



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Signifying Autobiographical Memory on Social Media: A Semiotic Analysis of Food-  
Themed Imagery on Instagram

by

NICOLE ALEXI WHITE

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree

Magister Artium (Digital Culture & Media Studies)

In the

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

October 2021

Supervisor: Dr Karli Brittz

## PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

**Student number: 15079610**

I hereby declare that *Signifying Autobiographical Memory on Social Media: A Semiotic Analysis of Food-Themed Imagery on Instagram* is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Nicole Alexi White

October 2021

## ETHICS DECLARATION

**Student number: 15079610**

I, Nicole Alexi White, have obtained for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. I declare that I have observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of Ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.



Nicole Alexi White

October 2021

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The financial assistance of the University of Pretoria towards this research is hereby acknowledged with appreciation. Opinions expressed in this dissertation and conclusions derived are those of the author and not attributed to the University of Pretoria.

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the following individuals:

Dr Karli Brittz, my supervisor. For our copious sponsored Starbucks coffee dates and discussions - thank you. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks for providing me your plentiful inspiration, indispensable guidance and perseverance throughout my research journey. I am beyond grateful for the time, effort, energy and support you have given as my supervisor. Your words of encouragement and heartfelt interest in my academic progress will for long be cherished.

Jerry and Marinda White, my parents. Thank you for the enduring love, support and words of affirmation you have expressed throughout my academic career. Dad, I am indescribably grateful for your invaluable insights, effort and input as a second reader and meticulous editor. Mum, thank you for those toasted sarmies, snack-runs and pep-talks throughout my years of study. Words cannot express how valuable your guidance, motivation and encouragement has been.

Finally, a special mention to Les, Margy and Nicholas Vally. My fellow foodies and food mentors. My love of 'all things culinary and cuisine' has flourished from many a night spent in the Vally kitchen and the Olive Branch Cookery School. From chopping an onion, learning to flambé and carving a leg of lamb - thank you so much for the bountiful knowledge, passion and insatiable hunger you've inspired in me. A special tribute to the late Les Vally - thank you Les for teaching me that, always, "to cook great food is to cook it with love".

## ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS

### Abstract

During the last decade, digitisation has become a pervasive influence on social culture, a trend largely due to the widespread emergence inter-alia, of the Internet, personal computers, smartphones and other devices as affordable and effective means of mass digital communication. As people spend more time online, their interactions, behaviours, sense of self and self-representation are progressively shaped and influenced by their social media engagements and the social context in which online users and their digital interactions are embedded (Framroze 2017). Social networking sites have become a principal avenue of self-expression and representation (Rettberg 2014); a digital space to share one's unique life narrative through the use of images and words, enabling new and creative opportunities for self-expression and memory creation.

One core element of our contemporary lifestyles increasingly influenced by digitisation, is that of food - the most basic and fundamental element of human nourishment and survival. Accompanying the increasing prevalence of digital media in society is the simultaneous acknowledgement of the "complex entanglements between the digital realm, and food" to the extent that food and food culture have become firmly entrenched as mainstream features of contemporary digital culture (Lewis 2018:3).

As such, food-themed imagery shared within the digital space constitutes a worthwhile focus for enquiry to enhance the understanding of self-representation and autobiographical memory. This study explores the phenomena of food and food-culture and investigates how social media users utilise the online space to express their self-identity and to catalogue their autobiographical experiences and memories. To do so, I apply a semiotic analysis to a data set of online images selected from three Instagram hashtag categories.

In conducting a semiotic analysis of various posts shared on Instagram, it is confirmed that food-themed images form an inherent part of a user's self-identity and autobiographical memory. The study applied semiotic analysis to review a data set of food-themed images posted across three Instagram hashtag trends (*#foodiesofinstagram*, *#foodmemories* and *#homechef*). The semiotic analysis exhibited how individuals utilise food-themed digital imagery as a form of self-expression; as a platform to share, communicate and engage with memories and experiences that connote meaningful symbolism and interpretation. Connotations included, for example, notions of wholesome, healthy and natural living (Fig. 26), cultural authenticity

(Fig. 29), familial warmth and cultural familiarity (Fig. 33). These connotations were considered as an extension of a user's sense of self and autobiographical memory. The conclusions identify how in the contemporary digital age, users' embodied food-themed experiences and memories are being extended into the digital realm.

\*\*\*

### **Key Terms and Definitions**

***Autobiographical Memory*** - a form of human memory that combines self-experiences within a cultural frame for understanding differing identities, behaviours, personalities and lifestyles. Autobiographical memory is a uniquely formulated component of the self, enabling individuals to narrate their personal experiences and guiding their interactions with family members, wider communities and global cultures (Fivush 2011:322).

***Critical Food Studies*** - an interdisciplinary field of study contributing to the Humanities and Social Sciences. Food Studies examine the political, economic, and geographic framework of food production, while attending equally to the study of consumption, including gastronomy and media portrayal (Steinhardt 2021). For the purpose of this study, Critical Food Studies encompasses the media portrayal of foodstuffs, and individuals' relationships with food and foodstuffs.

***Digital Realm*** - embedded in many individuals' contemporary everyday lives and incorporates, inter-alia, the mobile technologies, screens and smart devices with on-going connection to the Internet, ground positioning systems, high-quality audio, video technologies and social media platforms and applications (Apps), websites and networking sites. The ever-expanding network of smart digital technologies are continuously connecting our material and embodied worlds to the Internet (Riley et al. 2015).

**Foodie** - an individual who self-identifies as such, and maintains an enthusiastic interest in the preparation and consumption of food, enjoying a wide variety of food-related knowledge, experiences and memories, including cooking, learning and eating (Kılıç et al. 2021). A foodie typically enjoys a wide variety of food from different cultures, enjoys dining out and, in contemporary times, is often found taking photographs of food moments and sharing these food experiences across social media platforms such as Instagram.

**Food Culture** – refers to the practises, methods, attitudes and beliefs as well as the networks and environments concerning the production, distribution and consumption of food. Food culture integrates cultural heritage and ethnicity with our environmental culture (the way our surroundings impact and influence the foods we eat, and the way we experience them) (The Well Co. 2021).

**Foodstuffs** – any substance that is considered appropriate to eat, or to assist in the production and consumption of food. For example, essential foodstuffs include flour, cooking oil, milk and eggs (Cambridge Dictionary 2021).

**Foodscape** – considers the places and spaces wherein you acquire, prepare, consume and talk about food and foodstuffs. Originating in the field of geography, foodscapes are widely used in urban studies to refer to contemporary food environments. Sociologists have extended the phenomenon to consider also cultural spaces, and the discourses that mediate our relationship with our food (Machendrick 2014:16).

**Food Voice** – the idea that the food individuals choose to eat/not to eat, and unique methods of preparation and consumption of foodstuffs communicates vital aspects of individual and communal identities, emotional states and other fundamental lifestyle elements imperative to the richer understanding of an individual's sense of self identity and memory generation (Hauck-Lawson 1998:21).

**Gastronomy** – the science that studies culinary culture, and the connection between food, tradition and culture of a specific society, region or area. Gastronomy explores the value assigned to food by different individuals, and the meanings it portrays towards various cultural practises (Naumov & Costandachi 2021).

**Gastro-graphy** – coined by Professor Rosalia Baena (2006), gastro-graphies refer to our culinary memories and considers how culinary texts and images are interconnected with our recollection and expression of personal memories.

**Hashtag** – a hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#) used on social media platforms, websites and applications. Hashtags serve as an indication (for both social platform users and site algorithms) that a particular post or piece of content relates directly to a specific category or topic, and allows content to be effectively discoverable in “on-platform searches” (Olafson 2021).

**Instagram** – a free, online photo-sharing application and social networking site acquired by Facebook in 2012. Instagram allows digital users to capture, edit, upload and share photos and short videos through a mobile application. Users can “caption their posts” using copy and hashtags, and insert “location-based geotags to index these posts” to make them more discoverable for other users of the app (Holak & McLaughlin 2017).

**Memory** – refers to the processes that humans utilise to acquire, store, retain and later retrieve information. Human memory involves the ability to preserve and recover information and knowledge we have previously learned, experienced and acquired (Cherry 2020). This study utilises the understanding of memory as the basis for the investigation into self-identity and autobiographical memory within the digital realm.

**Mnemonic** – any device, technique or method that aids information retention and retrieval in human memory for optimal comprehension and understanding, usually by “forging a link or



association between the new information to be remembered and information previously encoded” (APA Dictionary of Psychology 2021).

***Self-identity*** – Locke (1689) defines self-identity as the continuity of consciousness, and refers to the stable and prominent aspects and characteristics of one’s self-perception (Abrahamse 2019). Self-identity refers to a person’s self-conception, self-referent cognitions or self-concept that individuals apply to themselves and others – it reflects the “labels people use to describe themselves” (Biddle et al. 1987:326). This study focuses primarily on psychologists Locke’s conceptualisation of self-identity.

***Self-Representation*** – the representing self encompasses the way individuals choose to depict themselves, either to themselves or others. Self-expression, self-discovery and self-projection are processes that involve self-representation, which involves the careful portraying and communicating of one’s unique own emotions, values and behaviours to their external world (Thagard & Wood 2015). Self-representations can be expressed through creative likeness or image of oneself - an avenue for creative expression, showcasing one’s personal feelings, experiences, preferences and partialities (Rettberg 2014).

***Semiotics*** – the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation. Semiotics is the philosophical theory of signs and symbols within society and their relative interpretations, and concerns itself with the symbolic exploration of cultures and societies in order to develop an understanding of their signs and symbolism, and the meanings they represent (Bouzida 2014:1001). This study applies Barthes’ methodology of semiotics in order to analyse food-themed images on Instagram.

***Social Media*** – employs mobile and web-based technologies to generate “highly interactive platforms” through which digital users and communities can share, co-create, express, discuss, and modify “user-generated content” (Kietzmann, et al, 2011: 241). In this way, social media sites like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter provide a digital space for users to engage in social interaction, and share information, opinions, personal narratives and self-knowledge (Lama 2018:2).

*Social Networking Sites* – otherwise referred to as SNSs, is a web-based service that allows individuals to construct online profiles within a bounded system, generate a lattice of users with whom they wish to communicate. Individuals are hereafter able to view, interact and traverse with this list of connections within the system (Body & Ellison 2007).

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PLAGIARISM DECLARATION.....	i
ETHICS DECLARATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LA CARTE.....	xiii
<b>CHAPTER 1 - AMUSE-BOUCHE: Signifying Autobiographical Memory by Semiotic Analysis of Food-themed Imagery on Instagram: Introduction and Background to the Study</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1.Introduction.....	1
1.2.Background to the Study.....	5
1.3.Rationale for the Study.....	10
1.4.Objectives of the Study.....	12
1.5. Methodology and Theoretical Framework.....	12
<i>1.5.1 Semiotics and Semiotic Analysis</i> .....	12
<i>1.5.2 Semiotic Analysis of Instagram Hashtag Trends</i> .....	13
<i>1.5.3 Digital Humanities Project</i> .....	15
<i>1.5.4 Ethical Considerations</i> .....	16
1.6.Literature Review.....	16
<i>1.6.1. Self-Identity as Memory</i> .....	16
<i>1.6.2. Autobiographical Memory</i> .....	17
<i>1.6.3. Self-Representation in the Digital Age</i> .....	22
<i>1.6.4. Food Culture in the Digital Age</i> .....	24
<i>1.6.5. Semiotics &amp; Semiotic Analysis of Social Media</i> .....	26
<i>1.6.6. Digital Humanities</i> .....	27
1.7.Overview of Chapters.....	29
<b>CHAPTER 2 - HORS D'OEUVRES: Exploring the Relationships between Self-Representation, Autobiographical Memory and the Digital Realm</b>	<b>31</b>
2.1. The Self: Understanding Identity, Representation, Memory and Autobiographical Memory	32
<i>2.1.1. Understanding the Self</i> .....	32
<i>2.1.2. Understanding Memory</i> .....	38
<i>2.1.3. Understanding Autobiographical Memory</i> .....	40

2.2. The Self Online: Understanding Representation, Memory and Autobiographical Memory in the Digital Realm.....	46
2.2.1. <i>Self-Representation in the Digital Realm</i> .....	46
2.2.2. <i>Self-Representation and Virtual Identity</i> .....	52
2.2.3. <i>Autobiographical Memory in the Digital Realm</i> .....	53
2.2.4. <i>The Digital as an Embodied Experience</i> .....	55
<b>CHAPTER 3 - L'APÉRITIF: Exploring Cultural Identity and Self-Representation through Contemporary Food within the Digital Age</b>	<b>59</b>
3.1. The Emergent Role of Food in Food Culture.....	61
3.2. The Semiotics of Food Culture .....	66
3.3. Finding the Self through Food.....	70
3.3.1. <i>The Importance of Food to Self-Identity and Memory</i> .....	70
3.3.2. <i>The Experience of Embodiment Through Food</i> .....	72
3.4. Food, Memories and the Feeling of Home.....	74
3.5. Food Imagery - Contemporary Controversies and Food Porn.....	81
3.6. Food, Visual Culture and the Digital Realm.....	85
<b>CHAPTER 4 - ENTRÉE: Instagram Foodies: A Digital Semiotic Analysis of Contemporary Food Culture on Instagram</b>	<b>92</b>
4.1. Digitisation of Food.....	93
4.2. Instagram Foodies: Identity, Self-Representation & Autobiographical Memory.....	102
4.3. A Semiotic Analysis of Instagram Hashtag Trends.....	104
4.3.1. <i>Semiotic Analysis - #foodiesofinstagram</i> .....	105
4.3.2. <i>Semiotic Analysis - #foodmemories</i> .....	113
4.3.3. <i>Semiotic Analysis - #homechef</i> .....	120
4.4. Digital Humanities Project.....	126
<b>CHAPTER 5 - DESSERT: Summary of Findings from the Semiotic Analysis and Conclusion</b>	<b>129</b>
5.1. Summary of Findings.....	129
5.2. Observations from the Semiotic Analysis.....	131
5.3. Contribution of the Study.....	134
5.4. Suggestions for Further Research.....	135
5.5. Concluding Remarks.....	136
SOURCES CONSULTED.....	139

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: @jamieoliver. 2020. #keepcookingcarryon. Screenshot by author.....	3
Figure 2: @jo.wonder. 2021. Instant Noodles. Screenshot #foodmemories. Screenshot by author.....	4
Figure 3: Li Hauifeng 2021. Taste. BBC News. Photograph.....	63
Figure 4: David Chang. 2018. Sichuan Fish with Peppers. Ugly Delicious. Screenshot by author.....	65
Figure 5: Lévi-Strauss. 1997. The Culinary Triangle.....	67
Figure 6: Giovanni Bellini. 1509. Madonna with Child. Oil panel painting.....	69
Figure 7: @Sarah’s Day. 2021. Sarah Tilse Instagram profile. Screenshot by author.....	80
Figure 8: Louise Moillon. 1630. The Fruit and Vegetable Seller. Musée du Louvre. Oil on panel. 48cm x 65cm.....	81
Figure 9: Hardee’s Advertisement. Poster. c 1950.....	82
Figure 10: Burger King Advertisement. Poster. c 1990.....	82
Figure 11: @dashofMandy. Mandy Hickman Instagram Feed. 2021. Screenshot by author.....	89
Figure 12: The Diet of Ancient Egypt. The processes of making bread. Aaron Art Prints. 2021.....	94
Figure 13: Vincent Van Gogh. 1885.The Potato Eaters. Oil Painting. 82cm x 114cm.....	95
Figure 14: Andy Warhol. 1968. Campbell’s Soup Cans. 32x Screen Print Canvases. 51cm x 41cm.....	95
Figure 15: Ralph Goings. 1995. Donut. Oil Painting 51cm x 41cm.....	95
Figure 16: @Laurelmanette. 2021. Charlottesville, Virginia. Screenshot by author.....	96
Figure 17: @pogiboydc. 2021. The Block DC. Screenshot by author.....	99
Figure 18: @coffeegossipgirl. 2021. Mannheim, Germany. Screenshot by author.....	101
Figure 19: #foodiesofinstagram feed. 2021. Screenshot by author.....	106
Figure 20: @MunchingWithMax. 2020. Fetta Nera Pizza. Screenshot by author.....	107
Figure 21: @Snackiesong. 2020. Duende Dos. Screenshot by author.....	107
Figure 22: @Jillbakes_. 2020. Chinchinicecream. Screenshot by author.....	108
Figure 23: @Damnd_elicious. 2020. Little French House. Screenshot by author.....	108
Figure 24: @Fingeryfood. 2020. Atrium Hutt City. Screenshot by author.....	108
Figure 25: @Lineatstheworld. 2021. Krispy Kreme Great World City. Screenshot by author.....	108
Figure 26: @theskinnydoughnut. 2021. Wakefield. Screenshot by author.....	109
Figure 27: @Annaliseeatsbath. 2020. Bath, Somerset. Screenshot by author.....	110
Figure 28: @maphiweskitchen. 2021. South Africa. Screenshot by author.....	111
Figure 29: @healthymumway. 2020. London. Screenshot by author.....	115

Figure 30: @foodconnectioncontinentsapart. 2020. Munich, Germany. Screenshot by author.....	117
Figure 31: @Lokicooks. 2020. Ubub, Bali. Indonesia. Screenshot by author.....	119
Figure 32: #homechef feed. 2021. Screenshot by author.....	121
Figure 33: @Alvaritofire. 2020. Bogota, Colombia. Screenshot by author.....	122
Figure 34: @FrancescanaFamily. 2021. Massimo Bottura. Sponsored Advertisement. Screenshot by author.	125
Figure 35: @Silenceyourhunger. 2020. <i>Lazy Monday</i> . Screenshot by author.....	126
Figure 36: @medicinepanda. 2020. <i>My New Dress- #watermelondress</i> . Adriatic Beach. Screenshot by author.....	127
Figure 37: @crissherrera. 2020. <i>Watermelon Happiness - #watermelondress</i> . Flowerpot Island. Screenshot by author.....	127

# ***LA CARTE***

## ***AMUSE-BOUCHE***

*Signifying Autobiographical Memory by Semiotic Analysis of Food-themed  
Imagery on Instagram: Introduction and Background*

## ***HORS D'OEUVRES***

*Exploring the Relationships between Self-Representation, Autobiographical  
Memory and the Digital Realm*

## ***L'APÉRITIF***

*Exploring Cultural Identity and Self-Representation through Contemporary  
Food within the Digital Age*

## ***ENTRÉE***

*A Digital Semiotic Analysis of Contemporary Foodie Culture on Instagram*

## ***DESSERT***

*Summary of Findings, Observations from Semiotic Analysis, Contribution &  
Limitations of the Study*

# CHAPTER 1

## *Amuse-Bouche*

### *Signifying autobiographical memory by semiotic analysis of food-themed imagery on Instagram: Introduction and Background to the Study*

*I'm sitting in a kerb-side café, buzzing with diners. Some are already enjoying their meals, chatting amicably and sipping drinks. Almost all have their mobile phones close to hand, and many are busily engaged with their device, reading or typing, or showing to friends. A waitron bustles through the service doors clasping three white porcelain platters - the starters. Each is meticulously plated and garnished. A table of eager eyes watch the mouth-watering dishes approach. The waitron carefully lays down the plates as the hungry diners look on enthusiastically. Almost in unison they reach for their cell-phones. Deftly and deliberately, they navigate their screens to Instagram, adjusting here and there to capture the perfect Insta-pic to upload to their followers. Then they set down their phones and take hold of a knife and fork - only then do they start their meal, and smile.*

#### **1.1 Introduction**

During the last decade, digitisation has become a pervasive influence on social culture, a trend largely due to the widespread emergence inter-alia, of the Internet, personal computers, smartphones and other devices as affordable and effective means of mass communication. As Miller (2011) highlights, digital technologies have become so omnipresent around the world that the study of digital culture now encompasses numerous aspects of our daily lives.

An area in which digital culture has become particularly influential is in the formulation of participants' self-identity and how people chose to portray themselves in the digital environment. As Framroze (2017:i) describes "one aspect of living a digitally oriented life involves how and why one represents oneself in virtual environments, and how one interacts with others within the digital ecosystem". As individuals spend more time online, their interactions, perceptions, behaviours and sense of self are shaped by new social media applications and the social contexts in which users and their digital interactions are embedded (Framroze 2017). As a consequence, SNSs have become the "main gateway" for this type of



self-expression; telling one's own unique story in words and images has enabled new, dynamic autobiographical practises to become the norm (Guomundsdottir 2014:42). Digitalisation has enabled more networked, collaborative and participatory forms of culture to emerge. As a result, online expression has flourished so much in the last decade that more people now than ever are engaging online in "some sort of autobiographical activity" (Guomundsdottir 2014:42).

The widespread influence of digitisation on contemporary lifestyles is well recognised. As Lewis (2018:2) makes clear, in the face of the digital turn there have been various studies (such as Lally [2002], Morley [2006] and Haddon [2016]) that consider the "emergent role of the digital" in shaping and influencing our everyday lifestyles, interpersonal relationships, drives, motivations and values.

The growth and expansion of Web 2.0 and subsequent social media, has dramatically transformed the way people experience both online and offline life.<sup>1</sup> Stokes and Price (2017:159) illustrate how in contemporary society, the majority of individuals lead rich digital lives that focus on creating and preserving social networks through "image-based social networks" such as Instagram. As a result, "their identities and social practises are continuously shaped and influenced by these ubiquitous technologies" (Stokes & Price 2017:159).

Not only has the rapid development of digital communication technologies resulted in the exponential growth of online social interaction, but it has also begun to blur the distinction between the online and offline self (Watson 2013). As a result, the identities and memories formulated in our offline lives are now extending beyond our immediate reality and contributing to the way we represent ourselves online.

A substantial component of online communication takes place by means of visual imagery (Cinque 2015), as individuals engage in a "continual practise of identity construction and maintenance" through the use of photographs and videos on SNSs and by using digital imagery to maintain the "careful curation of their online persona" (Stokes & Price 2017:159-160).

One core element of our lives that has become increasingly influenced by digitisation, is that of food - the most basic and fundamental element of human nourishment and survival. As famous scientist John Young (1968:21-22) identified, "the fact that the brain and the mouth

---

<sup>1</sup> Web 2.0 is a term introduced in 2004 referring to the second, more sophisticated wave of the world wide web (www.) that included software programmes with upgraded features and functionalities not previously available (for example, SNSs, blogs and Wikis) (Christensson 2008).

are both at the same end of the body may not be as trivial as it seems. No animal can live without food”. Unsurprisingly therefore, accompanying the digital turn has been an increase in social behaviours and narratives acknowledging the “complex entanglements between the digital realm, and food, eating and growing” to the extent that food and food culture have become firmly entrenched as a mainstream feature of contemporary digital culture (Lewis 2018:3). As Kilgour (2021) confirms, the phenomenon known as "eat and tweet" has for long been flooding social media platforms with food-themed images. Diners are no longer content to just enjoy their food, they want to photograph it and share it with the online world.

The inherent popularity of food-themed expression within society, and how individuals are increasingly willing and able to interact within the contemporary digital realm is well established. In particular, the burgeoning global growth of social media usage has facilitated an unprecedented escalation in the volume of food-themed content expressed on various digital platforms. Many millions of users are known to follow a catalogue of food-themed sites, for example by learning to cook with the help of celebrity chefs who have “taken to Instagram” offering cooking classes and recipes (Aureus 2020). Figure 1, for example, profiles the renowned celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and his son on Instagram promoting his *#keepcookingcarryon* initiatives in which Oliver provides family-oriented, easy-to-follow tutorials for home cooking.



Figure 1: @jamieoliver. 2020. *#keepcookingcarryon*. Screenshot by author.

Individuals also regularly engage in online food-themed exchanges and making use of digital communications and interactions in order to catalogue their personal experiences and memories. Figure 2, for example, illustrates how one online user expresses her fondness of instant noodles and recalls her childhood experience: “I have absolute love for instant noodles. This love started young. When I was probably around 7 or 8 years old, I remember sharing a bowl of instant noodles together with my mom and sis...” (jo.wonder #foodmemories August 2021).



Figure 2: @jo.wonder. 2021. *Instant Noodles*. Screenshot #foodmemories. Screenshot by author.

This study explores such food-themed content that are shared publicly on social media platforms like Instagram. Through the semiotic analysis of much food-themed digital content, this research considers the concepts of self and autobiographical memory and how these concepts are expressed and signified within the digital realm. In particular, the interdisciplinary study therefore examines the nature of self-representation and autobiographical memory as it manifests through food-imagery shared by users of social media.

Thus, the study investigates how social media users represent themselves and express their autobiographical memories on selected food-themed social media sites. To this end, a semiotic analysis is used to examine a selection of images posted under three Instagram hashtags, namely; #foodiesofinstagram, #foodmemories and #homechef - each of which boasts more than one million followers. The analysis identifies how individuals use social media to express their self-identity and autobiographical memory through the creation and distribution of

personalised food-themed imagery. In doing so, the digital realm becomes a complex extension of a user's self-identity, self-expression, life narrative and autobiographical memory.

This chapter provides an introduction to the research which is rooted in a foundation of key theoretical concepts and considerations; these concepts are highlighted in the background to the study and then expounded in more detail in the literature review. The rationale for the study is discussed, followed by a summary of the research objectives. An overview of the methodology applied is provided with an outline of its theoretical framework. The chapter concludes by detailing the scope of the study and provides a summary overview of subsequent chapters.

## **1.2 Background to the Study**

In contemporary society, individuals are continuously exposed to a vast spectrum of images, signs and symbols. Our visual culture emerges from the visual imagery and experiences through which “information, meaning or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology” (Mirzoeff 1999:3). As Norman (2003:232) describes, visual culture is the contemporary study of the structures and influences of “visual regimes and their coercive and normalising effects”, and fulfils a central role in the development and expression of ideology within society. Visual culture underpins the very manner in which individuals perceive themselves, and represent themselves to the world around them. Mitchell (2002:170) further asserts “Visual culture is the visual construction of the social - not simply the social construction of vision”. Individuals live and function within culturally constructed, visually-saturated communities. Visual imagery influences how different cultures are shaped; the resultant visual culture acts as a forceful driver in the evolution and perpetuation of society's prevailing ideologies, its myths and stereotypes.

In *How to See the World: An Introduction to Images, from Self-Portraits to Selfies, Maps to Movies, and More* (2016), Mirzoeff describes how contemporary visual culture has evolved to transition the gap between visual and digital culture. Mirzoeff (2016) illustrates how traditional visual culture once relied on seeing and understanding objects and visuals within defined viewing spaces - for example, ancient artefacts in a museum or a movie in a cinema. In contrast, as a result of global digitalisation, contemporary “image-dominated network society” is now able to view the world in a far more dynamic and adaptable fashion. Internet users are now able to livestream programmes and activities in real time, for example to view famous artworks

through online archives or to enhance their cooking skills only, as previously exemplified in Figure 1. Contemporary visual culture thus embraces the evolution of digitalisation and reflects how individuals have come to interpret the world in an era of “dynamic change and vastly expanding quantities of imagery” (Mirzoeff 2016).

The rapid evolution of digital technology has facilitated the emergence of a broad spectrum of social media platforms hosting massive amounts of user-generated content - digital material which is readily accessible, interactive and can be easily modified and networked with other platform users. User-generated digital content has established itself as a mainstream cultural phenomenon in many aspects of contemporary society (Miller 2011, 15) and is an entrenched feature of modern digital culture. The prevalence of global digitisation continues to shape our digital culture and to transform society, as people embrace the technologically orientated, visually-saturated environment they live and breathe in a world which is “young, urban, wired and hot” (Mirzoeff 2016).

Users are now able to make use of the Internet and numerous online social media platforms to express and share their unique experiences. One prominent popular example of this ‘wired and hot world’ is Instagram - a photo and video networking platform acquired by Facebook in 2012 (TechTarget 2017) on which users can post visuals to share amongst followers, and exchange comments with other site users (Instagram Incorporated, 2020). The platform has developed into an immensely popular social media application that “adjusts, controls and normalises particular social practises, influencing individuals and their broader societies” (Poulens & Kvale 2018:701). Such pervasive influence is further reinforced as the platform develops and evolves. Recent digital advances include extended capabilities for mobile phones and devices, and sophisticated mechanisms for filtering, storing, and archiving content, all of which serve to enhance the detail and aesthetic nature of images shared on the platform (Manovich 2016:4). In 2011, Instagram also introduced the concept of hashtags through which users are able to share images and comments with vast numbers of like-minded users (Giannoulakis et al. 2016). Instagram’s hashtag sites have thus established themselves as sophisticated, simple-to-use digital platforms for users to express their identities and share their unique memories and experiences.

In *Food & Culture: A Reader* (Counihan et al. 2008:24), Lévi-Strauss highlights how “the process of cooking and eating is a truly universal form of human activity” influenced both by nature and by culture. Just as society has assimilated the evolution from visual culture to digital

culture, so too food culture has also become a largely digital pursuit representing “a profound transformation of the field brought about by the proliferation of online and digital media” (Kobez 2020). As Spence et. al (2016) describe, the dining public are becoming increasingly obsessed with taking images of the foods they are about to eat, and often sharing those images on their social media networks. Within the digital realm, contemporary food culture is evolving to the extent that the way food looks is perhaps more important than ever: “I’m sure some restaurants are preparing food now that is going to look good on Instagram” (Saner 2015). Some restaurants are even embracing this trend by providing diners with camera stands at their restaurant tables, as well as serving food on plates that spin 360°. Thus allowing their customers to get the perfect shot every time (Elliott 2015; Michel et al. 2015).

This emerging digital preoccupation with food and food-imagery calls to question the authenticity of our contemporary foodscapes – is our digital environment and incessant need to share food-stuffs online compromising the authenticity of our food experiences and memories?

Psychology professor Robyn Fivush (2003) highlights the dynamic interdependence between self-identity and memory and describes how the formulation of an individual’s unique identity stems from the “narrative construction of the self” in which self-identity and memory become intertwined “through the construction of a life story” (Fivush 2003: iv). Similarly, Zimmermann (2014) highlights the linkages between self-identity and memory and asserts that memory is the process of retaining information over time, allowing us to use past experiences to determine our future path. In so doing, memory “underwrites our identities as individuals” whilst simultaneously binding us to others in our local community and larger globalised societies (Michaelian et al. 2007).

In formulating their self-identity, individuals lace together a spectrum of memories within which different categories of memory contribute variously to formulate the perception of ourselves, and of the world around us.<sup>2</sup> In particular, Fivush et al. (2011:321) identify how autobiographical memory is a “uniquely human form of memory” that consolidates unique self-experiences within a cultural frame for understanding differing identities and lifestyles. Autobiographical memory is uniquely formulated component of the self, enabling individuals

---

<sup>2</sup> Short term memory for example, involves the “recollection of things that happen immediately and within a few days thereafter” (Zimmermann 2014). *Episodic memory* is a person’s recollection of unique events associated in specific emotional, locational and time-related instances (Zimmermann 2014).

to narrate their personal experiences and guiding their interactions with family members, wider communities and global cultures (Fivush 2011:322). Greenberg and Knowlton (2014:922) further highlight how visual imagery plays a fundamental role in the development of an individual's autobiographical memory.

As the digital world develops, so researchers are increasingly emphasising the importance of online memory, how it has evolved and functions, how it is perpetuated in contemporary society, and how online memory can be differentiated from historical and more traditional conceptualisations of memory (Garcia-Gavilanes et al. 2017).

In *How is Google Changing Your Brain* (2013), Daniel Wegner and Adrian Ward assert that prior to the turn of the Digital Age, individuals were reliant on one another to recall and recreate the minutiae of their daily lives. In the contemporary digital realm however, the Internet has become our primary form of external or transactive memory,<sup>3</sup> through which various elements of information and detail are collectively deposited outside the human brain. The Digital Age has dramatically impacted how individuals and broader society, “create, store and recall information” (Garcia-Gavilanes et al. 2017) and digitisation has changed the way in which people share memories and “modulates the way we think about our experiences and, ultimately ourselves” (Fivush & Haden 2003:1).

Whilst traditional methods of diary-keeping and photograph albums fulfilled the same purpose, the immeasurable digital capacity of social media platforms such as Instagram and the constant networking of individuals' personalised experiences ensure that social media now constitutes a hugely popular and effective repository of memory for the autobiographical self within the Digital Age (Qi Wang et al. 2017:772). In addition, social media also adds a more social, public and communal dimension to memory creation in which digital autobiographical memories express both personal and social aspects of society.

The confluence of technology and visual culture has thus resulted in the constantly expanding use of digital platforms as individuals aspire to “assert their identities”, create memories and share their experiences amongst their online communities (Rabbani 2015). As such, the digital space is becoming increasingly fundamental in the contemporary representation of self-identity and autobiographical memory. Parallel to this, foodscapes, foodstuffs and food cultures are consistently utilised as a tool in the representation of the self and our experiences. Accordingly,

---

<sup>3</sup> A transactive memory system is the mechanism hypothesized by Daniel Wegner (1985) through which humans collectively encode, store and retrieve their various experiences, information and memories.

just as the digital realm continues to form a meaningful part of ourselves, so food in digital culture also contributes to our authentic understanding of ourselves.

Food is central to our existence and intrinsic to many of the aspects of being human and of human identity (Coff 2012:815). In *Food Self and Identity*, Fischler (1988:275) illustrates how food is a fundamental component of our identity, which not only celebrates difference and individuality, but how a group or and culture eats “assert[s] its diversity, hierarchy and organisation”. Similarly, agricultural scientist Christian Coff (2012:817) describes how food is a powerful omnipresent phenomenon directing our day-to-day motivations and signifying “our religion, cultural belonging [and] personal identity”. As Coff (2012: 817) explains:

Food is a medium through which relationships - from close to global - between human beings are expressed. We use food to express ourselves, to understand others, to convey our feelings, opinions, preferences, sense of belonging, ethical and political stands, and cultures.

Food is also used as a means of communication; however, this form of communication is not necessarily verbalized as, in many cases, it is more likely to take place by means of non-verbalized signs and actions.

Leer (2018:83) identifies how the consumption of food is an “extraordinarily social activity laden with complex and shifting layers of meaning”. Furthermore, analysis of food imagery provides an informative means to understand self-identity - not only *what* we eat, but *how and why* we eat, tells us much about society, cultural change, and society’s underlying views.

According to Stajcic (2013:5) food emerged as a distinct field of study at the beginning of the twentieth century, prior to which food was considered more conservatively as simply a necessity for human life. Over decades an emergent “new-found interest and enchantment” in the culinary arts has increasingly influenced the way society views and considers food (Stajcic 2013:5). As Lévi-Strauss (1962) famously proclaimed, “Food is not only good to eat but also good to think”; food has become more than just nourishment, it is an essential determinant of human thought, a means of expressing and examining the self. The act of eating is a largely social event - with the advent of online life, many people have continued to move their “social eating activities” into the digital realm, which has resulted in an exponential growth digitised social interactions centred around food (Andersen et al. 2021). It is this intersection between food, memory and digital culture that the study seeks to critically explore, to gain a better understanding of the significance of online food-imagery.



### **1.3 Rationale for the Study**

Digital culture is dynamic and changing - it evolves as society evolves. Rapid technological evolution has taken place in recent decades, underpinned by on-going advancements in electronics, digitisation and the progressive emergence and accessibility of digital communications. In the late 1980s, less than 1% of the world's technologically stored information was in digital format. This had grown to 94% in 2007 and to more than 99% by 2014 (Hilbert and López: 2011). Furthermore, by 2020, the number of Internet users and cell phone subscribers was estimated at 4.78 billion or some 59% of global population (Statista 2020). This massive growth in digital media usage underscores the contemporary relevance of digital culture and how it is impacting society. Social media in particular has established itself as a powerful driving force within contemporary digital culture, highlighting the urgency to more fully understand the pervasive dynamics of its impact. Similarly, the concepts of self-representation and autobiographical memory have evolved in pace with the evolution of contemporary online life and the groundswell of digital communications and social media. As a consequence of such radical transformation - towards more technologically orientated, visually saturated styles and means of communication - a shift has also occurred in the way individuals seek to portray selected aspects of their self-identity, to network and share memories and experiences and express unique components of their individual personas (Loker 2018).

Guomundsdottir (2014:43) highlights how SNSs such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and LinkedIn have enhanced and transformed themselves into platforms through which users can tell, share and record their life narratives. The rapid global proliferation in numbers of active members making use of these sites, and the dramatic shifts we are witnessing in their styles of self-expression, is deserving of focussed investigation and warrants detailed research, analysis and discussion. O'Halloran et al. (2009) further observe that "interactive digital communication platforms" such as Instagram are "multimodal semiotic technologies" diverse and powerful in functionality and providing rich scope for the study of digital communications within the semiotic sciences.

Lévi-Strauss (1962) long-since expounded the symbolic meaning of food across different cultures, emphasising how food culture has been a compelling field of research as it impacts so pervasively within both smaller communities and broader society. Since then, research into the study of food culture has allowed academics, researchers and theorists alike to develop

richer, more meaningful insights as to how individuals and their communities style their identities and cultures (Coff 2012:814). Thus, food studies and food-themed research allow us to construct a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of self-identity and self-representation.

Food-themed social media platforms such as Instagram are now embedded as a mainstream feature of contemporary digital culture. Recognising the complex relationships between self-representation, autobiographical memory and digital culture in relation to food-imagery and its symbolism, not only provides rich opportunities for research - it has become a scholarly imperative. In lock-step with the on-going evolution of the digital realm, so it is essential to develop a sound knowledge of contemporary portrayals of the autobiographical digital self and, more specifically, how these concepts are becoming so deeply rooted within contemporary food culture. In this respect, a notable knowledge gap is evident within academic literature investigating the relationship between autobiographical memory and digital culture; relatively limited research is documented that explores how autobiographical memory is represented in our digital lives. Such a knowledge gap creates the opportunity for this study.

This study uses the popular social media platform Instagram as an appropriate and readily accessible site to investigate self-representation, autobiographical memory and its expression through digital food-imagery. The research reflects on the relevance and role of digitisation and food-themed social media, with a specific focus on how self-representation and autobiographical memory are manifest within contemporary digital food culture. The research therefore explores the relationships between personal memories, self-representation and food, and investigates how social media participants use the imagery and symbolism of selected food-themed hashtag profiles in order to express their unique identities, formulate narratives and archive their memories.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The current Covid-19 pandemic has added recent impetus to the global usage of Instagram and its popularity as a means to post and network food-themed images, and provides a pertinent example of how digital culture mirrors contemporary events and developments. In this respect, there is also an urgency for further research to better understand how digital culture evolves, and how it relates to society. This study addresses one such aspect of the knowledge gap. As Framrose (2017: ii) makes clear, "Given the ubiquity and pervasiveness of digital technologies within contemporary society and culture, scholarly exploration about how online life is lived in this digital era is critical in order to understand the impact upon our lives, as well as upon society".

