

Constructing culinary personae online: An analysis of the websites of British celebrity chefs

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Abstract

Celebrity chefs can be seen almost every day on TV shows in the UK, and they also communicate with the public via cookery writing in print and on websites and social media. This study investigates the websites of 10 British celebrity chefs from both a communicative and a linguistic perspective, focusing in particular on the 'About' sections, in which they present themselves to the public, and their introductions to each recipe. Eleven chefs have been selected: six male (including one duo) and five female, and covering a range of ages and different degrees of seniority. The aim is to show how the chefs construct their culinary personae and if they keep this consistent across their self-presentation and in the presentation of their culinary know-how. The findings show that in general the chefs tend to reinforce gender-based characterizations, although younger female chefs show a characterization more usually assigned to male chefs.

KEYWORDS: CELEBRITY CHEFS; COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION; CULINARY LINGUISTICS; CULINARY PERSONAE; DISCOURSE ANALYSIS; FOOD WEBSITES

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1 Introduction

Discourse of and on food has been investigated from several domains. Already in the 1930s, the anthropologist Audrey Richards (1932, 1939) through her work ‘launched the formal acknowledgment of foodways as an effective prism through which to illuminate human life’ (Counihan 1998: 1), and the subject in recent years has been approached from a linguistics and communication studies perspective by Gerhardt *et al.* (2013: 11), who observe that food-centred discourse ‘strongly manifests’ an ‘interdisciplinary nature’. The traditional genres in which food discourse is constructed for specific communities are recipes and cookbooks (Cesiri 2009), and these are the most studied areas. Scholars such as Cotter (1997), Görlach (2004), Diemer and Frobenius (2013) and Garzone (2017) – to name just a few – have highlighted the highly conventionalized nature of recipes, while cookbooks have been analysed as a complex genre, for instance as texts that reproduce gender-based inequalities (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003; Innes 2006; Neuhaus 2003; Shapiro 2005; Matwick 2017) as well as hierarchical divisions in society (Brownlie and Hewer 2007).

The construction of food-related discourse has also been studied in relation to visual media such as cookery shows and YouTube videos (Gerhardt *et al.* 2013), as well as food blogs that allow collaborative participation between food experts and members of the public, in contrast to the unidirectional communication of traditional media. Such sites have been investigated by Diemer and Frobenius (2013) and Cesiri (2016, 2017, 2020); the affordances of the digital medium give chefs new opportunities to share not only recipes, but also travel experiences and personal information. The celebrities are also able to connect across digital platforms, thus creating a complex, multidimensional foodscape that centres around their ‘culinary’ persona rather than around food (Cesiri 2019, 2020). Currently, ‘virtual foodscapes [...] are becoming a thing in and of themselves, especially in the way Web 2.0 technologies have developed space for multidirectional communication amongst food celebrities, audiences and eaters’ (Johnston and Goodman 2015: 209; see also Johnston *et al.* 2014).

The present study investigates the ways in which eleven British celebrity chefs construct their culinary personae on their official websites, focusing on the ‘About’ sections, in which they present themselves to the public, and on the introductory descriptions to their recipes, in which they may explain how a dish or other food item represents their personal ‘philosophy’ of food. It thus considers the ways in which the chefs construct their persona both in their self-presentation and in the presentation of their culinary know-how, which makes them recognizable as cooking celebrities with unique characteristics. Moreover, variables of age, social class, gender and professional seniority are considered in relation to the characterization of the chefs.

The next section provides an overview of the literature on the language of food, with particular attention on the discourse of food celebrities. After that, the data and methodology used in the study are presented, followed by the analysis of the celebrity chefs' websites and culinary personae. The study draws greater attention to the ways in which celebrity chefs 'transfer' their culinary personae in their websites, thus using food only as a secondary means to gain popularity.

