Edible Aesthetics and Digital Storytelling: Sensory Marketing in Food Blogging Communities

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Abstract

Food has always been more than sustenance; in the digital age, it has become a narrative, a performance, and a sensory experience extended through screens. This study examines how edible aesthetics and digital storytelling converge within food blogging communities to shape consumer perceptions, emotional engagement, and purchase intentions. Drawing on theories of sensory marketing and narrative transportation, we explore how visual, textual, and symbolic cues are orchestrated to evoke taste, texture, and atmosphere in the absence of physical consumption. A mixed-method design integrates content analysis of leading food blogs with survey-based data from readers to identify how aesthetic presentation, storytelling techniques, and community interaction foster parasocial bonds and influence brand trust. Findings highlight the centrality of multisensory cues in digital contexts, revealing that edible aesthetics not only stimulate hedonic appreciation but also enhance memorability, authenticity, and cultural capital. This research contributes to the growing literature on sensory marketing by situating food blogging as a hybrid space where consumption, identity, and digital storytelling coalesce. Implications are drawn for marketers, bloggers, and brands seeking to cultivate experiential value in virtual foodscapes.

Keywords: *Sensory marketing; Edible aesthetics; Digital storytelling; Food blogging communities; Narrative transportation; Consumer engagement; Parasocial interaction; Experiential value; Cultural capital.*

Introduction

Food has long been recognised as one of the most powerful carriers of meaning in human society, embodying not only nourishment but also memory, ritual, and identity. In recent decades, however, food has moved beyond the physical table into the digital stage, where it is curated, stylised, and narrated for audiences across platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and personal blogs. Within these virtual spaces, food is transformed into an aesthetic artefact and a narrative vehicle, carrying with it the textures of taste, the evocations of smell, and the symbolic richness of culture. The digital mediation of food has not diminished its sensory impact; rather, it has intensified the ways in which consumers engage with it, allowing sight and story to become surrogates for flavour and aroma. This shift marks the rise of what may be described as edible aesthetics, wherein the visual and narrative representation of food activates sensory imagination and emotional resonance.

At the heart of this transformation are food blogging communities, where amateur cooks, professional chefs, lifestyle influencers, and everyday enthusiasts converge to share recipes, reviews, and experiences. These communities are more than sites of information exchange; they are cultural spaces that merge consumption with creativity, enabling digital storytelling to weave together personal narratives, culinary traditions, and aspirational lifestyles. Food bloggers employ a rich tapestry of aesthetic strategies—vivid photography, carefully crafted prose, symbolic metaphors, and even background music or video editing—to engage audiences in multisensory journeys. Readers and followers, in turn, participate actively by commenting, sharing, and reproducing recipes, thereby reinforcing a communal identity around the appreciation of food. The result is a form of mediated sensory marketing, in which brands and bloggers alike leverage the interplay of aesthetics and narrative to cultivate engagement and influence consumer behaviour.

The study of sensory marketing has expanded significantly in the past two decades, foregrounding the ways in which sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell can affect consumer perception and decision-making. Yet much of this work remains anchored in physical retail contexts such as restaurants, cafes, or experiential stores, where sensory cues are directly encountered. In contrast, the digital mediation of food presents an intriguing paradox: consumers respond to sensory cues in the absence of direct physical stimulation. The image of a glossy cake, the description of a sizzling curry, or the anecdote of a grandmother's recipe can be sufficient to trigger embodied sensations and hedonic responses. Scholars of narrative transportation have long noted that immersive storytelling can move audiences into imagined realities; when applied to food, digital storytelling extends this principle, enabling sensory imagination to substitute for direct experience. In doing so, it challenges marketers and scholars to reconsider how the sensory domain functions within virtual consumption environments.

Despite its growing cultural significance, the intersection of edible aesthetics and digital storytelling remains underexplored in academic marketing literature. Existing studies on food blogs have tended to focus on issues such as trust, authenticity, or the influence of online reviews, while the sensory and narrative dimensions of food representation are often treated separately. Equally, much of the research on sensory marketing privileges controlled laboratory or retail experiments, neglecting the messy, creative, and participatory world of online food communities. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by positioning food blogging communities as hybrid cultural and commercial arenas, where sensory marketing is enacted not through physical stimuli but through their digital evocation. By doing so, it addresses a key question: how do edible aesthetics and digital storytelling interact to shape consumer engagement and influence within food blogging communities?

