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Exploring adolescents' motives for food media consumption using the theory of uses and gratifications

<https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2019-0164>

Abstract: Food media have become a formidable part of adolescents' food environments. This study sought to explore how and why adolescents use food media by focusing on selectivity and motives for consumption. We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 31 Flemish adolescents aged 12 to 16. Food media were both incidentally consumed and selectively sought for education, social utility, and entertainment. The levels of selectivity and motives for consumption varied among the different food media platforms. Incidental consumption was more prevalent with TV cooking shows compared to online food media. The dominant motives for TV cooking show consumption were companionship and entertainment, while online food media were used for a more diverse range of motives dominated by information/inspiration and social interaction. Some participants consumed food media to get motivation and inspiration to improve health and fitness (Fitspiration) while others consumed food media to watch appetizing and aesthetically pleasing food content (Food porn). The social environment in the form of friends and family as well as existing food preferences were dominant psychosocial factors for both traditional and online food media use. Future research is warranted to explore how incidental exposure and the identified motives for use relate to food media effects.

Keywords: Food media, adolescents, selectivity, uses, motives, TV cooking shows

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1 Introduction

Media play a significant role in adolescents' lives: This age group engages with multiple media platforms for various purposes such as information seeking, entertainment, communication, self-disclosure, and identity exploration (Crone and Konijn, 2018; Uhls, Ellison, and Subrahmanyam, 2017). These functions are critical for healthy development and adjustment as individuals transition to independence (Uhls et al., 2017). Adolescence is also a transitional period for the development of independence in food choices; during this period, social influencers of diets such as peers and the media become more important (Pearson, Griffiths, Biddle, Johnston, and Haycraft, 2017; Story, Neumark-Sztainer, and French, 2002). Given the increase in food content across various media platforms (Spence, Okajima, Cheok, Petit, and Michel, 2016) and the high-level of engagement of adolescents with these platforms (Twenge, Martin, and Spitzberg, 2019), understanding the uses of media in the context of food and adolescents is timely. This study seeks to explore food media use among adolescents. The food media explored in this study entail traditional food media in the form of TV cooking shows and new media in the form of YouTube cooking channels, social media culinary videos, social media food posts and online recipes.

TV cooking

TV cooking shows have grown in popularity to take on more formats and attract wider audiences (Adema, 2000; de Solier, 2005; Oren, 2013). Consequently, TV cooking shows occupy more prime-time slots than before, and there are now channels that are dedicated to broadcasting cooking programs and TV cooking shows that target specific age groups like children and adolescents (Adema, 2000; de Solier, 2005; Oren, 2013). The growth and diversification of TV cooking shows has seen a shift in focus from classical instructional TV cooking shows to more entertainment oriented programs in the form of, for example, travel, drama, and reality TV cooking shows (Collins, 2009; de Solier, 2005; Oren, 2013). In addition, TV cooking show content converges with online food content, as TV cooking show hosts such as Gordon Ramsey and Jamie Oliver have online YouTube channels, blogs, and social media pages (Lofgren, 2013). This implies that even people that do not necessarily watch TV cooking shows may encounter the content online (Rousseau, 2013).

Online food media

Similarly, internet food platforms have grown in numbers, resulting in a network of sites where online food communities can socialize over food, and share, post, or repost food content (Rousseau, 2013). Today, online food content comes in multiple formats such as food blogs, YouTube cooking channels, short-form culinary recipes, online recipes, and social-media posts. In addition, online platforms have become a tool for former traditional content to crossover to new media, for instance, TV chefs creating YouTube channels and social networking pages (Lofgren, 2013). Internet platforms themselves are interconnected; content-based media such as BuzzFeed's *Tasty* short-form culinary videos can be found on social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. The convergence is an indication that in the case of food media, new media may not necessarily be replacing traditional media (Rousseau, 2012).

Despite this popularity, there is paucity of research on the uses of food media, especially among adolescents. Studies on adults' perceptions of TV cooking shows indicate that TV chefs are perceived to be more entertainment figures than sources of information (Caraher, Lange, and Dixon, 2000; Villani, Egan, Keogh, and Clifton, 2015). Some scholars argue that TV cooking shows are sources of vicarious experience with food and aesthetics of food, and that whatever elements of education they possess are limited to cultural education rather than cooking skills or nutrition (Caraher et al., 2000; Villani et al., 2015). In a study with preadolescents, education, entertainment, and vicarious participation were cited as motives for consuming food media (Goodchild, 2012).

