Fu's study breaks new ground by looking at foodstagramming from a psychological perspective.

THE CAMERA EATS FIRST:

What foodstagramming reveals about personal behavior

Some chefs may try to ban it, but 'foodstagramming'—diners taking photographs of food to post on social media—is a valuable tool that can boost both restaurants' and diners' public image. That's the conclusion of new research led by UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management's Associate Professor Xiaoxiao Fu. The study takes a psychological perspective and finds that foodstagramming helps both individuals' self-efficacy—the belief that if individuals act in specific ways they can achieve certain goals—and provides opportunities for restaurants to promote their businesses in new and exciting ways.

It's now impossible to eat in a restaurant and not see other diners photographing their food and posting it on social media. 'Foodstagramming' has become such a phenomenon that, according to the restaurant rating platform Zagat, 60% of diners regularly indulge in it. Instagram alone received 400 million photographs tagged #food in 2021, making food one

perspective. Published in the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management,* her research reveals how posting images of dining experiences has become a leading way in which individuals present themselves in the online world.

Contextual clues reveal as much about a person as the food. For example, posting an image of several pairs of hands above a sharing plate on a stylish table suggests a close friendship group enjoying an evening out. It portrays the person taking the picture in a positive light and suggests they have a fun life. Alternatively, posting a picture of beautifully prepared and presented Japanese sushi on a simple woven mat hints that the photographer has a clean-living, healthy lifestyle, and an elegant, pared-back esthetic. It also suggests they are open to other cultures and food experiences.

SELF-PRESENTATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Fu investigates what foodstagramming tells us about 'food experiential value'—the value that individuals place on their consumption experience. This is understood to have both

The study offers practical insights for restaurants, particularly in relation to marketing.

of the most common subjects that users post about.

What lies behind this global trend? Despite its prevalence, foodstagramming has attracted little academic attention. Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management breaks new ground by looking at foodstagramming from a psychological

influences self-efficacy and strategic self-presentation, and that this in turn has a positive influence on people's perceived enjoyment and subsequent behavior.

TOURIST AND RESIDENT DINERS

The study is based on a questionnaire completed by diners who had posted food experience images on social media in the previous 18 months. Around 600 people took part, half of whom posted about a dining experience as a tourist, and half about a dining experience as a neighborhood resident.

A literature review helped identify the measures tested. To probe extrinsic value, for example, participants were asked whether the restaurant service was friendly, and for intrinsic value whether the food was enjoyable. Self-efficacy was probed by asking, for example, whether diners knew how to share photos to present their images well online.

Statements about strategic self-presentation included whether individuals posted about positive experiences. Statements about perceived enjoyment asked, for example,

> *INSTAGRAM ALONE RECEIVED 400 MILLION PHOTOGRAPHS TAGGED #FOOD IN 2021.*

extrinsic value regarding such things as cost, waiting time, and service, and intrinsic value regarding food style, esthetics, and taste.

Using the lens of psychology, Fu also looks at what foodstagramming tells us about the person posting the image. The study is based on strategic self-presentation theory, as developed by Canadian-American sociologist and psychologist Erving Goffman. According to Goffman, individuals adapt the way they present themselves to other people to suit different social situations. The research is equally indebted to Canadian-American psychologist Albert Bandura, who developed social cognitive theory and the concept of self-efficacy. Social cognitive theory proposes that people learn and acquire new behaviors by observing others. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that if they act in specific ways they can achieve certain goals.

Fu's research tests the assumption that in foodstagramming, food experiential value

whether they found posting fun. Behavioral intention was probed by asking such things as whether participants would recommend the food experience to others.

Demographic data showed that the tourists and residents in the survey shared a similar profile. Around half identified as male, and the majority of respondents were aged between 30 and 59. In addition, around half had a bachelor's degree, and annual income was widely spread between less than $15,000 and more than $104,000 a year.

The responses were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling—a statistical technique which examines the inter-relationships between observed and latent variables.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The results show that in foodstagramming, the extrinsic and intrinsic value of the food, together with an individual's feeling of self-efficacy,

The research adds to the social media literature by taking a detailed look at the psychology behind foodstagramming as a strategic self-presentation behavior.

positively influence strategic self-presentation for both resident and tourist diners. In addition, extrinsic value has a positive effect on self-efficacy for residents, and intrinsic value has a positive effect on self-efficacy for both residents and tourists. Perceived enjoyment and behavioral intention were found to be positively influenced by strategic self-presentation for both resident and tourist diners.

Fu argues that the results support the view that how people feel about themselves can be positively affected and enriched by life experiences, including how they experience food and portray themselves when foodstagramming. This is helped by self-efficacy belief and food experiential value. The fact that self-efficacy was positively influenced by food's extrinsic value for residents but not

FOODSTAGRAMMING OPENS DOORS FOR RESTAURANTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A BROADER MARKETING NETWORK ACROSS CONSUMERS' SOCIAL MEDIA SITES.

for tourists might be because tourist diners expect tourist food experiences to be different and exciting.