## 1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To explore the role played by digital social media as an extension of users' self-identity, and autobiographical memory;
- To identify the underlying connotations pertaining to selected posts on Instagram hashtag trends (*#foodiesoninstagram*, *#homechef* and *#foodmemories*);
- To explore the impact of food imagery and food culture on self-identity, self-representation and autobiographical memory, and;
- To identify how food-themed digital texts posted on Instagram are representative of users' self-identity and autobiographical memory.

## 1.5 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Seminal critical studies theorist, Tara McPherson (2009:120) argues that studies situated within the field of digital culture and media should not only comment on technology and media, but also focus on participating and actively “constructing knowledge *in and through* our objects of study”. Following McPherson, this study employs a multimodal approach to analyse food content on Instagram. It consists of a written component, informed by semiotics, as well as a digital humanities component. Preferably, the components should be interpreted together, with the written text as the main focus of the study and the digital humanities project as an extension of the research and experience of engaging with food content online. The components of the study are described below.

### *1.5.1 Semiotics and Semiotic Analysis*

This study makes use of semiotic analysis to examine a dataset of images selected from three current Instagram hashtag categories; *#foodiesofinstagram*, *#homechef* and *#foodmemories*.

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbolism within society and their relative interpretations, and seeks to develop an understanding of their meaning within diverse cultures and societies (Bouzida 2014:1001). Barthes asserts that there are two principal levels involved in the production of meaning, namely the ‘denotative’ and ‘connotative’ levels (Bouzida 2014). Denotation describes the most basic, definitional meaning of a text, the “permanent sense” of the text, devoid of any subjective input (Bouzida 2014). In visual images the denotative level

of meaning refers to that the image perceived without reference to any culturally subjective associations or contexts (Bouzida 2014). The second level of meaning, connotation, circumscribes our personal interpretation of a sign or image and refers to the secondary, culturally influenced understandings, incorporating any contextual associations and interpretations (Bradley 2016). As Fiske (2010) describes, connotation describes the interaction between particular signs and the unique subjective feelings, emotions and experiences of the observer and the values of their culture (Fiske 2010).

The fundamental focus of semiotic analysis is to question how “meanings are formed” and considers signs “as existing in various forms: pictures, words, letters, objects, gestures, phenomena and actions” (Lähdesmäki: 2010). Semiology thus “aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits: images, gestures, musical sounds [or] objects” (Bouzida 2014; Barthes 1987:9).

Semiotic analysis is thus the process of interpreting an image or a text “within a particular cultural or theoretical framework” (Reid 2013:69). As Rose (2007:74) emphasises, the primary function of semiotics is to expose the preconceptions, stereotypes and ideologies that underly the signs and symbols present within society. Vozar (2013) further argues that, the way in which we derive meaning from the world around us is drawn from all disciplines, and especially from contemporary technology. This study is rooted in the application of semiotics, as it aims to identify signs, symbols and connotations relating to food-themed images.

### ***1.5.2 Semiotic Analysis of Instagram Hashtag Trends***

For the purpose of this study, a data set of digital artefacts is identified for semiotic analysis. A qualitative analysis of the categories is used to develop a perspective of how social media users express their self-identity and autobiographical memory using personalised digital food-themed imagery. Images are selected from the following three Instagram hashtag trends and provide a diverse range of visual data for analysis:

1. *#foodiesoninstagram* - a broad-based trend for ‘foodies’.<sup>5</sup> The trend has massive following (approximately 5.6 million posts to date), and a globally diverse user-base.

---

<sup>5</sup> A person who has a keen interest in cooking and eating different kinds of food (Oxford Dictionary 2020).

2. *#foodmemories* - a more ‘niche’ following (approximately 53 thousand posts to date). The trend displays a variety of different posts directly expressing users’ food-related memories.
3. *#homechef* - a more limited following (approximately 1.7 million posts to date) with specific focus on home-based, ‘family style’ cooking. The trend includes video tutorials (noticeably popular during Covid-19) and occasional input from commercial restaurants and celebrity chefs.

On each of these hashtag trends, the images selected for analysis receive continuous and repeated exposure and demonstrate high followership. The images are selected using both the desktop and mobile versions of Instagram. Screenshots were captured of each individual text with their accompanying user profiles. In order to optimise the reliability and validity of the study, images are selected according to the following criteria:

1. *Food-specific* - images must contain items of food
2. *Accompanying captions* - images must have descriptive written captions
3. *Location* - posts must include details of location
4. *Personal and public accounts* - posts must be public and not attach to commercial accounts

Compliance with these criteria allows the author to focus on aspects of self-identity and autobiographical memory, and to exclude posts which are driven predominantly by marketing or commercial motivations<sup>6</sup>.

As researcher and author of this study, I have also added a number of my own autobiographical memories throughout the body of the text. These simple remembrances contribute an authentic and personalised aspect to the narrative, in which I share examples of nostalgic memories from my personal experiences. These are shown in italics, and are also linked to the personal food-themed digital archive presented in the accompanying digital humanities project, as detailed below. These personalised autobiographical memories provide what Tara McPherson (2009:119) suggests as being vital for digital culture analysis namely, an “interactive, immersive and multimedia expression for our own thinking and scholarship”. Since the study

---

<sup>6</sup> Instagram posts motivated primarily by commercial and/or promotional incentives are sometimes driven by inauthentic behaviours whereby due to societal pressures and conventions, users are motivated to depict “idealised images of themselves” (Safronova 2015).

also focuses extensively on the creation of personal storytelling and memory, the portrayal of my own food-themed anecdotes substantiates arguments and provides context in a more colloquial style. The foodie archive section of the Digital Humanities project also contains relevant soundbites which accompany selected videos. The soundbites enhance the sensorial experience to which the viewer is exposed. (For example, the viewer is able to hear the sizzling of bacon frying in the pan or the hubbub of people cooking in a busy kitchen).

### ***1.5.3 Digital Humanities Project<sup>7</sup>***

Conforming to McPherson's (2009:120) argument to follow a multimodal approach when examining digital culture and media, the study also includes a digital humanities project. Digital Humanities is the application of collaborative computational techniques and visualisation technologies within the contemporary spaces of the arts, social sciences and humanities (Svensson 2016:28). These projects apply techniques from the fields of computer science and information technology and are designed to stimulate innovative thinking in the management and interpretation of humanities texts with the intention of providing "greater powers of thinking and larger reach for our imaginations" (Berry 2011:12).

The semiotic analysis of this study is used to generate a digital humanities project thereby complimenting the findings of the research. The project provides a digital and visual component to the study, encouraging readers to fully immerse themselves within the detail of the narrative, thus providing for a richer, more authentic digitally-oriented experience of the study.

Food-themed images posted on Instagram encompass a variety of explorative elements; metadata, captions, locations and image alterations that form part of a wide network of information that, when combined form a comprehensive narrative (Ponzi 1993:1). Tifentale (2014:3) further explains how "new image-making and image-sharing technologies demand also radically new ways of looking at these images". Digital humanities creates a digital space for the purpose of exploring the content of this research. Users can immerse themselves – digitally - in the content of this research, and perhaps even indulge in the digital foodie content.

---

<sup>7</sup> This Digital Humanities project can be viewed at <https://nicolealexwhite.wixsite.com/instafoodie> . For optimal viewing on smaller (<15") desktop or laptop screens, please use 50% zoom on your web page. Please ensure sound is turned on.

The project consists of a website entitled *Exploring the Digital Foodie*, which acts as a visual archive of contemporary food-themed images shared within the digital realm. The website is made up of two principal components: firstly, a selection of images from the hashtag categories used for the semiotic analysis of this study and, secondly, a compilation of my personal food-themed autobiographical memories.

#### ***1.5.4 Ethical Considerations***

The images selected for the study are from public Instagram accounts in order to respect the privacy and discretion of individuals choosing to keep private accounts. The images are for academic purposes only and will not be reproduced or shared for any reasons beyond the conclusion of the study. The images are acknowledged and their sources referenced. Images refer only to the user's content and do not claim the image as the study's own.

The images selected comprise content disclosed by users acknowledging Instagram's Terms of Use and Privacy Policy in respect of which the content has voluntarily been made available on public accounts as confirmed by each user within their privacy settings. Once content is made public, it becomes accessible to all other users and may be re-shared subject to Instagram's API (Application Programming Interface). No income is generated either from this research or from the analysis.

### **1.6 Literature Review**

A comprehensive literature review was conducted in order to develop deeper insights into a number of key concepts relevant to this research. The literature review is detailed below.

#### ***1.6.1 Self-Identity as Memory***

John Locke's (1689) *Theory of Mind* is frequently cited as the theoretical origin of the concept of self-identity in which he proposes that self-identity is defined through a "continuity of consciousness" (Baldwin 1913). In studying "the nature of his own mind, and the power of the individual" (Baldwin 1913:179), Locke asserted that knowledge is a product of experience and that the mind is an "empty tablet" at birth (Baldwin 1913:180). In this, Locke attributes the *evolution* of a person's self-identity to the presence of memory. Individuals accumulate

information and formulate knowledge by means of which, in conjunction with their memory of unique life experiences, *the self* is born and nurtured. In *The Principles of Psychology* William James (1891) presents a more dynamic perspective of the self, proposing that individuals undergo constant change, and that by actively selecting relevant information from their world experiences, they combine their experiences in adaptive ways to form a coherent self.<sup>8</sup>

Fivush et al. (2003:vii) highlight the well-established but much debated linkage in psychological studies between the self and memory. Psychology theorists and cognitive scientists have for long identified the symbiotic relationship between memory and self-identity, recognising their mutual influence and inter-dependence. The theory of memory dates back to Aristotle's early attempts to understand memory, later re-explored by twentieth century psychologists John Locke and Sigmund Freud.<sup>9</sup> More recently theorists such as Fivush (2001) and Nelson (2003) have made substantial contemporary contributions.

Whilst there is less objective evidence confirming the nature of the cognitive interplay between self-identity and memory, and differing scholarly perspectives on how they emerge and engage within an individual, theorists universally recognise the cognitive importance of the interplay between the two entities. To this end, psychologists acknowledge that it is through the construction of a life-story or life narrative that the self (and its representations) and autobiographical memory are intertwined (Bruner, 1987; Fivush, 2001; MacAdams, 1996; Neisser, 1988; Nelson, 1993). As Tahgard (2014) also asserts, both historical and contemporary psychologists assign substantial importance to understanding how individuals are shaped and influenced by their socio-cultural experiences and by the influences of self-identity, self-esteem, self-regulation and self-improvement.

In particular, Robyn Fivush provides substantial academic contributions to the study of autobiographical memory and its relationship to self-identity. Her workings provide important theoretical background to this research, of the development of autobiographical memory and the construction of the narrative self.

---

<sup>8</sup> The early theoretical perspectives of John Locke (1689) and William James (1891) are considered as sources for reflection upon contemporary ideas relating to the self and consciousness. It is acknowledged that alternative psychological and philosophical theorists and schools of thought offer varying perspectives of relevance to this field of research, and that on occasions, theoretical perspectives and conclusions will diverge.

<sup>9</sup> For Aristotle, the panorama of reality included the past, present and the future. As such, Aristotle limited conception of remembering and memory considered only the "cognitive power in virtue of which we apprehend objects in the past" (Parsons & Gillian 2016).



### ***1.6.2 Autobiographical Memory***

Fivush et al. (2003:19) propose that autobiographical memory exclusively integrates the social, cultural and personal aspects of an individual into one coherent whole. It is from this process that *the self* emerges, and is formulated in terms of “explicit and implicit social and cultural” stereotypes and normalities, coupled with distinctive similarities and differences drawn between oneself and others. As Fivush et al. (2003:20) explain, autobiographical memory can be considered one extensive life-narrative comprised of a multitude of “mini-stories” - the events, emotions and experiences that together form the “one coherent whole”. In this way, an individual’s life-narrative is the single thread “that binds our memories, ourselves, our social partners and our culture together” (Fivush et al. 2003:20).

Nelson (2003:4-7) describes how a person’s autobiographical memory emerges during infancy and develops throughout childhood alongside other social, physical, cognitive and emotional developments that work together to formulate a holistic “self-understanding”. This self-understanding rests on the individual’s “successive ability to make increasingly distinct contrasts” between oneself, and other aspects and experiences of the outside world (Nelson 2003:4). Of fundamental importance, is that the individual’s autobiographical memory equips them to differentiate themselves from others in the world around them by constructing meaningful socio-cultural contrasts between themselves and others in their local and global communities.

Van Dijk (2007:2) further emphasises how the “interconnection” between the self and memory is a critical element of healthy human development. Autobiographical memories form an essential component of our well-being and serve to develop a unique sense of personhood and identity. Van Dijk (2007:3) further describes how “our autobiographical memories ground our sense of continuity between past memories, current experiences and future endeavours”.

Similarly, Reese (2003:29) explains, “reminiscing, or talking about the past with others, is a critical part of our autobiographical memories”, highlighting how our autobiographical memories are both private and unique, while simultaneously public property as they often include experiences involving others. In this way, Reese (2003:29-30) notes the primary purpose of reminiscing as social - to regularly communicate to others about our past, highlight

meaningful experiences involving others, whilst simultaneously promoting our unique perspectives and personalities. Reese's perspectives are particularly appropriate to social media and to the subject matter of this study, in which Instagram users post digital images in a public forum as a means of sharing experiences and interacting with others of similar (in this case food-themed) interests.

Fivush et al. (2003:21) also highlights how the construction of one's autobiographical self-history will characteristically incorporate "the history and mythology of the culture within which one grows up". Whilst autobiographical memory is inherently personalised and unique, without an appropriate "cultural frame of place, time and social structure", the emerging self-history would lack contextual relevance and importance. Autobiographical memory emerges over time, throughout our lives. In this context, digitisation and social media interaction provide almost unlimited scope for this to take place.

Rubin (1995) further explains how autobiographical memory is an essentially "favoured cultural memory practise" that can be observed, interpreted and understood in both oral (spoken) and literate (written) context. These culturally orientated memory practises are representative of the symbolism and mythology of a specific culture, which are then adopted by individual members of these communities. The emergence of contemporary digitisation and digital technologies, by means of which individuals and communities now interact extrapolates Rubin's perspective to incorporate social media as an increasingly popular and powerful favoured cultural memory practise.

Whilst we experience different "episodes and narratives" during our lives that are heavily influenced by both our social and cultural environments, Carrithers (1991) asserts that communities and societies depend on these episodic experiences to form meaningful ties between *past* generations, *current* community members and *future* experiences by means of culturally constructed myths and ideologies. In the digital age, contemporary episodes and narratives are now strongly influenced by digitalisation and the emergence of technologies and which now provide for continuity and creativity across successive generations.

Fivush et al. (2003:23) draw the fundamental conclusion that "autobiographical memory is highly personal and idiosyncratic but never escapes its social and cultural boundaries. The best the individual can do is to challenge the boundaries and the myths that define them". Most certainly, the emergence of the digital age and the exponential growth of digital capability has

had a profound evolutionary impact on the nature and role of autobiographical memory in contemporary society - and thus forms a vivid backdrop for this study.

Autobiographical memory is “a uniquely human form of memory that integrates individual experiences of self with cultural frames of understanding identifies and lives” (Fivush et al. 2011:321). Autobiographical memories thus “comprise the story of our lives” rich in thought, emotions, interactions, experiences and relationships (Fivush et al. 2011: 321). These life narratives that individuals construct for themselves come to adopt “human shape and human meaning” (Fivush et al. 2003: vii) - our autobiographical memories constitute an essential formative element of our well-being, fundamental to developing our sense of personhood and identity.

According to Bluck et al. (2005) autobiographical memory serves three broad functions: directive, social, and self-representative. The directive function uses past experiences as a reference for solving current problems and a guide for our actions in the present and the future. The social function provides the subject matter through which individuals develop and nurture social bonds. Sharing personal memories and personal experiences facilitates social interaction. Most importantly however, autobiographical memory uses personal memories to develop and portray an enduring self-identity. The continuity of self-identity is the most frequent self-representative function of autobiographical memory (Bluck et al. 2005). Over time, a stable self-identity facilitates introspection, self-evaluation and personal growth (Williams et al. 2008). A person’s autobiographical memory emerges from childhood through adolescence to adulthood and progresses through a series of developmental milestones (Nelson 2003). Gradual advances in the individual’s ‘social and cultural language functions’ and an increase in self-understanding allows the individual to create a ‘self-history’ and establish his or her ‘whole self’ - a unique individual differentiated from others by their unique experiential histories.

As Nakash and Brody (2006:41) explain, the content and structure of autobiographical memories are assumed to “reflect an individual’s core motives and affects”. For example, key aspects of their identity and intimate, personal life experiences. In addition to this however, autobiographical memory is also influenced by the more cultural, social aspects of society.<sup>10</sup> Nelson (2003:125) explains that the function of autobiographical memory, and sharing stories

---

<sup>10</sup> The concept of autobiographical memory incorporates both personal and social components; both are acknowledged as being of equal importance throughout this study.

of ourselves with ourselves and others, is to gain a better understanding of not only the self, but ones surrounding culture and society and describes how autobiographical memory is both a social function for sharing stories as well as a “vehicle for self-expression and definition”.

Similarly, Van Dijck (2007:3) proposes that autobiographical memory “grounds us in our sense of continuity between past memories, current experiences and future endeavours”. In this fashion, the concept of self-identity is considered a preliminary component in the emergence of episodic memory retained in an individual’s unique autobiographical memory system (Howe & Courage 1997:499). Our self-identity thus emerges and develops hand-in-hand with autobiographical memory. In recent years the development of increasingly sophisticated digital technologies has increasingly impacted the way people communicate and store information and the “processes of remembering and forgetting”.

Further, Guomundsdottir (2014:42) illustrates how the narratives we voice of ourselves and others are not only as a result of “natural or physical processes”, but are also influenced by our external environments. He continues that “narrative traditions, social conventions, a shared sense of what is appropriate” and various rules and rituals circumscribe how we choose to define and represent our selves. In this way, the inquiry into the private and social aspects is a key aspect of gaining a richer understanding of the influences placed on an individual’s self-identity. Goffman’s perspective refers essentially to face-to-face interaction; contemporary society requires a perspective that incorporates Goffman’s social and private aspects of our online interactions.

In this respect, Guomundsdottir (2014:48) explains that the scale of self-expression through SNSs is unprecedented in terms of the vast number of people using the sites, and their frequency of use Garde-Hansen et al. (2009:6) suggest that “social network memory is...a new hybrid form of public and private memory”, therefore questioning our traditional conceptualisations of public and private spheres. Similarly, sociologist Manuel Castells (2009:64) argues that with the proliferation of SNSs such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, “we now live with the web, rather than watch it”. As social media platforms become increasingly integrated into our daily lives, online social interactions on these sites raise questions regarding as to how the boundaries between the private and the public might be redefined (Lehmuskallio 2009:2). Similarly, Guomundsdottir (2014:48) illustrates that online self-expression “crosses the grey divide”, and blurs the distinctions between the public and private spheres of the digital participant.

### ***1.6.3 Self-Representation in the Digital Age***

In *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (2007), Van Dijck uses the analogy of a shoebox filled with items signifying past events in order to illustrate the concept of “mediated memories”. Van Dijck (2007) describes how the items “mediate the remembrances” of past experiences and relationships and ultimately come to represent a formative part of an individual’s autobiographical memories and cultural identity (Van Dijck 2007:1). Van Dijck (2007:1-2) develops the analogy to describe how such mediation of memories “intrinsically shapes” our unique individuality, self-identity and group belonging.

Similarly, Jill Rettberg (2014; 2017) considers the emergence of self-representation within contemporary digital culture and highlights how different techniques of self-representation have for long been an entrenched feature of cultural development. Over many centuries, generations of individuals and their communities have made use of the available media tools of the day in order to represent themselves; for example; indigenous peoples creating parietal art, community elders and their progeny sharing folklore through ‘stick figure’ artwork, or contemporary adolescents writing in diaries (Rettberg; 2014: 2; 2017:1).

Van Dijck (2007) considers how in contemporary society, numerous individuals deploy photo-media tools to record and document their everyday events and rituals. For many generations, people have stored memories in albums, diaries (and shoeboxes) to retrieve later in life; autobiographical memories have always been core concerns in everyday lives. However, digital transformation and the emergence of the Digital Age has prompted people to reflect on the value and meaning of their own “mediated memories.”

A host of modern technologies (e.g., mobile cameras, digital cameras, camcorders, multimedia computers) have replaced analogue equipment, inevitably leading to changes in everyday routines and conventional forms of memory storage and recollection. Through these means, we now utilise digital technologies to create, store and distribute our self-representations. With the emergence of social media, users are able to share and express their self-representations to a much wider audience and by means of social media the “social and communicative aspects” of our self-representation becomes uniquely individualised and clear-cut (Rettberg 2017:2). As Rettberg (2014; 2017) concludes, contemporary society utilises digital technologies as a means “to *see* parts of ourselves”.

Van Dijck (2007) thus considers how media technologies can build and act as reservoirs that hold our “past experiences and knowledge for future use”. Digitisation now shapes our

individual remembrances and influences the relationships between our private and public realm, our memories and experiences, our self and others (Van Dijck 2007: 2). Van Dijck's conceptualisation of mediated memories is thus relevant to this study in which digitalised social media images are analysed as contemporary representations of what were once the so-called 'shoebox' items of a pre-digital world.

Signifying the trend towards increased digitisation, Cinque (2015:160) describes how the generation of Millennials have grown-up witnessing the continued development of the "wave of visual trends and meaning-making emerging online throughout their lives".<sup>11</sup> Cinque (2015:160) highlights how the proliferation of inexpensive, "convergent digital tools" have allowed the youth of today to document their lives, memories and experiences in a hitherto unprecedented manner. The burgeoning capacity to facilitate continuous communication through visual forms has incubated a "generation of new media bricoleurs" who are able to draw upon these creative tools in order to construct their online identities in "multiple and shifting ways" (Cinque 2015:160). In this way, users are continually engaging in "identity construction and maintenance, specifically through photographs and videos" shared and consumed on SNSs such as Instagram (Cinque 2015:160). This study explores this new wave of identity construction as manifest in selected social media sites.

Rettberg (2017) identifies three distinct modes of self-representation in contemporary digital media; namely the written, visual and quantitative modes. Written modes of self-representation include blogs, status updates and captions that accompany the visual modes; photographs, vlogs and Instagram stories captured and shared on social media (Rettberg 2017:3-4). Quantitative modes of self-representation include smart technologies that allow individuals to monitor and track their activity, form 'virtual life-logs' and quantify specific aspects of their daily lives. Together, these three modes of representation form a complete characterisation of an individual that can be analysed and interpreted in an attempt to understand the attitudes, values and behaviours of the individual (Rettberg 2017:3-7).

As Rettberg (2017) makes clear, whilst self-representation has always been a fundamental component of culture, individuals and their communities are now able to use digital technology to mediate the content of their self-representation and, to some extent, control the way in which they are perceived. Rettberg (2017:11) further describes this digital self-representation as a

---

<sup>11</sup> The Millennial generation comprises those individuals currently between the (approximate) ages of 21 and 37 years and born into the so-called 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', with the incumbent necessity to learn, communicate and function within their techno-sophisticated environment (Alsop 2008; De Vaney 2015:12).

form of “self-documentation” in which users can now post, log, share and like individualised moments of their lives to be stored, distributed and remembered for the future. In this study, the nature of self-documentation is analysed as it occurs on selected Instagram (hashtag) sites.

The rapid proliferation of digitisation is reiterated by Mirzoeff (2016) who indicates that between 2000 and 2015, global access to the Internet rose by 806% with an estimated 45% of the world’s population having some form of access to the Internet. As Mirzoeff asserts “this is not just another form of mass media - it is the first universal medium” (Mirzoeff 2016).

In addition, the development of higher Internet speeds and the convergence of multi-compatible smart devices has greatly enhanced the role and capability of the “current information age where much communication occurs through visual forms” (Cinque 2015:160). Mirzoeff (2016) identifies how the most frequent uses of the globalised network are to “create, send and view” a multitude of different media types, especially photographs, videos, art images and animations. These media posts act as a means for society to “understand the world we live in” as users feel compelled to generate images and - more significantly - *share* their unique self-representative images of circumstance and experience within the wider digital community (Mirzoeff 2016). It is this capturing and sharing of images that reveals our motivation to find meaning in experiences, and to craft our unique place in the world around us.

In addition, Cinque (2015:160) recognises that individuals who have grown-up during the “turn of the millennium” have come-of-age at a time when SNSs are a routine feature of daily life and that regular social media use “assists in the development of sophisticated social practises” that influence users to “shift their own representations” through the digital world.<sup>12</sup>

#### ***1.6.4 Food Culture in the Digital Age***

As Dowless (2017) explains, the contemporary society has an obsession with food, and food photography. Contemporary digital culture has facilitated a community of SNSs site users who are able to document, share and comment on food-themed posts. For example, the popular hashtags *#food* and *#foodie* have together accrued more than 300 million posts on Instagram - a volume of user traffic explicitly indicative of how food photography has evolved as a hugely popular social media interest deserving of recognition and worthy of further understanding and

---

<sup>12</sup> It is understood that personal preference and motive also play a significant role in what an individual decides to share through the digital realm. This will form part of the enquiry into understanding self-identity and representation.

research (Dowless 2017). The proposed analysis embraces this investigative opportunity in the digital media space.

As Lewis (2018:2) suggests, the contemporary world of food is gradually being “colonised by an array of electronic devices, online content, and information and communication technologies”. Twentieth century society has seen continued expansion in the volume of cookbooks and food magazines, culinary festivals, TV shows and celebrity chefs which, combined with YouTube channels, cooking blogs and other digital and social media platforms have “completely altered the meaning of food culture” (Stajcic 2013:5). With endless food-related snapshots shared on social media, digital culture is physically changing the nature of our engagements with and understanding of food and food cultures (Lewis 2018:2).

As a consequence, food culture has become a “generative space” through which individuals and communities are able to develop insights and experience within the complex evolution of the digital realm, as it impacts our socio-political culture and lifestyles (Lewis 2018:3).

For Dowless (2017), food is a globally relevant topic of communication; a universal subject with cultural relevance to individuals from all walks of life across innumerable communities, countries and creeds. Food is a familiar, essential and intimate component of life and living; it can be experienced through multiple commonalities, but also an expression of the very different and unique characteristics attached to food by different societies (Dowless 2017). With the evolution of digital technologies and social media, the simple act of eating has been transformed into a holistic experience - and very often an inspirational source of positivity, prompting the desire to share with others. Hence, in the contemporary digital world, millions of social media users are now enjoying, capturing, and sharing their food experiences with other online users - their friends, family and followers (Dowless 2017). Food enthusiasts share digital images representing innumerable food themes; whether at local eateries, quaint teashops or famous restaurants, regular meals or once-off eating experiences, users represent diverse cultures, communities, religions and traditions (Dowless 2017). Indeed, food and culture are now so intimately intertwined that there can be little way of experiencing one without the other (Wong 2018).

Atanasova (2016) further highlights how posting “aesthetic snapshots” of selected gourmet dishes constitutes part of an individual’s “visual self-representation” through which the user



seeks and achieves validation and approval from the social media community by means of carefully constructed and edited photographs. The act of photograph-taking during a positive experience (for example, when enjoying a meal at a local café or baking a favourite pastry at home) can also induce emotions of happiness and well-being (Atanasova 2016).<sup>13</sup> As such, Atanasova (2016) thus theorises that when we post and share online food-themed photographs “we create an atmosphere of intimacy”; food imagery expresses a universal language and invokes a shared intimacy that draws individuals and communities together.

### *1.6.5 Semiotics & Semiotic Analysis of Social Media*

In Annette Lavers’ (1972:10) translation of *Eléments de sémiologie* (1964), Barthes describes how contemporary society consists of an “extensive system of signs beyond human language” including “images, gestures, musical sounds or objects” (Barthes 1957:9) that “infiltrate our societies and social contexts” and are used and interpreted to communicate specific meanings (Barthes *et al.* 1972:9). In *The Linguistic Sign*, Saussure (1985:28) further describes language as an “instrument of thought within culture” encompassing multiple signs that collectively communicate a particular meaning. Additionally, Bignell (2002:6) identifies how our perception and understanding of reality is shaped by myriad signs to the extent that all of our thoughts and experiences, and indeed “our very sense of our own identity”, depends on the systems of signs society which in turn, give meaning to our own consciousness and reality (Bignell 2002:7).

Barthes suggests there are two components of every sign we encounter, namely ‘the signifier’ and ‘the signified’ (Barthes *et al.* 1972:10; Bouzida 2014; Manon de Reeper 2013). The signifier has a material nature, a referent, understood as the vehicle that expresses the sign within the physical material world (Bouzida 2014; Bignell 2002). In contrast, the signified is the *mental* representation of a particular sign incorporating a psychological, somewhat abstract nature. The signified, is the mental “concept which the signifier calls forth” when we perceive it (Bignell 2014:12). The signifier and signified are thus two integral and inseparable components of a sign that are inextricably linked in the mind of the user. As a consequence, the signified is shaped by the signifier to the extent that the nature of a specific communication

---

<sup>13</sup> This said however, it is important to acknowledge that the act of capturing, posting and sharing of experiences and memories is typically more easily accepted by ‘younger generation’ people, while older individuals might perceive this act as rude or disrespectful: further research is warranted here.

and its assigned meaning is determined by means of the arbitrary relationship between the two (Bignell 2014:12).

In addition, Danesi (2010:138) considers how Marshal McLuhan's (1964)<sup>14</sup> approach to media analysis was characterised as "proto-semiotic" in which media is considered a social and cognitive extension of the individual, and acknowledges the influential role of the *change in media* on our social structures and knowledge systems. Similarly, Danesi (2010) also refers to the "semiotic purview" as an approach that envisions "human cultures as networks of intertwined sign systems" that are significantly influenced by mass communications media. He identifies the "semiotic law of media", which describes how media adapts, changes and develops simultaneously with the sign systems of relative cultures and communities (Danesi 2010:135). Media is thus an ever-changing phenomenon, which emerges with the development and progression of different societies and cultures. In this way, Danesi suggests that (social) media is a tool which provides for the extension of human communication "beyond their own physical limitations" (Danesi 2010:138).

As Bevins (2014:41) illustrates, Instagram is still a relatively recent area of research within the Digital Age, and limited semiotic research of social media has been conducted. Nevertheless, Mirsarraf et al. (2017) indicate that social media platforms provide a rich contemporary source of semiotic enquiry with meaningful analogies to traditional visual culture and contemporary digital culture. The Internet has become a hugely powerful technological tool increasingly central to our lifestyle in which a proliferation of "rich, Internet-borne multimedia technologies burrows meaning under a myriad of representation" (Mikhaeil & Baskerville 2017:2).

### ***1.6.6 Digital Humanities***

The widespread emergence of numerous digital technologies is transforming the way society engages in the traditional research process, with academic research now increasingly mediated through digital technologies, thus influencing the underlying epistemologies and ontologies (Lui 201; Moretti 2000).

The practical application of digital humanities began in the late 1990s within the domain of research tool-building, text analysis, data encoding and computational analysis (Presner

---

<sup>14</sup> McLuhan's approach to media is "the medium is the message" where the medium or technology conveying a message influences the meaning that is produced/signified. It's from his book Understanding Media.

2010:6) and emerged as a logical evolution of digitalisation. Early DH projects incorporated the development of quantitative analytical methods that have been able to enhance hitherto traditional, humanistic elements of meditative thinking and interpretation, thus transforming them into more pertinent tools for enquiry and examination (Lui 2013:8).

Identified as the 'first wave' in the progression towards the so-named computational turn, this highlighted the need for the further development and maturation of computer-based humanities to engender and optimise the meaningful collaboration of 'traditional humanist fundamentals' alongside 'computer based datafication' (Berry 2011:3). Thereafter, Berry (2011) identified a 'second wave' (the so-called 'Digital Humanities 2.0') describing the evolution of a collaborative, computational and interdisciplinary approach to research, teaching and publication of texts (Presner 2010:6). In this phase, digital humanities emerged to become more "qualitative, interpretive, experiential, emotive, and generative in character", and utilised 'digital toolkits' to ensure that the "core methodological strengths" of Humanities' disciplines could most optimally be harnessed (Berry 2012: 44). As a result, real-world situations and research could now be meaningfully transformed into 'digital visualisations' open to the creative scrutiny of contemporary interpretation, analysis, critique and curatorship (Berry, 2011:3).

Berry (2011:12) makes further reference to a 'third' and final wave in the evolution of the 'computational turn' and emphasises how third wave digital humanities and its underlying digital technology have highlighted the "anomalies generated in a Humanities research project" leading to the questioning of assumptions implicit in such research.

By presenting novel ways of working with the representation and comprehension of subject matter, digital humanities projects now provide a critically analysed digitised research process and offers "a condition of possibility for the many computational forms that mediate our experience of contemporary culture and society" (Berry, 2011: 17).

Berry (2011:11) thus suggests that the computational turn is ultimately "the use of technologies to shift the critical ground" of Humanities concepts and theories. In this way, digital humanities is able to provide a growing capacity to "collect and analyse data with an unprecedented breadth and depth and scale" (Lazer et al. 2009 in Berry 2011:12). As such, researchers can now make use of DH projects to enhance the self-expressive nature of their findings and create an integrative digital platform for richer academic engagement and enquiry into contemporary humanities phenomena.

Digital humanities projects are thus successfully harnessing technological platforms to advance awareness of the body of knowledge within the Humanities. Such projects are creatively designed platforms, constructed with similar structural components providing standardised and consistent repositories of information, readily available for “mediation” and ‘remediation” (Drucker et al. 2014:9). Their purpose is to provide readers and viewers with data, information, files and taxonomies using digital visualisation and enhanced interactive appeal (Drucker et al. 2014).

\*\*\*

This literature review has provided an overview of key concepts immediately pertinent to this study. The review provides the theoretical basis on which the study is founded. Based on the literature review, it is evident that there is a lack of substantive research investigating the phenomena of self-representation and autobiographical memory and how these concepts are expressed through food imagery on social media. This study addresses this gap in the academic discourse.

## **1.7 Overview of Chapters**

This research examines the nature and relationship between three interrelated components within contemporary digital culture, namely; the prevalence of food imagery posted on Instagram as it relates to self-representation and autobiographical memory. The study develops a foundation understanding of self-identity, self-representation and autobiographical memory and investigates how these elements are expressed on digital social media.

Chapter 1 has provided the introduction and background to this study and detailed the research objectives and the methodology applied to attain such objectives. It has also established a clear theoretical outline for the research to follow. Chapter 2 follows, and explores the relationships between self-representation, autobiographical memory and the digital realm. The chapter considers traditional and contemporary theories of self-identity, self-representation and memory and explores the relationships between these concepts and how they are expressed in the contemporary digital realm. Thereafter, Chapter 3 explores the history and emergence of food and food culture as it relates to self-representation and memory. The chapter illustrates how in contemporary society, cultural identity and self-representation are expressed by means of digital food-themed images and their accompanying personalised captions, as posted on

online social media platforms. In Chapter 4, semiotic analysis is applied to a data set of digital food-themed Instagram posts selected from three hashtag platforms, namely; *#foodiesofinstagram*, *#foodmemories* and *#homechef*. The analysis identifies how social media participants make use of digital images as an online extension of their self-identity and autobiographical memory. The analysis is further enhanced by means of an online digital humanities project. Finally, Chapter 5 summarises the findings of the research and details the conclusions. Opportunities for further research are also noted. Finally, the different elements and chapters of the study build on one another, while overlapping in part, to identify how digital food-themed imagery is used as an expression of autobiographical memory on social media.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Hors d'oeuvres*

#### *Exploring the Relationships between Self-Representation, Autobiographical Memory and the Digital Realm.*

*I tell young chefs to always have their feet on the ground... to travel with their eyes and ears open and absorb everything, but never forget who they are or where they come from.*

Chef Massimo Bottura (Maris 2020)

This chapter explores the concept of the self and how it relates to the concepts of identity, self-representation and autobiographical memory from a predominantly psychological point of view. In so doing, it traces the evolution of early theories of self-identity and memory with particular reference to the works of John Locke (1689) and William James (1890) and explores the linkages between self-representation and autobiographical memory. The chapter further considers the contemporary nature of the online self, and discusses how self-representation and autobiographical memory are mediated within the digital realm using the academic contributions of Robyn Fivush (2003; 2017) and theorists Stuart Hall (1997) and Jill Rettberg (2017).

The rapid and expansive emergence of our technological age is highlighted, and illustrates how smart technologies and digital media impact our perceptions of, and relationships with the world around us. Thereafter, the chapter elaborates on the role of story-telling and self-representation on social media and considers how social media users actively portray a uniquely individualised digital narrative of their life experiences and autobiographical memories. In summary, the chapter argues that online social media platforms such as Instagram, serve as vehicles for users to express their unique self-representations and autobiographical memories by means of digital visual images. Social media platforms provide online opportunities for the personalised accumulation of mediated memories wherein both private and personal, and collective memories, coalesce to create unique extensions of each user's autobiographical memory.

## 2.1 The Self: Understanding Identity, Representation, Memory and Autobiographical Memory

### 2.1.1 Understanding the Self

Contemporary understanding of the concept of self, identity and representation is rooted in historical academic literature. The contributions of John Locke (1632-1704) and William James (1842-1910) are noteworthy and immediately relevant to this study. In Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and James' *Principles of Psychology* (1890), both theorists made founding contributions to philosophical and psychological discourse. Centuries prior to that, philosopher Saint Augustine (AD 354-430) scripted the first detailed Western analyses of human memory, as he proposed it related to knowledge and self-identity (Funkenstein 1989). Augustine's *The Confessions* (AD 397-400) is widely recognised as the founding philosophical discourse from a self-perspective viewpoint - effectively, the first autobiography - which influenced all subsequent traditions of autobiographical writing (Chadwick 2008). In thirteen volumes, Augustine explores the relationships between the self and political society (Holland 2020), and psychologists have for long been intrigued by his early ideas of language formulation, knowledge, emotion, the structure of the human mind, and the concept of the self (Christian 2008).

Furthering Augustine's early viewpoints, the conceptualisation and understanding of the self has foundations in varying schools of psychological thought. Widely regarded as one of the founders of modern philosophy, René Descartes (1596-1650) expounded the theory on the dualism of mind and body. In *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) Descartes asserts that humans are a composite union of mind and body, encompassing the idea that mind and body are distinct entities that closely align (Cunning 2014). Known as Cartesian dualism (or mind-body dualism), Descartes' thesis on the separation of the mind and the body went on to influence successive Western philosophies (Gobert 2013). Descartes established the foundation for subsequent branches of philosophy, including the seventeenth century continental rationalism advocated by Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677)<sup>15</sup> and Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716),

---

<sup>15</sup> Continental Rationalism refers to a set of shared epistemological views (pertaining to the theory of knowledge) identified by a number of active philosophers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These views emphasise the idea of a reliance on reason (rationalism).

and was later opposed by the empiricist school of thought advocated by Locke, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), George Berkeley (1685-1753), and David Hume (1711-1776).<sup>16</sup>

Descartes' views on the concept of embodiment highlighted one of the most perplexing problems of his dualism philosophy, namely: What exactly is the relationship of union between the mind and the body of a person?<sup>17</sup> The debate surrounding the precepts of Cartesian dualism persisted throughout philosophical discussion of the mind-body phenomena for many years following Descartes' death (Westphal 2016). Descartes was also a rationalist and believed in the power of innate, distinctive ideas, and asserted the theory of innate knowledge in which all humans were born with knowledge endowed through the higher power of God (Westphal 2016). It was this theory of innate knowledge that was later opposed by philosopher John Locke's empiricism holding that all knowledge is acquired through experience.