2 Literature review: Celebrity chefs and the language of food

2.1 Celebrity chefs

A 'celebrity chef' is 'a famous professional cook who is often seen on television showing people how to cook' (*Macmillan Dictionary Online* n.d.). Examples in the UK go back to the 1950s, but there was a mushrooming of cookery shows hosted by famous chefs in the 1990s (cf. Chiaro 2013), and the first systematic scholarly studies on these figures appeared in the early 2000s. Some of these works considered how celebrity chefs engage with the public and maintain this relationship over time (Hansen 2008; Tonner 2008), constructing and influencing consumers' demands via their writings and cooking shows (Ketchum 2005; Hansen 2008). The ways in which celebrity chefs construct a kind of 'personal brand' is now intensified through websites and social media (Rousseau 2013).

2.2 Socio-cultural implications in food-related communication

Research on celebrity chefs has focused on these figures not only for the symbolic values they might convey, but also for the socio-cultural implications of their food-related communication. Matwick (2016, 2017) has used Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate a group of cookbooks written by female celebrity chefs, demonstrating how they all reproduce 'a discourse that continues traditional gender roles of women being predisposed to care, cook, and serve others' (Matwick 2017: 532), and he observes that 'scholars emphasize how cookbooks are not simply a collection of recipes but are a transformative device in telling readers what the preferred style is, particularly in class and gender norms' (Matwick 2017: 535). The cultural significance of cookbooks in fostering gender-based stereotypes has been explored by Andrews (2003), Brownlie and Hewer (2007) and Cruz (2013), while Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) have noted how they reflect the unequal status of women in patriarchal societies. Cookbooks are also found to reinforce social class hierarchies (Brownlie and Hewer 2007) and the traditional division of domestic work (Neuhaus 2003; Innes 2006; Shapiro 2005).

The media phenomenon of celebrity chefs also produces and reinforces digital discourses of inequality based on gender (Hollows 2003a, 2003b; Harris and Giuffre 2010), ethnicity (Gvion 2009; Naccarato and Lebesco 2012) and social class (Piper 2005; Johnston and Goodman 2015).

2.3 Celebrity chefs in the media

Studies such as those of Adema (2000), Caraher *et al.* (2000), Ketchum (2005), Scholes (2011) and Barnes (2017) have analysed the role of celebrity chefs in TV shows and how they influence the cooking and eating habits of their audiences. Paay *et al.* (2013), meanwhile, have examined communication through YouTube videos, while Page (2012) has analysed the use of hashtags on Twitter as a practice of self-branding. Finally, Rousseau (2012, 2013) has investigated the celebrity chefs' reliance on social media to enhance their popularity.

Recently, food blogs have also been investigated as a computer-mediated platform for communication about food, mostly involving amateur experts in direct interaction with their audiences (Diemer and Frobenius 2013; Cesiri 2016, 2017). These experts are usually individuals who are very skilled in cooking for family and friends but without recognized, or recognizable, formal training or professional status in the cookery industry (Cesiri 2020). Blogs can be defined as 'frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence' (Herring *et al.* 2005: 1), and each entry typically has a space for readers to leave public comments. In contrast, celebrities with a professional status in cooking usually prefer more static websites, consisting of a connected series of webpages that are updated less frequently and that do not contain space for a direct interaction between the creator or administrator and the public, except perhaps a link to a forum or to a blog (cf. Boardman 2004). These websites are also distinct from how celebrities may promote themselves on social media platforms (e.g., Rousseau 2012, 2013; Fried Daniel *et al.* 2014; Neuman and Fjellström 2014).

In this regard, we could say that, while the main purpose of a celebrity website is communicative-informative, the purpose of a blog is mainly communicative-interactive. Non-blog websites make it easier to publicize some new recipe or media event without the need to monitor and perhaps respond to large numbers of user comments.

2.4 Celebrity chefs' websites as a genre in food communication

Celebrity chefs' websites can be considered a hybrid genre positioned halfway between traditional cookbooks and food blogs: like cookbooks, they contain recipes, but like blogs they may be frequently updated and incorporate multimedia material (including personal information). Websites offer the public direct and virtually free access to the chefs' recipes and writing, giving the impression that direct contact can be established between the public and the celebrities. This is particularly so when chefs share personal memories and details. In this way they promote their specific culinary persona.

