes rate, the attributes of influencer as a potential framing strategy were also considered in this study.

In the process of objectifying social arrangements, the visual representation can highlight logical conjunction, accurate and detailed depiction through the absence of prediction (Meyer et al., 2013). It also has been regarded as a powerful instrument that "ignite the process of knowledge fabrication" (Quattrone, 2009, p. 89). Thematically, the visual representation can recall complex systems of knowledge through a minimal sign and move to the design of the business-society interface. Mandel and Johnson (2002), moreover, show that visual aspects can prime information that leads to changes in choice and decision making on the part of recipients, such as color and texture. These peripheral elements may activate the audiences' preference to accept the visual frame without question (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

Parmelee, Perkins, and Sayre (2006) used framing theory to study the college student group, to investigate how they react to the political ads in the presidential race voting campaign. They found that "political advertising failed to connect with young voters because the issues that spoke to participants were not discussed from the perspective of young voters" (p. 23). This study is a good example, which emphasizes the significance of real-life experiences as well as popular culture. The food industry is the inevitable realm when we connect with daily lives, especially during a period when our life is transformed into a hyper-reality. Additionally, the young adult is a fluid boundary; including references to popular culture, which are relevant to them, can increase the salience of advertisement.

Alternatively, Bouvier (2018) also found that the food image elicits an exchange beyond the visual and usually receives the other's intense responses. This is because it is based on a sensory experience that they recall and touch people's tactile experiences of them. The Instagram

influencers are from a variety of people who creates an imagined community; they are producing a visual experience that performs an aspect of identity. He concluded that the food images "may only reinforce hegemonic, normative values and communities and become a space for exclusivity and wealth" (p. 165), but people still long for something tangible. Consequently, sharing images online resulted in ostentation of status. "Visual analyses should move beyond the positive versus negative index measures and investigate more specific and nuanced character frame building dimensions. The goal is to identify enduring character frames and examine the "visual manifestations of these frames" in food posts (Jerit, 2009, p. 101).

Instagram is the reflection of real life, a database version of day-to-day lives. The communication way and shared images reveal much about oneself. With the function of visuals, it can be used to realize the meaning of our culture and pass on social knowledge within communities (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). In sum, this study is to put food consumption into today's social media context and consider it in light of conventional eating. It is also to fill the gap in the existing scholarship related to how food influencers employ visual framing strategies to post images on social media. By investigating commonalities and discovering congruency of framing strategies of the influencers, the results of the study show how a new digital group of influencers with love and passion for food presented their work on Instagram.

Research Questions

Based on the related studies introduced above, the questions thus become:

RQ1: What do the top ten most-followed food channel Instagram influencers post on their accounts?

RQ2: What framing strategies are used to visually represent food posts?

Method

As a research technique for the systematic study of communication, content analysis views data such as images, text, and expressions that are created to be seen and interpreted for their meanings (Krippendorff, 2012). This method has been used in prior visual studies (Gevorgyan, 2010; Parmelee et al., 2006) to examine image differences in a specific group`s visual representations. Both quantitative (Cmeciu, Cmeciu, & Patrut, 2014) and qualitative (Duncan, 1990) methods have been engaged in prior studies to determine visual aspects of photographs that might alter viewer perceptions of the individuals or the groups. Riff, Lacy, and Fico (2014) suggested that quantitative content analysis was defined as "the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationship involving those categories using statistical methods" (p. 3). They stated that quantitative content analysis is a logical assessment and information-gathering technique, which assists researchers in illuminating attributes in communication content validly and reliably.

The selected method was appropriate for this study, which could be explained from three aspects. First, this method is a widely used technique in previous studies examining similar research questions. It consists of a coding scheme and detailed instructions related to the categories of analysis. The attributes defined for this study were manifest content, and they were easy to identify from the data with a clear explanation. Using this method combined with Frequency-test and Chi Square-test, it was comparatively precise to get the answer to research questions. Second, the ranking data resource was reliable, and the framing categories are well-designed according to the real state of the images. Third, images derived from social media and the Internet are easily accessible.

