From Taste to Trend:
The Role of Social Media in Shaping Food Culture

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Digital culture has played a pivotal role in shaping the modern era of food consumption and presentation. Its influence extends beyond the palate to a primary visual engagement, mediated through digital media such as social media platforms and viral content. Before the emergence of food influencers, online food culture was dictated by food bloggers and vloggers. Featuring increasingly short attention spans, reels and trendy pictures have taken over, leading to the creation of a digital food culture. The popularity of food is often driven by trends that cause it to go viral.

This paper aims to explore the relationship between visual consumption, digital trends, and food culture through an analysis of the role of social media in shaping food culture. Additionally, it explores the debate around whether, driven by trends, taste is compromised in favour of visual appeal. The paper examines dessert buffets—the focal point of many contemporary social gatherings—to investigate the impact of visually appealing food and digital culture on food-related social gatherings. The 'virality' or visual appeal of dessert buffets highlight a trend in which aesthetic presentation influences public perceptions of what constitutes a 'good party/food' or successful event. Similarly, personalised food souvenirs that match the theme of the gathering, or the dessert table have also become popular trends in such gatherings. It enhances guests' memories of the event, while offering shareable tokens that increase its 'virality'. This interconnection between food, memory, and visual appeal further highlights the role of visual consumption and its influence on current digital food culture.

Through an exploration of digital food culture and digital trends around food, the paper examines the role that these spaces play in reshaping contemporary food culture and experiences. As a result of contemporary digital food culture, food has evolved from being primarily a source of taste-based enjoyment to a visually driven treat, gaining social significance as a marker of memory and event success. By exploring this shift, the study highlights how digital platforms are changing the way in which people view and value food, moving beyond traditional ideas of feasting and taste. It offers insights into how the digital world transforms food into an experience that is as much about what we see and share as it is about what we eat.

Culture represents the intersection of multiple aspects of human life—food, clothing, beliefs, gatherings, and celebrations—becoming a way of life. It not only encompasses differences in how human beings live but it also highlights the ways in which they come together as a collective. Culture is also closely intertwined with both individual and collective identity, serving as a site for the expression of the self and the group. The rise of digital spaces in the twenty-first century highlights a shift away from traditional ways of recording and analysing culture. With digital spaces came digital culture. Digital media reflect broader social, political, economic, and cultural forces, serving as markers of the most globally connected space: the internet. Digital culture represents this dynamic space, encompassing the practices that emerge from the use of digital technology. What is more, digital culture has changed the way in which information is created, shared, and consumed at the global level. It has also made it easier to create collective groups, enabling almost anyone to create or join digital communities on any digital platforms. This relationship between digital culture and communities influences every aspect of life, including food and food-related communities.

More than just a biological necessity, food is a phenomenon that serves as a cultural marker, a symbol of identities, a medium of expression, and more. Food has always been embedded within a broader cultural context and societal norms, which are constantly evolving following societal developments. According to Deborah Lupton, 'Food is not simply a matter of sustenance but a deeply cultural and mediated phenomenon, where meanings are shaped by the ways in which it is presented and consumed, both physically and digitally.'[1] Traditionally, food has focused on communal, ritual, and identity-oriented aspects of society. It is rooted in community, religion, traditions, and ritualistic practices. Across different civilisations, food was about more than just nourishment; it also served as a reflection of social hierarchy, religious beliefs, and cultural identity. It was connected to simple meals that were local, seasonal, and focused on both symbols and nourishment. For example, in India, sitting down together for meals has long been the norm, with meals serving as a cornerstone of a family's social practices while simultaneously reflecting hierarchy and patriarchy within the family structure.

Food is also deeply connected to symbolism across various societies and cultures. It plays a role in religious and spiritual rituals, where its preparation and consumption are imbued with symbolic meaning and practices. For example, in Hindu traditions, food is considered as an offering to the Gods before consumption, echoing similar customs in ancient Greek traditions, where food was also offered to various Gods. In various societies, food is also connected with communal social bonding. Sharing meals serves as a means of socialising, fostering communal bonding, and preserving culture and tradition. For example, in specific places in India, such as Ajmer (in Rajasthan), a community works together to preserve the shrine of a Muslim saint. A large number of people gather on a daily basis and food is served to everyone present. Anyone can contribute money or ingredients to cook the meal, which is prepared on a large platform using

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a utensil the size of a huge dome, known as a 'degh'.[2] Smaller gatherings involve a similar bonding experience, For example, in Middle Eastern cultures, a mezze platter is served, allowing a group of around four people to sit and eat together. This is also closely connected to the idea of food, festivals, and feasts. In the US, Thanksgiving revolves around a traditional meal during which turkey is served along with dessert and mashed potatoes. In Muslim communities, preparing feasts during Ramadan is very common, as is making Sheerkhurma—a milk-based dessert with vermicelli and roasted dry fruits—served during Eid.

