Media: Why Collaboration Matters

An In-Depth Look at Food Media Content

By Anna Dadiomov and Dinesh Ganesarajah

The increasingly common practice of marketers creating their own media content enables them to provide a tailored media experience to consumers, while also saving on costs. But it’s not surprising that marketers’ own content differs from similar content produced by media companies. The content created by the media company might be expected, for example, to appear more credible than that created by the marketer since the marketer is motivated to promote their own goods and services. Surprisingly, we have found that while differences exist, there are also synergies between the two approaches. Therefore, a case can be made for co-creation and collaboration on media content for the purpose of creating greater value. The bottom line: The dimensions of difference between the two content approaches can add experiential value for consumers as well as commercial value for companies. The two approaches can be blended so as to create a much larger sum value for both consumers and the companies involved. An integrated approach to creating media content could better satisfy marketers’ desire to drive product sales, while at the same time add an element of trust and perceived objectivity to the content. It could also better satisfy media companies’ need to drive ratings, and provide viewers with a more tangible way to access the lifestyle promoted by the content.
INTRODUCTION

When reflecting on the classical model of advertising, a company’s use of paid media to sell more products usually comes to mind. During the Super Bowl, for example, companies pay millions of dollars to air their 15- or 30-second television commercial during the broadcast to stand out from the competition (La Monica, 2007). There is, however, an alternative to this model. Increasingly, companies are creating their own content and developing their own media instead of buying advertising. For instance, companies are increasingly using social media, user-generated content (UGC), video clips, contests, and other web-based content to engage their consumers. While this alternative approach has always existed in various forms, it has gained in popularity in recent years with both companies and consumers. A key finding from the King Fish Media 2009 Survey on Marketing, Media and Measurement shows that 81 percent of respondents believe that brands and companies can create content that is as engaging and informative as content created by media companies (Falkow, 2009).

In the past, it was more difficult for companies to create their own content, due to the significant financial risk of such an undertaking. Advances in technology have reduced such risks – marketing and media activities that were previously difficult, expensive and slow to implement suddenly have become cheap, easy and fast. With on-film special effects requiring only a mouse-click and digital media allowing for greater flexibility in shooting and editing film, the
cost of creating media content has shrunk and continues to shrink. Increasingly, companies have a choice between two media strategies: buying advertising versus creating their own media content.

But how effective is content created by companies’ marketers? And how does it differ from similar content created by media companies? If consumers understand that marketers are incentivized to sell goods and services (to increase sales), whereas media companies are incentivized to entertain (to increase ratings), does the level of credibility of each approach differ in the consumer’s mind? What other differences exist?

In order to uncover what, if any, differences exist between media companies’ and marketers’ content, we conducted a qualitative study to analyze the content created by a set of food companies and media companies that produce food-related content. We chose to focus on food content because plentiful stimulus materials are available from both of these types of companies.

For the purposes of this study, we focused on the experiential value to the consumer and the commercial value to companies. Further, although we focus on food and media companies that produce food-related content, we offer how our observations and results may translate to other industries at the end of this analysis.

In conducting the study, we sought to uncover higher-level dimensions of the content. We tested the hypothesis that there is a difference between the two approaches to content and found that the approaches differed on multiple dimensions, more than on purely the dimension of credibility.
This leads to the question: What does a difference in the two approaches mean for marketing and media companies? It may mean that these are competing ways to produce media content (in which case one approach is preferred over the other), but it may also mean that these are complementary ways, implying cooperation between the media and food companies’ approaches may be possible. Many people from both industries believe the former to be true. The research described here shows the latter to be more accurate.

To consider the potential from integrating both approaches, we asked the question: Could co-creation and the collaboration of media content be different and more valuable to both the food company and the consumer?

According to our research, collaboration can add value. The two main takeaways were that (1) the dimensions of difference between media companies’ and food companies’ content strategies add incremental value so as to give a much larger sum value to both consumers and the food company; and (2) theoretically, a third blended approach is possible due to the compatibility between consumer and company value. We introduce this third approach as a suggested path for food and media companies to take.

