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Introduction to Food Blogging in English

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FULL ARTICLE

Introduction

This article aims to present food blogs as one of the genres in which digital food-related communication has been commonly expressed in the last few decades. Food blogs are a sub-typology of blogs that focus on food preparation and consumption, dating from the early 2000s and growing significantly in importance. They allow non-experts to gain influence by sharing knowledge, experiences, and recipes within Web 2.0. (Cesiri 2020).

Food blogs function as virtual communities where enthusiasts share information and interact directly with bloggers and each other, unlike traditional food media (Gordon and Tovaes 2021). This interaction involves participants ranging from beginners to semi-professionals and amateurs. Applying Anita Blanchard's (Psychology Expert in Online and Face-To-Face Groups and Communities) (2004) concept, they can be considered spaces for sharing interests and information.

Furthermore, they constitute discourse communities, meeting John Swales' (1990) criteria: shared public goals (sharing food information), intercommunication mechanisms (comments sections), participatory feedback mechanisms, use of multiple genres (recipes, images), specific lexis (cf. Diemer and Frobenius 2013; Cesiri 2016), and a range of expertise levels. They also function as communities of practice where users learn through regular interaction (Wenger-Trayner 2025). Applying Susan Herring's (2007) criteria, Computer-Mediated-Communication Expert, their status as virtual communities is confirmed in that they include participation patterns, shared norms, solidarity, conflict management, group identity awareness, and distinct roles.

Through the state-of-the-art review we notice that while popular, food blogs have received limited academic attention as a specific textual/multisemiotic genre. Existing research approaches include gender studies (Cairns et al. 2010; Salvio 2012), communication studies (Rousseau 2012), and sociological/cultural studies (e.g., Lee et al. 2014; Diemer et al. 2014), with only a few specific corpus/discourse analyses (Diemer and Frobenius 2013; Cesiri 2016; 2017; 2024a; 2024b).

Overview

Food blogs are a rich area of study within the field of Food Studies, offering a unique intersection of food, culture, and digital media (De Solier 2014, 2018; Glenn 2021). These platforms are used not only as repositories for recipes but also as spaces through which food bloggers construct their online identities and interact with a global audience. In this regard, food blogs in English are a particular case in point in that they attract audiences from English-speaking countries, for obvious reasons, but also international audiences. International audiences both find inspiration for recipes and are educated on the specific sensorial and technical language used especially in food blogs that concentrate on certain kinds of cuisines and approaches to nutrition, such as veganism. These terms are later used in food blogs written in other languages, such as French and German, allowing the inter-cultural transmission of lexicon and knowledge, as has been ascertained by Linguistic and Food Study Expert Cornelia Gerhardt (Gerhardt 2021).

Thanks to the widespread popularity of English-based food blogs, the significance of food blogs in general terms extends beyond mere culinary documentation; they play a crucial role in shaping food trends, influencing cultural perceptions of food, and fostering online communities centered around food. From a global perspective, food blogs illustrate the diverse ways in which food is experienced, prepared, and discussed across different cultures (Hood 2021).

Moreover, key scholarship in the field emphasizes the multimodal nature of food blogs (Cesiri 2020). The analysis has examined the visual and verbal elements, as well as social interactions within these blogs, providing a framework that can be applied to the study of food blogs in other regions (Rodney et al. 2017; Gerhardt 2021). The comparative approaches reveal that while some aspects of food blogging, such as the use of visual media and the construction of a blogger's persona, may be universal, the specific content, style, and cultural references vary significantly, reflecting regional differences in food preferences, culinary traditions, and social norms.

This scholarship highlights the importance of considering the visual design of blogs, including layout, color schemes, images, and videos, in conjunction with the textual content. Areas of debate within this field include the extent to which bloggers' creative choices are influenced by pre-designed templates and the negotiation between personal expression and adherence to gender-related stereotypes (Cesiri 2020).

If one wishes to analyze food blogs, this genre can be approached through various disciplinary lenses. Corpus linguistics, for example, provides tools for examining the language used in recipes and food descriptions, revealing patterns and tendencies in culinary discourse. Pragmatics offers insights into the ways bloggers and users interact, negotiate social roles, and manage politeness in online communication. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a framework for examining how power relations and ideological assumptions are embedded in the language and images used in food blogs.

Challenges in researching food blogs include the ephemeral nature of online content and the variability in bloggers' practices. Some blogs may be inactive or infrequently updated, and the quality and reliability of information can vary. Additionally, the analysis of user comments and

interactions can be complex due to the large volume of data and the potential for anonymity and pseudonymity online.

To support students and academics in this field, online and printed library resources offer a wealth of applicable material such as monographs on food culture and digital media, as well as academic articles published in scientific journals dealing with culinary topics and food study methodologies. Primary sources can include not only food blogs themselves but also social media networks, run by the same food blogger. This would allow researchers and students to observe how the same content creator can represent and narrate food across different media.