Celebrity chefs are immediately recognizable to the public for their distinctive personalities. This is known as 'self-branding' and has been investigated in

media studies in relation to the ways in which celebrities construct their public ‘character’ via traditional and digital media to gain and maintain their popularity by marketizing a public persona, which is created like a product (e.g. Driesens 2012; Page 2012; Deery 2015; Marwick 2015). In relation to celebrity chefs, Johnston *et al.* (2014) define the ‘culinary persona’ as a constructed character, representing a specific type or ‘categories of individuals’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 3) which are ‘media creations and commodities that assume value through their persona, much like a brand’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 4). In order ‘to identify emergent themes relating to presentations of self and foodwork’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 5), the authors analysed cookbooks written by both female and male celebrity chefs, classifying seven types of culinary personae that ‘are highly gendered, but also classed and racialized’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 1): *homebody*, *home stylist*, *pin-up*, *chef-artisan*, *maverick*, *gastrosexual* and *self-made man*. These types are described in more detail in Section 4, as part of the analysis into the created personae of the chefs under discussion in this paper.

3 Data and method

The present study examines 10 websites of British celebrity chefs, representing different age groups and both male and female celebrities. The five sites of female chefs are those of Mary Berry (born 1935), Delia Smith (born 1941), Nigella Lawson (born 1960), Lorraine Pascale (born 1972) and Ching He Huang (born 1978), and the five sites for male chefs are those of Rick Stein (born 1947), the duo the Hairy Bikers (Dave Myers, born 1957, and Si King, born 1966), Paul Hollywood (born 1966), James Martin (born 1972) and Jamie Oliver (born 1975).

The chosen sections of the websites are the ‘About’ pages, in which the chefs present themselves to the public, describing their professional background and approach to food and cooking, as well as the descriptions that each chef provides before every recipe. These sections were selected because these are the spaces in which the chefs construct their culinary persona, making their voice immediately, and univocally, recognizable from that of their peers.

4 Analysis: Categorization of the celebrity chefs’ personae

It was found that the categorization of celebrity chefs as formulated by Johnston *et al.* (2014) cannot be applied perfectly to the websites under discussion here, even if we follow the differentiation they draw between primary and secondary personae. However, the distinctions remain of value for exploring the complex characteristics that emerge from chefs’ websites, and so were retained.

4.1 The homebody and the pin-up

The *homebody* type is a female persona that ‘embodies associations between femininity and domestic foodwork’ [...] and that ‘empathizes with the reader and assures them that she is facing similar struggles’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 9). The chefs representing this type present recipes that are ‘approachable, assume a low level of cooking skill, and often contain processed or ready-made food ingredients’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 9). This type of persona ‘is embedded in assumptions about women’s primary responsibility for domestic reproductions. [...] High-earning homebodies [...] may be popular and financially successful, but they appear to operate on the less artistically legitimate, dominated end of the culinary field’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 10).

In the group of celebrity chefs considered here, this specific type of culinary persona is embodied mainly by Nigella Lawson. Despite the fact that she is usually attributed the *pin-up* type, her website downplays her ‘seductive’ TV self-presentation in favour of a more domestic kind of approach to food. There is no ‘About’ section in her website, probably seen as unnecessary in that she was already internationally famous when she started the website. Examples 1 to 3 reflect this homebody persona.

Example 1

This is one of those salads I love to have around to pick at from the fridge, and it is the very model of virtue.

Example 2

I’m all for peas as an accompaniment, and keep a stash of frozen ones at the ready.

Example 3

By effort, I don’t mean you need to be hugely active or expert to make these; you just need the patience to sit around while they rise and the faith to believe they will. Very appropriate.

