



Article

Reading about Gastronomy—An approach to Food Contents in New York City's Newspapers

Francesc Fusté-Forné ^{1,2}

¹ Blanquerna School of Communication and International Relations, Ramon Llull University, 08001 Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain; francescff1@ Blanquerna.url.edu

² Department of Business, University of Girona, 17004 Girona, Catalonia, Spain

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Abstract: Food and gastronomy are significant ingredients of everyday leisure and lifestyle practices. Food is part of culture and culture is part of the media. The current research analyzes the mediatization of food in legacy media. Drawing from a quantitative approach, the paper reviews food-based contents in New York City's newspapers. In particular, *AM New York*, *El Diario*, *Metro*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* are studied over a period of 50 days. As a result, a total of 287 articles are analyzed. This research highlights the features of food and gastronomy contents and describes the differences and similarities between traditional newspapers and free dailies. Furthermore, the referent role of *The New York Times* in communicating food is confirmed.

Keywords: food journalism; gastronomy; legacy media; United States

1. Introduction

Food is a meaningful cultural asset. Both food and gastronomy are a vital part of cultural and leisure daily practices. In this sense, the discovery of food and gastronomy is a pleasurable and valorized lifestyle experience (Jones and Taylor 2013), which is increasingly mediatized (English and Fleischman 2017; Fusté-Forné 2017; Hughes 2010; Kristensen and From 2012; Naulin 2012; Voss 2012). Food is gathering a growing interest as part of the current media landscape which is manifested in a special interest form of journalism: food journalism. In this context, this paper aims to analyze media representations of food. To achieve it, a comparative case study of New York City's newspapers is used. New York is a cosmopolitan city where people can taste a different food culture every day (Goossens et al. 2013), which awards the city a paramount role in gastronomy. The research analyzes food-based contents of five of New York City's based newspapers (*AM New York*, *El Diario*, *Metro*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*) over a period of 50 days. The study period runs from 14 November 2016 to 2 January 2017. Results show the characteristics of food-based contents in newspapers drawing on a range of issues such as page placement, journalism genres and topics developed by legacy media in their narratives of food and gastronomy.

2. Food in Lifestyle: An Approach to Food Journalism

Food and gastronomy are meaningful expressions of culture and lifestyle. Food and gastronomy are significant cultural identity markers (Sims 2009), and they reflect a diverse landscape of communities and lifestyles worldwide (Sutton 2001). Gastronomy has acquired a social dimension and it holds a powerful capacity to express identity (Duffy and Ashley 2012; Sanjuán Ballano 2007) and it is increasingly regarded as a tool for communication and cultural transmission. According to Fusté-Forné and Masip, "gastronomy is a driving force capable of setting social trends and ways of life. Thus, media in general and newspapers in particular offer a pathway for the transfer of gastronomic knowledge to

society, and fulfil a key role as agents of democratization and popularization of food” (Fusté-Forné and Masip 2019, p. 136).

The origins of food journalism are directly connected with the “gastronome” (Jones and Taylor 2013), a food writer who contributed to the concept of eating as a social activity (Mennell 1996) and appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century in parallel with restaurants (Ferguson 1998; Naulin 2012). While food journalism was “a primarily aesthetic or philosophical field, rather than one closely linked to professional cookery or domestic practice” (Jones and Taylor 2013, p. 98), Bell and Valentine (1997) reported that food primarily appeared in the women’s page of newspapers (David 1986). Voss explains it: “the newspaper few options for women before the 1970s were pages for women. These sections were known by the four F’s [English] family, fashion, food, and furniture” (Voss 2012, p. 67).

Nowadays, food and gastronomy have emerged as a crucial topic of cultural reporting, and they have reached unprecedented media coverage (see, for example, Fusté-Forné 2017). According to Brown, “the transformation of food journalism from five things to do with cream of mushroom soup to the subject of an entire issue of The New Yorker, longtime food writers say, has a lot to do with changing attitudes about food across the country” (Brown 2004, p. 51). Previous studies have showcased how food journalism has dealt with new significant content such as products, food events and food tourism destinations, together with the leading role carried out by celebrity chefs (Fusté-Forné and Masip 2019). In particular, chefs have largely enhanced the involvement of people on the discovery of culinary and gastronomic aspects of food.