With regards to online food media, focus group discussions on the use of social media by young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 revealed that social media provided access to a variety of recipes. They therefore expanded their food choices and gave them a platform to showcase what they ate or prepared (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche, and Young, 2015). Furthermore, audio-visual food media such as YouTube and television are a preferred method of learning to cook by young audiences (Worsley, Wang, Ismail, and Ridley, 2014). Some studies have explored the consumption of new media as visual hunger and food porn, meaning the desire to look at food (McBride, 2010; Spence et al., 2016), while another study found that posting food images on Instagram is one of the ways through which adolescents express themselves (Holmberg, Chaplin, Hillman, and Berg, 2016).

The above overview of TV cooking shows and online food media indicates that food media are diverse and may be used differently depending on the platforms, for example, TV cooking shows versus online food media. Bearing that in mind, this study explores food media consumption of both traditional (TV cooking shows) and new media (online food media). We explore food media use from two

perspectives, a structural perspective and a selective viewing perspective (Ruggiero, 2000; Van den Bulck, 1995). The structural perspective posits that media are consumed because of various structural determinants such as availability or channel preference, while the selective perspective posits that individuals carefully select the media which they consume to fulfill certain motives (Ruggiero, 2000; Van den Bulck, 1995). These approaches are both necessary because while today's media environment enables audiences to create, share, and view content (Hanson and Haridakis, 2008), the large volume and convergence of content are conducive for structural viewing (Nee and Dozier, 2017).

Structural media use

From a structural perspective, media consumption is not always actively sought to fulfill needs but may be incidental (Van den Bulck, 1995). Earlier research on structural viewing proposed structural determinants of incidental viewing in the context of choosing between television programs and channels (Van den Bulck, 1995; Webster and Wakshlag, 1983). From this perspective, audiences watch a program because it is available or because the program is broadcast on their channel of preference but do not do so necessarily to fulfill certain gratifications (Van den Bulck, 1995; Webster and Wakshlag, 1983). In today's plural media environment, audiences are confronted with even wider choices of platforms that are used simultaneously and concurrently (Nee and Dozier, 2017). Within these platforms, media content converges between traditional and online media and across online platforms such as YouTube and social networking sites. In addition, in digital media there are multiple curators of information including professionals, strategic communicators, individual users, social contacts, and algorithm filters (Thorson and Wells, 2015). While audiences have a wider choice of options between the platforms, they do not always have control of what the curators share, and this has implications for selectivity (Thorson and Wells, 2015). Research on news media has shown that the use of social networks, reliance on online media, and complementary, simultaneous media use are associated with incidental exposure and incidental learning (Goyanes 2020; Nee and Dozier, 2017). Our study seeks to explore incidental consumption in the context of food media.

Selective media use

In contrast, selective media use stems from the selectivity paradigm, which posits that audiences choose media based on needs and desires moderated by various psychological and social factors (Valkenburg, Peter, and Walther, 2016). The most prominent perspectives of selective media use are uses and gratifications (U&G) (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, 1973; Rosengren, Wenner, and Palmgreen, 1985; Rubin, 1981) and selective exposure theories (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Zillman, 2000). The uses and gratifications approach is based on the premise that audiences are active and rational in selecting media (Rosengren, Wenner, and Palmgreen, 1985; Rubin, 2009), while selective exposure theory assumes that media users are not always aware of the motivational processes driving their motives for media selection (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Zillman, 2000). Given that food media take the format of new media, these audience-centered approaches can explain why adolescents use food media.

Our study approaches selective consumption of food media from a uses and gratifications perspective (Katz et al., 1973; Rosengren, Wenner, and Palmgreen, 1985; Rubin, 1981). With new media audiences being more active in producing, disseminating, and consuming content, this necessitates an audience-centered approach (Hanson and Haridakis, 2008). Existing research on the use of television (McQuail, Blumler, and Brown, 1972), the internet (Stafford, Stafford, and Schkade, 2004) and social networking sites (Joinson, 2008; Quan-Haase and Young, 2010; Sundar and Limperos, 2013) has shown that audience motivations explain media use. In addition, applications of the uses and gratifications approach in the context of adolescents' media use have also shown that motives predict engagement with social networking sites (Phua, Jin, and Kim, 2017), reality television (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2007), and YouTube (Wang, 2014). We seek to explore whether motives explain food media consumption among adolescents.

