



#FoodPorn

Karen Fewell examines why people are so keen to share their food images online

I love the shock and smiles I see on people's faces when I tell them that people upload photos to social networks with the hashtag #FoodPorn. For some, the #FoodPorn behaviour may seem strange, for others, they consider it normal. Every 30 days you can expect to see just under 200,000 tweets that contain the hashtag #FoodPorn. It isn't something that is only done on

Twitter, take a look at Instagram, which has over 19m #FoodPorn images. You will find food images across all the social networks.



At the start of the year I looked back at my most viewed piece of online content from 2013. It was in fact my research into why people share images of food on social networks. This has now had over 10,000 views on Slideshare and I'm regularly contacted for interviews and discussion on the topic as a direct result of the presentation. You can see the full report here at www.slideshare.net/karenfewell. I undertook the #FoodPorn research with web psychologist Nathalie Nahai. She looks at the ways in which online environments affect people's behaviour and together we have begun to examine why people share food and what impact this has on society.

When we asked people why they shared food images online they told us they did it because:

1. They are proud of what they have made
2. They want to share an event, moment or special occasion
3. They see the food as a piece of art

It happens more than you might think.

- » **65%** of respondents upload an image of their food while still sat at the table. 46% do this before they even take a bite.
- » **96%** of respondents think it is socially acceptable to share images of food.

NATHALIE'S THOUGHTS ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Why do you think we share food that we have eaten out?

Photography is one of the oldest visual media, and has historically been used to document aesthetics (scenes of beauty), people and events. When you combine food, central to our survival, and art, which fulfils our more aesthetic needs, it becomes a very seductive mix and one which lends itself naturally to being desired, photographed and shared.

We have seen people share images of every day food like sandwiches and salads, but what motivates people to do this?

I think that this kind of food photo sharing is much more social, and is often used to express how healthy we are (and

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by extension, our sexual fitness). If you're eating salad, the motivation behind sharing the photo is likely to be around rewarding yourself for being healthy and seeking the approval of others online ('look how healthy I am'). Sharing images of sandwiches is an interesting one – sandwiches are pretty lowly in the food stakes, however we tend to exalt images of sandwiches either because we've made it ourselves (and are proud of what we've created), or we've ordered a gourmet sandwich and want to share that pleasure.

Why do you think people are happy to share cake photos but not junk food?

I suspect it comes down to the way in which we want to be perceived. The photos we share online say a great deal about who we are as individuals and as a society. Cakes (which require a level of skill to make well) express a certain kind of indulgence and decadence, and sharing images of cakes is more socially acceptable than sharing images of junk food, which

is usually perceived as categorically unhealthy and less desirable.

Do you think photo sharing behaviour is a healthy behaviour to have?

It depends on whether it adds to, or detracts from, your life and the lives of others. If it's disrupting your meal times

is just another way of sharing the social and emotional relationship we have with food.

My Book #FoodPorn

This project was just the start of the research for my book, which I will be writing this year. Like many other people, I am happy to share a food experience via social networks. I'm really lucky that through work events I have been able to eat at some of the best restaurants in the UK. In that sense I have been able to share my experience through social networks. This type of food image sharing is where the book starts. The final chapter is about food poverty and how I have heard that some people in the UK are only finding out about a food bank or help because of Facebook. The book also features topics that fall between the extremes of fine dining and poverty. For example, learning to cook and health and eating disorders. I will be looking at the role of social media around all of these food related topics.

The book is a live piece of research with podcast interviews and findings available online. I'm sure I will be contacting many people who are reading this as part of my research. If you have any thoughts for the book please tweet @DigitalBlonde or email Karen@DigitalBlondeMarketing.com.

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by becoming an obsessive behaviour so that you can't eat without first documenting your food, then no, it's not a healthy behaviour to have. If you're snapping shots in socially inappropriate situations, then again, it's probably not a great behaviour. But generally most of us only share photos of food in certain situations and we're usually sensitive to whether it's appropriate or not, in which case I'd say that this behaviour