John Locke's (1689) theory of personal identity had a profound influence on the early development of psychological theory. As an Enlightenment scholar,<sup>18</sup> Locke's theory of mind is frequently cited as the pioneer of modern conceptualisations of identity and the self. Locke theorised that self-identity is defined through one's "continuity of consciousness" distinct from "the substance of either the body or the soul" (Nimbalkar 2011:268).

From Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) emerged evolving conceptualisations of the individual being, and consciousness, as "the repeated self-identification of one's self" (Nimbalkar 2011:269). Locke was the first to define the self as a continuity of consciousness. Contrary to prevailing Cartesian philosophy based on the existence of pre-existing knowledge, Locke maintained that people are born without innate ideas, and that knowledge is instead determined only by our experiences derived from our sensory perceptions - the concept now known as empiricism (Baird et al. (2008). In countering both the Augustinian view of humanity, as well as Cartesian dualism, Locke established the idea that every individual was born as a *tabula rasa* in which the human mind originates as a 'blank slate' ultimately to be shaped and crafted by a lifetime of unique personal experiences "in which sensations and reflections are the two root sources of all our ideas" (Nimbalkar

---

<sup>16</sup> The theory of Empiricism states that all knowledge stems from experiences derived from the senses, and emphasises the role of empirical evidence in the formation of ideas (Psillos et al. 2010).

<sup>17</sup> The phenomenon of embodiment within the digital realm is discussed in section 2.2.4

<sup>18</sup> The Age of Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement wherein thinkers sought to question traditional authority and embraced the idea that society could be enhanced through rational change (Enlightenment 2009).



2011:269).<sup>19</sup> Locke sought to understand “the nature of his own mind, and the power of the individual” (Baldwin 1913:179) and attributed the gradual evolution of our unique self-identity to the combined influences of consciousness, experience and memory.

Locke theorised that the individual consciousness was a distinct psychological entity mediated by the twin influences of body and soul. Locke proposed that “the brain as the body and as any substance may change, while consciousness remains the same” and hence circumscribed how our unique personal identity is not founded in the physical structure of the brain, but rather within our individual consciousness (Nimbalkar 2011:269). Individuals thus accumulate information and formulate knowledge in conjunction with their recollection of their unique life experiences; hence the self is born and nurtured, and evolves over time. To Locke’s way of thinking, a human being was an individual that could think self-reflectivity, whilst at the same time being conscious and mindful of their enduring existence into their future years.

In his chapter *Of the Association of Ideas* (1689) Locke considers how ideas, learning and thought are intrinsically inter-connected (Mandelbaum 2020). Locke argues that the “associations of ideas” formulated by individuals during their childhood and youth are fundamental to the foundation of their sense of self. In essence, they are the first markings on each’s *tabula rasa* (Nimbalkar 2011:273). Locke encapsulates this concept within the theory of Associationism imposing widespread influence on eighteenth century psychological thought (Ninbalkar 2011:273)<sup>20</sup> and providing the impetus behind subsequent theories of empiricism. In more contemporary scientific thinking, Associationism has since played an elemental role in psychological theories of human development, learning, thinking, and mental cognition (Mandelbaum 2020).

Subsequent to Locke, William James’ nineteenth century writings *Principles of Psychology* (1890) on the self, provided further important contributions to contemporary theorists and psychological thought. James and Charles Peirce (1839-1914) co-founded the so-called *Metaphysical Club* of the 1870s and, along with other scientific and philosophical theorists, established themselves as respected expert voices responsible for establishing psychology as a formal academic discipline (Taylor 1997). James was acknowledged for “reawakening the

---

<sup>19</sup> Tabula rasa - a Latin phrase translated as “clean slate”. In psychology and therapy, it refers to the idea that our ‘clean slate’ is inscribed by our subsequent upbringing and experiences (Fritscher [o] 2020). Interestingly, the Latin term ‘tabula’ also translates directly as ‘tablet’, a term used in contemporary society to describe a small portable computer or technological device. This links to the idea of using technological devices to inscribe memories which will be discussed in this chapter.

<sup>20</sup> The term Associationism was first recorded in Plato and Aristotle with regards to the succession of memory, and is originally traced back to the Aristotelian notion that human memory encompasses all mental phenomena (Anderson et al 2014). The term was first used by Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689).

moribund tradition of British Empiricism, along the lines of Locke and Hume” and in co-operation with Peirce gave rise to the philosophical school of Pragmatism (Taylor 1997).<sup>21</sup> James is recognised as one of the founders of functional psychology - a school of psychological thought that focuses on the utility and purpose of human behaviour as it adapts and evolves across human existence (Fancher et al. 2016).

Founded in his theories of pragmatism, James (1890) espoused a functional and dynamic perspective of human individuality, asserting that as people are exposed to continuous change, they actively select incidents and facts from their life experiences and interactions, and internalise the details as personal memories. Individuals then combine and interpret these unique memories as components of the self. James (1890:183) refers to an individual’s construction of the self as the “sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers” - “but also his materialistic units, interpersonal relationships, reputations and workings”. James describes how each of these personal entities generate unique emotions, collectively contributing to the individual recognised and represented as the self. James (1890:183) circumscribes four components of the self, namely: the material self, the social self, the spiritual self and the pure ego.

The material self (James 1890:183) consists of an amalgamation of those unique things that belong to a person - with each individual’s physical body being the innermost and most intimate part. Georges (2009:12) expounds on how the material self is synthesised from “the body, the clothing, the family, the home and the possessions” of an individual, conceptualised in decreasing order of importance and intimacy. The material self becomes especially instrumental in our identification of cultural norms and appropriateness. For example, James (1890:183) demonstrates the different identities and stereotypes associated with people wearing tattered and dirty clothing vis-à-vis those neatly dressed in clean and formal attire.

In the material self, individuals place significant emphasis on the role played by family members “Our father and mother, our wife and babes, are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. When they die, a part of our very selves is gone. If they do anything wrong, it is our shame” (James 1890:184). James thus highlights the influential role of other’s actions, impressions and experiences, and so provides an early demonstration of how external

---

<sup>21</sup> Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition that understands knowing the world as “inseparable from the agency within it” (Legg et al. 2021). It considers words and thoughts as instruments for problem solving, predication and action.

influences have a forceful influence on the way we think, feel, perceive and experience life, and ultimately, on how we conduct our day-to-day lives and activities.

James (1890:184) further describes how individuals possess an inherent impulse to “watch over our body, to deck it with clothing of an ornamental sort, to cherish parents, wife and babes, and to find for ourselves a home of our own in which we may live and improve”. In so doing, James underscores the importance and relevance of the home in formulating the material self in which defining and delineating one’s own sense of home carries broad connotations for one’s unique world view and personal development.

The social self is who we are in any given social situation, and highlights the importance of the nature of recognition an individual receives, or does not receive, from peers and acquaintances. As James (1890:185) suggests, we have an innate desire to be seen and noticed - usually favourably - by other persons. James explores the notion that an individual possesses varying ‘social selves’ - as numerous individuals, or social others, “recognise him and carry an image of him in their mind”. In this way, an individual adopts different versions of self, with varying character traits, according to the opinions of various others. As a result, an individual might represent only selected parts of themselves to identified others in order to seek social acceptance within specific circles. James (1890:185) notes for example how “we do not show ourselves to our children as to our club-companions, to our customers as to the labourers we employ, to our own masters and employers as to our intimate friends”. As a consequence, James (1890:281-282) suggests “to wound any man of his images is to wound himself”, highlighting how individuals attach significant importance to nurturing specifically crafted ‘images’ within their interactive social groups and classes.

Additionally, James (1890:296) refers to the spiritual self as a person’s “inner or subjective being, his psychic faculties or dispositions, taken concretely” thus highlighting its role in our personal consciousness and thought as a steadfast understanding of who we are at our innermost core. James (1890) asserts that to recognise one’s spiritual self is to acknowledge that we are able to “think subjectively as such, to think of ourselves as thinkers” (Leary 1990:110).

Finally, James’ fourth component of the self, the pure ego, provides the thread of continuity between our past, present, and future selves. James (1890) postulates that the pure ego is akin to the construct commonly understood as an “individual’s unique soul or mind”; it has no

tangible physical form and therefore cannot readily be physically observed or scientifically studied (Pomerleau 2021).<sup>22</sup>

Considering these varying components of self, the very concept of the self emerges as an intricate, and complex phenomenon. In the current digital age, given the contemporary transformation of digital media and smart technologies, the concept of self is worthy of detailed and focused enquiry; to better understand the self helps formulate a richer understanding of how the contemporary digital environment not only influences how people choose to represent themselves to society, but how it shapes the world.

Locke was a liberalist thinker and expounded his ideas in his influential *Two Treatises* (1690), the foundational text of liberal ideology asserting that all citizens should have unlimited access to the ideas of his fellow men in free and open forum<sup>23</sup>. Locke's liberalist relevance to the socio-psychology of contemporary digital culture, and to this study, is significant. The aspired principles of freedom of expression and social equality embodied within our Digital Age - and as particularly manifest in social media applications such as Facebook and Instagram - constitute a cornerstone of our emergent digital culture (Makasi 2021).<sup>24</sup>

James' hypotheses are similarly informative to this study. Reputed as the 'Father of American Psychology', James highlights how the individual's self is mediated and influenced by the broader context of our experiences at any given point in time (Brink 2008). In this way, the self, and how individuals choose to represent themselves, becomes uniquely personalised and subjective. Self-representation is not a static, immutable notion, but more a dynamic, evolving entity that modifies and adapts with time and circumstance. This precept lies at the core of this study in which online participants repeatedly make use of social media (in this case Instagram) as a means to catalogue and express their memories and experiences in a dynamic, evolutionary, image-follows-image fashion.

---

<sup>22</sup> James' spiritual self and the pure ego self are not immediately relevant to the context of this study; these components are thus mentioned only briefly for purpose of theoretical contextualisation.

<sup>23</sup> Locke was strongly influenced by the liberal ideas of intellectual and poet John Milton (1608-1674) another staunch advocate of freedom in all its forms who in *Areopagitica - A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing (1644)* provided one of the first arguments recognising the importance of freedom of speech. Furthermore, Locke was perhaps the first major liberal thinker incorporating the integration of women into social liberal theory and advancing the notion of a more integrated pluralist society (Young 2002).

<sup>24</sup> For many individuals, social media platforms have provided a safe space to voice their opinions and express themselves in an authentic manner, without the fear of being ridiculed or judged.

### 2.1.2 Understanding Memory

Scholarly interest in the concept of memory dates back to Graeco-Roman and medieval antiquity, and continues as a prominent focus throughout the evolution of psychology, philosophy and sociology. Early Greek and Roman oratory theory placed emphasis on the art of memory and memorising as “a set of skills deemed essential for the successful orator” and for events where the spoken word was considered to be of utmost importance (Julião et al. 2016:677). In ancient Greek mythology, goddess *Mnemosyne* personifies the virtues of memory, her name derived from the word ‘mnemonic’ in reference to its importance in facilitating recall (Tipper 2009). Mythologically revered as the foundation of all life and creativity *Mnemosyne* was ‘knowing and understanding of all things past, present and future’ (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2020). In antiquity, mnemonics were memory cues originating in the art of memory. Ancient Greeks and Romans distinguished between two types of memory, the natural memory and the artificial memory, wherein the former is inborn and is used instinctively. The latter in contrast has to be adopted, trained and developed through the learning and practice of a variety of mnemonic techniques. Contemporary mnemonic systems are techniques or devices used to facilitate and enhance memory (Carlson et al. 2010). As social media platforms such as Instagram become increasingly popular, and the volume of posts increases beyond measure, so the platforms now serve as digital mnemonic facilities.

Also relevant to this study and the concept of memory, mimesis is a concept used in literary criticism and philosophy that carries a wide range of meanings, including representation, mimicry, the act of expression, and the presentation of the self (Auerbach 1953). In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (1978), social philosopher René Girard asserts that human behaviour is founded upon mimesis and identifies how society’s unprecedented capacity to embrace competition ultimately underpins all the achievements of the modern world. Girard cautions however, that competitive interaction can stifle progress should it become an end in itself, when “rivals are more apt to forget about whatever objects are the cause of the rivalry and instead become more fascinated with one another” (Girard 1987:307).

In considering the relationship between the self and memory, an individual’s self-narrative is a vital element of their being, essential to the development of self-identity. As Fivush et al. (2003:vii) suggests, every individual manifests a “life narrative” that stems from the socio-cultural frameworks that respectively define, influence and express “what is appropriate to

remember, what it means to remember, and what it means to be a self with an autobiographical past". Fivush et al. (2003:vii) further highlight the importance of the individual narrative in human cognition; it is through the intricate and personal construction of our own unique "life story" that self-identity, self-representation and memory are inextricably interwoven. In formulating a coherent self-narrative, the influence of our social interactions and expressions is fundamental to our ability to successfully merge the self with memory.

Funkenstein (1989:5) describes how memory and history interact to combine *res gestae* (the things that happen) with *historica rerum gestarum* (the narration of the things that happen), thus emphasising that without personal experience and the ability to reminisce over past events, we are unable to connect with our past and perceive ourselves as individuals within a wider social community. Without their unique experiences and memories, individuals lack the knowledge and understanding required to interpret and assimilate present and future behaviour patterns.

Furthermore, the construction of one's unique life narrative is influenced not only by "larger cultural frameworks" but simultaneously by an intricate understanding of "what a self is, and what it means to remember the past" (Oyserman & Markus 1993). Fivush et al (2003:vii) highlight that by their very nature life narratives are "culturally prescribed forms for organising events through canonicalized linguistic frameworks". It is through the expression of meaningful narrative that events and personal experiences assume "human shape and human meaning" (Fivush et al 2003:vii). The expression of experiences by varying means, for example through folklore, literature, traditional dance or cultural norms - and in the case of this study by means of online social media (Instagram) - circumscribes the unique detail of an individual's narrative.

Moreover, Funkenstein (1989:12) emphasises the importance within society of historical collective consciousness as the process of remembering the past and creating collective memories in order to formulate a cohesive identity in both the past and the present. In this respect, Serafinelli (2020) describes how Instagram is an effective online channel for sharing and cataloguing collective memories in the digital space.

### 2.1.3 *Understanding Autobiographical Memory*

There are various elements of memory that contribute to our self-identity, self-representation and personality. This study particularly focuses on the influence of autobiographical memory. In *A Typology of Memory Terms*, Roediger et al. (2017) affirm that whilst many theoretical conceptualisations of memory coalesce and overlap, it is our autobiographical memory that relates most directly to “oneself or one’s sense of personal history” and equips us with an immutable sense of continuity and connection between the past, present and the future, vital for the construction of the future “through the looking glass of the present” (Roediger et al. 2017:15).

Psychologists identify how autobiographical memory fulfils four broad functions: directive, social, self-representative and adaptive (Bluck et al. 2005; Williams et al. 2008). The directive function makes use of past experiences as a basis for problem solving and guiding behaviours. Memories of personal experiences and their associated positive or negative sentiments are used to formulate models of appropriate behaviour which can later be utilised according to circumstance and need (Pillemer 2003). In situations when a particular behaviour requirement cannot be identified from a memory model, more specific autobiographical memory incidents are accessed to provide more detailed focus. In this way, the individual makes use of “past experiences to construct models to understand the inner worlds” of the self and others and to behave accordingly (Bluck et al. 2008).

The social function of autobiographical memory nurtures social relationships by providing appropriate content for communication and social interaction (Bluck et al. 2005). For example, the sharing of personal memories with others is a mechanism to facilitate social interaction, whilst revealing detailed personal experiences or reminiscing about shared events can enhance intimacy and strengthen social bonds between individuals (Williams et al. 2008).

Autobiographical memory performs a self-representative function by using personal memories to develop and maintain the continuity of an individual’s self-identity (Williams et al. 2008). As Bluck et al. (2005) highlight, the self-representative function of autobiographical memory and its role in maintaining stability and continuity of self is essential to the individual, allowing the incumbent to evaluate past experiences - the process of self-reflection - as a precursor to self-awareness and expression.

Finally, autobiographical memory incorporates an adaptive function (Williams et al. 2008). By recalling positive personal memories, individuals are able to sustain positive moods and modify

or eradicate negative moods and emotions (Robinson et al. 1990). This adaptive functionality provides incumbents with a coping mechanism for negativity, and instils a level of emotional resilience.

As Fivush et al. (2017) assert, individuals are authors of their own autobiography, playing the leading role in their own life narrative, and choosing how and when to interact with their self-selected others. Initially at least, autobiographical memory seems uniquely intuitive and personalised: How can anyone other than the participant individual possibly assimilate the intricate details of a unique personal experience? (Fivush et al. 2017:119). Over time however, autobiographical memory is shifting, changeable and influenced by others. As Fivush et al. (2017:120) make clear, autobiographical memory is:

A complex blend of many forms of memories and knowledge integrated into one coherent story that is based on remembered experiences of single, recurring and extended events and facts that we have learned about ourselves from others, and gleaned from abstracting across our personal experiences filtered through evaluative frameworks provided by participation in socio-cultural activities.

Autobiographical memory thus emerges as “a uniquely human form of memory that integrates individual experiences of self with cultural frameworks of understanding, identities and lives” (Fivush et al. 2011:321). It is an intricate amalgam of episodic, recurring, extended and semantic knowledge and information generated and absorbed with the purpose of defining the self and future goals (Fivush et al. 2017:126). It is one’s personal history, comprised of childhood experiences and milestone events - such as graduating from university, learning to cook or falling in love (with chocolate chip cookies). Autobiographical memories thus “comprise the story of our lives” rich in thought, emotions, interactions, experiences and relationships (Fivush et al. 2011:321).

Guomundsdottir (2014:42) highlights how “narrative traditions, social conventions and a shared sense of what is appropriate” circumscribe how we choose to define and represent ourselves. The narratives we voice and express of ourselves and others, come not only as a result of “natural or physical processes”, but are also influenced by our external environments.

Nelson (2003:125) describes how one particularly notable function of autobiographical memory is to nurture a better understanding not only of the self, but of one’s contextual culture and society, particularly when combined with story sharing about ourselves with others. Nelson concludes that autobiographical memory serves as both a mechanism for social interaction and sharing stories *and* as a “vehicle for self-expression and definition” (Nelson 2003:125). As



Diaz-Moore (2006:35) illustrates, story-telling - incorporating narrative imagining - is an integral element of individual thought. It is an individual's means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining. Much of an individual's experience, knowledge and thinking is organised as stories (Diaz-Moore 2006:35).

Fivush et al. (2003:vii) further highlight how such autobiographical narratives provide individuals with a "more complex organisation and understanding" of their various experiences and life events by prompting "subjective evaluations...and the formation of thematic relations" and personal meaning-making essential to the development of interpersonal relationships and self-representation (Labov 1982; Linde 1993, in Fivush 2003:vii). In this way, "Memories of our past experiences blended and inter-twined into a coherent story of a personal past, leading to a present, and self-projected into an anticipated future, define who we are, how we came to be this way, and what we will become" (Fivush et al. 2017:119).

Thus, autobiographical memory is far more than the simple recall of selected events. It is the intricate inter-lacing of an individual's experiences, emotions and understandings that "generate a coherent and continuous self-identity over time, that allows an individual to develop meaning and purpose in life" (Greenwald & Pratkanis 1984, in Fivush et al. 2017:119).

Brewer (1986) considers autobiographical memory as consisting of three sub-components. The first - personal memories - refer to those specific events and life experiences which are "accompanied by imagery". Such personal memories are the individual's "real-world analogue of life", each specifically date-marked and referenced by a meaningful time and place. The second - autobiographical facts - refer to personalised truths and realities that are "devoid of personally experienced temporal or spatial context information" (Brewer 1986). For example, a person may be aware of their first word spoken, or the first steps taken as an infant, but is unable to remember or recall specific details of the event. The third sub-component - generic personal memories - refer to more abstract elements of knowledge, sometimes referenced as "acquired procedural knowledge", such as learning a new recipe or how to operate a new computer software package. Brewer's three-component model exemplifies how autobiographical memory is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon which facilitates a logical and cogent link between an individual's personal history and their sense of self.

*The Surf Lifesavers Club was our regular go-to haunt on holiday on the Gold Coast in Oz. After a long day of driving and walking and playing (and napping), we would head-on over to the club for dinner and of course a Fanta Orange. I loved it - the spag-bol with extra tamatie sous every time. Mom and Dad would sit and watch me in the playground and climbing all over the seats. Eventually though - 'magie vol, ogies toe' and I needed to go home. Mom would come to the rescue and build a perfect place to snooze - plastic restaurant chairs and Dad's fleece. Lights out. Little did I know back then, Mom and Dad both knew it was the best place to get plain and simple grub for fussy kids. I guess that's a personal memory I'll keep for a long while. Probably forever.*

As my personal holiday memories illustrate, an individual's autobiographical memory emerges from earliest infancy and childhood through adolescence into adulthood, and progresses through a series of developmental milestones (Nelson 2003). According to Rochat (2015) newborn infants display a nascent awareness of the physical self, "an embodiment of the extension of the self in space". Thus Fivush et al. (2017:125) describe how mirror self-recognition amongst infants - the act of a baby perceiving the reflection to be its own - constitutes an early indication of self-representation, and by the end of the child's second year, the infant harbours an established concept of "the self in the present". Thereafter, as they see, hear and experience language, children begin to learn the forms and functions of autobiographical narrative by means of sound and language articulation and through conversation with others (Fivush 2003:vii).

In this fashion, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) describes the 'mirror stage' of childhood development as being "formative of the function of the 'I'" (Lacan 1977). Lacan's mirror stage is based on his psychoanalytic theory that from the age of about six months, infants recognize themselves in a mirror, thus perceiving themselves as an object that can be viewed by the child from outside themselves. Lacan explains that "the mirror stage is a phenomenon to which I assign a twofold value. In the first place, it has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body-image" (Lacan 1977). The so-named mirror stage describes the formation of the ego via the process of objectification, the ego emerging as a result of a conflict between one's perceived visual appearance and one's emotional experience. The mirror image initiates and then aids, the process of the formation of an integrated sense of self. The

mirror stage also has a significant symbolic dimension, due to the presence of the figure of the adult holding the infant. Having cheerfully recognised the image as their own, the child then turns towards the adult as if to ask the adult to acknowledge and confirm the image (Lacan 2001).

Like all prominent theorists, Lacan also had his detractors. French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) was the founder of “deconstruction,” an approach he used to criticise not only literary and philosophical texts but also political institutions. Derrida sought to question the assumptions of the Western philosophical tradition and broader Western culture (Derrida 1992; Benjamin 2004). Derrida challenged Lacan (as he did many other structuralist perspectives) and criticises structuralism for trying rigorously to define meaning, as if systems of language are closed and confined with a clear and neatly defined starting point.<sup>25</sup> Derrida thus deconstructs Lacan’s mirror theory, claiming that he conjures language to reduce his psychoanalytic theory to a system of tidy meanings (Haber 2021). In Derrida’s own assessment, the emergence of a child’s self-identity cannot be fixed as an event in time, but is constructed and understood through the use of language with a multitude of different interpretations (Kerren 2012).

Derrida’s deconstructions notwithstanding, as children grow to adolescents and then adults, the way they share memories with others serves to modulate how their life experiences are perceived and interpreted, and ultimately, how they think about themselves, see themselves and represent themselves to others (Pasupathi 2001, in Fivush 2003:vii). As Dijck (2007:3) affirms, autobiographical memory “grounds us in our sense of continuity between past memories, current experiences and future endeavours”, and the formulation of self-identity is requisite for the emergence of memories retained within an individual’s unique autobiographical memory system (Howe & Courage 1997:499). In essence, our self-identity emerges and evolves hand-in-glove with our autobiographical memory.

So too within the digital age, self-identity and autobiographical memory are now reasserting themselves as enduring components of contemporary digital culture. The so-named Fourth

---

<sup>25</sup> Structuralism is an intellectual movement and philosophical orientation associated with the underlying patterns of social life. The Structuralist mode of inquiry sought not to simply identify social structures and relationships, but rather to look deeper than the visible surface (beliefs, ideas, manifestations) to unearth a richer meaning and understanding of active human subjects (Smith 2020).

Industrial Revolution has brought about far-reaching technological innovation; <sup>26</sup> as Hilbert (2020) observes “digital technology, including its omnipresent connectedness and its powerful artificial intelligence, is the most recent long-wave of humanity's socio-economic evolution”. Castells (2010:406) highlights how the evolution of media and communication technologies has contributed to fundamental changes in society and culture, with communities and individuals more frequently engaging with and experiencing a culture of real virtuality, a culture founded and organised around electronic media in which the space of flows and timeless time are the material hallmarks of a new culture - the network society - within which geographically distant users are able to interact in synchronised real-time venues, where space and time is effectively collapsed by the capability of global social networking platforms (Castells 2004: 146).

This study illustrates how the digital age imposes its influence on how individuals experience, record and recall their realities, as the network society makes avid use of social media as a repository of memories and a means to represent their collective identities, lifestyles, social norms, attitudes and behaviours. Mobile phones and social media platforms are now widely affordable and accessible, from infancy through childhood and adolescence into adulthood, and have become influential (in some instances seemingly indispensable) tools to facilitate the multiple functions (directive, social, self-representative and adaptive) of autobiographical memory, self-identity and representation (Williams 2008).

The section below considers the concepts of self-representation and autobiographical memory as specifically manifest within the digital realm. It illustrates how “digital representations conform to human perceptions, and seek to adopt our instinctive way of operating” (Georges 2000:5)<sup>27</sup> and identifies how individuals are influenced by, and choose to represent themselves, using online social media platforms.

---

<sup>26</sup> The Fourth Industrial Revolution refers to the sweeping emergence of smart technologies and Internet functionalities (for example, robotics, virtual reality systems, artificial intelligence and social networking platforms) which are changing the way society lives and functions (Wigmore 2021).

<sup>27</sup> Georges (2000:5) asserts that self-representation is “composed of signs visible on the screen that manifest and indicate the user’s presence”.

## **2.2 The Self Online: Understanding Representation, Memory and Autobiographical Memory in the Digital Realm**

### ***2.2.1. Self-Representation in the Digital Realm***

From traditional Stone Age cave paintings to more recent works of art and literature of antiquity, human individuals have sought to express and represent themselves through visual display, variously recording their historical experiences, cultural activities and stories. More recently, given the fast-paced development and evolution of digitised technologies and online communication networks, people have turned increasingly to digital media to express and represent themselves (Rettberg 2017:1).

As emphasised, so prevalent in contemporary society is digital functionality, that the distinction between the notions of ‘online’ and ‘offline’ self-identity has become blurred. From small personal pages, to full-blown mass communication platforms, digital users are now able to search and share posts about themselves and others within minutes (Ganda 2014:5). Desktop computers, tablets and smart devices render online interaction accessible to users on a twenty-four-hour basis - whether walking in a shopping mall, cooking at home in the kitchen, or enjoying a meal at a restaurant. Wherever they are, individuals now have the opportunity to connect and communicate online - immediately, instantaneously, at the touch of a screen.

Inevitably then, given the burgeoning popularity of online networks, has been the dramatic increase in the amount of time that users spend online. As a consequence, our offline interactions with others decreases as more socialisation and communication now occurs “within the glow of a computer or phone screen” (Ganda 2014:5). Such increased online engagement imposes significant influence on how individuals choose to represent themselves, and how people construct their evolving self-identities. As Ganda (2014:6) explains, as a result of our increased online interaction time, the formation of identity and our perception of the self is now hugely influenced by the “popularity of feedback” individuals receive on various aspects their online lives.

Online participants tend instinctively to share items of personal information and content they hope will be positively received by other online users. Hence whilst SNSs allow users to express their own personalities and “bare their true self while seeking like-minded others to create communities online”, the content is mediated not only by the online networks themselves, but also by the anticipated responses from other users (Ganda 2014).

The emergence of increasingly sophisticated digital technologies has progressively impacted the way people communicate and store information, so modifying their “processes of remembering and forgetting”. As Georges (2009:5) illustrates, since the first Internet technologies running through to present day Web 2.0 applications, SNSs have persistently been “feeding a cultural model of identity” (Georges 2009: 5) to society.

In *Self Representation and Digital Culture* (2012), Thumim describes the widespread proliferation of self-representation within contemporary digital culture<sup>28</sup> - a culture in which Framroze (2017) identifies how “one aspect of living a digitally oriented life necessitates deciding how and why one represents oneself in the virtual environment, and how one interacts with others within the digital ecosystem”. As individuals and households spend more time communicating online, so inevitably their online observations, perceptions, reactions and behaviours - indeed their unique sense of self - are more frequently and more forcefully influenced by digital media and technology and by other online users (Framroze 2017).

The opportunity for self-representation has thus become established as an attractive motivation for social media users to engage online as “participating audiences in our digital culture” to the extent that the very practise of self-representation has become synonymous with the many “spaces of Web 2.0” and other social networking platforms (Thumim 2012:6).<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Sconce (2000) expounds the concept of a person’s individual presence and emphasises how the contemporary evolution of a plethora of digitised communication devices is transforming user relationships, enabling people to more forcefully express and reinforce their self-styled identities and autobiographical memories.

The essential role of semiotics here must be emphasised. Rettberg (2017:3) defines representation as an object of signification,<sup>30</sup> a “sign that is seen as constructed in some way, and that stands instead of the object to which it refers”. A red rose for example, might be understood to represent love and passion on Valentine’s Day, whilst a pair of running shoes might be indicative of exercise and good health. As Pickering (1999) also asserts, selfhood

---

<sup>28</sup> Digital Culture has become a widely used term for the “diverse scholarship relating to new media and society”, and refers to the way in which contemporary technologies and the Internet are shaping the way humans interact, think, behave and communicate (Thumim 2012:10).

<sup>29</sup> Contemporary theories of self-representation in the Digital Age are emerging. The first theories of the ‘representation of the self’ date back to the post-Renaissance period when scholars considered how historical processes, knowledge and experience transformed the understanding of the individual self into “subject[s] of representation” (Thumim 2012:7).

<sup>30</sup> In his work *Representations* (1997) Hall (1997:24) identifies three types of representation; reflective, intentional and constructive. Reflective representation takes place when a sign or visual image articulates a reflection of reality. Intentional representation takes place when words or imagery “mean what the author intends for them to mean”, whilst constructive representation is specifically crafted to portray subjective experiences and individualised interpretations of reality (Hall 1997:25).

arises from the assimilation of cultural signs by a semiotic process in which the key to human selfhood is the capacity to symbolise; a process of symbolic interaction, both within the self and between the sign-world it inhabits. “In brief, ‘the self’ is a semiotic process” (Pickering 1999:10).

Furthermore, in Annette Lavers’ (1972:10) translation of *Eléments de sémiologie* (1964) Roland Barthes describes how contemporary society consists of an “extensive system of signs beyond human language” including visual representations and materials that can be used, interpreted and understood in order to communicate specific meanings. Just as visuals, signs and symbols initiate a particular idea or concept, so individuals can influence and inspire specific meanings about themselves through the construction of their self-representation. In this manner, semiotics is embedded in our innate capacity for self-representation (Rettberg 2017; Hall 1997).

In *The Linguistic Sign*, Saussure (1985:28) describes language as an “instrument of thought within culture” encompassing multiple signs that are able to communicate a particular meaning. In this context, Thumim (2012) identifies how social media technologies have popularised themselves as reliable and self-sufficient tools of communication, and that given the sophistication of numerous social media platforms, society no longer requires commentators, reporters or broadcasters to provide a platform on which “to invite or to edit” our various self-representations. Whilst society has historically made use of print version newspapers and magazines as a mainstream outlet for expression, the infinite capabilities of the digital realm have now come to epitomise the opportunities inherent within contemporary digital culture, so encouraging the “ordinary person to speak for themselves” (Thumim 2012:136).

Such is the case from which this study emerges: the online environment now boasts a multitude of colourful opportunities for user participation and self-expression - YouTube, Facebook, Google, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn, Flickr, Metacafe, Tumblr, Tinder and MySpace, to name but a few (Fuchs 2011:288). As a result of the pervasive and persuasive nature and “ever-increasing penetration” of online activity, digital media has fast become ingrained within the fabric of daily routine and sits at the “emerging intersection” of mobile devices, smart technologies and media networking, within our increasingly “digitally savvy society” (Thumim 2012:137).

Moreover, digital society is no longer the exclusive domain of experienced computer experts. The practise of self-representation is now widely seen as being synonymous with the

emergence of Web 2.0 and spawning a whole new population of self-styled amateurs fast-tracking themselves as creative, individualistic and self-expressive users gearing-up to “broadcast themselves” on SNSs (Burgess & Green 2009:29). The capacity for online self-representation is no longer the preserve of the digitally sophisticated few - it has become an omnipresent feature of our digital world where users are embracing every opportunity to express their identities and create their unique digital online memories - just as they choose and desire.

Whilst social networking may be the principal reason for online participation, self-expression and representation has in turn emerged as a persuasive “condition of such participation” (Thumim 2012:136). Moreover, online self-representation is more than the routine expression of the users’ experiences - it also encapsulates the influence of vast online audiences and their contextual and cultural environments, and has become a forceful influence on society’s collective consciousness.<sup>31</sup> As Rettberg (2014; 2017) makes clear, self-representation has always been a mainstream component of culture. From ancient sculptures and cave drawings, to scrapbooks and photo albums, society has been recording experiences and creating representations since the dawn of civilisation (Rettberg 2014:2).

Rettberg (2014) describes three distinctive modes of self-representation within contemporary digital media, namely the visual, written, and quantitative modes. Visual modes include for example, photographs, vlogs (video logs) and Instagram stories captured and shared on social media. Written modes of self-representation include the blogs, status updates and captions that often accompany visual imagery. Quantitative modes include smart technologies that allow individuals to quantify and track their activities, create ‘virtual life-logs’ and archive selected aspects of activity. Taken together, the three modes express the attitudes, values and behaviours of the curator. Thus Georges (2000: 6) describes how digital identities are “graphic, auditory, and visual transpositions of a representation in thought” shaped and modelled within a “living digital networking interface”.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) comments on the significance of daily face-to-face interactions between individuals and within communities. Goffman (1959:32) likens personal interaction to a stage performance - the relationship between the actor and the audience – and theorises that when one individual interacts with another, they

---

<sup>31</sup> French Sociologist Emile Durkheim (1893) refers to ‘collective consciousness’ as a shared way of understanding and behaving in the world, a shared set of beliefs, values and moral attitudes binding and unifying individuals together to create strong social integrations.



will seek to guide the other's perceptions and portray a specific image or impression of the 'actor'. As the "play of life" unfolds, the actor encounters himself in various situations where "different performances" are required (Goffman 1959:40-43). The guiding motivation is the actor's effort to highlight positive ideas of the self, and create the desired (usually positive) impressions. Peirce (1897) notes the same principle in his early conceptualisation of self-representation by means of the "skeleton diagram" of the self. Individuals will identify and define specific characteristics which in turn, will lead them to contemplate whether such characteristics constitute all or part of the desired appearance or representation. The same analysis can be applied to our contemporary online interactions, as social media users seek to express their identities, catalogue their memories and craft favourable representations. For as Ganda (2014:10) concurs, the idea that people seek to guide others and generate particular images and desired impressions of the self is implicit within the content users post online.

In the digital age, technological sophistication continues to evolve. Advances in hardware and software technology have enabled social media platforms to enhance the capabilities of the platforms they administer. Users are now able to mediate the content they generate, and more creatively manipulate their online representations. Individuals can thus modify their online expressions to comply with changing motivations or aspirations.

As Rettberg (2014:2) observes, whether by means of an oil painting, an old-fashioned camera, or a sophisticated hi-tech step-counter, technology "repeatedly reflect[s] back to us a version of who we are". In the context of Lacan's (1977) mirror theory, social media and smart technologies are effectively tools with which users are able to view, perceive and express themselves as objects within the external world. Contemporary psychologists also recognise the dynamic relationship between memory and the self, and acknowledge that these uniquely individual elements have become increasingly integrated within the broader, more complex fabric of culture (Dijck 2007:5) including contemporary digital culture.

The digital realm accommodates the dynamic and changing nature of society. As Thumim (2012:5) indicates, every form of self-representation, whether intended to be playful, flippant or controversial, can now be mediated by digital culture. Digital technologies have broadened the possibilities and opportunities for the mediation of interpersonal communication; self-representation is not only formulated and influenced by digital culture it emerges also as an inevitable by-product of it.

Thumim (2012:141) thus describes that on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, individuals act both as “participants in and audiences for self-representation”.<sup>32</sup> For example, even as onlooker to another person’s self-representation, we are innately inclined to represent ourselves. This encapsulates the concept of mimesis, in that human behaviour is founded upon a process of reflection and introspection, wherein individuals see themselves as a combination of both internal and external influences. Social media platforms thus influence the self-representing audience by means of the inclination that “we should socialise online and do so with recourse to self-representations” in the form of digital images and texts. Through this iterative process, the gradual construction of one’s own self-representation is an unavoidable aspect of our participation within the social network (Thumim 2012:142).

The posting, updating, and sharing of information on various social media platforms, and the opportunity for users to ‘like’ or ‘comment’ on posts, progressively generates a wider community of users - effectively a ‘collective self-representation’ - in similar fashion to more traditional techniques of societal communication<sup>33</sup> (Rettberg 2017:2). By means of social media, users are able to construct their personal identities, initiate and foster relationships, and self-manage the perceptions and interpretations of others. In this study for example, the photo-sharing facility of the Instagram hashtag sites, clearly empowers users to represent their identities and memories using digital food-themed images, and showcase what they believe to be uniquely meaningful and important. As Ganda (2014:7) describes, Instagram effectively becomes “an extension of the user” and becomes a reflection of their daily activities. As readily accessible areas for virtual interpersonal interaction, such SNSs serve as popular locations for the expression of self-identity (Ganda 2014:7). Moreover, ready access to laptops, tablets and smart phones equipped with high-resolution cameras and instantaneous access to real-time social media applications, has made it simpler and more universally convenient, to engage online (Rettberg 2017:2-3).