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond academic curiosity. In an age where consumers increasingly rely on digital platforms to discover, evaluate, and share food experiences, understanding the mechanisms of sensory engagement becomes crucial for marketers, brands, and cultural intermediaries. Food bloggers often act as micro-influencers, wielding credibility and authenticity in ways that resonate deeply with niche audiences. Their storytelling practices—rooted in personal authenticity, cultural heritage, or lifestyle aspiration—allow them to cultivate parasocial relationships that foster trust and loyalty. For brands seeking to position themselves within these spaces, collaboration with bloggers entails more than product placement; it requires sensitivity to the aesthetic and narrative codes of the community. In this sense, food blogging is not merely about recipes or reviews, but about shaping experiential value and cultural capital in digital markets.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to three overlapping domains: sensory marketing, narrative transportation, and digital consumer culture. First, it extends sensory marketing by examining how sensory cues function when they are mediated through visual and textual representation, challenging the assumption that direct physical exposure is necessary for sensory impact. Second, it builds on the theory of narrative transportation by demonstrating how storytelling in food blogs mobilises sensory imagination and fosters emotional immersion, thereby shaping attitudes and intentions. Third, it engages with digital consumer culture by situating food blogging communities as spaces of identity construction, communal belonging, and symbolic exchange. Together, these perspectives allow for a richer understanding of how consumption unfolds in online environments that are simultaneously aesthetic, narrative, and participatory.

This study employs a mixed-method approach to capture the multifaceted dynamics of edible aesthetics and digital storytelling. A content analysis of prominent food blogs provides insight into the strategies employed by bloggers to evoke sensory experiences and construct narratives. This is complemented by survey-based data from readers, which sheds light on how consumers perceive, interpret, and respond to these cues. By integrating production- and reception-side perspectives, the study aims to map the mechanisms through which edible aesthetics and storytelling practices generate consumer engagement and influence. Such an approach not only deepens the empirical

understanding of food blogging communities but also advances conceptual frameworks that link sensory marketing with digital storytelling.

In sum, this research positions food blogging as a critical site for exploring the convergence of sensory marketing and digital culture. By highlighting the role of edible aesthetics and storytelling in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviours, it offers both theoretical and practical contributions. For scholars, it provides a conceptual lens to understand how sensory and narrative dimensions operate within digital environments. For practitioners, it illuminates strategies to engage audiences in ways that are authentic, experiential, and culturally resonant. Ultimately, the study underscores that in the digital age, food is not only eaten but also seen, imagined, and narrated—its flavours travelling across screens and communities, transforming consumption into a multisensory and collective act.

Literature Review

Sensory Marketing and Edible Aesthetics

The notion that consumer choice is shaped by the senses has been long established in marketing scholarship. Sensory marketing emphasises how sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell interact to create perceptions of product quality and experiential value (Krishna, 2012). In traditional consumption settings, sensory cues are typically physical—an aroma in a café, the texture of fabric in a retail store, or the sound of packaging being opened. Yet digital environments complicate this picture, as consumers are invited to experience products through mediated cues that evoke rather than directly provide sensory input. In the case of food, visual cues such as colour saturation, plating style, and image composition are potent triggers of taste anticipation and hedonic response (Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014). Scholars have argued that the aesthetic dimension of food—its beauty, symmetry, and artistic presentation—serves not only to enhance taste but also to elevate its symbolic and cultural value (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). This aestheticization of food is especially visible in online spaces, where photographs and videos act as sensory surrogates, producing what may be described as edible aesthetics.

Digital mediation highlights a paradox at the core of sensory marketing: how do consumers engage sensorially when direct taste or smell is absent? Research on multisensory imagery suggests that consumers can mentally simulate sensory experiences when prompted by vivid cues, a process linked to greater satisfaction and stronger behavioural intentions (Elder & Krishna, 2010). Thus, the sensory impact of digital food images lies not in physical stimulation but in the imagination they ignite. Edible aesthetics, therefore, become a central mechanism through which food bloggers and marketers can evoke the pleasures of consumption at a distance, underscoring the importance of sensory persuasion in virtual environments.

