

Chapter 1

Food Porn: A Theoretical and Conceptual Background

CHAPTER-1

Food Porn: Conceptual Background and Review of Literature

“If the casserole is missionary style, food porn takes its devotees into the foodie Kama Sutra. It glistens. It drips. It uses props. It is both lusty and intimate. For those who partake, it is an obsession.” – Erin Metz McDonnell (2016, 239)

1.1 Introduction

Food porn is a very popular term around the world. The popularity of the term carries an important question: how in ordinary and common everyday life food and its related activities like eating, cooking, serving, and others are becoming popular on digital platforms under the umbrella term of food porn. As a phenomenon, it is universal and includes different cuisines with marked particular identities of particular cultures. In other words, it is important to understand how people from different cultures create a common digital platform for food porn. Since the whole concept of food porn has a significant connection with the digital platform, it seems that it is democratic in nature, however, it has a significant connection with class which is discussed in chapter four of this study. Many scholars have already worked from different perspectives regarding this question of the ordinariness of food and the popularity of food porn. Ordinariness of food, generally refers in this context as the food that the people have in mind as the home cooked food, the food that is not popular or not represented in a glamorous way, or the food that is just used to fulfil human’s physiological hunger in everyday life. For instance, the everyday foods like in fruits category orange, papaya, watermelon etc the everyday or most common fruits, however, when photographed and presented under as food porn in social media platforms, it seems that it is something different and exotic. Yasmin Ibrahim (2015) in her work ‘Food Porn and the Invitation to Gaze: Ephemeral Consumption and the Digital Spectacle’, opined that mundane and ordinary food are being attributed to a spectacle in this food-based economy as the message and the medium. Again, the food is being fetishized with the desire by styling culinary offerings through the vantage point of the camera lens to be consumed by the hungry public. This food is meant to be consumed by sight and senses other than ingesting it. Another food

porn scholar McDonnell (2016, 240) in his chapter titled ‘Food Porn: The Conspicuous Consumption of Food in the Age of Digital Reproduction’, said that food porn applies voyeuristic practice and the pornographic visual aesthetic to food that emphasizes the pleasurable, sensual dimensions of food which is in reality derived from human sexuality as reproduced in photography and popularized through the Visual media platforms. This can be understood that food porn is something that in a way attributes some special external qualities or values to the ordinary food that makes any common and ordinary food into a celebrated figure. To gain a clearer understanding regarding food in food porn and food porn as a whole, some definitions, and meanings of food porn would be a great help. Therefore, food porn as a concept and as a phenomenon are being understood through some of the definitions and meanings as defined by many scholars who have worked on food and its related disciplines. The present study tries to unveil the questions like whether food porn as a phenomenon and as a concept are two different things or both the terms are same, whether food porn is a new concept or it has an old genesis, whether the term is class-based, heterogeneous in nature or it is monolithic and homogeneous in nature.

1.1.1 Food Porn as a Phenomenon and as a Concept

There are many scholars who put forward insightful notions, opinions, and knowledge regarding a particular genre of food, which is different from other genres in many ways by wearing a veil of uncommonness. These definitions help us to get an idea about the term food porn both as a concept and as a phenomenon.

In regard to meanings and definitions of food studies Lucy Long suggests that (2017, 206) meaning in relation to food can always be broadly divided into two categories: Meaning in food as symbol and reference and on the other hand, meaning in food as significance. For this research both the categories as mentioned by Long are being tried to explore. Another interesting point that draws the researcher’s attention is that Long opined that “meaning is not inherent: it is constructed. Neither food in general nor specific food intrinsically reference something else- their meanings are given to them through usage and social consent, or sometimes they are created and imposed”.

Thus, we can understand that the symbols of food and the meanings associated with the symbols are not inherited but socially constructed. Likewise, food porn is also nothing

but an accumulation of different meanings of food presented in any platform, which gives the whole phenomenon a new identity and popularity. For instance, Fabio Parasecoli (2008), observed and opined that delicacies, recipes and other food-related traditions, all these go well beyond the economic and material aspects of consumption. Parasecoli referred to anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, where Appadurai stated that imagination and fantasy have become a fundamental social practice, playing an important role in shaping everyday life for many people all over the world. Thus, Food porn which is beyond the economic and material aspects of consumption deals with the imagination and fantasy of people claiming an immense popularity among the masses. Hence, it is important to examine the imagination and fantasy aspect along with the economic aspect, as economic aspects are basically run by using the fantasy and imagination.

Michael Jacobson, the co-founder of the Centre for Science in the Public Interest, in 1979, is given credit for the first use of the term food porn. He suggested that food that was sensationally outrageous deserved to be considered ‘pornographic’ to connote difference between healthy and unhealthy foods (McBride, 2010, 38). In other words, for Jacobson, food porn refers to only unhealthy foods and the ways of unhealthy eating. Food porn was introduced as something that is negative to society. Again, when one talks about the historiography of food porn, we can see how the term gastro-porn which was emerged two years earlier in a New York Times review of books noting the “curious parallels between manuals on sexual techniques and manuals on the preparation of food” (Cockburn, 1987, 125).

The connotations of the term unhealthy associated with the phrase food porn still exists in the public belief system such as mentioned in the articles of Doug Compton (2017) “Beware the Dangers of Food Porn”, Clare Park (2020) “Food Porn is Making You Fat” are some of them. One of the articles, where largely a discussion on unhealthy foods is being observed is Simon Davis’ (2000) article “Unhealthy Eating is New Fad in US”, “In what is being termed "food porn", American food manufacturers are capitalising on a backlash against low-calorie and diet foods by marketing treats that boast a high fat content and good artery-clogging potential. Obesity has doubled during the past decade and doctors and nutritional experts say that if the number of heavy weights continues to grow at the current rate, almost the entire population will be obese by 2010.”

These articles suggest that food porn has a nature that is always associated with availability of abundance and excessiveness of food items and in high calorie content. However, along with these meanings, some new perspectives are being added on, as it is not a new phenomenon that a particular term evolves with time with its denotative and connotative meanings.

It is a universal truth that the meanings of any term or word are not static. They are dynamic, and change over time. For instance, Raymond Williams (2011) in his book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* discusses the history of the meanings of some terms like Culture, Masses, Society, Nature, and many other important terms. His approach to discuss the meanings of the terms in the book is cultural rather than etymological. From the understanding of Williams' book, it can be said with confidence that the original meaning/s of any word/s changes or evolves into a completely new form in contemporary times or that there has been a fierce political struggle over the 'correct' meaning. Food porn is also not an exception in this regard.

1.1.2 Tracing the Development of the Term Food Porn

The concept of food porn has a significant history even before the term itself was coined. For instance, Roland Barthes talked about the concept of food porn without using the term 'food porn'. Barthes (1972, 78-80) discussed in the chapter 'Ornamental Cookery' that how food is different for different classes of people and presentation of food is another different and significant factor. Barthes in his article gives examples of two magazines named *Elle* and *L'Express*. *Elle* is a magazine for the working middle-class women who aspire to be higher class and *L'Express* is a magazine for the upper middle-class women. Barthes insightfully observed and discussed how the magazine which deals with the working-class group showcases what Barthes called, "dream-like cookery" where everything is shown in a luxurious way. On the other hand, *L'Express* magazine showcases, as Barthes called "Cookery is real not magical". From these discussions Barthes concluded the chapter by saying that the magazine *Elle* represented food "as objects at once near and inaccessible, whose consumption can perfectly well be accomplished simply by looking." Many scholars like Fabio Parasecoli and Yasmin Ibrahim discussed food porn in association to Roland Barthes' notions of food and its various interesting meanings of consumption.

