



360i Point of View Online Food & Photo Sharing Trends

Overview

There is so much emphasis on monitoring and analyzing written communication across the web and in social media. Online listening has become a standard for many companies and brands, but what is the next frontier? What are we missing? **Photos that consumers upload and share amongst themselves are a major missing piece of the online listening pie.**

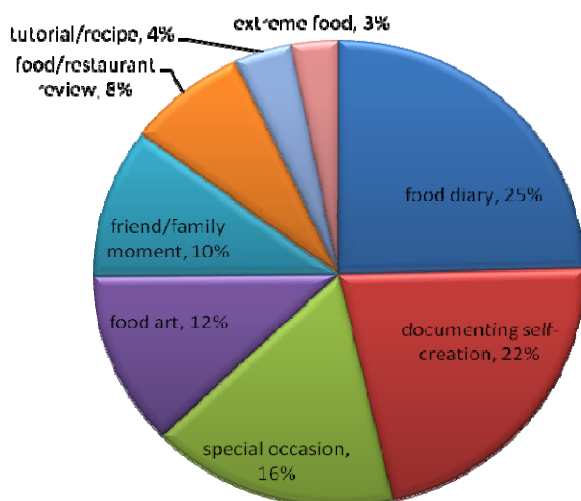
The numbers speak for themselves. By the end of 2010, more than 80 billion photos were uploaded across a variety of social picture platforms (source: Pixable; [Facebook Photo Trends](#)). At least once a month, 52% of mobile users take photos with their phones and 19% upload their photos to the web at least once a month (source: comScore MobiLens January 2011: 3 month average). Photo sharing behavior amongst consumers is especially important to look at when creating marketing programs targeted towards women; they are twice as likely than their male counterparts to upload, tag and view photos (source: Pixable; [Facebook Photo Trends](#)).

The analysis that follows looks specifically at photos shared by consumers relating to food, eating, and meals. The food photo sharing phenomenon is in full swing with new tools popping up all the time, such as Foodspotting, Fiddme, Eat.ly, and the recently added photo capabilities to Foursquare. Showing - not just telling - others what you're eating is becoming mainstream.

In this POV we explore the habits and motivations of people sharing food photos online by examining the content of UGC photos and what this phenomenon means for food-related marketers and brands.

Why are consumers sharing food photos?

Motivations for Sharing Photos of Food



Key:

Food diary: no special occasion, what I ate today

Documenting self creation: showing off a finished product, or the process of creation

Special occasion: special day or documentation of an event

Food art: focus of the photo is artistic

Friend/family moment: focus on people and social relationships

Food/restaurant review: commentary or critique on a food type, brand, or restaurant

Tutorial/recipe: photo or series of photos showing steps in a process

Extreme food: unusual, unconventional creations



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Food Diary (25%): A quarter of food photos are motivated by the relatively mundane activity of publishing a food diary – in other words, to simply document and show others “what I’m eating.” This parallels the trend of everyday status updates that people use to document their lives on brief publishing platforms such as Twitter, Foursquare and Facebook. People see personal value in just sharing the simple moments in life.



Breakfast at Camille's

Photo: Via Flickr, by *Laurenbeckwith*

Seventy-two percent of these food diary pictures showcase a main meal rather than a snack or smaller food item. Dinner is, by far, the most popular meal to share. This seems logical because dinner is usually the biggest meal and includes the most food elements. It is also a meal that is inherently the most social.

Tag Cloud of Food Photo Titles (August 2010 – January 2011)



Source: 360i analysis of 420 Flickr pictures created in Wordle.net



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Documenting Self-Creation (22%): Another major motivation for posting food-related photos is to show off a self-created meal or dish. Perhaps people are trying out a new recipe, or are particularly proud of how a meal turned out. This involves a more egotistical-related motivation, where people are proud of their efforts and want to show off their creations and implicitly seek approval or cred.



Smoked sausage, tomato and peppers

Photo: Via Flickr, by *moonheids*

Special Occasion (16%): Special occasions and cameras go hand in hand. Most households have a camera on hand for all special occasions because special occasions usually bring many family members together in one place. It must be documented! Also, a major element of all holiday celebration is food. Therefore, it is no surprise that 16% of the food photos focus on a special occasion.



thanksgiving

Photo: Via Flickr, by *toastymarshmallow*



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Food Art (12%): Photography is an art form and food is an art form – mix the two together and you have a masterpiece. About 12% of the posts are intended to impart some kind of artistic angle to food. Food is an interesting medium that can be both delicious and intriguing. It is a subject matter that has been part of art for centuries. Paul Cezanne in the 19th century probably would never have imagined still life food art instantly coming to life digitally. Food art is a wonderful opportunity to capture a creation visually that can evoke thoughtfulness, inspiration and great emotion.



Photo: Via Flickr, by *patrickYHC*

Friend/Family Moment (10%): In general, people are less important than the food in the photos analyzed; friends and/or family were the focus only 10% of the time. The motivation for this is similar to that of sharing special occasions and other events – capturing a moment of people coming together around the table. There is something social, fun, and happy about the combination of good food and good company.

There is ample and growing opportunity to capitalize on the food photo-sharing trend, and marketers should be mindful of the organic motivations that are behind these behaviors. Armed with knowledge of why and how people share food-related photos, marketers can encourage and create platforms for what is already a natural inclination among their targeted audiences. For instance, Oreo has leveraged the status update format of food photos by asking users to submit pictures of themselves in everyday situations eating an Oreo; every week a Fan of the Week is selected and featured on the brand's [Facebook page](#).