As we can see, in Example 3 especially, the language used corresponds to the description of the homebody type: it is friendly, engaging and shows ‘quodidian concerns such as time constraints and cooking on a budget, while de-emphasizing status displays, wealth, and cultural capital’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 9–10). In fact, Nigella Lawson is known for being the daughter of a former Chancellor of the Exchequer in Margaret Thatcher’s Government and a wealthy heiress. Moreover, her second husband was a famous businessman, whom she divorced citing unreasonable behaviour. Her well-known social class and family background, however, are not evident in her website, where

she presents herself as facing the same culinary struggles as her audience. This is testified in Example 4 below, where she suggests her solution for making a dish using less expensive ingredients and how to face practical issues connected to its preparation.

Example 4

If you're worried about using alcohol in a cake that might – but doesn't have to – be destined for children, then just use two spoonfuls of the (usually apple) juice the pineapple was canned in. It also makes it less expensive to make if you don't keep Malibu in the house; frankly, though, I am never without it. But if I were you, I certainly wouldn't dream of going out and buying it especially.

It must be noted, however, that some traits of the pin-up type are nonetheless present in her descriptions of the recipes. It was as a pin-up type that Nigella Lawson became famous as a chef, and although she seems to have largely abandoned this persona in favour of a more domestic characterization it remains a secondary attribute. As such, the pin-up type is worth exploring further here, although this persona's absence from the other chefs under discussion means that it is not given a separate designated section in this paper.

The pin-up type 'embeds food and cooking in a lifestyle of leisure, entertainment, and sensual pleasure' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 11). This type of persona presents 'the author's beauty and sensuality explicitly – in vivid photographs, luscious descriptions of food experiences' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 11). This kind of 'sensual' language is certainly present in some of Nigella Lawson's descriptions of ingredients or dishes, as Examples 5 to 9 illustrate.

Example 5

When I've got time, I am happy to stand at the hob, whisking up a roux, and stirring, stirring, stirring to usher forth the perfect velvety parsley sauce.

Example 6

This makes for a very quick, warming and yet elegant supper.

Example 7

The anchovies here are mellow and, with the soft-cooked onions, have a savoury but honeyed intensity – not strong, just deep-toned and harmonious.

Example 8

This is a wonderful cake: amusing but no joke; the velvety sponge is dark, moist and gently fragranced.

Example 9

It is a wonderfully damp, dense and aromatic flourless cake: it tastes like one of those sponges you drench, while cooling, with syrup, only you don't have to.

These examples represent the way in which Nigella Lawson carefully selects specific sensorial adjectives, such as 'velvety, warming, elegant, mellow, soft, harmonious, moist, damp', which are all used to describe the texture of the dish, making it sensually appealing to her public. Indeed, her main focus appears to be directed almost exclusively on the sensual gratification that the dish gives rather than on its nutritional value, and her choice of adjectives aims at describing the impact that the texture, the taste, the smell of the dish has on each one of the senses.

4.2 The home stylist

The home stylist persona is somewhat the opposite of the homebody type. Indeed, the chefs representing this group present 'cooking as part of a larger home-management project', and they offer 'advice on how to transcend the mundane and the ordinary' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 10). Their cuisine is 'rarified, classy, and linked closely to "tastes of distinction"' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 10), and the language used in their cookbooks emphasizes 'elements of their lives that reflect high status and cultural capital' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 10). The chefs included in this category 'all have previous experience owning upscale food preparation businesses and it is assumed they bring associated skills to helping readers create an idyllic life' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 10). Johnston *et al.* (2014) cite, among other chefs, Ching He Huang, who is also included in the present study. An analysis of her website fits this description, and the same category here could include Lorraine Pascale, Delia Smith and Mary Berry.

Ching He Huang is of Taiwanese origin, although she has lived in the UK since she was 11. After graduating from university in 1999, she combined her business studies with her passion for cooking, starting her own catering company, which led to the creation of her own brand of Chinese-inspired food and drinks. On her website, she describes herself as 'an International Emmy nominated TV chef and cookery author, who has become an ambassador of Chinese cooking around the world'. She has fronted series in both the UK and the USA, as well as a series of world-selling cookbooks.

