

Finding the Purpose of Tasty Videos According to Social Media Audiences

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Abstract

The digital age has brought a new form of integrated advertising through social media content. Today, users no longer want to be advertised to, but advertisers still need to attract consumers. Using Tasty videos as an example, this study examined how social media content is used to integrate advertisements into a medium popular with consumers. Utilizing a survey and focus group, the researcher studied social media users' motivations for watching Tasty videos, and how the integration of an ad affects the viewer. While users enjoy and often seek out this short-form video content, the study found that most viewers consider it entertainment, and don't consume it for its intended educational purposes.

I. Introduction

Facebook has become a major platform for companies to release short form content because it permeates so many different audiences with little to no effort on their behalf. One current trend has been "Tasty" videos. Tasty videos originated on BuzzFeed, with a camera overlooking a single plate or pot as an unidentified chef prepares, cooks, plates, and samples a recipe. These videos contain a range of recipes, from foreign street foods to a couple's Valentine's Day dinner. In fewer than two minutes, viewers can see the entirety of a dish's creation, from gathering the ingredients to eating the final product. These style videos have moved beyond BuzzFeed to major food-focused networks and websites, and beyond food to craft-, family-, and fashion-based tutorials.

Short form content has become increasingly popular on social media. Many online-based content producers opt to keep videos shorter than 10 minutes to ensure that they keep audiences' attention through the end of the video. It has become a way for people to get information on entertainment, news, politics, fashion, food, and much more in a simple and comfortable setting. Because of their potential reach on Facebook, companies have used short form content to reach their audiences and to permeate the social networks of those audiences. Many consumers do not register this as an advertisement, but the popularity of these videos has prompted even more companies to produce these videos, or sponsor ones that fit their demographics.

Because this content is easily accessible and permeable, Tasty videos have become exceedingly popular on Facebook. The current research aimed at finding the purpose of these videos, not for the producer,

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but for the viewer. It theorizes that these videos are not just forms of advertising and learning materials, but also entertainment. Although these videos are booming in popularity, viewers are primarily watching for entertainment purposes. The influx of these videos has created consistent viewer interest, but a much smaller percentage is actually cooking the featured items. Therefore, Tasty videos have become a successful marketing tool, but only moderately successful as a resource for new recipes.

II. Literature Review

To further understand the implementation and user views of Tasty videos, the literature review focused on the purpose of social media, both for the user and as a space for advertisement. It considered food and beverage advertising due to the advertisement aspect that many of these videos contain. It also examined the concept of audience labor as a means of promotion or sponsorship for other companies. The goal was to understand the use of Tasty videos as related to a company's motivation for advertising.

Student Social Media Use

Social media has become not only a way for users to stay informed, but also a way to inform the world about themselves. People, young people in particular, use social networking sites to present themselves to others, but primarily to fulfill a need to belong (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012).

To present a certain image, Facebook users can edit and decide what they want to post. For example, Peluchette and Karl (2010) showed that students who preferred to be seen as hardworking posted different content than those that wished to be seen as "wild" (Peluchette & Karl, 2010). They also can remove content they find unappealing, as many users use the "untagging" feature to put aside photos they find not relevant and interesting (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009).

To fulfill the need to belong, users prefer the wall [timeline] function. Users who are less self-accepting tend to share more private personal information over Facebook, a way to interact with their peers and foster relationships (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Pempek et. al, 2009). Posting or sharing their preferences with others as a way to express identity, rather than through photos or "update" posts (Pempek et. al, 2009).

Because Facebook visualizes human connection, users often feel a boost in their connectedness, leading to a boost in self-esteem (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Users can visualize their "networks," or their social groups such as college, family, student organizations, work, etc. (Pempek et. al, 2009).

These factors are some of the driving forces behind the use of Facebook. Facebook users can present a certain image to the select few they allow in their network. This image can be constructed through status updates, posting photos, and sharing videos. This is the origin of the "Tasty" videos' popularity, as users shared them repeatedly to present that image and connect with other users.

Food and Beverage Advertising

Advertising of food and beverage products has a strong effect on what people choose to consume. A controlled study by UCLA Public Health showed that when food-based advertisements were run in a 45-minute show, viewers were more likely to eat provided snacks after the show (Shimoga & Zimmerman, 2014). The group that was shown non-food related advertising chose snacks with 65 less calories on average, a statistically significant difference. The study implies that long-term ifood advertising, which is shown repeatedly over someone's lifetime, will have an even stronger effect on caloric intake. Therefore, food advertising and food videos have a strong influence on what people buy in stores.

