

## Repositório ISCTE-IUL

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Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2023-01-04

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Loureiro, S. M. C. & Ferreira, E.S. (2021). Tourists' lifestyle and foodservice tendencies in social media. In Saurabh Kumar Dixit (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of gastronomic tourism*. London: Routledge.

Further information on publisher's website:

10.4324/9781315147628

Publisher's copyright statement:

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Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro and Eduardo Moraes Sarmento

Lifestyle and foodservice in social media

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Tourists' lifestyle and foodservice tendencies in social media

Sandra Maria Correia Loureiro and Eduardo Moraes Sarmento

### Introduction

All over the world, international tourism flows and receipts have been consolidating their growing tendencies, as well as becoming a major category of international trade in services and therefore providing a high relevance in stimulating economic growth (UNWTO 2016). The World Food Travel Association (2014) estimates that 25% of global tourist spending is on food and drink. This study seeks to understand the influence of lifestyle changes and the effect that Web 2.0 had on gastronomic tourism.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the recent literature on gastronomy tourism. Section 3 provides an overview of the most important characteristic features of the fieldwork methodology. Section 4 describes the most salient results while section 5 list draw the main conclusions.

### Theoretical background

#### *Culinary tourism: influence on the travel experience and types of tourists*

Although the literature proposes a link between tourism and gastronomy, there is still a need to deepen the understanding of the perspective and opinion of tourists as end users of activities related to culinary tourism (Okumus et al. 2013). Mak, Lumbers, and Eves (2012) propose two different approaches towards tourists' relationship with food: (i) food is an attraction; (ii) food may be an impediment since many tourists may require some familiarity with the cuisine when visiting different countries.

Regardless of this, the relationship between gastronomy and the way tourists experience the trip, a key element is the tourists' perception of the authenticity of the local food (Mason and Paggiaro 2012). This will provide them greater knowledge, more loyalty, better emotional connection, more involvement, as well as brand differentiation. Sparks (2007) argue that typical local food introduces tourists to new flavors and brings them in closer contact with local traditions, thus benefiting not only the local economy, but also providing better wages and social justice to some parts of the population (Schneider 2008).

In terms of tourist profile towards their approach to food, Cohen and Avieli (2004) distinguish different profiles: (i) 'Recreational tourists', who seek to relax and enjoy themselves, do not care about authenticity and will look for familiar foods; (ii) 'Experiential tourists' who seek to experience the authentic life of local residents and will look for local dishes and food habits. Thus, we can claim that food and drinks may not be the primary motivation or purpose to start a trip, but it will make the tourist value the destination image and give benefits to the travel experience (Okumus et al. 2013). Indeed, consumers' patterns have been changing and they have progressively become more involved in their consumption experiences, as well as consumption patterns. Under this context, the messages and symbolic meanings connected to products and the relationships established through them have become vital to attract consumers (Loureiro, Pires, and Cayola 2014).

#### *Trends in culinary tourism*

From our investigation, we can list some of the most important issues from 2015 to 2017. In 2015: (i) increase in importance of food design for social media since Instagram and Twitter are revolutionizing word-of-mouth and proving to be a make-or-break platform. Hence, restaurants changed the dish presentations to satisfy the Instagram-hungry generation (Shaw 2015); (ii) the increasing concerns about health and obesity have diminished the portions and plate sizes. Dining rooms have also become smaller and more efficient to reduce energy usage and overhead costs, encourage intimacy and reduce staff that in some cases have been replaced by new technology (Sonnenshein 2015); (iii) remodeling of the traditional foodservice market by offering alternative forms of foodservice; (iv) growing importance of beverages as a way to capture new clients and more revenues; (v) the increase of peasant dishes, ethnic street foods, and foods from the former Soviet Union's Asian satellite countries (Taylor 2014a,b); (vi) due to looking for healthier menus, nutritional labeling and food-transparency, restaurants are customizing meals for diabetics, vegetarians, and people on gluten-free, dairy-free, and other special diets; (vii) the importance of local food has increased and many chain restaurants struggle to convince their clients that their products are sustainable and environmentally friendly (Taylor 2014c); (viii) restaurants have become more socially responsible and care more about the origin of their food, how it is grown, how employees are treated by suppliers, and animal rights (Taylor 2014d); (ix) restaurants have been focusing in grabbing the attention of Millennials (Taylor 2014e) through social media. However, they have to start

