

DEVELOPING A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL FRAMEWORK
FOR FOOD AND TRAVEL PROGRAMMING

by

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Ever since the late journalist Anthony Bourdain popularized the genre in 2002, food and travel television has dominated our screens. These shows typically feature a host or hosts traveling far and wide, trying out cuisines from across the world and featuring some famous and some unheard-of restaurants.

This study aims to examine how these programs affect the restaurants that are featured, and to compare different formulas of food and travel shows to discover if one generates the highest overall ratings from both the audience and participating restaurants.

This thesis first lays out the common formulas used in food and travel programs: 1) Focus on Restaurant, 2) Focus on Host, 3) Focus on Culture and 4) Combination. I hypothesized that the shows that follow the Focus on Restaurant model would receive the highest scores from the restaurants, and those that follow the Focus on Host model would receive the highest scores from the audience.

To test these hypotheses, five well-known food and travel shows following five different formulas (Focus on Restaurant, Host, Culture, Combination of Culture and Host and Combination of Host and Restaurant) were selected, and a survey was

distributed to restaurants that were featured on each show. The 12-statement survey asked restaurant owners to rate their overall experience on the show, whether it improved their business and whether they would recommend the experience. The scores received from the survey were then compared to available online audience ratings.

The results did support the hypothesis that restaurants had the best experience with shows that follow the Focus on Restaurant formula, while shows that follow the Host and Culture Combination or Focus on Host model received the highest audience scores. From these findings, we can infer that in order to receive high scores from both participating restaurants and the audience, food and travel shows might be able to achieve the highest scores by combining a focus on restaurant, host and culture; however, more research is required to draw strong conclusions.

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Introduction

I grew up watching Anthony Bourdain travel to faraway places and eat unimaginable foods. I would stare, wide-eyed, at my clunky box of a television. I ate my inferior microwave dinner, incredulously, while he ate meals in Cambodia, Brazil and Mexico. He was unafraid, and undeniably himself. Anthony Bourdain introduced me to the world before I had ever even left the country. He was, and still is, my hero. He was also a driving force in my decision to study journalism and food studies, as he so eloquently and impactfully combined the two fields through his many books and shows. But Anthony Bourdain impacted far more than a younger version of myself.

Bourdain, in a sense, created a whole new genre of television. His show, “A Cook’s Tour,” premiered in 2002. Before him, food television hosts were typically confined to studio settings and were more instructional how-to-cook-this-or-that type shows. Think Rachel Ray, Paula Deen, Bobby Flay. But Bourdain was different. He and his small crew travelled from the jungles of Southeast Asia to the cities of Central America, trying the food and meeting with locals along the way. Bourdain ended his life suddenly and tragically in 2018, but the legacy he created lives on.

“A Cook’s Tour” set off a chain reaction of these shows, which combined food and travel. Instead of focusing solely on a chef or a personality, these programs began to focus on small restaurant owners and culture. In 2021, the food and travel television genre take on countless forms. From Guy Fieri’s “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” to Netflix’s “Ugly Delicious,” the market is huge and seemingly unlimited. As soon as you finish one show, your streaming platform is sure to automatically suggest ten more just like it.

Judging by the large volume of these series that are produced, it seems like the genre has captured the heart of many television viewers. But we rarely stop to think about what happens to the restaurants that are featured after the show is over. Is the new-found popularity worth it? Are the restaurants better or worse off than they were before being premiered for the world to see for 5, 10, even 60 minutes?

There are many different ways to run these shows. My question, as a Journalism major with a Food Studies minor, is whether or not there is one superior way. By superior, I mean: is there one formula that leads to high audience ratings as well as overall high satisfaction from restaurant owners? Journalists, even in entertainment fields such as food and travel television, rely heavily on the cooperation of our subjects in order to tell stories. Because of this, it is crucial that we do our best to make sure our subjects are happy with the way their stories are represented in the media. At a time when trust in the media is at a low – one study found that in 2020, only 34% of Americans had a great deal/fair amount of trust in mass media, which is far lower than previous decades (Brenan, 2021) – it is vital that journalists maintain good relationships with their subjects and the public.