**METHOD**

Food companies provide a common example of marketers making their own media content. For instance, it is common to find food companies producing recipe websites and online cooking videos to demonstrate how their products can be used. We decided to conduct our research based on food companies because their products are applicable and relevant to most consumers and therefore
certain to elicit some response from most audiences. Sample media content from food companies is also more readily available. An example of the create approach in practice is Del Monte’s Stirring Up Health National Middle School Recipe Contest, in which students were invited to develop or modify a healthy recipe using Del Monte products. Recipes were placed online and four regional winners were treated to a classroom visit by a culinary chef. The chef prepared the winning recipe, demonstrated culinary skills and provided tips for healthy food preparation to the school children (Figure 1).

![Del Monte's National Middle School Recipe Contest](image)

**Figure 1** Del Monte’s National Middle School Recipe Contest

To begin to understand how content from food and media companies (focusing on cooking shows featuring celebrity chefs) is similar or different, our analysis began with examples of comparable content produced by both sides. To
create consistency and comparability, we paired each food company with a
celebrity chef media vehicle targeting a similar audience (Figure 2). As a case in
point, both Kraft’s Philadelphia Cream Cheese “Real Women of Philadelphia”
promotion and Rachael Ray’s cooking show primarily target hurried moms with
young families. Three different pairs of stimulus material were compared to allow
for replication of the data.

Next, consumers familiar with the products and services produced by both
types of companies were interviewed to better understand their beliefs about the
brands surveyed, their perceptions of the stimulus material, and to uncover
insights regarding the differences of the two different content strategies. The
choice of content varied enough to elicit different reactions from viewers. In our
assessment we uncovered certain beliefs coloring consumers’ perceptions about
the relevant prototypical content as well as how consumers value both food and
media companies’ content.

Finally, we tested our findings with brand managers and executives at the
respective media and food companies. For example, we talked to television
producer Iri Greco from Panforte Productions, which counts The Food Network
among its clients. From such interviews, we uncovered deeper motivations
shaping the creation of media content. By analyzing the content, interviewing
consumers with stimuli and extending our findings with company executives, we
developed a framework for comparing food and media companies’ content.
Finally, from this framework, we created guidelines for leveraging best practices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kraft Foods vs. Rachael Ray</th>
<th>Del Monte Foods vs. Robin Miller</th>
<th>Quaker Oats vs. Jamie Oliver</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Audience for Both Food and Media Companies</strong></td>
<td>Hurried moms of young families</td>
<td>Women (45+) who want to get their fruits and vegetables in a convenient way, as well as get the family around the dinner table</td>
<td>People living an urban life who want to eat natural, healthy and nutritious foods</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Food Company Stimulus Material</strong></td>
<td>“Real Women of Philadelphia” on PaulaDeen.com, an online show in which female viewers send in videos of their recipes to win money and a chance to publish a cookbook, with the hopes of becoming celebrities themselves</td>
<td>Del Monte’s commercial for sliced peaches as well as Stirring Up Health National Middle School Recipe Contest to create healthier recipes</td>
<td>“Quaker Oats Quickfire Challenge,” an online cooking show in which three contestants compete to produce the best dish that uses Quaker Oats</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Celebrity Chef Stimulus Material</strong></td>
<td>Rachael Ray makes squash soup for Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Chef Robin Miller guides us through the landmines of getting food on the table nightly with her stress-free meal-planning strategies. NYC residents are interviewed on the street to help with cooking</td>
<td>Jamie Oliver makes barbeque chicken outside in the wilderness</td>
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**Figure 2** Analysis of Stimulus Materials Formulated for Consumer Interviews

**DIMENSIONS OF DIFFERENCE**

Confirming our original hypothesis, we found differences between the media companies’ and food companies’ approaches on a number of dimensions (Figure 3). We highlight the five dimensions that demonstrate the greatest differences in the two types of content.
**First Dimension: Targeting**