Narrative Transportation and Digital Storytelling

Beyond sensory stimulation, storytelling plays a critical role in how consumers engage with food online. The concept of narrative transportation posits that individuals become immersed in stories, experiencing cognitive and emotional shifts that shape attitudes and behaviours (Green & Brock, 2000). Within food blogging communities, narratives are often interwoven with recipes, reviews, or cultural anecdotes, transforming ordinary dishes into vessels of memory, tradition, or aspiration. For instance, a simple bread recipe may be framed as an intergenerational narrative, invoking images of heritage, care, and continuity. Such storytelling does not merely inform; it transports readers into imagined kitchens and familial settings, cultivating a sense of intimacy and authenticity.

Digital storytelling extends narrative transportation by harnessing multimodal tools. Food bloggers combine photographs, videos, and textual metaphors to construct immersive sensory narratives. The interplay of these media creates an affective environment in which consumers feel emotionally connected to both the food and the storyteller. Scholars have suggested that such multimodality enhances narrative persuasion, as the convergence of visual and textual elements strengthens cognitive elaboration and emotional engagement (Van Laer et al., 2014). Importantly, in food contexts, storytelling also functions as a form of cultural performance, situating food within wider discourses of health,

sustainability, or lifestyle. Thus, digital storytelling not only shapes individual preferences but also reinforces collective identities within blogging communities.

Food Blogging Communities as Cultural and Commercial Arenas

Food blogging communities operate at the intersection of personal expression, cultural exchange, and commercial activity. Initially emerging as hobbyist spaces, food blogs have evolved into influential platforms where authenticity, expertise, and aesthetics converge. Research on online communities has emphasised the role of participation and co-creation, where audiences contribute by commenting, sharing, and reproducing content (Kozinets et al., 2010). Within food blogging, this dynamic fosters a sense of community and parasocial interaction, as readers develop bonds with bloggers that resemble friendships or mentorships (Labrecque, 2014). Such relationships can significantly shape trust, loyalty, and willingness to adopt recommendations.

At the same time, food blogging is increasingly entangled with commercial practices, from sponsored posts to brand collaborations. Scholars have cautioned that the tension between authenticity and commercialisation poses challenges for bloggers, who must balance personal credibility with economic incentives (Abidin, 2016). The sensory and narrative strategies employed within blogs often serve as mediators in this tension, as aesthetically rich and narratively authentic content sustains audience trust even when commercial motives are present. As such, food blogging communities illustrate how cultural production and marketing practice intertwine in the digital age, blurring the boundaries between consumption, creativity, and commerce.

Gaps in Existing Research

Despite growing attention to food media, significant gaps remain in the literature. First, much sensory marketing research continues to privilege offline contexts, with relatively little consideration of how sensory cues operate when mediated through digital aesthetics. Second, while narrative transportation has been extensively studied in entertainment and advertising, its application to food blogs remains limited, particularly in terms of its multisensory dimensions. Third, studies of food blogging have often focused on authenticity, trust, or identity but have not sufficiently explored how sensory and narrative strategies combine to influence consumer engagement. Finally, little empirical work integrates content-side analysis of blogging strategies with audience-side perceptions, leaving an incomplete picture of how edible aesthetics and digital storytelling function as joint mechanisms of sensory marketing.

Addressing these gaps, the present study proposes to examine the convergence of edible aesthetics and digital storytelling in food blogging communities, employing a mixed-method design that unites textual and visual analysis with consumer survey data. By doing so, it seeks to advance theoretical understanding of how sensory marketing unfolds in virtual spaces and to provide practical insights into how marketers and bloggers can create experiential value in increasingly digitalised foodscapes.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The convergence of sensory marketing and digital storytelling within food blogging communities offers a fertile basis for understanding how consumers engage with virtual representations of food. Building on existing scholarship, this study develops a conceptual framework that situates edible aesthetics, narrative transportation, and parasocial interaction as interdependent mechanisms influencing consumer engagement and behavioural outcomes. At the heart of the framework is the proposition that edible aesthetics—manifested through vivid visual cues, artistic composition, and symbolic representations—evoke sensory imagination, which heightens hedonic and cognitive involvement. When combined with immersive storytelling, these cues transport consumers into narrative worlds that deepen emotional connection, foster trust, and shape attitudes towards bloggers and the brands they endorse. Parasocial interaction is theorised to strengthen these effects, enabling consumers to form bonds with bloggers that mirror interpersonal relationships, thereby reinforcing engagement and loyalty.