Within the framework of lifestyle studies, lifestyle journalism is focused on a wide range of topics, where food takes a relevant portion. Media outlets are paying a growing attention to the development of areas that play a significant role in public life such as food and drink (Cole 2005; Craig 2016; Fürsich 2012; Hanusch 2012). These areas are heavily linked to how people spend their free time (Hanusch 2012) which is, in turn, associated with culture and leisure consumption. In this sense, food journalism contents are conceptualized as “soft news”. According to Hanusch, “recent decades have seen an apparently rapid rise in media content that falls outside what many have traditionally regarded as ‘good’ journalism. Increasingly, it seems, newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet are preoccupied with what is generally referred to as ‘soft news’” (Hanusch 2012, p. 2). While “soft news” contributes to “extend the reach of media, who teach audiences the pleasures of staying tuned, who popularize knowledge” (Hartley 2000, p. 40), it is less dominant in the hierarchy of news values (Harcup and O’Neill 2017).

Kristensen and From (2012) highlight that in contemporary media “the coverage of food includes good advice, recipes, reviews and expressions of taste and lifestyle, and the subject is therefore approached not only as guidance to cultural and/or gastronomic products or experiences (e.g., restaurant reviews) but also, like fashion, as a representation of ways of life and a symbolic marker of taste and lifestyle” (p. 34). As a consequence, according to Germann Molz (2007), “it is clear that food is seen as symbolic of particular places and as a way of getting close to or consuming the essence of those places” (p. 88).

In the framework of agenda setting theory (McCombs 2004; McCombs and Shaw 1972), media are not only a source of influence, but also of inspiration and motivation for people (see Månsson 2011; McLennan et al. 2017). A special interest journalism—such as lifestyle journalism (Hanusch 2012), food journalism (Fusté-Forné and Masip 2019; Hughes 2010; Jones and Taylor 2001, 2013; Naulin 2012) and, to a broader extent, also travel journalism (Pirolli 2019)—drives audiences to processes of knowledge gathering on food through media. These forms of journalism allow audiences to symbolically taste food without physical mobility (Damkjær and Waade 2014). This means that reading a newspaper article or watching a documentary are also examples of food cultural and leisure practices. This paper contributes to the understanding of media food landscapes from a legacy media perspective.

3. Methods

The objective of this study is to analyze how legacy media communicates food. Previous researchers have studied the representations of food in press (see, for example, Aguirregoitia Martínez

and Poyatos 2015; Fusté-Forné 2017; Fusté-Forné and Masip 2018, 2019; Hughes 2010; Jones and Taylor 2001; Naulin 2014; Voss 2012). This study adds texture to this conversation. In particular, it analyzes the food-based contents of five New York-based newspapers over a period of 50 days ($N = 287$), from 14 November 2016 to 2 January 2017. Media analyzed include *AM New York*, *El Diario*, *Metro*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. These newspapers were selected according to the 2019 edition of the Alliance for Audited Media database: *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* are the two largest daily newspapers in terms of circulation, and *AM New York* and *Metro* are the two largest free daily newspapers. From its side, *El Diario* is the largest Spanish-language daily in New York.

All the newspapers were analyzed manually through their printed editions by using the hard copies of the newspapers daily available at The New York Public Library, New York. Food-based articles were manually coded following a codebook tested and used in previous research (see Fusté-Forné and Masip 2018). The codebook has two different sections: general features and thematic categories. The first section includes general data in order to identify each article: title, author, date, newspaper, genre, section and length. The second section refers to the thematic categories. These topics were divided into eleven sub-categories: “products”, “dishes”, “chefs”, “restaurants”, “food selling points”, “events”, “gastronomy and arts”, “gastronomy as social fact”, “alimentation and nutrition”, “gastronomy and media” and “food and tourism”. Drawing from a quantitative analysis of food-based contents, results are discussed from a comparative approach.

4. Results

In order to describe the characteristics of food-based contents in New York City’s newspapers, 287 articles were analyzed. They represent all the pieces with food content found in five New York City’s newspapers (*AM*, *El Diario*, *Metro*, *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*) during the period running from the 14 November 2016 to 2 January 2017.