Food companies overtly target their audience by considering how to market *exclusively* to a particular segment (e.g., young urban moms). Their intention is to persuade the target to buy the company’s products. To appeal to young urbanites, the “Quaker Oats Quickfire Challenge” is set outside under a large tent in the middle of New York City, connecting the show with the vivid streetscape of the Big Apple; a voiceover begins the show intoning, “Bright knives, big city – New York City to be exact” (Figure 4). When asked about Quaker Oats’ targeting tactics, consumer interviewees were fairly confident about the supposed target: “A female who is on the go, trying to be healthy, but busy, so [she] eats granola bars...clearly someone in their 30s.”
While media companies also target the audience that the chef personality might appeal to, it is not explicit to the viewer – this “opt in” strategy allows viewers to decide if they want to include the show as part of their regime. Media companies consider the kind of personality that will inclusively draw in, not a specific target, but rather the Saturday night family. Their intention is to entertain and engage their audience. For instance, Jamie Oliver’s stimulus material portrays a confident, universal young person, using typical slang and animated body language. For this audience, the material embodies the experience of following a confident, passionate leader on his mission. A middle-aged female consumer, probed about Jamie Oliver, stated knowingly that “he has a TV show criticizing high school cafeterias. He has a point of view and strong personality, not like Rachael Ray [who is] easy-going.” She pointed out that with Oliver, “the one impression was so strong, it carried over to everything I know about him.”
In terms of targeting, food companies tend to be more exclusive while media companies focus on the positive media experience for the viewer to interact with.

**Second Dimension: Tactics (To Watch Chef or Use Product)**

Food companies employ contests that offer *extrinsic* rewards and are used to create engagement with food products in new ways. This relates to food companies’ need to generate product sales. For example, in Kraft’s “Real Women of Philadelphia” stimulus material, viewers are encouraged to send in videos of themselves creating recipes with Philadelphia cream cheese. Four winning viewers receive $25,000 and a chance to publish a cookbook with the hope of subsequently becoming a star.

While food companies motivate viewers by external factors, media companies encourage with *intrinsic* rewards. It is less obvious that any “selling” is occurring as the celebrity chef tries to motivate the viewer to use her own initiative to succeed in (for example) preparing the family meal or entertaining guests. Interviewees commented on celebrity chef shows, noting their positive viewing experience: “[I feel like] I can make the meal... that I’m capable... that I can put a meal together in 30 minutes, and that gives me confidence... I feel positive.” In celebrity chef Robin Miller’s stimulus material (Figure 5), she coaches regular people on the streets of New York. By administering interventions on the street and asking people what they make for dinner, Miller is a celebrity out in public inspiring others. While talking to one mom holding her
toddler, Miller advises, “Use five ingredients or less because more is not always more.” The message to the viewer: You can make your family happy, simply.

Figure 5 Celebrity Chef Robin Miller Coaches People on the Streets of New York City

While contests presented by food companies can be “carrots” to encourage and interact with viewers beyond mere advertising, they could also be perceived as bribes. The executives that we interviewed at food companies noted that contests/online reality shows work best for recipe brands (products that are used in recipes, such as Velveeta cheese). Inexperienced cooks will tend to not deviate from a recipe, buying recommended brands of products to ensure they are successful in creating their meal, so it may be effective for food companies to have contests that generate recipes with their products. After the contest or show, the written recipe can be posted online, stating specific ingredients used. Some recipe brands, such as ConAgra’s Ro*Tel (a popular brand of canned seasoned diced tomatoes in the South), have “gone viral”; recipes including the
ingredient are easily disseminated by email and social media, which leads to a boost in product sales.

**Third Dimension: Emotional Connection**

Food companies tend to link the functional use of the product to the consumer’s emotional payoff. They connect the *product* to consumers’ beliefs around emotional benefits so that consumers are more likely to buy the particular product. The target audience’s experience is often colored by nostalgic memories of using the brand as a child. A consumer interviewee explained, “My mother would buy Del Monte when I was a kid, so it’s comforting to see the colors and the brand” (Figure 6). The emotional connection, while subliminal, is deliberately designed to drive product sales.

![Figure 6 Del Monte Canned Foods Commercial Used as Stimulus Material for Consumer Interviews](image)

While food companies focus on the product, media companies producing celebrity chef shows connect to their audience emotionally through the impact the chef’s *personality* has on the viewer. Describing Jamie Oliver’s stimulus material, a consumer noted, “He has a point of view and strong personality, [he
is] not afraid to say the truth and look for trouble.” In “Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution,” the chef stirs up emotions about food, the effects it has on our bodies, and the beliefs about who can cook and how to become a better person through cooking.