2 Methodology

Given that this research explores food media consumption from the adolescents' perspectives using existing theories on media selectivity and uses and gratifications, a phenomenology approach was used. Purposive snowball sampling was used to recruit any participants within the specified age range that were media consumers and willing to participate. The sample consisted of 31 middle-school adolescents (14 male, 17 female) between the ages of 12 and 16. All participants were of Belgian nationality.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow participants to freely express themselves while we were probing and guiding the interview to cover a wide array of the food media we sought to explore. The first part of the interview guide was introductory to build a rapport with the participants and consisted of information about their lives, hobbies, and interest in food. The second part was to introduce the topic, and the participants were asked how they would define food media, which media exposed them to food, and how they perceived the influence of this exposure. Lastly, the participants were asked about the different ways they used food media. The interview guide was based on the classical uses and gratifications for television (Rubin, 1981) and internet use (Stafford et al., 2004) such as using media to be informed or for education, for entertainment, to enhance social interaction, or to escape from reality.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In order to protect the participants' anonymity, the names of the respondents were removed from the transcripts and were replaced by a code. Two researchers read the interviews before the analysis started. One of them conducted the analysis, which was reviewed by the second researcher. Codes were formed while reading and analyzing and were assigned to participants' answers. Afterwards, all answers assigned to a certain code were reviewed. Codes that covered different topics were split into more specific codes; overlapping codes were merged into one overarching code. The codes were structured according to thematic categories. All quotes provided below are translated from Dutch.

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the institutional ethics committee. Assent and informed consent were sought from all participants and their parents. Participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn without any consequences.

3 Results and discussion

The findings of this study are divided into two parts. In the first part, we present our sample characteristics with regards to interests in food, general food media use, and perceptions of food media. In the second part, we present the findings of the study.

Sample characteristics

Interest in food. Interest in food varied with gender. Of the 17 participants who reported that they were interested in food and cooking, 12 were girls. Interest in food was often mentioned in the context of family and healthy eating behaviors. These findings show that although adolescents may be becoming more autonomous in food choice, social norms and parental influence still play a role (Higgs and Thomas, 2016; Pearson et al., 2017).

I'm interested in food just because my parents also eat healthy food, I am now also eating like that. (Girl, 12)

No, not so much. (...) If I go eat at home then what I fry is an egg or something. Or if mama is not at home then I will prepare pasta. (Boy, 14)

Oh yes, I see sometimes something in the store and I cook it with my mom, or she cooks it. (Girl, 13)

There was more interest in making desserts and sweet foods, congruent with the literature on adolescents' preference for sweet foods (dos Santos et al., 2019; Johnston and Foreyt, 2014). These were also the foods they searched for on online platforms.

Uh yes, I'm pretty much busy with it. (...) Yes, I also like to cook, and I do like that. (...) Yes, I do that a lot. (...) If I see that somewhere or something and that looks nice then I like to copy that. (Girl, 13)

I like to bake. (...) Cookies, cake ... and cupcakes! (Girl, 12)

General media use TV cooking shows. Most of the participants reported that they do come across food through media, most citing advertisements through television, TV cooking shows, YouTube, Snapchat, and Instagram. Eighteen participants (55 %) reported that they encountered food content through TV cooking shows. Of those only five (three boys and two girls) reported actively seek TV cooking shows. This is in line with assertions made by Twenge et al. (2019) on the general decline in television use among this age group.

Yes, I think that advertising or cooking programs are coming up on most channels. (Boy, 16)

I like Come Dine with me, My Pop-Up Restaurant and sometimes also MasterChef. (...) Because I ... I think it's pretty interesting how they make it. Uh ... sometimes I make something to eat healthy myself. (Boy, 13)

The rest of the participants were incidentally exposed to TV cooking shows when other people, mostly family members, were watching.

I just watch what's on (television) ... (...) If that comes then I'll see what they make. (Boy, 14)

There is one I watch, I think Cake Boss. But sometimes, when I'm with mama and programs about food show then I watch it, but she doesn't do that so often, so I don't actually do that so often. (Girl, 13)

General media use online platforms. All but two participants were engaged with digital media. Twenty-eight participants used multiple digital platforms concurrently. A majority of our participants used Facebook and YouTube, 27 and 24, respectively. This supports the notion that adolescents are more highly engaged with digital media than they are with television (Twenge et al., 2019).