Tufte (1997) posits that more formal and sophisticated forms of visualizations will assist

in making sense of patterns within data, in references to an analysis of data in the form of tables, graphs, diagrams, and networks. This study used a quantitative content analysis as it pertains to digital color photographs that appear in the online Instagram site. Moreover, in the public realm, images derived from social media and the Internet are not password protected and easy to access (Hookway, 2008). Drawing from a representative sample of images, this research uses physical attributes of both the influencers and the food to identify differences in visual content. Thus, a quantitative content analysis with coding categories related to the research questions is appropriate to determine statistical patterns in visual photographic portrayal of influencers on Instagram.

A codebook was developed for framing strategy analysis of food images; the coding categories are based on the Duncan (1990) study, which focused on facial expression, body proximity, and appearance of athletes with other athletes operationalized for the content analysis approach. Duncan offers a visual analysis via contextual readings of visual photographic imagery, which will be the partial basis of the coding categories for this study. Duncan created a set of categories, including camera angles, physical appearance, body positions, and emotional displays that were used to emphasize women's sexual differences. By switching the subject from athletes to influencers and food, this study is also adding some new categories to test the efficacy of these patterns. The influencers of food channel on Instagram are different. Thus, their image content is more interpretative.

Images were analyzed in 13 nominal categories (see Table A1). Before the content analysis was started, necessary explanations for the standard categories are needed. Most of the categories are easy to understand, so the following are the debatable criteria used to operationalize the variables:

- Image composition referred to the number of foods in the post that how many foods the picture contained, the intensity of the food was analyzed. The focus of this study is on the food itself, some of the images contained multiple foods, but the use of background blur function resulted in its classification as a clean composition.

- Proximity to food means the distance between the camera and the food, the texture of food was clearly visible. Having the food shot from far-away is considered as a high proximity image (away from the camera). A far-away shot should not be confused with the quantity of food on the plate; this requires detailed explanation because the inter-coder had mistakenly regarded the image with many foods as a symbol of a far-away shot. Another criterion for judging the proximity was that close-up shots usually have apparent post-editing traces such as crop.

- Decoration referred to tableware or other props that appeared in the post. Neither a complex environment background nor food containers were counted as decoration. For example, some photos use the restaurant as a shooting scene. Among the numerous posts, the one with the highest frequency is a knife or fork that does not use for food. When the characters in the picture are eating, the tableware was not considered as a decoration.

Coding categories for this study are presented in Table A1 along with their theoretical backing.

Data Collection

The Instagram accounts for this study were selected based on a formal ranking by Statista, which is an online statistic, market research, and business intelligence portal that

provides access to data from market and opinion research institutions. Statista presented the

most-followed food influencers on Instagram in the United States as of January 2018 (Statista,

2018). Based on the reliable external assessment data, this study used content analysis to

investigate how the different categories of visual framing mutually or independently contribute

to the popularity of these top ten food influencers.

Using the food-related images posted by these food influencers from January 1, 2017 to

December 31, 2017, and considering the popularity of the image, this study only analyzed

images that received more than 10,000 "likes" on the influencer`s account. The 10 participants

included both male (20%) and female (70%), one of the accounts did not have explicit gender

implications for the holder. Images were randomly selected in each influencer's Instagram, one

image per month, obtaining a total of $N = 120$ posts.

Reliability

In order to ensure the reliability of the codebook used in the content analysis, another

coder was trained by the researcher to analyze 10% of the image posts. The intercoder and

primary researcher reached an agreement and decided on a final set of rules after results

comparison. Acceptable levels of inter-coder reliability via Krippendorff's alpha were achieved

and ranged from 0.86 to 1.0 for each variable tested.

Data Analysis

All the descriptive categories (see Table A1) were coded in Excel spreadsheet before

importing into IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software. First, the frequencies

for each variable were computed to identify missing information and patterns in the data. A

complete breakdown of descriptive variables of each influencer can be found in Figure A2. To

test the relationship between these variables, a Chi-square test was run on the combined data set.

The Chi-square test of relationship is often used to define how many participants fall into a

specific category, based on simple frequency data (Wilson & Joye, 2016).

Results

Summary

The categories were content-related and showed different aspects of posts. I concluded

the attributes after observing most of the images and divided them into two parts: influencers and

food, deleting some unnecessary categories to reduce the interference caused by too many

independent variables. For example, discarding detailed descriptions of food decorations.

Additionally, some minor adjustments and improvements were made to the image's attributes

based on individual framing techniques to meet the actual condition of images and set a proper

coding standard.

