



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 10. Issue.2. 2023 (April-June)

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

LIVE TO EAT OR EAT TO LIVE: ANALYSIS ON DIGITAL FOOD CULTURE AND FOOD  
BLOGGERS IN INDIA

FAHIMA FAIGEE

Masters in English with communication studies,  
Christ university, Bengaluru, Karnataka  
Email: fahimafaigee747@gmail.com



Article information

Received:18/5/2023  
Accepted:11/06/2023  
Published online:20/6/2023  
doi: [10.33329/ijelr.10.2.169](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.10.2.169)

ABSTRACT

In recent years, social media usage and growth in India have been equally significant. It has developed into a potent instrument for social networking, information exchange, and communication among India's vast population. Digital food culture has recently gained popularity and significantly altered India's culinary culture. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the pervasive phenomena of digital food culture in Indian society today. The study also emphasizes on the transformation of capitalism into media capitalism. Furthermore, this paper also looks at how media capitalism makes customers into spectators and turns them into sheeple for monetary gain. Netizens, however, act in a sycophantic manner while denying the influence of media capitalism. Thus, the study intends to investigate how media capitalism affects customers and viewers in India through the lens of digital food culture and food bloggers. Therefore, the theory of media capitalism and spectacle is used to analyze these issues.

**Keywords:** Digital food Culture, Food culture in Indi, Media Capitalism, social media, Food bloggers.

Social media in India has experienced significant growth and widespread usage in recent years. It has become a powerful tool for communication, information sharing, and social networking among India's vast population. Meanwhile, media dependency of people has gradually increased; from seeking for information in internet browsers to catering their basic necessities like food, clothing, shelter and what not; Lately, Digital food culture has become widespread phenomena and it has brought a major change in food culture in India. Digital food culture refers the ways in which food and cooking have been impacted by and incorporated into digital technology. This digital food culture has created a remarkable impact on the way people order, consume and share food; with the growth of social media, food delivery platforms, food bloggers and influencers, digital payments, and access to food-related content has transformed food culture in India and made it more accessible, diverse, and convenient than ever before.

However, with regard to escalation of digital food culture; capitalism has morphed into media capitalism, where digital media companies and social media have gained significant power and influence over the country's media landscape. Moreover, this study examines how media capitalism creates a spectacle among consumers and make them sheeple for capitalist's monetary purpose. However, Netizens act as a sycophant without acknowledging the role of media capitalism. Thus, the study aims to look into how digital food culture and food

---

bloggers in India influence consumers/viewers and how they fall prey to media capitalism. Hence, these factors are analyzed using spectacle and media capitalism theory.

Primarily, several social media platforms in India are specifically related to digital food culture, focusing on sharing food related content and culinary experiences. One of the most prominent platforms is Instagram. Instagram is a visual based platform that is known for sharing food-related content. Food bloggers, home cooks, and professional chefs use Instagram to showcase their culinary creations, share recipes, and offer cooking tips. Moreover, as these platforms prioritise visual over textual it has got features like reels, hashtags, instant sharing- pictures and video option called stories. Thus, Instagram has facilitated the growth of food influencers and have had offered space for amateurs to share food related content.

Similarly, Pinterest is yet another visual discovery platform that allows users to save and discover ideas for various topics, including food and recipes. It is a famous platform with features which aids in searching and saving recipes and creating recipe boards based on an individual's choice. Furthermore, Users can also follow specific food bloggers or recipe creators to get inspired. Hence, Pinterest promote digital food culture which voids the boundaries between cultures.

In addition, YouTube a video- sharing platform; has vast collection of food related content. Furthermore, it has channels dedicated to cooking, recipe demonstrations, and food vlogs; which have gained significant popularity. Many cooking enthusiasts and professional chefs have their own YouTube channels where they share recipe tutorials, cooking techniques and food related content. Hence, YouTube acts as a democratic platform where anyone can showcase their culinary experience, skill and criticisms.