Tisha DeJmanee (2016, 431-432) briefly noted the effect of food porn in her article “Food Porn as Postfeminist Play: Digital Femininity and the Female Body on Food Blogs” after the launch of 1993 Food Network, an American basic cable channel owned by Television Food Network, gaining popularity in the early 2000s with evocative food styling and shot selections that could be readily analogized to pornographic conventions. From this onwards food porn gains new additions to its arena. Jacobson uses the term porn in food porn to signify the nature of unhealthiness, but after print and digital media widened their span and included food as an important genre to showcase, the term food porn takes direction towards more sexual pornographic conventions.

Likewise, Antony Bourdain (2001), also used “food porn” as the romanticization or celebration of food as a substitute or proxy for sex which can be seen in the "objectification" of food that is being displayed or description of food and its preparation, where the audience has no intention of actually cooking or eating any of it. In this regard to the idea of sexual connotation in food porn, Beau Cook’s (2017) food porn stand with a unique and distinct display of food porn content. Beau Cook’s Food porn is a food porn cookbook by Beau Cook. Beau Cook was a construction worker, who came to the limelight as one of the contestants of Masterchef Australia (series 4). Beau Cook was not the winner of the series, but, according to David Watson, “Beau’s touch of humor in his cooking skills makes him popular among the television audience. Now, Beau is working as a professional firefighter” (Cook, 2017, 7)

In the cookbook of Beau Cook, it can be seen that both healthy as well as unhealthy foods are taken into consideration. The book contains 39 chapters or recipes, which names are combinations of real recipe names with a twist of sexual connotation. For, instance, the name of the chapter or recipe 18 is ‘Vegina’ a mixture of two similar terms vegan and vagina (the female sexual organ). Each chapter has a kind of small summary of the recipe. For the recipe ‘vegina’ the summary is as follows,

“These Zucchini spirals are a great healthy alternative to pasta, or even used as underwear. If you’re not vegan add some tinned tuna to the bolognaise to get your meat fix” (Cook, 2017, 53). Fig:1 showing the screenshot of Beau Cook’s food porn’s book chapter ‘Vegina’s’ photo.

From this recipe, it can be seen that both healthy and unhealthy foodstuffs are being included. Moreover, the author is showcasing healthy foodstuffs and also gives importance to the sexual connotation of the recipes. The pictures are another most important part of the cookbook. The picture associated with this chapter consists of two female individuals laying naked with their hands holding their upper parts and the zucchini spirals used as a healthy alternative to pasta are being placed on their private parts in a triangle shape. Likewise, the so-called unhealthy food is also being included along with the non-veg ones. From this book, it is very clearly understood that food porn can be both healthy, unhealthy, vegan, non-vegetarian and others till the presentations are seductive to the viewers.



Fig.1.1 *Beau Cook's Food Porn*. Source: (Cook, 2017)

Brittany Benninger (2017), in her essay “Clicking Away From Culture: Food Instagramming and its Gastronomic Effects” talks about how food porn as well as Instagrams can play a big part in a restaurant's success. This is done by individuals who upload pictures of their food to Instagram to advertise more subtle statuses as well, like self-satisfaction. The individuals by uploading food pictures showcase to the media

public that their life is so called happy and happening and food is also an accomplishment of their success, as it means that they can afford fancy food. Some contradictory images to confuse as well as to show uniqueness like, fit woman uploading a picture of a big and savory cheeseburger is like sending a message to everyone saying,

"Look at me; I manage to have junk food and keep a great body!" Posting a picture of an açai bowl or a green juice a few days later could then show the moderation and control this woman has in her life. This stream of pictures only composes an idealized version of one's life, where nutritional deficiencies and ill-fitting clothes slip out of the frame. So, food porn enhances a different picture altogether.

In contemporary times, Dejmanee (2016, 431-432) opined that food porn and the term 'porn' has the following implications. Firstly, Dejmanee argues that there is no moral opprobrium intended with the usage of "porn" as the shock value of this term has been diminished in the current sex-saturated, postfeminist context. Indeed, digital "food porn" is often couched within exaggeratedly chaste, girly, and maternal performances of heteronormative femininity. Secondly, she believes that digital "food porn" can be distinguished from marketing due to its existence within the logic of user-generated content. Digital "food porn" is typically produced and published by individual amateurs. Accordingly, it is less aligned with the emotional manipulation of marketing and more with the agency and digital identity play of postfeminist subjects indicating the degree to which digital "food porn" differs from historical understandings of this concept. Another, Scholar, Signe Rousseau (2014) discusses the importance of food porn by saying "Beyond the obvious historical relationship between food and sex, it is in line with the sexual connotations of fetishism that the term 'food porn' has become a new catchphrase for media representations of food, from stylized cookbooks to high-definition television, not to mention its obvious exploitation by the food advertising industry..." Among these two articles, the latter is showcasing food porn as a capitalist profit earning machine and in the former article food porn is discussed as a tool for enhancing their personal power. For this study, the perspective of food porn as a tool for enhancing power is not the focus, rather food porn as the tool for capitalist exploitation is the prime concern.

The discussion of food porn as a concept and as a phenomenon is concluded with this observation of Uku Tooming (2021), in his article, "Aesthetics of Food Porn". According to Tooming, food porn in general denotes stylized depictions of food in ways which are

supposed to be arousing for the viewer. Most importantly, he added that food porn is in reality a phenomenon where one can experience cross-modal gustatory, more than just sensual arousal. This argument can be easily validated while observing food porn vlogs, where food is projected in such a way that the paradigm is shifted from the real food to the fake one while projecting food in the platform of food porn vlogs. Artistic potential one can derive from food porn which mostly depends on the viewers, so, as a result there are a very few viewers who can enjoy the artistic potential of food porn, as one must acquire or have the artistic perspective. For this work, a mere understanding of the sensual pleasures by the viewers are being read.

From these discussions, it is observed that from all these physical foods served and maintained by human made technologies like cameras, digital media, various food enhancing tools, these phenomena of activities created a kind of mental imagination in the human mind that gave rise to the concept of food porn. Thus, it is hard to find a watertight division between food porn as a phenomenon and food porn as a concept. The whole process of phenomenon of food porn only gives rise to the concept of food porn.

1.2 Review of Literature

Food porn as a research area is growing rapidly, though many aspects are still under the shadow of academics which need some rigorous work. Moreover, food porn in the context of India, is a very less explored area till now. The researcher in this work, tries to provide a review of the relevant literature on food porn from different aspects.

1.2.1 Gaze

Gaze has many connotations, one of the most common and popular notions of gaze is that it is related to the eyes and the look. However, according to the theorists of gaze, it is more than just the eyes and steady intent look, it has many twisting and deeper meanings. Scholars like Michel Foucault (1977), Jean-Paul Sartre (1956), Laura Mulvey (1975) and Jacques Lacan (1982), are the most important theorists regarding the conceptualizing concept of 'Gaze'.

Michael Foucault (1977), who coined the term medical gaze in the book *Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, and also at the same time Jeremy Bentham's Panoptic gaze in *Discipline and Punishment* is discussed at length. By

medical gaze, Foucault signifies certain techniques of observation and gives power to the expert. The Doctor or medical expert examines and decides the malfunction of the body and create a patient who is passive. The parts of the body are examined like a machine and nothing but mere carriers of the disease, the human beings who are under medical gaze are mere bodies for examination and study. Moreover, the idea of the panoptical gaze is nothing but an examining gaze, using fear as a technique to govern individuals and society has retreated to the background arena, using the mere insinuation of examining gaze to control people as a mass. Whether medical gaze or the panoptical gaze, Foucault opined that bio-power is the main attraction, which can be controlled through the medical gaze as the medical experts and other knowledge experts as well as fear of being noticed and hence disciplined and controlled body forms the bio-power.

