



Michelin Stars and Digital Plates: A Discourse Historical Analysis of U.S. Food Posts on Instagram

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Abstract— *The point of this paper is to look at how the words and pictures used in Instagram posts about Michelin Guide restaurants show how power works in the U.S. food industry. It looks at how these digital artefacts support or challenge social norms and food hierarchies by focussing on posts from 2020 and later. The study uses Discourse Historical Analysis (DHA) to look at how these posts are ideological texts that shape how people think about restaurants with Michelin stars and boost their reputation. The paper shows that Michelin's influence goes beyond food quality and includes cultural capital and identity formation through textual and visual elements. Language, power, and digital representation are all brought together in this study to show how American food culture is changing.*



Keywords— *Michelin Guide, Instagram, Food Posts, Historical Discourse Analysis, United States*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Michelin Guide has a big impact on food cultures around the world because it has been seen as a standard for fine dining for a long time. The United States has been especially affected by it, where restaurants with a Michelin star are often associated with high status, cultural capital, and new food ideas. In this digital age, social media sites like Instagram have become important places to show and talk about this kind of cultural power. This essay looks at how Instagram posts about Michelin Guide restaurants affect the ongoing construction of culinary prestige and authority. It does this by showing how larger social changes affect the U.S. food scene. The study looks at how these posts reflect and reinforce the power structures that shape modern food culture through the lens of DHA.

II. DISCOURSE HISTORICAL APPROACH (DHA)?

DHA is a great way to look at Instagram food posts because it focusses on putting conversations in their proper

historical, social, and cultural contexts. DHA is different from traditional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which only looks at power and ideology in language. It also looks at how historical events affect modern stories in a more complex way. This way of looking at things is important for studying posts about Michelin because it lets us see how digital images of food interact with old cooking traditions and new cultural trends. By including historical background, DHA gives us a complete way to comprehend the symbolic power present in Instagram's various forms of communication, such as pictures, captions, hashtags, and user interactions. This method also considers the platform's part in both supporting and questioning established food hierarchies.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method is used in this study, which includes parts of both discourse analysis and cultural studies. When people post on Instagram with tags like "Michelin Guide," "Michelin Star," "Michelin Restaurant," and "Michelin

Green," starting in 2020, data will be gathered from those posts. During this time, there were big changes in U.S. food culture, like how the COVID-19 pandemic affected fine dining and how sustainability became a major issue. The study will look at both written and visual parts, using DHA's multi-layered method to see how language, images, and cultural stories work together. This method makes sure that a thorough study of how content related to Michelin works as a place where ideas are made is possible.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) uses the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to look at how language and power are used in the past. It is a well-known framework that stresses the importance of historical context. DHA was first created to look into anti-Semitic stereotypes during Kurt Waldheim's controversial campaign for president of Austria in 1986. It showed hidden power dynamics by revealing Waldheim's covert Nazi ties in public discourse (Datondji, Cocou, & Amousou, 2019, p. 70). DHA is different from other CDA approaches because it uses ideas from linguistics, sociology, history, and political science. This makes it perfect for looking at complicated social and political issues (Wodak, 2009, p. 65). It is based on problem-oriented analysis, interdisciplinary research, and methodological triangulation, which means combining different data sources, theoretical perspectives, and contextual insights to lower analytical bias (Wodak, 2009, p. 65). This way of looking at things sees discourse as historically connected to both current events and situations from the past. It shows how language, power, and social structures are always changing (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 417). DHA also stresses the important part of context, which is thought of as the mental representation of important social and situational factors that shape discourse (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 417). Wodak (2001, p. 65) says that a full DHA analysis should include past experiences, current discursive events, and expected future outcomes. This shows that the researcher has a deep understanding of how discourse can be connected to the past. This approach from different points of view lets us criticise dominant ideologies in a more nuanced way, even ones that support social inequality or cultural hierarchies (Reisigl, 2017, p. 44). DHA also puts a lot of weight on rhetorical strategies, especially argumentation. This is done by connecting the descriptive, explanatory, and evaluative stages of discourse analysis to find out how power works behind the scenes (Datondji, Cocou, & Amousou, 2019, p. 77). Using these different ways of looking at things, DHA creates a strong framework for looking at how power and ideology are constructed through discourse. This makes it especially useful for studying digital media and cultural discourse, like looking at Instagram posts about the Michelin Guide.

IV. DATA SAMPLING

The information for this study will be gathered in a planned way by using both random sampling and digital analytics tools, like Traackr or similar platforms, that let us filter very precisely based on location, engagement metrics, and content themes. The keywords found, such as "Michelin Guide," "Michelin Star," and "Michelin Green," help find accounts that have a big impact on the food conversation surrounding Michelin. This study uses a method called purposeful sampling to make sure that the posts chosen to show a range of views in the American food industry. Levels of engagement, content themes, and the presence of explicit or implicit language related to power are some of the things that are used to choose which ones to show. Posts are further divided by type, such as promotional, narrative-driven, or advocacy-oriented, to include all kinds of conversations about Michelin. This all-around approach tries to show how larger cultural and social factors affect how people think about great food. The goal of this paper is to add to the growing field of digital food studies by critically examining how talk about Michelin affects modern food culture in the US. This will help us understand how language, power, and digital representation interact.

V. POST 1



Fig.5.1 Collage composed of screenshots from "Huge congrats to Chef @canna_queen71 and the entire team at @lowellcafe for their monumental opening in LA." By [sensimagazine]. [Instagram], [2 October 2019].

5.1 Description of the Instagram account and the post

This post was chosen from the MICHELIN Guide's official Instagram account, @michelinguide, which is followed by people all over the world. Fine dining, culinary innovation, and gastronomic excellence are the topics that this account

curates for its more than 3,3 million followers and 8,600+ posts. Featured content increasingly focusses on sustainability and includes elite restaurants, renowned chefs, luxury experiences, and more. The featured post promotes Chef @canna_queen71 as the embodiment of an exciting new culinary concept infused with cannabis. Even though it showcases local chefs and interesting restaurants, the post is hand-picked and shared by an internationally acclaimed organisation. According to Johnston and Goodman, the MICHELIN Guide takes part in the "spectacular foodscape"—the process by which local authenticity is presented to an international audience—by framing local culinary stories within a globalised framework of prestige, quality, and innovation (Food, Culture & Society 210). Despite the ethical underpinnings provided by sustainability and plant-based themes, this is more of a global marketing story than a grassroots movement for local food.

5.2 Visual and Textual Description of the Post

First Image: The image showcases a chef, likely Chef @canna_queen71, standing proudly in a professional kitchen. She's wearing a crisp white chef's coat that signals professionalism, paired with a brown apron that adds a relaxed yet functional vibe. Her wrist is adorned with bracelets and a watch, and her serious, determined expression reflects her commitment to her craft.

Second Image: The cafe's interior bursts with life and warmth, highlighted by a wall adorned with lush green plants that bring a bit of nature indoors. A neon sign shaped like a cow adds a fun and creative twist, merging rustic charm with modern flair. The bar area boasts a wooden counter, stylish bar stools, and neatly arranged shelves, creating a cozy yet chic vibe.

Third Image: A broader view of the cafe's dining space reveals a decor that feels both earthy and refined. Greenery dangles from the ceiling, infusing the space with life and a connection to the outdoors. Wooden tables and chairs are neatly set up, and the branding, "Whole Plant," emphasizes the cafe's cannabis-inspired theme. The lighting is soft and inviting, enhancing the relaxed atmosphere.

5.3 Discourse Historical Analysis of the Instagram Post

The Instagram account @michelinguide plays a crucial role in shaping conversations about global cuisine. As the online face of the MICHELIN Guide, the content shared here significantly impacts how people view gastronomy, the power dynamics in the food industry, and the changing stories around sustainability. This discourse historical analysis takes a closer look at a post that celebrates the launch of the first cannabis cafe in the U.S., using a framework that considers historical, social, and ideological contexts.