The total amount of food-based articles found in each newspaper (Table 1) showcase a first result: the leading role of *The New York Times* in communicating food. Almost half of the articles are published by this newspaper.

Table 1. Distribution of food-based articles found in each newspaper.

Newspaper	N	%
<i>AM</i> (AM)	41	14.3%
<i>El Diario</i> (ED)	30	10.5%
<i>Metro</i> (M)	41	14.3%
<i>The New York Times</i> (NYT)	138	48.1%
<i>The Wall Street Journal</i> (WSJ)	37	12.9%
Total	287	100.0%

First, in focusing on the articles that have appeared on the front pages (Table 2), both *The Wall Street Journal* (27%) and *The New York Times* (9%) showcased the highest results. In particular, the analysis of the free dailies and *El Diario* revealed an extremely low presence of food on the front pages. Overall, only one out of ten pieces were found in the first page of the newspapers. The vast majority of the contents found on the cover pages of both *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* only anticipated content under specific Food sections.

Table 2. Analysis of food articles found on the front page.

Front page	AM	ED	M	NYT	WSJ	N
N/front page	39	29	38	125	27	258
Front page	2	1	3	13	10	29
Total	41	30	41	138	37	287

Data collected also focused on the importance of food contents in relation to the articles that open section and page (those found in the top left-hand of the page). Results are observed in Table 3. 35% of the pieces are part of the opening page and almost 60% of them are found to open section. In comparison to the feature above, this issue shows a different trend: both free dailies and *El Diario* count on more than half of the articles that open section and page. Given its high amount of food-based contents, only 22% of the articles published by *The New York Times* are part of section opening while 57% are found in the top left hand of a page. Finally, *The Wall Street Journal* showcases lower percentages (22% section opening and 30% page opening).

Table 3. Analysis of the food articles that open section and page.

Opening	AM	ED	M	NYT	WSJ	N
Section opening	23	17	23	30	8	101
N/page opening	18	13	18	108	29	186
Total	41	30	41	138	37	287
Page opening	27	24	29	79	11	170
N/page opening	14	6	12	59	26	117
Total	41	30	41	138	37	287

Following, the study analyses the space that food contents occupy in the newspaper layout. Table 4 shows that articles with four or more columns account for almost 80% of the sample, which confirms the importance that all newspapers give to food contents.

Table 4. Analysis of the columns of the food articles.

Columns	AM	ED	M	NYT	WSJ	N
1	5	2	0	6	2	15
2	3	5	2	7	3	20
3	8	1	9	5	5	28
4	7	3	7	25	12	54
5	5	4	1	61	4	75
6	13	15	22	34	11	95
Total	41	30	41	138	37	287

Similar results are observed with regards to the space per page, and Table 5 displays that the weight of short articles is extremely few. In relation to the articles with a larger extension, 65% of them take at least half a page, and nearly 90% of the pieces at least a quarter of page. Again, this shows the huge importance given to food content by all the newspapers.

Table 5. Analysis of space per page of food articles.

Space per Page	AM	ED	M	NYT	WSJ	N
1. Article $\geq 75\%$	9	21	10	24	0	64
2. Article 74–50%	15	3	17	79	10	124
3. Article 49–25%	9	2	11	26	15	63
4. Article 24–10%	5	4	3	9	11	32
5. Short article	3	0	0	0	1	4
Total	41	30	41	138	37	287

In focusing on the journalism genres (Table 6), news (information and news report) is of the greatest importance throughout the sample, and it represents an aggregate of two-thirds of all food-based contents, which is because the overall evolution that food-based news has experienced in recent decades, from opinion to information articles. However, *The New York Times* communicates food from

an opinion perspective. As a result, food is released through food columns, critics and recipes which are only relevant in this newspaper since it defines the trends developed in food journalism.

Table 6. Analysis of the genre of the food articles.