Surely the issue is not black and white. But in this study, I set out to discover if there are certain steps that food and travel shows can take to provide the best possible experiences for the restaurants featured. Perhaps, given the current state of the global COVID-19 pandemic and all the travel and restaurant restrictions currently in place, I can use this downtime to come up with a better way to do it once this simple pleasure is able to make a comeback.

Literature Review

I began my research with what seemed like a fairly simple question: Do food entertainment television programs have an overall positive or negative effect on restaurant owners and the communities featured within them? After much review of the existing literature, I have determined that very little research on my specific question has been done. There is, however, a moderate amount of literature surrounding how tourism (not specifically culinary) affects rural communities as well as the origins and importance of culinary tourism. There is also a handful of journalists who have interviewed restaurant owners visited by these television series. From this scattered information, I was able to determine what information already exists, and I was also able to recognize the major gaps that I needed to fill with my own field research and interviews.

One space in which there was no shortage of research was how tourism benefits the economy of communities. Most of this information cited reviews international culinary tourism and its effects on the economy. Due to limits of communication and language barriers, I always planned to focus my study on restaurants featured within the United States. However, I still think there is much to learn about how culinary tourism can benefit an economy, regardless of the geographical location. One study, for example, looked at a rural community in Japan, and how a recent influx in tourism has been extremely beneficial not only financially but also in terms of improving the quality of life of the population (Chen et al., 2018). Another scholarly article more broadly outlined advantages of tourism in rural communities, such as increased income, creation of new jobs and reviving local culture (Egbali et al., 2011). Overall, there is plenty of

information and research to support that tourism is good for the economy. I would like to note, however, that many communities have expressed a pushback to an increase in tourism. From far-off countries such as Portugal (Almeida, 2015), to my own backyard of the Oregon Coast (OCVA, 2020), more tourism can sometimes be detrimental to the environment, economy and life of locals. Therefore, an increase in tourism might not always be the best thing for a community.

There is also research and literature written on culinary tourism, and its benefits and pitfalls. One case study looked at how small communities in Yucatan, Mexico, capitalize on the increasing interest in Mayan cuisine by offering up their homes and preparing lunch for tourists (Ardren, 2018). A chapter in a book about sustainable agriculture credits culinary tourism for a significant amount of overall economic growth in the tourism industry, but cautions that the food must be produced responsibly and thoughtfully for culinary tourism to be sustainable (Kuang et al., 2017).

I found some articles written by journalists who spoke directly to restaurant owners who were featured on shows like “Diners, Drive-ins and Dives” and “Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations.” Most restauranteurs who were on these shows reported that it changed their lives for the better and they were extremely grateful for the experience. The *New York Times* ran an article in which they interviewed five restaurant owners who had been featured on Guy Fieri’s show. Overall, the general sentiment was that the experience was amazing for their business, in terms of increasing revenue and acquiring new customers (Spiegel, 2011). However, they also admitted that sometimes the newfound fame and busyness was overwhelming, and lamented that it pushed out some of their old regulars. Another article reported similar interviews with people

featured on shows like “Kitchen Nightmares” and again, “Diners, Drive-ins and Dives” (Tomicki, 2011). An article by *Time* interviewed a restaurant owner who was visited by Anthony Bourdain (Calfas, 2018). He also said the experience changed his life and his business and had nothing but positive things to say about Bourdain. It is also important to consider that the restaurant owners who agreed to be interviewed might have only done so because of their positive experience on the show, as someone who had a negative experience may not see any benefit in openly speaking poorly of the show. Because of this, there may be many voices that are not being heard.