Historical Context: The MICHELIN Guide has long been a hallmark of excellence in the culinary world. Initially launched by the Michelin tire company in 1900 to promote automobile travel, it has transformed into a trusted authority on fine dining (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003). Today, its influence goes beyond just restaurant ratings; it also shapes trends in gastronomy, including sustainability and inclusivity. The post we're examining highlights the opening of the first cannabis cafe in the U.S., placing it within a larger historical shift in how society views cannabis consumption. Traditionally, cannabis has faced stigma, criminalization, and ties to countercultural movements (Chapkis & Webb, 2008). However, as legalization and acceptance grow, its presence in fine dining marks a notable cultural shift. The farm-to-table movement, which emphasizes local sourcing and sustainability (Guthman, 2003), connects the cafe's culinary approach to global food trends. This link reinforces the MICHELIN Guide's role in legitimizing new gastronomic practices and framing them within the elite culinary conversation.

Cannabis consumption has really transformed over the years, moving away from its old-school ties to rebellious countercultures and stepping into the spotlight as a regulated, wellness-focused industry. This change fits right in with our current neoliberal consumer culture, where experiences and ethical choices are turned into commodities (Johnston & Baumann, 2010). The imagery and caption in the post really drive this point home, showcasing the cannabis cafe as a desirable dining destination instead of just a place for casual indulgence.

The chef, shown in a confident and professional pose, represents the growing acceptance of cannabis in the culinary world. Dressed in a crisp white chef's coat and a brown apron, she not only conveys professionalism but also adds a personal touch to an industry that has often been male dominated (Harris & Giuffre, 2015). By putting the chef front and center, the post shines a light on individual talent while also elevating the importance of culinary experts in changing the way we think about cannabis consumption.

The cafe's interior, filled with lush greenery, warm lighting, and a blend of rustic and modern design, reflects today's food trends that prioritize authenticity and sustainability (de Solier, 2013). This cafe is positioned as a crossroads of gastronomy, wellness, and environmental awareness, catering to well-off consumers who are on the lookout for dining experiences that are both ethical and luxurious (Lewis & Huber, 2015).

The MICHELIN Guide holds a powerful position in shaping the culinary landscape. By highlighting certain

topics, it promotes a narrative where sustainability and cannabis culture are not just alternative movements but rather markers of exclusivity and privilege. As Bourdieu (1984) points out, cultural capital is key in differentiating the consumption habits of the elite from those of the public. By focusing on farm-to-table dining and cannabis-infused cuisine, the post elevates both to the status of high culture, further solidifying the MICHELIN Guide's influence in defining what is considered gastronomically legitimate.

Additionally, the post sheds light on the evolving power dynamics within the cannabis sector. Historically, marginalized groups, especially Black and Latino communities, have faced significant challenges due to cannabis-related criminalization (Alexander, 2010). The shift of cannabis into a mainstream, lucrative industry primarily benefits corporate entities and elite culinary establishments, prompting important discussions about economic and racial disparities in this context (Small, 2018). By highlighting fine dining and sustainability, the MICHELIN Guide plays a role in rebranding cannabis as a luxury item rather than a substance that has been stigmatized for so long.

On the topic of local and global influences, the café serves as a prime example of how global food trends can be localized. The farm-to-table movement, which gained traction in fine dining across Europe and North America (Friedmann, 2007), is now a key part of the cannabis café's identity. At the same time, the café is helping to globalize cannabis gastronomy, aligning itself with broader culinary trends that intertwine food with wellness and ethical consumption (Goodman, DuPuis, & Goodman, 2012). Moreover, the post encourages interaction through its direct acknowledgments and celebratory tone, highlighting how digital connectivity is essential to modern gastronomic conversations (Abidin, 2016).

5.4 Caption Analysis

The caption takes a thoughtful approach to how it constructs its message, presenting Waters as a leading voice in sustainability. By highlighting her initiatives like the Chez Panisse Foundation and the Edible Schoolyard Project, it aligns with the idea that sustainability is not just a choice but a necessary change (Fairclough, 1992). Waters' quote, "To relate to nature is critical for our future. It's not just an option, it's an imperative," serves two purposes: (1) it emphasizes the urgent need for sustainability, echoing eco-critical discussions (Stibbe, 2015), and (2) it places her in a role of visionary leadership, like how eco-activists use persuasive language to establish their authority in climate conversations (Dryzek, 2013). Moreover, the engagement strategies like "Swipe right to check out" encourage interaction, tapping into digital

discourse studies that highlight the importance of audience participation in social media narratives (Zappavigna, 2012). Plus, giving credit to contributors—like illustrators and photographers—boosts transparency and fosters a sense of community, which aligns with theories of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006).

5.5 Hashtag Analysis

The chosen hashtags act as intertextual markers that place the post within a larger conversation about sustainability while also making it easier to find online (Page, 2012). Each hashtag plays a role in shaping the post's theme:

#MICHELINGreenStar and #MICHELINSustainability: These hashtags tie the post to the MICHELIN Guide's sustainability narrative, reinforcing its prestigious culinary reputation while advocating for ethical food practices. This reflects a strategy of legitimization, where sustainability is presented as a vital standard for culinary excellence (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

#MICHELINrestaurants and #MICHELINPlate: These tags really help to expand the post's reach beyond just sustainability, linking it to the prestigious MICHELIN network. While they boost visibility, they also create a bit of a clash between the exclusivity of fine dining and the inclusivity that sustainability promotes (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

#restaurant and #chef: These more general hashtags help people find the post, but they don't really dive into any specific themes. Their use shows a smart mix of broad and niche topics, striking a balance between reaching a wider audience and staying relevant to the subject matter (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

#portrait: This hashtag highlights the visual aspect, which is key in digital storytelling. It emphasizes how social media combines text and visuals to create meaning together (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

#MICHELINGuideCA: By focusing on California, this hashtag connects the post to local sustainability initiatives and the state's unique culinary scene. This approach shows how regional discussions can boost authenticity and engage the audience more effectively (Coupland, 2010).

VI. POST 2



Fig. 6.1 Collage composed of screenshots from “*Chez Panisse has become a proponent of the slow food trend requiring regenerative methods of growing, raising and cultivating ingredients*” by [michelinguide]. [Instagram], [4 January 2021].

6.1 Description of the Instagram account and the post

The chosen post is from Alice Waters' Instagram handle (@alicelouisew...), who has an influential role in the sustainable food movement. With 252K followers and over 1,380 posts, her account serves as a platform for advocating farm-to-table practices, food education, and sustainable gastronomy. As the founder of the Edible Schoolyard Project, Waters emphasizes the intersection of food, culture, and education, engaging with a community that includes prominent figures in sustainable food and hospitality. Her content likely highlights themes of accessibility, aesthetics, and the commercialization of sustainable food practices, making it a valuable subject for discourse-historical analysis. Although it echoes with worldwide sustainability principles, Alice Waters's post is more in line with the local food movement in the United States. Consistent with the tenets of the local food movement—which advocate for regional agriculture, seasonal eating, and place-based food knowledge—Waters has placed an emphasis on farm-to-table practices, food education, and community-based programs such as the Edible Schoolyard Project. Her work calls for more decentralised food systems that put an emphasis on ecological responsibility, fair trade, and long-term sustainability. But her message helps shape larger conversations about sustainable gastronomy, connecting local values with global food ethics, thanks to her extensive online following and influence in the world of international cuisine.

6.2 Textual and Visual Description

Image 1: Alice Waters is sitting outside at a charming wooden table, nestled under a sprawling tree. She's dressed in a simple dark blouse that exudes elegance and tranquility. With a relaxed posture, she leans slightly on one arm, her expression calm and serene. In front of her, there's a plate filled with fresh, colorful food and a cup, symbolizing her deep connection to sustainability and mindful eating. The natural outdoor setting beautifully reflects her philosophy of simplicity and living in harmony with nature. The vibrant, fresh food on the table draws attention to her commitment to organic and sustainable practices. The earthy tones of the table and the surrounding environment evoke a sense of warmth and authenticity, perfectly aligning with her values of sustainability and farm-to-table dining.

Image 2: A quote from Alice Waters stands out against a plain white background, highlighting her insights on sustainability and biodiversity, all stemming from her passion for taste. This quote reflects her journey from culinary enthusiasm to embracing ethical food practices. Below the text, her name appears in a clean black font, accompanied by a green clover logo that reads “Sustainable Gastronomy.” The design is sleek and minimalistic, featuring a crisp white background with bold black text. The green clover logo in the bottom left corner adds a splash of color, symbolizing sustainability. The uncluttered layout ensures that the quote takes center stage, while the clean font and green logo convey a sense of simplicity and professionalism, reinforcing the themes of ethics and sustainability.

