

Constructing Deliciousness Through Instagram: The Aesthetics of Foodstagram

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Abstract: In the Middle Ages, food presentations were more important than how the food taste. And in this digital era, since the past few years that kind of concept revert in such an unexpected way—through food sharing on Instagram. The activity of sharing food to Instagram has become a worldwide phenomenon, including in Indonesia. This activity often referred as ‘foodstagram’. The popularity of ‘foodstagram’ cannot be separated from how the food presented, because the main purpose of ‘foodstagram’ were trying to tease and arousing the appetite of anyone who sees it. This study become important in nowadays society. Through the virtual ethnography this study try to understand the aesthetics of ‘foodstagram’ as a cultural artifact by some Indonesia ‘foodstagramer’.

Keywords: Foodstagram, Instagram, Aesthetics

1. Introduction

Sharing food photos or videos to Instagram were known as foodstagram. This activity has become a worldwide phenomenon, including in Indonesia. The popularity of the foodstagram is triggered by the ‘beautification’ of food photos and videos that arouse the appetite of anyone who sees it. In this ‘beautification’, aesthetics play a very important role because its make the foods look more tempting and appetizing on the screen.

In the history of mankind, the presentation of food often to be a symbol of wealthiness. In the Middle Ages, “food presentation was far more important than how the food taste” (Civitello, 2011). Nowadays, that very kind of concept seems to find it’s meaning through foodstagram. Foodstagram was born out of Instagram and probably started from a simple act—just sharing food to your friend or showing off fancy foods so people know that you are rich—and eventually this activity become a global trend.

Instagram is a very easy to use (user-friendly) photo and videos platform and the platform has lots features that make it easier for the users to edit photos more ‘aesthetic’ in minutes. In Indonesia, foodstagram does not only exposed expensive Western culinary but also the exoticism of the Nusantara (Indonesia) culinary delight such as: cendol,

loteh, meatballs, satay, and others—which frequently appreciated by the Netizen of Instagram.

The Nusantara (Indonesia) culinary diversity is one factor that makes foodstagram in Indonesia appear more vibrant. However, not all of the foods mentioned above received lively appreciation from Netizen because foodstagram became something more than just posting food to Instagram. To get the very best appreciation, the uploaded photo or video must appear as tempting and as beautiful as possible. However, not everyone has an aesthetic sensitivity to make photos or videos of their food look more aesthetically tempting and appetizing.

These foodstagramers have different backgrounds. This means not all foodstagramers have a similar aesthetic basis. In the culinary world, someone who makes food look beautiful on the camera is called a food stylist or food photographer—both have a fundamental aesthetic basis so the photos or videos of food presented can tempt and invite those who see it.

Foodstagram and aesthetics are two things that cannot be separated because they are directly related. The relationship marks the position of foodstagram as something that plays a role in the current cultural context (read: digital culture). This study examines how aesthetics play a role in

constructing foodstagram that is widely appreciated by the Netizen of Instagram.

2. Research Method

We used virtual ethnographic as our method, which is a relatively new method in seeing cultural artifacts in the virtual world (Nasrullah, 2018). Virtual ethnography reveals how digital culture is produced, the construction of meanings, relationships and patterns between the symbols, and to how they function through the medium of the Internet.

In the virtual ethnography, there are several levels of analysis such as: (1) 'media space', namely the technical aspects of digital culture, (2) 'media document' relating to 'text' as cultural artifacts, (3) 'media objects' namely interactions between organisms and (4) 'experiential stories' of relations between organisms offline and online (Nasrullah, 2018).

Our research is at the 'media document' level because we examined a variety of foodstagram uploads from two Instagram accounts after we searched and reviewed 10 other Instagram accounts based on their popularity according to www.liputan6.com. In the end, we assumed that these two accounts that we assume as 'the pure foodstagramers'—because these two accounts only use Instagram as their main media.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Food as A Cultural Value in The Digital Age

According to Ross (1991), digital culture is, "a circuit of culture practices touched by advanced technology" Thus, digital culture is not just a technological transformation but also as cultural transformation because it changes human habits in general—including of how we perceive the food.