I sometimes look on YouTube for how you make something. (Boy, 14)

And then you can watch how it should be made instead of just reading a book how it should be made, because then it is not made in front of you. Then it is actually easier. (Girl, 15)

Yes, that usually just comes up with suggested messages (on Facebook) and then good food, but then I will never click on it. (Boy, 16)

In general, the participants consumed and participated more than they themselves created content on food media platforms. Food content was only shared in the context of social situations, for example, coffee with friends or food that was eaten at a party. This is in line with observations made by Holmberg et al. (2016) that adolescents' Instagram posts were lifestyle-oriented.

If I share something it should be a very special video, but in general not really, no. (Boy, 14)

Perceptions of food media. The respondents in this study perceived food media as influential in the way they eat and cook. They reported that food content can generate an immediate desire to eat or cook something similar, participants who mentioned this type of influence often associated this with sweet foods and advertising.

I think that if you watch often you will be likely to also cook those things. (Girl, 12)

Also with commercials and such. Uhm, especially on TV. If there are cakes or waffles or something like that ... (Boy, 13)

Because you look at that and then if you find it interesting and you want to try it yourself, you also make it. So I think so. (Boy, 13)

These perceptions are similar to those of young adults, who perceived social media food content as a source of inspiration to making healthy food choices as well as being a distraction (Vaterlaus et al., 2015).

Selectivity and motives for food media use

We found that food media use is characterized by both structural and selective viewing. Below we discuss the levels of selectivity and the motives concurrently. We grouped the motives into three categories that are not mutually exclusive, namely, educational, social utility and entertainment. The education motives encompass all uses of food media related to information or inspiration while social utility and entertainment motives refer to using food media to form or maintain (para-)social relationships and for entertainment, respectively.

Education motives

Food media were consumed for educational purposes such as information and inspiration. These gratifications stem from earlier studies on television (Rubin, 1981), internet (Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000; Stafford et al., 2004), and social media use (Joinson, 2008; Sundar and Limperos, 2013).

Information/inspiration. Twenty-two participants reported that they use online food media for information (referring to using food media to learn how to make a dish or recipe) and inspiration (referring to using food media to obtain ideas on what to cook). There were differences in the way different online platforms were used for information and inspiration: Information on how to make certain foods was predominantly sought from Google or YouTube, while inspiration on what to make was sought from social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest. The use of social media as source of inspiration is congruent with the findings of Vaterlaus et al. (2015), who found that young adults perceive food on social media to be a source of inspiration.

I sometimes search on YouTube how to make something. (Boy, 14)

Yes, or you look something up to make and then you end up on YouTube anyway. (...) So, looking up but you end up on YouTube so you can also look it up on YouTube itself actually. (Girl, 13)

Another aspect of information/inspiration was related to “fitspiration”. Fitspiration refers to the practice of sharing exercise and healthy food posts in order to inspire followers (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2016). The participants in our study associated food media with “diets” and “healthy lifestyles”. This was mainly with Instagram and reflects the current fitspiration trend on Instagram (Tiggemann and Zaccardo, 2016). Moreover, these findings are congruent with a recent study that food influencers were found to influence the food choices of their followers (Byrne, Kearney, and McEvilly, 2017).

I’m very involved with Instagram (...). Ehm, yes, because it interests me the most, it’s something that is constantly around me and really is about ‘food, food, food’, and not only on Instagram, but I think very much about it like ‘OK, what I am about to eat now, am I doing good or bad’, so I follow this too because it interests me and also because I can learn how to eat well, because I think that Instagram is something I can learn very much from. (Girl, 16)

Then you see someone else making healthy food and then you go make it yourself, consciously or unconsciously, as well. (Boy, 14)

Television was not mentioned for information/inspiration seeking; however, some participants encountered recipes from TV chefs while searching for recipes online. This is in contrast to a study by Worsley et al. (2014) that found both TV cooking shows and YouTube videos to be sources of cooking information. However, that study was on adults, who may have different preferences for learning how to cook. The online presence of recipes from TV chefs supports the notion of convergence of food media (Lofgren, 2013) and implies that even though the participants may not necessarily watch TV cooking shows, they can come across the content online. Similar observations have been made with exposure to digital media use and incidental learning in the context of news media (Goyanes, 2020; Nee and Dozier, 2017).