Lorraine Pascale, who is of Black Caribbean heritage, had formal training at cookery school and then at university. As explained on her website,

[d]uring her final year of University, Lorraine opened a bakery in London's Covent Garden selling cakes, tray bakes and cupcakes and it was at the time she filmed her

first Television series ‘Baking Made Easy’ which along with the book was an instant hit in the UK.

Pascale’s first TV series was in 2011, when she was 29 years old.

In contrast, Delia Smith’s TV career started in the 1970s, following some time writing for newspapers, and her first cookbook appeared in 1971, when she was 30 years old. Her focus has been on teaching the public how to cook. Her vast popularity has been described as the ‘Delia effect’: if she promoted a product, this soon became a best-selling item (*Macmillan Dictionary* 2009). Mary Berry is the eldest of the group, although she and Smith both started appearing on TV in the early 1970s and their professional standing is comparable. Her website’s ‘About’ section is essential; it covers the most important steps in her career with emphasis on the TV shows, cookbooks and the cookery school she runs. She received formal education and training in culinary and hospitality in prestigious cookery schools, and with Paul Hollywood (discussed below) she currently has a high-profile media presence as a judge on a popular baking competition programme.

The four websites present the chefs as women who built their own successful businesses and are now sharing their culinary skills with their public. Their entrepreneur-like personae are especially evident in the ‘About’ sections, in which biographical details are provided in the third-person singular, as if in a professional *résumé*. This is shown in Examples 10–13.

Example 10

Ching’s approach to cookery stems from the traditional cooking and lifestyles of her farming community grandparents in Southern Taiwan, and these are her major food influences. [Ching He Huang]

Example 11

During her final year of University, Lorraine opened a bakery in London’s Covent Garden selling cakes, tray bakes and cupcakes and it was at the time she filmed her first Television series ‘Baking Made Easy’ which along with the book was an instant hit in the UK. [Lorraine Pascale]

Example 12

At 21, determined to learn how to cook – perhaps partly to impress her new boyfriend – she started work in a tiny restaurant in Paddington. [Delia Smith]

Example 13

Mary Berry trained at The Cordon Bleu in Paris and Bath School of Home Economics. In the swinging ‘60s she became the cookery editor of *Housewife* magazine, followed by *Ideal Home* magazine. [Mary Berry]

It is noteworthy that these descriptions contrast with one aspect of how home stylists are described by Johnston *et al.* (2014: 10), which is that ‘professional backgrounds and business acumen are not substantially referenced beyond the book jacket’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014:10). On the contrary, their successful professional activities are evident not only in the ‘About’ sections, but especially in the introductions to the recipes, in which the chefs refer to specific events that inspired them (Examples 14–17).

Example 14

For me, travelling all across China has changed the way I cook and eat. [Ching He Huang]

Example 15

So I do not bake very much anymore. I write I do TV, and I talk about it a lot about baking, but the actual process of baking? Not so much... [Lorraine Pascale]

Example 16

This recipe is adapted from one given to me by Tony Carver, the chef who cooks for Norwich City Football Club players at their training ground in Colney. [Delia Smith]

Example 17

No better soup flavour and no better soup colour. When we were photographing this soup for the book, the team voted it the very best soup anyone had tasted for yonks! [Mary Berry]

These examples clearly show that the chefs want to position themselves professionally when they provide information and advice on preparation, thus ‘bolstering their culinary authority’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 10). Ching He Huang underscores the cultural influences on her cooking style and choice of food that she has derived not only from her roots but also from her travels, while Lorraine Pascale emphasizes her full range of business activities. Delia Smith cites her personal connection to a famous chef but, by hinting at her own personal changes to her recipes, she also draws greater attention to her professional ability. Finally, Mary Berry’s description refers to the preparation of one of her books, at the same time mentioning the presence of her team, thus stressing the fact that she is not just a cook but also manages complex professional activities.