These trends in technological sophistication and accessibility highlight the detailed level of choice and control which social media users are able to exercise over the imagery they share with their chosen audiences. The distribution of selected images and graphics is, in and of itself, an expression of self-representation; individuals curating their own visuals and narrative texts

---

<sup>32</sup> Social media involves digital communication with others. However, we need also to be aware of how we utilise social media to *reflect upon ourselves* as individuals (Rettberg 2014:13).

<sup>33</sup> Rettberg (2014: 2; 2017:1) identifies that self-representation has for long been an entrenched component of culture, and asserts that humans have utilised media to represent themselves for millennia; for example, indigenous people creating parietal art, grandparents sharing folklore, children drawing stick figures and teenagers writing in diaries.

and then sharing them with an audience of virtual viewers. An entire catalogue of social media applications now allows many millions of users to engage online. The question thus arises: *If social media becomes an extension of the users' self - an expression of their self-representation - how does it then extend into, and impact, the mental processes determining the self, those used to express and recall our life experiences and memories?*

### ***2.2.2 Self-Representation and Virtual Identity***

Hamilton (2021) extends the idea of self-identity represented online into the notion of a 'virtual identity', which is the "manifestation of one's self in the digital world of e-commerce, e-mail, social networking, and virtual worlds". Self-identities within our (post)modern digital age are no longer static, nor tied to physical anchors such as identity documents and passports. Instead, our identities are linked to the virtual worlds of social networks, creating an entire web of interpersonal interactions and communications amongst local and international users and their communities. Communication has never been as flexible and adaptable as we now find it to be online. For example, users' names, nationalities, genders and appearances can be readily manipulated (sometimes even changed and replaced) and require no close or authentic connection with the real world (Hamilton 2021). Online identities are "portable" and possess the ability to "transcend their origins and move to other social networks, other virtual worlds, and even to other web pages" (Hamilton (2021).

Furthermore, the ability for Instagram users to create their own online identities and choose their own user names allows people to be creative and control what they want to do and how they elect to represent themselves. Regardless of the fact that online identity might not be an authentic representation of true identity, it nevertheless has significant influence on the impressions that other individuals might hold (Krotoski 2012). The concept of human identity is complex and intricate, a "unique amalgam of characteristics that are either inherent or assigned to one individual by another" (Agbinya 2008). Such characteristics include unique personality and behavioural traits as perceived by other online users. Identity and self-representations evolve over time; no two representations or perceptions of an identity are the same (Agbinya 2008), instead they are continuously remodelled based on our evolving perceptions and motivations (Van Dijck 2007:3).

Agbinya (2008) illustrates how digital identity consists of two elements - whom the person is, and the attributes associated with the person - thus highlighting how individuals are susceptible

to external influences and opinions Identification with social groups and communities is inherently natural human behaviour and it is the norm for individuals to adjust their digital identity in order to relate to selected groups or as a pathway to closer engagement with other digital users (Agbinya 2008).

Garling (2011) also describes how the representation of multiple identities is a normal facet of individuality, reflective of how no one person behaves identically with each individual they encounter. For example, a person's professional or workplace identity and behaviour can be markedly different to the self-identity they express at home amongst family. Behaviour, social norms and etiquette vary according to different situations - the same principle will apply in the online social media realm. Whilst an individual may share personal life experiences through social media platforms in order to exchange memories with friends and followers, a separate professional account and identity for the purpose of business networking and representing professional impressions is commonplace (Doxjt 2017). Paradoxically perhaps, social media has made our engagements more transparent; an online environment in which users are consistently conscious of what they post, the identities they portray, and to whom.

### ***2.2.3 Autobiographical Memory in the Digital Realm***

During the past decade in particular, the fast-paced evolution of digital technologies, digitalised data processing and online communication platforms, has dramatically enhanced global accessibility and exposure to digital media. This groundswell of media engagement has influenced the way people form relationships, how they experience reality, and how they identify and recall unique defining moments in their lives (Psychcentral 2018: [o]). As such, researchers are now more specifically investigating the concept of online memory - how it evolves and functions, how it perpetuates in contemporary society and, in particular, how online memory can be differentiated from traditional expressions of memory (Garcia-Gavilanes et al. 2017).

As Bell et al. (2010) highlight, given the proliferation of sophisticated Web 2.0 capabilities, users are now able to “appropriate the Internet as an effective medium to recall and share their personal experiences” in the online space, using a continuum of social networking platforms. From a scholarly perspective, these ongoing advances underscore the need to modify our traditional interpretations of memory to incorporate the emergent digital and online components.

Wegner and Ward (2013) identify how prior to the Digital Age, the storage and retrieval of memory was effectively the responsibility of the individual; people would rely on each other to express the detail of memorable events. Digital media however, is eroding the individual's responsibility of remembering, by serving as an external virtual storage facility for their personal and collective memories (Wang et al. 2017:772). The necessity to remember information, indeed the very act of remembering, has now been (at least in part) installed in a digital application from which participants can extract experiences and memories at the touch of a digital screen. Such reliance on digital technology as a means of external storage, and the extension of our memories into the digital universe, exemplifies the role Instagram now fulfils in digital culture. Research by Sparrow, Lui and Wegner (2011) for example, suggests that individuals are knowingly choosing *not* to commit specific personal details to memory, or remember the detail of personal events, since they can now place reliance on "future access to digital information" via the Internet. The question thus arises: If we are increasingly reliant on digital media to recall and retrieve fundamental memories, is our inherent sense of self (self-identity or then virtual identity as Hamilton identifies) also increasingly reliant on technology? Is technology becoming a further extension of ourselves *and our memories*?

The seemingly endless capacity of digital technologies and the world wide web has resulted in a surge of users "creating content and broadcasting personal opinions and experiences" on their chosen SNSs - a digital space for individuals to creatively express their selves and represent themselves accordingly (wang 2013). As a consequence, social media platforms now collectively constitute a form of "transactive memory for the autobiographical self in the digital age" (Lenhart & Fox 2006 in Wang et al. 2017:772) in which individuals function as external memory aids to one another and by means of which individuals are able to develop a robust knowledge of each other and their memories (Wegner 1991:923). Individuals effectively create a shared memory system for encoding, storing and retrieving information.

In the digital realm, the same concept applies to online groups and communities such as Instagram. Our emerging reliance on digital media platforms as a repository for expression and memory has ensured the emergence of like-minded groups - in the form of hashtag trends - whose individual identities are created and perpetuated through a process of "digital mediation and mediated memory" (Godovic 2018). Van Dijck (2007:1) further identifies how the intercession of memory between and amongst individuals provides opportunity for the mediation of recollections of detail - for example of their incidents, experiences and memories

- and that these mediated memories form a “formative part of our autobiographical and cultural identities”. Such is most surely the case for millions of Instagram users.

The process of memory-making is also influenced by the nature of our online identities, by the way we represent ourselves and are perceived by others. To this end, Van Dijck (2007:2) highlights how memory and media serve as metaphorical “reservoirs” capturing our past experiences and knowledge in readiness for future use. Through the mediation of their individual reservoirs, social media users are able to construct, reinforce and retain their sense of history, community, individuality and personal identity (Van Dijck 2007:2). In this way, digital media provides attractive online sites for the individualised accumulation of mediated memories wherein both the private and personal, and the collective, coalesce to create our unique autobiographical memory (Van Dijck 2007:2).

#### ***2.2.4 The Digital as an Embodied Experience***

Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) rebuts the traditional principle of innate knowledge, and in contrast argues that all human knowledge stems directly from human experiences (Wirkus 2016:2). Locke’s theory suggests that all ideas “enter the mind through two types of experiences”; the first considers sensation channelled through the body’s senses, and the second contemplates “reflection upon mental operations” (Wirkus 2016:2). As such, the ideas and experiences generated by these two facets of consciousness, sensation and reflection, are thereafter stored in the mind for later retrieval or reminiscence. Locke (1689) suggests that knowledge is gained by physically being and existing in the world – “touching, seeing, tasting [and] interacting”. In parallel to this, knowledge is also a mental artefact, which Locke (1689) equates to a cabinet which functions as a carefully filed space to accumulate and store items - or ideas and experiences - for future recall (Wirkus 2016:2). As such, these ideas serve as the fundamental building blocks of knowledge that can be compounded and expanded in a myriad of ways (Wirkus 2016:2).

As Chemero (2009:43) suggests, Locke is a representationalist - acknowledged amongst representational thought which “runs from Augustine through Descartes through to today’s computational cognitive scientists”. The concept of representationalism, based on the Representative Theory of Perception<sup>34</sup> is a philosophical position that considers how the world

---

<sup>34</sup> The Representative Theory of Perception is generally ascribed to John Locke in *Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). According to the theory, knowledge is possible only through the assimilation of ideas.

we see as individuals is a conscious experience, recorded through our sense data of our real, material, external environments - a personal replica of the world through an internal representation (Chakrabarti 2018).

Embodiment is the tangibility of human form - to make comprehensible an idea, experience or concept through a physical presentation (Albu 2019). The contemporary study of embodiment in cognitive science stands in contrast to the Cartesian mind-body dualism theory, and theorises how “our ideas are shaped by our bodily experiences – not in any simpleminded one-to-one way but indirectly, through the grounding of our entire conceptual system in everyday life” (Lakoff & Nunez 2000:xiv).

In *Out of our Heads: Why You are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (2009) Alva Noë asserts that consciousness does not happen in the brain, nor is it simply a function of neural activity. Instead, Noë (2009) breaks traditional accounts of consciousness free of the brain, and echo's Locke's (1689) argument concerning the limited volume of information the knowledge of the body's structure brings.

According to Newen and Voegeley (2003), self-consciousness defines the ability of an individual to represent one's unique self, especially incorporating the individual's mental states wherein elements of self-representation are combined with conscious experiences. The core phenomena of self-consciousness thus include “the perspectivity of our experiences, the sense of ownership of body parts (‘this is my arm’), the sense of agency (‘this is my action’), the sense of authorship of thoughts (‘this is my thought’) and the trans-temporal unification of a plurality of self-related information into an autobiography” (Synofzik et al. 2008b). In this way, when Noë (2009:49) examines how the consciousness is not simply reducible to the brain, and asserts that “you can no more explain mind in terms of the cell than you can explain dance in terms of the muscle” and thereby illustrating that consciousness cannot simply be explained in terms of human anatomy or physiology. As Johnson and Lakoff (1999: 17) concur:

Because our conceptual systems grow out of our bodies, meaning is grounded in and through our bodies... There is no such thing as a computational person, whose mind is like computer software, able to work on any suitable computer or neural hardware, whose mind somehow derives meaning from taking meaningless symbols as input, manipulating them by rule, and giving meaningless symbols as output. Real people have embodied minds whose conceptual systems arise from, are shaped by, and are given meaning through living human bodies. The neural structures of our brains produce conceptual

systems and linguistic structures that cannot be adequately accounted for by formal systems that only manipulate symbols.

As such, Noë (2009:24) like Locke, looks beyond biological systems and structures to focus primarily on the holistic embodied experience, and writes “consciousness isn’t something that happens inside of us: it is something that we do, actively, in our dynamic interaction with the world around us”. Locke’s recognition of the importance of worldly engagement aligns him closely with these fundamental claims of embodied cognition in which consciousness is “akin to action within an environment, an enmeshing of mind, body, and world. All of these things contribute to a human understanding which cannot be understood as purely mental” (Wirkus 2016:6).

Van Dijck (2007:28) further describes how our personal memories are nurtured within the most intricate physical space of the body - the mind. Memories however, are also located in other sources - objects, items and entities - that serve as reminders of our lived experiences (Dijck 2007:28). Hence mediated memories are not simply ‘prostheses of the mind’ nor prompted wholly by our interactions with the material world; they are instead “manifestations of a complex interaction” between the body, the mind, material objects and the cultural matrix from which they arise. Whilst memories are indeed “embodied by the brain and the body” and embedded in complex cultural contexts, they are also enabled, nurtured and stimulated by digital media technology. This study examines - and identifies - how social media users actively participate in selected online communities in order to express their self-representations and autobiographical memories. In this sense, portrayals of self-identity and the personalised memories have most certainly ‘gone online’ as social media users make use of various Instagram (#hashtag) sites to curate and articulate their new-found digital identities.

\*\*\*

Using the academic contributions of the selected theorists, this study has been able to formulate a sound theoretical conceptualisation of the self, identity, self-representation and autobiographical memory. As James (1890) describes, the material and social self are fundamental components of an individual’s sense of self and their mode of self-representation. Using these elemental conceptualisations of the self, individuals are able to ground and give



meaning to their personal memories, emotions and experiences, and construct a life narrative that authentically reflects their personal values, beliefs and behaviours. As such, one's self-identity and self-representation is uniquely crafted - a compilation of core memories and experiences that contribute to our autobiographical memory and facilitate the continuity of self.

This chapter has also explored and identified how individuals have evolved and adapted to represent themselves within the digital realm. Just as people seek to create and share memories within their personalised groups and communities, so their use of digital media has become an immutable extension of this process. The continuous online portrayal of ourselves, our experiences and memories has become a popular - and increasingly instinctive - avenue for contemporary self-expression. The irreversible trend towards more frequent participation, communication and engagement within the digital realm is an essential point of departure for our richer understanding of contemporary society.

The following chapter considers the historical role and importance of food within society, and how the food landscape has evolved into the digital realm. In particular, the chapter explores how food and food-themed imagery has become a functional, and very popular, component of contemporary online engagement and how the posting of food-themed imagery contributes significantly to users' unique sense of self, identity and autobiographical memory. The chapter identifies how the phenomenon of food is an embodied experience: the online expression of such embodied experiences provides a rich source of material for exploration and enquiry.

## CHAPTER 3

### L'apéritif

#### *Exploring Cultural Identity and Self-Representation through Contemporary Food-Images within the Digital Age*

*Of all the places in the heart, it must be the kitchen that generates the warmest thoughts of home, in more ways than one. Put another way, in the hearth of our memoires, there's always something cooking.* (A Taste of Home: Pinoy Expats and Food Memories, Marnan et al. 2016).

As discussed in Chapter 2, popular culture and contemporary technologies are empowering people to create and share experiences within their online communities. In particular, social media and digital technologies have enhanced the means by which individuals are able to construct and record their unique experiences and memories. Just as contemporary digital culture has enabled us to represent our identities, express our life narratives and enhance our autobiographical memories, so food and food culture have shown themselves to fulfil a mainstream role in shaping these components of self-representation. Food, and society's associated food culture strongly influence how individuals choose to represent themselves within the digital age. Food is an essential element of cultural tradition and social celebration - food brings people together, connecting generations through stories, rituals and family recipes, while taking us back to nostalgic memories and experiences (Gupta et al. 2021:651).

Throughout the emergence of civilisations, scholars have examined how food, its preparation and consumption, can shape how individuals portray themselves and engage within society. Glyn-Jones (1996) for example, describes how "It was in the second century BC that interest in food developed to the point where cooking became an art instead of a chore" and by the first century AD the Roman gourmet Marcus Apicius was compiling recipes in *De re Culnaria (On the Subject of Cooking)* (Glyn-Jones 1996:137).

Semioticians, psychologists and anthropologists continue to investigate the role played by food in the construction of identity and memory, and how they are conceptualised and expressed. In so doing, food studies challenge researchers and social analysts to examine the "common daily occurrence of eating in order to unearth the deeper meanings rooted within this global everyday

practise” (Almerico 2014:1). By examining the where, how, why and what of our varying food choices, we formulate a broader, more insightful understanding of ourselves and others. As Culture Decanted (2014) makes clear, “food is something that all humans share but is also something that we use to differentiate ourselves on a daily basis”.

This chapter primarily considers the contributions of Roland Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Pierre Bourdieu (1984) to compile an academic foundation of the significance of food as articulated across different cultures, and provides insights into the role and influence of food on identity creation, self-representation and memory-making. Hereafter, the contributions of philosopher Carolyn Korsmeyer (2011) and anthropologist David Sutton (2001) (as well as a number of additional contemporary authors) provide a theoretical underpinning for the contemporary understanding of food and food cultures within our digital society. Sutton (2001) in particular provides anthropological reflection on the intersection of food and the senses, and the way food heightens one’s sensory experiences and memory generation.

The synergies between food and smart technology within modern society have opened a new space in Human-Computer Interaction,<sup>35</sup> facilitating more meaningful investigation into foodstuffs and their influence on individuals and society within our predominantly digital reality (Gupta et al. 2021:651).

For as long as visual imagery has been documented, artists, photographers and theorists alike have captured unique and timelessly enduring portrayals of food and foodstuffs. With the advent of online life in particular, society has experienced a surge in the volume of digital food-themed images. Through a food-focused lens, this chapter examines the influences that food, food cultures and foodscapes have imposed on the formulation of self-identity and its representation within the digital realm.

A brief historical contextualisation of food culture is provided, followed by a review of how contemporary digital societies continue to utilise food imagery and connotation to impart meaning to their identities and cultures. The chapter illustrates how food serves as a means to understand individuals, societies and their diverse cultural groups, and examines how food and food culture constitute an essential focus for autobiographical inquiry and an avenue for

---

<sup>35</sup> Human Computer Interaction (HCI) refers to the multidisciplinary field of study focusing on the design of computer technologies, and in particular on the interactions between humans (users) and computers. The advent of mobile technologies has prompted the broadening and diversification of this field of science. As such, HCI focuses on a wide range of human experiences and activities (Jon M. Carroll, author and pioneer of HCI 2021).

creative expression and self-representation. Visual examples are used throughout the chapter to demonstrate these concepts.

### **3.1 The Emergent Role of Food in Food Culture**

During the late nineteenth century Jean Brillat-Savarin, a recognised pioneer of French gastronomy, penned his famous observation “Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are” (Brillat-Savarin 1864:3). Unwittingly, Brillat-Savarin’s prescient pronouncements highlighted an elemental aspect of food culture: food, like language, is a fundamental means to the very expression of culture and identity. The ‘study of food’ is not simply an enquiry of food itself - it is an evolving interdisciplinary field of research that draws on the humanities, broader arts and sciences to explore the intricate fabric of individuals, their communities and cultures, and the foods they eat.

Through the study of food and food imagery, observers are able to develop an understanding of the complexities of the food people prepare and devour, and examine how food culture reveals vital attributes of people and their unique cultural characteristics. The food choices that individuals and communities display, are indicative of their unique reservoirs of knowledge and experience, their necessities and desires, their beliefs, traditions and opinions - even their richer motivations and personalities. As Almerico (2014:1) makes clear, the food choices evidenced within society identify the sentimental narratives of varying “families, migrations, assimilations, resistances and changes over time, personal as well as group identities” (Almerico 2014:1).

The necessities of eating and drinking are universal to all cultures. However, the perspectives and rituals surrounding the food and drink we consume, reflect the unique characteristics of specific cultures and become the hallmark of individuals identifying with a particular cultural group. Thus, food is thus not merely a source of energy, it is a “hedonic life experience” that nourishes the body and the soul through its “multi-sensorial and visceral qualities” while retelling the narratives that reflect the unique characteristics of individuals, groups and communities (Gupta et al. 2021:651). In general alignment with the early psychological theories of Locke (1689) and James (1890) food is a contemporary vehicle for exploring and

defining the self and for establishing the components of memory.<sup>36</sup> This study illustrates the influence of food on self-identity and memory formulation and identifies how these influences have been extrapolated into the contemporary digital realm.

Perhaps one of the most frequent and regular performed actions in an individual's life are the acts of eating and drinking, contributing to a "lived process of routinisation that all individuals experience" (Felski 1999:31). The culture of food contributes significantly to the way in which different individuals, communities and societies function in their day-to-day routines - it becomes part of their cultural norms and lifestyles. The consumption of food is an innately personal act which signifies and demonstrates to others our beliefs, cultural and social background, political stance and social experiences (Kevany 2018). As such, our personal food experiences comprise a key component of our social activities and our shared cultural events and routines - activities and experiences that influence how we consume and experience our food and subsequently how we represent ourselves and our self-identities. In this fashion, the food we prefer and our eating habits - the manner in which we choose, prepare and eat our food - become a cornerstone component of our entire existence, and contribute vitally to the construction of the self, our role within the broader community and the ideologies to which we subscribe. In fulfilling its role as a forceful influencer of self-identity, food culture draws from our experiences and memories, both as an individual and as participant within the broader socio-cultural community.

The physical sensation of hunger is a universally intrinsic human drive and need (Kevany 2018). We are driven continuously by physiological necessity to satisfy the 'rumbles in our stomach' - the desire to eat. However, whilst the functionality of eating is fundamental to the human welfare and survival, society nevertheless finds virtue and reward in innumerable other activities surrounding the consumption of food. As Culture Decanted (2014) highlights, food solves our alimentary needs, but also motivates us to seek-out different experiences. Thus, we choose foods based not on hunger alone, but on a multitude of other influences including personal and family preferences, dietary requirements, societal and cultural conformities and norms, conveniences, costs, and many complex psychological and emotional motivations (Kevany 2018).

---

<sup>36</sup> It is acknowledged that contemporary theorists may advance perspectives that diverge from these earlier schools of thought.

Within our increasingly connected and communicative global world, so an increasing awareness and knowledge of food diversity has emerged. Enhanced communication technologies provide ready access to a vast array of different foods and cooking styles, and have encouraged the gradual amalgamation or ‘blending’ of differing food cultures. Moreover, food and its preparation encompass a captivating sensory experience, and has demonstrated itself to be a powerful global influencer on people’s behaviour and perspectives (Culture Decanted 2014).

This concept is exemplified in Figure 3, a digital photograph which depicts a young oriental family preparing a meal together at their home in the rural Chinese village of Licheng in Shanxi Province. Photographer Li Hauifeng entitled the family-meal photograph *Taste* and won an international food photography award in 2021 (BBC News, 2021). Caroline Kenyon, founder and director of renowned The Food Awards Company, describes how the winning photograph is celebrated for its depth of emotion and storytelling, and “tells of a year of isolation and indoor living in the tiny communities of immediate family” during the global Covid-19 pandemic (Kenyon 2021). By displaying powerful elements of storytelling and narrative which shape and manifest meaning in people’s lives, the image highlights the instinctive human longing for family connectedness and vividly demonstrates the integral role of food activities in the development of these communities and their life narratives. The photograph captures the visceral significance of such moments of sentimentality and cultural identity, as portrayed through digital imagery in our contemporary age.



Figure 3: Li Hauifeng 2021. *Taste*. BBC News. Photograph. (BBC 2021).

Whilst food and food culture has always been innately human, the Covid pandemic has spawned a host of novel food-related concepts. Not only has there been a significant increase in food-themed digital traffic - for example sharing and displaying foods, recipes and online tutorials - but also a notable surge in the numbers of individuals and groups learning to home cook, motivated by global lockdown restrictions and protocols. As Croizat-Glazer (2020) highlights, for some, food and cooking has become an “important source of comfort during confinement, an opportunity to become more self-reliant, or to tackle that recipe for sourdough” that had previously seemed all too drab and time-consuming. Such trends demonstrate the dynamic and adaptive nature of food and food culture; as different countries and their lifestyle constraints evolve and adapt to emergent realities, so indeed does our food and our food habits. Food reveals itself as a useful means of reflection through which we can better understand the complexities of individuals and their international communities alike, and, as evidenced for example by its particular prominence during the current pandemic, food and food culture provides a versatile barometer for our understanding of societal and global change.

Culture Decanted (2014) assert that “How we eat is very personal, and at the same time influenced directly by the social and cultural environments in which we live”. The physical act of eating is prompted by more than just biological needs; what we eat and how we eat it is influenced by the context of society and culture, and becomes instrumental in how individuals think about themselves and their experiences. In this way, everything we eat becomes undeniably semiotic in nature (Culture Decanted 2014). The way in which we choose to prepare, consume and even celebrate food communicates an amalgam of signs and symbols that can be critically examined to develop insights and understanding of the participant individuals and groups. As such, recognising the variances in food cultures becomes fundamental to our comprehension of meaning-making and, thereafter, as to how such meaning is communicated (Culture Decanted 2014).

Chef David Chang is a celebrated chef who appears in the television series *Ugly Delicious* (Netflix 2018). The series follows Chang and a band of other foodies, critics and chefs as they examine and debate the hot topics of the global food and culinary industry. In the episode *Home Cooking* (*Ugly Delicious*, Episode 3, Season 1) Chang and other chefs reflect on their most enduring childhood memories of food as experienced in the context of their varying backgrounds and cultures. As the episode progresses, it emerges that the foods and food experiences dominant within our childhood, frequently predetermine the foods we later enjoy cooking and consuming as adults. The episode further highlights how an individual’s personal

identity and autobiographical memories are powerfully influenced by their unique experiences of food and food culture.



Figure 4: David Chang. 2018. Sichuan Fish with Peppers. *Ugly Delicious*. (Netflix 2021). Screenshot by author.

Chef Chang explains that at the outset of his culinary career, he wanted to remove himself from his cultural childhood affinity to Korean food, but as it eventually transpired “Things come full circle, right?” (Chang 2018)<sup>37</sup>. Chang now enjoys celebrating the zest and flavours of home cooking (or, as he calls it “ugly delicious food”) in his restaurants. After reflecting and reminiscing on his childhood memories of traditional Korean food from his family kitchen, Chang then recreates those memories through his contemporary recipes and cuisine, and digitally captures the dishes for posterity. Figure 4 depicts Chang’s new recipe dish - *Sichuan Fish with Peppers* - which brings together a combination of traditional flavours and cooking styles. Chang illustrates how his food is “an amalgamation of cultures, flavours and ideas, that when respected, can be brought together to create a beautiful and delicious dish” (Chang 2018). His objective is to create meals so strikingly delicious that eating the dish will be internalised as a personalised experience and memory which “moves you into another lifetime” (Chang 2018). Chang’s “ugly delicious food” demonstrates how people’s interactions with food play a formative role in how they experience the world and subsequently, how they choose to represent themselves and their memories to others and the world about them. In this way, food and food culture contributes fundamentally to the formulation of our unique experiences and

---

<sup>37</sup> The *Ugly Delicious* (2018) series further highlights a number of more controversial issues. For example, is it ethically acceptable to “culturally appropriate ethnic cuisines”? Is it really the *quality* of the food itself that diners value or rather the *experience* derived from it? (Laporte 2018).



memories, and ultimately to the formulation of our identity and self-representation. Chang (2018) therefore argues persuasively that to more fully understand the essential role of food in the emergence of civilisations, we must continue to explore and interrogate the subject matter, and acknowledge that food culture is a complex, subjective phenomenon which channels unique inputs into the personal intricacies of our autobiographical memories and self-representations.

### **3.2 The Semiotics of Food Culture**

Food functions as something more than a means of essential nourishment; semioticians, psychologists and anthropologists alike have equated the role of food in society and culture to language, highlighting its integral role in our perceptions and understanding of individuals, groups and societies.

In his work *Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (2012:21) Roland Barthes broadens the notion of food from “simply a collection of products serving a basic need” to a “system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviour”. As Barthes suggests (2012:21) “when he [the modern consumer] buys an item of food, consumes it, or services it, modern man does not manipulate a simple subject in a purely transitive fashion; this item of food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies”. Barthes (2012) thus articulates how food is not simply an “indicator...of conscious motivations” but more a “functional unit of a system of communication” that can be analysed in order to gain a rich understanding of a given society (Barthes 2012:21).

Barthes (2012:22) describes how food behaviours have become highly structured, and represent an assortment of “substances, techniques of preparation [and] habits” that together become part of an intricate system of difference, meaning and signification. In essence, society has developed a communication system through food, and utilises this system to generate meaning, a sense of belonging and community and to perpetuate societal ideologies.

Barthes’s structuralist perspective of food culture was broadened by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1964),<sup>38</sup> who asserts that food “must not only be good to eat, but also

---

<sup>38</sup> Lévi-Strauss considered structural anthropology as being within the domain of semiology - the field of study analysing sign systems and codes of all types (Leach 1996).

good to think [with]”. Social anthropologist Edmund Leach (1996:30) records how Lévi-Strauss was distinguished as a leading advocate of Structuralism, the movement advocating that we understand the external world by means of our own senses and that the “phenomena which we perceive have the characteristics we attribute to them because of the way our senses operate, and the way the human brain is designed to order and interpret the stimuli fed into it” (Leach 1996:30). This subjective assimilation of the world around us leads us to develop meaning for the sign systems, codes and conventions we encounter. In this fashion, our unique comprehension of the world around us is influenced by the beliefs, values, motivations and behaviours we exhibit, including in this case, our various engagements with food, its preparation and consumption.

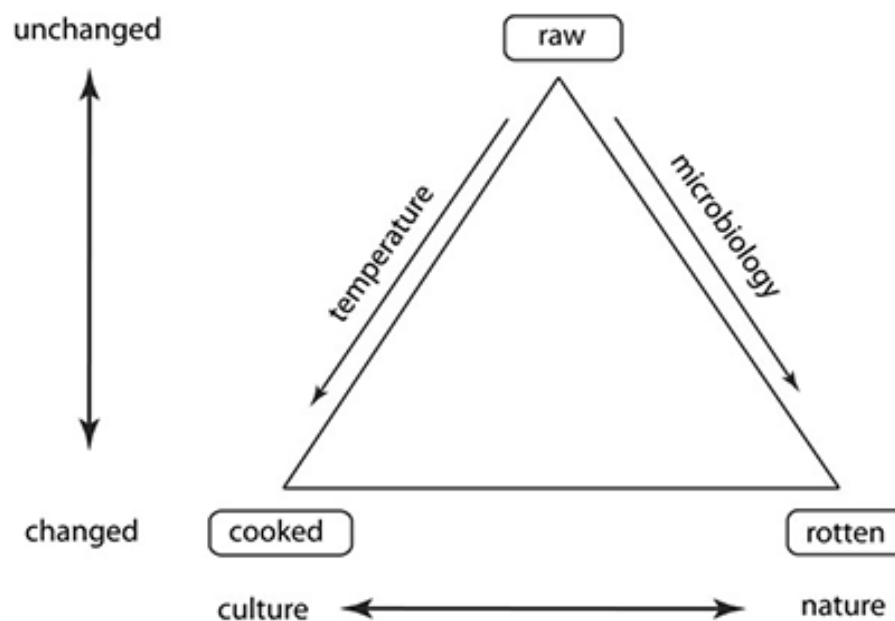


Figure 5: Lévi-Strauss. 1997. *The Culinary Triangle*

Lévi-Strauss proposes a model of the “culinary triangle” (Figure 5) to conceptualise how different categories of food might be perceived and interpreted by varying communities, cultures and identifies. Thus, how “cooking is a language through which society unconsciously reveals its structure” (Lévi-Strauss, in Counihan et al. 2008:35). The model represents how cultures categorise their food into three phases (raw, cooked, and rotten) each of which is influenced by varying cultural norms and perceptions of nature and the natural, as celebrated by different food cultures across the globe. The model usefully illustrates the relevance of food

culture within contemporary society and demonstrates how cultural values and identities are manifest through food, in a more nuanced framework for cultural understanding than traditional ‘us-and-them’ comparisons (Davis 2013).

Leach (1996:42) considers Lévi-Strauss’ culinary hypothesis, and asserts that while animals “just eat food” as an instinctive survival function, human beings have developed a far more intricate relationship with their food. As Leach (1992:42) explains:

Human beings, once they have been weaned from the mother’s breast, have no such instincts. It is the conventions of society which decree what is food and what is not food and what kinds of food shall be eaten on what occasions. And since the occasions are social occasions there must be some kind of patterned homology between relationships between kinds of food on the one hand, and relationships between social occasions on the other.

Drawing on Lévi-Strauss’ triangular differentiation of foods, French sociologist Jean-Pierre Poulain suggests that food is a direct product of both natural and cultural processes. In *The Sociology of Food: Eating and the place of food in society* (2002), Poulain asserts that the act of eating should be considered as a social endeavour, rather than a biological requirement. He expounds how food is the “foundation of socialisation” that teaches individuals the rules of social interaction and contributes to the formation of individual and collective memory (Poulain 2002).

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) further considers the complex relationship between consumption and cultural capital. Bourdieu emphasises how the notion of good taste as it relates to food choices, is a direct expression of variations in status and lifestyle within a hierarchical class system (Allen & Anderson 1994). To this end, Bourdieu asserts that taste is a socially conditioned concept, and that the products of consumer choice are a representation of a symbolic hierarchy of class. In this way, the concept of ‘good taste’ becomes a “social weapon” that distinguishes between the higher and lower classes and cultures, between the “sacred and the profane” (Allen & Anderson 1994).

Expanding these key theoretical perspectives, we can begin to recognise and interpret the intricate cultural food structures in society that have developed through multiple generations of transformation. These structures lend themselves to semiotic analysis in order to provide richer insights into the meaning and symbolism that individuals and cultures attach to foodstuffs. In addition, we can develop these insights to better understand how food structures

influence individuals and communities alike. They form an inherent element of how societies choose to represent themselves and experience the world around them.



Figure 6: Giovanni Bellini. 1509. *Madonna with Child*. Detroit Institute of Arts. Oil panel painting. (Giovannibellini.org).

For example, reflecting semiotically on Li Hauifeng’s *Taste* image (Figure 3) the warm, intimate nature of the image is immediately evident. As Caroline Kenyon (2021) observes “Here, the scene is bathed with love, with echoes of Madonna and Child”.

Figure 6 depicts a sixteenth century rendition of *Madonna and Child* (1509) by Italian Renaissance artist Giovanni Bellini in which the imagery of the Virgin Mary and Christ the child is widely celebrated as evoking the beauty of life and purity of humanity (Sitar 2012). The original *Madonna and Child* (c1300) was painted by one of the most influential artists of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Duccio di Buoninsegna, an iconic image seen throughout the history of Western art, which holds significant value in terms of stylistic innovations of its religious subject matter that would continue to evolve for centuries. There have been multiple renditions of the image by various artists, highlighting its enduring symbolism and relevance to society, in which the colours and iconography connoted within this style of imagery are symbolic of love, youth and everlasting life (Sitar 2012).

Li Hauifeng’s 2021 award winning food photograph *Taste* (Figure 3) has qualities which echo many of the sentiments of the *Madonna and Child* (1509) artwork. For example, the colour scheme and the warm light illuminating the mother and child at the table in their home

connotes feelings of love, warmth and innocence - emotions further amplified through the child's joyous facial expression, and the mother's open and engaging body posture. The contrasting darker peripheries of the image serve to enhance and bring into closer relief each of the family members collectively cooking their meal, and accentuate the significance of meal time activities for each of the individuals and the family unit. Just as the child in Figure 6 is holding a small apple given by his mother, the *Taste* (2021) photograph also encapsulates how food preparation is natural and universal, and illustrates how it is embedded within multiple components of culture. The image (Figure 6) is also striking for the shafts of natural light streaming into the dimly lit family home, illuminating the image in transcendental fashion and emphasising how food plays a powerful role in our lives that propels us forward in our life narratives (Haim 2019). As both figures suggest, the food we eat in our childhood has a significant, awe-inspiring influence on our world view, and ultimately on the way we choose to experience and reflect on our external and internal environments. By virtue of its strong link with cultural identity, food is one of the most sacred elements of traditional rituals and religious ceremonies; beyond merely nourishing our physiological needs, food can transcend the self, inspiring and strengthening bonds between individuals, groups and cultures, and even between entire nations (Sibal 2020).

As Kenyon (2021) emphasises of Figure 3, "[t]his exquisite image lingers in the mind". By critically examining visual depictions of foods, and by using semiotic analysis, the deep-rooted codes and conventions of different cultures can be highlighted, and used to construct a richer understanding of how these associations influence the way in which individuals choose to represent themselves.

### **3.3 Finding the Self through Food**

#### ***3.3.1 The Importance of Food to Self-Identity and Memory***

As clearly identified, the food we eat is a core component of culture "overlaid with multiple connotations" (Fisher & Reardon 2004). Our lifestyles, customs and celebrations shape, and are shaped by, our shared cultural values, beliefs and available resources (Sternheimer 2017). Food serves to formulate our sense of self and identity through our family groups and communities; it influences who we choose to be as individuals, and how we represent ourselves to society (Sternheimer 2017). Our food cultures, rituals and traditions play an elemental role in shaping who we are, how we see the world and how others see us. Food is an inherent

component of many global stereotypes; for example, when considering Japanese food, consumers might instantly think of sushi, or consider Italian food to be pizzas and pastas - instinctive mental imagery stemming from the sign systems, codes and conventions that society has assimilated over time. Yet whilst familiar foodstuffs and dishes (such as Japanese sushi or Italian pizza, or South African boerewors) might project a specific cultural or group identity, paradoxically they also provide opportunities for individuals to sculpt their unique self-identities. As discussed in Chapter Two, we age through our life stages, individuals generate a succession of meaningful memories - including food-related memories - that constitute elements of our unique autobiographical memory (Fivush et al. 2003). Food and our food experiences can evoke enduring and specific memories; for example, nostalgic recollections of Christmas lunches with family, or smells and sounds that evoke memories of a past food experience. As Stierwalt (2020) illustrates, many smell-driven memories are childhood memories because that's when we experience those smells for the first time. So "...a whiff of apple pie may instantly transport you home in your mind" (Stierwalt 2020). Neuroscientists have suggested that the close physical connection between the regions of the brain linked to memory, emotion, and our sense of smell can explain why our brain learns to associate smells with certain emotional memories (Stierwalt 2020).

In addition, Claude Fischler (1988:275-278) describes how food is central to our sense of cultural identity. How people eat not only serves to define their diversity, it encourages a sense of collective being amongst communities. In this way, diverse groups and cultures are able to foster unique socio-cultural systems of representation with their food cultures at the core. These systems influence how individuals from varying socio-cultural backgrounds experience and reminisce over food-related activities and directs the detail of the memories they retain. Food and food cultures are essential contributors to self-identity to the extent that "any given human individual is constructed, biologically, psychologically and socially" by the foods they choose to consume (Fischler 1988:275). In a sense, as Simmel (1994:346) asserts, food encapsulates the "paradox of absolute individuality and complete universality" because "of everything that people have in common, the most common is that they must eat and drink".

As Abarca and Colby (2016) describe, it is a person's sense of home, nostalgia and related food memories that provide the personal magnitude to the food that people and their communities consume. In *Gastrography: Food and Memory*, Abaraca (2012) further explores how food

memories are transmitted “sensually and articulated through sensations” (Abaraca & Colby 2016:2). Such sensorial food experiences influence our food behaviours, emotions and values, and form a basic element of our autobiographical memories - factors which are ultimately reflected in our sense of self and identity.

In forging their unique self-identity and autobiographical memories, Hauck-Lawson (1998:21) considers the concept of a food voice, and identifies how “food has the potential to yield information about meanings and roles in people’s lives”. The idea of a food voice asserts that the food people eat, or choose not to eat, communicates vital aspects of their personal identity and emotional state that words alone does not convey. Hauck-Lawson (1998:21) emphasises how the “social, symbolic dimensions of food” plays an important role in which food, and the way it is prepared and consumed, serves as a “nexus in social interactions” that communicates the status and value systems of individuals and groups. By listening attentively to a person’s unique food voice yields essential information about their self-representation and the connotations underlying their various food habits. The concept of food voice allows for a more detailed understanding of the personal meanings, behaviours and values that individuals attach to particular foods; food voice can identify elements of lifestyle and life narrative that might otherwise remain muted and unseen (Lawson 1998:21). In similar fashion, Chapman and MacLean (1993) report how researchers from a variety of academic disciplines investigated how food “forms a language of expression” and represents a creative vehicle for communication.<sup>39</sup> Exploring and understanding the language of food, its roles and meanings, reveals essential insights into identity and culture (Chapman & MacLean 1993).