A few participants noted that TV cooking shows were more difficult to follow and therefore more for adults than food content on social media. This shows that the dominance of the internet as the main information source of information also extends to food and recipe information (Stafford et al., 2004). Moreover, the ease of the experience of searching food information online was a deciding factor on whether TV cooking shows or YouTube were used to obtain this gratification, as conceptualized by Stafford et al. (2004) in process gratifications for internet use. Furthermore, the convergence of TV cooking shows and internet platforms blurs the lines between TV cooking shows and online platforms.

For me, TV is more for adults because these are more complex dishes than Facebook, for example, showing movies of 2 minutes how to fix it and such. (...) On TV it is longer. (Boy, 14)

TV is for me somewhat dying because, ehm, I think that only people above 30 watch TV and I think that those under 30 watch more Instagram and YouTube and such, as you can choose what you are watching. On TV you cannot really follow except what they are broadcasting, while on YouTube you can say “I want to watch this” and you click on it and you are watching it. (Boy, 12)

Social utility motives

The social utility gratifications obtained from this study were social interaction, popularity of the show, companionship, and popular personalities. The use of media to form and maintain social relationships was operationalized in earlier studies on the use of television (Rubin, 1981), and have also transcended to other media platforms such as the internet (Stafford et al., 2004; Sundar and Limperos, 2013).

Social interaction. Social interaction through food media was coincidental and more prominent on online food media than on TV cooking shows. Sixteen participants reported that they either forward interesting food content which they come across to friends and family or that they get tagged by friends and family, especially their mothers.

No ... or maybe sometimes ... my mom tags me sometimes. (Girl, 15)

Yes, sometimes through my mom. For example, if she makes something and then says who it comes from and if it is tasty then I go follow this person. (Girl, 13)

When I want to make something, I share it with my family until I'm there. Then we can make it. (Boy, 14)

The food content curation by both the participants and the people in their social networks is congruent with assertions made by Thorson and Wells (2015) on the multiple curators of content of digital media. This has implications for selectivity, as participants do not always have control of which content is shared by the people they follow. The use of digital media to share recipes between mothers and children appears to follow the matrilineal patterns of recipe sharing (De Backer, 2013) and the association of food preparation with mothers.

Similar to the educational motives, there were differences in how online food media was used for social interaction compared to how TV cooking shows were used. With family, the sharing served as inspiration for something to make later, while among friends, the participants shared images of foods they had made or had eaten as part of their daily activities, such as a coffee they had with a friend or

a meal they had at a restaurant. A study that analyzed images shared by adolescents on Instagram showed similar patterns, the food either reflecting aesthetics or lifestyle (Holmberg et al., 2016).

Among friends it's often things like DIY or Tasty, because these are circulating on the internet and such and sometimes, we're like 'hey, did you watch this and that too?' and then we talk about it and that's quite funny. (Boy, 14)

Popularity of the program. The consumption of food media due to the popularity of the programs was selectively sought, and predominantly observed in relation to TV cooking shows. Some participants consumed certain TV cooking shows because they were popular among peers. Popularity stemmed from the social environment. This highlights the role of peer influence in media consumption in this age group (Beyens, Vandenbosch, Bekalu, and Eggermont, 2016).

I do not watch it myself, but they explained to me that there are famous people who come dine and yes, it seemed interesting to me, so maybe I will watch the next season. (Girl, 13)

Tasty because many people talk about it. (...) And then yes if people say something about ah that looks tasty or something like that and you should follow it too, yes then I look at it if it interests me, yeah, other people play a role in this too. (Boy, 16)

While popular cooking shows were watched on TV, the participants used YouTube to catch up with TV cooking show episodes they had missed. This again highlights the convergence of food media and the complementary use of various media that has been also observed with news media (Goyanes, 2020; Nee and Dozier, 2017).

If I miss an episode that everyone is talking about, then I'll look it up too. Via, yes, Facebook or quickly look on YouTube to see if there is anything about it or something. (Boy, 14)

There were differences between how the different TV cooking show genres were used. Entertainment TV cooking shows were watched more for popularity compared to instructional TV cooking shows. The difference between the use of entertainment and instructional TV cooking shows supports the notion that TV cooking shows have diversified (Adema, 2000; de Solier, 2005) and are in line with a distinction made by De Backer and Hudders (2015).