Particularly on Facebook, Food advertising is useful, particularly on Facebook. A study in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that 25 of the top 27 most-liked food-centered brands on Facebook utilized user-generated content as promotional material (Freeman et al, 2014). This type of content reaches audiences and is effective—the pages tested were part of the top 250 most-liked pages on Facebook Australia. However, many of these pages were for foods or places that served foods with high calorie content and low nutritional value. Using a noninvasive marketing strategy to reach audiences is a way to achieve the goal that many social media advertisers strive for. This type of advertising is becoming increasingly popular across brands and throughout social media platforms.

Facebook Advertising

At first, interests and personal connections were the focal point of Facebook users' likes, but an abundance of "like-able" pages started popping up on companies' websites and other platforms. When companies saw the emerging popularity of Facebook, they also saw an opportunity for cheap, widespread, seamless advertising. Facebook advertising is unique in that to be successful, it must give the audience the necessary information without seeming like a sales pitch (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013).

Now, users have become "Facebook-fatigued" because they have seen their feeds filled with more advertisements as they have liked more company pages (Donston-Miller, 2012). Facebook quickly adapted to the influx of company pages by moving to the timeline system and making updates from pages only available by visiting those pages or searching for them on a news feed. Companies struggled to continue to reach their audiences, without consistently posting to make sure they reached the top of the feed with every refresh (Donston-Miller, 2012).

This "fatigue" has impacted the realm of social marketing, rather than just advertising on social media (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013). The network of users is utilized to spread a brand across user platforms, and the advertising is spread naturally and by user choice. Rather than spewing obvious advertisements, companies release integrated content, such as coupons, events, or informational videos. Thanks to Facebook's search history algorithms, advertisements can be tailored to users' demographics, making sure that advertisements reach the most relevant target audiences (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013).

Many businesses, celebrities, and brands have since taken on social media as another form of generating brand attention (Rousseau, 2012). It can often make interactions between consumers and producers fun and exciting. A social media user can now get responses from celebrities or even companies through a tweet or comment. However, this relationship can be a slippery slope, as ConAgra discovered in a marketing mishap in 2011 (Rousseau, 2012). The company invited bloggers to a dinner, and expected them to react in a certain way when they revealed that the "intimate" Italian food entrees they were served were Marie Calendar's dishes. However, many of the bloggers were outraged by the lie, and a fun marketing event for ConAgra turned into a PR nightmare. They cancelled the remaining five events and compensated all the bloggers for travel and babysitting (Rousseau, 2012). Because the event was misleading, the subsequent blog posts and advertisements were not favorable. This mishap was a turning point for advertising, as companies realized that they could no longer trust that audiences would only understand what the ads. The social media era has created a way for companies to be held accountable and for internet users to hold them accountable.

As online users grow tired of advertisements and find ways to avoid them, companies develop alternative methods of advertising. Blurred advertising is the preferred method of many companies that wish to have an active presence on social media, as it easily combines advertisements with entertainment. Aksoy, Bhatnagar, and Malkoc (2004) recognized the importance of "brand embedding," such as product placement or embedded content. These types of advertising often fits advertisers' commodities within the natural narrative of visual content. Despite lack of strong empirical research, many advertisers have moved in this direction based on consumer feedback.

Audience Labor and Commodification

With these new models of advertising, companies must also rely on new ways to spread their brand. Social media websites' brand embedding was first described by Dallas Smythe as a way for the audience to serve advertisers by watching their material and occasionally (sometimes unconsciously) spreading it (Nixon, 2014). This "audience labor" turns the audience into commodity, meaning that the audience itself became ads as it bought or talked up certain products. In the digital age, the concept of audience labor expanded and exploded, as advertisers had a much more permeable surface to spread advertisements.

Advertisers have collaborated with Facebook to capitalize on audience labor and created sponsored stories to capitalize on the social media platform's market value (Fisher, 2015). In these stories, an average user's status update becomes a sponsored ad. When a user makes a post and mentions a business or company, that company pays Facebook to turn the post into an ad. The post then gets special treatment: it is moved to the top of the News Feed for their "friends," and the formatting is changed to include a link to the company through clickable logos. By changing small details of items that would have shown up anyway,

advertisers capitalize on the sharing nature of social media users. This way, ad content spreads without the advertisers spending much as far as the user's network spreads.