The last sector of research that is important to my thesis is the concept of good versus bad food journalism, and how it either condones or condemns the “Other-ing” of certain communities. In one article, the author speaks about how food tourism might make us feel adventurous or open-minded, but it reinforces the idea that we are inherently different from the people whose food we are eating (Germann, 2007). It is a way of creating “us” and the “other.” There are some food journalists or TV chefs who may unintentionally reinforce the idea of the other, such as Rick Stein in his show “Taste of the Sea,” which has been criticized for romanticizing or playing up certain parts of a culture without accurately representing the culture as a whole, for the purpose of gaining viewers (Randall, 1999). However, other TV personalities, such as Anthony Bourdain, have been heavily praised for their ability to minimize the idea of the “other,” and instead show the similarities among humanity (Compton, 2020). This kind of research is important to my thesis because it can help not only answer the question of if these shows are inherently good and beneficial to restaurant owners but also to the people who watch the shows.

Before beginning my research, I knew I would have to keep all of these concepts in my mind while carefully watching each episode of each show that I selected.

The Various Formulas of Food and Travel Shows

Not all food and travel shows are created equal. They vary in categories such as length, content and age suitability. After reviewing and analyzing a vast array of food and travel shows, I determined that most shows fit into one of four categories: focus on **culture**, focus on **host**, focus on **restaurant**, or a combination of these.

Focus on Culture

Seemingly the most common type of food travel show is the type that mainly focuses on culture above all else. They often feature a host or hosts who go to restaurants, but they also find themselves participating in other cultural activities in the places that they go. They are also often shown eating homecooked meals with locals. Examples of this style of show are Netflix's "Somebody Feed Phil," Andrew Zimmern's "Bizarre Foods" and Netflix's "Ugly Delicious."

These shows typically focus on the cultural significance of different foods. They have the interesting ability to either encourage or discourage "othering". For example, while "Ugly Delicious," created and hosted by well-known chef David Chang, often makes it a point to show the similarities among humanity and food culture, Andrew Zimmern's show capitalized on the "other-ness" of different cultures by showing him eating foods that are unlike anything that many Westerners have ever seen.

Focus on Host

Another type of food travel show is one that mainly focuses on the host or hosts. In other words, people watch this show specifically for the host or hosts. These shows typically follow around a person or people of interest as they go to various restaurants. While there is some focus on the food, the main focus is on the host themselves. An example of this type of show is Vice's "F*ck, That's Delicious," which follows rapper Action Bronson and his crew as they go on tour and eat their way through the different cities they visit.

Often with these types of food travel shows, the host will be at a restaurant but will be discussing something unrelated to the food. There are usually many scenes in which the hosts are engaged in other activities besides eating at restaurants, and the actual percentage of the show dedicated to featuring restaurants is relatively low.

Focus on Restaurant

Many food travel shows focus mainly on the restaurants that are being featured. They typically emphasize the different menu items and their preparation, include interviews with chefs, owners and customers, and discuss the history or background of the restaurant. Examples of this style of show are Netflix's "Chef's Table," Netflix's "Street Food" and Food Network's "Diner's, Drive-Ins and Dives."

This type of food travel show sometimes has a host, but the host is not the primary focus of the show. If there is a host, they are often unnamed or unseen, and mainly are there just to keep the show moving forward and fill out the narrative. Even when hosts are named and known, as is the case with "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives" host Guy Fieri, they do not dominate the episode.

This formula also spends the majority of the show actually focusing on the restaurants, and not on what is going on outside of the restaurants. Sometimes they can even seem like a subtle advertisement, as they are typically only positive in nature with little critique or criticism toward the restaurant.

Combination

While most food travel shows can fit into one of the three categories above, many shows are actually a combination of two or more of the formulas. Some shows, like Travel Channel's "Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations," are a combination of culture and host. While Bourdain's activities reflect those typical of the culturally focused shows, he also makes the show distinctly his own and talks a lot about his own life.