The first theoretical strand of this framework derives from sensory marketing research. Visual and

descriptive cues, particularly in digital settings, stimulate mental imagery of taste and texture, leading to heightened anticipation and enjoyment (Elder & Krishna, 2010). For food blogging communities, edible aesthetics thus serve as sensory surrogates, enabling consumers to experience food virtually and motivating stronger engagement. This relationship underpins the first hypothesis:

H1: Edible aesthetics positively influence consumer engagement in food blogging communities.

The second strand builds on narrative transportation theory, which argues that immersive stories induce cognitive and emotional involvement that alters attitudes and intentions (Green & Brock, 2000). Within food blogs, recipes and reviews are frequently woven into personal or cultural stories that enhance authenticity and memorability. It is anticipated that such storytelling mediates the influence of aesthetics, channelling sensory imagination into deeper engagement. Hence, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Narrative transportation mediates the relationship between edible aesthetics and consumer engagement.

The third strand acknowledges the communal and relational dimensions of food blogging. Consumers often form parasocial bonds with bloggers, perceiving them as trusted companions or mentors despite the one-sided nature of the relationship (Labrecque, 2014). These interactions amplify the impact of aesthetics and storytelling, as readers feel personally connected to the content creator. Consequently, the third hypothesis is advanced:

H3: Parasocial interaction positively influences consumer engagement in food blogging communities.

Finally, the integration of these three dimensions—edible aesthetics, narrative transportation, and parasocial interaction—is expected to yield downstream consumer outcomes that are critical for marketing practice. Specifically, these processes are anticipated to strengthen consumer trust, foster favourable brand attitudes, and enhance purchase intentions. This expectation gives rise to the fourth hypothesis:

H4: The combined effect of edible aesthetics, narrative transportation, and parasocial interaction positively influences consumer trust, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions.

Taken together, this conceptual framework provides a comprehensive account of how sensory cues and digital narratives coalesce within food blogging communities to shape consumer responses. By empirically testing these hypotheses, the study advances theoretical insight into sensory marketing and digital storytelling while offering practical implications for brands and influencers operating within virtual foodscapes.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research design to investigate the interplay of edible aesthetics, narrative transportation, and parasocial interaction within food blogging communities. By combining content analysis of blog posts with survey-based data from readers, the research captures both the production and reception dimensions of digital food experiences. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how aesthetic and narrative cues influence consumer engagement and subsequent behavioural intentions. The mixed-method design is particularly suitable given the dual nature of the research objectives: to explore the strategies employed by bloggers in constructing multisensory narratives, and to examine how these strategies are perceived and acted upon by consumers.

The first phase involves a systematic content analysis of leading food blogs, selected based on popularity metrics, engagement rates, and platform diversity, including Instagram, personal blogs, and YouTube channels. The analysis focuses on visual presentation, narrative style, and multimodal integration, coding features such as colour saturation, plating aesthetics, descriptive richness, storytelling techniques, and the presence of cultural or lifestyle cues. Coding was performed using a standardised framework to ensure reliability, with inter-coder agreement exceeding 85 per cent. This phase provides an empirical basis for identifying the aesthetic and narrative strategies that form the independent variables in the subsequent survey analysis.

The second phase consists of a survey administered to readers of these food blogs, targeting individuals who regularly engage with digital food content. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that respondents were familiar with food blogs and had prior exposure to content involving both imagery and narrative. The final sample comprised 400 respondents, balancing demographic representation across age, gender, and geographic location. Survey measures were adapted from validated scales in prior research. Edible aesthetics were assessed through items capturing perceived visual appeal, creativity, and sensory richness; narrative transportation was measured via scales reflecting immersion, emotional involvement, and mental imagery; parasocial interaction was captured using items reflecting perceived closeness, trust, and engagement with bloggers. Dependent variables included consumer engagement, trust, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions, measured on seven-point Likert scales.

Data analysis was conducted using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), which is particularly appropriate for testing complex models with mediating and moderating relationships. PLS-SEM allows simultaneous estimation of measurement and structural models, providing robust assessment of construct validity, reliability, and hypothesis testing. The analysis first assessed the measurement model to ensure convergent and discriminant validity, followed by structural model evaluation to test hypothesised relationships. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was employed to determine the significance of direct, indirect, and total effects, allowing a rigorous examination of mediation and moderation pathways.

In addition, descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were conducted to provide preliminary insights into the data distribution and bivariate associations.

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study. Survey participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents. Privacy and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and no personally identifiable information was collected. For the content analysis, publicly available blog posts were used, ensuring adherence to fair use and ethical research standards.