On the other hand, Jean - Paul Sartre's (1956) *Being and Nothingness*, is an example of how we create meaning as a pre-existing being. Sartre is a French existentialist and his famous line is 'Existence precedes essence' which means that we exist prior to any meaning being created in our lives. For this context, the researcher only focuses on the 'look' or the gaze as discussed by Sartre (Nothingness, freedom, and being as a whole need more rigorous study). Sartre questions how we know ourselves as 'self' and the fact that also there exists the 'other'. So, here comes the 'look' or the gaze as through the look we know structures in the world, these all experiences make the meaning. Sartre opined that one is a subject till when another subject being is absent, the moment a subject enters the scene and looks at the former subject being former subject becomes the object or 'to be looked at or in other words the latter also becomes the object as the former gazes on the person. So, the gaze is very important in meaning-making in our society. Thus, self-knowledge is based on conflict with others. All the social relationships we have as human beings are based on a conflict of looks. In the context of food porn, the study of gaze by Sartre is important to know the look of the gaze and how it is making meaning to the food porn phenomenon. Sartre's idea of gaze is relational as one can be subject till the other looks at the person automatically becomes an object and vice versa.

Among all these theories of gaze, Mulvey's (1975) theory of Male Gaze is also significant in the context of food porn. The male gaze was first used by John Berger (1972) in *Ways of Seeing* which is popularized by Mulvey. The male gaze of Mulvey

talks about how we look at visual representations. These include, cinema, television programs, and advertisements. Mulvey adopted the language of psychoanalysis, where she examined and argued that traditional Hollywood films respond to a deep-seated drive known as “scopophilia” which means the sexual pleasure involved in looking. Visual media that respond to masculine voyeurism tends to sexualize women for a male viewer, women are characterized by their “to-be-looked-at-ness” or the ‘Spectacle’, and man is “the bearer of the look” in cinema. Moreover, in real life too, masculinity is related to the active, whereas femininity is related to the passive. The term “scopophilia” was first introduced by Sigmund Freud in his book *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1949).

Jaques Lacan (1982) in his book, *Écrits*, opined that the gaze is always the gaze of the other as the object is looking at our objects. Gaze is not simply the seeing eye but the idea of gaze is detached from the physical act of seeing, it is something we internalize looking at. We imagined ourselves as objects present to the gaze of the other. This is the only way we can regard ourselves as subjects when we participate in our own objectification which also requires the illusion that others are true subjects who could see us as true objects. Thus, for this study, Lacan’s idea of gaze is more relevant to understand how the food porn products gaze back at the audiences which carries a whole different meaning. Understanding these meanings is the major concern for this study.

In the context of food porn, the gaze is the most significant concept for understanding how producers of food porn attract the viewers. However, such construction of the gaze is hard to recognise. Hence the present study takes the help from Lacanian gaze to explore the themes enshrined in the objectives of the study. According to Lacan, “The uncanny sense that the object of our eye's look or glance is somehow looking back at us of its own will. This uncanny feeling of being gazed at by the object of our look affects us in the same way as castration anxiety. Lacan also opined that gaze is pre-existing”. Lacan opines that one who gazes at an object the object also gazes back at the person. For this work, Lacan’s gaze is considered important as he is not only concerned with the gaze of the onlooker or the gazer, however, the same amount of importance is also being provided to study how the object is also gazing back at the onlooker. This is significant in understanding the whole process of how food porn works in the minds of viewers and most importantly the influence of the food porn producers in their products. For him,

“The gaze is not the look of the subject at the object, but the point at which the object looks back.” Therefore, Lacan’s gaze is important for this present study because the study deals with how food porn as an object that is gazed back to the viewers in the visual media texts.

While discussing the concept of gaze we must understand the concept of desire, as both these concepts are interconnected.

1.2.2 The Concept of Desire

The term desire as a verb means ache, aspire, covet, crave, hanker, long, need, plea, request, yearn, want, and wish. While as a noun it means drive, horny, interest, libido, lust, and motivation (Levine, 2003). Desire has different connotations in different contexts. However, in the present study, the desire here referring to sexual desire for food porn. Sexual desire has numerous subtleties, with different shades of meaning, which are often used to convey our desires for sex. To induce sexual desires in the viewers' minds different techniques are used. Mallari and Kerner (2017) beautifully discussed how desire plays an important role in the minds of audiences of food porn. According to Mallari and Kerner, food porn, is a perfect example of non-sexual content that has traveled beyond the notion of traditional porn, where it was believed that sexual explicit content is a must for an item to be pornographic. They opined that the arousal is also based on one’s preferences. Moreover, the content presented in a sensorial intense manner for the viewer using cinematic techniques, this would bring the content effective response from the viewer. It also happens sometimes, that the audience or viewer may react in disgust or rejection. Here from Mallari’s discussion it can be observed that desire, whether conditional or unconditional, should be there in the minds of the viewers. Moreover, the desire that seems to be natural or unadulterated, however, it is not the case, desires can be created. This creation of desire is mostly done by the capitalist producing system. For instance, Todd McGowan (2016) insightfully argues that the essence of capitalism is accumulation. Capitalism creates desire for an object then allows the subject’s desire to put an end to the relentless yearning to accumulate. In this sense, an image of the end of capitalism is implicit in its structure, and the key to capitalism’s staying power lies in the fact that this ultimately satisfying object doesn’t exist. So, in this way capitalism is playing with the never-ending desires of the consumers that gives profit to them. Moreover, the gaze is also based on the idea of desire, as food porn

producer capitalists try to hold on desires and as a result it also able to hold the gaze of the viewers.

1.2.3 Gaze and Seduction

Seduction means to lure someone with fake promises. The word is most of the time used in the context of sexual arousal either between heterosexual couple of any other sexual orientation. Scholars like Chloe Kennedy (2021) opined that seduction is a slippery concept, having many discourses. When looking at the history of the term seduction, it was once associated with disloyalty and disobedience. Then again in recent times, Kennedy opined that seduction is more commonly associated with the ‘art’ of persuading another person to have sex. To encompass the totality of the concept, it ranges meaning from gentle persuasion to substantial manipulation. There are many writers who wrote books on seduction as art, such as Robert Greene (2003) who wrote *The Art of Seduction*, and Seema Anand’s (2017) *The Arts of Seduction*. These writings are based on the fact that seduction is not just a derogatory term but can be utilized for well being of humans. Some scholars even discuss seduction with power and how to use it for the betterment of life, one such person is Robert Greene in his work *The Art of Seduction*. Thus it can be said that the term seduction has controversies in itself. On one end it is considered innocuous, and valuable, while at the other end is considered impermissible and condemned as such. So, the term seduction is very interesting to discuss.

It is important to understand that seduction does not always necessarily leads to sexual intercourse, it may lead to many different goals. For instance, on one hand, it can be persuasion to achieve the power of any sort or some other advantage. On the other hand, seduction is not limited to attracting the opposite sex or the same sex depending on your sexual orientation but it is more than that, the art of seduction is about getting others attracted to one. So one has more control over one’s relationship with others which in turn gives the manipulative power. Seduction is a power game played at all levels. Thus, seduction as a technique can be used for one’s benefit or it can be said that it is being used for ages for all kinds of profit earnings. Seduction can be used in both negative and positive ways. Positively, it could be about charming someone, making someone feel good about them, or reducing their unnecessary fears. Negatively, it could be using temptation to deceive people and get them to do something that they wouldn’t normally

do. The present work intends to look at how the seduction techniques are being used for manipulation.