### ***3.3.2 The Experience of Embodiment Through Food***

Gastronomist Valentina Amaral (2019) poses the questions: What if we reflect on what we eat and the way our food systems are structured? What does our relationship with food say about the way we relate to and connect with the world? As Brillat-Savarin (1825) suggests, we are what we eat, however we are also what our parents ate, and will continue to evolve by virtue of the foodstuffs we eat in the future. In this sense, our physiological compulsion to eat and the act of eating pertains to a wholly broader network of our life experiences and memories that

---

<sup>39</sup> For example, see Cicala, 1989; Fieldhouse, 1986; Humphrey, Humphrey and Samuelson, 1988; Jeanneret, 1991; Murcott, 1984; Parraga, 1990.

each of us comes to embody as we move through life - as individuals within groups and within cultures.

Renowned French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) explores the relationships between society and culture and the intersections of taste, class and education (Crossman 2019). In his book *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (1987) (The Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste - translated by Richard Nice) Bourdieu considers the notion of *habitus* referring to a habitual or typical state or appearance (Douglas & Paul 1994). Bourdieu references habitus as an individual's "open set of dispositions" that are constantly altered, reinforced and transformed according to experience (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:133). As such, habitus constitutes the lens through which a person perceives the social world, a world which is simultaneously framed by their personal socio-cultural and economic conditions of existence and experience (Douglas & Paul 1994). Habitus effectively equips an individual, group or community with the capacity to differentiate, appreciate, judge and thus distinguish the behaviours that make up their own scheme of "taste" and food experiences from others (Bourdieu 1987:165). Our concept of taste, and the sensorial experiences of our food consumption is a socially learned process which, in turn, becomes embodied through memory and experience.

In a similar fashion, In his book *Studio Olafur Eliasson: The Kitchen* (2016) Olafur Eliasson identifies that what we eat affects the world; it affects the way we perceive and understand world. The book celebrates the intrinsic beauty of food, the fascination of eating and the primordial relevance of food to ourself and to others. As Amaral (2019) asserts, "to embody food is to give our personal and collective eating the attention and reflection it needs". As such, our intricate relationship with food not only mirrors the way we choose to communicate with the external world, it also becomes a tool through which we can hone and refine our sensorial experiences and so "empower our thinking to come into new ways of relating and engaging with food" (Amaral 2019). Eating is a biological necessity; but it is intimate, transformational, emotional and sensorial all at once. Food and the act of eating is an embodied experience - an embodiment that embraces the inherent linkages between our food, our sense of self and its portrayal, and the ability to create and reminisce over our unique chronology of events. The act of eating, together with our food-themed experiences, play an active role in moulding our sense of self and our autobiographical memories. More generally, food is implied in all elements of humanness and the human experience (Ibrahim 2015). By publicly sharing everyday food



images on social media, people facilitate a more focused and intimate examination of their private lives, thus blurring the boundaries between their private and public spaces.

### **3.4 Food, Memories and the Feeling of Home**

*As a self-proclaimed foodie, I often find myself reflecting on fond memories throughout my life, many of which centre around food and food experiences. Our family Christmas tradition for example, always includes a stuffed turkey and a Nana's sausage - a meatloaf recipe passed-down from my grandmother. And winter holidays humming with the unbridled buzz of the annual potjie competition, invariably accompanied by generous amounts of glühwein.*

When I reflect on travel memories, I remember not only the rich diversity of passing landscapes, the local communities and the busy tourist spots - but always the food. The warm pastries and cheese wheels from Zermatt's sidewalk bakeries, the fresh cherries and indulgent artisan pastas in Dubrovnik. And in England of course, the fish and chips doused with salt and vinegar, wrapped then in newspaper from that quaint little seaside café in Brighton. So it's no surprise I realise, when I take a bite of that delicious something, to be spirited away at that instant 'back in time and space' to another enduring moment - another memory.

The way you enjoy a meal can quickly remind you of where you were, who you were with, and your feelings and emotions and surroundings at that time (Henderson 2006). This intricate interplay of memory and food suggests that the food itself is not the direct vehicle for memory, but more the agency prompting recall of the experience, your recollection of how you enjoyed that particular food, or not. For example, Eduardo Machado's memoir, *Tastes Like Cuba: An Exile's Hunger for Home* (2007) opens with his nostalgic memory:

I awoke to the smell of boiling milk. Not 1% or 2% or soy milk or rice milk. This milk had never touched a cardboard box. It had been freshly drawn, hours before, delivered at dawn from my grandmother's small farm just outside town. Every morning, our house was scented with the aroma of raw milk boiling with a little bit of salt (Machado 2007:1).

Throughout his memoir, Machado (2007) expresses a recurring nostalgia for the feeling of home, a longing for the physical return to his country, Cuba. Machado discovers however, that it is not the geographic physicality of Cuba that makes it home, but rather the food memories that “give him a visceral understanding of his own sense of cultural grounding” (Abarca & Colby 2016:1). It is the sentimental food memories gathered over his years of upbringing that embody Machado’s sense of home, and flavour his sense of self, his cultural identity. Culinary memoirs such as Machado’s serve to “revive and revalue cultures and communities through food and doing cooking” and in so doing, frequently pay tribute to the importance of embodied knowledge (Bigot 2020:3).

Food connects people across geography and time, and provides us with significant insight of “tricultural, intercultural and intracultural alterities” (Henderson 2006:237). In her novel *Überbleibsel: Eine kleine Erotik der Küche* (1995) (*Leftovers: A Small Erotica of the Kitchen*), for example, Jeannette Lander contemplates her years as a Jewish-American woman growing up in a predominantly black neighbourhood in Atlanta. Lander (1995) reflects on the role of food as a “marker of difference and cultural alterity, but also as a means of coming together”. Through discussions of “otherness and divergence” from the dominant culture and societal structures of her surroundings, Lander conveys forceful narratives celebrating the connections between food, memory and intercultural experiences. Lander (1995) expresses how these experiences constitute the essence of her novel, articulated as an autobiographical text (Henderson 2006: 238). Lander acknowledges the role of her cultural experiences in her own self-development and thus “anchors her autobiographical subjectivity not only in geography and time, but also within her own body” (Henderson 2006:239).

Baena (2006) coined the term “gastrographies” as a reference to our culinary memories and describes how culinary texts and images are concerned with recollecting and sharing personal memories - often childhood memories - for example, of significant past meals, cooking lessons or even family feuds around the dinner table. Thus Smith et al. (2010:159) describe a gastrography as a “food memoir [that] incorporates food-laced memories that feed readers’ desire to redefine themselves by both imagining pleasures and cooking them up, as a way of enacting the life chronicled”.

Furthermore, as “food can function as both memory and metaphor for a person’s identity and legacy” (Bigot 2020:3) writers have also come to use the culinary memoir as a way to tell stories of family and nation and culture (Smith et al. 2010). As Kelly (2001:266) suggests, the

culinary memoir enables the autobiographical self to “claim for herself a sense of place, heritage, and history that may not be otherwise articulated”.

Food therefore, far beyond being a biological necessity, becomes inseparable from powerful material and symbolic realities. The contemporary rise of gastography as expressions of food-themed autobiographical narratives, evidences a “radically personal form of memoir in which ‘you are what you eat’ with its suggestion that the subjectivity of another can be cooked up, reproduced and tasted” (Smith et al. 2010:150). Such narratives are often scripted in a person’s later years, consisting of a detailed storyline extending from personal childhood to the present day. The narratives are a means to revive specific autobiographical memories, and to revisit and share those memories and experiences that might otherwise be lost or forgotten (Smith & Watson 2010:150).

As Henderson (2006:240) further explains, any conversation of food points explicitly to the human body as a “site of autobiographical knowledge”. The act of eating, and the foods themselves are central to our “experiences of embodiment, or the way that we live in and through our bodies”, and in order to gain control of our bodies, one must “exert discipline over eating habits” (Lupton 1996:1;16).<sup>40</sup> Our bodies are effectively social constructions that are regularly influenced by our everyday experiences, and as such, the way we choose to regulate and control our bodies has a significant influence on how we experience life, remember our experiences and represent ourselves within our external environments (Lupton 1996).<sup>41</sup>

Delving into interactive food-related life narratives allows us to explore new ways of discovering and appreciating food, “intriguing people in gastronomy”, engaging with the nostalgic and emotional experiences surrounding foodstuffs and even turning one’s attention to their own body and sense(s) of self (Gupta et al. 2021:651).<sup>42</sup>

Heldke (1992:212) also highlights how the acts of growing, preparing and consuming food are learned activities in which the hands, ears, muscles, tongue, nose and fingers work together as combined sites of knowledge that embody and personify the food practices we conduct as part of our daily routine. Our food-themed memories are thus fully embodied within our actions and behaviours, both in our learned behaviours of cooking and eating, and within our digital

---

<sup>40</sup> Embodiment refers to the connection between the mind and the body (Wageningen 2021).

<sup>41</sup> Detailed review of the culture of food control (for example biology, diet, exercise regimes, eating disorders) is beyond the scope of this research.

<sup>42</sup> Gastronomy is the study of food and culture, with particular focus on gourmet cuisines (Berkeley Library).

online social media activities in which food now plays such a prominent role. This signals how the online posting of food-themed imagery has also become an increasingly popular part of daily routine; using a cell phone to snap a shot, standing and moving to ensure the perfect angle and carefully editing and enhancing the image to create the perfect Instagram post.

As illustrated through traditional cultural techniques, the preparation and consumption of food is surrounded by a plethora of rules, requirements and taboos, variously underpinned by tradition, cultural and religious guidelines and community practice. “Food and culinary practises possess the power to define boundaries between bodies and cultures”, and as such they are a central point of enquiry in developing a richer understanding of the uniqueness of cultures and societies (Henderson 2006:240).

Similarly, memories concerning food simultaneously transports us back to the past, while keeping us bound to the present (Abaraca & Colby 2016:2). Food memories can also create “situations for recollection” in the future, in which “prospective memory” entails taking action in the present to remember an event in the future (Sutton 2001:19). An example here is the smell of rosemary which research highlights can enhance prospective memory (Moss 2016).

In *My Fathers Kitchen* (in *A Taste of Home: Pinoy Expats and Food Memories*), Carla Montenmayor provides a detailed description of her memories of Pinoy (Filipino) customs, culture and food experiences (Montenmayor, in Marnan et al. 2016). She describes how being a Pinoy immigrant in England leaves her constantly “trudging through the...forest of self-definition” in reflective contemplation of the complex interplay between eating and being (Marnan et al. 2016). In clear reference to the role of food in the embodiment of our cultural memory, Carolan (2011) describes how food’s sensory and affective qualities are central to defining the manner in which an individual’s “emotional, psychological, social, economic, political, historical and cultural realities are embodied as a lived and living history” (Carolan 2011:9). In this way, food memories provide an individual with a type of “polytemporal consciousness” that functions as an embodied experience allowing us to (re)define our personal sense of belonging, our yearning for home and the roots of self-identity (Abarca & Colby 2016:4). The emergence of such a sense finds expression and authenticity through various narrative forms - including the visual, oral, written and digital.

As Chau (2012) observes, “we grow up eating foods of our culture”. The foods of our childhood are mostly associated with positive experiences and positive memories that tie us to our past,

our families and our cultures, and hold special personal value (Chau 2012). Montenmayer's experiences emphasise the influence of our day-to-day environment and realities, and as Henderson (2006:240) affirms, what we eat is capable of both shaping and transforming our identity. Food becomes a central part of our being – 'you are what you eat'. As such, an individual's unique consumption of food forms an inherent, embodied part of one's unique sense of self. Food, beyond being a simple biological necessity for society thus encompasses powerful and material realities and meanings that are accepted by diverse socio-cultural communities (Abarac & Colby 2016).

In similar fashion, food plays an important role in our feelings of nostalgia. Abarac and Colby (2016:4) propose how some memories are inseparable from nostalgia, and that moments of reminiscence evoked by food focus on the multi-sensorial experience of flavour, smell, taste and texture of food, as much as on the specific occasion time or venue.

Whilst it's a familiar adage that "we eat first with our eyes" it is essential to consider the synaesthetic nature of our senses in relation to food and food memories.<sup>43</sup> To this end, it is worthwhile to consider the role of memory as an additional sense as it pertains to our sensorial experience of food. By considering memory as a type of sixth sense in which memories generate new channels of communication between the past, present and future, individuals are able to seek out past experiences and moments that illuminate and enrich their present time impressions and experiences (Sutton 2011:472). As Gottfried (2004) observes, "That's the beauty of our memory system. Imagine a nice day on the beach. The smell of sun lotion, the friends you were with, the beer you were drinking; any of these could trigger memories of the whole thing" (Gottfried 2004). The key, say researchers is that "memories relating to a specific event are scattered across the brain's sensory centres but marshalled by a region called the hippocampus. If one of the senses is stimulated to evoke a memory, other memories featuring other senses are also triggered" (Hopkin 2004).

In *The Sensory Experience of Food*, Korsmeyer and Sutton (2011) describe how our collaborative sensory experiences can assign particular emotions and memories to food. Sutton (2011) uses the term "the gustemological approach to food" as he invites individuals to consider their food memory as an additional sense. A key component of Sutton's (2011:470)

---

<sup>43</sup> Relating to the experience of synaesthesia, which defines experiencing one sensory stimulus through the prism of different stimulus; the intersection and synergy of the senses (Masterclass 2021).

gustemological approach is how our sensorial experiences of food can lead to the “unlocking of key personal and social memories”. The gustemological approach considers taste as a “total social fact”,<sup>44</sup> as part of the act of eating which is an experience that necessitates all the senses and is “always inherently synaesthetic” (Korsmeyer 2011:462).

Sutton (2011, in Abarac and Colby 2016:5) speaks of synaesthetic memory as a process wherein the senses work in union to “convert a sensory moment into an embodied social and cultural experience that is then stored in memory”. These memories are then translated into socio-cultural remembrances that help define and express our personal sense of self. In this way, the interconnectedness between the sensory and affective qualities of food provides “mnemonic mechanisms by which experiences are embodied” (Abarac & Colby 2016:4). Sutton (2011:471) highlights how the sensory properties of any food are heavily influenced and shaped by our personal expectations and memories, and that our senses and emotions act as vital transmitters of mnemonic cues. As Neurologist Gordon Shepard (2012) further illustrates, our senses and emotions share the same “brain nerve pathways” that store our life experiences as memories. As such, our senses and emotions have an important formative role on our personal experiences and memories.

Thus, just as we begin to formulate our autobiographical memory from our childhood years, and are influenced by our multitude of experiences, so our food-themed memories are constructed over time, commencing during childhood and youth. As a result, memories and the senses can be conceptualised as a set of “active, creative and even transformational cultural processes”, that together contribute to the development of our unique memories and sense of self. As Brink (1999:17) suggests, our adult lives are structured and regulated by the rules and traditions surrounding food that we learn during our youth, and are often difficult to alter.

Figure 7 depicts a screenshot from Sarah Tilse’s Instagram social media feed. A well-known Australian influencer, the site - more famously known as *Sarah’s Day* - advocates a health-driven, wholesome-foods orientated fitness lifestyle.<sup>45</sup> As an influential foodie and founder of *Sunee* a healthy-cooking Application, the site promotes a variety of gluten-free, Paleo-friendly (non-processed food) dishes. Reaching more than 1.2 million Instagram followers, the content

---

<sup>44</sup> Through exploration of various cultures, memoirs, rituals and memories, Sutton considers the cultural shaping of our senses, and the way in which our senses are “embodied skills trained and deployed as part of daily life and cultural value” that is placed on food and flavour (Sutton 2011:468).

<sup>45</sup> See Tilse’s Instagram page: [https://www.instagram.com/sarahs\\_day/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/sarahs_day/?hl=en)

is exposed to a huge global audience. The influencing power of such sites is forceful and persuasive, encouraging followers to adopt specific lifestyle habits.

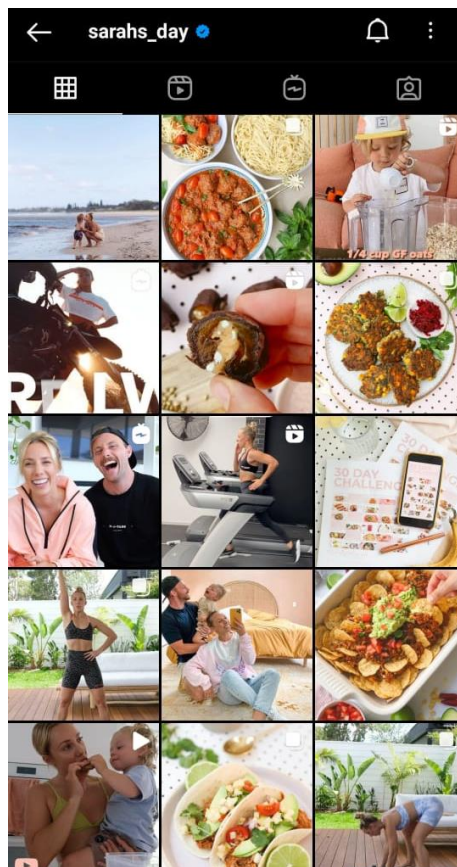


Figure 7: @Sarah's Day. 2021. Sarah Tilse Instagram profile. Screenshot by author.

Tilse's advocacy efforts are also prominent in her own home. In avoiding refined sugars, dairy, gluten rich and processed foods, she prescribes the eating habits and diet of her toddler, Fox, in directing the foods he eats during his childhood and, in likelihood the habits he will embrace as he grows older. As reflected in Figure 7, Fox is often portrayed 'helping out in the kitchen'; pouring, mixing, cleaning and eating. The role of the kitchen and the importance of healthy food choices is a constant in Fox's upbringing, crafting his memories and embedding his sense of self with healthy food-choice sentiments and predispositions.

As education and skills director Andreas Schleicher (2021) suggests, we are now more digitally connected than ever, and a large percentage of children worldwide have access to smart technologies and the Internet before they can even walk or talk.<sup>46</sup> Figure 7 exemplifies how Fox is frequently exposed to digital technologies and social media and the digital space of the

---

<sup>46</sup> This prompts an additional question (beyond the scope of this study): What are the impacts of technology on children, and how might screen time impact their development?

Sarah's Day site. Fox learns to interact with and respond to the camera. The question thus arises as to what impact these types of digital interactions during a child's infant years might have on the way children learn, register their experiences and memories? And to what extent are digital memories now becoming an embedded component of the new generation's sense of self and autobiographical memory?

### 3.5 Food Imagery - Contemporary Controversies and Food Porn

Historical imagery, including for example, artwork, photography and memes in popular culture, have for long depicted the female figure as having a dominant association with food, symbolic in many instances of the prevalent food culture. Many communities associate 'the kitchen' and 'food' with feminine societal roles. As illustrated in the examples below (Figures 8, 9 & 10), contemporary imageries have enduringly depicted women as a focal point of food-themed compositions, and artists have for long cultivated the popular notion that, much like the delicacies these women are preparing, women are also consumable and "served up for the visual delectation of the painting's male gaze" (Croizat-Glazer 2020).<sup>47</sup> Figures 8-10 illustrate the sexualised visual themes curated to appeal to the voyeuristic male gaze inherent within society and the popular constructs of each era. Whilst the contemporary style of imagery and symbolism varies across centuries, the masculine-dominant patriarchal connotations depicting women as sexualised objects of consumerism have persisted throughout.



Figure 8: Louise Moillon. 1630. *The Fruit and Vegetable Seller*. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Oil on panel. 48cm x 65cm. (Kren & Marx 1996).

---

<sup>47</sup> Originating in film theory and an integral theme of feminism, 'the gaze' refers to how we engage with visual representations. The 'male gaze' (Laura Mulvey 1975) invokes the sexual politics of the gaze, and suggests a sexualised form of viewership that empowers men and objectifies women (Loreck 2016).



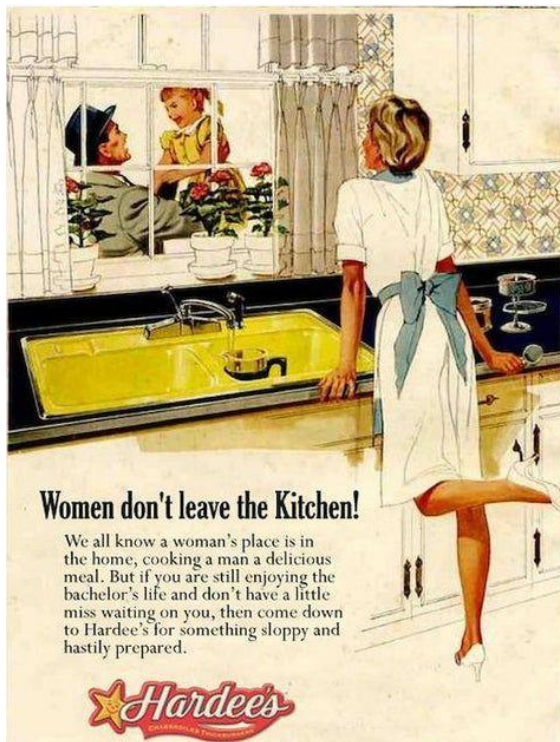


Figure 9: *Hardee's* Advertisement. Poster. c 1950. (Jin 2016).



Figure 10: *Burger King* Advertisement. Poster. c 1990. (Business Insider 2012).

As Kosmeyer (2011:642) suggests “the very look of food is an invitation to eat”. Artworks, advertisements, cookbooks and digital medias, as exemplified in Figures 8-10, portray food images as they are set before us just moments before consumption – “a foamy beer just poured...pasta gleaming with olive oil and a split potato” steaming with melty butter. These alluring presentations lend themselves to so-called *trompe l'oeil* effects that tease the perceived borders between art and reality (Sutton 2011:466)<sup>48</sup>. Similarly, simply reading a description about a delicious meal can tantalise your taste buds and evoke your imagination, which highlights again the synaesthetic exchange amongst the senses.

On a theme of contemporary debate, social media analysts have identified the concept of food porn - a set of visual aesthetics that emphasise the pleasurable, sensual dimensions of food, derived from human sexuality. As McDonnell (2016:239) describes “the aesthetics of food porn were vaulted into the contemporary popular imaginary through the rise of food blogs and social media sites dedicated to food production and consumption”. Characterised by the

<sup>48</sup> *Trompe l'oeil* is French for ‘deceive the eye’, and is an artistic technique that uses realistic imagery to create three dimensional optical illusions (Manon 2006).

glamourised visual representation of cooking or eating in advertisements, blogs, cooking shows and more predominantly on social media and other visual medias, food porn refers to the evocative descriptions of food, and the act of eating (Rousseau 2014:748). Food porn often takes the form of food photography with styling that presents food provocatively, in a similar way to glamour photography or pornographic photography. It makes use of styling, lighting and editing methods to present food in a provocative, often romanticised fashion. With its widespread occurrence in popular media, food porn conjures connotations of guilty-pleasures or agreeable-indulgences and is frequently referenced with endearment (Rousseau 2014:748). The term food porn was also used by the feminist critic Rosalind Coward in her book *Female Desire: Women's Sexuality Today* (1984) in which she writes:

Cooking food and presenting it beautifully is an act of servitude...That we should aspire to produce perfectly finished and presented food is a symbol of a willing and enjoyable participation in servicing others. Food pornography exactly sustains these meanings relating to the preparation of food. The kinds of picture used always repress the process of production of a meal. They are always beautifully lit, often touched up (Coward 1984:103).

Coward (1984) likened food photography to sexual porn. In displaying vivid, striking visuals to arouse individuals' taste buds and cravings, she draws parallels between food photography and sexual pornography. Similarly, in his article '*La grande bouffe*' - *Cooking Shows as Pornography*, Andrew Chan (2003:47) asserts that television cooking shows can in many ways be equated to pornographic visuals, "seeking to arouse the senses" by means of intricate, carefully crafted representations of food.

A variant synonym of food porn, 'Gastro Porn' was first observed in print media in the *New York Review of Books* (1977) in a cookbook review describing how "[t]rue gastro-porn heightens the excitement and the sense of the unattainable, by proffering coloured photographs of various completed recipes" (Cockburn 1977). The review alludes to elements of excitement and fantasy, considered also to be vital cornerstones of 'non-food pornography'. In similar fashion, Barthes (1972:78) reviews food images published in the *Elle* fashion magazine and introduces the idea of 'ornamental cooking', asserting how food in contemporary culture has been given an "artificial reality" in order to repackage it as a "dream of smartness and sophistication". Wolfe Review (2018) continues how if you open up a "magazine with recipes, the picture will be of a visual category rather than a culinary one", suggesting how food is meant to be seen, not eaten.

Barthes (1972:78) further describes how ‘fine colour’ photographs are exhibited in a similar manner to images shared on social media platforms in a modern digital age. As the Wolfe Review (2018) explains;

In the modern realm...everything portrayed must contain an element of ornamentation. Everything must be beautified if it is depicted. Food is glossed, smooth, beautiful. We know that at home, food doesn’t really look like this, but we buy into the magic, we love the fantasy of the pomp, the elegance, the inventiveness; the exotic element in that which is beyond us, the fantastical.

The imagery of ornamental cooking portrays food in dream-like state to readers that are actually incapable of cooking in that particular way (Barthes 1972:79). Whilst disparate in era, style and connotation, both Coward’s (1985) food porn and Barthes’ (1972) ornamental cooking illustrate how food imagery is reflective of emergent contemporary culture and can be controversial in nature.

Clearly too, food-related fantasies and trends in society are no longer underpinned by cookbooks and magazines only. As Rousseau (2014) illustrates, the voyeuristic escapism displayed by alternative food-related media (for example on advertising posters and hoardings) and on live television shows, has contributed to a significant spike in viewer obesity rates and other eating disorders. Food-imagery is now featured prominently across almost every form of contemporary visual media and on digital media in particular, and social media platforms are heavily saturated with food-themed imagery. Thus a more contemporary expression of food porn has emerged within the digital age and come to occupy a “contestant space between cultural constructions of legitimate and illegitimate eating desires” (Rousseau 2014:749).

In the digital environment, the vicarious component of food porn arguably fuels a perception that consuming food porn is potentially safer than the act of consuming real food because the calories are not physically ingested. However, whilst food porn might be dismissed as being “playful and bombastic”, there are a number of real-world health implications to which digital users are regularly exposed (Rousseau 2014, in Mejova et al. 2016). Examples include social media users who substitute physical food with the consumption of digital food images, and physical food overindulgence stemming from the persistent and repetitive stimulant of digital food images. Mejova et al. (2016) analysis of *#foodporn* posts on Instagram identifies how the hashtag category is often associated with “high-calorie and sugary foods such as chocolates and cakes” enhanced by the use of creative camera and sound techniques, subtle lighting, close-up photography, colour and tone variations and sound mixing. This said however, there have

been efforts to re-imagine the concept of digital “gastro-porn” in an attempt to motivate more healthy living (Mejova et al. 2016).

Rousseau (2014) highlights a further negative element of food porn culture, describing how extremes of food porn can be detrimental to “sufferers of eating disorders who rely on images of food” as subtle substitutes for addictive eating. Whilst the food porn movement celebrates and accommodates the ‘foodie culture’, commentators also identify how it “fuels unhealthy and obsessive relationships with food and distorted body imagery” (Rousseau 2014:748).

In navigating the foodie-world, consideration must be given as to how powerful social media influencers (such as *Sarah’s Day* on Instagram, Figure 7) might also inspire renewed eating trends and habit change. With vast global followings, the pervasive influence of such platforms is forceful and persuasive. Furthermore, as Mojet and Keoster (2005:151) exemplify, the knowledge we gain about the things we eat and drink can also be “acquired incidentally and without any explicit attention of learning” and stored in our memory for later recall. These often-subconscious pockets of learning carry latent potential to influence our subsequent behaviours, values and self-representation. Our memories of foodstuffs not only play an important role in our eating habits and preferences, and our emotional states, but ultimately in our daily experiences and life narratives (Canetti et al. 2002). Exposure to digital food imagery thus influences users both directly, by encouraging novel eating habits and behaviours and perpetuating online social media trends, and indirectly, by means of subconscious influences as described by Mojet and Koester (2015). In both cases, the use of and exposure to digital social media, influences participants expression of self, and to the construction of their online autobiographical memory.

### **3.6 Food, Visual Culture and the Digital Realm**

As explained in Chapter One, visual culture relates to those events and experiences through which consumers interface with visual technology in seeking information, meaning or pleasure (Mirzoeff 1999). It incorporates the structures and operations of such visual regimes within the digital sphere “and their coercive and normalising effects” (Norman 2003:232). Individuals now function within culturally constructed, visually-saturated “global societies” (Mirzoeff 1999) in which the images, signs and symbols prevalent within the digital realm significantly impact how society is shaped.

Contemporary society is exposed continuously to a plethora of images emanating from innumerable sources. Stokes and Price (2017:159) illustrate how individuals now lead digital lives focused on interaction through “image-based social networks” such as Instagram. The confluence of digital technology and visual culture has resulted in the continuous use of digital social media aspiring to “assert their identities” amongst their peers and communities (Moje 2002:116). As shown in Chapter Two, our identities and social practises are now continuously shaped and influenced by these multi-faceted technologies (Stokes & Price 2017:159). The groundswell of food images shared on numerous online sites has become central to our contemporary culture and ultimately, to our unique individual identities (de Solier 2013:9).

As Van Ooijen (2017:22-23) also highlights, the emergence of digital smart technologies has facilitated an explosion of food images shared on the Internet. With the proliferation of metadata hashtag sites on a multitude of social media platforms, viewers are now able to categorise and identify images according to topics of interest. Hashtags such as *#foodporn*, *#foodie*, *#homechef* and *#foodmemories* have grown exponentially in popularity on social media. These sites lend themselves to semiotic analysis in order to identify significant cultural trends and subjective connotations.

CJ Hernandez (Partner Solutions Manager at Instagram) identifies how food-themes have forever been popular amongst Instagram users. However, the last decade has seen a dramatic shift in the images captured and portrayed (Demarest 2020). Instead of simply capturing aesthetic images of the food (and only the food) itself, users are now capturing moments of “people eating and making the food, and *the stories behind them*” (Demarest 2020). This trend illustrates how food imagery on social media is shifting away from purely emotional (and aesthetically) based connotations (sensory, sensuality and desirability) towards images increasingly representative of individual life-stories and personalised narratives.

As Hernandez (2020) makes clear:

Food is really the OG Instagram.<sup>49</sup> When we think back to the early days of Instagram, food was one of the original popular interest areas on the platform. In those early days, all the food content was beautiful photos of food. Now we see people putting *themselves* and *their personality* at the forefront of this content.

---

<sup>49</sup> OG - an abbreviation of “original gangster” - the phrase used in digital and texting culture to describe someone or something of genuine or original quality (Fabiani 2020).

Hernandez (2020) magnifies the importance of the focal point of this study: emphasising how contemporary social media is witnessing the emergent desire of millions of users to represent themselves, their identities and their experiences by means of food-themed imagery. As Dowless (2017) confirms “Food is something that we all know and love” - regardless of cultural background, language or religion, everyone is able to understand and appreciate food. This elementary truism becomes explicitly apparent when contemplating the many millions of food-related posts shared each day across global timelines on social media (Dowless 2017).

Tracing the development of society and technology, expressions of food-themed imagery have evolved through the material and social self, to become an innate part of the spiritual self. As such, these media posts can be seen as contributing to our spiritual self, as theorised by William James (1890). Our spiritual self is our most subjective and intimate self that involves the process of introspection and self-reflection (James 1890). Unequivocally, social media has emerged as a preferred channel through which users can ‘share a meal or eating experience’ with a global virtual community reaching far beyond the guests sitting around the table. In this way, one needs to thoroughly reflect upon one’s own experiences and memories when sharing and engaging with others on Instagram.

As Dowless (2017) asserts, “We love food - but we love it more when it is twinned with an extraordinary experience”. Individuals and groups are able to multiply their enjoyment and interest by creating and sharing their unique culinary adventures with other people around the world. To gather with one another over food - ‘to break bread together’ - has been a human tradition since time immemorial. Again, this highlights the multidimensional, spiritual element of food, and how it shapes our identities, cultures and societies – just as different clothing items can be connotative of particular beliefs, so food conveys religious sentiments of communities, distinguishing individuals and assigning them their own unique socio-cultural identities (Sibal 2020). The functionality of digital social media thus simply adds to these experiences, since “It gives us something warm and wonderful to hold onto” (Dowless 2017).

As Atanasova (2016) highlights, for multitudes of social media users, the capturing of carefully curated food photographs has become part of their self-representation, and can form a positive element of ritualistic mealtime behaviour, in similar fashion to praying before a meal. For example, researchers from Yale University describe how the act of photo-taking during a positive experience - such as enjoying a meal with family or friends - can stimulate joyful and

blissful emotional reactions, an inner feeling of well-being (Barasch 2016).<sup>50</sup> As a form of personalised creativity, individuals are able to derive positive emotional sensation from their food photography, capturing the occasion or experience as an element of memory, a moment's expression of who we are, or who we want to be. For example, an annual (2016) Waitrose food and drink report highlighted how food and food-images have emerged as a form of contemporary 'social currency' - endowing an ability to exchange positive emotions and good experiences. According to British food retailers Waitrose, one in five individuals share at least one online food photo each month with their friends or family (Guardian 2016). As Tandoh (2016) makes clear, regardless of the prevailing political and emotional atmosphere of the times, food always "shines bright" as something to inspire, to relish and enjoy.

Consider for example, the Instagram account *@dashofmandi* in Figure 11. Texas based blogger Mandi has accumulated a massive number of followers, eager to indulge the simple yet delicious recipes she shares on Instagram. Mandi's images are vibrant, carefully floodlit, meticulously structured and well photographed. She uses punchy tones and vivacious colours to impart her images with deeper warmth and an indulgent feel, amassing huge interaction with her followers. The *@dashofmandi* account exemplifies how hashtag categories and Instagram accounts have become so widely followed and assimilated into mainstream social media activity, that they now readily spawn their own unique food trends and signature styles.

---

<sup>50</sup> As Barasch (2016) explains, "photo-taking" increases positive engagement with an experience, and directs greater visual attention towards specific aspects of the experience (as for example, the food photographed).



Figure 11: @dashofMandy. Mandy Hickman Instagram feed. 2021. Screenshot

Indeed, as The Guardian (2016) reports, once an Instagram-friendly food ‘goes viral’, it can completely transform the way communities eat. Contemporary style breakfasts for example, have shifted away from the dull, lifeless and “decidedly unphotogenic cereal” towards “the bright hues of avocado on toast and smoothie bowls” (Tandoh 2016). The positive implications of such trends become obvious: social media trends not only influence people’s choice of foods, they also have the momentum and ability to influence their underlying values, their food preferences, habits and behaviours. In essence, social media trends are influential at the very heart and soul of food culture.

Noteworthy too, The Guardian (2016) report on the significant ‘generation gap’ evident within the ‘online food movement’. According to the Waitrose report (2016), adults aged 18-24 are five times more likely to share online photographs of their food online than individuals aged 55 years and above. In this instance, the cuisine reflected online, its style and tone of imagery, is skewed towards ‘younger age categories’. Popular foods represented for example, might not include traditional older-fashioned dishes such as sherry trifle or Irish stew (The Guardian



2016). Consideration can usefully be given therefore, as to how generational differences might influence the autobiographical memory of digital immigrants and digital natives,<sup>51</sup> or how memory formation might have evolved across successive generations.

Whilst the act of scrolling through an array of the foodie visuals flooding the many Instagram feeds might seem harmless enough, there are negative connotations that are now becoming evident. The lure of viewing multiple images of food - known as “digital grazing” - has in some ways superseded the pleasure of seeing the “real deal”, suggests Michail (2015). Nowadays, avid social media users might routinely pore over copious food-themed imagery. Studies indicate however, that regular and consistent exposure to ‘virtual food’ can trigger a variety of physiological and behavioural responses, not least of which is to exacerbate physiological hunger within the observer (Spence et al. 2015). Whilst their primeval ‘visual hunger’ once aided hunter-gatherers to identify nutritious foods,<sup>52</sup> it has since become maladapted to our high-calorie food environment and may contribute to increasing levels of obesity within society (Michail 2015).

Whilst consuming food photography might dampen our immediate hunger cravings, physiological yearnings soon become dominant; we are driven to eat. Social media has indeed begun to blur the line between real and virtual hunger, and as we consume virtual food-content, it might encourage us to consume real food. For example, a recent TikTok pasta recipe recently went viral in the US. As Vouge (2021) describes, during February 2021 American supermarkets witnessed a 117% increase in sales of feta cheese, whilst the Harris Teeter supermarket chain reported a 200% increase in feta sales across 230 locations (Vouge 2021); as of March the hashtag *#fetapasta* had gained more than 661.7 million views on TikTok alone. Other TikTok accounts (including *@feelgoodfoodie* and *@grilledcheesesocial*) carried a simple tomato pasta recipe created and posted by Finnish blogger Jenni Häyrinen (2019) whose simple appealing recipe garnered massive virtual viewing with “countless variations swirling across the platform” (Farris 2021).

\*\*\*

---

<sup>51</sup> Millennials have been described as ‘digital natives’ in reference to their characteristic familiarity and competence in the use of technology, as compared to the ‘digital immigrants’ of preceding generations whose lifestyles were shaped before the advent of the ‘on-line era’ (DeVaney 2015:12).

<sup>52</sup> Visual hunger refers to our evolutionary desire, or urge, to look at food (Michail 2015).

Food is a universal language, powerful within and of itself. Whilst it has the ability to categorise, classify, discriminate and divide, it also has the capacity to unify individuals and their communities in novel and meaningful ways. Food and food culture constitutes an inherent and natural part of who we are as individuals, how we relate to the world around us, and how the world relates to us. Food and food photography can be hugely beneficial for cross-cultural communication. As a human necessity, food is universally understood and engaging, and as such is an obvious conduit for cross-cultural empathy (Woolley et al. 2017).

This chapter has considered the emergent role of food and food culture and identified how our culture of food contributes significantly to the way in which society functions. The role of food as a cornerstone of self-identity and autobiographical memory is highlighted and the importance of embodiment through food is identified. Chapter 4 considers specifically how online social media participants utilise the digital realm (Instagram) as a means for digital self-representation, and applies semiotic analysis to a selection of food-themed hashtag images.

