

Research on the Mechanism of Food Production Short Video Content Marketing from the Perspective of Use and Gratification Theory

Xiaoya Yang*

Faculty of Humanity and Social Science, Beijing Normal-Hong Kong Baptist University, Zhuhai, Guangdong, 519087, China

*Corresponding author's e-mail: t330031320@mail.uic.edu.cn

Abstract

To explore the marketing mechanism of food production short videos, and promote the development of the short video industry, this article analyzes the marketing methods of food production short videos to meet the needs of short video users and stimulate their purchasing power based on the Use and Gratification Theory. This article uses literature research and questionnaire survey to combine the results of the questionnaire survey with previous views, and finally finds that food production short videos are actively chosen by users of short video platforms because they meet users' needs of stress relief, cognitive needs, and social integration needs. Ultimately, commercial conversion is achieved through integrating product promotion into the work, embedding advertisements, live streaming sales, and a number of food bloggers who gain influence and attention beyond peers even have their own brands. This article also points out the existing problems of such short videos, such as serious homogenization and misleading. At the end of the article, suggestions for future development are put forward.

Keywords

Food Production Videos; Use and Gratification Theory; Needs; Content Marketing; Brand Marketing.

1. Introduction

The ongoing development of Internet technology and the rise of new media have already and continue to transform people's lifestyles, consumption patterns, and entertainment habits. Short videos, as a popular digital cultural product, meet the needs for entertainment, leisure, and information, making them widely popular among Internet users. Among these, food-related short videos make up a significant portion. These videos, centered on food, are categorized into production, store exploration, and food broadcasting[1]. Food bloggers showcase the preparation processes of various dishes in their videos, using exquisite facilities, high-quality ingredients, soothing colors, and background music to create warm and engaging scenes. This not only provides viewers with a comfortable and relaxing visual and psychological experience but also spreads knowledge about food culture and cooking techniques, attracting a large audience. Unlike other types of food-related short videos, food production videos serve additional functions beyond entertainment, such as teaching practical life skills related to food preparation and promoting food culture during the production process. The traffic and attention gained by food bloggers have caught the attention of many brands and merchants. Given that food bloggers attract more attention and affection than traditional advertisements, many brands, especially those in the food and kitchenware industries, have started to combine content marketing with food-related short videos. Meanwhile, some food bloggers have stood out among their peers with outstanding works, achieving a significant impact and eventually

establishing their own brands. The commercial value generated by the integration of food bloggers' creation and brand marketing demonstrates that food-related short videos are not only a digital cultural product but also a powerful tool for brand marketing. Food bloggers meticulously craft their personal and brand images, clearly define the video's positioning, thereby precisely attracting audience attention, allowing the audience to gain a deeper understanding of the brand, ultimately transforming short video users into consumers. However, today's food-related short videos still face some problem, such as severe content homogenization and the potential misleading nature of the knowledge conveyed in the videos, indicating room for improvement. This article primarily uses the Use and Gratification Theory to analyze how food-related short videos meet the needs of short video users and stimulate their purchasing power, pointing out the existing problems and offering simple suggestions for future innovation and upgrades.

2. Literature Review at Home and Abroad

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Research on Food-related Short Videos

Currently, a search for the keyword "food-related short videos" on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) yields 273 Chinese documents, including 257 in journalism and media and 20 in trade economics. This indicates that the topic of 'food-related short videos' is widely studied in journalism and media, but there are relatively fewer scholars studying this topic in fields such as economics and marketing. The topic of 'food-related short videos' still needs to be closely integrated with marketing and other related fields. The earliest document related to 'food-related short videos' published in China was in 2017, indicating that research on food-related short videos or Vlogs in China started relatively late and has been updated with the development and innovation of food-related short videos.