Sponsored stories raised many concerns. Simply mentioning a visit can turn into a recommendation or endorsement, which may be the opposite of the purpose of the post but benefits the company (Fisher, 2015). There have also been many privacy concerns as users prefer Facebook not to mine through their posts and pick out certain topics (Fisher, 2015). Users also do not get paid in this equation, even though they are producing the content.

The problem with audience labor in the digital era is not transparency. Users do not realize that they are seeing or creating sponsored content, and may inadvertently promote something to other users. However, advertisers and social media sites make a lot of revenue from audience labor. Because of this new model for advertising on social media, it has become easier for ads to slip by unnoticed under the cover of regular user's posts.

As social media has grown throughout the digital age, so has social media advertising. However, this has become increasingly difficult as internet users quickly tire of seeing unwanted ads on the content they are seeking. With the invention of ad blockers and general avoidance of advertising online, companies have responded by expanding their methods of advertising. Going forward, user-generated content has become the go-to method of advertising. It is effective in a social media platform due to its nativity and seamlessness. Although this has been largely successful, a brand cannot depend only on user-generated content for advertising. So, any content that can be spread through users as easily as it is generated is the second best option. Advertisements built into content that users enjoy, such as product placement or video partnerships, are becoming increasingly more popular in the digital age as advertisers struggle to reach their audiences through social media.

III. Methods

To learn about user interaction with Tasty-style videos, the author posted a survey online, allowing anybody to answer the questions after clicking on a link. The 10 survey questions were intended to identify the participant's level of knowledge and interaction with Tasty-style videos online. These questions asked not only if they had seen videos, but also how they viewed, shared, or used them, if at all. Responses from 132 participants helped the current author to understand how Tasty-style videos were consumed by the participants.

At the end of the survey, participants were offered a chance to participate in a focus group later. A total of eight people volunteered to participate in a focus group, which covered topics, such as Tasty videos as advertising, purpose of sharing videos, and why people do or do not make the recipes. It was intended to gather strong qualitative data about the motivations behind the answers given in the survey by asking the reasoning and results of the participants' viewing, sharing, and cooking.

IV. Findings and Results

Social Media and Tasty Videos

All 132 participants indicated that they use some form of social media, with Facebook being the most popular outlet (98.5%). Instagram and Snapchat were tied for the second most popular, with 120 participants indicating usage of either platform.

The numbers were just as strong for people who were familiar with Tasty videos and people who had definitely or possibly seen similar style videos from other outlets (92.4%). A majority of participants (99.2%) had been exposed to these videos through Facebook, and half (50.0%) had seen them on Instagram as well. Videos on Twitter reached only 10.6% of participants overall, even though 52.3% of the participants indicated they use Twitter.

Spread and Usage of Tasty Videos

Participants used a variety of time to watch Tasty videos, 32.6% watched “once a day,” 34.8% “once a week,” 22.7% “multiple times a day,” and 9.8% “once a month,” as shown in *Figure 1*. Among participants, 53.8% had never opted to “Save a video for Later.”

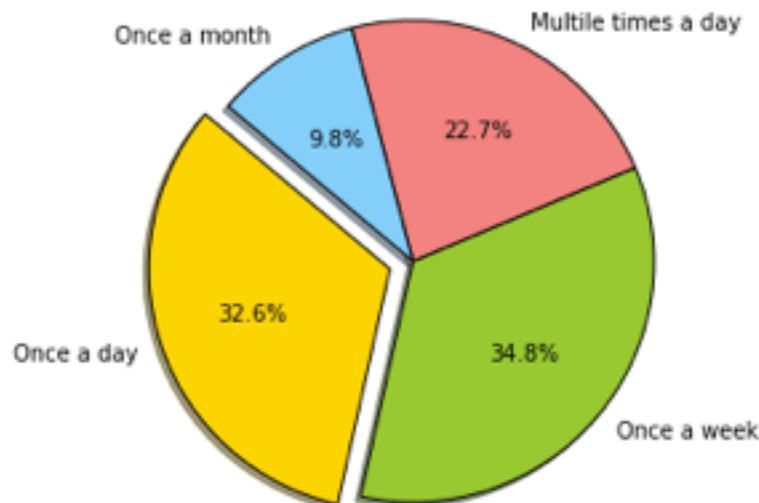


Figure 1. How often participants watch Tasty-style videos.