There are also shows that combine the formula of focus on restaurant and focus on host, such as BuzzFeed's "Worth It" series. While this program does mainly showcase restaurants, it also focuses a lot on the friendship of the two hosts and relies heavily on their entertaining personalities to carry the show.

Some shows also combine the focus on restaurant and focus on culture models, such as Hulu's "Eater's Guide to the World." This program showcases various restaurants in specific locations, but also follows around the people who frequent these restaurants to showcase the unique culture of each location.

Choosing the Shows to Research

In order to choose which shows to research, I knew that they would need to share some similarities but also some key differences. They had to be similar enough to accurately compare, but different enough to contrast.

In terms of similarities, first I narrowed down my options to shows that feature many restaurants within the United States. Because I would be surveying restaurant owners, I wanted to minimize language or cultural barriers that might affect the research. Furthermore, as these shows are produced in America for a largely American audience, it made sense to survey restaurants that would be the most affected by an American audience. In other words, even if a program excels at showcasing a restaurant in another country, they might not reap the same benefits (such as increase in business) as would a restaurant in the US that is closer and more accessible to the majority of the show's audience. This eliminated several options, as many shows mainly focus their episodes outside of the US.

Another similarity that I required was that the show be largely positive and showcase the restaurants and the food favorably. This ruled out shows like Gordon Ramsay's "Kitchen Nightmares," and Andrew Zimmern's "Bizarre Foods." I chose this requirement because I only wanted to survey restaurants that were featured on shows that were intended to help restaurants look desirable, rather than capitalize on what makes them bad or unusual.

Lastly, I needed to choose shows that featured enough restaurants that I could receive enough responses to my survey to analyze and draw conclusions. This ruled out shows like "Chef's Table," in which the entire series only features approximately 20 restaurants. I determined that in order to be able to get enough survey responses, I would need to choose a show that had at least 50 different restaurants that I could contact. Although it is a fairly arbitrary number, I was hopeful that sending the survey

to 50 restaurants would generate at least ten survey responses from each show, and thus give me enough data to work with.

Once I had the similarities decided, I then had to choose shows that also had enough differences. Mainly, I wanted to at least study one of each of the types of formulas that I laid out above. I also wanted the shows to vary in average time spent at restaurants and overall percentage of time dedicated to restaurants per episode and length of time that each restaurant is featured, in order to test if this would affect the overall audience and restaurant scores.

Considering all necessary similarities and differences, I landed on five final shows to study: 1) Travel Channel's "Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations," which follows a Combination formula, combining a focus on host and culture, 2) Netflix's "Ugly Delicious," which follows the Focus on Culture formula, 3) Vice's "F*ck, That's Delicious," which follows the Focus on Host formula, 4) Food Network's "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives," which follows the Focus on Restaurant formula, and 5) BuzzFeed's "Worth It," which follows a Combination formula, combining a focus on restaurant and host. All five of these shows met my criteria, but all follow very distinct formulas.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research Questions

- 1) Is there a specific formula of food and travel show that yields the highest scores of approval from restaurant owners?
- 2) Is there a specific formula of food and travel show that yields the highest audience ratings?
- 3) By comparing scores from surveyed restaurant owners with audience ratings, can we deduce which formula of food and travel show is the most mutually beneficial – meaning highest overall satisfaction for both restaurants and viewers?

Hypotheses

I hypothesize that shows that follow the Focus on Restaurant model will receive the highest scores from restaurant owners, as these shows typically feature the restaurants in the best possible light and for greater airtime.

I also hypothesize that shows that follow the Focus on Host model will receive the highest scores from viewers, as these shows typically feature interesting characters engaged in unique activities.

Therefore, I ultimately hypothesize that the most mutually beneficial type of food and travel show will be one that is able to combine a focus on the restaurant with an interesting or exciting host, thus making the Combination of Restaurant and Host model the most effective.