Seduction, according to Robert Greene (2003) from the book *The Art of Seduction*, when the source of power was mostly gained through physical violence and brute strength; and where women suffered the most. The one and only weakness of the power holder group is its insatiable desire for sex. Thus, women through much cleverness and creativity, invented a way of turning the dynamic around, creating a more lasting and effective form of power by teasing a person's imagination, stimulating the desire not just for sex but for something greater: the chance to possess a fantasy figure which end is never received but an illusion and hence, the person always remain the slave of a seducer. which is seduction (which is subtle but most effective). For him, seduction is a sophisticated art, the ultimate form of power and persuasion where there is no violence and brutality.

According to Seema Anand (2017), from her book *The Arts of Seduction*, where she discusses seduction from the perspective of *Kamasutra* (A group of texts on erotic love from ancient India compiled by Vatsayayan), seduction is art or a set of knowledge that is being applied in erotic journey of life. According the *Kamasutra* spirituality is an important element for a successful erotic journey. For this attempt, the concept of seduction is being used to understand how the viewers are lured and manipulated to be the consumers or to indulge in the gaze of food porn. Thus instead of focusing on the erotic journey of seduction, the present study focuses more on seduction from the angle of capitalist market. The concepts of gaze and seduction are being used as the techniques by the Capitalist market, however, they need an element which helps them to employ these techniques. This element could be sexualization of sexuality, which is a common phenomenon to sell a product in the contemporary market. Thus, sexuality in this context as an element of seduction and gaze is being discussed in the next point.

The seduction from the angle of capitalist market is more of focus. To be more precise, a discussion of an article titled, 'Crisis and Consumption: 'Saving' the Poor and the Seductions of Capitalism' by Jennifer L. Fluri (2017) will help, in thi regard. In this particular article Fluri has beautifully discusses how consumer capitalism by seducing consumers with the help of savior myths by promising a global humanitarian aid and development business as a "cure" for endemic poverty or promising an 'ethical consumption' to the consumers and most importantly a celebrity body associated with it

makes it more concrete to make invisible the true sense of capitalism, which is the actual cause of discrimination and inequality in the society. Thus, the Seduction that is being used for this attempt is referring to the seduction that means luring someone with the fake promise for something without allowing them to know the reality or by making the true sense invisible. To be more precise, for this context, seduction as an art is not taken as a prime element of discussion. For this context the aspects of crisis that remain hidden or sidelined by the seductive elements are being discussed with more emphasis.

1.2.4 Sexuality

Gender is a social construct which is popularly believed to be based on biological sex. As a concept, it presumes that biological sex issued forth in corresponding behaviours related both to rather generalised strategies in social behaviour (for example, independence and aggression versus dependence and co-operation) and to specifically sexual activity (for example. heterosexual courtship and reproductive marriage). According to Gerdar lerner, “Sexual attributes are a biological given, but gender is a product of historical process. The fact that women bear children is due to sex; that women nurture children is due to gender, a cultural construct.” (Gerdar, 1986, 21).

The intersectionalities of gender further reveal that the individual’s social identities profoundly influence one’s beliefs and experiences about gender. As a result, feminist researchers have come to understand that the individual’s social location as reflected in intersecting identities must be at the forefront in any investigation of gender. In particular, gender must be understood in the context of power relations embedded in social identities (Collins, 2000). Thus the very idea of gender could be understood in the context of its intersections such as class, caste, ethnicity, race, sexuality etc. On the other hand, sexuality refers to one’s sexual orientations, feelings, thoughts, attractions, and behaviours towards other people. It could be multidimensional and very much individual. As we all know, during the late 19th century and early 20th century scholars believed that gender and sexuality are natural phenomena and their relationship between them is universal and static. This idea was rejected by the scholars of the later phase of the 20th century. Scholars like Diane Richardson (2007) argued that both sexuality and gender are analytically separable and closely interrelated.

In the words of Véronique Mottier (2008),

Modernity is a world populated by people who define themselves as gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, bi-curious, exhibitionists, submissives, dominatrixes, swingers (people who engage in partner exchange), switchers (people who change from being gay to being straight or vice versa), traders (gay men who have sex with straight men), born-again virgins (people who have, technically, lost their virginity but pledge to renounce sex until marriage), acrotomophiliacs (people who are sexually attracted to amputees), furverts (or furies – people who dress up in animal suits and derive sexual excitement from doing so), or feeders (people who overfeed their, generally obese, partners).

The important point here is that we draw on these categories in order to make sense of who we are: we define ourselves in part through our sexuality. How have we come to believe that sex is so important to who we are?...this linking of ‘sexuality’, understood as the way in which people experience their bodies, pleasures, and desires, with sexual to Sexuality identity is in fact a modern phenomenon, which has emerged only in the course of the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe. That is not to say that people did not engage in sexual activities before modernity. Rather, the way in which people made sense of their erotic experiences was radically different from contemporary understandings of sexuality.

1.2.4.i Sexuality in Indian context

According to Das and Rao (2019) The term sexuality has been extensively deliberated upon, carrying numerous connotations. “Human sexuality” ranges from their capacity to have sexual responses and erotic experiences to sexual attraction. Sexuality is constructed upon individuals’ sexual orientation that is their emotional and sexual attraction to particular gender. Sexuality broadly encompasses the biological, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects.

The physical/biological component implies the physiology and anatomy of the human reproductive system, the emotional sexuality involves the deep attachment amidst

individuals, expressed by emotional or physical demonstrations, spiritual aspects deal with the humans' spiritual connection through sexuality with other living beings, and societal aspects speak of the impact of one's society on one's sexuality. Sexuality has a reciprocal relationship with culture, politics, legality, philosophy, moral codes, ethics, and religious aspects of life.

From the above definitions of sexuality, we can see significant difference in its idea. In case of the definition of the Indian scholar Das and Rao (2019) sexuality has an intimate connection with spirituality and for Véronique Mottier drawing on some of these categories as mentioned above in order to make sense of who we are and how we define ourselves in part through our sexuality.

Sexuality itself is an independent concept as well as a concept which is interconnected with its intersections like gender, caste, religion, region, colour, ethnicity etc. Moreover, the idea of sexuality is dynamic in context of different countries and different continents, for instance, in context of India sexuality hold some local elements in it. Like Foucault opined that sexuality is and will continue to be redefined and reconstructed in all its complexities with the passage of time. The following section discusses a brief idea of sexuality in India.

Uma Chakraborty (2018, x) in her book, *Gendering Caste* opines,

“Sexuality, hitherto not aired in India, has come to the fore. Its connection to pervasive violence against women has demonstrated the ideological and material hold of patriarchy in its manifest forms. Feminists had resorted to reform of laws and of law enforcing agencies. Despite all these efforts, the media work as eye-openers on the strength of the ideology of patriarchy in India, with its foundations still secure in caste, family, marriage practices; where female sexuality has to be curbed, where women are violated on issues of ‘honour’ or revenge or caste vengeance.”

Sexuality in context of caste and gender, in an article by Sharmila Rege (2002), she beautifully discusses about Lavani and Powada and sexualities associated with it. Sexuality is also influenced by gender. Lavani and Powada are two unique cultural forms of Maharashtra, India and have a great historical significance. Lavani is considered as Feminine and Powada is considered as masculine. Lavani is a dance form mostly carried out by females and Powada is a collection of ballads of heroes' bravery sung by males.