Considering the emphasis that the four home stylists put on their achievements, they seem also to show features that belong to the self-made man category, which is the secondary persona emerging from the analysis of these four websites, and which I discuss further below in Section 5.6.

5.3 The chef artisan

The chef artisan is the first type of persona that Johnston *et al.* (2014: 13) attribute to ‘the meta-category of food masculinities’. This kind of persona ‘firmly occupies the world of professional cooking and fine dining [...]. All chef-artisan personalities are rooted in professional kitchen and to varying degrees, celebrate creativity in the kitchen’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 13). Among the chefs analysed in this paper, this persona is embodied by Rick Stein and James Martin, who are both top chefs who own internationally renowned restaurants. Both chefs, moreover, fit into the category of the chef artisan by the way in which they present themselves as well as their recipes.

James Martin’s website contains a very short ‘About’ section, in which he presents himself as ‘one of the nation’s favourite chefs.’ The description is only a couple of paragraphs long, but it summarizes his achievements, current professional position and his academic and TV career, along with his hobbies, such as his love of cars. The ‘About’ section of Rick Stein’s website is also quite short, but is divided in two parts. The first part presents his riverside restaurant in London. The description of the place and menu is provided using the first-person plural pronoun, as if success were due to his team, not to Stein’s presence (Example 18). The second part, narrated in the third-person singular, briefly describes his professional achievements in the media and his cooking for famous individuals (Example 19).

Example 18

We started as a nightclub in 1974 in the Cornish fishing village of Padstow. The rest is history...

Example 19

He [Rick Stein] has written over 20 cookery books, an autobiography and made over 30 cookery programmes. He has also cooked for The Queen and Prince Philip, Tony Blair, Margaret Thatcher and French President, Jacques Chirac.

This corresponds with how chefs in the artisan category ‘emphasize [their] qualities through attention to hard-earned skills, credentials, expertise, knowledge, education [...]’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 13). This is also present in the introduction to the recipes, as in Example 20 below, in which the chef is presenting his reproduction of a dish tasted during one of his travels to Singapore.

Example 20

My life seems to be measured out in memorable meals and this was one of them. We had piles of chilli crab, Tiger beers and rice.

Another aspect of the chef-artisan is his interest in teaching their skills to the public, as Examples 21 and 22 illustrate.

Example 21

Making your own gravlax is absolutely worthwhile. You never get quite the same intense dill flavour if you buy it. I particularly like the flavour of the white peppercorns in this cure. [Rick Stein]

Example 22

When peaches aren't in season, you can use tinned peaches – just drain them well before adding them to the cake batter. Plums and damsons also work well, but avoid fruit with a high-water content, such as strawberries and raspberries, or you'll end up with a soggy cake. [James Martin]

In Example 21 we see how Rick Stein gives his opinion and a personal suggestion on preparing a dish personally rather than eating a ready-made one. In Example 22, James Martin's lecturing style is particularly evident in his detailed explanation of the best fruit to be used in the recipe. These examples are instances of another characteristic of this type of persona: 'a culinary artist is not explicitly interested in pedagogy, but instead uses cookbooks to offer readers a backstage view of culinary creativity' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 13–14).

5.4 The maverick

The maverick is a culinary persona of 'outsiders who derive creative authority from their defiance of custom or their ability to draw insight from worldly outside sources' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 15). This is certainly the case of the Hairy Bikers, the name of a duo comprising Si King and Dave Myers, who are 'life-long foodies and passionate cooks', as they define themselves in the 'About' section of their website. Their overview briefly describes their lives individually, and it continues with a description of their career together, stressing in particular their approach to food (i.e., how to diet with taste), their TV shows and cookbooks. Emphasis is placed on their being self-made men in cooking, with a love of adventure. This has led them to travel extensively with their motorbikes to taste other countries' foods, which they narrate in their books and shows. The style of the 'About' section reflects the duo's culinary persona, which is often presented to the public as one 'entity' (Example 23).