Cooked food images serve as a justification agent for real consumers, "thereby reducing

the conflict associated with the subsequent indulgent consumption experience and increasing

taste perceptions" (Duhachek & Krishnan, 2013, p. 124). Most posts did not include excessive

character elements such as attire, facial expression, or proximity to influencers. Random

placement and casual layout are more of a reflection of the influencer's own leisure lifestyle;

strategy also reflects Influencers' social network identity construction.

If we take "the desire for the sensory experience of a meal" into consideration (Bouvier,

2018, p. 168), the ordinary lifestyle is usually more casual and rarely well-organized. Hence, the

results reflect the connection of similar communities where people have homogeneous

characteristics and habits (see Figure A2). Therefore, the top ten most-followed food channel

Instagram influencers' posts tended to have some high-frequency attributes, including the food

without influencers or decorations, cooked food presented with high contrast color and placed randomly with a close-up shot.

Furthermore, the data inferred that the framing strategies that influencers used could be divided into two categories of cooked food and raw food. Cooked food images were associated with high contrast and close-up, especially the top-down camera angle, and raw food images were associated with cluttered composition and far away shots. Influencers also preferred the shooting angle from top-down to depict the whole image and emphasized the entirety.

RQ1: What do the top ten most-followed food channel Instagram influencers post on their accounts?

Research question 1 examined the most liked content on the top ten influencers' accounts and found that the frequency of food-only images ($n = 106$; 88.3%) to be higher than those with influencers images ($n = 14$; 11.7%). The majority of posts included cooked food ($n = 92$; 76.7%) compared to raw ($n = 28$; 23.3%). The depiction of images showed the frequency of food without decoration ($n = 85$; 70.8%) was higher than that with decoration ($n = 34$; 28.3%), these posts rarely add any decoration such as tableware.

From a visual and aesthetic point of view, symmetry or neat alignment may have advantages. However, the data showed the frequency of food placement to be random ($n = 88$; 73.3%) compared to aligned ($n = 32$; 26.7%). The angle of the camera was more scattered, split into from top-down (59.2%), from the front (27.5%), and from the side (13.3%). Meanwhile, frequency tests on the food composition showed a slightly lower percentage of clean composition (41.7%) than cluttered composition (58.3%), the overall composition of the image did not have a great impact on audience preferences.

The results revealed that the proximity of food as close-up (n = 79; 65.8%) was higher than an away-shot (*n* = 41; 34.2%), emphasis and magnification on details showed how visually appealing a meal is, as well as created a sense of tangibility. Similarly, the color of the image as high contrast (*n* = 73; 60.8%) was higher than low contrast (*n* = 47; 39.2%), which might emphasize a heightened emotional experience when observing the image.

RQ2: What framing strategies are used to visually represent food posts?

Research question 2 referred to the relationship between different visual strategies and the Chi-square test of independence showed a significant relationship between food condition and image color, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 120) = 9.489, p < .01. Cooked food (*n* = 49; 67.1%) had a higher contrast compared to raw food (*n* = 24; 32.9%). A significant relationship was also found between food condition and proximity, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 120) = 14.729, p < .01, where more images of cooked food (*n* = 69; 87.3%) were close to the camera compared to raw food (*n* = 10; 12.7%). The difference between food condition and placement was significant, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 120) = .052, p < .01, found that more random placement (*n* = 67; 72.8%) are cooked food compared to aligned (*n* = 25; 27.2%). A significant relationship between food condition and food composition, $\chi 2$ (1, N = 120) = 11.265, p < .01, found that cluttered composition (*n* = 24; 85.7%) included more raw food compared to clean composition (*n* = 4; 14.3%), the unprocessed nature of raw food maintained its consistency with the cluttered composition (see Table 1).

Table 1

Chi-square Test of Food Condition

	Food Condition		N (%)
	Cooked	Raw	χ2, p
Image color (High contrast)	49 (67.1%)	24 (32.9%)	9.489, *p* < .01
Proximity to food (Close to the camera)	69 (87.3%)	10 (12.7%)	14.729, *p* < .01
Food placement			.052, *p* < .01
Random	67 (72.8%)		
Aligned	25 (27.2%)		
Image Composition			11.265, *p* < .01
Cluttered		24 (85.7%)	
Clean		4 (14.3%)	