To date, literature on food-related short videos can be broadly categorized into three types: the first type involves research from theoretical perspectives, such as Zhao Shuyu, who analyzed how food-related short videos meet user needs and the issues in these videos using the lens of the use-motivation theory in 2023; the second type focuses on specific aspects of food-related short videos, like Chen Liyong's research in 2018, which used the food blogger Li Ziqi as a case study to explore the characteristics, methods, issues, and development suggestions for brand communication in food-related self-media, with a focus on brand communication; the third type provides comprehensive analyses without confining food-related short videos to a specific theoretical perspective, but directly examines the videos or Vlogs themselves. For example, Liu Yuanyuan conducted a comprehensive analysis of the current status, features, issues, and countermeasures of food-related Vlogs in 2022. Although the number of these three types of literature is currently limited, they provide a detailed reflection of the current state of food-related short videos. The issues reflected in these studies often overlap, such as the homogenization of content in food-related short videos. Additionally, most of the current literature does not further categorize food-related short videos or Vlogs, such as dividing them into categories like store explorations or food preparation, indicating that most studies have conducted comprehensive research on food-related short videos.

To sum up, domestic research in China keeps pace with the times. For the research on food-related short videos or Vlogs, domestic literature is also updated with the development and innovation of such short videos, but further in-depth and detailed research is needed.

Regarding foreign research, the emergence and rise of Vlogs are primarily observed on foreign video platforms like YouTube, with the definition provided by YouTube: "A video blog. A casual, conversational video format or genre featuring a person talking directly to the camera." Therefore, compared to domestic studies, foreign research on Vlogs has a more localized

advantage. A search for the keyword 'Vlog' on Google Scholar reveals that foreign literature on Vlogs is undoubtedly rich, but unlike domestic literature, which focuses on communication studies, foreign literature spans various disciplines. For instance, in the field of education, J.Watkins explored the role of Vlogs in increasing student speaking time in 2022; in the areas of language and gender, A.Dame analyzed the roles played by transgender male Vloggers on YouTube in 2023. Foreign research often views Vlogs as cultural carriers and tools for promoting scientific development, rather than new media examples that reflect news and communication theories. A search for the keyword 'Dinner Vlog' on Google Scholar yields results similar to those for simply searching for 'Vlog' indicating that foreign research rarely links food Vlogs to media theory or cultural dissemination.

Replacing the search keyword with 'short food video' yields results that differ significantly from those obtained by searching for 'Vlog'. Compared to Vlogs, 'short food video' is more closely aligned with the category of 'food-related short videos'. Most foreign studies on short food videos focus on their impact on tourism and public appetite, primarily in fields such as tourism management and psychology. For instance, Yao explored the relationship between short videos and travel in 2024, linking food clips to the tourism industry; Nggangashe in 2021 examined the effects of watching online cooking videos, or food production short videos, on teenagers' appetites. However, compared to Vlogs, research on short food videos is more prevalent in communication studies and KOL and marketing fields. Li Ziqi, a renowned food blogger globally, is frequently cited in foreign studies as a case study to analyze the dissemination methods of her short video works and their impact on brand marketing. In summary, while there are studies on food-related short videos in communication and marketing fields, they are relatively few.

2.1.2. Use and Meet the Perspective of Food Short Video Research

In China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), a search for the themes 'food-related short videos' and 'use and satisfaction' yielded a total of 7 documents, including 3 from journals and 4 master's theses. These 7 articles explore the dissemination strategies, effects, and audience satisfaction of food-related short videos using the Use and Gratification Theory. For instance, Jiang Lan and Hu Dan analyzed the content creation and operational strategies of the food blogger Mianyang Liaoli in 2024, 'using the Use and Gratification Theory to understand the needs of its audience'[2]. Fu Xiaochao studied family food-related short videos on TikTok in 2023, using the Use and Gratification Theory to analyze why audiences are interested in such videos, summarize the challenges faced by these videos, and propose suggestions for improvement[3]. Li Guoju used the two major bloggers 'Office Xiao Ye' and 'Ye Shi Xiao Ge' as examples to analyze the content creation and audience reception psychology of creative food-related short videos in 2019, reflecting on the issues present in similar videos and suggesting solutions[1]. Li Li examined the characteristics in 2023, existing problems, and optimization strategies of content marketing in food preparation short videos from the perspective of the "healing economy"[4].