Example 23

[...] big hearted, down-to-earth cooks with a love of good food, they have been cooking together for more than twenty years. They have created haute cuisine dishes with Michelin-starred chefs and travelled the world in the pursuit of great food.

The use of the third-person plural pronoun in the 'About' section helps the creation, in the readers' mind, of one, single cooking persona that is composed of two individual chefs. In terms of the definitions provided by Johnston *et al.* (2014: 15), the maverick's authority is 'affirmed by reference to professionalism of various kinds', which overcomes the type's 'quirkiness'. This aspect is also represented in the Hairy Bikers, for instance when they describe their professional attainments and source of inspiration, as shown in Example 24.

Example 24

They take every opportunity they can to pack their panniers and head off in search of authentic culinary and cultural experiences in all corners of the world.

In this case, their cooking authority comes from their travels, which lead them into contact with the dishes they present in the places where they originated (Examples 25–26).

Example 25

We cooked these in Manchester as our answer to the famous Manchester egg.

Example 26

The Corsicans often serve this stew over pasta but some new potatoes would be nice too.

The examples illustrate how they provide information on how the dish is served by locals and how they modify it, thus reinforcing their culinary authority and 'creative autonomy' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 15).

5.5 The gastrosexual

The gastrosexual culinary persona 'fully embrace[s] cooking at home' (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 16), challenging 'traditional masculinity' (Johnston *et al.* 2014) by mixing elements traditionally attributed to women (domestic cooking, grooming and fashion) and some elements typical of male chefs (e.g., professionalism and high-level training in cooking). According to Johnston *et al.* (2014), Jamie Oliver is one of the best representatives of the gastrosexual type, and this is consistent with an analysis of the chef's website. Jamie Oliver is a chef and restaurateur who worked in professional kitchens before becoming a TV celebrity chef with his own show on the BBC, a YouTube channel, social media pages and, of course, a website. He has used his celebrity status to improve British children's eating habits by introducing healthier menus in school meals.

He presents himself while he cooks in his restaurant as well as in a domestic environment, thus mixing professional, masculine cooking with domestic,

feminine cooking. However, as is typical of this kind of persona, he does not dissolve the boundaries between ‘the professional and the domestic kitchen’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 16). This is particularly evident in his presentation of the recipes (Examples 27–28).

Example 27

The kids’ favourite dinners are always the traybakes – we cannot get enough of them in our family! Our trick for keeping it fresh is to combine roasted ingredients with fresh ones and to top them with a good sauce or pesto, giving a mix of temperatures as well as textures.

Example 28

A fresh and nutritious twist on the classic carbonara, with smoky bacon, peas and almonds. Humble little peas are a source of nine different micronutrients, and are especially high in thiamin, a B vitamin that helps our heart to function properly.

The examples attest that, in the presentation of the recipes, he can narrate about his family’s preferences (Example 26), but he can also insert expert nutritional information (Example 27).

5.6 The self-made man

The last type of persona is the self-made man, who ‘rises from poverty through hard work in the restaurant industry, usually without formal training or financial security’ (Johnston *et al.* 2014: 17). This persona emerges as a secondary trait in the websites of home stylists Ching He Huang, Lorraine Pascale, Delia Smith and Mary Berry, but, among the 10 chefs, Paul Hollywood embodies it as his primary persona.

As we read in the ‘About’ section of his website, Paul Hollywood is a trained sculptor who turned to bakery following in the footsteps of his father. As well as involving himself in his father’s business he also baked in exclusive hotels. He travels the world to get inspiration for new recipes, which he brings back to his baking company, which supplies supermarket chains. As is typical of the narrations of this kind of persona (Johnston *et al.* 2014), the ‘About’ section of his website highlights that his successful business was built almost from scratch, by starting with his ‘humble’ origin and culminating with his professional achievements, testified by the first two sentences of his personal description (Example 29).

