

Analysis of Digital Aesthetics and Everyday Taste Construction in Douyin Food Reviews

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Abstract. In contemporary China, Douyin has become a major source of dining information for young consumers, reshaping how taste is experienced, communicated, and legitimized. This study investigates how restaurant-review videos construct standardized taste cues and produce everyday food authority through visual storytelling, evaluative language, and platform-driven visibility. Using a case-based qualitative approach, the analysis reveals two intersecting mechanisms: the operationalization of taste through highly replicable visual and sensory templates, and the semi-professionalization of judgment through abstract descriptors and selectively framed expertise. Viewers alternate flexibly between the roles of audience, consumer, and follower, creating a dynamic trust relationship that amplifies creators' influence while maintaining the appearance of accessibility. The findings highlight that taste formation on Douyin is neither fully democratized nor professionally institutionalized, but shaped by the interplay of platform algorithms, creator practices, and participatory viewing cultures. This study contributes a deeper understanding of digital taste governance and the cultural power embedded in short-video food media.

Keywords: Douyin, digital taste, food authority, visual culture, influencer practices

1. Introduction

Restaurant review material is transforming the way the Chinese youth make dining choices in the era when consumer videos have become a major information source on what to eat and where to eat [1]. In comparison to previous uses like word-of-mouth by friends, on-site visits like queue length, or professional rating systems such as the Michelin Guide, the products of the new generation rely on platforms like Douyin to provide an extremely visual and immersive platform of the restaurant guide [2]. The videos in question stimulate the senses and emotions of the viewers directly by way of their unboxing-like experience, immediate responses, use of real camera effects like ASMR and close shots of dishes, and relaxed, talkative expression. Consequently, the food recommendations have stopped being the prerogative of professional critics but have become a participative cultural practice that has a high communicative value. However, behind this seemingly transparent and natural short video format, creators are unknowingly building new taste benchmarks. By repeatedly using regular visual patterns combined with carefully designed food scenes, they presuppose the audience's sensory judgments and ultimately build a food value system [3]. It can be said that short videos use the new media dissemination model to determine sensory judgments, but current research

often focuses on commercial or traffic perspectives, while ignoring the cultural process behind the reshaping of the taste system.

Based on this context, the present study takes Douyin restaurant review videos as its core case. It investigates how creators standardize public taste through visual storytelling and linguistic strategies and how they acquire content authority through the tension between accessibility and professionalism. Using case-based qualitative analysis, this study selects representative accounts and sample videos and conducts detailed examination from the perspectives of narrative patterns, evaluative language, visual structures, and audience interaction mechanisms. By revealing how short video platforms participate in the production and circulation of taste, this study aims to deepen understanding of the interaction among contemporary Chinese food culture, media technologies, and consumer psychology and to provide a new theoretical lens for examining digital taste governance in the short video era.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Platform-mediated taste-making

Within the digital media context, taste is not so much the personal sense of appearance, but rather an issue in culture that is constructed through the infrastructure of platforms, the re-enactment of visual cultures, and socializing with one another. To begin with, studies in the visual culture and sensory media have suggested that images do not merely manifest reality, but they have to cause the body to respond, by means of composition, rhythm, perspective of the camera and visual-auditory association, to bring about a sense of directed experience to the spectator. Close-ups of dishes, food ASMR, sound effects of the environment, and follow-camera shots are all components of a sensory-mediatised form of displaying taste in short video contexts, which makes the viewers base their evaluation of items on visual-auditory experience, and not on the experience of actual taste. At the same time, the Bourdieuan notion of cultural capital is recoded into the digital form according to the Bourdieuan terminology, which is digital cultural capital, incorporating the notions of power, content style, platform literacy, and the ability to interact with the audience [4]. These are what shape the discursive location of the creator in the taste production. The fresh homogeneous production of taste is being driven by platform recommendation algorithms, the sense of time compression of short video formats, and the immediate demand under highlighter created by the attention economy in total. Algorithms further advance the narrative tropes that advance heavy click through and finish rates, as a result of which there is homogenization in the contents of the restaurant reviews: preordained opening lines, camera logic, emotionally charged terms of evaluation, and the value-for-money construct are steadily recreatable, which together are slowly being converted into a platform dominated logic of visualized taste. Here, one will not create an experience of taste but capture it in data structure, content templates, and visualization standards of the platform.