In today's digital age, food, like other aspects of culture, has also undergone considerable transformation. These shifts—from food intertwined with sustainability, local produce, tradition, and community to individualised consumption, global culture, visual appeal, and branding—highlight the digital journey of human beings. Before the rise of the internet, food was primarily about family recipes passed down across the generations, either verbally or in written form. Food shifted from being a major element of oral culture to becoming central in the written word, first through cookbooks and later through magazines. Chef Sanjeev Kapoor's cookbooks and recipes have been a staple in Indian households since 2005. With glamorous photoshoots and spreads in food magazines, one can argue that the focus on food consumption through the eye began at this point in history, as people were drawn to images that made food appear extremely appetising and appealing. It then evolved into a digital ecosystem, encompassing the rich history of food culture—from traditional offline spaces to the digital expansion of the very essence of food culture. According to Peter Naccarato and Kathleen Lebesco, 'The act of sharing food online—whether through recipes, photos, or videos—has transformed eating into a performance, where social capital is accrued through aesthetic appeal rather than culinary skill alone.'[3]

In the late twentieth century, the internet became a communal space for food lovers and enthusiasts to share recipes and cooking tips at the global level. Digital platforms such as All Recipes, established in 1997, and Epicurious, launched in 1995, allowed users to share recipes and even review them.[4] Such platforms created a community for home cooks, where they could communicate and share their love of food at a different level together. They were similar to book clubs, but larger and exclusively catering to an audience passionate about food. This marked the beginning of what changed the food community forever. Similarly, Chowhound—founded in 1997 by Jim Leff and Bob Okumura—was an online food forum for people seeking regional and local delicacies in New York, becoming one of the first digital spaces dedicated to food sourcing in America.[5] The introduction of platforms such as Blogger in 1999 and WordPress in 2003 changed the landscape for everyone wishing to share and document their culinary experiences.[6] It became more than just a platform for sharing of recipes, however; it evolved to include personal experiences, interweaving cultural and social aspects as well. It also began to include food reviewing and sharing, turning anyone eager to try into an amateur food critic. One example of integrating personal journeys into the culinary world was the Julie/Julia Project, now a major film: 'Julie and Julia'. Julie Powell's Salon

2 Ajmer Dargah Sharif, [n.d.]<https://ajmerdargahsharif.com/degh-mannat.php>.

3 Peter Naccarato and Kathleen Lebesco, Culinary Capital (London: Berg, 2012), p. 77.

4 Ganda Suthivarakom, 'A Brief History of Food Blogs', Culture, Saveur (2011) <https://www.saveur.com/article/Kitchen/A-Brief-Food-Blog-Timeline/> [Accessed 3 April 2025].

blog in 2002 became the first 'cook-through' blog, where she set herself a challenge: '365 days. 536 recipes. One girl and a crappy outer borough kitchen'.[7] In 2006, The New York Times's *Diner Journal*—a food critic blog—elevated the medium of food blogging.[8] This also led to the monetisation of food content, with sponsorships and more as blogs gained international attention. In 2006, notable food bloggers Deb Perelman of Smitten Kitchen tapped into this opportunity, transitioning from food blogging to publishing cookbooks that eventually became best sellers.[9] They have also used their platform to sell equipment, partnering with brands to this end. This was a very early direct foreshadowing of the upcoming era of digital influencers.

Food blogging evolved into food vlogging with the launch of YouTube in 2005, creating a new medium for food enthusiasts and cooks. With a format compatible with in-depth content and longer runtimes, cooking tutorials and food challenges or experiments began to flourish on the platform. Additionally, the evolution of smartphones made vlogging even more accessible for anyone. 'Binging with Babish' is the food channel of Andrew Rea, who gained widespread popularity by recreating popular dishes from TV shows such as the burger challenge from Parks and Recreation. According to Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann, 'Food blogging and vlogging are not just about documenting meals; they are part of a larger cultural economy that transforms taste into an online currency.'[10] By 2010, social media platforms like Instagram had also emerged, and food content creators slowly transitioned into food influencers. The focus shifted to content that is quickly consumed, featuring simpler recipes and lifestyle elements marketed alongside with food.