Companionship. YouTube and TV cooking shows emerged as platforms that were consumed for companionship. Only three participants specifically mentioned using YouTube for companionship, and this was primarily with friends, while 16 participants reported that they watched TV cooking shows to be in the company of family. Half of the participants that watch TV cooking shows only watched because their families, mostly mothers, were watching. This is congru-

ent with the findings of a study on positive media use, in which media were used positively for interpersonal and family needs (Coyne, Padilla-Walker, Fraser, Fellows, and Day, 2014). There were format differences in the use of TV cooking shows for companionship: The participants consumed instructional TV cooking shows only in the company of others, while entertainment TV cooking shows were also watched when the adolescents were alone.

Usually that is quite coincidental or because my mother likes to watch such programs sometimes. (Girl, 14)

No, but if our mum and dad see it, then watching is okay but I would never put that up myself. (Boy, 16)

Popular personalities. Eleven participants mentioned popular personalities in the context of food media. The popular personalities were celebrity chefs from TV cooking shows and YouTube personalities from online media. With regards to TV cooking shows, celebrity chefs from popular instructional TV cooking shows were cited more as a motive for food media consumption than participants from entertainment programs. Participants often knew TV cooking shows by the name of the celebrity chef rather than the name of the show. This again confirms the notion that TV chefs draw audiences to the shows (Hansen, 2008). The influencers identified in this study originated more from the instructional TV cooking shows compared to entertainment TV cooking shows. Consumption of TV cooking shows for popular personalities was more selectively sought than coincidental.

Hmm ... Yes, (mentions local instructional TV cooking show host) because he makes daily food and more different kinds, like a waffle in between. (Boy, 14)

Yes, Yolanda Gump, for the rest Gordon Ramsey. (Girl, 15)

With regards to online food media, the participants consumed content from popular personalities in two ways. First, they reported they followed people that do not necessarily always produce food media content but who may on occasion post about food (e. g., a pop star who posts on social media about healthy foods may influence his or her followers to eat more healthily as well). In this case, food content was encountered incidentally as the personalities were not initially followed for food content. This has implications for selectivity as the audiences do not always have control over the content posted by the people they follow (Thorson and Wells, 2015). Second, participants also follow people that are actual food-content producers such as influencers promoting certain diets, YouTube cooking channel hosts, and celebrity chefs. In this case, the influencers are actively sought and are the main reason for consuming the media.

Dove Cameron and Sofia Carson (...) ‘Yes, if they go eating in a restaurant then they put a picture on their stories. (Girl, 13)

I always watch a YouTuber, a famous person from the (...) Dylan Haegens. (...) He always makes top tens of things, from everything that exists. And then he has 3 times top ten breakfasts, eh, top ten lunches or just dinner and top ten desserts. And from this I took some five things and made them as well. (Boy, 14)

Entertainment motives

Compared to education and social utility motives, fewer participants mentioned food media as a source of entertainment. The entertainment motives that emerged were food porn, laughter, voyeurism, passing time, and escapism.

Food porn. Some participants reported watching snippets of food on Instagram because it is “beautiful to watch”. Food porn was only mentioned in relation to Instagram images and was selectively sought. This is not surprising considering the fact that food images are often portrayed in unrealistic aesthetically pleasing ways in both social media (Bevelander, Anschütz, Creemers, Kleinjan, and Engels, 2013). Moreover, watching such images may result in “digital satiety”, referring to the pleasure obtained by consuming food media content (Spence et al., 2016).

Sometimes there is such an account, I don’t know if you say it that way. And then with multiple foods. Just because it looks tasty or beautiful, for example, I follow it sometimes. (Girl, 15)

What I always like to see are desserts and pies. (Boy, 16)

Laughter. Food media consumption for laughter was only mentioned in the context of TV cooking shows. Programs such as *Masterchef* and *Come Dine with Me* responded to comedic needs of the participants. This is consistent with assertions made by Harbidge (2013) on how *Come Dine with Me* capitalizes on the comedic elements such as the narrator’s voice (Harbidge, 2013). These shows were both actively sought and incidentally encountered.

Yes, Gordon Ramsey too (...) Yes, and further on, ehm, yes, that’s it actually from things that I know, because he always gets mad and it’s funny to watch. (Boy, 14)

Come Dine with Me has something like, such a weird ... Yes, I think that it doesn’t fit with the other cooking programs, because it is something else and I watch it just because I think it is funny. (Girl, 16)

Voyeurism. Food media also seem to gratify voyeuristic needs. Although not as dominant as other gratifications, voyeurism emerged as one of the reasons participants liked the TV cooking show *Come Dine with Me*. This was attributed to the fact that this TV cooking show is about more than food but also offers a sneak peek into participants' homes and lives.