appealing to Generation Z (those born between 1995 and 2012) (Taylor 2014a); (x) although snacking is rising among all ages and genders, snacking among consumers over the age of 65 contributes to additional years with a higher quality of life (Zizza 2014); (xi) online grocery shopping and delivery is becoming more and more used by consumers (ConAgra Foods 2015); (xii) the demand for smoked food has risen as chefs keep applying smoking and grilling to add some sizzle and impart new flavor to other proteins and alternatives like vegetables, butters, and even beverages (ConAgra Foods 2015); (xiii) the rise in popularity of fermented foods (ConAgra Foods 2015); (xiv) Generation Z's attitude towards food, since they have a great passion for food (ConAgra Foods 2015); (xv) in-house usage of craft foods (ConAgra Foods 2015); (xvi) consumers are more and more worried about their health and they demand more information about their food, and several apps were created, such as Fooducate, ScanAvert and ShopWell (Meijers 2013). They all help demystify food labels and enable people to make better and healthier food choices; (xvii) supermarkets are positioning themselves as direct competitors with chain and local restaurants by offering cooking classes and special events inside their installations (ConAgra Foods 2015).

In 2016 and 2017, the most important tendencies were: (i) the smartphone revolution that may endanger restaurants because they may lose marketing control of their own businesses (Whiteman 2016); (ii) 'healthification' of fast and fast-casual food (Tristano 2015); (iii) in the last five years, pasta sales have decreased 8% in Australia, 13% in Europe (with Italy having a 25% drop), and 6% in America (Whiteman 2016) since this ingredient has been substituted by quinoa, chickpeas, and lentils, among others; (iv) vegetables as the main ingredient; (v) the anti-tipping movement, since it is believed that the growth of the restaurant industry for the past five decades has been sustained by the artificially low prices made possible through underpaid labor (Whiteman 2016); (vi) the poke trend (a Hawaiian mainstay - bowl of chopped or cubed raw fish, mainly ahi tuna, over seaweed-seasoned rice). Restaurants specializing in this dish are growing strong and adapting the recipe to other kinds of fish, like scallops, salmon, and octopus (Whiteman 2016); (vii) modernization of traditional cuisine; (viii) the rise of acai bowls (smoothie made with frozen pulp from this Brazilian fruit, milk, various other fruits, ice, and toppings, like chocolate, chia seeds, granola, or peanut butter); (ix) fried chicken's sandwiches are coming back; (x) aromatic heat; (xi) retailers have been luring shoppers into their stores with snacks and meals. The idea is that the longer a customer is inside

the premises, the more he will buy per hour of stay; (xii) the impact of snacks. The fast-paced world of today is taking a toll in the alimentary habits of consumers. People used to have three meals per day, but they are now switching them for snacks, completely obliterating meals. This trend that could seem to be only for millennials is actually affecting everyone. In the US, snacking increased 47% from 2010 to 2014 (Whiteman 2016).

## Methodology

Developed in 1995, due to the innovations in online social interactions, the novelty about netnography approach lies in the realization that the online space is a social and cultural world, and that scientists would only gain from understanding online interactions using a cultural frame of reference (Kozinets 2012). Thus, a netnographic analysis requires to follow five steps. (i) research planning: it was planned to analyze public forums that delve into the subjects studied. Therefore, restaurant opinion websites, public blogs, and app websites were taken into consideration to understand the consumers' needs and wants; (ii) the observational approach. Websites specializing in restaurant opinions (i.e., Zomato and Yelp), public blogs, and app websites (i.e., Google Play and iTunes) were screened, to find consumers' opinions on the found foodservice trends. No participation with the online members was taken – in order to not disrupt them – since a direct participation could change the natural flow of conversation; (iii) data collection and interpretation: a netnographic table was created to hold the most relevant opinions found and then, analyzing the consumers' perspective, those opinions were interpreted and related to the foodservice trends of the years 2015 and 2016 and to the consumption motivations that members had when partaking in their activities; (iv) ensuring ethical standards: there was a serious concern about not disrespecting the privacy of online members. All information used is public and referenced; (v) research representation: netnography results were compared to the foodservice trends in the data analysis section.

## Data analysis

### *Foodservice trends and netnographic analysis*

Most of the sample showed had a huge concern with *health* in several ways, confirming the tendencies related to this. Dietary concerns have made restaurants change their policy of a full plate, incentivizing *smaller and healthier quantities of food*. Consumers have been jumping on this trend, finding it incredibly positive.