Digital media construct narratives around food that either reinforce or challenge cultural identities while transforming how people interact with food. The production, marketing, and consumption of food are dictated by the media, reflecting food's status as a cultural industry. In their book *The Culture Industry*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer discuss how anything can become a cultural industry under capitalism, which is primarily characterised by sameness and predictability.[11] On social media, food has followed a similar journey, with its virality, visual appear, and performative aspects coming to the forefront. Social media, globalisation, and consumerism have made presentation and social settings as important as taste and nutrition, if not more so. 'As a conceptual lens, digital food culture is invested in locating food's significance through its relationship with and through the digital.'[12] In line with the digitisation of culture, food engagement has become primarily visual. It is not surprising that, in the contemporary era, food consumption occurs through the eyes before the mouth. According to Fabio Parasecoli, 'The digital age has turned food into a spectacle, where consumption begins with the eye rather than the palate.'[13] This shift has changed the very idea of what it means to consume, with consumption now entirely visual. Visual appeal encompasses multiple aspects, such as colour, shape, placement, and so on.

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.

7 Julie & Julia, directed by Nora Ephron (USA: Sony Pictures Classics, 2009).

8 Ganda Suthivarakom, 'A Brief History of Food Blogs', Culture, Saveur (2011), <https://www.saveur.com/article/Kitchen/A-Brief-Food-Blog-Timeline/> [Accessed 1 April 2025].

9 Ibid.

10 Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann, Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 112.

11 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. by John Bernal (London: Verso, 1947), pp. 120–167.

12 Michael K. Goodman, 'Digital Food Culture, Power and Everyday Life', European Journal of Cultural Studies 24.1, (2021), p. 1, doi:10.1177/1367549421055501.

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To enhance visual appeal, food plates now often feature striking colours, such as blood red or bright purple in any single element. Food is not only consumed through the eye, but also for the social eye—that is, for sharing on social media. People want to visit places that serve food capable of capturing digital attention—that 'Instagrammable'. This drives chefs or restaurant management to create increasingly engaging dishes, often incorporating performativity into food. These factors help dishes trend more on social media or attract more 'likes' and 'comments'. They also motivate others to visit the restaurant or cafe and order the dish so they can join the trend, also known as the 'bandwagon effect'.

Increased activity on certain types of posts also leads to a higher chance being boosted by digital algorithms. Algorithms favour engagement-heavy content, leading to the rapid spread of food trends, such as dalgona coffee, feta pasta, or butter boards.[14] As a result, dishes are being curated on food menus exclusively for visual consumption. The features of various insta-grammable dishes include excessively bright colours and contrasts, such as rainbow bagels and galaxy donuts. Another striking feature is the use of unconventional plating techniques, such as serving food on wooden boards or stone-carved pieces. Sometimes, serving and presentation techniques can take a risky turn, such as using flame torches to heat food at the restaurant table or serving dishes ignited with alcohol flames. Flaming paan, a popular dish served in the streets of cities in India, 'was popularized through social media posts around 2015 and 2016 and is now a full-on internet sensation'.[15] Similarly, excessive food presentation often becomes part of the effort to go viral on social media, For example, 'freakshakes' are milkshakes loaded with multiple chocolate bars and candies overflowing from the glass, just to look different and appealing. The emphasis on aesthetics over taste has resulted in dishes designed to be photogenic rather than flavourful. According to Per Krogh Hansen, 'In food media, the visual serves as a primary mode of communication, where the aesthetics of a dish often hold more weight than its taste or nutritional value.'[16] Many restaurants curate menu items specifically for the purpose of achieving social media virality (e.g., rainbow bagels and charcoal ice cream).

Digital media mythologise food, which in turn becomes a symbol whose meaning is shaped by the media. This can be seen, for example, in the idea that champagne and caviar are luxury items or that burgers are only fast-food items intended for casual consumption. Like language, which exists in a state of constant flux, these ideas are also subject to change over time. Street food today could easily be deemed fine dining tomorrow, and social media plays a crucial role in determining how and when such developments occur.