Research

The research section is divided into two categories: the preliminary research on each show and the subsequent survey research. The preliminary research is predominantly qualitative, and was derived from careful and comprehensive notetaking while watching at least ten episodes of each show. In order to be able to look back and recall information about each show, I noted the show's flow, how long each restaurant was featured, the types of conversations and scenes happening while at the restaurants, the people interviewed, and so on. At the end of each episode, I calculated the percentage of the show that was dedicated to restaurants. Also in this preliminary research, I gathered information about each show's ratings from Rating Graph (ratinggraph.com) and IMDB (imdb.com) in order to assess overall audience opinions. Rating Graph gathers ratings from multiple sites on the internet and compiles them into one site. The website describes Rating Graph as "an online visualization tool which generates fancy graphs about TV shows and movies based on 958 million user ratings." It is not specific, however, about from where exactly this information is being gathered. IMDB is an online database which allow users to cast numeric votes (on a scale from 1-10) on shows they have watched, based on their enjoyment of the show. The website requires a simple account to be set up in order to cast a vote, but no other qualifications.

In the subsequent research, I developed a survey to send to restaurant owners featured on each show. This survey asked about overall experience on the show, whether they would recommend the experience to other business owners, if they felt that the show led to an increase in business, etc.

Part I: Preliminary Research

1) Travel Channel's "Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations"

As discussed earlier, Anthony Bourdain was a pioneer in the food and travel show industry. While Bourdain actually produced and hosted a number of shows, I found that "No Reservations" struck the best balance between host and culture. It serves as a great example of the Combination model that I outlined earlier, specifically combining host and culture.

"No Reservations" does not a rigid formula for the content of each episode. Each episode lasts approximately 42 minutes, beginning with a brief introduction and followed by the opening credits. Some episodes feature up to ten restaurants and bars while other episodes only feature a couple. Furthermore, some restaurants get up to six minutes of airtime, including interviews with owners and workers, while other restaurants get less than a minute. Often, Bourdain dines at a restaurant with a friend or local and they do not even mention the name of the restaurant or go into much detail about the food.

Bourdain's personality is a big part of the appeal of his show. He jokes around a lot and does not take situations too seriously. He is blunt (he is always honest when he does not like the food or atmosphere of a restaurant), and at times can be crude (making sexual innuendos or drug-related jokes), all which adds to his persona. He often talks directly to the audience, creating the image of a longtime friend.

Of the episodes that I watched, he spent an average of 163.3 seconds, or ~ 2 minutes and 43 seconds, at each restaurant. Also on average, approximately 41.4% of the episode was dedicated to showing Bourdain inside restaurants.

According to Rating Graph, of the 4,436 people who voted, the show received an average rating of 8.2 out of 10. On IMDB, of the 6,381 voters, the show received a rating of 8.5 out of 10. Averaging these two ratings, the overall average rating is approximately 8.38 out of 10.

2) Netflix's "*Ugly Delicious*"

"Ugly Delicious" is produced and hosted by celebrity chef David Chang. Each episode focuses on a different type of food, such as pizza, tacos or barbecue. Throughout the roughly 50-minute episode, Chang and his colleagues travel to various restaurants around the US and the world to properly discuss the history, cultural context and potential conflicts surrounding the food. The main themes of each episode typically focus on the meaning of authenticity, cultural appropriation and tolerance. These themes make "Ugly Delicious" the perfect example of the Focus on Culture formula. While it could also be argued that the show combines a focus on culture with focus on host, Chang does not make the show all about him. In fact, many scenes are of his friends or other chefs traveling the world and trying new foods without him. There also are not many scenes of Chang doing things that are not food-related, unlike Anthony Bourdain in "No Reservations" or Action Bronson in "F*ck, That's Delicious." For these reasons, "Ugly Delicious" falls more into the Focus on Culture category than Combination.

Like "No Reservations," "Ugly Delicious" does not always explicitly state the name of the restaurant in which they are dining. However, they usually show a clip of the restaurant front either while entering or exiting the restaurant, which typically contains a sign with the name of the restaurant. Like Bourdain, Chang is quite

personable and real. He is not afraid to speak his mind, and he is perceived to be honest when he dislikes the food or atmosphere.