“[...] The cafe is a serious healthy hipster’s dream with loads of yoghurt based sweet and savory dishes on the menu even though prices are astronomical. [...]” (Zomato 2016c)

This trend may affect restaurant spaces since the tendency is to replace big places by *smaller spaces* as a way of controlling costs.

“[...] It’s a little small and seating is limited. It does get crowded and busy during peak hours so watch out for that. I’ve even heard that the line goes out the door sometimes. [...]” (Yelp 2016b) “[...] Apparently, it’s recommended you make a reservation, but we walked in anyway and moved when the couple arrived. [...]” (Zomato 2016a)

Recent consumers would rather appreciate restaurant and food markets with *custom dining options for health*. As it was mentioned earlier, entrepreneurs claim that the best way to make restaurants work for customers is to display pick-and-choose options, in order to stay current as nutrition buzzwords come and go (Taylor 2014a).

“Great Whole Foods locale and the choices for eating in store are rather enormous ... a good thing. Reminds me of a place in another country. The Asian counter with sit down area and noodle bowls along with other items is very inviting [...]. - Pierre Le Beach (Zomato 2016b)

Other important issues are related to specific diets, due to health issues. One anonymous online member refers this in its Zomato review about a yoghurt cafe.

“[...] Good concept with a yogurt menu of sweet (imagine toasted coconut and pineapple) and savory concoctions like mango and avocado. As it opens early in the morning, one can have breakfast foods laced with labne and go on to soups and healthy salads for lunch and assorted yogurt products. [...]” (Zomato 2016c)

This health worries affect not only the older generations, but also Generation Z. This generation has been confronted with more flavors at a younger age than any other before them (ConAgra Foods 2015). They have a simple position in life.

“Sure, it can have a lot of calories. Or it could have 300 like the bowl I had today. It’s mostly all fruit. I’d rather have calories and sugar from fruit than from a doughnut. [...]” - Jade Keys, on Acai Bowls (Thomson 2014)

As a consequence of the ‘healthification movement’, restaurants have been adapting their menus. On the other side, this new lifestyle brought a great number of new trends, like

Acai Bowls or the rise of Poke, which can be seen to be incredibly appreciated by consumers in the Netnographic Table.

“[...] This stuff is great. I eat for snacks; keeps me away from carbs. Has a nice, smoky BBQ flavor without being syrupy or overbearing. You don't get a lot for what you pay. [...]” - David P. Gonzalez (Amazon.com 2016b)

This quest for health also affected social media and technology. Apps with healthy food are becoming popular in several homes and in restaurants.

“ [...] For a busy working family this program reduces eating out and eating better. [-- -] As a busy mom of three kids (9,10,13) ... the benefit of Blue Apron is that we know we have go-to meals that are ready in about 30 minutes.” (App Store 2016)

In terms of flavors, we found out that consumers are looking at different *traditional cuisines that were modernised* to include Asian ingredients or spices from common dishes as happened in a French cuisine restaurant, with Japanese influences.

“[...] Recommendations: uni consomme gelee, lobster linguine, foie gras croquettes, kamo-duck, anago rice. Cocktails are delish too. Bottomline: this place is Momma Moto (my mother) approved. A true rarity. [...]” (Yelp 2016a)

Consumers are always looking for new flavors and are willing to try new things, like *smoked foods* and *craft foods*, both at the restaurant or at their own homes as well.

“When I bought these, I really didn't expect I would be able to tell any difference from regular Hunt's diced tomatoes. [...]I am familiar with delicious, fresh, firm bread. The only thing can make it better is extra hot chicken drippings on that bread, and a cold beer to wash the heat down, talk about good eats. [...]” - TravelerLloyd (Zomato 2016c)

In terms of social media, we found out that restaurants and retailers have adapted to the new technological platforms in various ways. They try to be faster in service providing as well as the app using. We found out that there was been a growth of *online grocery shopping with same-day delivery*. For example, Blue Apron is an app that shares recipes and delivers the right amount of ingredients to accomplish recipes, in accordance to customers' needs.

“[...] I work 12-hour nights as a nurse and not having to go grocery shopping right after my shift is great. Plus, there's no way I could pick up 3 full meals from the grocery

store for only \$60 [...]. [...] The food and service are not lacking in any way, but the app is a little too simple [...]" Sparkle\_lite on Blue Apron (App Store, 2016) "[...]" You pick your preferences. Easy to use. I would give app a try and if you don't like it there is always uninstall [...]" (Play.google.com 2016)

Restaurants have been improving *their food design* in order to *satisfy the needs of social media platforms*, like Instagram or blogs, since their impact on businesses may be dramatic and it is often difficult to control. Consumers are used to publishing their meal photos, and restaurants must be prepared to anticipate possible problems and face bad filtering.