Rege observed that Lavani dancers which are mostly females from low caste are considered as erotic and the dancers are seen as whose sexualities are uncontrollable and their low caste men are not able to control their sexuality. Moreover, only the high caste male “heroes” can only control them and their sexuality, so they are enslaved. This is also another significant picture of sexuality as pointed out by S. Rege.

There are many different types of sexualities in different societies but only a few sexualities always remain in the limelight. The reason behind this is that the nature of sexualisation is such that it disregards any gender regardless of the person’s moral sensibilities against the stimulation, for a limited period the viewers’ brain is hijacked with the glamorized visuals. So far this is one of the important elements to analyse how the visual texts of food porn carry the issues related to social constructs. With these deliberations on the techniques, elements of food porn, a brief but crisp understandings of the literature on food porn is discussed in the following segment.

In the context of food porn, another significant perspective of sexuality can be seen and that is latent sensuality and sexual symbolism, which can be understood from the discussion of McDonnell’s (2016) work, titled, “Food Porn: The Conspicuous Consumption of Food in the Age of Digital Reproduction”. In this particular work, McDonnell, very beautifully discusses how some food is already being established due to their shapes and sizes as in many different cultures as symbol of sensual items, such as bananas for phallus, apple for women’s breast, etc. It can be said that the sensuality is latent in itself. However, some food items are not at all having any quality to be sensual, in spite of these; these items are being presented in such a way that eventually becomes a symbol of sensuality. Thus, food porn uses food in both ways, i.e. both the latent as well as the symbolic sexuality.

1.2.5 Food Porn

Now, another significant section of the review of literature on food porn as a general is being carried out through the following works.

“Food Porn” as Postfeminist Play: Digital Femininity and the Female Body on Food Blogs” by Tisha Dejmanee (2016).

Dejmanee very intricately delivered important topics such as food porn and postfeminist digital femininity together with many interesting examples throughout her article. Dejmanee took the feminized space of food blogs to describe how in the ‘digital’ food porn postfeminist subjects by using their creativity, divert the gaze of the audiences from them as mere objectified sexualized bodies towards their creative induced arts i.e. on food items. In this journey of discussing food porn and postfeminist subjects' creativity Dejmanee criticizes the criticisms of Krishnendu Ray and Alan Madison on the existence or the validity of the term food porn itself. According to Ray, as discussed in the article by Dejmanee, the term “porn” in food porn brought down the moral opprobrium on it and it poisoned the topic and nothing is left for further discussion. Madison also opined similarly to Ray that the term food porn is disingenuous and hypocritical. To these statements, Dejmanee very interestingly responded. According to her in the present times, the shock value of the term ‘porn’ has been diminished in the current sex-saturated society, so, no more moral opprobrium. Moreover, Dejmanee demands that digital “food porn” differs from historical understandings of this concept. Dejmanee beautifully concluded that “food porn” is like a mild protest against the conditions of hypersexuality for the postfeminist subject and yet more to go.

After getting an interesting perspective from Dejmanee, a slightly different but interesting view can be seen in the works of Metz McDonnell. “Food Porn: The Conspicuous Consumption of Food in the Age of Digital Reproduction” by Erin Metz McDonnell (2016). In this particular chapter, McDonnell very vividly discussed on various perspectives of food porn like the aesthetic techniques and practices that highlights the pleasurable, sensual dimensions of food, derived from human sexuality, however, not employed in it. He mainly focused on the food bloggers and the food porn audiences and their responses to the idea of food porn. He opined that exoticized foods or any well-prepared food with an artful presentation with the twist of hedonistic and sensual dimensions are one of the most important parts of Food porn to be studied, it is more than just the fabricated unattainability. Another very important perspective is triggered by introducing the photographic producing techniques –such as zoom, orientation, framing and depth of field – that are relatively characteristic of food photography termed ‘food porn’ and which are significant to distinguish between food porn and food art. Generally, people tend to regard every art on food as food porn, which is not true, there is a very thin line of difference that can be observed between food porn

and food art that has been discussed by McDonnell. Food porn is also not an escape from class discrimination; this is interestingly put forward by McDonnell in this chapter.

“Fetishizing Food in Digital Age: #foodporn Around the World” by Yelena Mejova, Sofiane Abbar, and Hamed Haddadi (2016)

In this particular article, the authors discuss the very pertinent question of whether the popular #foodporn hashtag used in social media, especially on Instagram (a social media platform) is an unhealthy food practice as in sexual pornography the pornography would contribute to an unrealistic view of sexuality. Moreover, the discovery of the ‘food porn’ term was associated with idea of the unhealthy nature of food only. The authors of this article try to look at this issue through some surveys done on social media platforms, especially on Instagram and also on Twitter with the popular tag #food porn hashtag. The results shown by the authors from their surveys were rather surprised that the #foodporn hashtag both healthy and unhealthy practices of eating food have come into light. Moreover, the countries with higher GDP are inclined towards the much healthier practice of eating food through the #foodporn hashtag and again this #food porn hashtag also motivates through emotions expressed around #Foodporn is overwhelmingly positive. Generic emotions expressed include, #happiness, #sogood, #good, #happy, #love, etc. Among the top 30 emotions, we also see #selfmade, and #motivation indicating association with a healthy lifestyle.

“Lust for the Gastronomic--from Zola to cookbooks--is nothing new, but maybe it's time to shelve it” by Anthony Bourdain (2001)

Antonio Bourdain, a popular media figure, was expressing his own observations and opinions in this regard. He in his article “Lust for the Gastronomic--from Zola to cookbooks--is nothing new, but maybe it's time to shelve it” which was published in the year 2001, gives some ideas and thoughts regarding the food porn phenomenon have changed in little bits in due course of time, nevertheless, the article is relevant as well as in the present time too. Bourdain, in the article, has opined that Food porn, is “the glorification of food as a substitute for sex, is not an entirely new phenomenon” is definitely true and its relevance in the prevalent food porn phenomenon. However, the idea that the audience of food porn having no intention of cooking or eating in reality, any of the food they see online or offline as a part of the food porn phenomenon, is not

applicable to the food porn of the present times, as now a days people tend to cook, prepare, eat, serve the food they see as food porn audience, though the idea of unattainability and pleasure associated with it still exist.

An article, reviewed previously, discussed that food porn photographs, videos, live, online or offline, viewed and is being practiced to recreate it (the recreation is are successful or not that discussion is different). Bourdain successfully established his argument that food porn is the glorification and romanticization and celebration of food as a substitute for sex. Various contemporary food porn features or characteristics are being compared parallel to its counterpart, sexual pornography's characteristics. One such example put forward from Emily Zola's novel "The Belly of Paris" is a beautiful story of a starving character revolving around French food and the Parisian central marketplace of Les Halles. In this novel, food is discussed in a glamorized and detailed way, a very thin line is being drawn between sex and food. Bourdain interestingly put forward his imagination that how people as the readers of this novel as well as the readers of "The Story of 'O'," as a comparison, (a popular erotic novel) would in a similar manner crowded the markets to buy the ingredients to make boudin noir or tongue en gelee and a corset or a riding crop respectively. He put the responsibility of the readers behaving in a particular way, on the voyeuristic aspect of the narratives of both the novels. In the context of the nature of food porn, its contemporary popularity and also the popularity of food as well as chefs' personalities are a very recent occurrence. Bourdain himself was a chef in the early '70s, at that period, food and chefs were not regarded as some of the most celebrated entities hence not much attention is being seen, unlike today. People believed that a category of people used to be professional chefs only to get free liquor and food, readily available drugs, and casual attitudes toward sex. Slowly time has changed and the perspective towards food, chefs, and sex also changed. People once had interest and enthusiasm reserved for sex now food somehow includes itself in this area. Hence, food porn has become so important in the present time society. In this article, one thing can be observed that is the carnal pleasures which are being talked about and the attempt to make a parallel relationship between food porn and sexual pornography without any doubt the work is very thought-provoking as well as interesting. However, a very pertinent question may arise, whether sexual pornography or erotica which is having similarities with food porn.