“Ugly Delicious” does not follow a strict formula, although most episodes feature around nine restaurants in total. There are a couple episodes that do not feature any restaurants, and instead focus on home cooking, but for the purpose of this research I have not included these episodes into my calculations.

Of the episodes that I viewed, the show spends an average of 146.2 seconds, or 2 minutes and 26 seconds, at each restaurant. The show also dedicated an average of 43.2% of the airtime to restaurants.

According to Rating Graph, of the 1,341 people who voted, the show received an average rating of 7.5 out of 10. On IMDB, of the 3,145 voters, the show received a rating of 7.8 out of 10. Averaging these two ratings, the overall average rating is approximately 7.71 out of 10.

3) *Vice’s “F*ck, That’s Delicious”*

“F*ck, That’s Delicious” is produced and hosted by east coast rapper Action Bronson, with the support of a few of his famous friends. The premise of the show is to follow around Bronson and his crew as they go on tour and eat their way through the city. Each episode is approximately 22 minutes long and features between four and seven restaurants. Unlike the previous shows, “F*ck, That’s Delicious” follows a more set formula. Each episode starts with a quick introduction of what is to come, then goes to the crew eating at their first restaurant. After this, they are typically shown doing some sort of activity before going to their next restaurants. There is a lot of time spent showing Action and his crew participating in fun and unusual activities.

While the show does showcase different restaurants, “F*ck, That’s Delicious” is a good example of the Focus on Host model. Action Bronson takes centerstage in this show, as there are frequent shots of him in his hotel room, tour van and even in concert. Each episode dedicates a lot of airtime to showing the relationships between the different crew members, and following them doing a range of non-food related activities such as glassblowing or playing handball.

Action Bronson is also candid and outspoken about his likes and dislikes. At times, he can come off as a bit aggressive or rude to waitstaff at restaurants. There is also a heavily recurrent theme of marijuana usage and crude language throughout the show, making it recommended only for a mature audience.

The show spends an average of 194.9 seconds, or 3 minutes and 15 seconds, at each restaurant, and dedicates an average of 60.7% of the total airtime to restaurants.

According to Rating Graph, of the 506 people who voted, the show received an average rating of 8.6 out of 10. On IMDB, of the 848 voters, the show received a rating of 8.0 out of 10. Averaging these two ratings, the overall average rating is approximately 8.22 out of 10.

4) *Food Network’s “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives”*

“Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” features 22-minute episodes which follow chef and TV personality, Guy Fieri, as he road-trips across the country in search of some of the best lesser-known restaurants. He typically travels off the beaten track, showcasing small, family-owned restaurants, although he sometimes visits well-known, upscale restaurants as well.

The show follows a very specific formula that does not vary much between episodes. The show always starts off with a quick introduction, in which Fieri energetically explains where he will be going throughout the episode. After the introduction and opening credits, Fieri always visits three different restaurants, splitting the airtime fairly equally between each one. At each restaurant, Fieri spends the bulk of the time in the kitchen, learning how to make two different meals in which the restaurant specializes. He also visits the dining area to speak with satisfied customers.

The tone of the show is incredibly positive, and works to showcase the restaurants. Fieri and the guests that he interviews never say anything negative, and the show is full of interviews with restaurant owners and employees. For these reasons, “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” is a prime example of the Focus on Restaurant formula.

The show spends an average of 365.5 seconds, or ~ 6 minutes and 6 seconds, at each restaurant. An average of 85.8% of the show’s airtime is dedicated to restaurants.

According to Rating Graph, of the 3,251 people who voted, the show received an average rating of 7.1 out of 10. On IMDB, of the 3,276 voters, the show received a rating of 7.3 out of 10. Averaging these two ratings, the overall average rating is approximately 7.20 out of 10.