## CHAPTER 4

### Entrée

*Instagram Foodies: A Digital Semiotic Analysis of Contemporary  
Food Culture on Instagram*

*We all have our food memories, some good and some bad. The taste, smell, and texture of food can be extraordinarily evocative, bringing back memories not just of eating food itself but also of place and setting. Food is an effective trigger of deeper memories of feelings and emotions, internal states of the mind and body.*

- The Omnivorous Mind (John S. Allen - 2012)

In their article *Eating with our eyes: From visual hunger to digital satiation*, Spence et al. (2015) investigate the influential role of vision and our other senses on the consumption of food stuffs, both physically and in the digital realm and describe how one of the brain's key functions is to "facilitate foraging and feeding" (Spence et al. 2015:53). Early life-forms probe their surrounding environments to detect relevant stimuli and the eyes and visual systems evolved in order to increase the species' chance for survival (Spence et al. 2015). The act of foraging is one of the brain's most essential functions which, in humans, is directed by vision and our other senses to recognise familiar food, and contributes significantly to our complex "physiological cycles of hunger" (Spence et al. 2015:53). As previously highlighted, our food memories and experiences rely heavily on the synaesthetic nature of our senses, and their ability to cooperatively bring about a specific emotion, experience or memory (Sutton 2011). This prompts the necessity to further consider how humans use a combination of their senses to sensorially experience digital food.

This chapter examines how food-stuffs, self-identity and autobiographical memory interact and transmute within the digital space. More specifically, the chapter considers the digital representation of food-items posted on Instagram, and how they reveal themselves as extensions of one's self-representation and autobiographical memory. The analysis focuses on three selected hashtag categories (#foodiesofinstagram, #foodmemories and #homechef) and provides an analysis of food-related images posted within each category.

A brief contextual overview is detailed of relevant phenomena as they relate to self-representation, autobiographical memory, digital visual culture and the role of food. Thereafter,

the selected Instagram visuals as posted by various users are analysed semiotically in order to identify underlying symbols and connotations that authors use to express their unique self-representations and memories. The analysis identifies how individuals utilise their online Instagram profiles to convey personal experiences and memories in creative digital expression and highlights the uniquely individualised intricacies and complexities of the users' Instagram posts. This form of expressionism is explored as an online extension of the author's digital autobiographical memory.

#### **4.1 The Digitisation of Food**

Humans have for centuries functioned within culturally constructed, visually saturated societies. Contemporary society is influenced by the visual imagery, signs and symbols to which we are continuously exposed.

In similar fashion, the imagining and recording of food-related imagery has been a core feature of humanness since the dawn of time. Food plays an essential role in the cultures of different people, as is often portrayed in the art and imagery created during each period (Barilla 2019). However, as with other fundamentally human phenomena, the representation of foodstuffs within our visual culture has transformed and shifted concurrently with changes in societal norms, stereotypes and ideals. Hooper-Greenhill (2008:14) expounds how it is the role of visual culture to “examine the act of seeing as a product of tension between external images or objects, and internal thought processes” - in this manner that we are able to analyse the spectrum of cultures, norms and mythologies signified and embodied in the imagery of food-stuffs.

Art historian Donovan Gauvreau (Aaron 2021) explains how still-life paintings of food-stuffs such as bread, fruits and vegetables are a well-established historical feature. For example, archaeologists have discovered sentimentalised drawings depicting food-items and food preparation rituals on the walls of the Egyptian tombs and pyramids; the Egyptians would record their recipes and cooking methods in images as a legacy for future reference. Figure 12 depicts an artistic expression of bread making - a traditional, sustainably staple food that was consumed at every meal, and was even portrayed to play a prominent in ancient cult rituals (Metwally 2008).<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Figure 12 exemplifies how food has been a fundamental element of culture since antiquity. Ancient Egyptians used hieroglyphics (for example, in wall paintings decorating the walls of tombs) to retell important symbolic narratives and represent important rituals and activities (Royal Society of Chemistry 2021).

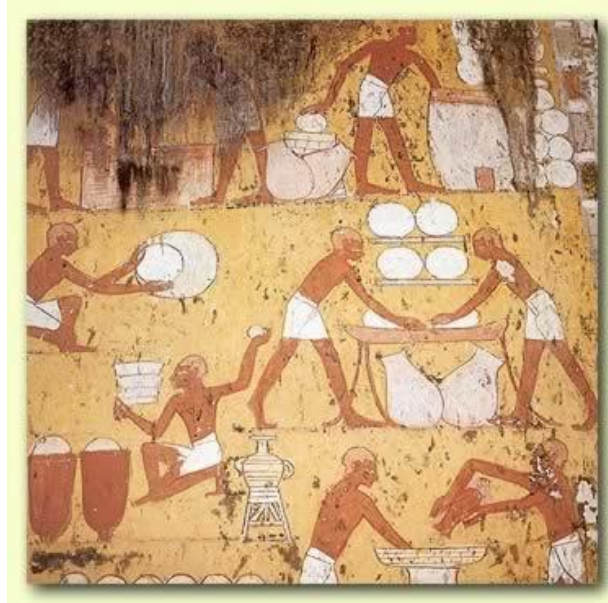


Figure 22: The Diet of Ancient Egypt. 2021. *The processes of making bread*. (Aaron Art Prints 2021).

The portrayal and celebration of food items through paintings, images and graphics evolved from ancient Greek and Roman civilisation, continuing through the Renaissance era (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) to more contemporary periods. A multitude of artists have crafted impressive food-themed artworks over time (Barilla 2019).<sup>54</sup> The work of three such artists<sup>55</sup> is highlighted in this chapter, namely; Impressionist Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890),<sup>56</sup> Pop artist Andy Warhol (1928-1978),<sup>57</sup> and photorealist painter Ralph Goings (1928-2016).<sup>58</sup>

Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters* (1885) shown in Figure 13, depicts the harsh realities of country life, and celebrates how peasant folk have ploughed the earth themselves with the bare hands they now use to eat their potatoes. Their grungy-looking faces, earthy and gnarled hands look as if they are made from the same ground they dig (Jones 2003). As Jones (2003) continues, "their simple supper is sacramental; they are grave, intent and somehow excited, as if they get more pleasure and social communion from this meal of potatoes and coffee than the rich man

<sup>54</sup> It is not intended to question excessively the historical relevance of foodstuffs within artworks and imagery. Instead, these artists are used to showcase how food has been a recurring theme in visual imagery throughout civilisation.

<sup>55</sup> These artists are used as examples as they are recognised as prominent, ground-breaking and unconventional artists during their independent periods of work. Each artist rejected the movement, ideas and beliefs of the time to bring about their own school of thought within the art world (Ide 2017; TAS Foundation 2022; ArtLyst 2020).

<sup>56</sup> *Impressionism* is a 19<sup>th</sup> century art movement focused on subjective perceptions of nature and reality, rather than exact, realistic representations (Samu 2004).

<sup>57</sup> *Pop Art* emerged in the United Kingdom and America mid-fifties that challenged the traditions of fine art by celebrating imagery from popular and, mass culture (Tate 2020).

<sup>58</sup> *Photorealism* (or super-realism) is an American art movement that began in the sixties, utilising photography as a means of inspiration. Emerging from Pop Art, Photorealists were interested in breaking down traditional hierarchies of their subject matter by highlighting every-day scenes of commercial life (Wainwright 2019).

takes from his exquisite feast”. Cutting through the dull, grey harshness of the peasant reality is the red and yellowish warmth of the oil lamp that illuminates the faces of the characters. In this way, the painting expresses Van Gogh’s close association with the care, humanity and moral beauty revealed through the intimacy and community amongst peasants (Jones 2003).

In contrast, Warhol’s *Campbell’s Soup Can’s* (1968) in Figure 14 is a renowned American work of modern-art, that makes stark commentary on contemporary consumerism and mass media. The work gained international acclaim as a “breakthrough in Pop Art” (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 2020) and highlights Warhol’s artistic focus on all things mass produced, especially foodstuffs (Small 2006). Similarly, Going’s *Donut* (1995) in Figure 15 highlights the intimate simplicity of the morning coffee and donut ritual, evoking thoughts of the basic pleasures of the American working-class lifestyle. These artists made special efforts to hone in on the more routine and mundane aspects of life, finding relevance and rich meaning in the simplicity of everyday life and its artefacts - including the preparation and consumption of daily foodstuffs.



Figure 13: Vincent Van Gogh. 1885. *The Potato Eaters*. Oil Painting. 82cm x 114cm.



Figure 14: Andy Warhol. 1968. *Campbell's Soup Cans*. 32x Screen Print Canvases. 51cm x 41cm.



Figure 15: Ralph Going. 1995. *Donut*. Oil Painting 51cm x 41cm.

More recently however, has been the “digital boom” in the depiction of food-themed imagery posted across various online social media platforms (Demarest 2020; Van Ooijen 2017), reflecting the increased prevalence and cultural significance of food within art, imagery and its contemporary digital realms. Whether used to celebrate bountiful harvests, to communicate a diversity of opinion or simply to boast artistic talent, food-themed imagery has always been appealing to a broad audience of viewers. In this same way, online audiences are now exposed to digital images shared by users on Instagram, that constitute parallel contemporary reflections of the artworks illustrated above (Figures 13-15).

Just as Van Gogh depicted and celebrated the lifestyles of (for example) the working-classes through his artworks, Instagram users post and share photographs and compositions of friends, family and loved-ones sharing moments around a table - visuals which signify the fundamental importance of community-eating and food. The food laid on the table in Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* (Figure 13) is a testament to the toil and hardship each of the characters has endured. The colours of the dark interior of the room stand in stark contrast to the warmer, softer brown and green tones that highlight the hands and faces of the peasants, and the activity of sharing their meal, and nourishing themselves in a familial, mutually comforting and soothing setting (Van Gogh Organisation 2021). Significantly, Van Gogh explains that his use of colour and texture within the artwork intentionally depicts the characters in a manner akin to dirty, earthy potatoes. Not only does this highlight the association between peasants and their manual labours, it is also symbolic of purity and closeness to nature (Van Gogh Organisation 2021). The gathering around the table and sharing their sustenance, in turn symbolises the unification of loved ones in the convivial safe space of their congenial household. Thus, although the characters of Van Gogh's artwork (Figure 13) are beset with portrayals of poverty and their dirty subsistence labours, the solitude of the individual is predominant as they find solace in their companionate nourishment. In a similar manner, the Instagram image shown in Figure 16 depicts the harmonious union of family and loved-ones in their sharing of a meal.



Figure 16: @Laurelmanette. 2021. Charlottesville, Virginia. Screenshot by author.

In the accompanying caption, the author @Laurelmanette describes an intimate family dinner party where they share touching moments and experiences over a feast of food and wine. In

her caption, she relates how “...the flora and fruits they chose represented qualities they love and admire in each person” when elaborating on the activities of the evening. The image exemplifies how food and nature constitute a fundamental and deep-rooted aspect of culture and society. Just as the characters in Van Gogh’s *The Potato Eaters* (1885) are celebrating one another’s company and sharing moments around a dinner table, so to in contemporary society people continue to attach enduring meaning and value to the celebration of family, food and sharing.

Visually, Figure 16 identifies closely with Van Gogh’s *The Potato Eaters* (Figure 13) in that the dark frame of the image stands in stark relief to the warm, comforting shades of amber light on the individuals’ faces and the table setting, the candles the flowers and the platters. In particular, the warm glow of the flickering flames (candles and oil-lamp) illuminating the centre of composition of both images is “symbolic of celebration, home and remembrance” (homesick 2019). The symbolism of a glowing candle has a range of meaningful connotations throughout antiquity; in the instance of these visual compositions (Figure 13 and Figure 16) it is the presence of a burning flame that “quells the nostalgia...bringing us peace and tranquillity” (Homesick 2019). Candles represent a pervasive and almost meditative cultural consciousness that “reverberates with every flick and lick of the flame” - a universal symbol of light and life in times of darkness or uncertainty (homesick 2019). As such, Figure’s 13 and 16 both demonstrate the prominent and ubiquitous role of food, food-sharing and community gatherings centred around food, in human socialisation, culture and society.

As Kukkonen (2008) suggests, visuals and texts can never be understood “in and of themselves”, and in order to make sense of a visual’s connotative dimension and cultural conventions one must develop a strong contextual knowledgebase and understanding. Figure 16 - as with other visual texts - is a product of culture, and draws closely from previous experiences, memories and practises that continue to endure within that group or community.

For Andy Warhol, the repetitiveness of images in his artworks was an expression of mass culture and production (Figure 14) (Tate 2021). When America finally recovered after the Second World War, a powerful economic surge swept the country, which, combined with progress in technology and the media, gave rise to the so-called "culture of consumption" – the culture of people with stability, high income and an abundance of leisure time.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Manufacturing, an industry which had expanded and strengthened during the war years, began to offer the mass consumer a wide variety of products, from hair sprays and washing machines to shiny new convertibles which, according



Andy Warhol is a world-renowned American Pop Artist who applied his artistic skills through a spectrum of art media, in his oft controversial efforts to deliberately blur the lines between fine art, mainstream aesthetics and consumerism. Warhol's art was typified by the portrayal of foodstuffs using the repetitive stylistic technique (Figure 14) - a means for Warhol to utilise context, content and composition in characterisations of consumerism<sup>60</sup>, capitalism<sup>61</sup> and the "practical and impermanent... mode of life in a mass society" (Bellay 2015: 27). His particular interest in food subjects demonstrates how food and food imagery was used as a lens for deconstructing global consumerist culture, in which mass-produced foodstuffs are readily obtained and consumed by individuals across all ranks of society, and thus carry significant personal meaning and national appeal (Small 2006).

In similar fashion, contemporary society's Instagram accounts are laden with a vast digital landscape of collages and Pop-art inspired portrayals of foodstuffs that reflect insights into contemporary consumerist culture; Instagram users frequently post images of mass-produced food items in similar Warhol style. Figure 17 illustrates a popular Instagram filter that creates a collage effect of the chosen subject matter, in this case a repeated-image design of the 'Pogi Burger' which the author boasts "looks good in every colour" (@pogiboydc 2021). As Warhol (in Keegan 2019) notes:

The Pop Artists did images that anybody walking down Broadway could recognise in a split second - comics, picnic tables, men's trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles - all the great modern things that abstract expressionists tried so hard not to notice at all.

The example (Figure 17) posted on Instagram evidences the continuing portrayal of a culture of capitalism-inspired consumerism by means of food-themed digital imagery. The visual familiarisation of individuals and groups in society with the foods items of mass consumption indicates the presence of consumer memory - "processes that allow us to record and later retrieve experiences and information" relating to our consumer experiences and consumer products (Mercurio & Forehand 2010). The past experiences and autobiographically inclined

---

to their advertising, were the material embodiment of happiness. The emergence of television and new trends in print advertising provided impetus to the culture of consumption, with an emphasis placed on graphic images and immediately recognisable logos - the brands and products now taken for granted in our visually saturated world (Archive.com 2021).

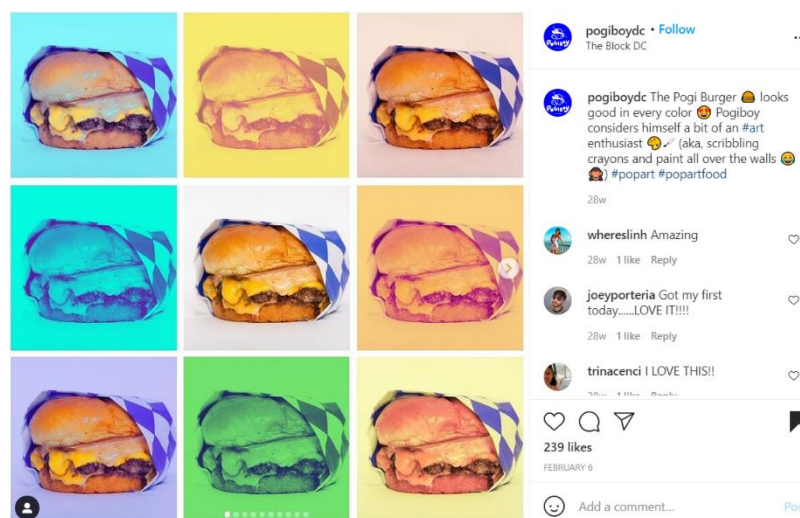
<sup>60</sup> *Consumerism* is the idea that increasing the production and consumption of goods and services is a desirable goal, and that a person's well-being and happiness is dependent upon consumer goods and material possessions (Hayes 2021)

<sup>61</sup> *Capitalism* is an economic system focused on the production of goods and services based on the supply and demand of the market (Cheng 2020).

memories embedded in the consumer's memory enhance the consumer's self-congruence.<sup>62</sup> So influenced, consumers will be more inclined to acquiesce to items - in this instance food items - that are most congruent with the consumer's unique sense of self and autobiographical memory. In essence, the greater the congruence between an image and the individual's self-image and autobiographical memory, the more positive the consumer will be towards that food item or brand.

Through his art Warhol draws attention to routine consumer items that constitute fundamental elements in the narratives of our daily routines and lifestyles, portrayals which in turn form embedded elements of our autobiographical memory. This contemporary rendition (Figure 17) of bringing a bold, creative appearance to commonplace consumer goods mimics historical popular culture, and illustrates how modern society continues to comment on the topics of mass culture and consumerism, still so pertinent within contemporary society. As such, it becomes clear that our modern consciousness remains heavily influenced by the socio-cultural engagements passed-on and passed-down through civilisations, and continues to manipulate the content we choose to share, and consume, in a contemporary world.

The portrayal of repetitive images, starkly bright, bold and colourful pop-art influenced artworks is still widely used in advertising and design, and also in social media posts. The combination of photography and pop-art within the digital space allows individuals to participate within an increasingly virtual (art) world while making use of the styles and conventions of the past. As such, Instagram provides yet another stage for individuals to express themselves creatively, and so generate an engaging experience of visual indulgence for users and their followers.



<sup>62</sup> *Self-congruence theory* - Consumers are motivated to evaluate items more favourably when the brand-user image of the product or item is high in self-congruity, that is, it matches the consumer's self-image.

Figure 17: @pogiboydc. 2021. The Block DC. Screenshot by author.

Just as Ralph Goings (Figure 15) uses his art to highlight the lifestyles of the working classes and mundane aspects of routine and daily life, so contemporary digital society continues to find sentimental value in ordinary, everyday facets of life. Hashtag trends such as *#coffeeholic* *#morningrituals* and *#morningcoffee* are highly popular categories where users share images of their daily rituals and routines that nevertheless form a meaningful part of who they are, and how they choose to represent themselves. Figure 18 for example, depicts the author revelling in a quiet Sunday morning moment, “refuelling on soul foods” whilst enjoying family, friends and “a cup of coffee” (@coffeegossipgirl). The image (New York Times, book, flowers, morning coffee, fruit breakfast on the bed) and captions (“Sunday, a day to refresh your soul”) clearly demonstrate elements of the author’s lifestyle and self-representation. The newspaper and the open paperback signify the author’s keenness to keep abreast of current news events and to read more broadly; the flowers signify brightness and creativity; the coffee depicts an element of morning indulgence; the carefully styled coconut-and-berry bowls signify a health and wellness lifestyle, all presented on a morning tray alongside the caption “Take a deep breath and relax” signifying a moment of Sunday morning indulgence.

As Verplanken and Sui (2019) suggest, ritualistic behaviours and habits contribute significantly to a person’s sense of identity. Our integrated self-concept involves a high degree of connectedness between “cognitive, affective, motivational and behavioural systems” (Kuhl et al. 2015).<sup>63</sup> In the digital online world, portrayals of a simple morning cup of coffee - and the user’s continual desire to capture the moments and share on Instagram - represent repetitive behaviours that become embedded within the autobiographical memory and constitute a repetitive feature of the user’s self and self-representation.

Figure 18 thus exemplifies how food becomes a recurring facet of the (often) smaller moments in life that, when woven together, form the fabric of a coherent life narrative; a narrative that when explored, can reveal a deeper and richer understanding of one’s sense of self. Furthermore, the act of posting and sharing such mundane lifestyle moments reinforces our habits and behaviours that form part of our autobiographical memories.

---

<sup>63</sup> The *Integrated self* considers how people are characterised by a unity in thought, emotions, and actions that together constitute “being someone” or having “an integrated self” (Kuhl 2015).

Perhaps @coffeegossipgirl (Figure 18) would not have remembered this particular moment, and many others, without sharing it digitally on Instagram. As such, Instagram also functions as an extension of @coffeegossipgirl’s memories and experiences, and provides a convenient, close-to-hand, and detailed repository of experiences that may well otherwise have been forgotten. As such, her digital food memories establish and represent a strong congruence within her broader offline-online life narrative. This Instagram post also contrasts vividly against the stereotypically negative interpretations of food porn and its commentators.



Figure 18: @coffeegossipgirl. 2021. Mannheim, Germany. Screenshot by author.

Just as Lévi-Strauss (1962) identifies the visual appeal of many foods has become increasingly enticing, a trend of significant influence on the sensual experience of food and its relevance to different cultures. As such, food-related imageries can be considered as an intricate extension of one’s sense of self, and how individuals choose to represent themselves, and relate to external environments.

As Tulving (1984) suggests, autobiographical memory provides a “familiar phenomenal flavour of recollective experiences” that are characterised by pastness and subjective variation (in Baumgartner et al. 1992). In short, the content users post online is representative of the unique memories, emotions and experiences that they choose to express externally. The food-themed posts that users share are digital representations of an event or experience captured within a particular time and place, and form part of their self-identity and awareness (Brewer & Pani 1983).

By posting and engaging with particular food-themed Instagram posts, users are gradually generating a digital archive that more closely reflects their personal life narratives. Each post

shared is a small-scale narration of a personal food-related story, or an experience that is chronologically deposited into our digital (and physical) memory bank for later retrieval. These isolated digital memoirs represent moments and experiences reliant on the *digital extension* of our self-identity and memories of which our food experiences constitute an important element.

The immense popularity of Instagram and its hashtag trends as a means to revitalise our memories and frame new experiences and fleeting foodie moments, once again underscores the socio-cultural relevance of food and its fundamental role within the expression of self-identity and autobiographical memory. In posting images of these experiences online, we are perhaps reinforcing the innate consciousness of our food-related self, and in turn expressing a more comprehensive, more holistic portrayal of self within the digital realm.

#### **4.2 Instagram Foodies: Identity, Self-Representation and Autobiographical Memory**

Gomez and Thornham (2015:2) expound how images have for long been considered as “representations to be interpreted”. Expressions of self-representation are a repeated feature of online engagement as social media users participate in their various online activities (Thumim 2012:6) and develop their ever-evolving “virtual identities” by means of regular interaction in the digital sphere (Hamilton 2021: [o]).

Theorists have also highlighted how smart devices have further bolstered the intensity of online self-expression by means of selfie-photography encouraging the “rapid documentation of the self” as part of a “socio-cultural revolution” in which participants seek identity affirmation (Thumim 2012). The digital selfie represents a “visual signifier of the self” through which the image is a self-representative signifier of the author (Gomez & Thornham 2015:2). The popularity of digital selfie photography stems from its multifaceted nature, being “temporary, contextually specific, changeable and durable” (Gomez & Thornham 2015:3) - characteristics ideally suited to social media users seeking to express their identities and bolster their autobiographical memories.

However, whilst the widespread popularity of selfie photography has added major impetus to online self-representation and opportunities for memory making, such memories are also found in a vast array of other objects. In their article “*Sick bunnies and pocket dumps: ‘not-selfies’ and the genre of self-representation*” Tiidenberg and Whelan (2017) comment on the

expressions of the self that are not selfies, but are visual self-representations composed of images featuring, for example, still-life objects, animals, landscapes, fictional characters and other subjects. Despite the absence of selfies in these online compositions, they are nevertheless considered to be “the best conceptualisations” of self-representation (Tiidenberg & Whelan 2017:1).

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Van Dijck (2007:28) also describes that whilst memories manifest themselves in and occupy the mind, they can also be located in things - objects, items and entities - that serve as subjective, personalised reminders of our lived experiences. This concept mirrors James’s (1980:183) four components of the self and highlights in particular the material self - the unique synthesis of people and their possessions that coalesce to constitute part of our unique sense of identity and self-representation. According to James (1980) the material self is instrumental in aligning ourselves with socio-cultural norms, which in turn influences how we store and retrieve our experiences and memories. Through this mechanism, individuals attach sentimental value to particular experiences creating autobiographical memories of particular moments, objects and entities that can later be retrieved with a sense of nostalgia. Whilst not being actual selfies *per se*, online visual depictions of foodstuffs and food themes create meaningful portrayals of memory and constitute powerful expressions of self-representation.

Peluse (2017) suggests that it is the complimentary senses of taste and smell are “quite literally what memories are made of” and work hand-in-hand in evoking our fondest memories and experiences. The foods we enjoy and consume are not by themselves the definitive reason for our particular memories; it is more the whole sensory experience of enjoying the food that we remember and recall in order to reminisce - whether that be celebrating life’s simple moments such as a cup of morning coffee or spending quality time enjoying a food experience with friends, family and loved ones (Peluse 2017).

In the digital world, Instagram users express and share these personal foodie experiences, moments and memories. Afterall, suggests Korsmeyer (2011:467) it is the “ever-anticipated first bite” that online food images evoke, arousing our appetites in apprehension of the taste-smell experience that awaits. Whilst individuals may not physically be able to smell or taste an Instagram image - or hear the sizzle of the grill and feel the heat of the braai fire - the incentive to view the images and the emotions so prompted, highlight the synaesthetic nature of our

senses, in which stimulation of one sensory pathway leads to stimulation of our other senses (Korsmeyer 2011:467).

As Fisher and Reardon (2004) make clear, food images displayed on social media are overlain with a multitude of connotations that help shape users' sense of self, and magnify their autobiographical memories. The food-themed images shared on Instagram are a form of self-curation and self-representation in which Instagram provides a space to digitally store and archive memories, a place to manage the feelings and emotions we hold about ourselves. In this fashion, our Instagram profiles become a digital assemblage<sup>64</sup> of our self and of autobiographical memories.

*Reflecting on my personal Instagram foodie account, I often share my food experiences and memories on my personalised Instagram Story - many are of sentimental moments shared with friends: the Ono sushi bar with my bestie Tarryn, that fresh mussel pot on The Deck during Rage and my Mum's yummy homemade mulberry pie. I'm very aware of the mise-en-scene of the visuals I share - my personal digital assemblage of images, GIFs and video snippets garnishing my profile with all the pizzazz I can find.*

As a result, our autobiographical memories become a complex amalgam of experiences, memories and knowledge of the external world, organised and interpreted in our personal fashion. As such, our uniquely self-styled digital assemblages are a representation not only of our personal sense of self, but also of our accumulated experiences as they are shaped by our liaisons and relationships with the world around us.

### **4.3 A Semiotic Analysis of Instagram Hashtag Trends**

For the purpose of this study, a data set of images has been selected from three Instagram hashtag trends, namely: *#foodiesoninstagram*, *#foodmemories* and *#homechef*.

The *#foodiesofinstagram* category currently accesses some 13 million shared posts. The number of posts increases incrementally, as users continuously upload their chosen images. As such *#foodiesofinstagram* is a globally popular hashtag category and provides a broad-based

---

<sup>64</sup> The phenomenon of assemblage was developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). Assemblage theory suggests that the social world is not fixed and stable, but is rather an assembly of complex configurations consisting of interrelated heterogeneous elements, signs and utterances (Little 2012).

population of data. Exploring this hashtag involved engaging in a massive, visually saturated food-related conversation taking place on real-time social media.

This study considers how individuals utilise food imagery on social media as an extension of their autobiographical memory. The *#foodmemories* hashtag usefully portrayed how individuals choose to re-create, express and share their nostalgic memories from their past.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, digital users were increasingly sharing their home cooking experiences and, in so doing, created a global food-orientated platform on which users learned to appreciate and experience home-cooking. As such, the *#homechef* hashtag category was identified as a relevant and appropriate platform for this analysis.

For each of the three categories, posts were selected using purposive sampling allowing the researcher to use their own subjective judgement in choosing the data set.<sup>65</sup> Each hashtag contains many thousands of posts; for the purpose of this research, the images were selected from posts uploaded during the course of 2020 and 2021. The posts identified from each hashtag were then semiotically analysed. Through this analysis, an array of underlying themes, denotations, connotations and interpretations were identified, and are described below.

The study took place during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. The influence of the pandemic on some of the imagery and captions of the posts, and the associated connotations is acknowledged, and noted in the commentary.

The analyses for each of the identified hashtag categories follows below.

(For each hashtag category, navigate to the appropriate tab on the DH project in order to view the posts explored during this research).

#### ***4.3.1 Semiotic Analysis - #foodiesofinstagram***

Roman gourmand Apicius professedly coined the “We eat with our eyes first” - an ancient aphorism that highlights the multi-sensorial nature of enjoying our food.<sup>66</sup> Instagram users draw on past experiences and autobiographical memories to anticipate the smells, flavours and

---

<sup>65</sup> *Purposive sampling* - otherwise known as judgemental, subjective or selective sampling, purposive sampling is a form of data collection whereby the researcher relies on their own judgement when choosing the sample (Alchemer 2021).

<sup>66</sup> Apicius, also known as *De re culinaria* or *De re coquinaria* (*On the Subject of Cooking*) is a collection of Roman cookery recipes. Though it is impossible to prove the connection, it is thought to have been compiled in the 1st century AD by Marcus Gavius Apicius, a Roman gourmand and lover of luxury, who lived in the 1st century AD, during the reign of Tiberius.



textures of the food items portrayed in the images before them (Korsmeyer 2011:467). The mouth-watering allure experienced when looking at a digital food-themed visual can stimulate further sensory arousal, and the sometimes-compulsive tendency to scroll in search of other visually appealing food images.

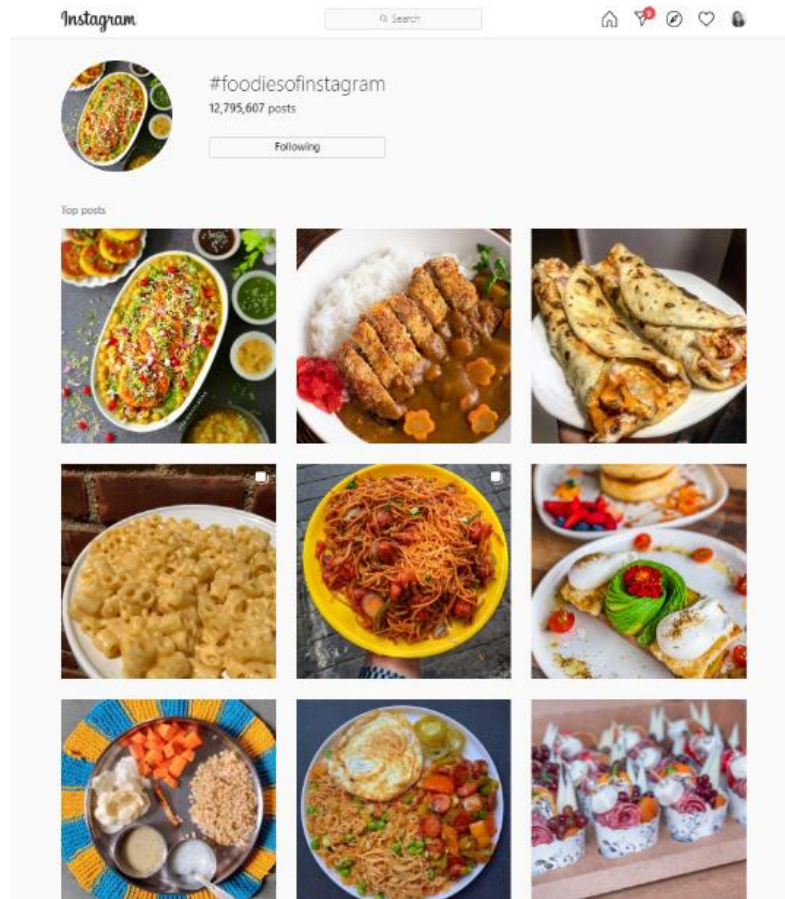


Figure 19: #foodiesofinstagram feed. 2021. Screenshot by author.

Figure 19 portrays a selection of images from the #foodiesofinstagram hashtag category. The platform attracts visually appealing, carefully curated and skilfully designed food-photography. The majority of #foodiesofinstagram images appear carefully designed and visually staged in order to heighten interest and maximise online viewership.

The expansive popularity of virtual food on Instagram and other social media platforms has led to the “inevitable exposure to ‘virtually succulent’ cooking procedures and beautifully portrayed dishes” (Howard et al. 2012). As such, digital users are now increasingly exposed to appealing, visually appetising, high-definition, digitally enhanced food images that are often “wholly divorced from the natural situations of consumption” (Spencer et al. 2015:55).

Furthermore, with the widespread availability of digital interfaces, smart devices and accessibility to various “embellishing technologies” and filters (such as Photoshop), amateur and professional photographers alike are readily able to capture, edit and distribute more visually appealing images (Spence et al. 2015:55).

The concept of food porn seems to be more relevant here; the immediate allure of the carefully curated high-quality images is quite likely to encourage fervent consumption of the visual content. As Rousseau (2014) considers, digital modification facilities serve to encourage the guilty food porn pleasures of consuming digital food (Rousseau 2014:748).

A further observation, is that *#foodiesofinstagram* posts frequently depict (professionally curated) photographs of restaurant style food. Figures 20-25 below exemplify that whilst this hashtag is one of the more popular food-orientated categories, the majority of images posted are from public dining establishments such as restaurants, bistros and diners, many of which are named and promoted as such. As Nielsen (2020) suggests, self-proclaimed *#foodies* have “cemented themselves as a mainstream consumer group” and will “go to great lengths to discover a multitude of food experiences” including fine-dining, speciality markets, local diners, out-of-the-way eateries and food trucks (Nielsen 2020). Using digital enhancement techniques, whilst the photographs of these restaurant style recipes and dishes are often captured by amateur photographers, the various editing, and light and colour filtering functions modify and beautify the images to appear as professional photographs.



Figure 20: @MunchingWithMax. 2020. Fetta Nera Pizza. Screenshot by author.



Figure 21: @Snackiesong. 2020. Duende Dos. Screenshot by author.



Figure 22: @Jillbakes\_. 2020. Chinchinicecream. Screenshot by author.



Figure 23: @Damnd\_elicious. 2020. Little French House. Screenshot by author.



Figure 24: @Fingeryfood. 2020. Atrium Hutt City. Screenshot by author.



Figure 25: @Lineatstheworld. 2021. Krispy Kreme Great World City. Screenshot by author.

On *#foodiesofinstagram*, the vibrant colours, stark colour contrasts and artfully curated compositions illustrated in Figures 20-25, further signify the intricate attention to detail and design. The immediate connotation is that a great deal of time, forethought and planning and skilled input is directed towards capturing “the perfect shot” in order to share with other Instagram users. As such, these images signify a more glamourised approach to food - more so for example than the down-to-earth posts of the *#homefoods* category below. As users describe their experiences of the moment and personalised memories associated with their posts, the images themselves have been carefully orchestrated and edited to conform with, and appeal to, the intentions of that category’s following of users. For example, two of the posts (Figures 22



& 23) illustrate strikingly decadent (and clearly food porn worthy) images of homemade recipes that align closely with typical characteristics of the food porn trend.

Figure 26 depicts a so-called ‘topped toast Tuesday’ image posted by qualified nutritionist Evie Mae, known to Instagram users as @theskinnydoughnut. The visually striking and deliciously appealing homemade breakfast boasts a variety of healthy nutritious ingredients, carefully plated and presented to create an eye-catching foodie-style composition. The attached caption denotes the assorted healthy ingredients, and the beneficial nutritional effect of the meal on fuelling the body.



Figure 26: @theskinnydoughnut. 2021. Wakefield. Screenshot by author.

In contrast to many of the previous images, Figure 26 advocates a positive, healthy lifestyle approach to eating with wholewheat bread, fresh fruits, nuts and edible flowers. Whilst food porn imagery is so often an agglomeration of deep-fried, creamy-buttery-cheesy goodness, frequently scorned for deepening society’s “growing obesity crisis” by “exacerbating our physiological hunger”, @theskinnydoughnut instead portrays appealing and mouth-watering recipes designed to fuel our bodies with healthy, wholesome foods (Spence et al. 2015:54).

The image and the wholewheat seeded bread, edible flowers, fruit, soya-yoghurt and bee-honey ingredients denoted in the caption, combine to connote a sense of wholesome, natural goodness. In addition, the environmentally friendly grass-green background and the striking cobalt blue flower petals and red berries signify warmth, happiness and freshness. In its

entirety, Figure 26 promotes a sense of vivacious tropicality to be eagerly and healthily devoured by its following of digital users.



Figure 27: @Annaliseeatsbath. 2020. Bath, Somerset. Screenshot by author.

In Figure 27, the home-cooked *slow cooker honey mustard chicken* recipe created by @Annaliseeatsbath is presented with a decadent serving of butterbean mash. The author is a food blogger - the self-proclaimed “Bath blogger” - who boasts the “best of Bath & home-cooking” (@Annaliseeatsbath 2020). Her posts portray meals experienced in and around Bath, England and her own home cooked meals. In one of her captions, she expresses her “longing to dine out again” a reference to the strict Covid-19 restrictions imposed at the time during the pandemic. With restaurants constrained or completely closed, and strict limitations on socialising “individuals have turned to their home kitchens to create new, exciting recipes” (BBC 2020).

The majority of @Annaliseeatsbath’s posts reflect a similar aura to Figure 27 namely, warming, homely and sometimes decadent winter dishes, closely congruent with the seasonal cold and grey English weather. Unlike the striking vibrant colours displayed by the @theskinnydoughnut, Figure 27 uses a softer, warmer colour palate, so providing for a more hearty, generous and indulgent appeal. The melty-buttery golden sauce infusing the pulled,

slow-roasted chicken further exemplifies the portrayal of indulgence and satisfaction. The image conveys elements of guilty pleasures and over-indulgence so closely identified with food porn. This recognised however, the occasional hints of vibrant green vegetables in the same figure boast a sense of healthy, wholesome freshness, that aligns with the caption. This element of ‘healthy greens’ when paired with the butterbean mash (the healthy alternative to potato mash) again seeks to emphasise a more beneficial, nutritious approach to eating, in contrast to the salty-fatty-cheesy meals consumed on some digital media platforms.



Figure 28: @maphiweskitchen. 2021. South Africa. Screenshot by author.

Figure 28 portrays a carefully plated meal, prepared and photographed by self-taught cook @maphiweskitchen, including two quarters of braai chicken in a sweet and sticky peri-peri and BBQ sauce<sup>67</sup>. Side dishes include *ujeqe*, a traditional Zulu steamed bread prepared using freshly ground mielies, chakalaka, coleslaw salad and beetroot<sup>68</sup>. Chakalaka is an authentic spicy South African vegetable relish traditionally served with meat, breads and other side dishes (Unilever 2021).

<sup>67</sup> To braai something is to grill or roast (meat) over an open fire or coals (Collins 2021).