Image 3: Imagine a visually stunning dish featuring a bright green soup that looks almost too good to eat. It's elegantly topped with a delicate swirl of cream and garnished with fresh herb sprigs. The vibrant green color really highlights the freshness and purity of the ingredients, perfectly reflecting the principles of organic and sustainable cooking. This dish is served in a simple white bowl, which allows the eye-catching green soup to take center stage. The swirl of cream and the small herb garnish add a touch of elegance and balance to the overall look. The bright colors and refined presentation really showcase the visual appeal of high-quality, organic ingredients, making the dish not just appetizing but also sophisticated.

Image 4: Here we have the entrance of Chez Panisse, with its name beautifully displayed on a rustic wooden archway. The surrounding lush greenery really emphasizes the restaurant's commitment to sustainability and nature. This setting perfectly reflects its farm-to-table philosophy and rustic charm. The wooden archway, proudly displaying “Chez Panisse,” is enveloped by dense greenery, creating a

warm and earthy atmosphere. The rustic wood and natural surroundings lend the space a timeless and authentic feel, visually reinforcing the restaurant's connection to its sustainable, farm-to-table ethos.

Image 5: This piece features a black-and-white line sketch of a person, likely Alice Waters. The individual is portrayed with short to medium-length swept-back hair and a composed expression, dressed in a collared shirt or jacket. The sketch is clean and minimalist, with "Sustainable Gastronomy" alongside a green clover logo in the lower-left corner, and the initials "AMW" in the lower-right. The sketch is minimalistic, using clean black lines against a plain white background. The figure's features are detailed yet understated, emphasizing a sense of simplicity. The vibrant green clover logo really brightens up the otherwise black-and-white image, emphasizing the theme of sustainability. Plus, the initials "AMW" tucked in the corner give it a personal touch, turning it into a heartfelt nod to Alice Waters' impact on sustainable gastronomy.

6.3 Discourse Historical Analysis of the Instagram post

Layer of Context: Power and the International Food Movement: The discussion of ethical gastronomy and sustainability is becoming more and more entangled with international power dynamics. A leading figure in this field, Alice Waters, deftly negotiates these complexities by observing what Fairclough (1995) calls the "naturalisation" of ideologies, the process by which prevailing cultural norms are accepted as common sense. She is in harmony with alternative food networks (AFNs), which oppose industrial farming, in her support of organic, regional food. But these movements frequently re-inscribe elitism by advocating consumption patterns that are mainly available to the wealthy, as Guthman (2003) contends. The discursive site where these power dynamics are negotiated is Waters' Instagram, which is visually and textually appealing to simplicity, natural beauty, and artisanal food.

Building Authority and Ethos through Text and Visual Discourse: Sitting outdoors in a setting that evokes genuineness and a pastoral ideal, Waters is embraced by organic vibrancy and rustic elegance in the first image. This context is consistent with Bourdieu's (1984) idea of "cultural capital," according to which aesthetic sensibilities are not objective but rather socially coded markers of socioeconomic status. The poised and refined way Waters presents herself—in casual yet tasteful attire—reinforces her authority in the lifestyle industry and the validity of her food philosophy from a moral standpoint. According to Allen (2004), there is a connection between this visual narrative and historical depictions of the American agrarian ideal. These depictions have frequently helped to hide the sexism and racism that are inherent in the food system.

Subtly bolstering Waters' privileged position within a complex power structure, the depiction of idyllic simplicity masks the larger global inequalities associated with food production and distribution.

Recontextualization and the Semiotic Nature of Brands: Wodak and Reisigl (2001) coined the term "recontextualization" to describe the process of incorporating older discourses into new contexts. The second image, which features a quote graphic with the tagline "Sustainable Gastronomy," serves this purpose. At this point, a person's love of cooking becomes an ethical stance. In keeping with the "moralisation of taste" described by Johnston and Baumann (2015), the minimalist design and green clover logo indicate environmentally conscious branding. Ethical consumption is portrayed as desirable, fashionable, and elite by this aesthetic choice. Using semiotic resources, the visual content constructs a "green" identity through repeated emphasis on minimalism, purity, and organic vibrancy. The neoliberal belief that people's consumption decisions alone can resolve systemic environmental and health crises is what Julie Guthman (2011) calls "healthism" and it demands a critical examination of this discourse. Waters runs the danger of adding to this depoliticised narrative through her progressive writing, which portrays food ethics as an issue of individual virtue rather than a collective fight.

Symbolic Capital and Gastronomic Representation: Barthes (1972) would describe the third image as a "mythologization" of food; it depicts a verdant green soup with delicate garnishing. The picture makes eating look like a sophisticated performance where aesthetics play a major role in upholding ethics. The rich colour palette and white bowl emphasise the symbolic value of organic food by signalling freshness and purity. However, neoliberal food politics—in which authenticity and sustainability are turned into commodities for commercial gain—is intricately linked to this portrayal (DeLind, 2011). Visual discourse like this subtly promotes one kind of sustainable living—one that is frequently exclusive—through a strong emotional appeal. Food deserts and economic inequality disproportionately affect marginalised communities, making this beautiful and ethical food rarely accessible (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011).

The Validity of Institutions and the Beauty of Space: The fourth image firmly establishes Waters' ethos with its depiction of Chez Panisse surrounded by verdant surroundings and rustic architecture. Rootedness and locality are fundamental AFN values, and the picture visually embodies them. This aesthetic of space-making evokes what Gieryn (2000) terms "place-making," the

process by which a specific location becomes a symbol of cultural and moral authority. Still, it's a selective depiction that leaves out the larger socioeconomic systems that support these establishments, such as the restaurant industry's labour hierarchies and the international supply chains that are frequently required to achieve consumer expectations.

Personal Legacies and Iconography: As an iconographic condensation of her brand, the fifth image is a minimalist sketch of Waters with "Sustainable Gastronomy" and her initials. By fusing her individuality with her ideological purpose, Waters becomes a symbol of the movement through this stylised portrayal. The image's understated beauty belies its persuasive power: it elevates Waters to the status of a gastronomic philosophy moral compass, not merely a chef or educator. The importance of collective action and structural critique could be overshadowed by this individualisation of sustainable ethics. The "ethical entrepreneur" becomes a stand-in for deeper, systemic reform, according to Chatterton and Pickerill (2010). This tension is portrayed by Waters's representation, which shows how charismatic individuals can drive political agendas to the sidelines.

6.4 Caption Analysis

Validity of Institutions and Symbolic Assets: Using the MICHELIN Green Star as an example, the caption taps into what Bourdieu (1984) calls "symbolic capital"—the prestige of an institution that can transform cultural power into greater social and political clout. Referring to Chez Panisse as a "temple of Californian cuisine" elevates the restaurant to the status of a sacred place, making it a destination for cultural and ethical pilgrims. This is in line with the idea put out by Fairclough (1995) of interdiscursivity, in which the subject's moral standing is elevated within a secular domain by borrowing metaphors from religion and ethics.

Strengthening Conversations on Sustainability: A deliberate use of positive self-presentation is shown by the focus on regenerative agriculture, local sourcing within 50 miles, and minimal landfill waste (Wodak, 2001). These word choices place Waters and Chez Panisse in the context of worldwide ethical eating trends while also building a story of environmental virtue. As Guthman (2003) warns, these alignments may misrepresent sustainability as a lifestyle choice for the elite rather than a systemic necessity, which could obfuscate issues of class access and labour.

Ethos Expansion via Interaction with Society and Politics: Waters' impact goes beyond the culinary realm into civic and educational spheres as the caption moves from restaurant practice to educational activism, mentioning the

Edible Schoolyard and Chez Panisse Foundation. The incorporation of Waters' culinary philosophy into larger social discourses like food education and environmental justice exemplifies recontextualization (Wodak and Reisigl, 2001). Waters' status as a moral leader in the worldwide sustainability movement is further solidified by the caption.

Emotional and Convincing Oratory: "For our future, it is critical to be connected with nature," the quote said. "It's not just an option, it's an imperative"—aims to mobilise emotional resonance and ethical urgency, grounded in pathos, as stated by Aristotle (quoted in Kennedy, 2007). Such wording is characteristic of what Chouliaraki (2006) calls "cosmopolitan compassion," in which universal solidarity is fostered using abstract ethical claims, frequently without resolving the underlying structural injustices.