Genres	AM	ED	M	NYT	WSJ	N
1. Information	10	10	17	42	27	104
2. News report	18	11	17	26	8	79
3. Interview	2	1	3	0	0	6
4. Food column	9	0	4	18	1	32
5. Opinion column	2	1	0	2	1	6
6. Food critic	0	1	0	15	0	16
7. Recipe	0	6	0	35	0	41
Total	41	30	41	138	37	287

Finally, Table 7 shows the topics developed. Although products are the category with the highest weight (24%), it is observed that three other categories represent over 10% of the sample each: restaurants (17%), dishes (16%) and food selling points (13%). Overall, these four top-ranked topics mean 70% of the articles. Themes such as alimentation and nutrition, arts or tourism have a very limited presence. The presence of these topics demonstrates the significance of “what” is offered, that is, products and dishes, and “how” it is delivered. Restaurants and other food selling points represent the places where production and consumption experiences are possible through the valorization of local and international culinary identities.

Table 7. Analysis of the main topic developed in food articles.

Topics	AM	ED	M	NYT	WSJ	N
1. Products	5	7	8	29	19	68
2. Dishes	1	7	2	35	0	45
3. Chefs	1	2	4	2	3	12
4. Restaurants	12	2	5	27	2	48
5. Food selling points	8	1	7	13	8	37
6. Events	3	3	6	10	2	24
7. Gastronomy and arts	1	0	2	5	0	8
8. Gastronomy as social fact	3	6	2	10	2	23
9. Alimentation and nutrition	1	2	0	2	0	5
10. Gastronomy and media	3	0	3	3	1	10
11. Food and tourism	3	0	2	2	0	7
Total	41	30	41	138	37	287

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The study of the mediatization of food contents is a pathway to understanding cultural, leisure and lifestyle contexts. The current paper has approached the importance of food journalism in legacy media from a quantitative perspective. This is the main implication of the research, which expands the field of food journalism by describing the features of food-based news as an example of “soft news” in print media. This also contributes to the understanding of food news values and provides an avenue towards the development of impactful and relevant food-based journalism. As early as in the fifties of the twentieth century, food was a significant attribute of American journalism: “in US dailies, few staffers exert more direct influence on readers than the food editor; only the front page and the comics have a bigger readership” (Time 1953).

As a result of the study of food-based contents in five newspapers based in New York City, the first outcome confirms the importance of *The New York Times*, where food is a salient ingredient. The embedded supplement Food (and also its online version) has become a worldwide referent for food and gastronomy-based communication. Furthermore, results have showcased that newspapers,

except *The New York Times*, provide a similar presence of food and gastronomy contents. Added to the observed differences between free and non-free daily newspapers—for example, regarding the percentage of articles that open section or page, *The New York Times* owns a powerful role in terms of relevance, size and news content about food. Every day, 2.76 articles deal with food issues appear in the printed edition of *The New York Times*.

This paper contributes to further understanding both the dynamics and presence of food-based content in newspapers (Fusté-Forné and Masip 2018). A significant issue refers to the themes developed. The most important content (products, dishes, restaurants and food selling points) is heavily attached to production and consumption dimensions of food, and closely relies on the understanding of food as a cultural, leisure and lifestyle practice which may be later transferred to tourism (see, for example, Fusté-Forné and Masip 2020). From a theoretical point of view, this paper contributes to the current literature on the relationships between food and journalism studies (Voss 2020) and informs about the role that food plays in legacy media as an example of special interest journalism (see Turner and Orange 2012) and of a slow journalism practice (Vodanovic 2020). In terms of practical implications, the study's findings could be used by the newspaper industry to explore their processes of mediatization of food which may lead to changes in the way they communicate food and gastronomy issues.

Limitations of this research are specifically based on three issues. First, its quantitative nature. Second, the limited study period, and third, the study of newspapers in a single city, where results described in relation to New York City's newspapers need to be compared with other cities in the United States in order to confirm or not if similar outputs are obtained. While New York is a significant food city (Davis 2009), its unique profile it is not generalizable to other American cities. As a consequence, the study opens further opportunities for upcoming research. A discourse analysis with a robust qualitative approach would certainly provide a more impactful contribution and would lead to more conclusive results in terms of how topics are covered. Furthermore, the use of a larger sample would allow one to draw on food contents' evolution. Finally, the method applied to this research may serve to elaborate studies in different geographical contexts that would lead to cross-cultural comparative media scenarios.

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