“From Eroticism to Pornography: the culture of the Obscene” by Aura-Elena Schussler (2013)

The terms Pornography, Eroticism, and obscene have a very problematic nature, but in reality, people use these terms in a very casual way in their informal life and when they are on the formal platform, people try to hide it as an open secret, which seems paradoxical. Aura-Elena Schussler in her article “From Eroticism to Pornography: the culture of the Obscene” holds the view that the history of obscene takes a turn from Eroticism to Pornography. She beautifully discusses how this process is going on with the help of philosophical, psychoanalytical, and some of the most important literary works. She intelligently demonstrates her point that the transition from eroticism to pornography was achieved with the transition from the instinctual (animal) stage to the cultural (civilization) stage, through the transgression of the sexual taboo, this transgression of sexual taboo not only undermines the traditional values but also creates a whole new level of culture of obscene. Within the boundary of “Pronotopia”, Pornography is the central element. She opines that eroticism exists to transgress the sexual taboo through inner experience and on the other hand, pornography exists to undermine this experience and to bring to the surface the outer experience, meant to create a culture of the obscene. “The pornographic sphere, through the frustrations of human nature which resulted from civilization, has been used to create a world in which the boundaries imposed by society would be dissipated under the auspices of pornotopia” (859). Now, when we try to understand food porn in the context of this article by Aura-Elena Schussler, we can understand food porn is nothing but the transgression of the sexual taboo through outer experience to the surface.

One of the Food blogs is Beau Cook’s (2017) Food Porn. In this blog, the author shares his recipes along with his (author’s) newly released Cook book named The Beau Cook’s Food Porn: The Food Porn Cook Book. Here, the research has discussed the issues he wrote in his cookbook along with some of his blogs. In this particular blog, the author’s idea regarding food porn is given in the following way-

Former Masterchef contestant, Professional Firefighter, and the author of the book as already mentioned, Beau Cook, has taken that age-old concept of combining food and sex and created a recipe book called Beau Cook’s Food Porn - for those who love a bit on the side with their main course.

In this particular book, Beau Cook has described what is food porn in a way that is very much related to sexual pornography. Beau authored this book with pictures along with the recipes of the food to be cooked. These pictures are more of a connotative of sexual pornographic in nature where Beau plays with the puns such as Hummosexual, to make it closer to sexual pornography. Moreover, his words like:

“I find the current definition of food porn so boring; no one actually cares if you have eaten a delicious meal and want to show the world... For me the true meaning of food porn is the combination of food and sex, I would love to see more people getting naked and having fun in the kitchen! There is nothing wrong with wobbling a lengthy banana and a couple of blood plums in front of your groin,” exclaims Beau.

This section deals with the literature on Food porn and the gaze in particular. One of the most important perspectives of food porn is whether food porn is healthy or unhealthy. In this perspective, the gaze plays a very significant role.

Katherine Wildman (2018), in the article “Food Porn, Fantasy, and Authentic Pleasure: Through the works of Coco Fusco & Nao Bustamante, Lisa Yuskavage, and Stephanie Sarley”, discusses three different angles of doing food porn, one group (Fusco’s & Bustamante) is performing food porn by mere speaking of consumption with intentional gross, mindless gorging, other one is Stephanie Sarley who is performing by using fruits which is a clear connection between Yuskavage’s and Sarley’s works, as their use of fruit is an allusion to the female presenting parts and erotic fulfillment. The third one is Yuskavage, a painter, who paints female figures denoting food. In this particular article, the author with the help of the above-mentioned scholars shows how in different ways female bodies have connotations with food like direct eating is also there and consumption which connotes the process of eating is also there. This article is a good example of how the female body in food porn can be decoded.

In the article, “Beware the Dangers of Food Porn” Doug Crompton (2017) opined that when one views food porn begins to salivate and stomach growls so, a compulsive desire to eat something grows stronger. It demands that food porn makes one hungry — it’s a scientific fact and at the same time doing harm too. Food porn also applies methods to drive even more attraction to food images, working on packaging and branding.

Cumpton talks about the power of appetizing imagery. It harms the natural hunger in humans.

Healthy food porn – Using strategies from the snack world to create healthy cravings by Lelia Samson & Moniek Buijzen (2019)

In this article, the writer did empirical research on showcase participants who selected the images depicting youth consuming healthy fruit and vegetables. The images depicted ripe and less ripe foods and people enjoying them more or less, text messages emphasized the enjoyment of food consumption ('finger-licking good'), the nutritional value of it ('all necessary vitamins'), or nothing (no text message). The result was to recognize images with appealing (ripe and tasty) healthy foods than images.

From the above two articles' discussions, it can be understood that it is the gaze imposed on the audiences which are being important rather than the fact that food porn is healthy or not.

Another important piece of literature in this context of gaze can be discussed. Understanding Food Porn through Carol J. Adams' Concept of Absent Referent of Carol J. Adams.

In the book *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Adams (1990) talks about a concept called 'absent referent' referring to the context of animals, like 'animals in name and body are made absent as animals for meat to exist. The dead body replaces the animal'. With this idea of absent referent, Adams beautifully discusses how animals in this anthropocentric world are replaced with meat only through various processes like language, masking violence, false naming, metaphors, and others making the real animals absent from human agency. However, in this article also it can be seen that the gaze imposed by the governing authority makes it absent referent as a whole.

#Foodporn in the Age of Coronavirus (an Epilogue) by Nishant Shah (2020)

During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, people were forced to shift life to online mode; those who are not privileged enough, struggle and wait for their fate of death either by the virus or starvation. There existed two groups of people, one who collected enough food to be indoors and the other group starving indoors as well as outdoors. But

during this time of scarcity also, the social media platforms are mostly full of images of ‘Comfort cooking’ and ‘corona baking’ and people love to indulge in fake and frivolous visuals of food as can be understood from the phenomenon of Clemens Apprich calls the ‘paranoia of scarcity’. Shah very rightly explains the issue of ‘paranoia of scarcity’ in the context of COVID-19 food porn. Food porn during COVID-19 is the overproduction of fake and delicious, glamorous food that is assumed to be going to disappear, or the fear of becoming scarce. This phenomenon in turn creates food as a fantasy item, food as so excessively visible and food as visuality, that it diverts the audience's mind to from worrying about the politics of food as reality and the scarcity or paucity of resources that are so critically experienced and witnessed during the crisis. Another set of fears gives rise to the healthy food porn trend.

This article interestingly showcases the real picture of food porn during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another significant element of food porn that can be seen during the COVID-19 pandemic is its inclination toward healthy food porn, which can also be understood from Clemens Apprich’s Paranoia of scarcity. This will be one of the discussions in the later part of this thesis.

The discussion so far has described all the elements and how they are interrelated to each other to form the whole concept of food porn. The following section deals with the picture of how these mentioned elements perform their action and their consequences.

1.3 Seduction and Food Porn

Seduction can be considered one of the most important concepts for the present work as it will help in understanding how the viewers are lured and manipulated to be the consumers or to indulge in the gaze of food porn. Moreover, an understanding of how food porn become one of the major popular terms in the present digital society can be gained from this study. In the context of my work, the meaning and connotation of the term seduction is not limited to the concept of sexual intercourse only, rather it transcends into the realm of political, economic as well as a social arena.