Engaging Audiences and Fostering a Culture of Participation: A good example of the kind of participatory discourse prevalent in digital media, the sentence "Swipe right to check out..." encourages engagement and belonging among users (Jenkins, 2006). Although the post originates from a very institutionalised platform, it reflects the discursive strategy of inclusion by recognising photographers and illustrators, which helps to cultivate a collaborative image that is in line with grassroots values (Wodak and Reisigl, 2001).

6.5 Hashtag Analysis

In addition to building ideological alignments, hashtags serve as digital indexical signs, classifying content for discoverability. Hashtags are seen by DHAs as more than just technical tools; they are also acts of discourse positioning that can be performed (Zappavigna, 2015).

Sustainable practices and the MICHELIN Green Star program: These hashtags firmly place the post within a discourse of sustainability that is elite and institutional. Even though they claim to be advocating for ethical cuisine, MICHELIN is strengthening its brand power by linking moral excellence with its own evaluation system. Such practices are indicative of what Johnston and Goodman (2015) term "ethical branding," in which companies use sustainability initiatives to win over sceptical customers and gain respect in the eyes of the general public. According to DeLind (2011), there is a danger that food ethics will become commodified as lifestyle consumption instead of collective praxis due to this dual positioning, which aims to please both sustainability and luxury.

#foodie spot and #chef: The post's algorithmic visibility is increased by using these generic hashtags, but its thematic focus is diluted. In what Freidberg (2004) calls "ethical

globalisation," progressive principles circulate within profit-driven platforms, and their inclusion shows the conflict between targeted advocacy and mass-market appeal.

#photo and the MICHELIN GuideCA: Hashtags make posts more specific to a certain area and person. California is often romanticised for its sustainable innovations, and #MICHELINGuideCA places the story within that terroir. The regional perspective in this discussion adds to the "Californian exceptionalism" myth in the realm of food (Guthman, 2011), which downplays the racial and socioeconomic inequalities that impact land access and food equity in the state.

The hashtags combine personal principles, official power, and local pride to form a multi-faceted discursive identity. By influencing how people perceive the post and bringing its message into line with certain political and social ideals, they perform dual marketing and ideological purposes. But they also help make sustainability a fetish, replacing critical analyses of systemic food injustice with more superficial, aestheticised content (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011).

VII. POST 3



Fig.7.1 Collage composed of screenshots from "[Since its grand opening in 2018, @atomixnyc has received numerous accolades](#)" by [atomixnyc] [Instagram], [6 April 2024]

7.1 Description of the account and the post

The post features ten photos from @atomixnyc's Instagram account, which boasts an impressive 90.7K followers, reflecting its popularity and the attention it garners, likely due to the restaurant's stellar reputation and accolades. Interestingly, the account showcases only nine stories, emphasizing a brand-focused approach that gives off an air of exclusivity. The profile bio highlights the restaurant's

owners, Chefs Junghyun and Ellia Park, along with their other ventures (@atoboynyc and @naro.nyc) and the restaurant's location. The selected post features sleek, simple images that highlight the dishes, the interior design, and behind-the-scenes moments, showcasing a commitment to modernity and sophistication that aligns perfectly with Atomix's fine-dining concept.

7.2 Visual Description

Image 1: The way this meal is presented has an earthy vibe that really connects it to its surroundings. With elements like moss, wooden bowls, and beautiful garnishes, it strikes a perfect balance between rustic charm and culinary skill. Picture a small, boat-shaped dish nestled in a wooden bowl lined with moss. Inside, you'll find carefully sliced fish (or a similar protein), sprinkled with black seasoning and delicate green leaves. The display beautifully blends natural and artistic elements.

Image 2: This image captures the essence of professional synergy and friendship. The neutral background really makes their coordinated outfits and gestures pop, reflecting a shared vision and harmonious collaboration. Two individuals dressed in black stand close together. The man, with a warm smile, sports short, purple-dyed hair and light facial hair. The woman, with her dark hair tied back, exudes understated elegance in a high-neck sweater.

Image 3: This dish emphasizes purity, balance, and high-quality ingredients, showcasing a simple yet sophisticated presentation. The blend of neutral tones with bold accents conveys a modern yet timeless elegance. On pristine white ceramic plates, a beautifully arranged dish features a core protein adorned with golden crispy garnishes, a yellow sauce, and delicate white edible flowers. Fresh green herbs add a touch of vibrancy.

Image 4: The simple presentation and harmonious color palette of this dish embody fine dining. It celebrates texture and subtlety, showcasing an artistic approach to cuisine. On a dark brown plate, thin, translucent orange slices are layered over a creamy white sauce, with crumb-like textures scattered throughout to add complexity to the plating.

Image 5: This avant-garde dish highlights the art of molecular gastronomy. The striking color contrasts and innovative plating reflect a commitment to culinary artistry and precision. In the center of a sleek black bowl filled with vibrant green liquid sits a square-shaped object. This square has a textured surface, topped with a smooth green layer adorned with cheerful yellow blooms and lush green leaves.

Image 6: A simple area features beige ribbed walls and lofty ceilings, with natural light streaming in through rectangular skylights. The modern elegance is highlighted by a dark gray sofa and abstract ottomans, complemented by a stylish black staircase and a sculptural seat. This setting showcases seasonal ingredients and visual diversity, capturing the essence of fine dining. Each meal tells a story of creativity and a deep connection to nature.

Image 7: A black stone table is adorned with an array of gourmet dishes. Highlights include grilled fish on a smooth puree, scallop shells garnished in a rustic style, and vibrant salads embellished with edible flowers. The color palette ranges from earthy tones to bright greens and yellows.

Image 8: Designed for communal dining and seamless interaction, this space embodies modern luxury. Warm lighting enhances the natural wood tones, creating an inviting atmosphere for guests. A cozy, warmly lit area dominated by wood features an open kitchen at the back, centred around a stone countertop with soft cushioned chairs. Stainless steel elements add a touch of utility to the welcoming environment.

Image 9: With its rich appearance and intricate details, this dessert is the epitome of high cuisine. Focusing on precision and elegance, the monochromatic color scheme creates a striking visual impact. Image: A dessert presented in a matte black bowl, featuring a spherical, textured white component drizzled with golden caramel. Surrounding the dessert are decorative black rolling elements with marble patterns.

Image 10: The dishes are presented in a rustic yet elegant way that really highlights their freshness and seasonal ingredients. Each component reflects a sense of refinement and a love for organic materials. Nestled among decorative grains or wheat, a scallop shell cradles delicately sliced shellfish. The setup includes a bowl of vibrant red-yellow relish, a small, stacked dish, and colorful salads. Seared protein drizzled with green sauce adds a charming rustic-modern twist.

7.3 Discourse-Historical Analysis of the post

The post in question reveals the tensions between authenticity, commodification, and the impact of the internet, all while showcasing the evolution of culinary traditions in the global fine-dining landscape.

Culinary Commodification and Cultural Representation: The Instagram images beautifully blend the old with the new, pairing simple plating techniques with rustic elements like moss, grains, and wooden surfaces. This visual style aligns perfectly with modern cuisine, as chefs intentionally craft visual narratives that resonate with elite tastes while maintaining a sense of authenticity (Bourdieu 67).

Incorporating Korean cooking methods into a fine-dining framework exemplifies cultural commodification—essentially reinterpreting traditional dishes to meet Western fine-dining expectations.

As Sousa et al. (“The paradox of Authenticity”³¹⁹) point out, highlighting local food traditions in global dining spots serves as both a form of cultural recognition and a way to reframe those traditions, where authenticity is either preserved or tweaked to fit current culinary trends. Additionally, this post delves into the idea of “gastro-nationalism,” where national dishes become powerful symbols of identity in fiercely competitive global markets (DeSoucey 433).