Among 132 participants, 103 (78.0%) decided not to share Tasty-style videos on their own feed, no matter the platform, but those who did preferred Facebook Timeline (21.2%) over their Twitter profile (1.5%).

In response to a question on sharing a video with friends, only 40 individuals (30.3%) indicated that they had never shared a video with a friend. Those who had shared a video with a friend preferred Facebook (42.4%), using Timelines, Messenger, and the comments section to share content with friends.

Participants in the focus group indicated that they preferred to keep their social media accounts “clean,” which is why they do not post or share these videos to their own feeds. However, many factors led them to share a video with a friend. Some participants said that certain ingredients, themes, or foods reminded them of a certain person, which was the main reason they decided to share a video. Another reason for sharing videos was to connect with friends, and open an invitation to get together to make the recipe, although most noted that they would not follow through on actually cooking or baking.

Although the overwhelming majority of participants indicated they had seen and watched Tasty-style videos on at least a semi-regular basis, 51.5% of participants had never made a recipe (Refer to *Figure 2*). Participants were not often inspired by a Tasty-style video: 52.3% were never inspired and 37.9% were inspired only 1-5 times (Refer to *Figure 3*).

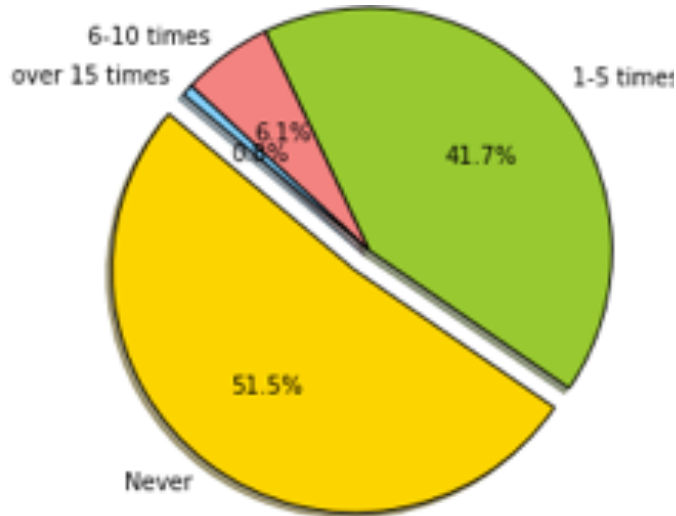


Figure 2. The number of times participants have made a Tasty-style video recipe.

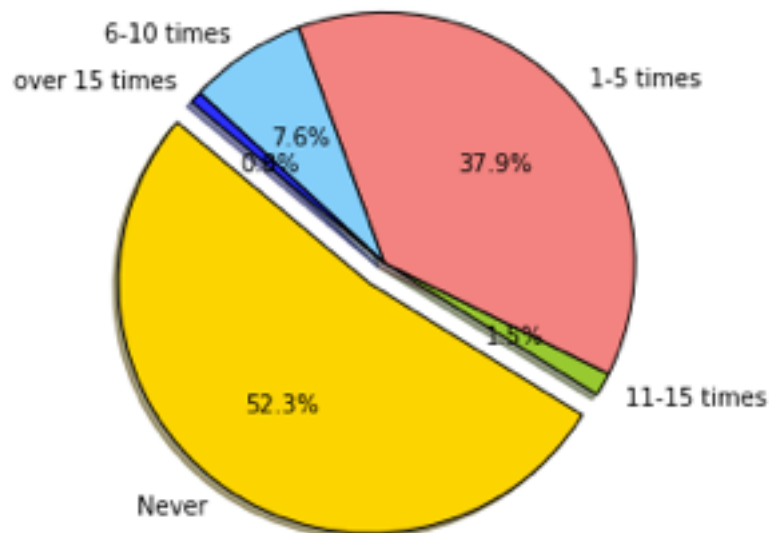


Figure 3. The number of times participants have made something inspired by a Tasty-style video.