Example 29

The son of a baker, Paul originally trained as a sculptor before his father persuaded him to join the family business. He went onto become head baker at

some of the most exclusive hotels, including Cliveden, The Chester Grosvenor and The Dorchester, gaining a reputation as an innovator and one of the country's finest artisan bakers.

Moreover, the self-made man type presents himself as a high-end professional who does not forget his roots (Johnston *et al.* 2014), and this recurs also in Paul Hollywood's description of his dishes. In the following example we can see how he alternates between recipes from his family (Examples 29 and 31) and recipes taken from his work in high-end restaurants (Example 30).

Example 30

Packed with flavour, these are real hot cross buns. I started making them with my Dad, also a baker, when I was just 9 years old.

Example 31

I am partial to a slice of lemon drizzle and that's why I decided to include it in the afternoon tea that I served at Cliveden House during my visit back there.

Example 32

This is my mother-in-law's recipe and it makes an excellent alternative to a classic, dark Christmas cake.

6 Discussion

At the beginning of this paper, the variables of age, social class, gender and professional maturity were listed as factors that could influence how the celebrity chefs analysed here construct their culinary personae on their official websites. The analysis has revealed that age does not play any role in the different categorization of the celebrity chefs into personae.

As regards gender differences, much has been written about the way gender influences the construction of discourse of food and cooking. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) attribute gender influences to the division of roles in patriarchal culture, whereby women are associated with the private social sphere and men with the public sphere, even after women's emancipation. This also explains why women are associated with domestic cooking while men become famous chefs, as confirmed by a series of studies that include those of Cairns *et al.* (2010), Johnston *et al.* (2014) and Matwick (2017), to name just a few. In the present study, the celebrity chefs both reinforce and challenge the traditional gender-based division of roles. On the one hand, the feminine personae of the homebody, the home stylist and the pin-up are all embodied by the five female celebrity chefs, while the five male chefs embodied the masculine types of the chef-artisan, the maverick, the gastrosexual and the self-made man. However,

exceptions must be acknowledged. For instance, four of the five female chefs (Ching He Huang, Lorraine Pascale, Delia Smith and Mary Berry) embody the feminine home stylist type, but they also show marked traits of a secondary persona, namely the self-made 'person,' that falls in the masculine group.

Finally, the 'professional maturity' variable is a factor that might play a role in the changes found in Nigella Lawson's website compared to her characterization in cookbooks: if Johnston *et al.* (2014) assign her to the pin-up type, typical of her early career characterization, the website shows a more mature person, and traits typical of the homebody persona. Thus, we might presume that – having gained greater professional maturity – the aesthetic part of her presentation is receding in favour of a more substantial characterization that focuses on her expertise in cooking.

7 Conclusion

The present study has investigated the construction of culinary personae in a group of female and male celebrity chefs' websites. The analysis, conducted on the 'About' sections and in the introductions to the recipes, has revealed that most of the chefs reinforce the gender-based characterization seen in the previous literature, with some exception in the female chefs.

Previous research has investigated cookbooks, while the present study has examined websites, revealing different strategies in the construction of the celebrity chefs' culinary personae. Further research on this could analyse other media such as YouTube and social media platforms (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook) to investigate if, and the extent to which, these new social platforms of virtual communication determine a different construction of discourse, or if they rather reinforce the chefs' culinary personae already seen in the cookbooks and on the websites.

Websites

Mary Berry: <http://www.maryberry.co.uk/>

The Hairy Bikers (Si King and Dave Myers): <http://www.hairybikers.com/>

Paul Hollywood: <http://paulhollywood.com/>

Ching He Huang: <https://www.chinghehuang.com/>

Nigella Lawson: <https://www.nigella.com/>

James Martin: <https://www.jamesmartinchef.co.uk/>

Jamie Oliver: <https://www.jamieoliver.com/>

Lorraine Pascale: <https://www.lorrainepascale.com/>

Delia Smith: <https://www.deliaonline.com/>

Rick Stein: <https://www.rickstein.com/>

The sites were last accessed in May 2020.

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