A significant relationship between image color and camera angle, χ2 (2, *N* = 120) = 9.165, *p* < .01, showed images taken from top-down (*n* = 50; 68.5%) had higher contrast compared to from frontal (*n* = 18; 24.7%) and side (*n* = 5; 6.8%). A significant relationship between food proximity and food composition, χ2 (1, *N* = 120) = 15.498, *p* < .01, found that cluttered composition (*n* = 34; 82.9%) included far-away shot compared to clean composition (*n* = 7; 17.1%), cluttered image needs to be shot from a distance to get a panoramic effect. However, the difference between food condition and decoration was not significant, χ2 (1, *N* =

120) = 2.149, p = .143. The difference between food proximity and camera angle was not

significant, $\chi2$ (1, N = 120) = 5.018, p = .081.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze Instagram influencers` framing strategies based

on the visual framing theory. More specifically, it considered how this theory could be used to

understand practical framing strategies. Framing analysis has largely been used to study how the

news media present political and social movement, whereas this study focuses on the individual-

level framing. Scholars have described the online consumptions of individuals, for example,

> Because modern society is characterized by a process of deregulation
>
> of social structures and increasing individuality, consumption becomes a key instrument
>
> through which individuals can express their identity. This incoherent and fragmented
>
> representation is largely a result of a post-modern society wherein individuals create their
>
> consumption style by selecting ingredients, recipes and advice for their consumption
>
> practices. (Cappellini & Parsons, 2014, p. 75)

Social media such as Instagram is increasing our passion for consuming, and it might as

well disorient the consumer. Allué (2013) stated the role of influencers "in the food sector,

gastronomic bloggers are key influencers and represent an interesting way of developing

communication strategies linked to food" (p. 313). Thus, the results of this study showed how

influencers were framing and presenting images in a rhetorical style on Instagram, and how the

food "messages" are received more readily in visual form (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

The more that is known about the efficacy of the framing strategies used by influencers

that produce appealing content, the more potential there is for future markets and visual

communication to replicate and expand upon their successes in the public interest. This study

found what food influencers have posted on Instagram and what framing strategies are used. The first research question showed a main theme of the posts, indicated the high-frequency related attributes of images. By highlighting certain facets including cooked food condition, food-only images, posts without decoration, high contrast color, close to the camera and random placement, the study discovered some hidden traits of the top ten food influencers` images.

Specifically, the results showed that most of the images focused on the food itself, instead of the influencers. The decorations such as kitchen utensils were rarely included in the images. The images that included food only than posts showing mixed visuals, such as including the influencers or their families. There was a clear preference exhibited by influencers in food preparation and placement to ensure successful visual framing. For example, many of the posts featured cooked food compared to raw food, random placement was more popular than aligned. The results confirmed Poor et al.'s (2013) study, which showed that the taste perceptions in favor of food images increase when the consumer is exposed to unhealthy foods. An unhealthy (cooked) food image acts as a justification agent that can be also regarded as "social proof of the appropriateness and acceptability of indulgent consumption" (p. 124). Clear visual framing can be used to make unhealthy food attractive, hence, its use by the fast food industry. Shooting techniques for food were also considered, as many photos highlighted the characteristics of close-up shooting and emphasized the details in high contrast colors. However, far-away shot and low color contrast images appeared less frequently in the data sample.

In addition, according to the different attributes of the food being shot, this study analyzed the relationship between those variables and the degree of how they were connected with each other. Based on the food condition, raw food was associated with cluttered composition and far-away shot (proximity), whereas cooked food was more linked to high

contrast and close to the camera. The results of this study are partially consistent with Mandel and Johnson (2002), and Rodriguez and Dimitrova's (2011) findings which showed that the visual aspects can "prime" information and make use of peripheral elements including color and texture, to activate the audience's preference to accept the visual frame directly.

My findings partially confirmed existing research on visually attractive images and viewers' satisfaction with corresponding images, especially how the influencers channeled information through social media with framing techniques. Considering how many connections these influencers have in terms of individual influencing degree, image posts reflect their efforts to establish connections with potential audiences. As Smith and McDonald (2011) stated, imagery complicates public deliberation due to their ambiguous authorship. Hence, this study paid close attention to the attributes of both influencers and food in gourmet images. The influencers were missing in most of the images, which is also the main reason why the research results did not focus on the analysis of the influencers. Compared to other categories, food influencers tended to highlight the food itself, especially the detailed depiction of images with visual representation.