In general, real people (e.g., celebrity chefs) evoke more emotion than products. Since the most successful advertising campaigns tap into higher emotional needs, food companies prefer the technique of including real people. Since chefs use products when cooking, there may be consumer (and company) benefit to the chefs mentioning what the product brand is. When food companies use celebrity chefs in their media, they try to choose chefs who already use their products to make the presentation seem more authentic and credible. To ultimately gain the trust of consumers in the long term, media content has to appear as though the celebrity chef is acting in the best interests of the viewer.

**Fourth Dimension: Aspirational Quality**

Food companies focus on how using the company’s *product* is a way of living the aspiration of being healthy, being able to provide a meal for the family, or whatever the target group’s aspiration may be. For example, Paula Deen’s stimulus material shows viewers how to make in just a few steps a sophisticated mashed potato dish (using Philadelphia cream cheese) that the family will love. In our consumer interviews, one viewer mentioned, “I buy macaroni and cheese if I know I have kids (cousins) coming over that I need to feed. Kids like it, and the mac and cheese is easy to make.” The takeaway: With little effort on your part, a food product can make your family truly happy.
In contrast, celebrity chefs set the example of how to live an aspirational lifestyle, and demonstrate what viewers can do for themselves to reach that aspiration. The focus is on changing yourself and your life by emulating the chef. The women that Robin Miller meets on the street in her stimulus material are aspiring to follow her strategies and provide interesting meals for every day of the week; they want to follow her example to spice up their meals. A consumer interviewee noted in particular that Robin Miller’s ideas are “unique and completely realistic [as a] strategy for a busy workweek.”

Food companies give the impression that obtaining the aspirational lifestyle is as simple as buying their product. They match the product to what their target consumer likes to do and the kind of person they are, while media companies (celebrity chefs) show the viewer how to change their lives and become the best version of themselves. Consumers seem to aspire more to the examples of celebrity chefs since they are people and not objects, even if the steps to become a “better you” are not as clear as simply buying a product. To strengthen the aspirational quality of their products, food companies might consider attaching a brand personality (e.g., Betty Crocker) to a certain product.

**Fifth Dimension: Brand Authenticity**

Food companies’ brand authenticity is based on their credibility – from existing beliefs and external endorsements. Consumers have preconceived ideas of what a brand and the food product stands for, positive or negative. Food companies tend to use spokespeople to endorse, reinforce or counter these perceptions to gain credibility. For example, in the “Quaker Oats Quickfire
Challenge” stimulus material (Figure 7), senior company representatives and celebrity judges show approval for the contest experience and promote it by saying, “We want to share with consumers how versatile the super grain is.” Consumer interviewees reinforce their approval of the brand. “I buy it because it’s classic. What is Quaker Oats going to do better than oats? They’ve really cornered that market.”

![Figure 7 Senior Company Representatives Reinforce the Brand and the Contest on “Quaker Oats Quickfire Challenge”](image)

Celebrity chefs create authenticity through the carefully crafted *portrayals* of their “true” *personalities*. In the various stimulus materials, the chef appears to make the meal from scratch, using ingredients and techniques that reflect his or her personal experiences and outlook on life. In her stimulus material, Rachael Ray uses non-traditional ingredients, such as orange pulp juice and boxes of puree butternut squash, which some may disapprove of because they aren’t fresh. However, these ingredients are appropriate for Ray and her audience, as referenced by one interviewee’s comment: “[Rachael Ray is] not fancy. [She]
makes cooking accessible, says she has no training. She makes a lot of mistakes and goofs around.” After all of these seemingly negative observations, the interviewee concludes by saying “[Her show] was the only reason I started watching the Food Network eight years ago.”

The media executives interviewed note that it is important to understand that celebrity chefs are molded into brands much like products, so Rachael Ray is not the same personality that she was when first considered for her show (although viewer perception is that she is truly authentic). Iri Greco mentioned, “There are people who are hosting cooking shows who do not even like to cook. Only 40 percent are real chefs. The rest are not trained as chefs—they were cast in roles. The real personalities are selling themselves. They are salesmen as much as any brand.”

