

Public Abstract

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Title:Voracious Villains or Hungry Heroes? Depictions of Food Critics in Popular Media

There are copious types of visual media that viewers presently consume as entertainment. These various mediums showcase depictions that influence perceptions of both individuals and entire careers. In journalism studies, scholars look at these visual depictions to categorize how journalism works and how journalists interact with the world. Depictions too often focus on hard news and mainline journalism at the expense of subfields such as food criticism. This study responds to a call to action to look into media beyond film, while carving out its own path and establishing that food critics are understudied. The thesis is a textual analysis that looks into over 40 different texts including graphic novels, television series episodes, films, commercials and Internet videos. In popular fictional visual media across time, close textual analysis of the depiction of food critics shows unique and shared themes, tropes, and story arcs specific to food critics, including: violence and anonymity. Depictions of food critics were homogenous regardless of the medium and were shown primarily as older white men with similar dress, attitude, and ethics. These depictions were overwhelmingly negative with few showing food critics doing their job well in a positive light. That, of course, can have real-world consequences on the how food critics are judged by the general public. This thesis combats the neglect of depictions of food critics in journalistic study, as well as showcases the characterizations of food critics that separates them from other journalists and critics.