"[...] During my visit, which I've covered in more detail on my blog, I had sunchoke chawanmushi that was just amazing. [...]" - VeggieBuzz (Zomato 2015)

Taking into account the market transformations, the foodservice market has adopted a more *social responsibility and accountability* in their daily procedures. One of the main measures that is being taken by several restaurants is related to the abolition of the traditional *tipping policy*. As a consequence, they have chosen to increase their prices so that they can fulfil their fiscal obligations and contractual terms with staff wages for example.

"[...] This restaurant had a no tipping policy, but they do add 20% for an administrative fee. [...]" - *TheDude1974* (Zomato 2016a)

Finally, as expected, the traditional foodservice market has been changing. For example, *retailers have been stepping into the foodservice market* with great success, since they try to answer the needs of a new generation that is constantly moving and experiencing new novelties about what they eat.

"[...] This is an unexpected surprise! I got this for the health benefits, but I didn't really expect it to taste good! I learned that: Turmeric is a spice that comes from the turmeric plant. It is commonly used in Asian food [...]" - MVO, (Amazon.com 2016a)

### ***Consumption, consumerism, and anti-consumption and netnographic analysis***

If we take the previous section as a reference, we can conclude that health and environmental sustainability were major motivations for the consumers. From the 32 opinions collected, 8 fell into the category of *green consumers* and *ethical motivations*.



As it was previously explained, they refuse to acquire products that are environmentally undesirable.

“[...] We value organic products, so this was a great choice--buying in bulk is the way to go to get organic, healthy options at a reduced cost and with reduced environmental packaging waste! [...]” - M. Harris (Amazon.com 2016a)

Complementary to this motivation, 8 out of 32 consumers choose their consumption habits in accordance to their *personal motivations*. They have taken their buying option based on instant personal benefit they may achieve through alternative consumption experiences.

“Sure it can have a lot of calories. Or it could have 300 like the bowl I had today. It’s mostly all fruit. I’d rather have calories and sugar from fruit than from a doughnut” - Jade Keys, on Acai Bowls (Thomson 2014)

We also claim that *alternative consumption* was an important motivation to study. Easily related in this day and age, due to the rise of the ‘hipster’ movement, were the *identificatory motivations* (they occur when consumers adapt their behaviors so that they can match to their beliefs and their peers as happens with the search for vegan food) and the *hip consumerism* (understood as the consumers who choose to go against typical trends and consumption motivations, and also seek the new and best tendencies).

“It seems like a hot new vegetarian/vegan restaurant is opening every couple weeks in New York. But Dirt Candy is the original gangster of the gourmet greens movement and still the one to beat. [...]” (The Dishelin Guide 2016)

Finally, *consumerism* is understood as a set of beliefs and values that secure happiness through consumption, possessions, and materialism (Loureiro, Pires, and Cayola 2014) was also a relevant motivation.

“[...] Great Whole Foods locale and the choices for eating in store are rather enormous ... a good thing. [...] Went twice in two days and will stop in again soon for a quick, delish meal. [...]” - Pierre Le Beach (Zomato 2016b)

### **Research conclusions**

This study analyses the change of lifestyle in the last years and its influence on tourism food trends. Who creates the tendencies? Why and how are restaurants and food distributors adapting to the new needs of the market? Thus, four main facets are found

based on literature and the netnographic analysis. The diagram of Fig.33.1 shows an overview of the main gastronomic tourism trends:

*Health food.* The fight against obesity, the new diet plans, based on allergies and intolerance to certain foods, the combat against food with unnatural components, and the will to have healthier lifestyles were the main concerns of consumers. This gave strength to the vegan movement, with restaurants using vegetables as their main ingredient. Restaurants also began reducing their food portions, in order to combat obesity, providing custom dining options for health, and taking the origin of their ingredients more into account, to respect customers' concerns. In sum, this concern is so big that companies even began developing mobile apps that provided nutritional analysis of food and meals.

*Asian Influence.* The foodservice market has been suffering a strong impact from Asian food. There has been a modernization of traditional cuisine, like the French cuisine, adapting the typical meals and adding Asian ingredients or flavors. There is an on-growing growth of this type of cuisine.