Moreover, Platforms like WordPress, Blogger, and Medium serve as popular blogging platforms for food enthusiasts. However, these platform enables food bloggers to create their own websites or blogs dedicated to sharing recipes, food photography, and culinary experiences. These platforms provide a space for more detailed and in-depth content compared to social media platforms.

Food delivery apps such as Swiggy and Zomato, leverage social media platforms to engage with users, promote discounts and offers, and showcase popular food options. Moreover, it allows users to share their food delivery experiences and write reviews, thus influences others' choices.

Although, the rise of digital food culture has led to a proliferation of food-related content; including blogs, social media posts, and videos. Content related to these food items are delivered to people belonging to different cultural backgrounds by individuals called food bloggers; these bloggers usually establish their content on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, websites and other social media platforms. Content ranges from recipes and cooking tips to restaurant reviews and food photography. In addition, digital food culture has created new opportunities for food bloggers to monetize their content through sponsored posts, cookbook deals, and other revenue streams.

Evidently, social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube and several other blogging platforms shape viewers' consumption practice and opinions. Besides, it has become the leading platform of culinary knowledge production. As Adorno mentions, the media have the power to standardize things (14); Similarly, these platforms have revolutionized digital food culture in India by democratizing access to food-related information, inspiring creativity in cooking and food presentation, connecting individuals with shared culinary interests, and influence dining choices and trends. Hence, these platforms encourage anyone with an internet connection to publicise their point of view and proves that everybody can be a food critic.

Likewise, social media plays a major role in cultural exchange; especially food. People consume food without realizing that they are consuming food which originated from a different culture. For instance, Chinese food in India, has become common; food items such as fried rice, spring roll and Hakka noodles are now a part of every Indian menu card and cuisine. Additionally, digital food culture brings people together, fosters community and social connection.

Before the advent of digital food culture, information on it was primarily passed on through traditional means such as cooking a meal at home, eating at restaurants, and sharing meals with family and friends. Recipes were passed down from generation to generation, and people relied on cookbooks, magazines, and word of mouth to learn about novel dishes and to explore new restaurants in the vicinity; reviews about such places were also passed on by oral means. Food photography and presentation was not as widespread as it is today, and there was limited access to information about food from other cultures. With the rise of the internet and social media, digital food culture has transformed the way people interact with food, providing access to a vast array of recipes, cooking tips, and food-related content.

Ultimately, there is a link between digital food culture and media capitalism which the consumers\ viewers are unaware of. Media capitalism refers to the economic system in which media companies and outlets operate as profit-driven enterprises, seeking to maximize revenue through the production and distribution of media content. In the context of digital food culture, this means that food-related content is often commodified and monetized through sponsored content, advertisements, and other forms of brand promotion through food bloggers.

However, From Animal Kingdom to Media Capitalism, each wing of human civilization has had its own ideological affirmations. Similarly, In the digital era, Capitalism's new ideology came with a rising media apparatus that is using science to create powerful ideological manipulations (Habermas79). Besides, various corporate media companies play a major role in creating these ideologies using different techniques; especially via/in social media.

Moreover, corporate media uses persuasive statement like 'consumer is the king', and other words like happiness, freedom, affordable and many others. Furthermore, produces a desire for comfort, for luxury and prestige (Packard 238). On the contrary, social media see customers not as kings, but as media capitalism would like its consumers to believe, not its subject but its object (Adorno 12). For instance, Users of social media believe that they are customers of that particular platform; but they are unaware of the system's engineering power and algorithms. Thus, it includes both knowledge and power, in Lyotard's term (Computerization). (Lyotard 4).

Consequently, a unique technique followed by these social media and digital platform are algorithms. Algorithms in social media refer to the complex mathematical formulas and computational processes used by social media platforms to determine what content is shown to users and in what order. These algorithms analyze various factors, such as user behaviour, engagement patterns, content relevance, and quality, to curate personalized feeds and recommendations. In case of digital food culture, it aids users with content discovery; individuals interested in food and cooking are more likely to come across food-related content in their feeds. These algorithms analyze user behaviour, such as liking, sharing, and commenting on food- related posts.