2.1.3. Research on Food Short Videos from the Perspective of Content Marketing

A search for 'food-related short videos' and 'marketing' on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) yielded 37 articles, all of which are related to the fields of journalism and media. Another search for 'food-related short videos' and 'content marketing' found six articles. This indicates that research on food-related short videos in the marketing field still needs to be further explored. For instance, Qin Yan in 2019 analyzed new methods and trends in content marketing for food-related short video self-media, using bloggers like Li Ziqi and Huanong Brothers as examples. Fu Shengnan examined the current application and issues of scenario-based community marketing strategies in the food-related short video self-media sector and proposed optimization suggestions in 2021[5].

2.2. Literature Commentary

This article focuses on food preparation short videos, drawing from examples found on Chinese local short video platforms. It incorporates theories related to media and culture, aligning with domestic research trends. The article specifically analyzes food preparation short videos within the broader category of food-related short videos. Building on previous studies in short videos, particularly those focusing on food, the article will provide a detailed analysis of relevant examples. However, the analysis will not be confined to the media domain but will also incorporate cultural insights, marking an innovative aspect of this work.

3. Research on the Mechanism of Food Production Short Video Content Marketing

3.1. How to Attract Audiences in Food Short Videos

The Use and Gratification Theory, first introduced by American sociologist E. Katz, focuses on analyzing the motivations behind audience media consumption and how media consumption satisfies these needs, to examine the psychological and behavioral effects of mass communication[6]. Unlike traditional media studies that primarily focus on the role of media in influencing audiences, this theory emphasizes the active role of the audience, placing greater importance on the audience rather than the media. It measures the effectiveness of communication based on whether it meets the audience's needs. Katz points out that people engage with media to satisfy their needs, which are influenced by social and personal psychological factors. After using a specific medium, whether or not their needs are met, it will influence future media choices. People adjust their existing impressions of the media based on the results of these needs, changing their expectations of the media to varying degrees. Katz and his colleagues categorized the needs that the audience expects to be satisfied into five types: cognitive needs (acquiring information, knowledge, and understanding), emotional needs (emotional, pleasurable, or aesthetic experiences), personal integration needs (enhancing credibility, information, stability, and status), social integration needs (strengthening connections with family and friends and participating in public affairs), and stress relief needs (escaping and diverting attention)[3]. Popular food-related short videos attract audiences by carefully crafting content that aligns with user needs.

In order to fully understand how such short videos meet the needs of users on short video platforms from the audience's perspective, we collected a questionnaire on the viewing situation of food production short videos from 127 users of different age groups. According to the theme and content of the blogger's works, the food bloggers were roughly divided into the following categories:

Table 1. Categories of Food Bloggers

types	Content characteristics	instance
Narrative food blogger	Narrate the process of making food in a certain order	Li Ziqi; Rishiji
Family food blogger	The blogger appears as a member of the family	Food Diary of Liuyi; Diary of Xiazhi's daily diet
Food blogger for teaching	Focus on teaching home-cooked food	Village donkey
Creative food blogger	Try to make challenging and creative food	Black Cat Kitchen; Mianyang Liaoli
Daily Vlog sharing blogger	Focus on sharing daily meals	Yiwan Annie; Datou who is not full

The survey results indicate that narrative food bloggers are the most favored by users, with 48.48% of respondents choosing this category. The questionnaire then asks in the following question, "Why do you enjoy watching such videos?" and provides multiple options for reasons. By analyzing user preferences and applying the five types of needs from the Uses and Gratifications Theory, we can understand how food preparation short videos attract users.