In addition to being our daily needs, food in a cultural context is a symbol that identifies the social status of a person. On Instagram, what is shared is a kind of identity marker; food automatically becomes a symbol of identity of social status in a complex yet sophisticated digital culture. Mi-young Lee (2011) states that, when people share food, they seem to bond at a fundamental level, which affirms their common identity. An example of this bonding ritual is

the Passover Seder, in which a Jewish family or community affirms continuity for a tradition that has endured despite the geographic dispersal of their people through history.

Food becomes a symbol of identity that can be personal or communal. In the digital era, Instagram is a fertile ground for the growth and development of identity for every user. A person has their own motives when posting something on Instagram: some of them just showing off, maybe just being kind and giving information, or just want to exist. People who share foods on Instagram might be just showing off or just wanting to show what he or she was eating at that time. But when Instagram increasingly was being commercialized, sharing food is not just an interlude but also an activity that can bring some serious cash.

3.2. Hereafter the Foodstagram

Foodporn is a term for photos and videos of foods that are extremely glorified. Foodstagram can be a continuation of foodporn because it also glorified food photos and videos. However, foodstagram emphasizes the aesthetic aspects because it relates to the number of people who see and like the picture of the foods and videos. This aesthetic aspect is related to how food is displayed.

Food presentations have actually been around since ancient times. Great nations in the history of mankind often make food presentations a symbol of wealth. For example, Roman aristocrats made food presentation one of the social statuses: wealth and power symbols. In the modern world where television is used to be the only mass media, food advertising always pays attention to its presentation—paying attention to aesthetic aspects as a form of communication that persuades the public.

When the Internet and social media become something that cannot be separated from our daily lives, food culture dynamically merges into the Internet culture and becomes a part that we now consider to be a culture that sticks with us. A new job has born out of it and social media such as Instagram give people more chance to earn money in such a new way that we can even think it will happen in a few years back.

Instagram is a platform of social media that share photos and videos. One of Instagram's advantages is the feature

of the filter that can turn photos or videos to be more 'aesthetics' in a minute. Therefore, foodstagram was born out of Instagram because users who really made sharing photos of food on Instagram as a full-time job got their work to be easier.

3.3. The Aesthetics of Foodstagram

We reviewed 10 Instagram accounts—based on www.liputan6.com—that are famous among the Netizens on Instagram in Indonesia because of their food content. The 10 accounts are: @eatineraryid, @separuhakulemak, @the.lucky.belly, @eatandcapture, @anakjajan, @eatandtreats, @henjiwong, @jktdelicacy, @hungryfever, and @gagaldiatt. From these accounts, we found that only 2 accounts use Instagram as their main media while the rest of them use another social media such as blogs, websites, Facebook, and YouTube—and this is the reason we analyze the two accounts because we can consider them as the true foodstagramer.

The two Instagram accounts are @henjiwong and @eatandcapture. Both are personal accounts. Henji is the man behind the @henjiwong since 2012. Vincent is the foodstagramer behind @eatandcapture since 2014. Both of them are Indonesian citizens and live in Jakarta. @henjiwong has more followers by 70.900 followers than @eatandcapture only has around 51,100 followers.

@henjiwong (2012) was exist before @eatandcapture (2014), but from this research, @eatandcapture gets more likes than @henjiwong—although the number of likes doesn't necessarily indicate that one is more aesthetic than the other. Here are four of the most popular @henjiwong and @eatandcapture posts:



