PAPER TITLE: Making over practice: Using food magazines to make over food consumption practices

ABSTRACT

This article presents a case study on the makeover process through the consumption of lifestyle media. Drawing on interviews with consumers of UK food magazines BBC Good Food and Delicious (N = 26), it explores how consumers identify and use the magazines as manuals to make over their food consumption habits, not just shaping their ideas about food but affecting the decisions they make about food purchases and preparation. This is triggered by a change in personal circumstance, including motherhood.

KEYWORDS

Consumption, food, lifestyle media, makeover, motherhood

ARTICLE

This article explores how the readers of BBC Good Food and Delicious magazines use lifestyle media as manuals for makeover. Lifestyle media and the concept of makeover advice have a long-standing relationship (Lewis, 2008: 26-47), often in relation to an individual's appearance, wardrobe or house; however, this article is about consumers choosing to consult a lifestyle media text, in this case a food magazine, and using that as an advice manual on how to change their own material practices and habits. In essence, these consumers are making over their consumption habits in relation to contact with these magazines, be that through explicit advice or through developing tastes. Warde (1997) discusses how more research is needed on how readers 'respond in practice' to information in magazine columns relating to food, noting that it is not clear if contact with texts like this impact on consumption practices or just play a role in altering the ways in which food is discussed and perceived (Warde, 1997: 179). This case study aims to address this point.

This case study is based on a theme that emerged from a set of interviews with 26 consumers of two food magazines, BBC Good Food and Delicious. All participants were female, aged 25–48, all read the magazines on a regular basis and had done so for at least two years prior to the interview taking place. Participants were recruited through a snowball method; starting with a small group of three people who had approached the researcher as they had an interest in food magazines as avid readers. In their interviews, 15 of the consumers explicitly referenced the way in which they used the food magazine(s) they read to influence their consumption patterns and behaviours surrounding food preparation and presentation; six of these specifically used the word 'makeover' to describe this process. A further five participants attributed wider changes in their consumption to the influence of lifestyle media in general. The fact that these consumers identify for themselves the influence of lifestyle media on their consumption patterns starts to address Warde's question on the role of food magazines in the wider consumption process.

Vicki (28) explicitly describes how the magazine was part of a process of making over her knowledge of food and cooking. She acknowledges it has had a direct influence on her consumption of food; other readers also outline this influence (n = 15):

I think it influences me more like what goes in the trolley and what goes on the plate in the end ... it helps me makeover my food and cooking a bit like Gok does to women's wardrobes and dress sense. (Vicki, 28)

Interestingly, Vicki likens her food and cooking makeover to other forms of makeover, including Gok Wan's television shows. The way the term 'makeover' is used by the consumers suggests that the term has now become integrated into everyday contexts through lifestyle media; they use the language of makeover in reference to prominent lifestyle media programmes, including Changing Rooms and 10 Years Younger, using these titles as points of reference to describe the relationship between themselves, the magazine and any changes they make as a result.

A distinction is made by the participants between a makeover as a change in appearance and one which is about a change in attitudes and consumption practice. Louise (36) discusses how her kitchen cupboards are full of different things which she bought because of something she read, some of which are 'great discoveries', which she enjoys showing off, while admitting that there were some 'not so good lurking at the back' but argues that this is not important as no one from the outside can see these items and she enjoys the fact that she was brave enough to try them. This suggests that for Louise, her food style makeover is about experimentation and isn't always for outward public display to others, but for herself.

When referring to the makeover process, gendered identity issues, specifically around motherhood and becoming a good wife, were a key theme. Ten of the participants mentioned how these texts helped them change from someone who liked food, to a mother or wife who needed to know about preparing good-quality meals; quality in this case referring to both nutritional quality and taste quality. They talk of not only needing to learn how to cook but, more specifically, which ingredients to use, styles of cuisine and what is 'acceptable'. Central to this concept of 'acceptable' was a moral ethic to provide healthy meals for their families and to learn what it meant to 'cook properly'; this usually referred to not using ready meals or pre-prepared foods.

Michelle (44), described how pregnancy triggered her desire to learn to cook; she describes how it was her duty to provide 'proper' food for her family and that this was an important process for her personally; she describes how pre-pregnancy she and her husband ate out a lot, and she had always enjoyed food but now she needed to shift her priorities and using food magazines was one way in which she achieved this:

That was important for me to know I was feeding them OK.... Good Food really helped me with that. (Michelle, 44)

This is one of many explicit references to using the food magazines to shape consumption habits. Michelle specifically sought out the magazine for precisely that reason; it was a deliberate and intentional act, not just a consequence of reading these magazines.

Other women (n = 5) note that getting married was an important transition period, not just generally but specifically in terms of food consumption practices. They largely relate this to

cultural and traditional expectations that women, and wives in particular, should be able to cook. However, in other cases they talk about wanting to move away from the food of their childhood or from their parental homes and learn about a more varied, modern diet, and they use lifestyle media for inspiration. Shivani (31), talks about how she used the magazines as a 'manual and guide' for consumption of food products, not just in terms of what type of food but with specific ingredients. This echoes Gallegos' (2005: 99) thoughts on 'cookbooks as manuals of taste'; this wasn't just about instructions but about learning about what was in fashion and what was considered good taste. It also highlights that cultural influences play a big role in how we use lifestyle media; Shivani was using lifestyle media to learn about other cuisines, yet she used traditional socialisation methods when learning how to cook Indian food with her mother.

In conclusion, these women are using lifestyle media to perform their own makeovers in terms of their material practices, and not just being voyeurs of the makeover process as it happens to others, as is often assumed in discussions of makeover media texts (Lewis, 2008). The participants in this study note that these magazines influence their choices, as eaters and as food shoppers, which addresses the question raised by Warde (1997) suggesting that the level of influence held by lifestyle media goes beyond changing discourses in conversation to actually shaping material practice. The readers are selfreflexive on this process which then means they continue to consume these magazines – their makeover is never quite complete. Jones (2008) discusses how 'makeover' is not about an end result but instead is always about the process of work itself and showing that work is continually being done. This is a useful concept to work with as it helps us to understand why these women keep buying and reading these magazines (Jones, 2008: 12). Learning a new recipe or how to use a new ingredient is essential to the makeover process, and allows for both an internal self-development makeover but also the potential for outward display of this to others.

Overall, this case study highlights the way in which changing tastes become catalysts to seek out practical changes and it draws attention to the way in which major life events such as marriage and motherhood are key instigators in consumers seeking out transformation. It is worth noting that these processes are all bound up in traditional norms, often relating to gender or family roles. Consumers are looking for convenient and accessible ways to enter into these makeover processes, and lifestyle magazines, and the way in which they act as manuals can fulfil that role.

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