3.1.1. Meet Users' Needs for Stress Relief

In the multiple-choice question "Why do you like watching such videos?", about 72% of users chose "the process of making food is soothing and relieving," indicating that the ability of food production short videos to relieve stress and heal the mind and body is a key reason for users to actively watch such videos. According to the survey results, about 90% of the sample users are aged between 19 and 30 and 31 to 50. These age groups often face pressures from education, employment, work, and family in their daily lives, and they have very limited free time for leisure and entertainment. Food production short videos are relatively short, making them ideal for people with limited free time, such as postgraduates and office workers, to watch the entire food-making process in their spare time. This is one of the advantages of food production short videos over TV food programs.

When the color, aroma, and taste of the food are already highly appealing, food bloggers incorporate various visual and auditory elements, such as color, lighting, production environment, and background music, into their videos[7]. By using skillful shooting and editing techniques, they create a variety of effects in the food preparation process[2]. As mentioned earlier, the survey results indicate that narrative food bloggers are the most popular, and their videos are the most soothing. These bloggers slow down the pace of their videos to authentically capture life, allowing viewers to temporarily escape from their busy, monotonous, and mechanical lives. They create a warm and cozy environment that allows viewers to experience the simplicity and beauty of everyday life. Although the focus is on the food, the blogger often inserts close-ups of landscapes and scenic shots at transitions, giving the short videos a micro-film-like feel. A vivid example of this type of video is 'The Life of a Rose... Beauty...' uploaded by Li Ziqi on Bilibili on August 28, 2020. This video showcases the traditional methods of making rose tea, brown sugar rose jam, rose flower cakes, and rose wine-stewed glutinous rice balls, using roses as the main ingredient. It records the life details from planting rose seedlings, collecting roses, processing them, to making various dishes, following the time sequence from Jingzhe. The video uses changes in natural elements like flowers, trees, the sun, and wheat fields to indicate the passage of time, and features numerous close-ups of the food to highlight its delicious and tempting qualities. The video features soothing piano music, with its volume not drowning out the natural sounds of birds and water, creating a sense of immersion and relaxation. The video has garnered 270,000 likes on Bilibili and has been saved by 24,000 users for repeated viewing. Li Ziqi and other narrative-focused bloggers have gained significant attention, reflecting the current situation where people in high-pressure environments desperately need comfort. Many bloggers leverage this to attract viewers to their content voluntarily.

3.1.2. Meet Users' Cognitive Needs

The survey results show that 55% of the sample users enjoy watching such short videos because they want to learn how to make different dishes, while 38% choose the option of wanting to learn more about food culture. Additionally, 86% of the sample users often learn how to make dishes from food bloggers or occasionally refer to their videos when cooking. This indicates that most users have a thirst for knowledge when watching videos. Food, a topic closely tied to daily life, naturally attracts people of all ages. Moreover, food is a cultural medium; its significance goes beyond just satisfying hunger and fulfilling desires, as it also reflects local customs and national character[5]. Teaching-oriented food bloggers understand the needs of

their audience and primarily focus on shooting short videos that teach the preparation of home-style dishes. The ingredients and tools required are simple and daily. Bloggers provide a complete and detailed process, clearly indicating the amount of each ingredient needed at each step. Furthermore, they summarize their experiences and lessons learned through repeated practice, adding annotations, precautions, and personal insights for more challenging steps. One highly praised blogger, Village Donkey, is an excellent representative of teaching-oriented food bloggers. On her personal profile page, Village Donkey states her goal as 'a food tutorial without a single word of nonsense' and frequently uses titles like 'the nanny-level tutorial for a certain dish.' Her videos not only teach the detailed process but also emphasize the types of vegetables, fruits, meats, and seasonings used, using more understandable quantifiers to indicate the quantities, maximizing the practicality of the tutorials. For instance, in the video tutorial she uploaded on July 15, 2024, for braised pork with rice, she provides clear and easy-to-understand explanations for each step and material selection. For example, when cutting the pork belly into 1 cm thick slices, she explains that this thickness is 'about the size of a thumbnail'. When explaining more complex steps, she also clarifies the principles behind them, such as why the heat should be medium-low when stir-frying the pork belly, because if the heat is too high, 'the meat will become dry and tough'. This approach helps reduce the likelihood of viewers making mistakes during the actual cooking process, truly meeting users' needs to learn how to prepare home-style dishes.