Figure 2. @henjiwong Instagram account



Figure 3. @henjiwong Instagram accounts

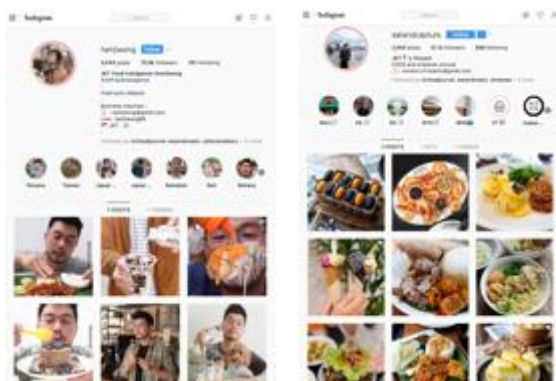


Figure 1. @henjiwong and @eatandcapture Instagram accounts



Figure 4. @henjiwong Instagram accounts



Figure 5. @henjiwong Instagram accounts



Figure 8. @eatandcapture Instagram accounts



Figure 6. @eatandcapture Instagram accounts



Figure 9. @eatandcapture Instagram accounts



Figure 7. @eatandcapture Instagram accounts

People use particular visual aesthetics and style to fine-tune their membership in subculture, to signal their “identity”, and to identify with particular life style (Manovich, 2017). In addition, the aesthetics in Instagram are also a matter of how ‘taste/feel’ communally be liked, we can see the most popular posts by @henjiwong: fig. 2 (Mie Bogor), fig. 3 (Bakmi Lili Dwiwarna), and fig. 5 (Seblak Jeletot), display various Indonesian noodles but in one bright red color composition that is a very delight to see.

Fig. 2, fig. 3, and fig. 5 does not mix everything, visually this is an interesting composition to be seen because it is a monumental unity. Fig. 2, fig. 3, and fig. 5 does not show the original picture it has gone through the editing process so that the three of them look more shiny and this is what becomes aesthetic appeal so people are tempted and like it.

Fig. 4 (Puyuh Eggs and Ebi Tempura) aesthetically follow the principles from Fig. 2, fig. 3, and fig. 5—but what’s make Fig. 4 interesting is that we can see the principle of repetition in it.

Fig. 6 from @eatandcapture is Japanese Cheesecake, fig. 7 a Burger, fig. 8 Fried Chicken and French Fries, and Fig. 9 Taichan Satay Melted Cheese. As with @henjiwong, @eatandcapture actually constructs aesthetics that are more or less the same. In fig. 6 we can see how in composition, @eatandcapture separates one slice from the cheesecake so that one part is exposed.

The same thing we can see with fig. 7 there are two burgers, one of the burger is separated so that the eyes of the audience will be aimed only at one burger. Fig. 8, fried chicken is also the same, exposing the two chickens in the front to a background of blurred french fries. Fig. 9 Taichan Satay is a bit different because there a repetition principle on it but still the principle is the same; there is a part that is exposed.

Fig. 6 from @eatandcapture is Japanese Cheesecake, fig. 7 a Burger, fig. 8 Fried Chicken and French Fries, and Fig. 9 Taichan Satay Melted Cheese everything we saw has been re-edited so that the colors shown are brighter and clearer. The focus on the food is the same because it is extremely exposed the main food so that the audience's eyes will be directed towards the food.

5. Conclusion

Agung (2017) states that, aesthetics nowadays does not always question philosophical issues, but also social, political, religious, cultural, and even 'negligible' issues. Researching the aesthetics on Instagram actually opens up something amazing that we can see how Instagram is an environment that consists the 'new' forms aesthetic. However, the characteristics of Instagram as a social media consisting of millions of users make the relationship that forms its aesthetics become very complex.

From these research that we have done, we get the same aesthetic pattern between @henjiwong and @eatandcapture foodstagramers, which is: exposing the main food, food consisting of several unmixed items, bright and shiny colors, foods that are closely related to people's tastes Indonesia such as noodles and fast food. We did not find healthy food that was really liked by the two followers of the foodstagramer.

Aesthetics in foodstagram have a role to glorify food in color and shape composition. In both the foodstagrammer

accounts above, aesthetics have this role and based on the two accounts above, the glorification of food in pleasing compositions and appetizing colors tends to be liked by its followers. We realize that this research is far from perfect and there should be a lot of research that focuses more on this problem in more detail by considering the aspects of the algorithm because of the possibility that the aesthetic taste on Instagram is also identified by 'algorithm-traps'.

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Internet:

- 1) @eatandcapture Instagram Account
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