The balance between accessibility and exclusivity. The post’s emphasis on luxury, uniqueness, and meticulous craftsmanship reinforces the hierarchical nature of fine dining. By presenting Korean food as elevated or modern, the discussion aligns with Western culinary norms that prioritize taste, precision, and artistic presentation (Johnston and Baumann “Foodies: Democracy and Distinction” 132). This approach subtly supports cultural gatekeeping, where fine-dining establishments, rather than everyday food culture, control access to authentic culinary experiences. At the same time, the inclusion of community elements—like open kitchens, shared dining areas, and interactive service—hints at a thoughtful move towards inclusivity. While fine dining has traditionally relied on exclusivity to maintain its status, contemporary gourmet restaurants are increasingly adding interactive features to engage guests more directly (Pietrykowski 256). As Bae and Jeon (“Luxury Dining and Social Signalling” p.147) argue, the fine-dining experience is more than just a meal; it’s like stepping into a performance where diners participate in a ritual that showcases cultural capital, going beyond just the food itself. By immersing themselves in this beautifully crafted culinary narrative, consumers reinforce their status within the global food hierarchy.

Food as a Digital Consumptive Visual Object: Food has evolved into something we consume not just for nourishment but also as a visual and aspirational object, largely thanks to social media (McDonnell “Visual Consumption in the Digital Age” p.112). The concept of “visual hunger” illustrates how seeing food images on platforms like Instagram can spark cravings, heighten sensory expectations, and influence consumer behavior (Spence et al. “Visual Hunger” p.57). An Instagram post often features high contrast, meticulously arranged food photos designed to grab attention, ensuring that the visual allure takes precedence over the actual eating experience. Moreover, Instagram fosters a culture of conspicuous consumption, where individuals select dining experiences

to project an idealized lifestyle (Siepmann “Instagram and the Curation of Digital Identity” 412). This aligns with Baudrillard's (99) idea that consumer society thrives on symbols and images rather than basic needs. In this context, the act of visually savoring a dish becomes just as significant as the act of eating it.

Modernity's Stories and Chefs' Role in Them: Chef portraits of Chefs Junghyun and Ellia Park, and personalized hospitality further emphasize the evolving role of chefs as creative visionaries and cultural ambassadors. In the past, cooks were often stuck in labor-intensive roles within rigid kitchen hierarchies; however, today's culinary landscape increasingly portrays them as artistic creators (Lastariwati et al. 94). This shift can be traced back to Auguste Escoffier, who revolutionized kitchen operations by introducing the brigade system—a structured hierarchy that still exists in modern cooking (Salsabila and Jony “Kitchen Hierarchy”, 2020 p.211). By tapping into this digital stratification, Instagram positions chefs as symbols of innovation, sophistication, and global acclaim. Additionally, Instagram's verification system reinforces power structures within the culinary industry. The blue checkmark distinguishes established chefs from lesser-known figures, signifying authenticity and trustworthiness (Vaidya et al. “Does being verified make you” p. 272). This digital endorsement illustrates how online and offline hierarchies interact in today's culinary discussions, reflecting traditional culinary awards.

How Instagram Influences Consumer Buying Behavior: The process of making a purchase is a cognitive journey where consumers transition from awareness to action, driven by aesthetic appeal, perceived quality, and social validation (Indika and Jovita “The Digital Shift in Consumer Behaviour” 109). When it comes to this process, there are a few key elements to keep in mind: first, seek out more information about the products. Next, align the product with your personal tastes and individuality. Also, consider making a purchase based on social cues and visual signals. Hartanto and Haryanto (“Understanding Consumer Buying” p.112) identify four main indicators of buying interest: 1. Transactional Interest: Your likelihood of making a purchase. 2. Reference Interest: Your tendency to recommend a product to others. 3. Preference Interest: A strong inclination towards a specific brand. 4. Exploratory Interest: The desire to gather more information before buying. High-quality images, endorsements from influencers, and user-generated content on Instagram like this post really highlight these trends. Beautifully curated dining experiences draw in consumers, often placing aesthetics above traditional factors like price or nutritional value (Foster 78)✎

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in our digital food consumption: In today's world, FOMO has become a significant driver of how we engage with content and such posts create FOMO amongst the users. Przybylski et al. (321) describe FOMO as “a pervasive anxiety that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent.” This anxiety keeps people glued to social media, influencing how they interact with online food content. Research indicates that people often experience FOMO when they come across visually appealing food or exclusive dining events on Instagram (Rifkin et al. “FOMO and Impulse Buying” p. 143). This urge leads to impulsive eating, as users prioritize visually stunning food to stay in the loop. Moreover, there are noticeable trends where individuals choose food products based more on their shareability than their personal taste (Wai and Osman “Conspicuous Consumption” p.198). The broader implications of this behavior particularly touch on issues like food waste and ethical consumerism. As noted by Lahath et al. (“The Social Media Influence” p.231), the pursuit of “instagrammable” food can promote unhealthy eating habits, where visual appeal takes precedence over mindful consumption.

7.4 Caption Analysis

The caption cleverly references prestigious accolades and rankings—think Michelin stars, The World's 50 Best Restaurants, and James Beard nominations—to place Atomix within the global fine-dining scene. The term “New Korean” acts as a bridge, connecting traditional Hansik with a modern, worldwide culinary identity. This situates Atomix in a historical narrative where Korean cuisine evolves with a growing institutional awareness (Sousa et al., “Cultural Adaptation” 2020). Mentioning esteemed culinary schools like Les Grandes Tables du Monde and notable figures such as Chef Junghyun Park and Ellia Park adds to Atomix's credibility in the realm of global gastronomy (Johnston & Baumann, “Spectacular Foodscapes” 2015).

Power Relations and Cultural Portrayal: The caption positions Atomix as a beacon of Korean cuisine, challenging the Eurocentric dominance often seen in high gastronomy (DeSoucey, 2010). By incorporating Korean terminology (like “Hansik”) and highlighting unique, handcrafted dishes, the restaurant is framed within an authentic yet cosmopolitan context. Presenting Korean food in a fine-dining atmosphere exemplifies culinary commercialization, where aligning with Western gastronomic standards helps local traditions gain recognition (Bourdieu, 1984).

Linguistic Techniques

(a) Lexical Decisions: By strategically employing language that conveys prestige (terms like "boundaries," "global perspective," and "new vision"), the caption positions Atomix as a trailblazer rather than a traditionalist (Baudrillard, 1998). By using praise and a touch of fancy language—like "one of the finest" and "world-renowned"—Atomix asserts its influence in the fine-dining world (Bae & Jeon, "Luxury Dining" 2021). (b) Descriptive imagery: The lively descriptions in the caption—think "dark stones, calm earth tones" and "elegant bar"—capture the audience's attention beyond just taste, crafting a visually rich experience. This emphasis on textures and atmosphere aligns perfectly with Instagram's culture of visual consumption, where dining becomes an artistic and sensory celebration (Spence et al., "Eating with eyes" 2016). (c) Active Role Chef Junghyun Park and Ellia Park are portrayed as dynamic agents of change, working to elevate Korean cuisine on the global stage. By tailoring their contributions, the caption highlights culinary authorship, a hallmark of fine dining (Lastariwati et al., 2019). 4. Cultural Narratives The caption weaves a narrative of cultural blending, where contemporary techniques breathe new life into traditional Korean cooking. This aligns with Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where authenticity is curated for consumption and status (Baudrillard, 1998). By reimagining tradition through innovation, the message makes Korean cuisine attractive to a global fine-dining audience and secures its place in haute cuisine (Sousa et al., "Cultural Adaptation" 2020). 5. Engagement and Social Dynamics In today's dining landscape, which emphasizes connection and experience, Atomix's caption highlights hospitality as a core aspect of its brand (Pietrykowski, 2018). By featuring Junghyun and Ellia Park in Les Grandes Tables du Monde, this act of inclusion signifies a shift in culinary appreciation that moves beyond Eurocentric views.

7.5 Hashtag Analysis

No Hashtag Strategy: The Prestige of Absence

Choosing not to use hashtags is a deliberate choice that aligns with the principles of luxury brand identity (Guerrero, 2022). Atomix stands out by steering clear of mass marketing, influencer promotions, and the typical algorithm-driven reach that often comes with hashtags. Instead, it relies on its established reputation, word-of-mouth referrals, and direct engagement with a discerning audience (Bae & Jeon, "Luxury Dining" 2021).

The Role of Exclusivity in Social Media Branding

Luxury brands, including high-end restaurants, often avoid hashtags to create an aura of scarcity and uniqueness (Fielding, 2023). Atomix opts for carefully curated content, prestigious partnerships, and visually compelling

storytelling to foster genuine engagement rather than relying on algorithmic visibility tactics. This approach resonates with Baudrillard's concept of symbolic capital, where exclusivity itself becomes a coveted asset (Baudrillard, 1998).