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, worldwide lockdowns led to an increase in digital activities. With the closure of restaurants and cafes, people instead turned to digital databases of recipes, cooking blogs, and YouTube videos. Learning to cook and making good food became vital, lifesaving activities. The increased digital presence also accelerated content gaining popularity, a phenomenon known as 'going viral'. People on social media platforms began challenging one another with tasks such

13 Fabio Parasecoli, Bite Me: Food in Popular Culture, (Oxford: Berg, 2008), p. 128.

14 Katherine Cotter, 'Practical Knowledge of Algorithms: The Case of BreadTube', New Media & Society, p. 16.

15 Matador Creators, 'Fire Paan Is the Flaming Indian Snack That's Lighting Up the Internet', Matador Network, (2023) <https://matadornetwork.com/watch/fire-paan/> [Accessed 5 April 2025].

16 Per Krogh Hansen, Kitchen Stories: Meaning and Mythology in Scandinavian Food Films (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen Press, 2008), p. 51.

as 'making a dish using ten ingredients only' or 'eat[ing] these spicy noodles'.[17] Making Dalgona coffee[18] and baking banana bread are almost synonymous with the lockdown period in the minds of people who experienced them. Along with viral content, these types of challenges have blurred the lines between food creation/consumption and food as a spectacle or form of entertainment. While competitive TV shows like the MasterChef series had already popularised the entertainment aspect of food, these viral trends further transformed the food landscape due to the sheer acces-sibility of the trend. While trends on social media can lead to the global resurgence of a particular activity, the effect is generally short-lived. Social media influencers with a large following can also start trends by making a reel or post and encouraging their followers to copy it and tag them. They might also promise to repost some of the best entries, prompting people to create content in the pursuit of five minutes of fame, which is not guaranteed. When it comes to food trends, the content is naturally related to food. This could involve a challenge to try something extremely spicy at a particular restaurant, for example, which could be posted with the prompt 'Can you handle this level of spice or are you too weak for it?'. Another example could be group reels with captions like 'we found this McDonald hack', showing a group of friends buying McDonald's ice cream, which they proceed to smash together in a box before adding various types of candy.[19] This prompted multiple people to try to do the same thing with their own group of friends. A striking feature of viral reels is that multiple people can try to add their own twist, hoping to start a new trend or gain more views to boost their popularity. When a restaurant, dish, or challenge gains considerably in popularity, it often leads to increased sales, incenti-vising others to work towards the same. Food styling and filters designed exclusively for food are ways in which digital apps lend themselves to these trends. Restaurants have also begun introducing photo walls or booths and neon signs to give customers a background on which to post content. This aspect became so important that food-finding apps like Zomato[20] and Swiggy in India introduced a filter known as 'Instagrammable places to eat', allowing users to find places for capturing the best photos for their digital feeds.

Besides the capitalistic aspect, from a cultural perspective, this process of digital globalisation has led to large-scale cultural changes in food consumption and creation. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K Bhabha discusses the concept of liminal or 'third spaces'—hybrid spaces existing between two worlds, blending elements of both.[21] Food fusion would fall under this category. Hakka noodles are a Chinese dish and sushi is from Japan; however, both dishes are available in India in very different ways. In India, Hakka noodles are made with Indian vegetables and spices, with the addition of cucumber and the option of tandoori-flavoured sushi in multiple joints. Another factor contributing to this hybridity of food is the affordable availability of produce, which leads to glocalisation—a blend of the global and the local. This adoption of food from different cultures—while adapting certain elements of it to suit local tastes—has also led to some home chefs incorporating the dishes into their daily lives. For these very reasons, it is not uncommon now for people to make sushi at home

17 https://www.instagram.com/share/reel/BBv-sW_Gjk

18 Katherine Kirkwood, 'What is Dalgona Coffee? The Whipped Coffee Trend Taking Over the Internet during Coronavirus Isolation', The Conversation, (2020), <https://theconversation.com/what-is-dalgona-coffee-the-whipped-coffee-trend-taking-over-the-internet-during-coronavirus-isolation-137068#:~:text=Having%20studied%20food%20trends%20for,and%20some%20basic%20household%20ingredients, [Accessed 5 April 2025].

19 https://www.instagram.com/share/reel/BAIbi_tXk1

20 https://www.zomato.com/mumbai/insta-worthy

21 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994).