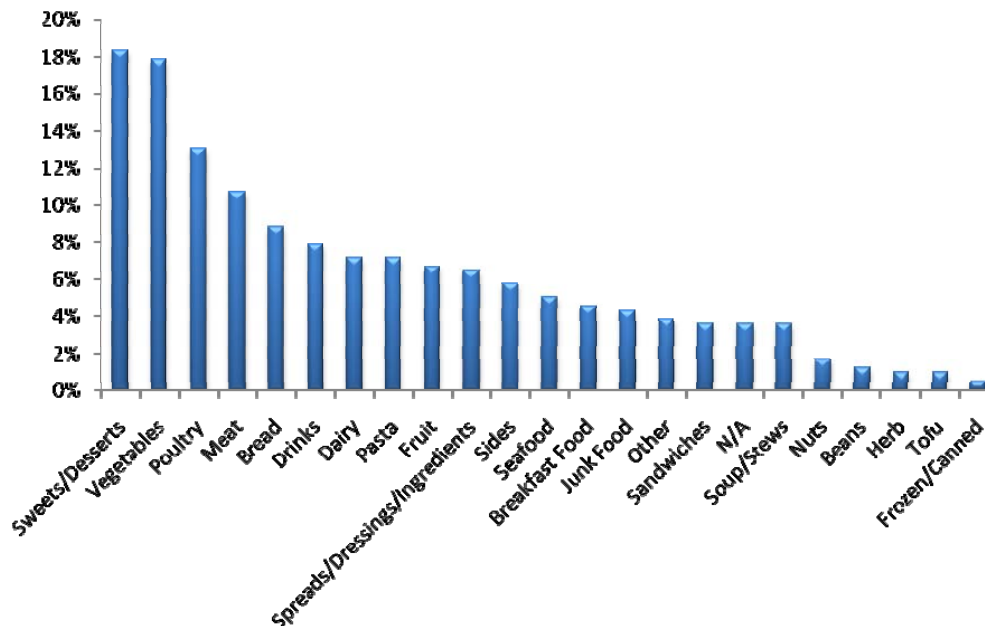


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What kinds of food do consumers share photos of?

Consumers are most inclined to take and share photos of desserts, followed by vegetable dishes and poultry.

Specific Food Shown in Pictures (August 2010 – January 2011)



Sweets/Desserts top the list because they can be colorful and creative, giving sharers a chance to show off unique creations. Also, they are often a key aspect of special occasions, making them an important subject to document.



Photos: Via Flickr, by *The son of Krypton* & *Kim in color*



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Why vegetables? Since vegetables are necessary but sometimes boring, people may want to show off their vegetable dishes when they make something more appetizing and colorful – and they are proud of these creations.



Mini shell pasta with a creamy smoked bacon and pea sauce

Photos: Via Flickr by *misanthrp* & *turncoat tendrils*

Marketers have an opportunity to challenge consumers to get creative with their food and their photos. They can provide opportunities for consumers to liven up their regular dishes such as vegetables and chicken with different products (i.e. cheese) and show off the results. The challenge could be to only include certain colors in the food pictures, or only foods that start with the letter “C.” It really can be anything, but the point is that people are already doing it themselves. **There is a huge opportunity for marketers to become part of the fun or encourage the fun themselves.**

For example, Philadelphia Cream Cheese hosts a contest asking registered members of the “Real Women of Philadelphia” to submit their original recipes featuring Philadelphia Cream Cheese and Philadelphia Cooking Crème. This effort provides consumers with the opportunity to showcase new and interesting takes on everyday meals, while capitalizing on people’s desire to document and share a self-made creation.



Photo: User’s Post of a Real Women of Philadelphia Contest Entry



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Where are brands occurring currently in food sharing photos?

Unfortunately for marketers, brands (like people) are also secondary or nonexistent in these food sharing photos. Only 12% clearly exhibit a branded product, which is the same percentage 360i found when conducting a [recent study on Twitter usage](#). Only 12% of consumer tweets mentioned a brand. The brands that did show up in our photo analysis were highly diverse – no brand or set of brands seemed to dominate the field. Here are some examples of brands we found in our research (Clockwise from top left: In-N-Out Burger, Coca-Cola, Doritos, and Kellogg's):



Photos: Via Flickr, by [_tar0_](#), [Lisa Jean](#), [the Food Junk](#) & [Security_Blanket](#)

This low brand presence reveals that food-related marketers could be doing more to insert their brands into food photo sharing trends. There is a big opportunity for brands to become part of the "picture."

According to Alton Barbour, author of *Louder Than Words: Nonverbal Communication*, the total impact of communication breaks down like this:

- 7% verbal (words)
- 38% vocal (volume, pitch, rhythm, etc.)



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- **55% body movements (facial expressions, gestures, posture, etc.)**

Words will always be important online, but it is crucial for marketers to start paying attention to the visual aspects of this communication or consumers might miss out on the true brand message.

Methodology Notes

- 420 UGC Photos Analyzed on Flickr
- Time frame of tweets: August 2010 – January 2011

Next Steps

Contact your 360i strategic advisor to learn more about how consumers are sharing food experiences in social using photo sharing.

About 360i

360i is an award-winning digital marketing agency that drives results for Fortune 500 marketers through insights, ideas and technologies. 360i helps its clients think differently about their online presence and evolve their strategies to take advantage of the new world of marketing communications – one where brands and consumers engage in interactive and multi-directional conversations. In 2010, Ad Age named 360i to its prestigious Agency A-List. Current clients include Kraft Foods, JCPenney, Coca-Cola, NBC Universal and H&R Block, among others. For more information, please visit blog.360i.com or follow us on Twitter [@360i](https://twitter.com/360i).