This study partially supports Bouvier`s (2018) study that showed that food images based on a sensory experience could be recalled and touch people's tactile experiences. The interaction between real-life meal gathering and social media creates a combined type of commensal experience. Despite considering the hidden culture behind these influencers` demographic background, the food industry is an inevitable realm when we connect our society with daily lives. And images "offered the viewers a path to self-improvement and affirmation of their social status" (Fell, 2017, p. 1289).

However, this study contradicts some of the findings of Bouvier (2018), who concluded that while the food images reinforce hegemonic, exclusivity and wealth, people still long for something tangible. Consequently, sharing food images online could result in ostentation of status. The focuses of different influencers might be diverse. They are from a variety of people with a unique background. Keeping continuity of their posts weigh more than presenting the privilege or status of the influencers themselves. They are producing a visual experience that performs an aspect of identity on social media, the construction of identity has a non-negligible role in the long-term development of the Instagram accounts.

In addition to several potentially fruitful avenues for future online markets, a potential advertising market arises with the growth of new influencers who develop the eye-catching and attractive images. Finol and Pérez (2016) found that consumption can transform an object into symbols, and it can be regarded as the new process of communication. Beauty, fitness, and other fields first entered the realm of social media marketing, and the content output of food influencers also have the potential to transit to visual advertising. Food's connotative value is more determinant and influential than its use value (Baudrillard, 1974), particularly when food that is shown and shared on new media platforms.

An attractive image can improve a message's effectiveness and sell a product; marketers can strengthen brand relationships by providing high-quality visual content to maintain their unique positioning in social media (Pentina, Guilloux, & Micu, 2018). The influencers generate positive and creative behavior through the framing techniques, and the food is the interface to create a "low effort, high demand" communication behavior (p. 55). The visual strategies discovered in this study show the focus and preference of influencers in framing from multiple angles, which also reflects the relationship between each attribute to some extent, thereby

enhancing the audience's degree of likes for posts. Images as carriers, account operators as subjects, flexible use of strategy are the focus of current practice. How the influencers interact with their followers with visual framing theory might support corporations and organizations to maximize their marketing profit with a limited budget, while managing reputation and identity in the long run.

However, the complexity of the relationship between marketing and Internet decides how companies are "not able to deploy but a single strategy for social media marketing" (Alves, Fernandes, & Raposo, 2016, p. 1029). Individual characteristics such as framing techniques end up affecting the approaches through which audiences react to these strategies. Moreover, product characteristics such as hedonistic and function appeals are also influencing the social media marketing strategies. Thus, further studies need to implement a more integrated analysis with the help of a complementary database and a qualitative method approach (Holt, 1995). For example, from different angles consumers consume, including experience (reactions to objects), integration (how consumers acquire and manipulate consumer meanings, facilitating the use of the symbolic object), classification (how meaningful objects classify consumers), and play (putting them together to socialize). Overall, paying closer attention to the relationship between food and communication to offer an interdisciplinary and international perspective, and the role of gastronomic culture in forming the identities on personal, national, and global levels (Fell, 2017).

The study also contributes to the scholarship on visual framing studies within the domain of the food industry through the development of a new codebook. Results provided a framework for establishing the importance as well as comparing the results with other scholarly findings. From the aspect of food influencers, this paper analyzed the visually attractive techniques and

strategies of framing on the social media platform, giving future research an innovative view of discovering the value and meaning of the online images.

Limitations

This study is limited by several factors. First, framing strategy was divided into two categories, including the influencers and the food. This classification may ignore some of the hidden framing attributes in the images. Second, post editing options such as filters and crops are not considered because their effects were sometimes difficult to distinguish with the naked eye. Therefore, future research can examine the framing strategies of images specifically and consider both content and information appeal of the images on the social media platforms. Third, the current study only examines the image itself. The audience's response and preferences should be given enough attention and be investigated thoroughly, such as comments, interactions, and relationship with influencers. Despite the perception of image content, emotional motivation leaves room for future research.

Applying a quantitative content analysis method with the total sample size for 120 images is not necessarily generalizable to be a larger phenomenon. Despite these limitations, this study demonstrated the framing strategies of the ten influencers' posts.