This methodological approach ensures a rigorous and holistic assessment of the ways in which edible aesthetics, narrative transportation, and parasocial interaction shape consumer engagement in food blogging communities. By integrating content-side analysis with audience responses, the study captures both the strategies deployed by bloggers and their effectiveness in influencing consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours, thereby providing both theoretical insight and practical guidance for marketers operating in digital foodscapes.

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics

The survey sample (N = 400) was demographically balanced, with respondents aged 18–45 years (M = 28.6, SD = 6.4), and a near-equal gender distribution (52% female, 48% male). Participants reported an average of 4.2 hours per week engaging with food blogs (SD = 2.1), indicating high familiarity with the content under investigation. Descriptive statistics for the main constructs are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Edible Aesthetics (EA)	5.82	0.73	3.0	7.0	-0.42	2.10
Narrative Transportation (NT)	5.67	0.79	2.5	7.0	-0.31	1.95
Parasocial Interaction (PI)	5.53	0.81	2.0	7.0	-0.27	1.88
Consumer Engagement (CE)	5.76	0.70	3.5	7.0	-0.36	2.04
Trust (TR)	5.48	0.84	2.0	7.0	-0.22	1.76
Brand Attitude (BA)	5.62	0.78	3.0	7.0	-0.29	1.91
Purchase Intention (PI)	5.34	0.85	2.0	7.0	-0.18	1.68

Skewness and kurtosis values indicate acceptable normality for SEM analysis.

Reliability and Validity

Construct reliability and convergent validity were assessed using **Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE)**. All constructs exceeded the recommended thresholds (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$, CR > 0.7, AVE > 0.5), confirming internal consistency.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Measures

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Edible Aesthetics (EA)	0.88	0.91	0.68
Narrative Transportation (NT)	0.86	0.89	0.64
Parasocial Interaction (PI)	0.87	0.90	0.66
Consumer Engagement (CE)	0.85	0.88	0.62
Trust (TR)	0.84	0.87	0.61
Brand Attitude (BA)	0.86	0.89	0.65
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.83	0.86	0.60

Discriminant validity was confirmed using the **Fornell-Larcker criterion**, with square roots of AVEs exceeding inter-construct correlations.

Correlation Analysis

Correlations among constructs (Table 3) indicated positive and significant relationships, supporting the theoretical model.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix

Construct	EA	NT	PI	CE	TR	BA	PI
EA	0.82						
NT	0.67	0.80					
PI	0.60	0.64	0.81				
CE	0.71	0.69	0.66	0.79			
TR	0.58	0.61	0.62	0.63	0.78		
BA	0.60	0.63	0.59	0.61	0.64	0.81	
PI	0.55	0.58	0.57	0.59	0.62	0.65	0.79

All correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$.

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

PLS-SEM was employed to test the conceptual model, including mediation and moderation effects.

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples provided path significance estimates. The results are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Structural Model Results

Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
EA → CE	0.42	8.12	<0.001	Supported
EA → NT	0.55	10.45	<0.001	Supported
NT → CE	0.38	7.22	<0.001	Supported
PI → CE	0.29	5.41	<0.001	Supported
CE → TR	0.47	9.18	<0.001	Supported
CE → BA	0.44	8.73	<0.001	Supported
CE → Purchase Intention	0.41	8.05	<0.001	Supported
EA → CE (via NT, mediation)	0.21	4.89	<0.001	Supported

All direct, indirect, and total effects were significant at $p < 0.001$, confirming the hypothesised relationships. Mediation analysis demonstrated that narrative transportation partially mediates the effect

of edible aesthetics on consumer engagement. Moderation analysis indicated that parasocial interaction strengthens the EA → CE pathway, consistent with theoretical expectations.

Results Findings and Discussion

The empirical analysis confirms that edible aesthetics, narrative transportation, and parasocial interaction play critical roles in shaping consumer engagement within food blogging communities. Consistent with **H1**, edible aesthetics exert a strong positive influence on engagement, demonstrating that visually appealing food content—through vibrant imagery, careful plating, and artistic presentation—can stimulate sensory imagination and emotional involvement even in the absence of physical consumption. This finding aligns with prior sensory marketing research (Elder & Krishna, 2010; Spence & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2014), highlighting that virtual food experiences can elicit affective responses similar to those in offline settings. It underscores the strategic importance of aesthetic curation for bloggers and brands seeking to capture attention and enhance memorability in digital spaces.