While media companies spend a substantial amount of energy crafting the celebrity chef personalities to appear authentic and to gain the trust of the audience, food companies rely more on endorsements to build trust in their brand. Relying on real people not connected to the company or brand may be more effective than attempting to portray a brand as authentic through advertising and self-promotion. For example, consumers of ConAgra’s Ro*Tel are using social media to promote the brand to other parts of the country.

**Why Are There Differences?**

Our interviews with the food and media company executives demonstrated deeper reasoning behind the five main dimensions of difference in the content. More specifically, the differing motivations of the food and media
companies lead to differences in the media content. Food companies focus on
driving product sales by targeting a very specific consumer segment and tailoring
the media to fit that segment’s needs, exclusive of the needs of other segments.
Their approach to media projects is very similar to the traditional approach to
CPG (consumer packaged goods) marketing. “It’s how I was trained at [an MBA
school],” cited one interviewee from a food company. Conversely, media
companies produce media to capture the largest possible audience for a
particular timeslot. They know the category of people watching their channel at
different points in the day, so for a particular time slot, media companies choose
the chef personality most attractive to the audience that is watching.

The entire framework, including the companies’ motivations, dimensions
of difference, and resultant value, is shown in Figure 8.
The Best of Both Worlds: The Potential for Collaboration

As Figure 9 illustrates, collaboration can enhance consumer and advertiser value of media content and advertising. Some degree of collaboration is in consumers’ and advertisers’ best interests, but pushing collaboration too far can undermine the value to both consumers and advertisers (Kolsky and Calder, 2008). Because each media approach produces different value for consumers and companies, there is an opportunity to create greater value through collaboration. In general, the value from food company media is centered on the product the company offers to help the viewer understand how to attain a better lifestyle through its use. In contrast, the value from celebrity chef media is
centered on the objectivity that boosts ratings for the media company and shows consumers what they can do for themselves to access a desired lifestyle.

An (almost) real example of a collaborative approach in practice is Kraft’s March 2010 campaign in which southern Food Network chef Paula Deen and Kraft Foods teamed up for the “Real Women of Philadelphia” contest. Kraft, whose Philadelphia Cream Cheese is the #1 brand in the category, is ramping up its digital efforts and incorporating more user-generated content (Figure 10).
A hypothetical example of this blended approach, which takes it a step further, draws on best practice elements from both the food company’s approach and the celebrity chef’s approach to media content. The perception of objectivity and alignment with the consumers’ interests is derived from the celebrity chef, therefore making it optimal for the chef to create a package or good and endorse it for viewers to purchase. Together, the package and show help the consumer become a “better you.” The chef’s encouragement to try something new provides one way to attain the aspired-to lifestyle, and the product itself becomes the second way to attain this lifestyle. Possible packages might include:

- **Bundle the recipe’s ingredients.** A food company can offer a service that packs all the ingredients for a certain recipe shown in a celebrity chef’s show and delivers it straight to the consumer. The celebrity chef could endorse this because not only is it the chef’s own recommendation
(amplifying objectivity), but it also adds consumer value by saving time from grocery shopping.

- **Offer a pre-made version.** A celebrity chef could demonstrate how to make a particular part of a recipe, and also offer shortcuts such as a pre-made bottled version for a particular sauce. For the consumer, again, the benefit is time savings and feeling comfortable knowing exactly how the contents of the bottle were made.

In both cases, the package allows for ease of access to the endorsed lifestyle, while the celebrity chef maintains impartiality.

**CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

Which is more effective in communicating with and influencing the consumer—created company content or media content? Or is a third blended approach more impactful? The results of our research were surprising and important. In the constantly changing world of media, it is becoming easier for advertisers to create their own media content. Our findings suggest clear potential for collaboration in using both approaches. As Calder and Kolsky illustrate (Figure 9), such collaboration could of course go too far, but if optimized with the consumer in mind, could ultimately add value to all three parties (consumer, food companies and media companies).