Future Research Directions

This study contributes to existing knowledge with image analysis on the Instagram platform. Additional research can also combine more theories to analyze the online interaction psychology between influencers and audiences and the audience reactions under different relationships. This study provides some inspiration for media operators. Influencers can take advantage of both the controllability of message and the unique insights of the content to design the posts on their social accounts. In the food industry, the future research on the media effects

can also be supported by content analysis. Future research should continue to explore the effects of image-based dietary communication and the mechanism of emotional communication from the perspective of the recipient.

"The differentiation of content analysis is usually limited to classifying it as primarily a qualitative versus quantitative research method" (Canella, 2016). Content analysis is useful and readily understandable, typically in combination with other research methods such as an in-depth interview. In the direction of qualitative analysis, future research can be extended to in-depth interviews with influencers, paying attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text. Meanwhile, the codebook summarized in this study can be used as a reference for future visual framing research. The coding categories are replicable, and this Instagram content analysis allows future effects studies "to be firmly rooted in a content analysis of such messages in UGC Web sites and social media" (Zhang, Baker, Pember & Bissell, 2017, p. 45).

Social media does not dilute the way we live. It provides us with new approaches to interacting with people. It enhances our ability to search information and extends the scope of our communication. With the rapid changes in the media landscape and the emergence of new platforms, the Influencers industry may undergo even greater changes. When the hot trend becomes too mainstream, it may lose the luster of early pioneers. But for now, this fairly new study could help companies and influencers craft campaigns that have favorable effects on consumer perceptions and behavior, the potential is rich for framing images and formats for these vehicles of the future.

Conclusion

This study revealed the process where the natural becomes the cooked is a type of socialization of the human consumer. Results shows that food influencers prefer to post images

about cooked food, without any decorations, using high contrast colors and close-up shots. Raw

food images were found to be associated with cluttered composition and far-away shots, whereas

cooked food images were associated with high contrast and close-up, especially the top-down

camera angle.

Claude Lévi-Strauss maintains that man cannot have access to a physical world without

the mediation of the cognitive structure. Such as the savage mind is an improvisation based on

available materials and tools (Lévi-Strauss, 2010). A basic binary pair from this structure are

nature and culture, which are also perceived as emotional-instinctual and intellectual. Move from

the first stage to the second stage, the natural categories such as cooked and raw provide the

basis for an explanation of cultural categories. Then, from the conventional subject of "the cook"

to the influencers in the digital world, social media becomes a type of cultural agent that links the

consumer and the food. Fonseca (2005) also emphasized many of the experiential and

imaginative ways food can come together with buildings and ambiance. They are "aestheticizing

and commodifying traditional meals" via the construction of new cultural representations and

spectacle, anesthetization "into gourmet food" (p. 106).

Food continuously crosses the border of the categories of nature and culture. For

example, sushi from Japanese cuisine, roasted meat of a native American, and Roquefort cheese

from France. Those foods either involve minimum transformation or less human intervention.

Visual framing was shown to have multi-dimensions that emerged from the analysis of image

samples. The transformative level of food reflects social status, and it is closer to culture and

prestige. New terms such as "civilization of desire" and "hyper consumption" from Lipovetsky

(2005) are inherently connected to the capitalist matrix. And the emergence of consumer

capitalism has replaced the foregoing production-based economic systems. Consumers become co-producer in the process of food consumption.

Various visual content is bringing about profound changes to human social systems. In the era of social media, this marks a significant omission in our understanding of visual analysis regarding consumer behavior. This study represents a step toward a more cogent and digital-focused aspect of visual framing. Framing the visual as a feature of the attention economy has shifted the unconscious observation to an insightful explanation for how digital instrument positions the social media users to view and post content in traceable ways (Zulli, 2018). Driven by attention economy, image posts on Instagram encourage capital-seeking behavior of influencers, which in turn brings them financial and social success, not to mention the possibility that any user can strategic item placement and capitalize on selfies. The results imply benefits would accrue to companies with interesting approaches to develop communication strategies linked to food. The effects of image-based dietary communication provide implications for visual communication to replicate and expand upon the successes of the influencers in the public interest. The results also have implications for advertising and the use of social media within marketing.

Overall, food meanings and imagery were co-opted. As an aesthetic subject, consumer integrates aesthetics into everyday life. As a new type of communication and marketing tool, the influence of social media images on contemporary society is profound and enduring.