When showcasing food as a cultural medium, bloggers tend to use more rare ingredients and tools, transforming dishes into artistic creations. The process of preparing the food remains detailed and complete, and bloggers often specify the materials used in their videos. However, in these videos, the focus shifts from teaching practical life skills to highlighting the intricate techniques and cultural significance behind the dishes. For instance, the food blogger 'Nan Xiang who do not like to eat' recreates the culinary scenes from the classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Many of these dishes require complex preparation processes and expensive ingredients, such as 'Qie Xiang', which involves nine steams and nine sun-dries, using nine chickens and a large number of eggplants. After thoroughly reviewing the original text, the blogger meticulously reproduces this dish, which exemplifies the ancient Chinese approach to creatively and delicately preparing food, helping viewers better understand the dietary culture depicted in the novel.

3.1.3. Meet Users' Social Integration Needs

Approximately 21% of the sample users chose to watch such videos because of the humorous and engaging commentary from food bloggers, while 7% opted for it to interact more with fellow food enthusiasts. Beyond the videos themselves, the bloggers and their fan communities are also key factors in choosing social media. Bloggers create a unique media image, forming a 'quasi-social relationship' with their fans, which is akin to real-life social interactions. This relationship significantly reduces the distance between bloggers and fans and enhances the fans' trust in the bloggers[2]. By actively engaging in the comment sections, bloggers strengthen this 'quasi-social relationship'. Fans often discuss food videos in the comment sections or through bullet comments, or they may form dedicated group chats[8]. For example, family-oriented food bloggers not only showcase delicious dishes but also highlight the family members featured in their videos, often one of whom is skilled in cooking. This relatable image resonates with viewers. Viewers often ask about home-cooked recipes or updates on other family members' lives in the comment sections, leading to friendly exchanges between bloggers and their audience. The formation of these close social relationships meets users' needs for social interaction, helps retain existing fans, enhances trust, and prepares for future content marketing.

3.2. How to Carry Out Brand Marketing

The commercial transformation of food production short videos is achieved through content marketing. Content marketing is a new marketing approach that attracts and retains target audiences by producing and releasing valuable, relevant, and continuous content, thereby stimulating their purchasing power. Survey results show that about 70% of users frequently or occasionally purchase the same kitchen tools or foods featured in these videos. Brands select influencers who are closely aligned with their products based on the content and audience characteristics of food bloggers, and invite them to collaborate to promote their products. Influencers with top-tier industry recognition can even establish their own brands, such as Li Ziqi and Rishi Ji[1]. Besides well-known food bloggers setting up their own brands and leveraging their fame and influence for brand marketing, there are currently three main methods of content marketing for food production short videos: inserting ads into videos; promoting products through live streaming after gaining followers; and creating a dedicated food-making video centered around the promoted brand's products[1]. Survey results indicate that about 63% of users prefer the last method, which integrates product promotion into the video content. This approach effectively showcases the product's performance, making it more convincing than a simple introduction of product functions. Moreover, compared to direct ad insertion, the food-making process is more engaging, allowing users to fully absorb the advertisement without skipping it. Moreover, the live-streaming 'product promotion' favored by 6% of users is a marketing approach that heavily relies on the blogger's image and the quasi-social relationship between the blogger and their fans. This method typically does not achieve the same impact as food videos because it lacks a usage component. Integrating products with food preparation is the closest to the essence of 'content marketing,' and it is currently the most innovative, effective, and popular promotional strategy among users.