Visibility vs. Authenticity: Atomix prioritizes depth over mere visibility (Siepmann, "Conspicuous Consumption" 2022), differentiating itself from influencer-led dining events that thrive on hashtag engagement. Atomix cultivates a highly selective audience by foregoing hashtags, reinforcing its status as a cultural and culinary authority rather than just another viral trend.

VIII. POST 4



Fig.8.1 Collage composed of screenshots from "🍣% SUSHI IKKO (Sapporo) || 鮨一幸(札幌)" by [Andrew Gyokudari]. [Instagram], [28 July 2024].

8.1 Description of the Instagram account and the post

The selected post comes from @andrew_gyokudari's Instagram account. In the realms of fine dining and Japanese cuisine, this meticulously curated and impactful Instagram account radiates authority and authenticity. With a follower count of 42.9K, it caters to a specialized audience of food enthusiasts and industry professionals, emphasizing quality over quantity. His impressive accolades, including a third-place ranking from OAD (Opinionated About Dining) and his role as a judge for the "World's Top 10 Restaurants," further bolster his reputation and influence in the fine dining scene. The account features posts that likely showcase fine dining experiences, collaborations with renowned chefs, and insights into high-end products, blending Japanese cultural traditions with global culinary perspectives.

Photo 1: The first image shows two pieces of sushi topped with sea urchin (uni), captured in close-up on an Instagram account managed by @andrew_gyokudari. The uni, a

brilliant orange and creamy delicacy, rests atop small rice balls wrapped in seaweed, or nori.

Photo 2: Continuing from the same Instagram post, this image presents a unique type of sushi—grilled black throat sea perch (nodoguro) served over rice. It's beautifully arranged on a rustic, textured ceramic platter, with the fish appearing slightly seared and garnished with a green topping, likely wasabi.

8.2 Visual Description

The first picture highlights a striking sea urchin sushi (uni gunkan) displayed on a clean, simple hardwood board. The vibrant orange of the sea urchin stands out beautifully against the deep black of the seaweed. The minimalist presentation emphasizes simplicity.

In the second image, a slice of grilled black throat sea perch sushi is elegantly presented on a handcrafted ceramic plate with interesting textures. The lightly seared fish enhances the artisanal quality and attention to detail in the dish, showcasing its golden-brown finish.

8.3 Discourse Historical Analysis of the post

Globalization and Commodification of Sushi: As seen in discussions on social media, the globalization of food has led to the blending and commercialization of traditional culinary practices. This post dives into the socioeconomic and psychological impacts of culinary stories shared on social media, sitting right at the crossroads of commercial influence and cultural authenticity. The post points out premium ingredients in Japanese cuisine, particularly focusing on uni (sea urchin) and nodoguro (blackthroat seaperch). By targeting customers who have some extra cash to spend and a taste for fine dining, the selection of these high-end ingredients elevates the dining experience into a top-tier culinary adventure. According to social identity theory, people tend to make choices about their actions and tastes based on the aspirational groups they want to be part of, aiming to shape their desired social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1979). In this light, Instagram users who engage in status consumption deliberately select their materials to project exclusivity and prestige (Han et al. 2010). The visual representation of high-end dining reinforces cultural capital, where food experiences symbolize social distinctions (Bourdieu 1984). However, as Yang, Xun et al. (2016) point out, luxury dining can lose its exclusivity when it becomes too accessible, prompting status-conscious consumers to seek out new ways to stand out.

Visual Rhetoric and Food Aestheticization: The visual elements of the post emphasize craftsmanship and uniqueness, appealing to those who appreciate carefully curated experiences. The use of natural tones, like ceramic

plates and wooden surfaces, aligns with minimalist aesthetics and the "clean eating" trend, suggesting purity and artisanal quality. Especially on Instagram, social media platforms underscore the significance of visual appeal in food consumption, fueling the trend of "visual hunger," where people often replace actual meals with stunning food photos (Spence et al. "Visual Hunger" 2016). The emphasis on presentation and plating suggests that food transcends mere sustenance; it becomes a form of art and performance, blurring the lines between dining and visual spectacle. When it comes to intertextuality and cultural reinterpretation, the meal is deeply rooted in its cultural origins, using Japanese culinary terms like "uni" and "nodoguro." Yet, the post also recontextualizes Japanese cuisine for a global audience, showcasing sushi in a digitally savvy environment. Often, culinary authenticity is commodified, transforming local traditions into marketable experiences for affluent customers (de St. Maurice 2018). This trend reflects the broader phenomenon of culinary globalization, where food adapts to suit international tastes while still preserving its essence. The historical backdrop of the sushi restaurant's relocation to Ginza highlights shifting culinary power dynamics. Tokyo has long been seen as the heart of Edo-mae sushi, but this move positions local sushi chefs as innovative players in the fine dining arena. This aligns with Harrington et al. (2013), who note that Michelin ratings and global travel have reshaped perceptions of culinary excellence.

As for the role of social media in food discussions, the Instagram landscape of 2020 has amplified the impact of social media on food discourse. An account's verified status enhances the author's authority in the food blogging realm, reinforcing influencer culture as a key player in shaping culinary trends (Murtarelli et al. "Digital Food Communication" 2022). The inclusion of Taylor Swift's songs also cleverly ties into pop culture, appealing to millennials and Gen Z. These groups increasingly appreciate the blending of food, music, and lifestyle branding, reinforcing the idea that fine dining is about rich, multi-sensory experiences rather than just flavor (Spence et al., "Eating with our Eyes" 2016).

Social media and Consumption: Social media has a way of promoting flashy consumption, where people showcase experiences instead of material possessions to enhance their social standing (Bronner and de Hoog "Conspicuous Consumption" 2018). The carefully curated quality of food images like the ones posted in this post, inspire viewers to aspire to a certain lifestyle and encourages them to mimic high-status activities (Roy Chaudhri et al. "Conspicuous Consumption" 2011). However, this behavior can lead to psychological pressures, including the fear of missing out

(FOMO)—a phenomenon where individuals feel compelled to participate in trend-driven events to maintain their social relevance (Argan & Argan 2020). The term "fomsumerism" captures the intersection of consumption and social comparison, highlighting how users often feel more discontent when they see carefully crafted lifestyles (Przybylski et al. 2013). Beyond its psychological impact, social media promotes visually appealing yet impractical consumption habits, which in turn exacerbates food waste issues. Research shows that food waste at the retail-consumer level has significant financial and environmental consequences; digital platforms contribute to sustaining unsustainable consumption patterns (Spang et al. 2019; Thyberg and Tonjes 2016). Highlighting the ethical dimensions of food representation on social media, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12 emphasizes the need to reduce global food waste by 50% by 2030 (United Nations 2018).

Prestige and Culinary Narratives: By reiterating the concept of scarcity to enhance the allure of dining experiences, the post points to Michelin recognition, OAD rankings, and the challenges of securing reservations. In the realm of fine dining, word-of-mouth, review ratings, and Michelin stars significantly influence consumer choices, shaping perceptions of exclusivity (Chiang, Hung and Guo, Wen 2021). Kiatkawsin and Han (2019) argue that awareness of Michelin ratings enhances the allure of luxury brands, which in turn boosts demand among those who prioritize status. The journey of Sushi Ikko illustrates this transformation, showcasing its evolution from a local business to a high-end dining experience. This aligns with the views of Svejnova et al. (2007), who suggest that shifts in culinary hierarchy are linked to the rise of fine-dining venues.

8.4 Caption Analysis:

The caption and hashtags in @andrew_gyokudari's Instagram post employ strategic linguistic and discursive techniques to engage diverse audiences, emphasizing the commercialization of local sushi within a global fine-dining context.

Two languages used in the caption and representation of culture: The thoughtful dual-audience approach in the caption, which incorporates both English and Japanese, really stands out. While the English translations make it easier for international viewers to connect, the Japanese phrases, like "鮨 ONE幸" (Sushi Ikko), add a layer of authenticity that resonates with locals familiar with the nuances of high-end sushi culture. This bilingual tactic aligns with previous studies on language use in digital spaces, where multilingual subtitles help create a global yet culturally rich business identity (Lee, Jennifer 2021). In

discussions about food, bilingualism plays a key role in the global spread of sushi, transforming a deeply rooted culinary tradition into an international sensation. By weaving Japanese terms into English descriptions—like "uni" and "nodoguro"—we see what Heller ("Language, Capitalism and Colonialism" 2013) calls "linguistic commodification," where language itself becomes a marketing asset that enhances perceived authenticity.