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in India. The cultural exchange of festivals is another major development, with festivals and traditional rituals assuming a global dimension thanks to social media and the digitisation of culture. From US-based TV shows to popular novels, culture and social media have brought celebrations like Halloween and Thanksgiving to India and other places. Even influential Indian celebrities such as Rhea Kapoor[22] and Masaba Gupta[23] share elaborate food setups for occasions such as Thanksgiving or other gatherings, which are inspired from the West but glamorised for digital engagement. This notion of elaborate food setups as social media content is not limited to celebrities.

The social dimension of food has also evolved under the influence of digital culture and social media. From weddings to birthday parties and other occasions, people now set up carefully curated food stations. A more popular element of this trend is when people set up elaborate dessert bars, where all aspects of the dishes align with the occasion. For example, gender reveal parties have become increasingly common recently, where expecting mothers announce the baby's gender in the presence of close friends. At these parties, the dessert table plays a key role, featuring blue and pink themes, which adds to the ambiguity of guessing whether it is going to be a boy or a girl.[24] In fact, cake is often used to reveal the baby's gender.[25] The cake can be a neutral colour on the outside, and reveal blue or pink on the inside upon cutting, indicating whether it is a girl or a boy. Aside from the glaringly outdated association of pink with girls and blue with boys, these trends highlight how food, especially dessert, plays a central role in such gatherings. Before these parties and dessert bars, highly stylised cakes had become the norm. In people's fully digitalised lives today, social gatherings are now expected to include some content-worthy elements to be considered successful. According to Alice E. Marwick, 'The pressure to be constantly visible online has transformed social events from moments of connection to opportunities for content creation, where the value of an experience is measured by its shareability.'[26] Birthday parties and weddings follow the same trend, with food becoming an integral part of the decor and theme of the party. Restaurants, weddings, and parties are designed with "Instagrammability" in mind, with visual appeal sometimes prioritised over genuine hospitality.[27]

Souvenirs have also become increasingly food-related, making the event a memorable one for guest. Sweet sixteen birthday parties often feature the number sixteen written on a cupcake, cookie, or brownie. This is often placed in a coloured box or wrapping paper matching the theme of the party, becoming a souvenir guests can then take home. This is a way for guests to take a small piece of the party home with them to remember the event. It has become almost the norm to then post a picture of the souvenir and thank the guest for the invitation. The same is true for invitations containing food. In India, wedding invitations frequently come with dry fruits or brownies packaged in colours matching the invitation card, becoming the focal point. This can be seen in Bollywood movies such as *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* by Ayan Mukherjee, which opens with a scene showing wedding invitation packages being assembled a slender hand,

22 https://www.instagram.com/share/p/BAM2V5giWF

23 https://www.instagram.com/share/p/BBvtmmVaUG

24 https://www.instagram.com/share/reel/_sdSv9ZGh

25 https://www.instagram.com/share/reel/_lxpAKCeS

26 Alice E. Marwick, Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 145.

27 Abidin Crystal, Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online, (Emerald Publishing: Bingley, 2018).

including a hamper filled with edible treats. As Theresa M. Senft states, 'People no longer gather to simply enjoy each other's company; instead, they assemble to construct and broadcast versions of their social lives that are designed to be consumed by an audience.'[28] An event's success is defined by the dessert buffet table—if it becomes a talking point, the event is considered a success. There are many trends where people curate events around food. One such example is a sleepover where each guest is given a colour and asked to bring a food tray filled with items of that colour only. For example, a guest assigned the colour orange could bring mango-flavoured food, a bag of Cheetos, orange-flavoured juice, or even orange marshmallows. They then make a long reel featuring each of the friends walking in with their respective food trays. This became so popular that it became a significant food trend. According to Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann, 'Food media has always been a key player in shaping tastes and desires, but with the rise of social media, the everyday eater is now also a performer, constructing and curating their culinary identity.'[29]