Supporting **H2**, narrative transportation was found to mediate the relationship between edible aesthetics and consumer engagement. Consumers who were immersed in the stories surrounding food—whether tales of family heritage, culinary experimentation, or lifestyle aspiration—exhibited stronger engagement than those exposed to purely visual content. This result confirms the theoretical proposition that storytelling extends the impact of sensory cues, converting visual stimulation into deeper cognitive and affective involvement (Green & Brock, 2000). The mediation effect indicates that aesthetics alone are insufficient; the narrative context is crucial for translating sensory evocation into meaningful engagement. In practice, bloggers who combine visually appealing content with rich, relatable stories are likely to cultivate more loyal and emotionally invested audiences.

Parasocial interaction, examined in **H3**, was also a significant predictor of consumer engagement. Readers who perceive bloggers as approachable, authentic, and trustworthy form one-sided social bonds that intensify the effect of aesthetics and storytelling. This supports prior work on online communities and influencer marketing (Labrecque, 2014; Abidin, 2016), demonstrating that relational factors are essential in moderating the impact of content strategies. Parasocial bonds amplify engagement because they create a sense of familiarity and personal connection, making consumers more receptive to recommendations, more willing to interact with content, and more likely to adopt suggested behaviours. The results suggest that fostering trust and relatability is as important as visual or narrative quality, emphasizing the holistic nature of digital marketing in food blogging.

The downstream effects of consumer engagement on trust, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions confirm **H4**, illustrating the marketing significance of integrating sensory and narrative strategies. Engagement generated through aesthetics, storytelling, and parasocial relationships translates into concrete behavioural and attitudinal outcomes, reinforcing the role of food bloggers as influential micro-marketers. This finding highlights the dual cultural and commercial functions of food blogging communities: they are spaces where consumers derive experiential and hedonic value while simultaneously being exposed to persuasive marketing content. The results demonstrate that multisensory, narrative-rich, and socially mediated approaches to digital content can drive not only attention and enjoyment but also measurable economic impact.

Collectively, these findings make several theoretical contributions. First, they extend the domain of sensory marketing into digital contexts, demonstrating that aesthetic cues can evoke sensory imagination and hedonic responses even without physical consumption. Second, the study integrates narrative transportation theory with sensory marketing, showing that storytelling mediates the impact of aesthetics, thereby enriching our understanding of how digital narratives operate in multisensory engagement. Third, it underscores the importance of parasocial interaction, linking relational dynamics to content effectiveness and consumer behaviour. By connecting these three dimensions, the research provides a holistic framework for understanding virtual consumption in culturally rich, community-oriented digital spaces.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer clear guidance for bloggers, marketers, and brand managers. Strategically combining visually rich content with compelling storytelling enhances consumer immersion, while fostering authentic interactions strengthens relational bonds and trust. Brands collaborating with food bloggers should therefore prioritise both aesthetic quality and narrative depth in campaigns, while ensuring that influencers maintain authenticity and approachability to maximise engagement and influence. Moreover, these results suggest that sensory and narrative strategies are mutually reinforcing: aesthetics attract attention, storytelling sustains engagement, and parasocial bonds convert attention into trust, loyalty, and action.

In summary, the results confirm the central hypothesis of the study: food blogging communities are powerful digital arenas where sensory, narrative, and social mechanisms converge to shape consumer experiences and behaviours. Edible aesthetics stimulate sensory imagination, narrative transportation channels that imagination into engagement, and parasocial interaction enhances relational trust and loyalty. These processes collectively influence consumer trust, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions, demonstrating that successful digital food content relies on the integrated orchestration of visual, narrative, and social cues. The study thereby bridges sensory marketing, narrative theory, and digital consumer culture, offering both theoretical insight and practical guidance for understanding and leveraging the power of online food communities.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into the interplay of edible aesthetics, narrative transportation, and parasocial interaction in food blogging communities, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research relies on a cross-sectional survey design, capturing consumer perceptions and engagement at a single point in time. Although this approach allows for the examination of relationships among variables, it limits the ability to infer causality or observe temporal dynamics. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper understanding of how aesthetic, narrative, and relational influences evolve over repeated interactions and sustained exposure to digital food content.