Power Dynamics in Cooking and Regional Identity: The description positions Sushi Ikko as an emerging star in Japan's high-end sushi scene, shifting the culinary spotlight from Tokyo to local eateries. This challenges the traditional hierarchy of sushi restaurants, where Tokyo-based chefs have long held the global stage (Ikezawa, 2019). The mention of Junya Kudo's move to Ginza highlights the fluid nature of culinary influence and reflects a broader trend in fine dining, where top chefs gain recognition by relocating to urban hubs (Johnston & Baumann, "Spectacular Landscapes" 2015). The caption really highlights what makes Sushi Ikko special, mentioning phrases like "Michelin two stars" and "reservation difficulties" to emphasize its exclusive vibe. It points out the irony of authenticity in fine dining, where traditional sushi techniques and local sourcing are packaged for a global audience, creating a tension between preserving cultural heritage and commercializing it (Beriss & Sutton, 2007).

When it mentions the "final visit before relocation," the caption adds a historical layer that makes the experience feel even more significant. This ties into the broader discussion about culinary temporality, where the idea of "last-chance dining" boosts interest (Finkelstein, 2019). The narrative of Sushi Ikko "raising the level of regional sushi" connects the restaurant to larger historical trends in gastronomy, where innovation and accessibility are constantly reshaping fine dining (Kiatkawsin & Han, 2019).

On a personal note, saying "excited to see what transpires during Sushi Ikko 3.0" shows a genuine connection and helps weave a community-focused story. By sharing personal insights, the article shifts from a straightforward analysis to a more engaging narrative style, reflecting current trends in digital food discussions where audience engagement is heavily influenced by personal experiences and subjective authenticity (Murtarelli et al., "The Impact of Digital Image based features" 2022).

8.5 Hashtag Analysis

On social media hashtags they act like indexing systems that enhance the visibility of the posts (Zappavigna, "Searchable Talk" 2018). The hashtags used in this article are intentionally crafted to mix local authenticity, global

reach, and visual appeal, which boosts interaction and fosters a sense of exclusivity.

A. Bilingual and Contextual Hashtags

#鮨一幸 (Sushi Ikko), #予約困難店 (Reservation difficulty): These Japanese-language hashtags resonate with local followers, food critics, and anyone who understands the exclusivity of high-end sushi spots, firmly rooting the post in its local scene. Customized hashtags like Andrew's Sushiikko and Andrew's Sapporo help create a unique brand identity, transforming the poster into a digital culinary authority. Research shows that branded hashtags can enhance audience loyalty and engagement by catering to niche communities (Page, 2012).

B. Global Discourse on Food

#sushi, #sushigram, #sushilovers: These hashtags ensure that the post is discoverable to international audiences by placing it within the broader global conversation about sushi. #michelintwostars, #oadtop100, #gastronomy: Highlighting awards and rating systems emphasizes the culinary credibility that's so important in online food culture. Once a traditional guide, the Michelin Guide has transformed into a digital currency where online reviews and social media buzz shape how consumers perceive dining options (Chiang, Evelyn and Guo, Yushan "Understanding the Role the Michelin Stars" 2021).

C. Sensual and visual appeal: Hashtags like #artofplating, #wonderfulcuisine, #gastroart help the photo align with Instagram's visually driven algorithm, where food is not just about taste but also about how it looks. The rising importance of food porn images in influencing dining choices highlights how visual allure often overshadows nutritional value or the actual experience of eating (Çelik et al., "The Effects of Consumers FOMO" 2019). #foodporn, #foodgasm, #eggeats: These exaggerated hashtags tap into the pleasure-seeking side of food culture, reinforcing Instagram's role in promoting consumption narratives centred around enjoyment.

D. Engaging with Broader Culinary Trends (#japanesefood, #instafood, #foodiegram): These hashtags connect the post to wider movements celebrating Japanese cuisine within global food photography trends. #eattheworld, #gastronomia: These tags frame sushi as an artistic and cultural experience rather than just a meal, fostering cultural exchange and culinary exploration. This emphasis on cuisine over mere consumption reflects the increasing intellectualization of food, where culinary enjoyment is seen as a sophisticated cultural practice (Johnston & Baumann, "Spectacular Landscapes" 2015).

IX. POST 5

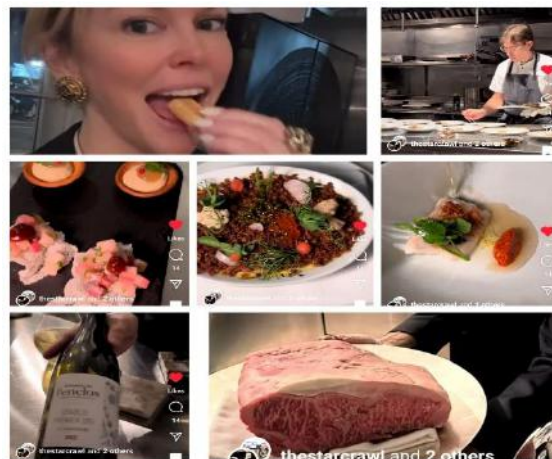


Fig.9.1 Collage composed of screenshots from "Mixing it up this weekend with a star prediction in Brooklyn!" created by [thestarcrawl]. [Instagram], [14 October 2024].

9.1 Description of the post and the Instagram account

Originally shared by the Instagram account @thestarcrawl, this image is a collage created from screenshots of a selected reel. This unique narrative follows Ellen Hunter as she embarks on a journey to dine at every Michelin-starred restaurant in New York City. With 451 posts and 24.6K followers, the account offers a blend of personal storytelling, detailed reviews, and stunning food photography. Ellen's bio, which playfully states she's "not an inspector," emphasizes her independence and positions her as a relatable guide rather than a formal critic. Her content makes fine dining accessible and appealing to her audience by striking a balance between professional aesthetics and genuine reflections. Through her connections to her jewelry business and YouTube channel, she actively engages with over 5,000 accounts, fostering a sense of community and expanding her brand identity. Food enthusiasts will find @thestarcrawl to be an intriguing and inspiring space, thanks to this unique combination of personal passion and thoughtful curation.

In this Instagram reel, a passionate food critic dives into the dining experience at Mason's Son, a Brooklyn restaurant that's still on the hunt for its first Michelin star. The reel artfully showcases close-ups of the chef in action, the inviting atmosphere of the restaurant, and beautifully plated dishes. Among the highlights are:

- A sophisticated appetizer featuring foie gras and pear canapé
- A luxurious cauliflower velouté topped with caviar
- A vibrant octopus dish paired with sweet potato foam
- A meticulously presented black cod, caught fresh from the wild
- Duck that showcases the chef's innovative touch with a house-made koji rub
- A5 Wagyu, described as "melting in the mouth," this exquisite cut of beef

The reel also captures the premium wine pairings, including tailored selections like Montrachet, which elevate the dining experience. For fine dining, the \$125 tasting menu is considered quite reasonable. Soft background music enhances the visuals, adding a touch of elegance. The narrative wraps up with a call to action, urging Michelin to award the restaurant a star, encouraging viewers to pay a visit.

9.2 Visual Description:

In terms of visuals, the Instagram post emphasizes texture, symmetry, and color contrasts, with a simple yet artistic plating style. Each element is thoughtfully highlighted to showcase creativity, like the glistening caviar pearls atop the smooth cauliflower velouté. The ambiance is warm, featuring sophisticated lighting and an industrial-chic interior typical of upscale Brooklyn dining spots. The photos include glimpses of well-dressed chefs behind the scenes and a shot of the influencer enjoying her meal, reinforcing the restaurant's upscale vibe and exclusivity. A close-up of a premium wine bottle, such as Montrachet, is also featured.

9.3 A Historical Discourse Analysis of the Instagram Post

Michelin Star: Building on the established culinary hierarchy, the Instagram post featuring Mason's Son's dream of earning a Michelin star places the restaurant within a global reputation system. The post underscores the wealth, exclusivity, and cultural significance that the Michelin rating system embodies, drawing on the historical ties between fine dining and European aristocracy. In this way, the potential for Michelin recognition serves to enhance Mason's Son's reputation, positioning it within a prestigious culinary landscape and boosting its appeal.