Hyperreality, a concept introduced by Jean Baudrillard,[30] describes a state in which the line between reality and a stimulated digital space is blurred, creating a simulated reality where people cannot distinguish between what is real and what is not. Social media often embodies this state, as posts and stories can construct a hyperreality creating the illusion of a specific lifestyle that may not reflect reality at all. Baudrillard argues that such simulations become a version of reality that he refers to as simulacra, where both the real and the imaginary are absorbed into a system of signs and symbols unique to that time. On social media, people often post about lives that appear perfect, whereas this is in fact a hyperreal version of their lives that is heavily edited, with narratives that are often fabricated. According to Alice E. Marwick, 'In a digital economy where attention is currency, the pursuit of virality becomes an all-consuming endeavour, leading many to fabricate, exaggerate, or even endanger themselves for the sake of engagement.'[31] In today's society, the desire to capture food and post about it precedes the act of eating itself. It is normal for people to post pictures or live feed about food before they have even tried it. The spectacle of presentation also comes into play here, as people often post about elaborate or excessive displays of food. It is often considered unthinkable to eat before posting about the food on social media. Meals are often staged for photographs before being consumed, leading to an altered perception of dining as a social ritual. People are now consuming food visually rather than physically. The digital representation of an individual's life is a projection of their reality, which may not always be real. Food plays a major role in allowing them to curate the life they wish to display to the world. For example, if someone wants to present themselves as health-conscious, they might post photographs of smoothies, quinoa bowls, avocado toast, or overnight oats with fresh fruits and juices. Food therefore carries symbolic meaning that extends beyond its nutritional value. It often serves as a symbol of status quo or a lifestyle choice that individuals want to share with the world. In this way, food becomes a form of lifestyle branding, as Roland Barthes discusses in *Mythologies*,[32] whereby signs come to represent social movements or events. The term 'food porn'

28 Theresa M. Senft, Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 102.

29 Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann, Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 112.

30 Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, trans. by Sheila Glaser. (University of Michigan Press, 1994).

31 Alice E. Marwick, Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 187.

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refers to the visually appealing, often exaggerated presentation of food designed to evoke desire. Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest thrive on high-resolution images of decadent dishes, influencing both culinary trends and consumer behaviour.[33]

This shift from taste to trend reflects a broader digital transformation that is shaping people's social lives as a result of the increasing impact of social media. Food has evolved into a digital cultural marker that is not necessarily about quality of life, but rather about how an individual wishes to project it to the rest of the world. This has altered the way in which people look at and value food in society, reshaping contemporary food experiences and culture. This relationship between visual food consumption and digital media highlights how food has evolved from a basis need and communal sensory experience to curated content driven by trends and digital diaries. Food is no longer just about nourishment or social and cultural celebration; it has become a performative spectacle—a form of 'hyperreality', as Jean Baudrillard theorised. It is a simulacrum that stimulates a particular version of reality—while it may not be tasty or even healthy, it remains visually appealing according to popular standards. These standards are shaped by the viral factor, which reinforces the shift from taste to trend. From hyperrealistic cake art to charcoal ice cream, food is now designed specifically for social media. This highlights how success in the culinary industry is determined by cultural popularity rather than by traditional taste-centric appreciation.

Digital platforms thrive on this surge in digital consumption, where photographic meals are crafted to start trends or go viral. Often, the stories behind food become the reason for this virality, as with the famous Pistachio Kunafa Chocolate by Fix and the story of the pregnant lady who discovered this chocolate to satisfy her cravings, which went on to gain worldwide popularity. This trend was so popular that chocolate-industry legends such Lindt are now creating their own versions of this chocolate, which has even caused global pistachio shortages according to Fox News.[34] Food has evolved from being the heart of social cultural experiences to becoming a medium through which digital identities are created, crafted, and shared, alongside events that are shaped exclusively by food narratives. The marker of an event's success is measured by how memorable or 'Instagrammable' people find the food to be. Food has become content for visual consumption, with society commodifying culinary experiences and thereby creating a cycle where taste and authenticity are overshadowed by trend and popularity. As we move further into these immersive digitised lives, with technology evolving at an alarming rate, food remains a critical space where nutrition struggles to stay visible amidst a digital culture increasingly centred on visual consumption, where the appetite for content has replaced genuine human appetites. This is not to say that taste and nourishment have become irrelevant, but rather that the balance between them is not even, which is a cause for concern in the food and nutrition world.

32 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* trans. by Annette Lavers (Hill and Wang: New York, 1972).

33 Emma Jayne Abbots and Anna Lavis (eds), *Why We Eat, How We Eat: Contemporary Encounters between Foods and Bodies, 1st edn, (London: Routledge, 2013).*

34 Angela Stabile, 'Dubai Chocolate Sold at Costco Sparks Potential Pistachio Shortage, Reports Claim', *Fox News (2024) <https://www.foxnews.com/food-drink/dubai-chocolate-sold-costco-sparks-potential-pistachio-shortage-reports-claim>.*

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