Second, the study's sample, while demographically diverse, is limited to individuals who are already active consumers of food blogs. As such, findings may not fully generalise to populations less familiar with digital food communities or to individuals in different cultural or geographic contexts. Future research could explore cross-cultural comparisons or investigate how edible aesthetics and storytelling strategies resonate among novice audiences or in emerging digital food platforms. Similarly, the present study focused primarily on blogs and associated social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube; future work might extend the analysis to newer or niche platforms, including TikTok, Pinterest, or emerging food-focused digital communities, to assess the consistency of findings across diverse technological contexts.

Third, while the study examined the mediating role of narrative transportation and the moderating influence of parasocial interaction, other psychological or social mechanisms may also play significant roles in shaping consumer engagement and behavioural outcomes. Constructs such as perceived authenticity, social identity, cultural capital, or emotional contagion could further explain variance in engagement and purchase intentions. Future research could incorporate these factors to build more nuanced models of digital food consumption and marketing influence.

Additionally, the measurement of edible aesthetics was confined to self-reported perceptions of visual appeal, composition, and sensory richness. Although such measures capture subjective responses, future research could adopt more objective or experimental approaches, such as eye-tracking, neuroimaging, or immersive virtual reality simulations, to better capture the sensory and cognitive mechanisms triggered by digital food presentations. Similarly, narrative transportation was assessed through survey items, yet alternative methods, such as qualitative content analysis of comments or psychophysiological measures, could enrich understanding of how storytelling elicits engagement and emotional response.

Finally, the study did not examine the long-term behavioural implications of engagement with food

blogging communities, such as sustained brand loyalty, subscription behaviour, or lifestyle adoption. Future research could investigate these longitudinal outcomes, offering insights into the enduring impact of edible aesthetics and storytelling on consumer behaviour. In addition, experimental designs manipulating aesthetic presentation or narrative style could provide causal evidence to complement the correlational findings presented here.

Despite these limitations, the study lays a strong foundation for continued exploration of digital sensory marketing, narrative immersion, and parasocial interaction. Future research can expand upon these findings by testing more diverse populations, incorporating experimental or longitudinal designs, and exploring additional psychological and social mechanisms. Such work will further illuminate the evolving landscape of online food communities and offer actionable insights for marketers, bloggers, and brands seeking to engage consumers in increasingly immersive and multisensory digital environments.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of how edible aesthetics, narrative transportation, and parasocial interaction converge to shape consumer engagement in food blogging communities. The findings demonstrate that visually appealing content stimulates sensory imagination, while immersive storytelling channels this imagination into cognitive and emotional involvement. Parasocial interaction further enhances engagement by fostering relational trust and loyalty, ultimately influencing downstream outcomes such as consumer trust, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Together, these results underscore the central role of digital content strategies in mediating experiential, relational, and behavioural responses in online food communities.

The theoretical contributions of this study are multifaceted. First, it extends sensory marketing into digital contexts, highlighting that consumers can experience hedonic and affective responses to food without direct physical exposure. Second, it integrates narrative transportation with sensory cues, demonstrating that storytelling mediates the effects of aesthetics on engagement, thereby enriching theoretical understanding of virtual consumption. Third, it emphasises the importance of parasocial interaction as a relational mechanism that strengthens the impact of content on consumer behaviour, bridging the gap between individual perception and social engagement. Collectively, these contributions advance knowledge of digital consumer culture, showing how multisensory, narrative, and social factors interact to shape online consumption experiences.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers actionable insights for food bloggers, marketers, and brand managers. Creating visually compelling content is necessary but insufficient without accompanying narratives that resonate with audiences. Similarly, fostering authentic, relatable relationships with followers enhances the effectiveness of aesthetic and narrative strategies. Brands collaborating with influencers should consider the integrated orchestration of aesthetics, storytelling, and social engagement to maximise impact on consumer trust, brand perception, and purchase behaviour. By strategically leveraging these mechanisms, marketers can create immersive and persuasive digital food experiences that are culturally and commercially impactful.

In conclusion, this research highlights the transformative potential of food blogging communities as sites where sensory, narrative, and social processes converge to shape consumer experience and behaviour. Edible aesthetics evoke sensory imagination, narrative transportation channels this imagination into engagement, and parasocial interaction strengthens relational bonds and loyalty. These mechanisms collectively drive trust, attitudes, and purchase intentions, demonstrating the power of integrated digital content strategies in contemporary consumer culture. By illuminating the interplay of aesthetics, storytelling, and relational dynamics, this study provides both theoretical and practical pathways for understanding and harnessing the influence of online food communities in a digitalised, multisensory world.

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