4. Analysis of limitations of Short Videos on Food Production

4.1. Lack of New Content, and Serious Homogenization

As the commercial value of such videos becomes increasingly evident, the food creation industry is seeing a surge in new bloggers eager to achieve the same level of traffic as established food influencers. Lacking creative inspiration and themes, these newcomers often mimic the styles and ideas of their predecessors to gain attention. For instance, Li Ziqi has over 10 bloggers with similar video styles, including 'Jiang Xunqian', a cultural heritage blogger; 'Dianxi Xiaoge', a Yunnan rural cuisine blogger; and 'Linlin Qi', who shares a name and content style with Li Ziqi. These bloggers have garnered tens of millions to tens of thousands of followers, making them strong competitors and potential 'substitutes' for Li Ziqi. Similarly, family-style food bloggers like 'Liuyi's food Diary' and 'Diary of XiaZhi's Daily meal' have gained popularity for their casual approach to infant and toddler food preparation and their innovative use of ingredients. It's hard to determine the order in which these two bloggers pioneered unique niches, but many similar bloggers have since emerged, though they haven't yet gained significant traction. While it's easy for food bloggers to come up with similar ideas, each blogger brings their own innovations despite the similarities. However, relying heavily on imitation can lead to plagiarism disputes, negative public opinion, and damage to the blogger's image, hindering commercial success.

The root cause of content homogenization lies in the depletion of creativity. To break through the bottleneck and attract attention, food bloggers often sign contracts with MCN (Multi-Channel Network) companies, in addition to borrowing from each other[4]. MCN companies help bloggers improve their work by teaching a relatively fixed production model, leading to bloggers under the same company having similar styles. For example, daily Vlog sharing videos that are commonly seen on TikTok, Red Note, and Bilibili all feature stainless steel pots as the

cover, with neatly arranged and beautifully presented food inside. The food preparation processes and even the narration styles in different bloggers' videos are very similar. While MCN companies' assistance makes bloggers' works more eye-catching, it also leads to mechanized creation, lacking uniqueness, which can lead to fan fatigue. For the promoted products, formulaic videos lack vividness, potentially making users doubt the presence of staged shots, thereby reducing trust in the bloggers.

4.2. The Video Content is Short of Rigor and May Be Misleading

"Culture plays a crucial role in setting trends, educating the public, serving society, and driving development." Food production short videos are essentially digital cultural products that cater to users' cognitive needs, leading them to actively choose these products. However, due to the varying levels of education and professional knowledge among food bloggers, many lack a deep understanding and verification of their video content. As a result, some of their works may contain errors, whether in the cooking techniques or the cultural significance of the food. Such errors can lead to two outcomes: if the video is chosen by users with rich life experience or a deeper understanding of the subject, they might point out the mistakes, leading to doubts about the blogger and even other similar bloggers, damaging the blogger's image and hindering brand marketing. If users fully trust the blogger and accept the information conveyed in the video, applying this knowledge to their daily lives, they may be misled. While this does not negatively impact brand marketing, receiving incorrect information can be detrimental to the user.

5. Summary and Development Suggestions

As can be seen from the above, a wide variety of food production short videos today attract audiences through their content, encouraging them to actively choose to watch such videos. This not only meets the needs for stress relief, cognitive stimulation, and social integration as proposed by the Use and Gratification Theory, but also promotes brand marketing in ways that are more appealing to the audience, serving three purposes: leisure and entertainment, cultural education, and content marketing. However, food production short videos still face issues such as homogenization and lack of rigor in content. To improve this situation, food bloggers should first shape an image that best fits their own characteristics, rather than leaving the image design entirely to MCN companies. They should precisely target their audience and focus on creating works that align with their positioning, rather than seeking attention at all costs. Secondly, food bloggers should enhance their professional skills, gain a deep understanding of their work themes, and actively learn about creation techniques, ensuring that while engaging in content marketing, the cultural value of the video is maintained.

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