Focus group participants pointed out two main factors that deterred them from making the recipes that they watched. First, many participants noted that they were “just lazy most of the time.” Although the videos were quick and simple, they did not depict much of the preparation or cleanup that went with the recipe. They noted that the less ingredients a recipe had, the more appealing it was, because not only would there be less to shop for, but there would also be less raw ingredients left over. Second, amid the constant influx of videos, participants just could not remember what they wanted to make. Videos were either played sporadically through browsing sessions or they were binge-watched and too many were playing at once. Videos auto play on news feeds when users are either not thinking about making food or not expecting to see food. When this happens, a video is acknowledged but quickly forgotten as the user continues to scroll to other content. Tasty videos have become such a staple in the constantly rotating cycle of video content on news feeds that they have become easy to ignore. In other cases, people might watch one Tasty video after another after another, creating a black hole of Tasty information. Participants mentioned that they consumed so many videos that their memory began to blur, and they could not effectively recall what they thought they might want to make. Those who had made food from Tasty videos said they cooked frequently, so at least the problem of motivation did not affect them. Instead of finding a video to make a specific food, they looked at

the ingredients they had and looked up a relevant video.

Tasty Videos as Advertising

Although the survey included no questions on advertising, the focus group reflected it as a major discussion topic. When initially asked if they saw Tasty videos as advertisements, participants responded with a strong “no.” However, they did recall with strong distaste the few videos they could remember with their obvious partnerships and advertising. Participants recalled certain videos were “pointless” or “too simple” when they had a sponsorship.

It was mentioned that each parent brand of the Tasty-style videos (i.e. BuzzFeed, Food Network, etc.) uses a certain brand of equipment that is featured in their videos, which was then acknowledged as a form of advertising within the videos. Further, it was acknowledged that some of these videos pique viewers’ interest in certain products (without necessarily naming a brand), which prompts them to purchase that product. It was also notable that people preferred to watch these videos on Facebook, rather than looking to the parent brand’s website or YouTube channel. There was also a brief discussion on the benefit of Tasty videos as a general learning tool. Two participants said that rather than paying attention to the recipe provided, they preferred to take away the general rules of cooking, such as cooking temperature or time.

In addition to the videos, BuzzFeed recently released a cookbook that consumers can personalize with their favorite genres of Tasty recipes. Many of the recent Tasty videos have advertised this book, and it is widely advertised on many of BuzzFeed Tasty’s social media pages. Even with the knowledge gained in videos, participants in the focus group said they would not purchase the cookbook because they generally believe that the amount they cook would not be changed by owning the cookbook.

Limitations

The survey was sent out through various groups and pages on the author’s personal network on Facebook, severely limiting the breadth of participants. No questions were asked about demographics except for their age for brevity and privacy. Due to a small number of age categories, it is even unclear if the participants reflected college students well. Many potential participants indicated that they would only spare a limited amount of time on a survey or focus group, limiting the length, depth, and number of questions included in both the survey and focus group. A major limitation of the focus group was the necessity to have it on the current author’s campus.

V. Conclusion

Although a strong majority of social media users have been exposed to BuzzFeed’s Tasty videos or similar videos from different outlets, most users do not and have not consumed the content for its intended purpose. In the social media market, most producers have to focus on long term implementation of their content. Otherwise, their content may not be viewed among the rest of the major influx of online content.

Although many social media users reported being highly interested in these videos and often seeking them out, very few reported seeking them out for the intended content of the video. Some found the content relaxing, some find it educational, but very few found it to be a useful tool in their cooking repertoire. Tasty-style videos are another intriguing, distracting, flashy object that plaster the news feed of many Facebook users. These videos have the intent of teaching and sometimes advertising, but to social media users their purpose is the same as many other videos. There is potential for these videos to grow into a base for cooking knowledge as well as provide an aesthetically pleasing distraction for viewers.

Because Tasty-style videos have become such a fixture for social media users, they could be an extremely useful tool for advertisers. These videos have already started to become a way for parent brands to gain audiences as users share the content and generate audience labor. Food Network, Tastemade, BuzzFeed, Spoon, and others have already seen a major increase in brand recognition in the 18-30 age group because of their respective videos. If advertisers find a way to integrate themselves into the video product without being intrusive, they can capitalize on the strong user-generated content base of Tasty videos.

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