Our work uncovered the most relevant dimensions of difference (beyond credibility) of media and food company content. We also discovered that idiosyncrasies do exist. For example, in some instances, celebrity chefs are more strongly targeting than food companies; the individual with personality becomes
the brand to which viewers connect. To illustrate, Jamie Oliver has several cooking shows that reach specific audiences, but also hosts the “Food Revolution” human interest show that is geared towards a mainstream audience. There may be benefits in using both approaches in order to better appeal to the audience.

Our studies further found that by bridging the gap between what celebrity chef and food company media provide, there are opportunities to create greater value to both the company and consumer. While food and media companies both focus their media content in helping consumers, their methods differ:

• **“Become a better you.”** Food companies and media companies (celebrity chefs) depict different ways in which viewers can aspire to become better people. Food companies tie the aspiration to the practicality of a product, while celebrity chefs coach viewers to become “a better you.” A combined approach offers previously unrealized value—alignment with consumers’ interests and aspirations in a practical way.

• **Access the aspirational lifestyle.** While cooking shows are in no way more real or less real than, for instance, the show “Lost,” they portray objectivity and alignment with consumer interests that help drive ratings. Food companies produce products to help consumers directly access the promoted lifestyle. By combining both approaches, shows can help consumers reach the lifestyle they aspire to, while presenting products aligned with these interests.
An important note is that while we ultimately gained consensus on the framework across both food and media company executives, neither side was open to changing their current approach to be more collaborative. Because of the intent of each type of company, coupled with a strong corporate culture, they struggled to comprehend how alternative approaches could be as effective for their strategy.

Our research, analysis and findings surround food companies creating their own media, but this approach can be generalized to other industries; for instance, insurance giant GEICO created an effective television advertisement using the Xtranormal animating website—costing the company next to nothing (Calouro, 2010). Another example involves the automotive industry. In June 2010, Volkswagen launched its “Fast Lane” campaign by uploading to YouTube a few videos in which Volkswagen transformed an elevator, a shopping cart and a subway slide to make the world move a little bit faster. Viewers were asked, “Are you ready for the FAST LANE?” (O’Neill, 2010). Even President Barack Obama is conducting fewer press conferences, instead leaning more on internal media to distribute White House news (Maloy, 2010). Such media campaigns, although not created with the help of media companies, are still effective, impactful, and add to the promotion of the various products.

Further research should be conducted to explore medium- and small-size companies with more flexibility to re-engineer their processes and improve upon their media approach. These companies would undoubtedly find vast opportunity not only in the potential to produce their own media content in order
to compete against large corporations with seemingly larger marketing and advertising budgets, but also in collaborating with media companies to help propel their business forward.

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### Interviewees List

#### Interviewees from food media / celebrity chefs

**Iri Greco**  
*Media Producer (lifestyle programs) at Panorte Productions*  
Iri Greco works as a television producer. Select clients range from Scripps Networks/Food Network to Hearst. Her work has appeared on Food Network, Fox and elsewhere.

**Brandon Johnson**  
*Food Writer for Scripps Networks / Food Network*  
Brandon is a food writer and new media manager. She has a column for Saveur Magazine, and manages Food2.com, a new media sister site to Food Network.

**Madeline**  
*Author of Everything Rachel Ray blog*  
A small town lawyer who, in her spare time, writes the most visited unofficial website about Rachel Ray.

#### Interviewees from food companies

**Marisa Blankfeld**  
*Associate Brand Manager, Kraft*  
Currently works on Kraft Singles. Prior, worked at JPMorgan.

**Jessica Schoen**  
*Assistant Brand Manager, Sara Lee*  
Interned at Kraft and worked at Cadbury Schweppes (Snapple)

**Kristen Schimmoler Kessler**  
*Brand Manager, ConAgra*  
Interned at Procter and Gamble and worked at J&J

**Xander Shapiro**  
*Director of Marketing for Consumer Products Innovation, Del Monte Foods*  
Prior work at Clorox and founded Not Your Granny’s Jam LLC

**Sarah Bild**  
*Assistant Marketing Manager, Quaker Oats*  
In charge of Integrated Marketing Communications (ads, sampling, FSI’s) for 360° marketing campaigns