Lastly, there is the effect of short video creators, which comes in the form of everyday influencer authority [5]. Despite their position as commoners, their vast following, unrelenting production, and promotion on the platform substantially provide them with a scholar effect that resembles food critics. Their judgment language, emotional displays and recommendation actions are repeatedly perceived, reproduced and internalized as taste points of reference to the populace thereby turning ordinary creators into new taste makers. Within a platform environment, taste is not just a result of sensory discourses and an algorithmically-controlled practice, but a highly visible, even decentralized practice of cultural power.

2.2. China's restaurant rating system

The modern rating system used in the restaurants of China has got a complex web like structure. Michelin has a great symbolic value in China, but the level of influence is evidently weak. The lack of coverage, lack of knowledge of the local food culture, and the lack of concern of Michellens with the local street food and low-end restaurants would not allow visiting every aspect of the rich and diverse Chinese culinary culture. That cultural imbalance leads to its symbolic rather than real authority and that is why it is more akin to external symbolic capital than a kind of effective day to day consumption guide. Conversely, the Must-Eat List and the Black Pearl Restaurant Guide of Dianping are a smaller expert system. They use algorithms and five-star review boards based on their user review data of masses and on the local culinary expertise and are highly sensitive to the local cuisines, ingredients preference, and price-sensitivity [6]. This online, data oriented rating regime is more influential in the Chinese catering sector and the inherent locality and high scale of the model guarantees a fairly resilient market impact. This institutionalized review combined with grassroots experience is the origin of the emergence of restaurant review videos. Classical expert systems offer power and criteria and the culture of word of mouth and the experience of a wide user base gives the content creators the freedom of interpretation. The media form which lies between these two and fills the void between the institutional authority and the experience of a common person, through the visual storytelling, the emotional expression and the opinion of the common person, becomes the fast growing third force in the restaurant evaluation system in China.

3. Case analysis: taste, authority, and viewer positions in Douyin restaurant-exploration videos

3.1. Narrative format and aesthetic strategies

The narrative structure of the videos on Douyin restaurant reviews is generally very formulaic as the video creator introduces the scene, shows the food, describes the details, talks about the taste, and ends with a recommendation. It is possible not only to guarantee the delivery of information in a very short period but also to give a viewer a chance to get engaged with the experience of food and to enjoy it in the familiar rhythm. Consider the widely known Douyin creators like Bai Bing, who usually makes the footage start with a typical fast cut between exterior shots and a short statement in relation to the place (like “Today I went to a hidden restaurant at X Street”) as a hook and then moves on to the food itself [7].

The videos by Bai Bing focus on the focus of seeing the actual food, and they are shot in an unceasing manner of capturing the first bite response. The prime sensual approach to restaurant review writing entails visual indicators such as: gleaming sauces, rising steam, extending cheese pulls, transparent surfaces in cross-sections, and the speed with which the food is served. These signs are not necessarily about food as such but rather about the so-called sensory templates that are predetermined by the aesthetical norms of the platform [8]. They show the experience of taste as visual, so the time when it can be seen to be delicious is more persuasive than when it actually tastes good, and this fits the interests of the algorithm in high interactivity. At the linguistic level, restaurant review videos are characterized by the use of very short and informal language, which focuses adults on instant experience and emotional feedback. Common phrases are as follows: This is simply amazing, it is just so tasty, this place is very good and highly recommended. Such remarks lack an in-depth discussion but directly lead the viewers to give their taste expectations based on the emotional determination.

3.2. Viewer's triadic identity: audience – consumer – follower

The proliferation and impact of the Douyin restaurant review content is not solely due to the narrative techniques used by the creators themselves, but the numerous identities viewers possess through the various identities they constantly alternate with in the process of watching. The platform is generally watched by viewers who exist in three overlapping roles; the viewer, the consumer and semi followers/follower. The three roles are interrelated but have boundaries, a triadic identity is created that contributes to the proliferation of short-video food reviews [9].

Users become consumers as reviewers of restaurants first by having to watch the videos as entertainment. They copy the words in the videos, recite the catchphrases of the bloggers, or follow the memes, and engage in secondary creative work, including editing their videos, mash treating the videos, commenting on them, or, subjecting the creators to the reaction they themselves become one of the memes. The entertainment viewing mood decreases tensions of the material and makes food suggestions an informative and cultural participatory culture engagingly and sustainably. As the viewers change to the consumer identity, the viewers compare the visual symbols, price details, and the dining situation the videos with their needs to make dining choices. As an example, the viewers may evaluate the strong taste based on the looks of the smooky one or the freshness of ingredients based on the close-up cross-section. The major functioning of this identity is explained by the fact that viewers do not need to thoroughly trust the blogger because they actually consume the video as a reference point of view in order to indulge or avoid bad products, thereby creating a selective and strategic way of acceptance. By being a fan or a semi-fan, the viewers in some way accept the taste and the judgment of the blogger, but point at remaining detached, one usually says, I am not a fan, I just think what he says is rather valuable. This semi-fan identification does not involve heavy emotional investments but allows accepting the recommendations of the blogger in a narrow range creating a flex-following that exists between acceptance and skepticism. The fluidity between the three identities is the original mechanism of the short video platform, which is flexibly trusted. The viewers do not adopt everything in the same way that they would adopt a food critic nor are they completely independent of the content in the sense that pure entertainment users would but they alternate between various identities based on what they want to watch, how they feel and what they are consuming.