<sup>68</sup> Mielies is South African slang for 'corn on the cob', referencing also mielie meal or maize meal, a coarse flour made from maize. Enriched with thiamine, riboflavin and iron, mielie meal is considered a staple food within South Africa, used to make porridges and various kinds of breads (Serna-Saldivar 2016).

Food is an important component of South African heritage and tradition across the diverse range of cultures within South Africa. The food landscape is used to “celebrate, to mourn and even communicate with a higher power” (Seshoene 2021). Drawing on my own South African cultural background, I am able to hermeneutically contextualise the visual display which illustrates an array of South African dishes. The imagery in Figure 28 prompts familiarity, nostalgia and memories around a braai. *Braai* (literal meaning ‘fry’ in Afrikaans, term describing a barbecue) is a familiar and often used South African colloquialism, used commonly across different language groups and cultures. As Nel (2017) suggests, a braai “is about being South African” and is a common outdoor cooking and eating practise in many households across the country. As such, braai-culture is not simply the preparing and cooking of meat and vegetables over an open fire, but more a much-loved social norm, a gathering of friends and loved ones; the warm and welcoming atmosphere of people coming together for a braai makes it such a special event within South African culinary culture. As Nel (2017) confirms, the country even celebrates Heritage Day, September 24<sup>th</sup> as an opportunity to braai with friends and loved ones, in celebration of common heritage, South African culture and diverse peoples.

In essence, the South African braai is equivalent to the universally acknowledged *barbeque*, with one typical distinction being the fuel used to create the flames, and ultimately cook the meat (Nel 2007). A barbeque typically utilises gas or electricity, a braai often makes use of various types of wood and charcoal. The braai-barbecue dichotomy can be used to illustrate Lévi-Strauss’ culinary triangle, distinguishing how food phases (raw, cooked and rotten) are influenced by cultural norms and identities (Lévi-Strauss, in Counihan et al. 2008:35). The simple process of cooking a piece of meat (in this case, braaiing and barbequing food) imparts significant cultural relevance to food and varying foodscapes.

As @maphiweskitchen (Figure 28) comments “I miss cooking for my clients so much, so I was browsing through my pics. As soon as the curve (Covid restrictions) flattens, I’ll bounce back”, further illustrating the communal foodscape of South Africa in her memories. Just as Nelson (2003:125) describes how the sharing of stories, experiences and memories form part of our autobiographical memories and sense of self, so socialisation over food, mingling of different food cultures and sharing of food memories becomes a vehicle for expression and self-representation. The caption in Figure 28 further illustrates how South Africans are eager to return to normality following Covid and share their food experiences gain. The spread of local food - its colours, flavours, textures and tastes - conjures thoughts of South Africa’s

variety of cultures, traditions and cuisines. Figure 28 embodies the essence of South African as a Rainbow Nation, honouring the cross-cultural unity of its diverse racial and ethnic groups (Handa 2007). Like other nations and cultures, South African's enjoys a unique set of diverse food cultures that contribute to their sense of self and identity.

The glamorisation of food, and our increased consumption of such media has been proven to influence individual's cravings, energy-intake patterns and calorie consumption (Bodenlos & Wormuth 2013). As Figures 26, 27 and 28 demonstrate, the style in which food is *plated and presented* and portrayed visually on social media wields significant influence on an individual's flavour perception and can modifying their subsequent "food choices and consumption behaviour" (Spence et al. 2015:34). Figure 26 exemplifies how individuals might be enticed to adopt more healthy eating habits with dishes that are appealing and nutritious.

As noted, a large number of the *#foodiesofinstagram* posts depict precisely curated, visually enhanced food experiences that strive to entice our senses and bring about a meaningful sensorial experience (Korsmeyer 2011). These posts reflect experienced users portraying restaurant-grade appearing dishes, likely to attract more viewers as a result of their professional visual appeal and alluring design, than the substandard photographs of amateur users. This recognised however, the content of these *#foodiesofinstagram* posts still exhibits subjects representative of "ordinary, everyday life, domestic and homespun", thus illustrating how food imageries are fundamentally representative of the "smaller moments in life" that form part of our conglomeration of memories and experiences which as a whole represent a detailed unique life narrative (Oyserman & Markus 1993). Such images, and their associated captions, offer strikingly visual representations of their authors, and contribute to their fundamental sense of self.

#### **4.3.2 Semiotic Analysis - #foodmemories**

Digital users utilise foods and their food experiences to share and reflect upon moments and memories with their followers on social media. Reflecting through food-themed digital images is a means to "bring one's autobiographical memory to life by generating a digital archive" and just as our autobiographical memories are developed from a young age, so our food-related preferences, customs and traditions are frequently rooted in our childhood upbringing (Henderson 2006:240).

Posts on the *#foodmemories* hashtag frequently reflect sentiments and memories of childhood experiences; individuals sharing images and narratives that represent their personal upbringing



and youthful years. The posts tap into autobiographical memories and extend these into the digital realm.

As Abarac & Colby (2016:6) illustrate, food memories are regularly associated with “habitual memories shaped through repetition”, for example the physically embodied memories of “dicing, kneading, baking, serving, offering and sharing foods” in quotidian or traditional cultural settings, for example brewing tea and coffee each morning, preparing a Sunday lunch, carving a turkey at Christmas, or cutting a cake for a birthday celebration. Such performative memory consists of past experiences and knowledge recalled in the “active process of re-enacting”; as such, the skills of rolling dough or filleting a joint of meat is a learned skill, embodied and memorised and repeated and repeated (Abarac & Colby 2016:6). Performative memories are assigned specific value and identity across diverse socio-cultural environments. As such, different cooking techniques, ingredients, methods and cuisines embody unique performative memories and feelings of nostalgia, and these are found to be represented on social media. For example, the techniques an Italian *nonna* (grandmother or nanny) might use to knead her pasta dough will be passed down through the family members.<sup>69</sup> Memories and nostalgic sentiments are instantly evoked or recalled when re-creating or reimagining past occasions and performative memories, which are then shared visually on social media where the embodied memories are performed and re-enacted using the digital online space.

When exploring the *#foodmemories* posts on Instagram, there were significantly more symbolically ‘human’ elements identifiable in the images when compared to the more wholly food-orientated posts of *#foodiesofinstagram*. For example, many of the images included features of the self; whether a face, a human hand, a domestic pet, a friend or a family member - symbolic components that accompany the food, creating a more personalised, often nostalgic element to the posts. In some of the posts, food imagery was used to conjure particular emotions or revive sentimental memories. Whilst some commentators consider food porn indulgence as a voyeuristic escape from reality into other food worlds, in similar fashion, visual indulgence also facilitates transition back to a particular emotion, experience or memory.

In exploring the *#foodmemories* category, another notable contrast with *#foodiesoninstagram* was not in the visual imagery per se, but more often in the captions accompanying the images. The captions accompanying some of *#foodmemories* posts express a nostalgic escapist

---

<sup>69</sup> ‘Secret family recipes’ suggesting a particular method, ingredient or recipe.

transference back in time, recalling a unique memory or experience, as for example, a ‘trip down memory lane’ through the gratifying indulgence of a childhood recipe or traditional food.

Figure 29 depicts a post from Francesca IT, otherwise known as @Healthymumway who creates appealing nutritious family food ideas and puts her unique spin on her healthy foods and recipes. As an Italian mother of three children, now living in London, @Healthymumway reminisces over her Italian childhood roots, and entwines her memories of Italian traditions with more contemporary western style recipes.



Figure 29: @healthymumway. 2020. London. Screenshot by author.

Whilst the image posted identifies an attractive pasta dish, on reading the caption it is revealed that @healthymumway has re-created one of her wistful childhood memories: “I made one of my favourite childhood dishes which my grandma used to regularly prepare for all of us” - Parmigiana with pasta. Layers of aubergines, passata sauce, rigatoni pasta, boiled eggs, ham, mozzarella & Parmesan cheese” (@healthymumway 2020).

Exemplified even more so during the Covid-19 pandemic,<sup>70</sup> this analysis also identified a profusion of individuals reminiscing over their home countries and memories of their traditional childhood roots, while resident (and sometimes stranded) in foreign countries. Thus, for example, during the harsh early days of the pandemic in Italy, @healthymumway (figure 29) nostalgically reflects on the “authentic parmigiana” she could share with her family, in the hope of easing her concerns and worry for her country, and arousing more positive sentiments.

<sup>70</sup> During the initial outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, many individuals were stranded in foreign countries, separated from their families and loved ones. Individuals thus found themselves nostalgically longing for family and social gatherings.

Although the image does not actually display the traditional recipe, @healthymumway uses the caption to affectionately describe the nostalgic, soft-hearted childhood experiences she fondly remembers in a vivid reference to her unique autobiographical memory. The emoji's @healthymumway uses in her caption (hearts, glowing love-faces and smiley-faces)<sup>71</sup> portray further emotions of the loving, caring and happiness embedded in her memories self-representations.

The warm red, orange and yellow tones of the rich tomato sauce soaked into the pasta, the cheesy layers and succulent aubergine connote feelings of homely warmth, comfort and motherly care. By discreetly displaying the whole pasta dish in the background of the image in Figure 29, @healthymumway conveys a feeling of generosity and plentiful abundance, and connotes the notion of sharing and caring as family and loved ones coming together at meal time. Such connotations are similarly referenced on the *#foodmemories* category in images posted by migrants now living in a foreign city; social media users distanced from their homes and loved ones, but able to come together again in the digital environment by means of their food-themed images and captions.

The neatly sliced portion of the parmigiana pasta positioned squarely on a plate in the foreground and the fresh basil scattered on the top, also accentuates the carefully curated impression of the post.<sup>72</sup> On exploration however, a significant number of *#foodmemories* posts were devoid of any manner of filter editing or embellishment. Stripping away the necessity for digital perfection from the images contrasts the *#foodmemories* style of posts against the glamorous (and often food porn inspired) images of *#foodiesofinstagram*.

---

<sup>71</sup> *Emoji* is a "small digital image or icon used to express an idea or emotion". The term is a loanword from the Japanese language referring to 'picture' + 'character'.

<sup>72</sup> Although the posts related to *#foodmemories* appear to illustrate more amateur style cooking, plating and photography, there were nevertheless some posts that clearly attempt to capture their recipes and food-experiences in a more vibrant, eye-catching manner.



Figure 30: @foodconnectioncontinentsapart. 2020. Munich, Germany. Screenshot by author.

The image in Figure 30 denotes a crispy, buttery platter of toasted sandwiches plated and sliced purposefully to exhibit the generous, vibrant fillings melting from the sandwich, posted by @foodconnectioncontinentsapart. The accompanying caption denotes that the image shows toasted cheese sandwiches filled with tomato chutney and coriander and mint chutney. The sandwiches re-create those that the author's Mum would prepare for school lunches. "Growing up, chutney sandwiches were a regular packed lunch for school. My mother would slather slices of white bread with homemade coriander and mint chutney and homemade butter. Sometimes she would throw in some cucumber or boiled potatoes" describes the caption. The image and the caption in Figure 30 combine to portray a sentimental representation of the author's autobiographical memory of a simple childhood school lunch. Notably, the author has chosen to embellish the mother's traditional sandwich - basic ingredients, quick to prepare for school, low cost - as an expression of their modern day preferences, but still expresses the simple, no-nonsense, down-to-earth nostalgia of the post: "Instead of butter I used some vegan cheese and decided to toast the sandwich as the bread wasn't the freshest. Even cold the sandwiches tasted yummy".

The visual image shows traces of the green and red of homemade chutney (a family recipe tradition retained) paired with the crisp brown toasted bread, no butter but a simple slice of

vegan cheese - a snack remembered for schoolday lunches those years ago, but now made “Today for our hike” and shown to the world on social media. As O’Caoimh and Powell (2018) describe, the key to the ultimate toastie is that “crisp on the outside but gooey on the inside” look. Our global society has a knack for toasted sandwiches, not only because they are cost-effective and convenient but because they bring about a sense of comfort; “It warms you up and brings back memories of simpler times” (Voice of London 2017).

On some images, authors have listed their interest in additional hashtag categories. The suggested go-to links offer insights into users’ broader interests, preferences and skills. For example, the caption in Figure 30 displays *#vegan #plantbased* which connotes how the user *@foodconnectioncontinentsapart* is creating a snack tailor-made to suit a vegan, plant-based diet. The sandwiches have set aside the “homemade butter” of past school days, and replaced it with vegan cheese; the author remains true to the sentimentality of mum’s packed school lunches, whilst now conforming to a more contemporary lifestyle. Once again, this displays a clear expression of an autobiographical memory (the school sandwiches) now twinned with an element of self-identity and representation of the author (veganism). As such, whilst the visuals themselves portray a wealth of detail about the user, the captions play a fundamental role in contextualising the posts.

A further interesting element of Figure 30, is that the author’s gender is unknown. When exploring the user’s profile, there was no clear evidence of the author’s name, gender or other identity-related characteristics, nor detailed statements or evidence of any cultural or traditional influences. This particular author has thus assumed a wholly food-based identity immersed in the food theme and chosen foodstuffs. In so doing, the author has explicitly chosen to use selected social media hashtag sites (in this case *#foodmemories*) as a means to represent their self-identity and autobiographical memory using food themes and memories of their food experiences; a cyborg-like rejection of traditional boundaries and encouragement of coalition through affinity.<sup>73</sup>

For some of the selected posts, the analysis was able to contextualise the content within the authors’ gender and cultural background. Perspectives and ideologies of gender play an

---

<sup>73</sup> Donna Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto* is an essay published in 1985. The concept of the cyborg is a rejection of rigid boundaries, the figure of the cyborg urging movement beyond the limitations of traditional gender, feminism, and politics. The ‘Manifesto’ criticizes traditional notions of feminism, particularly feminist focuses on identity politics, and encourages instead coalition through affinity.

elemental role in the understanding of contemporary patriarchal order, cultural texts and identity construction. In this study, the analysis of food-themed visuals and texts within a gender-related framework provides for a more detailed interpretation and understanding of the various posts.

In addition, the author frequently posts images and texts which reflect on fond food memories and experiences in the kitchen or around the dinner table that include mention of a female figure (for example, the mother preparing school sandwiches in Figure 30). Whether it be a sister, mother or grandmother, there are oft times when this author incorporates a female figure in representing their unique food-themed memories. This reflects on the female-orientated gender roles and cultural signifiers that have for long been a significant aspect of food culture and consumerism.<sup>74</sup>




Figure 31: @Lokicooks. 2020. Ubud, Bali. Indonesia. Screenshot by author.

The image in Figure 31 shows deliciously golden, buttery pastry filled with a pale, creamy filling, decorated with fresh green garnish. The food appears intricately prepared and visually warming. Since the image does not portray any broader context, it is not immediately clear why

<sup>74</sup> As discussed in section 5.4 (Suggestions for Further Research), although not directly pertinent to the scope of this research, the incorporation of gender culture and gender representation could be considered a point of departure for further research related to this topic.



@Lokicooks asserts that it has “been an emotional few days...”. Clearly evident in the caption however, is how the author nostalgically represents his childhood memories through the “egg puffs” by exclaiming “...From my heart  to yours - a little slice of my childhood!”. The statement, accompanied by suggested references to #foodlove and #cookedwithlove highlight how his fondest food-related childhood memories evoke sentiments of love, family and sharing.<sup>75</sup> The post highlights the interplay between themes of home, nostalgia and reminiscence. @Lokicooks “little slice of childhood” embodies his sense of homeliness and food-themed memories gathered during his unique experiences, now strung together in the online representations of his life narrative. The snippets of his food memories infuse @Lokicooks self-identity.

Through difficult times, @Lokicooks finds happiness and solace in the comfort of memories directly relating to home, family and his childhood. In reminiscing on these memories, and utilising them as creative inspiration for his dish displayed in Figure 31, @Lokicooks expresses a sense of exhilaration and upliftment. Figure 31 vividly portrays the positive emotions that @Lokicooks associates with his deep-rooted autobiographical memories, and exemplifies how his online posts serve as a vehicle for self-representation and as a digital repository of sentimental food-themed memories, now reimagined and shared online.

The #foodmemories posts provide recurring and convincing evidence of their users’ expressions of identity and the sentimentality of their unique autobiographical memory profiles. Their various online posts signify expressions of a nostalgic yearning for past experiences and memories, and elicit a myriad of sentiments - feelings for example of homeliness, warmth, refuge, celebration, family, togetherness, childhood, shared indulgence. Deep-seated emotions that run to the core of humanness and self-identity.

#### **4.3.3 Semiotic Analysis - #homechef**

Culture Decanted (2014) explains how the act of eating is “prompted by more than just biological needs”, and that “what we eat and how we eat it is influenced by the context of society and culture, and is instrumental in how individuals think about themselves and their experiences”. As such Culture Decanted (2014) make clear, the food we eat and the way we

---

<sup>75</sup> Refer also to the *Semiotic Analysis* tab on the accompanying Digital Humanities project <https://nicolealexwhite.wixsite.com/instafoodie>

choose to prepare and eat our meals, is influenced by our unique communities and cultures. Food becomes instrumental in how we perceive ourselves and how we represent ourselves to others. Most certainly then, the food culture engendered within our own homes plays a prominent role in who we are. In this sense too, home-based cooking is a fundamental driver of our unique individuality and make-up.

In addition, home-cooking allows individuals to “connect to others” while exploring their own traditional roots, as well as the food cultures of other communities (Simmons & Chapman 2012). The way in which we conduct food-related rituals and procedures is intimate and personal; however, it is also strongly influenced “directly by the social and cultural environments” in which we function and exist (Culture Decanted 2014). The way we experience life and initiate memories has a fundamental impact on our sense of self; food and food experiences and food structures affect us on a continuous basis.<sup>76</sup>

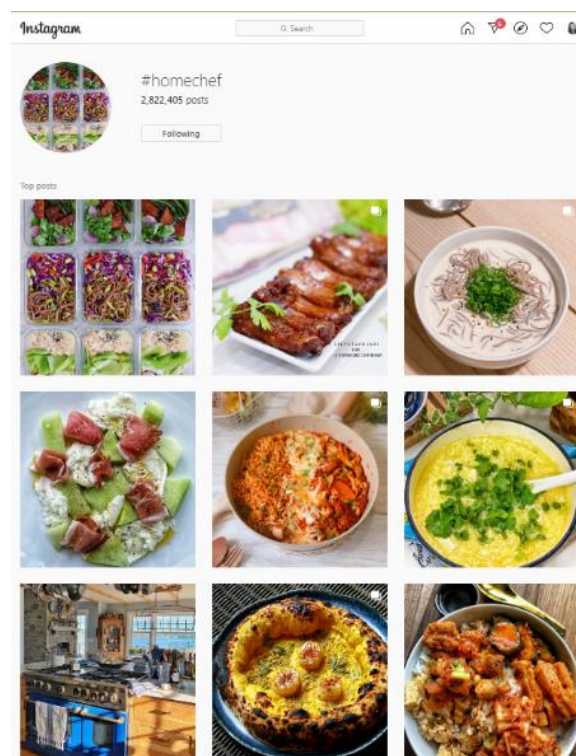


Figure 32: #homechef feed. 2021. Screenshot by author.

---

<sup>76</sup> During the Covid-19 pandemic many social activities were restricted and opportunities for social interaction severely curtailed. As a consequence, many individuals chose home-based kitchen activities as a creative means of online interaction; by exploring ideas for home cooking and digital socialisation, users created new experiences and memories to share online within their digital communities. The common medium - was food.



As exemplified in Figure 32, the most striking posts in most food-related hashtag categories are images that have been precisely curated, edited and digitally embellished in order to produce vibrant, eye-catching visuals most likely to attract attention and encourage engagement. These posts are often the output of professional photographers and designers. Other posts appear more amateur and novice in their preparation and production, and often have a deeper feel of authenticity, uniqueness and individuality. The *#homechef* site exhibits both styles.

Noteworthy too, is that Instagram also provides home cooks with the opportunity to use filters and editing techniques to enhance their food images and thus create posts that appear more professional and considered such as those often found on *#foodiesofInstagram*. As such, posts depicted in Figure 32 are examples of this type - *#homechef* posts exhibiting high-definition, photographs edited to appear as more eye-catching professionally designed images.



Figure 33: @Alvaritofire. 2020. Bogota, Colombia. Screenshot by author.

As Sternheimer (2017) exemplifies, food helps shape and define our sense of self, and the communities and cultures we align with. The combined image and caption of Figure 33 illustrates this concept; in the event of misfortune, the author wants to be remembered by means of the tortilla soup he shares with his son. He joyfully instructs his son to remember the moment by remembering the soup. The post is hugely informative. The visual of the tortilla soup is

colourfully engaging and the caption exemplifies essential elements of self-identity (“eating this besides my son”), self-representation (“it [my tortilla soup] was so good”) and appeals to autobiographical memory (“please remember me for this meal”).

The Covid-19 pandemic has enforced people to stay at home and so highlighted the importance of family interactions, and the satisfactions of more conventional stay-at-home lifestyles. This has engendered overwhelming interest in home-cooked recipes, online tutorials and digital cookbooks that have flourished during the pandemic. With the upsurge in online engagement, renowned chefs and culinary experts have made use of social media platforms to interact with other online users and have encouraged and assisted millions of users around the world to create their own home styled dishes. As a result, people have spent more time in the kitchen, learning new skills, experimenting and creating new dishes and sharing them online with the world. As a consequence, the #homechef Instagram category has grown massively in popularity.

Prior to the pandemic, a #homechef user was simply that - someone who cooked home meals for self, family or friends. In the current context of Covid-19, however, #homechef is also a symbolic celebration of family, resilience and the ability to overcome hardships.<sup>77</sup> It is a celebration of life, love and the simpler things in life - like learning how to make the perfect banana bread. This analysis also reflects on how #homechef takes on its novel role since the start of the pandemic.

A cornerstone of #homechef is the notion of social learning. Our food preferences, preparation and consumption are shaped by “family and friends, advertising, celebrity trends and, these days, social media influencers” (Baines 2020). As many users are confined at home, isolated from social gatherings, they turned increasingly to social media to provide social interaction and stimulation.

The concepts of learning and memory go hand-in-hand; memory is essential to all aspects of learning, allowing people to store and retrieve information when needed. Further, the way in which we learn and acquire knowledge provides the framework through which we link new experiences, knowledge and memories (Dubuc 2002). The #homechef site in particular, exemplifies how Instagram has evolved as a digital learning platform whereby online users can develop their insights and skills of local and international food styles and traditions.

---

<sup>77</sup> During the first pandemic lockdowns, social media was flooded with homemade banana bread recipes and imagery as individuals world-wide turned to baking in lieu of (restricted) face-to-face socialisation (Baines 2020).

A multitude of celebrity chefs have turned to social media as a means to engage with their fans and followers. As Figure 34 below illustrates, cooks and chefs have also begun utilising these platforms as an avenue to offer courses, tutorials and digital seminars where participants learn to create new, innovative meals in the comfort of their own kitchens. Massimo Bottura, depicted in Figure 34, is a world-renowned Italian restaurateur and the chef patron of Osteria Francescana, a three-Michelin-star restaurant in Modena, Italy.

Bottura has for years been recognised as a renowned force in the culinary revolution, and states how he “grew up under the kitchen table at his grandmother Ancella’s knees” and that home is where his appetite and passion for food began (Gordinier 2016; Osteria Francescana 2021). He recalls a striking memory from his childhood retelling how he would hide from his big brother under the kitchen table, and “from down there, where my grandmother was defending me... she was rolling pasta” (Osteria Francescana 2021).

Bottura places significant importance on the value of food within culture and memory, thus explicitly connecting our socio-cultural knowledge and sense of self with food stuffs. Just as our home environments have significant socio-cultural influence on the way we learn to cook and eat, so Instagram has begun to implicitly influence our unique food experiences and our memories thereof. As Figure 34 illustrates, Bottura uses Instagram to teach modern Italian cooking. He utilises Instagram as a learning platform to engage with digital users from various backgrounds and to share his passion for food and cooking in the digital space. Bottura imparts his recipes and narratives accumulated through the unique experiences and memories that constitute a formative part of his self-identity and autobiographical memory. As the famous chef proclaims, “I am Massimo Bottura. I close my eyes and I want to understand where I am. Cooking is about emotion, it’s about culture, it’s about love, it’s about memory” (Maris 2020).



Figure 34: @FrancescanaFamily. 2021. Massimo Bottura. Sponsored Instagram Advertisement. Screenshot by author.

In this way, Instagram influences the who, what, where, when and why of our memory generation and recollection. Not only is Instagram used as a digital archive of visual and captioned detail to represent and share our life narratives (in a similar manner to traditional storytelling) it is also used as an avenue for personal reminiscence, autobiographical memory storage and recollection of our food experiences and memories. As a digital user engaging with Bottura’s learning platform, individuals are encouraged to expand not only their knowledge of Italian cuisine, but also to create their own food-related memories and experiences as an element of their life narrative.

Just like Boturra, a multitude of Instagram users utilise the platform as a place for creative inspiration – sharing food posts to invoke creative ideas, memories and experiences for their viewers. In this way, @silenceyourhunger also provides creatively designed food photography as motivation to other users and as a source of online culinary inspiration. Figure 35 depicts a “Lazy Monday 1 pan dinner” cooked and photographed by @silenceyourhunger. The author is Ahmed Sayed, a self-acclaimed amateur chef, fitness enthusiast and food-lover living in Sydney. The dish presented in Figure 35 appears easy to prepare, simple and plain, thus aligning appropriately with the caption. The bright red and green vegetables placed

sporadically around the plate provide a sense of wholesome freshness, while the bite-sized cuts of steak lined-up alongside the bone in the middle of the plate look tastefully spiced and juicy.



Figure 35: @Silenceyourhunger. 2020. *Lazy Monday*. Screenshot by author.

Examining @silenceyourhunger's profile as a whole, there is a stringent uniformity in his posts. The dishes are photographed at birds-eye view on a black pan. This repetitive style of photography of his dishes is exemplifies his sense of identity and character. As Verplanken & Sui (2019) suggest, personal or self-identities embody a conglomeration of autobiographical memoires, self-attributes, motivations, recurring thoughts and habits. The repetitive nature of @silenceyourhunger's posts illustrate the author's deliberate and consistent stylistic choices, and exemplify his repeated stylised self-representations.

As Abarca & Colby (2016) note, beyond its biological necessity, food is "inseparable from powerful material and symbolic realities". The portrayal of the T-bone steak illustrated in Figure 35 is emblematic of a human brain, and again draws attention to @silenceyourhunger's stylistic elements of food and food-imagery. Individuals frequently utilise food-stuffs to recreate icons, symbols and representations present in society. The 'brain shaped T-bone steak' in Figure 35 is a creative, engaging and (perhaps) playful food-orientated representation - an



expression of originality, of the unique originality of self. A further example is reflected in the *#watermelondress* trend that swept social media in 2020. As Figures 36 and 37 exemplify, the trend parades a carefully shaped and positioned slice of watermelon in the foreground of a photo, whilst the subject stands behind. The composition suggests that the fruit mimics a vibrant ruby summer dress (Matera 2017). With more than 21 000 posts shared on Instagram to date, this hashtag trend boasts a diverse range of unique, imaginative versions of the watermelon dress craze (Instagram 2021). For example (Figure 36) some posts show carefully carved shapes and patterns out of the fruit slice whilst others simply exhibit the fruit in a natural (wedge slice) shape. The figures illustrate the creativity of input as individuals actively seek to represent and express their own identities and experiences in the online realm.



Figure 36: @medicinepanda. 2020. *My New Dress- #watermelondress*. Adriatic Beach. Screenshot by author.



Figure 37: @crissherrera. 2020. *Watermelon Happiness* - #watermelondress. Flowerpot Island. Screenshot by author.

*It was 21<sup>st</sup> birthday season – all my friends were organising birthday bashes to celebrate the big twenty-one. My school buddy Blake decided on a ‘Hawaiian Havoc’ theme. Rebecca and I hand-painted ourselves some watermelon T-shirt dresses as part of our fruit salad group – strawberries, pineapples, kiwis and watermelons. The party was ripe with pina colodas, spicy rice dishes and flavoursome fruity salsas. I often reminisce over the memories we created that warm summer weekend.*

The #homechef category exhibits a large number of uniquely meaningful, nostalgic posts that reflect the emotive experiences individuals across the world are choosing to share and reminisce. This semiotic analysis has examined a data set of Instagram posts on three hashtag categories and identifies how individuals are using Instagram as a platform for expression and self-representation.

The analysis of these hashtag posts demonstrates how the visual images and accompanying captions are captured and shared on a digital platform and how users are able to craft unique, personalised expressions of self-representation and their autobiographical memories.

Digital authors are able to use their creative expressionism to curate digital graphics that express fond memories, newly found skills, and life experiences. The graphics are then shared on a platform that encourages broader user engagement, and ultimately influences and directs how posts are received and consumed and elicit responses from other site users.

In addition, the analysis identifies the complex relationships that individuals experience with food and food culture and how food often plays a sentimental, nostalgic role embedded in the memories of individual. As hashtag communities use food as a vehicle for self-expression, so exploration of the narratives inherent within their posts provide insights into participants' unique identities, experiences and autobiographical memories.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Dessert*

#### *Summary of Findings and Observations from the Semiotic Analysis and their Contribution to Critical Food Studies*

*The most powerful social media...it is not the Internet, it is not  
Facebook - it is food. This connects all human beings.*

– Alex Atala (Bas Van Lier 2015)

#### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

The objectives of this study were fourfold, in summary; (i) to explore the role played by digital social media as an extension of its users' self-identity and autobiographical memory; (ii) to identify the connotations of selected Instagram hashtag posts; (iii) to explore the impact of food imagery and food culture on self-identity, self- representation and autobiographical memory, and; (iv) to identify how food-themed visuals on Instagram are used as a means to represent self-identity and autobiographical memory.

People have found ways to express their identity since the dawn of civilisation. So too in the digital age, expressions of self-identity and autobiographical memory have entrenched



themselves as prevalent features of contemporary digital culture. Social media is now a widely used space for people to portray their unique narratives - digital expressions of their life experiences and autobiographical memories. A plethora of globally interactive social media platforms - such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram - now provide easy-to-use, zero-cost online opportunities for the personalised accumulation of their users' mediated memories where both the private and personal, and the collective, coalesce to create living extensions of self-identity and memory by means of visual images. This study has demonstrated how people want to be the authors of their own autobiography, eager to assume the leading role in crafting their online life narratives and choosing how and when to network their unique chronologies with self-selected others. The study identifies how - to paraphrase Hilbert (2020) - *digital technology has become the most recent long-wave of humanity's socio-economic evolution* - the perfect means for people to liberate their memories from the confines of their minds.

The study applied semiotic analysis to review a data set of food-themed images posted across three Instagram hashtag trends (*#foodiesofinstagram*, *#foodmemories* and *#homechef*). Each of the images denoted objective details and facts and evoked a spectrum of underlying connotations - suggestions encompassing the interplay between the images themselves and the subjective feelings, emotions and experiences of observers. In addition, a variety of connotations were identified and described (as detailed in chapter 4). Connotations included, for example, notions of wholesome, healthy and natural living (Fig. 26), cultural authenticity (Fig. 29), familial warmth and cultural familiarity (Fig. 33).

Whilst some connotations were common to all three hashtag categories, others were more typically associated with one particular category. *#foodiesofinstagram* posts typically conveyed symbols of boastful indulgence, consumerism, restaurant-quality cuisine, dining out, and focused glamourisation of food and its presentation. These connotations are indicative of how *#foodiesoninstagram* users reflect conformity with local community trends (for example, local restaurants and popular food outlets) and widespread mass consumption of foodie content (including for example, affinity with food-porn). Connotations typically identified within *#foodmemories* are those of nostalgia, childhood memories and sentimentalised reflections of family background, upbringing and youth. Posts frequently connotated life narratives and performative style memories (for example, the kneading, rolling and baking of bread) characterised by frequent 'trips down memory lane' and nostalgic memories such as 'Sunday roasts in Grandma's kitchen'. *#homechef* posts were typically less stylish and more amateurish in appearance, and introspective in tone. Connotations were characteristic of authenticity,

individuality and uniqueness, social-learning and knowledge (for example, the digital cooking tutorials of Massimo Bottura) and oneness of self.

Food and its associated food culture strongly influence how individuals, communities and populations represent themselves to the world. The food we eat and how we eat it, is an inherently personal choice and signifies to others a catalogue of our individual characteristics, our upbringing, social background and cultural affiliations. Food brings people together, connecting families and generations through stories, rituals and handed-down recipes, whilst our nostalgic memories of food convey us back to prior experiences and memorable occasions. This study has demonstrated how food and food culture contribute significantly to how people construct and conduct their daily lives. Food is our life source and impacts every aspect of our lives; it lies at the core of our cultural norms and mores, shapes our lifestyles and signifies how we identify ourselves and how we represent ourselves to the world.

The study has further illustrated how digital food imagery allows social media users to express their unique online self-identities, life narratives and memories. Against a backdrop of increasing global technological sophistication, society is witnessing unprecedented growth in the online networking of digital food-themed imagery. Blogs, websites, and social media platforms are encouraging digital users to share their food memories and experiences. The creation and posting of food-themed memories allows users to network their embodied experiences within the digital space, a process that contributes forcibly to their unique sense of self and autobiographical memory. The digital space provides for the on-going expression of our food memories; the posting of food-themed content on Instagram and other platforms facilitates complete digital immersion, allowing participants to curate their unique suite of digital experiences and to create enduring memories for posterity.

The study identifies how digitally crafted food-themed posts shared on Instagram, served not only as a personalised chronological catalogue of visual *aide-mémoires* but also - in many instances - as robust elements of the author's life narrative. The posts analysed during the study evidenced a complex web of meanings, interpretations and representations articulating the users' unique identities, experiences and autobiographical memories which, when woven together, constitute the fabric of humanness and mortality.

The study further illustrates how foodscapes, food cultures and the portrayal of food-themed imageries have become increasingly prominent features of the online space, as digital users post and share their food-related content. In parallel with the burgeoning expansion of online

communication and self-expression, food-themed imagery has for many users, become the subject matter of choice for the expression of self-identity and autobiographical memory in the digital space.

## **5.2 Observations from the Semiotic Analysis**

In conducting the semiotic analysis, a number of important methodological observations became evident. These are summarised below.

***Accessibility of Instagram posts*** - Images uploaded onto Instagram can be accessed at any time unless removed by the user. During the study, it was simple and time-effective to navigate the hashtag posts already selected and saved, allowing for the analysis of each of the images. However, as a result of the popularity and live status of each of the hashtag categories (massive volumes of images uploaded each day at high rapidity) it was not impossible to revisit a category in order to re-locate specific older posts. It was thus essential to compile an on-going digital archive of visual images selected over a period of months as the research progressed.

A further practical difficulty was that as the study progressed, some of the images selected for analysis were removed by user. Once a post is deleted from Instagram, the platform automatically removes the image and accompanying captions in its entirety, including removal from the profiles of any user that has previously shared or saved the post. Several images were lost in this way.

***User profiles for contextualisation*** - When scanning Instagram, the images would link to the author's personal profile, allowing for contextualisation of the image against the user profile. While some users elected to post predominantly food-themed content, others would use the platforms to gain exposure related to a commercial venture. Some posts were used to promote blogs and websites across a network of digitally linked platforms. In addition, some individuals used the platforms to post selected food-themed experiences within a chronology of other (non-food-themed) memories.

***Instagram algorithms - experimenter bias*** - Instagram makes use of a variety of algorithms to optimise the versatility of the platform for users. One such algorithm calculates the likelihood of users interacting with a specific post - known as a 'score of interest' - which determines the sequence in which posts are channelled to their feed.

When conducting the semiotic analyses, it was possible that my own food-themed Instagram searches were influencing the content displayed on my personal feed. Whilst engaging with the selected hashtag categories (*#foodiesofinstagram*, *#foodmemories* and *#homechef*) the algorithm would influence the images streamed to my feed. Thus, for example, it became clear that I was accessing more ‘savory dishes’ than ‘sweet dishes’; the bias towards particular dishes (savory as opposed to sweet) would influence my personal score of interest algorithm and the content of my feed. This process highlighted my own *#foodie* tendencies and how social media users might be biased in their perspectives and comments towards different food themes and cuisine styles. In future research, a customised unfiltered Instagram profile could be created in which specific algorithms and filters can be muted.

***Influence of Covid-19 pandemic*** - The images selected for the study were posted during 2020 and 2021 (the time frame of the thesis). With stringent Covid restrictions and lockdown limitations, there was a reported increase in food-themed content on Instagram and other social media platforms, and a reported shift away from restaurant and outside dining experiences towards home based food experiences. The longer-term impact of the pandemic on social media usage and on *#foodie* culture itself remains uncertain - further research on this subject would be beneficial to food studies.

***The utility of Instagram captions*** - The connotative analysis of the Instagram images also draws on the accompanying captions. Whilst the images connote in-depth meaning, the copy plays an important role in formulating a richer understanding of the posts, and helps to generate a more comprehensive interpretation of each user’s style of self-representation and memory construction.

***‘Mass-culture’ and ‘alternative’ posts - the role of Instagram ‘Likes’*** - The study recognises the ‘mass-culture’ orientation of many posts created primarily for the purpose of maximising digital consumption and engagement. This type of post is specifically designed to garner as many followers as possible and maximise ‘likes’ and ‘shares’. In contrast, lower key ‘alternative style’ posts incorporate more personalised elements - for example, an experience or narrative portraying a particular sense of self and belonging. These alternative style posts are noteworthy in that they are created to go beyond the confines of being bald digital images, in order to endure as meaningful expressions of self.

***The global reach of online social media*** - During my analysis of the *#foodiesofinstagram*, *#foodmemories* and *#homechef* the vastness and amorphous nature of the digital web was

immediately striking. The global expansiveness and inter-connectedness of the Instagram community is imposing, and equally so the prevalence of food-themed imagery and the huge number of food-related sites. This study used images selected from only one social media platform (Instagram) and three hashtag sites. Whilst Instagram remains a highly popular social media platform, and the hashtag sites were appropriate and relevant for the analysis, further research could usefully examine a wider population of social media platforms and images.

***#foodies reimaged - a healthier approach to global eating*** - commentators and critics regularly highlight the negative impact of food-porn and digital food imagery, maligning the risks of over-indulgence and unhealthy eating behaviours to which users are exposed through excessive digital food-related content. This study has highlighted some of the positive aspects of the so called 'Insta-food community' and its global influence on the food landscape in general and on eating behaviours in particular. The images used in this study included a number of dishes created by health-orientated *#foodies*, some of which are aligned to the *#bodypositivity* movement which has gained considerable traction on social media. The study enthusiastically acknowledges the more informed and discerning approach of many *#foodie* Instagram users as an emergent group of lobbyists seeking to redefine the long-held stereotypical perception of the *#foodie* movement as being a cornerstone of global obesity and ill health. As Andersen et al. (2021) concur, there is no positive reason to rest on the idea that food imagery's current prevalence is a core negative influence *per se*. Instead, active participation in food photography, in conjunction with the selective use of food-themed digital media, has the potential to contribute to healthy lifestyle management and enhanced meal pleasure.