The Michelin Guide has long been seen as a key player in the world of fine dining, shaping restaurant reputations and establishing culinary prestige. Originally launched in France back in 1900 to boost tyre sales and promote car travel, it gradually made its way across Europe, introducing the iconic star-rating system in the 1930s (Harp, 2001). By

the mid-20th century, the Michelin Guide had become synonymous with culinary excellence (Durand et al., 2007). Although it started in Europe, its global influence was solidified in 2005 when it set up its headquarters in New York City. The arrival of Michelin in the U.S. was highly anticipated; as the executive director put it, "New York is the gateway. New York makes you discover other cuisines" (Fabricant, 2005). In its very first year, 39 restaurants earned stars, reinforcing Michelin's dominance in the American market and marking a significant moment in the history of American cuisine (Fabricant, 2005). Research indicates that Michelin stars have gained such power that they sometimes overshadow local critics, like *The New York Times* (Sytsma, Daniel 2012).

The impact of Michelin's presence in New York has truly transformed the city's dining landscape, influencing not just the restaurants themselves but also the entire value network surrounding them. Research shows that restaurants with Michelin stars often receive higher consumer ratings for both ambiance and food quality (Gergaud et al., "The Economic Effects of Michelin Stars" 2015). Additionally, many eateries tweak their menus to align with what Michelin seems to expect (Favaron et al., 2022). However, the repercussions extend far beyond individual establishments. For instance, some businesses struggle to stay afloat as landlords leverage Michelin recognition to justify rising rent prices (Strong, "Why are so many great" 2016). Restaurateur Danny Meyer (2014) noted that the surge of Michelin-rated restaurants in New York contributed to soaring rental costs, forcing some businesses to relocate. Suppliers also gain an advantage as restaurants seek out top-notch ingredients to meet Michelin's standards, further driving up expenses. Plus, having a Michelin star allows staff and chefs to negotiate better job opportunities or higher salaries (Chae et al., "Michelin Star and Employee Wages" 2021). While Michelin stars undoubtedly boost customer traffic and revenue, they also place significant financial and emotional pressure on restaurant owners and their teams. The stress of maintaining a Michelin star can be overwhelming; as Michelin-starred chef Skye Gennell put it, her star feels like a "curse" (Kashner, "The Michelin Star " 2015), highlighting the emotional strain of striving for continuous excellence.

Social Economic Obstacles and the Language of Exclusivity: The Instagram post cleverly uses a specific culinary vocabulary to highlight socioeconomic exclusivity. Terms like "foie gras," "A5 Wagyu," and "premium wine pairing" evoke images of wealth, luxury, and high social standing. When the post refers to the \$125 tasting menu as "relatively accessible," it underscores the irony of fine dining, suggesting that this luxurious

experience is still primarily available to those who can afford it. This choice of words reveals the truth that fine dining has long been a playground for the affluent, perpetuating socioeconomic divides (Bourdieu, 1984). In this context, the language not only reflects culinary elitism but also reinforces cultural capital as a marker of social distinction.

Elegance and Aspirational Branding: The visual presentation of the Instagram post enhances its message of high status. It paints a picture of sophistication, elegance, and exclusivity through carefully selected images of beautifully plated dishes, soft lighting, and stylish industrial interiors. Close-ups of luxurious ingredients like caviar and Montrachet wine showcase the craftsmanship and meticulous attention to detail associated with Michelin-starred cuisine. Additionally, the portrayal of chefs in action and the influencer's dining experience invites the audience into an aspirational lifestyle, emphasizing that fine dining is not just about the food; it's also about participating in a prestigious cultural experience.

Appropriation and Commodification of Culture: When the post talks about world cuisine, like foie gras and koji rub, it touches upon a bigger issue of cultural appropriation in fancy dining. These traditional cooking methods and ingredients, often tied to specific cultures and places, get a makeover and are sold to a wealthier crowd. Unfortunately, this often strips away the cultural significance of these elements, turning them into symbols of luxury and status (Lupton, 1996). Fine dining establishments, perhaps without realizing it, contribute to a form of cultural commodification, where the richness of cultural diversity is reduced to just a marketing gimmick aimed at making a profit, all while catering to an elite audience.

Gentrification and Spatial Dynamics: The socioeconomic narrative becomes even more intricate when we consider the restaurant's location in Brooklyn, a place with a rich history of working-class and diverse communities. Upscale spots like Mason's Son in Brooklyn reflect broader gentrification trends, where affluent businesses gradually take over traditional, often minority-owned establishments. The Instagram post subtly highlights the economic and cultural displacement that accompanies culinary gentrification by placing fine dining in a gentrified neighbourhood. This situation brings to light the ongoing struggle in urban areas between preserving cultural heritage and pursuing economic development (Zukin, 2009).

FOMO and Digital Influencer Relationships: By cleverly tapping into FOMO (fear of missing out), the Instagram post encourages viewers to check out Mason's Son while

highlighting its Michelin star accolades. The influencer's presence adds a layer of credibility, positioning them as a go-to authority in the fine dining world. Research on FOMO in digital marketing indicates that appealing to our innate desire for social connection and status can really boost social media engagement (Przybylski et al., 2013). As the post gains traction on social media, it heightens consumer interest, often leading to increased foot traffic and a higher demand for reservations at Michelin-rated restaurants.

9.4 Analysis of a caption and hashtag

The post's aspirational vibe is further amplified by its caption and hashtags. By directly engaging the audience and making them feel like part of an exclusive culinary adventure, the caption adopts a lively and conversational tone. Phrases like "Have you been yet?" and "Worth the simple journey to Brooklyn" serve as a friendly nudge to get involved. The influencer's confident prediction of a Michelin star builds trust and establishes them as a knowledgeable figure in the food scene. As luxury becomes more relatable for aspirational consumers, the emphasis on the "affordable" \$125 tasting menu makes it even more enticing. Interactive phrases like "Give 'em a star!" invite participation and foster a sense of community around the post.

When it comes to boosting the visibility and engagement of a post, hashtags play a crucial role. For instance, #StarPrediction taps into the ongoing conversation about Michelin star speculation, which helps to foster social interaction. On the other hand, #MichelinGuide connects the post to a globally recognized benchmark of culinary excellence. Additionally, hashtags like #OneStar and #BrooklynEats ground the post in the aspirational world of Michelin recognition and Brooklyn's emerging food scene. Meanwhile, #MyStoryWithMichelin links the influencer's personal journey with the Michelin brand, resonating with readers who value storytelling and personal ties to food culture, making the post feel more relatable.

This Instagram post strategically positions Mason's Son as a contender in the elite culinary landscape dominated by the Michelin Guide, utilizing both text and visuals. By harnessing the influence of digital personalities and the prestige of Michelin recognition, the post sheds light on the socio-economic and cultural tensions inherent in fine dining, while also reinforcing existing culinary hierarchies. The Michelin Guide, a key arbiter of culinary excellence, continues to shape public perceptions, restaurant practices, and the availability of high-end dining options. However, its influence extends beyond individual restaurants; it also impacts urban development, market competition, and broader socio-cultural dynamics within the fine dining

realm. In contrast to the elitist tone of this post, other culinary narratives—like those surrounding street food culture—highlight accessibility, cultural diversity, and the role of everyday diners in shaping culinary preferences.

X. CONCLUSION

The Michelin brand is used to show quality, independence, and belonging in a competitive dining scene. The analysis of the posts, suggests that while Instagram makes food culture more open by giving different voices a place to be heard, it also reinforces traditional hierarchies by putting a lot of value on high-end ingredients, fine dining, and status symbols like the Michelin star. This paradox shows how there is a constant struggle between cultural inclusion and socioeconomic exclusion in digital food narratives. It also shows how gentrification and commodification affect American food culture.

The study also shows how digital influencers play a part in shaping these food hierarchies. They often mix personal stories with high-end food to create content that is both inspiring and relatable. This mix of personal branding and food criticism not only changes how people think about fine dining, but it also changes the cultural meaning of it in the post-pandemic era, where digital platforms are very important for keeping brand prestige.

It also shows how powerful symbolic capital is in a world that is becoming more visual and connected. More research could be done in the future to see how these dynamics relate to cultural appropriation, gentrification, and how people's tastes in food are always changing in different U.S. communities.

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