In addition, algorithms help 'Influencers' and 'food bloggers' to reach a wider audience. Influencers create and share visually appealing food content, including recipes, food photography, and cooking tutorials. Social media algorithms often amplify their content to reach a larger audience, making these influencers instrumental in shaping food trends and introducing new culinary experiences.

However, Food bloggers in India play a significant role in promoting media capitalism within the digital food culture. They promote media capitalism in various ways. To begin, Food bloggers often collaborate with brands and businesses through partnerships and sponsored content. These collaborations can involve featuring specific products or promoting establishments in exchange for financial compensation or other benefits. Such partnerships contribute to media capitalism as they involve the monetization of content creation and the amplification of brand messaging. For instance, a food blogger promotes a movie or series which is streamed in other OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon, Hotstar and others with a paid partnership. Conversely, this is totally irrelevant to the food content they are supposed to produce.

Moreover, these food bloggers participate in affiliate marketing programs, where they promote products or services and earn a commission on sales generated through their unique links or codes. This incentivizes bloggers to generate content that encourages their audience to make purchases, contributing to the promotion

---

of consumerism and driving economic transactions. For example, Food bloggers visit certain restaurants and make a reel videos and pictures; then they give viewers codes; which may be fake or invalid when viewers go and visit the same restaurants. Thus, this kind of affiliate marketing is mere deception and creates false consciousness. ()

Nevertheless, Food bloggers may incorporate advertisements or product placements within their content, including blog posts, videos, and social media posts. The best example is advertisements in between YouTube videos. These promotional elements are often strategically placed to attract the attention of viewers and generate revenue through advertising partnerships. By showcasing specific brands or products, bloggers contribute to the commercialization of digital food culture.

According to Karl Marx, commercialization refers to the process by which economic activities and social relations become increasingly dominated by market exchange and the pursuit of profit. Likewise, the rise of food blogging as a profession has led to the professionalization and commercialization of the industry. Bloggers may pursue sponsored content, brand collaborations, and advertising opportunities as a means of generating income and establishing themselves as key players in the food media landscape. This professionalization contributes to media capitalism by turning content creation into a market-driven enterprise.

Apart from food bloggers, Food delivery apps like Swiggy and Zomato have played a major part in media capitalism especially in India. However, these food delivery apps have had a great amount of impact on traditional food delivery workers in India called 'Dabba walas'. Food delivery apps have disrupted the traditional system of dappa walas, who were typically self-employed individuals delivering homemade meals to offices and other locations. With the rise of food delivery apps, these workers have faced increased competition from gig economy delivery workers employed by the apps. The apps often classify these workers as independent contractors, which allows the companies to avoid providing them with benefits and protections enjoyed by regular employees. This classification can lead to exploitative labour conditions, such as long working hours, low wages, and limited job security.

Moreover, In Marxist terms these individuals face alienation due to capitalist control. Marx contended that commercialization leads to alienation, a sense of estrangement and detachment experienced by individuals in a capitalist society. As social relations and human activities become mediated by market forces, individuals may feel disconnected from the products they produce, the work they perform, and even from each other. Food delivery apps, as capitalist and commercial enterprises, exercise control over the labour process and the means of production. They set the terms and conditions of employment, including delivery schedules, pay rates, and performance metrics. This control can lead to the alienation of dappa walas, as they become disconnected from the ownership and control of their labour. They are reduced to being mere instruments of production, subject to the dictates of app companies.

In addition, Food delivery apps treat delivery labour as a commodity that can be bought and sold in the market. The apps facilitate the exchange of labour power for wages, but they often extract surplus value by paying low wages and taking a significant portion of the delivery fees. This commodification of labour contributes to the capitalist accumulation of profit at the expense of the workers' labour value.