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Appendix A

Table and Figures

Table 1

Coding Categories and Theoretical Backings

Variables	Categories	Type, Related H		Coding
Influencer gender (if influencer was present in the image)	Female/male/not appeared	NA	Descriptive category and additional analysis category.	1 = female 2 = male 0 = N/A
Type of attire (if influencer was present in the image)	Uniform/casual/ sexual	IV		1 = uniform 2 = casual 3 = sexual 0 = N/A
Contingent category: (if influencer was present in the image) and If with others, who?	Family/fellow/brand	IV	Descriptive category	1 = family 2 = fellow 3 = brand 0 = N/A
Facial expression	Smiling/concentrated	IV	Descriptive category	1 = Smiling 2 = concentrated 0 = N/A

Proximity to influencers	Close to/away from the influencer	IV	Descriptive category	1 = close to 2 = away from 0 = N/A
Condition of the Food	Raw/cooked	IV	Descriptive category	1 = raw 2 = cooked 0 = N/A
Food placement	Align/random	IV	Descriptive category	1 = align 2 = random 0 = N/A
Proximity to food	Close to/away from the food	IV	Descriptive category	1 = close to 2 = away from 0 = N/A
Photo's color	High contrast/low contrast	IV	Descriptive category	1 = high contrast 2 = low contrast 0 = N/A
Decorations	Yes/no	IV	Descriptive category	1 = yes 2 = no 0 = N/A
Contingent category: Type of decorations	Kitchenware/other	IV	Descriptive category	1 = kitchenware 2 = other 0 = N/A
Image composition	Clean/cluttered	IV	Descriptive category	1 = clean 2 = cluttered

				0 = N/A
Camera angle	Above/front/side	IV	Descriptive category	1 = above
				2 = front
				3 = side
				0 = N/A

Condition

Cooked   **Raw**

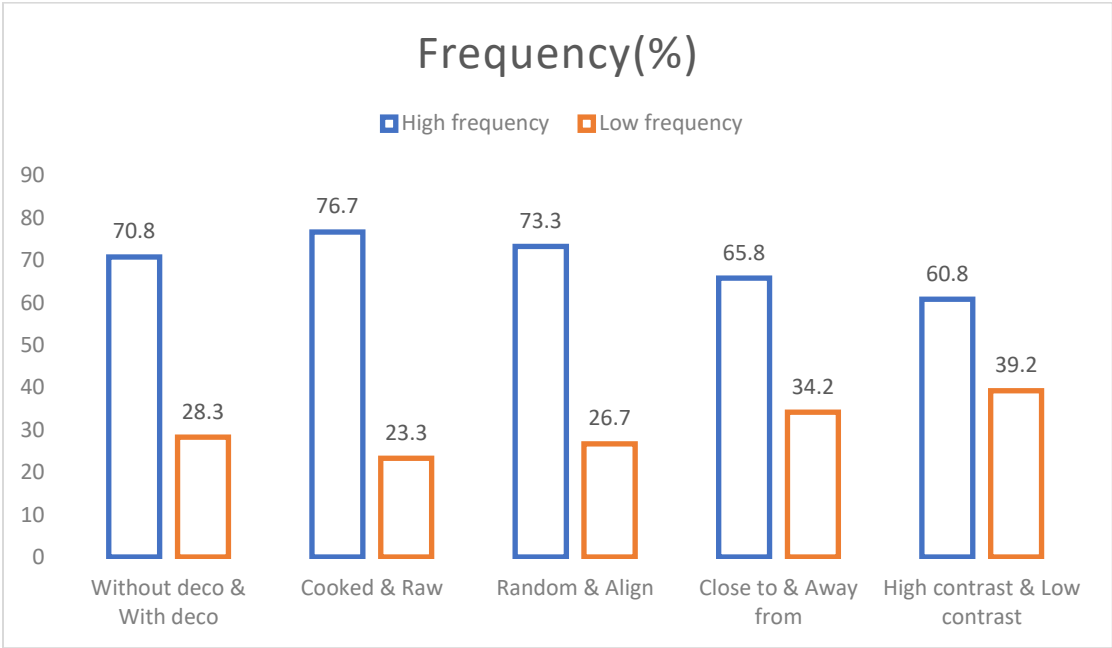*Figure 1*. Image examples of Food Influencers on Instagram.

Figure 2. Distribution of the number of categories on influencer posts analyzed during the content analysis.