These resources can support academic research and writing by providing students and scholars with access to relevant theoretical frameworks, methodological tools, and empirical data. For example, a student who wishes to research the representation of gender in food blogs could use the Bloomsbury Food Library to find key texts on gender theory and discourse analysis. Examples of food blogs to analyze can be easily found online, in English as well as in other languages, so a contrastive analysis might be conducted on any culture-influenced difference existing between the way in which gender is represented in the dataset. Finally, instructors can incorporate the methodological tools and the investigation of food blogs as a communicative or a mediatic genre into their teaching by assigning research projects that involve the analysis of food blogs, using the resources to guide students in their investigations and to provide them with the necessary theoretical and methodological background. This kind of activity can also be performed in class by master-level students, or at lower levels. Food blogs, in fact, can even be used to teach language structures, domain-specific phraseology, pragmatic practices, and translation in the foreign language classroom at undergraduate level.

Conclusion

Food blogs play a significant role in the context of food studies not only because they constitute a popular genre but also because they still have not been fully investigated. Existing studies have often provided only sketchy pictures, lacking a more thorough perspective on the characteristics that define food blogs and differentiate them from other digital food-related products.

Research has already ascertained that they are more than just a genre of computer-mediated communication; they are complex multimodal digital genres, in which the graphic component is as important as verbal and interactional aspects. This integration of text, pictures, and videos creates a multidimensional space that enhances interactivity and allows food bloggers to fully exploit the affordances of the digital medium. Moreover, food blogs foster the creation of virtual communities in which they actively interact with the audience, constructing a complex socio-cultural context around food preparation and consumption.

Several emerging trends indicate that there are still several areas for future research. A central trend is the contrastive analysis of food blogs in different languages and cultures. Given that food is a primary expression of a national culture, cross-cultural studies can provide deeper insights into how food-related discourse is shaped by cultural contexts. It also facilitates exploration of whether interaction with users not belonging to the same context might influence the way in which the food blogger constructs the food blog or how they interact

with the community within the food blog itself. Another trend is the exploration of the other social media profiles of food bloggers in order to compare the characterization of their digital/social persona, their public interaction, and their knowledge of the communication strategies across different platforms.

In addition, it might also be interesting to investigate how the recipes in the food blogs have changed across time, including the use of local terminology, and possible strategies applied to explain or paraphrase non-English food terms both in English-speaking and in non-English speaking blogs.

Finally, future research is likely to expand the multimodal analysis of food blogs to include videos and soundscapes; that is, to examine how speech, music, and sound are integrated to enhance the sensory experience surrounding food narration. This is connected with the trend that seeks to examine the verbal aspects of food blogs, by analyzing the use of sensory language, figurative language, humor, and the portrayal of gender roles.

In conclusion, these emerging trends highlight the dynamic nature of food blogs and their potential to provide valuable insights into various aspects of food, culture, communication, and social interaction that play, and have played such an important role in human culture and civilization across time.

Points for Consideration

1. Defining the key characteristics and functions of food blogs since their first instances in the early 2000s and how they are shaped today, especially with the contribution of other digital and social media.
2. Investigating the social dynamics, norms, and values that might influence the interaction between food blogger and users, especially when they do not belong to the same apparent socio-cultural context, or when they do not share the same language.
3. The role that multimodal elements play in shaping and enhancing communication and engagement, particularly in relation to sensory experiences of food.
4. Continuing from the previous point, investigating the interplay of text, images, and soundscape in food blogs, examining in particular how sensory and visual representations evoke taste, smell, texture, and other sensory perceptions in general.
5. Investigating the cultural contexts of food blogs, examining how they represent national/regional/local cuisines, traditions, and social norms. Noting how they integrate elements from other traditions to create new ones, evaluating the impacts of food blogs on cultural preservation, innovation, and globalization.

Recommended Reading

Key works from the Bloomsbury Food Library platform

De Solier, Isabelle. 2014. "Blogging: Digital Leisure and Material Media Production." In *Food History: Critical and Primary Sources: Contemporary Transitions*, edited by Jeffrey M. Pilcher. London: Bloomsbury Academic. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474220156.ch-016>.

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Cesiri, D. 2024b. "Culinary Recipes in English and in Italian: An Update on the Structural Features of the Genre between Stability and Change." *AGON* 42 (July-September): 102–129.

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Herring, S. 2007. "A Faceted Classification Scheme for Computer-Mediated Discourse." *Language@Internet*, 4, article 1.

- Lee, H.S., Samdanisa, M., and Gkiousoub, S. 2014. "Hybridizing Food Cultures in Computer-Mediated Environments: Creativity and Improvisation in Greek Food Blogs." *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 72 (2): 224–38 .
- Rodney, A., Cappeliez, S., Oleschuk, M., and Johnston, J. 2017. "The Online Domestic Goddess: An Analysis of Food Blog Femininities, Food." *Culture & Society* 20 (4): 685–707 .
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