I have watched *Come Dine with Me* before. I think it is better than those cooking programs because more happens and it's not only focused on ... yes, it is focused on food, but you see more from their houses and the people and stuff. (Girl, 15)

Pass-time and escapism. The participants in this study did not consume food media to pass time or to escape but incidentally encountered food media while seeking to pass time or to escape by watching television or using the internet. The participants watched TV because they were bored and would come across TV cooking shows while channel hopping. Similarly, the participants reported using social networks to pass time and to escape and encountered food content while browsing. Thus, the use of food media to escape was more structurally determined.

Ehm, I think that to escape ... I go on Facebook, and if something passes by of food, I'd watch it. (Boy, 12)

4 Conclusion and implications

This study sought to explore how and why adolescents consume food media from structural and selective media use perspectives. Our general observations showed that the preferred choice of food content reflected an existing preference for sweet foods, family attitudes towards (un)healthy food, and family food media consumption patterns. This is congruent with the position that motives for media consumption are also moderated psychological, social, and dispositional factors (Valkenburg et al., 2016).

The overall media use of the participants reflects the patterns observed in other media, such as a shift from television to online platforms, convergence of content between traditional and new media, and multiple concurrent use of different media platforms (Goyanes, 2020; Nee and Dozier, 2017). From research on news media, these are known to increase the chances of incidental exposure (Goyanes, 2020; Nee and Dozier, 2017); it is therefore not surprising that incidental consumption is more prevalent than selective food media use. Furthermore, the levels of selectivity varied between traditional and online food media, and

incidental viewing was more prevalent on TV cooking shows than online platforms. This could be explained by the fact that online media audiences have more control over what they choose to watch than television audiences (Goyanes, 2020; Nee and Dozier, 2017).

Similarly, the motives for food media use also varied between traditional food media and online food media. With regards to traditional food media, TV cooking shows were primarily used for social motives such as companionship and entertainment, while online food media were used for a more diverse range of motives dominated by information/inspiration and social interaction. In addition, for both traditional and online media, there were differences in motives within the genre types. Instructional TV cooking shows were more prevalent for companionship, while online food media were more prevalent for entertainment motives. With regards to online food media, education motives were more prevalent for YouTube, while social utility motives were more prevalent for social networking sites.

The motives identified in this research have implications for research on the positive use of media, especially in the context of using media to enhance social interaction and family connections, particularly during adolescence (Coyne et al., 2014). The genre differences in motives are also important for targeted interventions that seek to use food media to endorse healthy eating behaviors. However, the predominant use of online media as a source of information or inspiration, the preference for watching sweet foods, and the association of food media and health warrants concern given that food media are known to predominantly portray restrictive eating behaviors (Turner and Lefevre, 2017) and unhealthy food (Howard, Adams, and White, 2012; Jones, Freeth, Hennessy-Priest, and Costa, 2012; Ngqangashe, De Backer, Matthys, and Hermans, 2018; Schneider, McGovern, Lynch and Brown, 2013).

Implications for theory and further research

The incidental consumption of food media has implications for both media use and media effects research. First, while the uses and gratifications approach captures the motives for food media, complementary theories such as selective exposure and mood management theories (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Zillman, 2000) are necessary to get a full understanding of food media use among adolescents. In this case, the participants' food media consumption would be measured with interviews and participant observation (Valkenburg et al., 2016). Second, the reinforcing spirals model posits that selectivity and effects are mutually influencing, meaning that the effects of food media on attitudes or behavior may in turn

affect selectivity and continued engagement with content (Slater, 2007). From this perspective, the effect of food media may influence further engagement with food media. Thus, future research on the use of food media should determine the effects of consumption on adolescents in order to predict the continued use.

Limitations

This paper was subject to a few limitations. First, given the size of our sample and the study design, we were not able to make strong associations between age, gender, and socioeconomic status. Notwithstanding this limitation, the motives identified in this study are a good foundation for creating objective measures that can be used to infer associations between these variables and motives for consumption. Second, the self-reported motives for consumption of media do not capture consumption that is induced by emotional and social factors that do not stem from rational motives. Future research should include both observations of food media consumption and self-reported motives.

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