The act of media capitalism and its mass deception can be viewed from Guy Debord's spectacle theory. According to Debord, the spectacle is not merely a collection of images or media representations but a social relation mediated by images. It is a form of mass communication that dominates modern capitalist societies, shaping people's perceptions, desires, and social interactions. The spectacle represents the reification of social life, where social relationships become commodities and individuals experience a sense of alienation from their own lived experiences. For instance, Food is a basic necessity for human survival and well-being; However, in the context of digital food culture, its status is elevated and transformed in several ways using tempting images and videos of foods. Similarly, certain food items are consumed by people due to its virality and status than eating it because of the health benefits it offers and/or how good it tastes. Thus, it asks the question of whether people live to eat or eat for status and virality or legitimately, eat to live.

Consequently, Debord analyzes commodity fetishism and alienation; inspired from Karl Marx's concept of commodity fetishism and extended it to the realm of media and culture. In media capitalism, the spectacle commodifies social relations, turning them into objects of consumption. This process leads to the alienation of individuals, as their lived experiences and authentic social connections are replaced by mediated representations and commercialized images. To illustrate this, many social media and food delivery apps often monetize user data by selling it to third-party advertisers or using it for market research and analysis. User data, including food preferences, consumption patterns, and demographics, is valuable for advertisers and marketers. This data-driven monetization contributes to the media capitalism model by commodifying user information and providing insights that can be utilized for targeted advertising and market analysis.

Nonetheless, the spectacle theory states that the spectacle only presents individuals as being subject to commodities, and experience itself is made into a commodity. In the case of digital food culture, the consumers/viewers become a commodity in two ways; First, by watching food related content and trying to consume them. Secondly, by experiencing food items which indirectly pays both bloggers and the products and restaurant which they promote. Thus, the food bloggers by showing a spectacle to consumers/viewers; are commodified without consciousness.

All in all, with advancement of technology, digital food culture, social media and media capitalism has become an inevitable part of people's lives. However, media capitalism had made food as a product meant for profit-making; hence, media capitalism makes necessity a product and profit by displaying mouth-watering pictures and videos of food to the audience. Accordingly, media capitalism uses food bloggers as a tool to manipulate a large amount of people; especially food bloggers with many followers. They influence consumer behaviour to serve the interests of companies and brands. As a result, this mass deception is analyzed by Guy Debord's Spectacle theory and observes the commodification of consumers; Thus, consumers/viewer's lack of understanding of media capitalism; which is led by the food bloggers and by their social media content is reason for this mass deception and commodification

#### Works Cited

- Adorno, Theodor W. "Culture Industry Reconsidered." *New German Critique*, vol. 6, no. 6, 1975, pp. 12–19, <https://doi.org/10.2307/487650>.
- Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Black & Red, 1967.
- Feldman, Zeena. "'Good Food' in an Instagram Age: Rethinking Hierarchies of Culture, Criticism and Taste." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 6, Nov. 2021, pp. 1340–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494211055733>.
- Feldman, Zeena, and Michael K. Goodman. "Digital Food Culture, Power and Everyday Life." *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 6, Nov. 2021, pp. 1227–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494211055501>.
- Goodman, Michael K., and Sylvia Jaworska. "Mapping Digital Foodscapes: Digital Food Influencers and the Grammars of Good Food." *Geoforum*, vol. 117, Dec. 2020, pp. 183–93, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.09.020>.
- Klikauer, Thomas. *Media Capitalism: Hegemony in the Age of Mass Deception*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
- LeBesco, Kathleen, and Peter Naccarato. *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Food and Popular Culture*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
- Lupton, Deborah, and Zeena Feldman, editors. *Digital Food Cultures*. Routledge, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429402135>.
- Lyotard, Jean-Francois, et al. "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge." *Poetics Today*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1984, p. 886, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1772278>.