According to Fu, the study also highlights the importance of strategic self-presentation, not least that it influences diners' perceived enjoyment and behavioral intention. Although the results suggest that behavioral intention is not influenced by perceived enjoyment, this may be because foodstagramming is primarily a self-presentational behavior. Furthermore, a successful self-presentational posting may still

amount to a recommendation, even if that was not the photographer's original intention.

Last but not least, the research demonstrates the role of self-efficacy in successful foodstagramming. Diners who are confident in their ability to post positive self-images recognize the value of food experiences as a resource they can use to create a positive impression of themselves online.

FEAST YOUR EYES
Fu's study has both theoretical implications for the hospitality and tourism literature and practical implications for the hospitality and tourism industry.

The research adds to the social media literature by taking a detailed look at the psychology

behind foodstagramming as a strategic self-presentation behavior. Specifically, it shows how diners use photographs of food to portray themselves in a certain manner and promote themselves favorably online.

The study adds to the impression management literature by highlighting the importance of food experiential value and diners' feelings of self-efficacy, including how they are linked to strategic self-presentation. In addition, it identifies the behavioral outcomes of foodstagramming, including that people who

post food images online help to promote food businesses.

As a result, this research also offers practical insights for restaurants, particularly in relation to marketing. For example, it highlights the importance and value of the whole food experience. Fu suggests that restaurants should showcase food styles and local cuisines and consider providing distinctive settings and seating areas with foodstagramming appeal, as well as food that not only tastes good and has a strong story, but also looks good.

As well as inviting diners to post images online, managers could help boost diners' self-efficacy by helping them to improve their postings, for example, offering workshops on culinary skills and food esthetics. The aim should be to help diners create posts that communicate and promote their personal identities, and at the same time woo new customers for their venue.

Foodstagramming has the potential to become a joint marketing tool which brings personal and business branding together and helps restaurants to expand their online communities. The more foodstagrammers enjoy their food experiences and get satisfaction from using food to boost their personal image, the more recommendations restaurants should receive.

Fu's research should prompt restaurants to rethink the value of their dining experience. As the report concludes, 'Foodstagramming permits a multidirectional engagement with existing and potential customers, which opens doors for restaurants to participate in a broader marketing network across consumers' social media sites.'

RESEARCHERS
IN FOCUS

Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu

Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu is an Associate Professor at Rosen College of Hospitality Management, University of Central Florida. Dr. Fu's research expertise is consumptive experience in tourism and hospitality, addressing how destinations and firms improve consumer experience. As an award-winning scholar, Dr. Fu has published many articles in top-tier journals.

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study set out to investigate diners' self-presentation mechanism as manifested in foodstagramming.

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PERSONAL RESPONSE

The research gives a fascinating insight into a global trend, but not all postings about food are favorable. What does your research tell us about how restaurants should deal with the negative side of postings in which they are included?

❚❚ Our research underscores the importance of addressing negative postings about restaurants in today's social media and foodstagramming landscape. To effectively manage such situations, restaurants should adopt a proactive and customer-centric approach. Based on our findings, two key strategies emerge as vital. The first is timely response. Restaurant managers should promptly and professionally acknowledge negative postings. Responding to customer concerns demonstrates the restaurant's commitment to valuing feedback and continuous improvement. The second is quality improvement. Negative feedback should be viewed as an opportunity for enhancing the overall customer experience. Identifying recurring issues and taking steps to address them is crucial. This quality improvement process should involve staff training to ensure consistent and professional handling of negative feedback. In summary, our research suggests that a timely and professional response, coupled with a commitment to quality improvement, are essential for restaurants seeking to manage negative postings effectively in the age of social media and foodstagramming. ❚❚

Your unique study theoretically links food experience to foodstagramming behavior via a self-presentation mechanism. How would you like to see your findings used to generate impact for the industry?

❚❚ Our study's unique theoretical connection between food experience, foodstagramming behavior, and self-presentation provides valuable insights for the food industry. To harness the potential impact of our findings, two important strategies come to the forefront. The first is enhanced customer engagement. Restaurants and food-related businesses can employ our insights to foster more effective customer engagement. By recognizing how food experiences influence self-presentation on social media, they can customize their offerings to boost the visual appeal and shareability of their dishes. The second is tailored marketing strategies. Our research indicates that foodstagramming is often motivated by the desire to project a positive self-image. Restaurants can develop marketing campaigns that align with this aspiration, encouraging patrons to share their experiences on social media platforms. By integrating our research findings into practical strategies, the food industry can adapt to the evolving social media and foodstagramming landscape, ultimately elevating the dining experience and enhancing customer engagement. ❚❚