The phenomenon of seduction being utilized in food porn always plays with another set of very interesting phenomena called ‘desire’ and ‘gaze. Gaze, desire, and seduction go hand in hand in the context of food porn. In other words; food porn is nothing but a consequence of a beautiful amalgamation of desire, gaze, and seduction. Food porn

seduces the viewers by acting on their desires which in turn invite the gaze of the viewers to be its consumers. To get hold of the concept of gaze in the food porn context, desire needs a brief introduction.

Desire has been used as a regular feature of advertising and consumptive seduction, often manipulating racial, gender, and class stereotypes to solicit consumers to purchase products. Economies of desire and seduction often go hand in hand and create a beautiful consumer capitalism. The gaze, desire, seduction can be understood from these lines from Robert Greene (2003, xxiii),

Seducers see themselves as providers of pleasure, like bees that gather pollen from some flowers and deliver it to others. As children we mostly devoted our lives to play and pleasure. Adults often have feelings of being cut off from this paradise, of being weighed down by responsibilities. The seducer knows that people are waiting for pleasure—they never get enough of it from friends and lovers, and they cannot get it by themselves. A person who enters their lives offering adventure and romance cannot be resisted. Pleasure is a feeling of being taken past our limits, of being overwhelmed—by another person, by an experience. People are dying to be overwhelmed, to let go of their usual stubbornness. Sometimes their resistance to us is a way of saying, Please seduce me. Seducers know that the possibility of pleasure will make a person follow them, and the experience of it will make someone open up, weak to the touch. They also train themselves to be sensitive to pleasure, knowing that feeling pleasure themselves will make it that much easier for them to infect the people around them.

Pleasure works because of human beings' desires. In the case of food porn, there exist seduction techniques and elements with the help of which (who and what are elements of seduction are being explained in later part of this work), the viewers of food porn are being seduced in a collective manner. So, food porn is desired by almost everyone in the society. The packing and presenting in a whole noble way is the task for the seducers. Moreover, here this packing and presenting in a new and appealing way uses the concept

of gaze. The seducers always pay heed to the idea that they always try to utilize the gaze which is hegemonic in nature. The gaze in this context is as already mentioned through Lacan's theory of gaze. As mentioned by Lacan, the gaze is a two way processes, the gaze of the viewer or onlooker as well as the object, which also gazes back at the viewer. Thus, in the context of this study, the gaze of the onlooker or the viewer is not fully independent or in fact it is majorly influenced by the object's gaze. The object in this context of study is the food porn product where capitalism is the producer. Capitalism, through its various measures, already encapsulates the desires, sexualities of the viewers, and that is why it can be overpowered the gaze of the viewers. Hence, it is the hegemonic gaze of the object or the induced gaze of capitalism through the object (here the food porn product).

All these elements- seduction, sexuality, gaze, are being utilized in a perfect amalgamation and the result is food porn and its story of popularity as well as profit earning for the capitalists. So, here is a discussion of capitalism in the context of food porn.

1.4 Capitalism, Patriarchy and Food Porn

Capitalism is a prime force which influences the economic, political as well as socio-cultural aspects of the world. To talk about basic features of capitalism it is an economic system based on private ownership where the factors of production, accumulation of capital are controlled by private ownership, the prime goal is to earn profit and a cut-throat competition is a normal nature. Other features of capitalism are price systems, property rights recognition, voluntary exchange, and wage labour (Mueller, 2012). For this study, it is can be seen that private ownership of the firms that use food porn for their products of food. Capitalism, is often known for exploiting one group predominantly the so called 'underprivileged' or 'dominated group' pairing with the dominant group and earns profit. One of the most promising combining forces that pair up with capitalism from time immemorial, is the patriarchal system. And the most popular and known group that faces oppression of capitalism and patriarchy is the women's oppression through androcentrism. This amalgamation of ideas is nothing but always used strategy of status quo maintaining the patriarchal system and the profit earning capitalist business. This discussion regarding patriarchal system and capitalist business can be seen in many works by great scholars Ece KOCABIÇAK (2013),

Laura Oren (1996), Christine Vanden Daelen & Camille Bruneau (2020). In a specific column by Ellie Allan, discusses patriarchy and capitalism as inseparable aspects and works for profit and to exploit the other genders. Ellie Allan (2021) offers her idea regarding the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy as the following:

Capitalism is so successful in its exploitation and control of gender that the majority are not aware that their bodies are being used as a political tool to gain capital and increase profits for the one percent. The way this works is through the market “empowerment” tactic where individuals believe that they have autonomy over their bodies and choices. Capitalism presses the narrative that if you work hard, you deserve to buy nice things. Consumerism is a prime example of this veil, encouraging women to dress and consume products that make them feel good about their body. This is pressed by the patriarchy, which demands that women are visually objects to be consumed by men. In this manner, a woman’s worth is associated with how attractive she is, by the standards of men; therefore, her gender expression is constantly scrutinized.

Capitalist system’s policy is always to choose one group to exploit the others. The relationship of patriarchy and the capitalist system is already being discussed in academics, but its impact is significant for contemporary times too. Thus, in this study, an analysis of androcentric language in food porn would be an interesting point to study.

Another enthralling idea of Capitalism is that it tries to impress the mass with a fake promise which is popularly known as conscious capitalism. The term Conscious capitalism is a new concept popularized by John Mackey, founder of Whole Food Market. He said that this concept is based on the level of consciousness of individuals who adopt higher goals and choose wiser and most effective operational practices oriented towards stakeholders. The term was originally structured through the Conscious Capitalism Institute within Bentley university in Boston and extended globally. The term gives importance to the role of the spiritual aspect in the organization where spiritual dimension refers to the spirituality which is inherent to every organisation. (Frémeaux and Michelson, 2017, 704-705). A detail discussion of this concept is discussed in the Chapter number III.

In reality, capitalism in contemporary times also follows its same base with different perspectives. Same base refers in this context the basic of capitalism like private ownership, accumulation of capital, operation for profit only. Even under the banner of conscious capitalism, profit earning is the prime consideration, which is being discussed in the successive chapters. Capitalism uses this feature of gaze to back and in a way control the gaze in a subtle way through food porn. Food porn which is known for the reputation of spreading unhealthiness or it is always associated with the idea of unhealthy food as pointed out by Michael Jacobson. So, in this context, it is compelling to see the works of capitalism under the name of doing ‘conscious capitalism’, to wash away the bad reputation of food porn. The idea of ‘conscious capitalism’ and how it is being utilized in food porn is discussed in the third chapter of this thesis.

Along with this one another significant performance of capitalism is directing attention of people from reality towards the concept of fantasy. All these discussions with practical examples are explored in the following chapters of this thesis.

A reading of some literature related to the above-mentioned topics, can be of great help in formulating the aims and objectives for this attempt.

1.5 Aims and Objectives

My primary concern or emphasis is to understand the gaze that is being used in food porn in different situations or circumstances. The gaze is taken as prime consideration as it is being noticed regarding food porn is that it is sometimes being related to healthy food and again, on the contrary, some other times with unhealthy food, for instance in case of COVID-19 pandemic food porn is being related to healthy (it is being discussed at length in 3rd chapter). Another interesting point to be noted is that food porn is always associated with the availability and elite culture; however, at the same time food porn has also a close association with hunger (discussed in the 4th chapter). Thus, it is being noticed that to discuss food porn and its related issues, the lens of gaze is of prime importance. This study tries to provide an understanding on the concept of food porn from the lens of gaze.