Additionally, consumers have changed their preferences of spices, preferring heat with flavor. Instead of just spicy, they are requesting the usage of aromas and flavors to provide a better experience for the palate. This evidences the impact that Sriracha had in these years. Finally, bitter and smoked flavors are also in vogue. Restaurants and retailers are providing meals and ingredients with the traditional smoked flavor, where it was least expected.

*Social Media.* Social media has stepped into this market and is now a force to be reckoned with. Restaurants and food retailers had to jump on board this trend and adapt to the obstacles and opportunities it provided. Firstly, there was the need to adapt food design to combat the backlash that restaurants may get from bad photos that are posted in social media platforms, like Instagram and Facebook. Even Martha Stewart was criticized on Twitter, due to bad pictures of her recipes. Secondly, restaurants began adapting their marketing strategies to target younger generations. Louder music, the bigger presence on social media and digital strategies have been seen throughout the industry. One specific example provided by one customer was the providing of the menu after the meal, by e-mail. Thirdly, retailers had to respond to customers' demands quickly. Actually, consumers have now access to online grocery shopping with same-day delivery. Finally, Generation Z's attitude towards food is, and will continue, shaping the industry. They demand health and simplicity for their meals, putting aside the microwave-prepared food.

The usage of Spiralizers, craft foods, and informational mobile apps with recipe-sharing and nutritional analysis are examples of what the market may analyze.

*Organic and sustainable food.* This last major trend is due to the social responsibility and environmental sustainability that both consumers and retailers are diving into. A great number of food consumers are decreasing their consumption of meat due to the negative effects it has on the environment and on the animals. Additionally, they are more attentive to organic foods and to brands and companies who are eco-responsible. As a reply to this, restaurants have been using local and fresh foods that are free of GMOs and artificial flavors and colors, increasing their vegan menus, and using smaller spaces of business, in order to use less energy and to pollute less. However, restaurants also take into account their responsibility with society. Thus, measures have been taken to support their peers. One great example is the adoption of no-tipping policies in restaurants and the increase of the minimum wage.

Finally, in what concerns the main consumption motivations for consumers from 2015 to 2017 were: green and ethical, personal, alternative, hip consumerism, identificatory, and consumerism. Consumers have increased their concern with their own health and with the environment. Thus, a lot of their decisions were based on eco-friendly consumption. There was a rise of vegetable usage, the support of environmentally friendly brands, and the adoption of consumption habits that increased their health. Yet a great number of people still had personal motivations. Their consumption habits were based on personal preferences and instant satisfaction. Along with this were the alternative motivations. Consumers would also adapt their habits in preference of certain products against others, like cooking at home instead of going out for dinner.

Another kind of motivation was the hip consumerism, which shows that consumers would go against typical trends almost as defiance against standards. This led to the rise of vegan restaurants. Identificatory motivations of consumers who wanted to go in accordance with their own beliefs and those of their peers were strong. Finally, consumers who would just look for happiness through consumption were not out of place. There are still a number of people who just want to buy food and go to restaurants because it makes them feel satisfied and pleased.

### **Managerial implications**

Destination managers should be aware of these tendencies to promote the changes. They may organize meetings with local restaurants, hotels, and other places where food is sold to discuss the trends and propose new approaches. Tourists want to have new food experiences, local food, and traditions, but, at the same time, they need to know what is healthy or less healthy. The new chef plates should be able to select organic products, new textures, and flavors. The symbiosis between east and west is also welcome for new plates. Yet, it is not possible to forget that tourists also search for nostalgic moments, rural environments, and rustic places that seem to be down-to-earth, original, authentic, and with a lot of tradition.

The organization of gastronomic tours with different characteristics (some more sophisticated and others more rustic) are recommended. These tours should be organized among the food providers and promoted on social media in a comprehensive and coherent online message. Other tools of communication (e.g., flyers, outdoors, TV) could also be used but the core essence of the message should be the same.

Finally, destination managers may create prizes to encourage the development of this kind of tourism. These prizes may be categorized depending on the gastronomic offer of the destination. Therefore, prizes for traditional food and others from new wave food could be implemented.

### **Further research**

Although the current study has been developed with caution, any research has limitations that could be avenues for future research. Thus, we recommend the use of other approaches to complement the information from literature review and netnography. We may conduct focus groups with experts in nutrition and healthcare. Other focus groups with local food providers and cuisine chiefs.

We may also deeply explore the content in social media using text mining to analyze the reviews. Finally, the interviews with tourists may also contribute and go deeper in understanding their motivations and interests.

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Figure 33.1 Gastronomic tourism: new trends.