3.3. Standardization and semi-professionalization of taste

The food videos on Douyin create taste in a twofold process of standardization and semi-professionalization. On the one hand, creators make use of a collection of extremely visual and replicable standards -colour, gloss, steam, texture, cross-sections, portion rhythm- to make subjective taste visible and educable as operational cues. These clues allow the audience to cultivate a feeling of familiarity with how to rate food, even without trying it, to provide a common basis upon which they can have a template of flavour rating on the site in their daily lives. Alternatively, developers tactically deploy increasingly abstract, professional-sounding terms like clean acidity, balanced layers, advanced flavour profile, and tend to be supplemented by industry terminology concerning heat management, the fat structure or ingredient behaviour. These writings are more difficult to confirm and keep the creator and the viewer at a symbolic distance which enhances the power of authority as an influencer on the part of the former.

These two layers combine in a close-range mechanism: since they make the taste participating and available, the operational cues render the taste experience participatory, whereas the abstract descriptors enhance the authority of a creator. Consequently, Douyin taste is democratized and

hierarchized, as both platform-coercive aesthetic templates and selective use of professional speech impact each other and define one another as the outcome. Creators shape taste through operational and abstract standards, but their authority is ultimately amplified by the platform structure. This leads to a broader logic of the platform's mediating authority.

3.4. The logic of platform authority

Within a platform-based media environment, the power of restaurant-review videos has not been determined by professional structures of service but instead by the interaction of platform algorithm, visibility systems and audience recognition. The styles of aesthetics most preferred are dictated by algorithmic distribution; when the formulas of rich sauces, poetic close-ups, or saturation dominance and achieve high levels of completion and engagement, this platform boosts their message and makes such styles seem like common criteria of taste. Artists are building a hybrid self, which is the combination of availability of common users and partial knowledge of assessors. They appear to be approachable and use biased technical terminology and experience-induced decisions. Such mixed identity helps them to be credible without causing the distance that regular critics provoke.

Power on the platform is thus created in a process of visibility, repetition and influence of audience. Popularity is amplified; familiarity naturalizes some aesthetic decisions; and familiarity with other people increases trust. In this fashion, a platform-mediated power is created- based on data amplification and recognition of the daily instead of institutional knowledge.

4. Recommendations

The creators, viewers, and platforms must adapt their roles in order to make short-video food content more culturally diverse and richer in aesthetics. On the part of designers, the use of additional commentaries about local food culture, cooking philosophy, and sources of ingredients can add to the story and break the dull aesthetic pattern that template imagery creates. What is important to viewers is to be conscious of the sensory biases that can be brought on by visual stimuli and platform recommendation machine, and be cautious about what visual cues regarding a product such as bursting with juice, stretching, and rich color say, thereby forming a more independent consumer perception. In the case of platforms, sustaining different types of content, exposing more of the local cuisine, and discouraging the models of algorithms to promote the individual forms of visual aestheticism may steer more plentiful manifestations of the pleasurability into the mainstream. By means of such joint actions, short-video food culture will be able to retain its attractiveness and encourage more liberal, culturally deeper, and social involvement in food culture among the general population.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Douyin restaurant-review videos remake everyday taste through a multi-layered process that combines platform-driven visual standardization, creators' semi-professional linguistic practices, and viewers' shifting identities as audience, consumers, and followers. The findings reveal that taste on Douyin is simultaneously democratized and hierarchized: operational visual cues enable viewers to "learn to taste" through screens, while abstract descriptors and selective expertise elevate creators' authority in a platform-mediated environment. These mechanisms together illustrate how sensory judgments, cultural authority, and algorithmic visibility interact to form a new regime of digital taste governance in contemporary

China. A limitation of this study is that its case-based qualitative approach cannot capture the full variety of creator types, regional food cultures, or platform dynamics. Future research may incorporate cross-platform comparisons or computational analysis to examine how digital taste circulates across wider sociotechnical ecologies and evolves through changing algorithmic and cultural conditions.

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