Following are the distinct objectives of this work,

1. To understand how food porn uses the human body and sexuality as a whole and women's body and sexuality in particular as a seducing element. A special understanding of alcoholic beverages as food in the context of food porn is being considered for study.
2. To examine how food in food porn is personified and being in food porn as an important seducing element.
3. To read food porn as a paradoxical element as it possesses the qualities like glamorized, luxurious, and the nature of available in excess is examined with scrutiny in the context of a developing country, where hunger, starvation, and poverty are common phenomena. Thus the idea of Lacanian gaze would help the present study to explore the themes included in the objectives of the study.

In the context of this study gaze is significant as the food porn products are to be consumed through gaze. In addition to this, Lacanian gaze is being employed for the study, as Lacan is his theory of gaze giving equal importance to the gaze back at the onlooker by the object, which is a significant element for the present study.

1.6 Methods and Methodology

The visual media text where food porn elements can be seen, is informed by the conscious understanding that the viewers' gaze is seduced by a capitalist profitable agenda. The present study is discussed from the perspective of Cultural Studies and an interdisciplinary approach is being adopted.

This study is an attempt to critically analyze the meaning making process of food porn and the force behind its popularity among the online as well as offline media users. How food porn as a genre of food lure, seduce or attract its viewers to be its loyal consumers that too without any peculiar agencies. To know and understand these peculiar characteristics of food porn, an examination of its seducing capacity and its performance is studied with the help of some of the ideas of Robert Greene's seduction techniques. Another important element is concern in regard to seduction is gaze, as the viewers of food porn are being seduced by gaze. Thus, an understanding of gaze is being carried out

from the lens of Lacanian Gaze. For this study, to manifest the stated understandings, some texts are being considered as it gives a view from the practical field. These texts are studied from many angles, whether from popular definitions, meanings of food porn or from a contradictory lens. For instance, the concept of healthy food porn which is a new emergence in the field of food porn is discussed in this study along with the conventional association of food porn with the idea of unhealthiness. Thus, an opposite notion or contradictory idea such as availability of healthy food porn is also carried under the surveillance of this study. Moreover, the study also sees the concept of hunger as important intersections of any Food Studies. Thus, it tries to analyse the possible ways of food porn and seduction of gaze studied through this study.

For this study, the researcher is adopting textual analysis, so, in this regard the viewers and its gaze came into the scene. In this context, the researcher is not dealing with the reception studies theories, so little attention is being given on who are the viewers, anyone who consumes the visual media can be a viewer as the researcher is addressing the viewers from the perspective of Food porn as texts.

Addressing the first objective, the present study deploys alcoholic beverages as food vis-a-vis food porn. A special understanding of alcoholic beverages as food in the context of food porn is being considered for study. The food vlog named *Tipsy Bartender* is the primary text which is analysed to meet this objective. The food blog *Tipsy Bartender* is discussed briefly as the text, the videos named *Summer Ice Cream Party*, *The Skull eyeball Cocktail* are the specific ones that are studied in detail in the context.

Addressing the second objective the texts titled *Swisse Me Smoothie* and *Food Porn App* advertisement videos are used.

Addressing the third objective, for understanding the paradoxical element of food porn in the context of poverty-stricken countries like India, the popular photograph of Alessio Mamo's "Dreaming food" is being analysed.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

The present study comprises five chapters. The first Chapter is 'Food Porn: Its Theoretical and Conceptual Background' which includes a theoretical background of the

study, a brief review of the previous literature that is significant for this study, the aims and objectives of the study, a short note on the methods and methodology that grounded the study, a short introduction to the chapters and in the final part of this chapter I include the Scope and the Limitations of the study.

The second chapter titled, 'Reading Androcentrism in the Food Porn Vlogs: Food, Sex, and Body', is basically an attempt towards an understanding of how the human body and its sexuality are being used as an element of gaze to seduce the consumers of food porn. The use of the human body and their sexuality in any form of pornography is very common as well as an old phenomenon. However, in this chapter, the researcher try to establish that in food porn human body and specifically the female body is used today to seduce its consumers in various new perspectives and techniques. Moreover, in this chapter the alcoholic beverages are studied to discuss the elements of food porn.

Third chapter titled 'Food Personifications in the Visual Media Texts' discusses the idea that food in food porn is not only a passive object but a personified element having human sexuality as its main characteristic. Like the human body and their sexualities, it can also seduce its viewers to be its consumers in many different ways. The gaze that is being installed for food and its personified sexuality of food porn has its own unique language and symbolism that is discussed in this chapter. Another highlighting factor of this chapter is that the context of this chapter is food and food porn of the first phase of COVID-19 pandemic period. In this chapter some contradictory ideas like healthy food porn as against the popular construction that food porn is unhealthy is examined through various texts.

Fourth Chapter is 'Understanding Food Porn in the Context of Poverty, Starvation and Hunger'. A very prominent characteristic of Food porn is known to be the availability of food and its surrounding which includes in the frame of food porn showcases the abundance. The context of any place or country where the situations like poverty is more prominent and the terms like availability, abundance are far from reality. So, it is interesting to study food porn in the context of a country or place where poverty is the reality. In this context, a country like India is a great example where poverty is the reality and food porn is a popular category. Therefore, to study and understand poverty and food porn, together in this context definitely provides a different and unique gaze from the lens of food porn.

The Fifth chapter is the Conclusion of the study and discusses the key findings of the study. From the analyses, understanding, and discussions in the previous chapters, it can be said that food porn, though it seems shallow, is deep rooted in the society as we can know many interesting episodes of our immediate world. Food porn is healthy or unhealthy is not the issue; however, gaze is the driving force or the determining element which shifts its nature according to the profit-making market. Thus, in each chapter of the study, the researcher tries to establish a new perspective of food porn along with a discussion of a particular gaze each perspective holds, from the lens of food porn.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on how food porn as a popular category of Visual media, is being used as an exploiting element of human being as a whole and female body and sexuality in particular. While using the term call visual media, it could include many different texts like art works, films, televisions, YouTube etc. But the present study is based on the food vlogs and photography as mentioned in the section on methodology.

In the present era of simulated reality, the idea of desire or pleasure is also enhanced to a whole new level as a simulated object. In the name of Channelizing human subjectivity, this subjectivity of humans is alienated and diverted to channelizing its own (capitalist) profit with the dominant ideology. Thus, to understand all the new alienation strategies of the present society, some tools, and concepts are needed, that are being used in this work. Food porn is an element of alienation and exploitation of the female body and sexuality. Food porn, in general, is mostly studied in the context of platforms which are engaged in simulated reality and flooded with ideas of excessiveness and celebrate the availability only. Moreover, food porn is gradually becoming an element of hyperreality. For this study the hyperreality of food porn is observed and analyzed through the lens of gaze. The trial to understand the veil of capitalism which is surrounded by food porn.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The definitions and meanings associated with the term food porn are multifaceted and one can get ample opportunities to look at food porn from different perspectives. But the present study deals with food porn as a concept and food porn as a phenomenon and then tries to examine the select texts using Lacanian gaze. One of the limitations is that the concept of food porn is dynamic. It changes with time by adding new additions and

perspectives in it, so, the entire period of research is challenging. Moreover, social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and others, on which the present study is based on is also changed a lot during these years, which is problematic for the research as some of the important texts (was available during the initial days of the research) are being removed suddenly and now it cannot be accessed. However, some of the videos were downloaded beforehand; still this limitation hampered the research a lot. Along with the whole world, the researcher too suffered a lot during the COVID-19 pandemic period. With these limitations, the researcher tries to delimit the study to carry out the research on food porn based on the already mentioned aims and objectives.

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