

MASTER'S THESIS

The cultural politics of foodie criticism in Hong Kong: a case study of foodies on Instagram

Wong, Hei Tung Wilson

Date of Award:
2019

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent URL assigned to the publication

Abstract

This thesis investigates the cultural politics of taste in contemporary food media of Hong Kong through the lens of foodie *stylistics* on *Instagram*. By bearing on the semiotic theory and analysis by Roland Barthes, this research seeks to closely examine the mythmaking of taste in foodie criticism—the food and restaurant review written by foodies on social media platform. The theory will be used to spell out the layered meaning of foodie criticism: a linguistic depiction of food, visual stylistic of writing about taste, tactics of gaining voice of authority by foodie critics and their intention of writing. Considering taste as a cultural and social construct, the present research examines the pivotal role of foodie critics as mythmakers that render and stylize taste on *Instagram*, which mythologizes the intention of writing and complicates how voice of authority can be accumulated and how monopolized power of food media corporate can be further expanded invisibly. Through semiotic analysis, how taste is represented and informed by the mythmaker linguistically, how food trends are set stylistically to attract and affect the audience, as well as how attraction accumulates the voice of authority and engenders problems of self-branding, commercialization and collusion will become apparent. Finally, the findings of this pilot research of Hong Kong foodies will contribute to the understanding of cultural politics of contemporary food criticism media in the social media era.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	vi
Chapter One: Shifting Power in Food Criticism Media.....	1
1.1 Research Background: Writing About Taste in Food Criticism	
Media	1
1.1.1 Taste, Stylistics and Food Critics.....	1
1.1.2 Taste, Social Capital and Food Critics.....	3
1.2 Research Question:	6
1.2.1 Thesis Statement	6
1.2.2 Sub-divided Questions	6
1.3 Literature Review	6
1.3.1 Democratization of food criticism industry	6
1.3.2 Voice of Authority of Foodie Critics	15
1.3.3 Monopolization of Food Criticism on Social Media	19
1.3.4 Conclusion	20
1.4 Research Methodology	20
1.4.1 Chapters Two, Three and Four: Food and Foodie Stylistics	20
1.4.2 Chapter Five: Politics of the Authority of Foodie Critics	22
1.4.3 Chapter Six: Re- Monopolization of Food Criticism Media.....	23
1.5 Research Design	23

1.5.1	Work Schedule	23
1.5.2	Delimitation of Research	23
1.5.3	Significance of Research	24
1.6	Research Background	24
1.6.1	Defining Food Criticism and Food Critics	24
1.6.2	Defining Foodie Critics	27
1.6.3	How Do Foodie Critics Set Food Trends	30
1.6.4	Problem of the Voice of Authority on Social Media: Branding and Self-branding	31
1.6.5	Foodie as Another Site of Media Monopolization	31
Chapter Two: Food Critics and Professional Stylistics.....		33
2.1	Defining Professional Stylistics of Food Critics with Semiotic Theory.....	33
2.2	Four kinds of Food Stylistics Identified in the Food Criticism of Hong Kong.....	40
2.2.1	An Overview of Relationship between Food Criticism and Professional Stylistics.....	43
2.2.2	Authentic Stylistics in Early Stage of Food Criticism Development.....	46
2.2.3	Personal Stylistics in Early Stage of Food Criticism Development.....	49
2.2.4	Fantasy Stylistics in Contemporary Food Criticism Industry.....	55
2.2.5	Hip Stylistics in Contemporary Food Criticism Industry.....	59
2.2.6	The System of Professional Stylistics Before the Rise of Foodie Criticism.....	65
Chapter Three: Food Media Ecology in Social Media Era.....		67
3.1	Introduction: Changing Landscape in Food Criticism Media.....	67

3.2	Democratization in Food Criticism Media.....	68
3.3	Visual Trend in Foodie Criticism.....	74
3.4	<i>Instagram</i> : An Affective Platform of Becoming a Foodie.....	76
3.4.1	Habitualization of Mobile Reception of images with Affective Design.....	78
3.4.1.1	Grid View Design on <i>Instagram</i>	81
3.4.1.2	Scrolling View Design on <i>Instagram</i>	84
3.4.2	The Mechanism of Filters In Creating Affection.....	88
3.4.3	Editing Tools and Food Styling	93
3.5	Other Visual Editing Apps Employed by Foodie Critics.....	95
3.6	Short Conclusion on the Visual Trend in Contemporary Food Media.....	104
	Chapter Four: Foodie Critics and Foodie Stylistics.....	105
4.1	Fashion of Food: Developing Personal Style	105
4.2	Authentic Stylistics: Foodie Jackie	109
4.3	Fantasy Stylistics: Foodie SSML	115
4.4	Hip Stylistics: Foodie Sharon Yip	121
4.5	Personal Stylistics: Foodie Jessicaws	128
4.6	Conclusion: The System of Foodie Stylistics on <i>Instagram</i>	137
	Chapter Five: Cultural Politics of Foodie Professionalism.....	139
5.1	Voice of Authority in Foodie Criticism	139
5.2	Voice of Authority and Power of Trend Setting: Professional and Institutional Endorsement	140
5.3	Branding Practice by Professional Food Critic	142
5.4	Foodie Critic as Citizen Journalist: Establishment of New Authority	146
5.5	Sophonria Cai: Self-employed PR and Foodie Critic	151
5.5.1	Voice of Authority from the Public: Peer Support and Seemingly	

Ordinariness	155
5.5.2 Voice of Authority from The Institution: Celebrity and Event.....	161
5.5.3 Voice of Authority from The Semi-Institution: Foodie as an Institution	167
5.6 Conclusion: Recentralization of Power by Foodie Critics.....	172
Chapter Six: Re-Monopolization of Food Criticism Media.....	175
6.1 Monopolizing Power of Traditional Media	175
6.2 Media Landscape Before the Rise of Social Media	175
6.3 Media Monopolization in Social Media Era	185
6.4 Limits and Future of Food Criticism Media	190
6.5 Concluding Remarks	195
Bibliography	197
Appendix: Questions Investigated in The Ethnographic Interview with Foodies	202
Curriculum Vitae	205