***Affective influence*** - Whilst exploring the chosen food-related hashtag categories on Instagram, I occasionally found myself craving the various foods I was analysing, and sought to recreate the meals in my own kitchen. The study provided a clear illustration of the *affective influence* that digital food-imagery can impart on user behaviour - the way individuals consume their food, their indulgences, motivations and routines. Further studies could usefully be conducted to investigate this kind of effect.

***The power of the Internet*** - appears unlimited. Datareportal (2021) estimate that there are 4.48 billion social media users in the world, equating to some 57% of the global population. Social media attracts an estimated 17 new users each second. *#foodie* for example, currently boasts some 200 million posts to date. The typical online user visits an average of 6.6 social media

platforms each month, and spends an average of 2.5 hours on social media each day, equating to some 15% of their waking life. In total, the world spends in excess of 10 billion hours each day on social media, equivalent to some 1.2 million years of human existence. The implications of these statistics are immense, both in understanding the potential influence of social media on society, and in determining the direction and evolution of our digital culture in the decades ahead.

\*\*\*

### **5.3 Contribution of the Study**

In modern society, individuals co-exist and communicate within the ever-expanding digital realm. This study contributes contemporary insights into the role of social media and its broad functionality within the digital space as a means of self-expression and engagement. The study highlights the essential role of food as a functional component of online expression and interaction. Whilst exploratory in nature, the study identifies the linkages between self-identity, self-representation and autobiographical memory, and highlights how these concepts have been extrapolated into the online digital world. The study provides an interdisciplinary combination of key elements of the humanities - psychology, visual culture, digital culture and food studies - and identifies how these components of social science continue to assert pervasive influence within the realm of our contemporary digitalised, visual culture.

### **5.4 Suggestions for Further Research**

This study has drawn attention to the debate surrounding the emergence of digital consumption and its role in either exacerbating, or alleviating, global health and body-consciousness issues. Scope exists for detailed research into many aspects of how food-themed social media usage can function as a positive influencer for users, and to identify mechanisms to avoid and avert the often-reported negative influences.

The study has also noted the prevalence of societally constructed gender roles and stereotypes as they are attached to certain food-related functions, activities and rituals. Further studies could examine the background to and the nature of the various gender roles at play within the food-themed digital realm. Along these lines, the exploration of gender culture and gender

representation could be critically examined in relation to this current topic. Additionally, the study has highlighted how online social media connects a broad diversity of food cultures. Further study could usefully investigate how social media, by virtue of its massive global reach, has encouraged and facilitated the fusion of different food cultures and the global multiculturalism of food and food landscapes.

A clear theme that emerged during the course of this study has been the sharp upward trend in popularity of home-cooking and home-based kitchen teaching and learning programmes. Whilst the trend was clearly encouraged by the lockdown restrictions of the Covid pandemic, it is quite likely that the trend will continue post-pandemic. Research could usefully investigate the variable impact of the pandemic on food-related lifestyles across different cultures, and how different communities might have made use of social media to alleviate the impact of the pandemic. This study used food images posted across a range of countries and cultures. Further studies could consider the cultural uniqueness and individuality of non-Western food cultures and the role of food-themed imagery in identity construction and the expression of life narratives in specific language groups or communities. In the South African digital space for example, research could usefully explore South African specific food-themed posts to develop a richer insight into local norms. Studies could consider specific provinces or cities or language groups to hone-in on possible geo-specific influences impacting the diversity of our local food landscape and its role in self-identity formulation and autobiographical memory.

## **5.5 Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, memory matters! It is the bridging connection that amalgamates the past with the present, and opens up our assumptive interpretation of the future. But memory also matters, literally. Materiality is the stuff of memory; our memories are mediated materially through the symbols, icons and representations we recognise through the visual (Muntean et al. 2017). With the continuing global reliance on digital technology for daily communication and activity, the precise direction of further generations of social media - how it evolves to meet the challenges and aspirations of future users - remains uncertain.

Researchers, critics and theorists have asserted that digital foodscapes have an intricate and complex role to play in the growth and transformation of the self and of our socio-cultural environments. Not only does food constitute an integral facet of our lived experiences, memories and self-identity, it contributes fundamentally to our understanding of our uniquely

individual motivations, behaviours, ideals and social norms, and those of our groups and communities.

This research has highlighted the role enacted by food and foodstuffs within the digital realm, and its prominence within the daily routines of contemporary society. The study has identified how food images shared on social media constitute an expression of user identity and an extension of their autobiographical memories. Instagram allows us to create, communicate and reminisce over lived and living memories and experiences that might otherwise have been forgotten or abandoned without the assistance of digital media. In so doing, the individualised memories shared within the digital realm contribute to the assemblage of memories we internalise as our unique embodied experiences. Digital media (in this study Instagram) enables its users to nostalgically recall their embodied everyday life experiences, and to reflect and reminisce on the digital renditions of these moments and memoires.

In contrast to this however, has been widespread criticism of how digital media is negatively impacting our short-term memory, eroding our human ability to accurately remember and recall detailed information, even our experiences and memories. The digital space is saturated with unlimited volumes of knowledge and information that users consume on a regular basis - including for example, articles, photographs, videos and memes. Users thus become habitually reliant on digital prompts. Theorists have also lamented the disembodied nature of user experiences when curated through social media and digital technology. Digital media has been criticised as being inauthentic and divergent to our innate humanity, functioning rather as a disembodied entity or experience contrary to our inherent humanness and accompanying emotions and drives.

Against this background, this study has exemplified how Instagram can and does function as a detailed digital archive to store personal memories for later retrieval. A snapshot of after-work Friday cocktails, or a best friend burning toast on a Sunday morning - so we are able to share and communicate the details, memories and experiences of our lives on digital media, that in the past might have been dismissed as trivial and unimportant. As such, users slowly but methodically construct a detailed life narrative, or timeline, for future reflection and experience - a living legacy of events. This study has illustrated the use of digital media as a constructive extension of our autobiographical memory. The digital retrieval of these memories invokes nostalgic emotions and sensitivities associated with each memory and experience, and serves to enhance the detail of our recollections.



By posting food-images on Instagram, users are crafting a visual representation of their memories and experiences and, ultimately, an expression of their sense of self. The posting and sharing of food-themed content becomes more an act of self-expression and representation than an act of digital consumption. In this way for example, the notion of food porn can be reimagined as an authentic and meaningful process of self-expression. While consuming and sharing food-themed content, individuals are able to reflect on their past memories and so re-experience these moments in multi-sensorial fashion. Digital food experiences and their accompanying memories and emotions embrace a wholly embodied experience; experiences in which digital food imagery subsists at the very core of self-identity and autobiographical memory.

This study has illustrated how every individual manifests a unique life narrative that stems from the socio-cultural frameworks that respectively define, influence and express “what is appropriate to remember, what it means to remember, and what it means to be a self with an autobiographical past” - it is through the intricate and personal construction of our own unique “life story” that self-identity, self-representation and memory are inextricably interwoven (Fivush et al. 2003:vii).

Food and food culture constitutes an inherent and natural part of who we are as individuals, how we relate to the world around us, and how the world relates to us. This research has explored the role of food, specifically the importance of food imagery, and confirmed its essential role in the formulation of self-identity and autobiographical memory.

In the contemporary digital realm, online participants make use of social media to express their identities and to catalogue their life experiences and memories, and food-themed imagery is now widely used for this purpose. In providing social media users with platforms to contextualise and display their visual narratives, Instagram - amongst others - has encouraged the creation of ‘networked archives’ of both personal and collective memories. As Serafinelli (2020) emphasises, digital photography has not abandoned its traditional function of maintaining memories of the past, but has adopted new and creative technologies and practices as part of a global trend that is certain to continue into the decades ahead.

The shape and form of ‘the digital self’ will inevitably evolve with time and increasing technological innovation. But just as a fine wine, the certainty remains that the unique blend of ‘food’ and ‘self’ will mature long into the digital future.

## SOURCES CONSULTED

- Abarca, M. and Colby, J., 2016. Food memories seasoning the narratives of our lives. *Food and Foodways*, 24(1-2), pp.1-8.
- Abrahamse, W., 2019. *Encouraging Pro-Environmental Behaviour*. Academic Press. Cambridge Dictionary. 2021. *foodstuff*. [o] Available at: <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/foodstuff>> [Accessed 18 October 2021].
- Allen, D., & Anderson, P. 1994. *Consumption and Social Stratification: Bourdieu's Distinction*. [o] Retrieved July 23, 2020, from <https://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/7565/volumes/v21/NA>
- Amaral, V., 2021. *Embodied Food*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.embodiedfood.com/>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Auerbach, E., 1953. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Aureus, D. 2020. *These Celebrity Chefs Are Offering Quarantine-Friendly Instagram Cooking Classes*. [o] Tatler Hong Kong. Available at: <<https://hk.asiatatler.com/dining/celebrity-chefs-online-cooking-demos-during-coronavirus-quarantine>> [Accessed 26 May 2020].

- Artlyst. 2020. *Andy Warhol*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.artlyst.com/news/andy-warhol-groundbreaking-1985-digital-computer-art-experiments-discovered/>> [Accessed 11 February 2022].
- Baird, F.E., & Kauffman, W., (2008) *From Plato to Derrida*. Pearson Prentice Hall, New Jersey, USA.
- Baldwin B.T. 1913. "John Locke's Contributions to Education". *The Sewanee Review*. 21 (2): 177–187 [179] Available at: <[https://www.jstor.org/stable/27532614?seq=4#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/27532614?seq=4#metadata_info_tab_contents)> [Accessed 12 July 2020].
- Barthes, R. 1964. in Lavers' (1972:10) translation of *Eléments de sémiologie*
- Barthes, R., 2012. *Toward a psychosociology of contemporary food consumption*. 3rd ed. Routledge.
- Baumgartner, H, et al. 1992. "Autobiographical Memories, Affect, and Consumer Information Processing." *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 1, Wiley, pp. 53–82. *Crossref*, doi:10.1207/s15327663jcp0101\_04.
- BBC News, 2021. *Taste*. [image] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-56820167>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].
- Beantley A & Figueroa, S.L. (2017) *A History of Food in Popular Culture Over the Life Span*. Visceral Practices: Material Cultures of Eating. In *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Food and Popular Culture*
- Bellay, M., 2016. *The Paintings of Pop Art in the United States of America: Andy Warhol as a Pioneer*. Bachelor Thesis. Palacky University Olomouc.
- Berkeley Library. 2021. *Food Studies: Gastronomy*. [o] Available at: <<https://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/food/gastronomy>> [Accessed 26 September 2021].
- Biddle, B. J., B. J. Bank, and R. L. Slavings. 1987. Norms, Preferences, Identities, and Retention Decisions. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50 (4): 322–337.
- Bluck, S., Alea, N., Haberman, T., Rubin, D. C. (2005). *A tale of three functions: The self-reported uses of autobiographical memory*. *Social Cognition*. 23 (1): 91–117.

- Bodenlos JS, Wormuth BM. (2013) Watching a food-related television show and caloric intake. A laboratory study. *Appetite*. 61(1):8-12. doi: 10.1016/j.appet.2012.10.027. Epub 2012 Nov 12. PMID: 23154219.
- Bourdieu, P. and Nice, R., 1987. *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*. Harvard University Press.
- Boyd, D. and Ellison, N., 2007. Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, (13), (1), 210–230, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x>
- Burger King, 2021. *Burger King Advertisement*. [image] Available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-burger-king-went-from-mcdonalds-greatest-rival-to-total-train-wreck-2012-4?IR=T> [Accessed 28 October 2021].
- Buxton, M., 2018. *You 'Ve Probably Broken Copyright Laws On Instagram, Without Even Realizing It*. [o] Refinery29.com. Available at: <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/04/196864/instagram-copyright-dos-donts> [Accessed 4 July 2020].
- Chandler, D. 2002. *Semiotics the Basics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxon: Routledge.
- Cherry, K., 2021. *What is Memory?*. [o] Verywell Mind. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-memory-2795006> [Accessed 19 October 2021].
- Chopra, A., n.d. *Sociological Perspectives on Food and Eating*. [o] Sociology Group. Available at: <https://www.sociologygroup.com/food-sociological-perspectives/> [Accessed 2 September 2021].
- Chistensen, E., 2020. *How To Make Sourdough Starter From Scratch*. [o] The Kitchn. Available at: <https://www.thekitchn.com/how-to-make-your-own-sourdough-starter-cooking-lessons-from-the-kitchn-47337> [Accessed 7 July 2020].
- Cinque, T. 2015. *Visual Networking in an Information Age* in Changing media landscapes, Australia: Oxford University, pp. 16-28.
- Collins Dictionary. 2021. *Braai definition and meaning*. [o] Available at: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/braai> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Collins Dictionary. 2021. *Foodie definition and meaning*. [o] Available at: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/foodie> [Accessed 18 October 2021].

- Conway, M. A.; Pleydell-Pearce, C. W. (2000). The construction of autobiographical memories in the self-memory system. *Psychological Review*. 107 (2): 261–288.
- Conway, M. A. 2005. "Memory and the self". *Journal of Memory and Language*. 53 (4): 594–628.
- Conolly, A. 2015. Why sharing photos of food is about more than what's on the plate. TNW. [o] available at: <http://thenextweb.com/opinion/2015/09/01/whyssharing-photos-of-food-is-about-more-than-whats-on-the-plate/>
- Counihan, C. and Van Esterik, P., 2008. *Food And Culture: A Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Crossman, A., 2019. *Who Was Pierre Bourdieu, and Why Does He Matter to Sociologists?*. [o] ThoughtCo. Available at: <<https://www.thoughtco.com/pierre-bourdieu-3026496>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].
- Davis, S., 2013. The Culinary Triangle: What Can Claude Lévi-Strauss Teach Us About Food Fads Today?. [o] The Smart Set. Available at: <<https://www.thesmartset.com/article07181301/>> [Accessed 12 July 2020].
- De Long, S. (2006). How to be a foodie. De Long Wine Moments. [o] available at: <https://www.delongwine.com/blogs/de-long-wine-moment/14610211-how-to-be-a-foodie>.
- DeMello, A. (2014). Social activism with extra sauce: How food communication increases political awareness in social media. Johnson & Wales University, Providence. [o] Available at:<[http://scholarsarchive.jwu.edu/student\\_scholarship/16.](http://scholarsarchive.jwu.edu/student_scholarship/16.)>
- Douglas, M. 1972. Deciphering a Meal. *Daedalus*, 101(1), 61-81. [o] Retrieved July 23, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/20024058](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024058)
- Douglas, K., 2021. *self-representation*. [o] Merriam-Webster. Available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-representation>> [Accessed 18 October 2021].
- Douglas E. Allen and Paul F. Anderson 1994. , "*Consumption and Social Stratification: Bourdieu's Distinction*", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 21, eds. Chris T. Allen and Deborah Roedder John, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 70-74.
- Diggit Magazine. 2020. *Digital Culture*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.diggitmagazine.com/wiki/digital-culture>> [Accessed 5 July 2020].

- Dijksterhuis, G., Mojet, J., Köster, E., Møller, P., Hausner, H., Issanchou, S., Sulmont-Rossé, C. and Zandstra, E., 2006. Workshop summary: The role of memory in food choice and liking. *Food Quality and Preference*, 17(7-8).
- Discovery. 2020. *COVID-19: What Does It Mean To "Flatten The Curve"?* [o] Available at: <<https://www.discovery.co.za/corporate/covid19-flatten-curve>> [Accessed 24 May 2020].
- Dubuc, B., 2002. *memory and Learning*. [o] The Brain from Bottom to Top. Available at: <[https://thebrain.mcgill.ca/flash/d/d\\_07/d\\_07\\_p/d\\_07\\_p\\_tra/d\\_07\\_p\\_tra.html](https://thebrain.mcgill.ca/flash/d/d_07/d_07_p/d_07_p_tra/d_07_p_tra.html)> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Driver, M., 2008. Every bite you take . . . food and the struggles of embodied subjectivity in organizations. *The Tavistock Institute*, 61(7), pp.913-934.
- EatMe Recipes. 2018. *uJeqe - Steamed Zulu Bread*. [o] Available at: <<https://eatmeerecipes.co.za/zulu-cuisine/ujeqe-steamed-zulu-bread/>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Encyclopedia Britannica. 2020. *Mnemosyne / Greek Mythology*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mnemosyne>> [Accessed 26 May 2020].
- Fabiani, A., 2020. *What does OG mean? Here's everything you need to know*. [o] Screen Shot. Available at: <<https://screenshot-media.com/visual-cultures/internet-culture/what-does-og-mean/>> [Accessed 2 September 2021].
- Fallon, K. (2014) '*Streams of the self: the instagram feed as autobiography*', in M. Hudson, R. Sternberg, R. Cunha, C. Queiroz & M. Seilinger. *Interactive Narratives, New Media and Social Engagement*, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, pp52-60.
- Fischler, C. 1988. Food, self, and identity. *Social Science Information*, 27, 275-292.
- Foxe, K., 2016. *Scientific Study Says Social Media Helps Create Longer Lasting Memories - Lonely Planet*. [o] Lonely Planet. Available at: <<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/social-media-helps-create-longer-lasting-memories>> [Accessed 12 July 2020].
- Framroze, M. 2017 *The Construction and Representation of Identity in Contemporary Digital Culture*. PhD dissertation, UCLA, USA. [o] available at: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4h45b0vw>

- Glyn-Jones, A. 1996. *Holding Up a Mirror: How Civilisations Decline*. Random House, London, UK.
- Goodman, M. and Jaworska, S., 2020. Mapping digital foodscapes: Digital food influencers and the grammars of good food. *Geoforum*, [online] 117, pp.183-193. Available at: <<http://University of Reading>>.
- Gudmundsdottir, G. 2014. The Online Self: Memory and Forgetting in the Digital Age. *European Journal of Life Writing*. 3. VC42. 10.5463/ejlw.3.100.
- Hall, S., 1997. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage.
- Handa, V., 2007. *Why is the Republic of South Africa referred to as a Rainbow Nation?*. [o] The Times of India. Available at: <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/why-is-the-republic-of-south-africa-referred-to-as-a-rainbow-nation/articleshow/2515812.cms>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Hardee's Advertisement*. 1940. [image] Available at: <<https://blogs.ubc.ca/shenghuijin/2016/06/24/1940s-hardees-advertisement/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].
- Hilbert, M. & López, P. 2011. "*The World's Technological Capacity to Store, Communicate, and Compute Information*", In *Science*, 332(6025), 60-65. [o] available at: <http://www.martinhilbert.net/worldinfocapacity-html/>
- Holak, B. and McLaughlin, E., 2017. *What is Instagram?* . [o] Tech Target. Available at: <<https://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/Instagram>> [Accessed 18 October 2021].
- Hooper-Greenhill, E., 2008. *Museums And The Interpretation Of Visual Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Howe, M. S., & Courage, M. L. 1997. The emergence and early development of autobiographical memory. *Psychological Review*, 104, 499–523.
- Ide, W., 2022. *Loving Vincent review – groundbreaking homage to Van Gogh*. [o] The Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/oct/15/loving-vincent-van-gogh-oil-painted-animation-biopic-review>> [Accessed 11 February 2022].
- Instagram. 2016. *Introducing Instagram Stories*. [o] Available at: <<https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-instagram-stories>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].

Insatgram, 2020. @*foodconnectioncontinentsapart*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CGe83s3FTId/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2020. @*annaliseeatsbath*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CHGYo8cFjMG/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2021. @*coffeegossipgirl*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CS4j16GK0iU/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2021. @*damnd\_elicious*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CSYliomjoyr/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2020. @*fingeryfood*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CIKMfgoMD9G/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2020. @*healthymumway*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/B9mC2sHlgCJ/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2021. @*jillbakes\_*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CN8CbMNnOAd/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2021. @*laurelmanette*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CSxGB9Rp1LV/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2021. @*lineatstheworld*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CKocE98nJbA/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2020. @*lokicooks*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CBdaaA5jjDO/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2020. @*munchingwithmax*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CG8HZkvHUux/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2021. @*pogiboydc*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CK9ioFJh0Md/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2020. @*silenceyourhunger*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CGzMiLJBnRy/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].

Instagram, 2021. @*snackiesong*. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CSYuEGqCmrU/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].



- Instagram, 2021. @theskinnydoughnut. [image] Available at:  
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/CSYv9clq1UW/>> [Accessed 28 October 2021].
- James, W. 1891. *The Principles of Psychology, Vol.1*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, USA.
- Jewitt, C. (Ed.). 2009. *Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, J., 2020. *Types of memory: Learn more about the different types of memory here*. [o] Medical News Today. Available at: <<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/types-of-memory#types>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Jones, J., 2003. *The Potato Eaters, Vincent Van Gogh (1885)*. [o] The Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/jan/11/art>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Kaplan, J., 2020. *At Least 20% Of The Global Population \Is On Coronavirus Lockdown – Here Are Their Rules*. [o] Businessinsider.co.za. Available at: <<https://www.businessinsider.co.za/countries-on-lockdown-coronavirus-italy-2020-3?r=US&IR=T>> [Accessed 12 July 2020].
- Kevany, K., 2018. *Eating as a political, social, spiritual act: The World Peace Diet*. [o] The Conversation. Available at: <<https://theconversation.com/eating-as-a-political-social-spiritual-act-the-world-peace-diet-100867>> [Accessed 2 September 2021].
- Keegan, P., 2019. *At the Whitney: Andy Warhol*. [o] London Review of Books. Available at: <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n05/paul-keegan/at-the-whitney>> [Accessed 26 September 2021].
- Kietzmann JH, Hermkens K, McCarthy IP, Silvestre BS. 2011. Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons* 54(3): 241–251.
- Kilgour, M., 2021. *Social Media and Food: Is the Relationship Healthy?*. [o] Good Food Gift Card. Available at: <<https://blog.goodfoodgiftcard.com.au/social-media-and-food-is-the-relationship-healthy/>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].

- Kılıç, B., Bekar, A. and Yozukmaz, N., 2021. *The New Foodie Generation: Gen Z*. in *Generation Z Marketing and Management in Tourism and Hospitality*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Korsmeyer, C. and Sutton, D., 2011. The Sensory Experience of Food, Food, Culture & Society, *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research.*, 14:4, 461-475, DOI: 10.2752/175174411X13046092851316
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. 2006. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Landecker, H. 2011. 'Food as Exposure: Nutritional Epigenetics and the New Metabolism', *Biosocieties*, 6(2).
- Lee, S., 2017. *Picture perfect? How Instagram changed the food we eat*. [o] BBC News. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-42012732>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Levenstein, Harvey A. 2003. *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, vol. 8. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. 1962. *Le toté'misme aujourd'hui*. Paris: Puf.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude 2008 [1997]. *The Culinary Triangle*. In Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (ed.). *Food and Culture: A Reader*. Peter Brooks (trans.) (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge. pp. 36–43
- Lewis, Tania. 2018. Digital food: from paddock to platform. *Communication Research and Practice*. 4. 1-17. 10.1080/22041451.2018.1476795.
- Locke, J., Yolton, J. W. 1993. *An essay concerning human understanding*. London, Dent.
- Locker, L., 2018. *Making Memories Last A Lifetime In A Social Media Era*. [o] Verily. Available at: <<https://verilymag.com/2018/09/making-memories-last-a-lifetime-in-a-social-media-era>> [Accessed 12 July 2020].
- Lonsdorf, K. 2021. *At A D.C. Restaurant, One Generation Of Afghan Refugees Helps The Next*. <<https://www.npr.org/2021/08/25/1031067119/at-a-d-c-restaurant-one-generation-of-afghan-refugees-helps-the-next>> [Accessed 25 August 2021].
- Lupton, D. 1996. *Food, Body and the Self*. London: Sage.

- MacKendrick, N., 2014. Foodscape. *Contexts*, [o] 13(3), pp.16-18. [Accessed 18 October 2021].
- McLuhan, M. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw Hill Education.
- Makasi, T., 2021. *Can You Be Held Liable For Your Social Media Posts? - Media, Telecoms, IT, Entertainment - South Africa*. [o] Mondaq. Available at: <<https://www.mondaq.com/southafrica/social-media/1108766/can-you-be-held-liable-for-your-social-media-posts>> [Accessed 27 October 2021].
- Manago, A. M., Graham, M. B., Greenfield, P. M., & Salimkhan, G. (2008). Self-presentation and gender on Myspace. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 29, 446–458.
- Manon, H., 2006. Seeing Through Seeing Through: The Trompe l'Oeil Effect and Bodily Difference in the Cinema of Tod Browning. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 47(1), pp.60-82.
- Marcus, S., 1986. Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History. *American Ethnologist*, 13(2), pp.377-379.
- Matera, A., 2017. *The 'watermelon slice dress' is the newest food craze going viral*. [o] Insider. Available at: <<https://www.insider.com/what-is-the-watermelon-slice-dress-trend-2017-7>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Mastin, L. 2009. Existence and Consciousness. *The Basics of Philosophy*. Available at: [https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch\\_metaphysics.html](https://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_metaphysics.html) [Accessed 16 October 2021].
- Mashable.com. 2015. The 100 best iPhone apps of all time . [o] available at: <https://www.digitmagazine.com/wiki/digital-culture>
- Metwally, Y., 2008. *Bread in Ancient Egypt*. [o] Yasser Metwally. Available at: <<https://profyasser.wordpress.com/2008/05/17/bread-in-ancient-egypt/>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- MFA Masterworks Fine Art Gallery. 2021. *Andy Warhol Campbell's Soup, 1968*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.masterworksfineart.com/artists/andy-warhol/campbells-soup>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Murphy, K. (2010). First camera, then fork. *NY Times* [o] available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/07/dining/07camera.html>.

- Michalian, K., Sutton, J. 2017. Memory, The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy  
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/memory/>>. Metaphysics Research Lab,  
Stanford University
- Miller, Vincent 2011. *Understanding digital culture*. London: Sage.
- Moillon, L., 1630. *The Fruit and Vegetable Seller*. [Oil on Panel].
- Murphy, B., 2020. *Semiotics And Content Analysis*. 1st ed. [ebook] Msida: University of Malta, pp.1-5. Available at: <<https://www.scribd.com/document/228425486/Semiotics-Content-Analysis>> [Accessed 10 June 2020].
- Nakash, Ora & Brody, Leslie. 2006. The Effects of Social Roles and Personality Motives on Autobiographical Memory. *Sex Roles*. 54. 39-56. 10.1007/s11199-005-8868-z.
- Naumov, N. and Costandachi, G., 2021. Creativity and Entrepreneurship. *Innovation and Entrepreneurial Opportunities in Community Tourism*, pp.90-108.
- Nel, S., 2017. *What is Braai Culture and what does it mean for South Africans?*. [o] Braai Culture. Available at: <<https://braaiculture.com/what-is-braai-culture/>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Nelson, K. 2003. *Self and Social Functions: Individual Autobiographical Memory and Collective Narrative*. Psychology Press Ltd. *Memory* 11. (2), 125-136
- Nielsen, B., 2020. *Foodie Trends: Attracting the Growing Foodie Segment*. [o] Grande Custom Ingridient Group. Available at: <<https://www.grandecig.com/blog/the-foodie-revolution-attracting-and-appealing-to-the-growing-foodie-segment>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- NYU Steinhardt. 2021. *MA, Food Studies*. [o] Available at: <<https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/degree/ma-food-studies>> [Accessed 18 October 2021].
- O'Caomh, B. and Powell, K., 2018. *The ultimate toastie: Melt butter, go easy on the cheese, and give it four minutes each side*. [o] The Irish Times. Available at: <<https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/food-and-drink/the-ultimate-toastie-melt-butter-go-easy-on-the-cheese-and-give-it-four-minutes-each-side-1.3684149>> [Accessed 2 September 2021].
- Olafson, K., 2021. *How to Use Hashtags in 2021: A Quick and Simple Guide for Every Network*. [o] Hootsuite. Available at: <<https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-to-use-hashtags/>> [Accessed 18 October 2021].

- O'Loughlin, M., 2016. *Food for thought: the art of eating with Olafur Eliasson*. [o] The Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/apr/09/olafur-eliasson-sun-food-shared-ideas-lunch>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- O'Toole, M. 1994. *The Language of Displayed Art*. London: Leicester University Press.
- Omnicores. 2020. *Instagram By The Numbers (2020): Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.omnicoreagency.com/instagram-statistics/>> [Accessed 4 July 2020].
- Osteria Franciscana. 2021. *Massimo Bottura, an Italian chef born in Modena..* [o] Available at: <<https://osteriafrancescana.it/massimo-bottura/>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Oxford Languages. 2021. *Word of the Year 2015*. [o] Available at: <<https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2015/>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Poulain, J. 2016. What can sociology teach us about food? [o] Retrieved July 23, 2020, from <https://medium.com/@Danone/what-can-sociology-teach-us-about-food-12d4b9fa222b>
- Parsons, R., 2016. Aristotle on Remembering and Recollecting. *Princeton University*.
- Peluse, B., 2017. *Food & Memory - What Makes Their Connection So Strong?*. [o] Taste Vacations. Available at: <<https://www.tastevacations.com/2017/11/food-memory-makes-connection-strong/>> [Accessed 2 September 2021].
- Riley, S., Evans, A., Griffin, C., Morey, Y. and Murphy, H., 2015. *Crossing into the digital realm*. [o] The British Psychological Society. Available at: <<https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-28/august-2015/crossing-digital-realm>> [Accessed 18 October 2021].
- Rousseau, S. 2014. *Food "porn" in media*. In Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics. Springer.
- SA Corona Virus Online Portal. 2020. *Social Distancing Explained - SA Corona Virus Online Portal*. [o] Available at: <<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/2020/04/08/social-distancing/>> [Accessed 24 May 2020].
- Safronova, V., 2015. *On Fake Instagram, a Chance to Be Real*. [o] The New York Times. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/instagram-finstagram-fake-account.html>> [Accessed 26 October 2021].

- Samu, M., 2021. *Impressionism: Art and Modernity*. [o] The Met. Available at: [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/imml/hd\\_imml.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/imml/hd_imml.htm) [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Serna-Saldivar, S., 2016. Maize: Foods from Maize. *Reference Module in Food Science*.
- Seshoene, M., 2021. *Traditional African food in South Africa*. [o] South African Tourism. Available at: <https://www.southafrica.net/et/en/travel/article/traditional-african-food-in-south-africa> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Sedikides, C. & Spencer, S. J. (Eds.) 2007. *The Self*. New York: Psychology Press, USA.
- Sitar, D., 2012. *The Madonna as a Symbol of Life*. [o] Seven Ponds. Available at: <https://blog.sevenponds.com/soulful-expressions/the-madonna-as-a-symbol-of-life> [Accessed 2 September 2021].
- Smith, S. and Watson, J., 2010. *Reading autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Solier, I. D. 2013. Making the self in a material world food and moralities of consumption. *Cultural Studies Review*, 19, 9-27.
- Statista. 2016. *Number Of Mobile Phone Users Worldwide 2015-2020* [o] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/274774/forecast-of-mobile-phone-users-worldwide/> [Accessed 12 July 2020].
- Strydom, K., 2013. *Introducing Your Instagram Feed On Desktop | Instagram Blog*. [o] Instagram.com. Available at: <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/introducing-your-instagram-feed-on-desktop> [Accessed 12 July 2020].
- Spence, C., Okajima, K., Cheok, A., Petit, O. and Michel, C., 2016. Eating with our eyes: From visual hunger to digital satiation. *Brain and Cognition*, [o] 110, pp.53-63. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bandc.2015.08.006> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Sutton, D., 2001. Remembrances of the Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, (58)(4) pp. 582-584
- Synofzik, M., Vosgerau, G., and Newen, A. 2008b. I move, therefore I am: a new theoretical framework to investigate agency and ownership. *Conscious. Cogn.* 17, 411–424. doi: 10.1016/j.concog.2008.03.008

- RSC Education. 2021. *Principles of Egyptian art*. [o] Available at: <<https://edu.rsc.org/resources/principles-of-egyptian-art/1622.article>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Tate. 2021. *Pop art*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/pop-art>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- TechTarget. 2017. *What Is Instagram? - Definition From Whatis.Com*. [o] Available at: <<https://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/Instagram>> [Accessed 1 October 2020].
- Thagard, P. 2014. *What Is The Self?* [o] Psychology Today. Available at: <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/hot-thought/201406/what-is-the-self>> [Accessed 19 April 2020].
- Thagard, P. and Wood, J., 2015. *Eighty phenomena about the self: representation, evaluation, regulation, and change*. [o] NCBI. Available at: <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4375917/>> [Accessed 18 October 2021].
- The Art Story. 2021. *Ralph Goings Artworks & Famous Paintings*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.theartstory.org/artist/goings-ralph/artworks/>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- The Diplomat. 2010. *Indian Meals and Mothers*. [o] Available at: <<https://thediplomat.com/2010/11/indian-meals-and-mothers/>> [Accessed 2 September 2021].
- Westphal, J., 2016. *The Mind-Body Problem (The MIT Press Essential Knowledge series)*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- The Interaction Design Foundation. 2021. *What is Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)?*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/human-computer-interaction>> [Accessed 26 September 2021].
- Tate. 2021. *The Twentieth Century: Andy Warhol*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/dla-piper-series-twentieth-century/twentieth-century-exhibition-8>> [Accessed 27 October 2021].
- The Well Co. 2021. *What Is Food Culture And How Does It Impact Your Health?*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.thewellessentials.com/blog/what-is-food-culture-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-our-health>> [Accessed 19 October 2021].

- Tipper, M., 2009. *Mnemonics, Mnemosyne And How To Memorize*. [o] Michaeltipper.com. Available at: <<http://www.michaeltipper.com/news/mnemonics-mnemosyne-and-how-to-memorize/>> [Accessed 26 May 2020].
- Triggle, N., 2020. *Covid-19: Christmas rules tightened for England, Scotland and Wales*. [o] BBC News. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-55379220>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Tschinkel, A., 2018. *The body positivity movement on Instagram has one glaring problem*. [o] HelloGiggles. Available at: <<https://hellogiggles.com/lifestyle/there-is-a-huge-problem-with-the-body-positivity-movement-on-instagram/>> [Accessed 6 September 2021].
- Tulving, E. 1984. Memory and consciousness. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*, 26(1), 1-12. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0080017>
- Urban Dictionary. 2021. *Computer Geek*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=computer%20geek>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Watson, P. J. 2013. *Grab your fork: A netnographic study of a foodie blog and its community* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Bournemouth University.
- Van Gogh Museum. 2021. *The Potato Eaters*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl/en/collection/s0005v1962>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].
- Verplanken, B. and Sui, J., 2019. Habit and Identity: Behavioral, Cognitive, Affective, and Motivational Facets of an Integrated Self. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10.
- Vincentvangogh.org. 2021. *10 Secrets of Potato Eaters by Vincent van Gogh*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.vincentvangogh.org/potato-eaters.jsp#prettyPhoto>> [Accessed 14 September 2021].
- Voice of London. 2017. *Why do we all love a cheese toastie?*. [o] Available at: <<http://thevoiceoflondon.co.uk/why-do-we-all-love-a-cheese-toastie/>> [Accessed 2 September 2021].
- Walker Rettberg, J., 2014. Seeing Ourselves Through Technology. How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves. *Palgrave MacMillan*, 22(03), pp.1-3.
- Walker Rettberg, J., 2017. Self-Representation In Social Media. *SAGE Handbook of Social Media*.
- Wainwright, L., 2021. *Photo-realism | art*. [o] Britannica. Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/art/Photo-realism>> [Accessed 31 August 2021].



- Wang, Q., 2013. *The Autobiographical Self in Time and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Watson, I., 2013. *The blurring distinction between online and offline identities – Digital skills and participation*. [o] Digital Skills and Participation. Available at: <https://blogs.iriss.org.uk/socialmedia/2013/01/22/removing-the-distinction-between-online-and-offline-identities/> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Watson, P., Morgan, M., & Hemmington, N. 2008. Online communities and the sharing of extraordinary restaurant experiences. *Journal of Foodservice*, 19(6), 289-302
- Wegner, D. M., Giuliano, T., & Hertel, P. (1985). *Cognitive interdependence in close relationships*. In W. J. Ickes (Ed.), *Compatible and incompatible relationships* (pp. 253-276). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Wegner, D. and Ward, A., 2013. How Google Is Changing Your Brain. *Scientific American*, 309(6), pp.58-61.
- Weilenmann, A., Hillman, T., & Jungselius, B. (2013). Instagram at the museum: Communicating the museum experience through social photo sharing. CHI 2013: Changing Perspectives. Paris, France. 1843.
- Westbrook, G. 2016. Strategy briefing: the global impact of the rise of the can't cook gourmet. *Passport*. [o] Retrieved on May 25, 2020 from <http://www.euromonitor.com/the-globalimpact-of-the-rise-of-the-cant-cook-gourmet/report>.
- Westphal, J., 2016. *The Mind-Body Problem (The MIT Press Essential Knowledge series)*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- What's for Dinner. 2021. *How to Make Chakalaka from Scratch*. [o] Available at: <https://www.whatsfordinner.co.za/articles/how-to-make-chakalaka-from-scratch/> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- Woolf, V., 1929. *A Room Of One's Own*. 1st ed. London: Mariner Books.
- Williams, H. L., Conway, M. A., & Cohen, G. (2008). Autobiographical memory. In G. Cohen & M. A. Conway (Eds.), *Memory in the Real World* (3rd ed., pp. 21-90). Hove, UK: Psychology Press.
- Wix. 2015. *Instagram's Most Popular Hashtags Explained*. [online] Available at: <https://www.wix.com/blog/2015/03/instagrams-most-popular-hashtags-explained/> [Accessed 14 June 2020].

- Young, D., 2013. *Everything You Need to Know About the Hashtag*. [o] DigiFocus. Available at: <<https://digitlab.co.za/2013/04/everything-about-hashtag-twitter/>> [Accessed 17 October 2021].
- YouTube Culture & Trends. 2020. *Youtube Culture & Trends - The Explainer: Sourdough Videos*. [o] Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/trends/articles/stay-home-sourdough-tutorials/>> [Accessed 7 July 2020].
- Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S., & Martin, J. 2008. Identity construction on Facebook: Digital empowerment in anchored relationships. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24, 1816–1836.
- Zimmermann, K., 2014. *Memory Definition & Types Of Memory*. [o] livescience.com. Available at: <<https://www.livescience.com/43713-memory.html>> [Accessed 26 May 2020].
- Zycherman, A. (2014). Food and the self: Consumption, production and material culture. *Anthropology of food* [o], Book reviews. Retrieved from <http://aof.revues.org/7641>.
- 99firms.com. 2020. *How Many People Use Instagram*. [online] Available at: <<https://99firms.com/blog/how-many-people-use-instagram/#gref>> [Accessed 14 June 2020].