5) BuzzFeed’s “Worth It” Web Series

“Worth It” is a web series hosted by BuzzFeed employees Steven Lim and Andrew Ilnyckyj as well as cameraman Adam Bianchi. The show follows around Lim and Ilnyckyj as they visit three different restaurants at three drastically different price points serving something similar, such as salmon or hot dogs. They then go on to rate which version was the most “worth it” for the price.

Because the show is a web series rather than a television program, episodes vary greatly in length. Some episodes are quick, lasting less than eight minutes, while others are closer to 20 minutes. Despite varying in length, each episode typically follows the same formula. The show starts out with a brief introduction, given by Lim and Ilnyckyj, in which they introduce what food they will be trying out that day. They then go to the first restaurant, sample the food, interview an employee or owner, and then leave the restaurant and debrief what they thought about the experience. They repeat this process with the second, then the third restaurant. After all three restaurants, Lim, Ilnyckyj and Bianchi each reveal which restaurant they felt was the most worth it.

Although there is a hint of competition, the show is always very positive, and Lim and Ilnyckyj very rarely say that they dislike something. They are clearly happy to showcase the restaurants. The show is also quite humorous, mostly due in part to the funny relationship and jokes amongst the two hosts and cameraman. While the show would still be interesting with different hosts, it is undeniable that a central theme of “Worth It” revolves around Lim, Ilnyckyj and Bianchi as people. For these reasons, “Worth It” is a good example of a show that follows the Combination formula, specifically combining focus on restaurant and host.

The show spends an average of 197.8 seconds, or 3 minutes and 18 seconds, at each restaurant. On average, each episode dedicates 70.4% of the time to restaurants.

According to Rating Graph, of the 271 people who voted, the show received an average rating of 7.2 out of 10. On IMDB, of the 238, the show received a rating of 8.7 out of 10. Averaging these two ratings, the overall average rating is approximately 7.90 out of 10.

Table 1. Comparison of shows, based on 10 episodes of each show and average ratings from ratingraph.com and imdb.com

Name of Show & Formula	Avg. time at restaurant (seconds)	Avg. % of show dedicated to restaurants	Avg. audience rating (out of 10)
“Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations” - Combination Host & Culture	163.3	41.4%	8.38
“Ugly Delicious” - Focus on Culture	146.2	43.2%	7.71
“F*ck, That’s Delicious” - Focus on Host	194.9	60.7%	8.22
“Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” - Focus on Restaurant	365.5	85.8%	7.20
“Worth It” - Combination Host & Restaurant	197.8	70.4%	7.90

Part II: Survey Research

After preliminary research, I developed and distributed a survey, asking restaurant owners about their experiences on the respective shows. The survey was emailed to 215 restaurants. I initially wanted to reach out to at least 75 restaurants from each show, however “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” was the only show that featured enough restaurants which were still open and had an email address posted online that I could contact. For “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” I selected 75 restaurants which were

closest in proximity to Oregon to survey. I assumed that the closer to Oregon the restaurant was, the more inclined the owners might be to help a University of Oregon student. For the other four shows, which featured less than 75 restaurants that were still open and had an email address posted online, I reached out to every restaurant that I could. I sent the survey to 40 restaurants from “No Reservations,” 16 restaurants from “Ugly Delicious,” 65 restaurants for “Worth It,” and 19 restaurants from “F*ck, That’s Delicious.”

The survey received 33 responses: 18 from “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives,” 5 from “Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations,” 3 from “Ugly Delicious,” 6 from “Worth It” and 1 from “F*ck, That’s Delicious.”

Methodology

The survey first asked on which television show(s) their restaurant was featured. Next, the survey consisted of 12 statements, and participants chose their answers from a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree and 7 = strongly agree). The 12 statements were as follows:

- S1: My overall experience on the show was positive
- S2: Being on the show was beneficial to the restaurant
- S3: I am happy with how the show portrayed the restaurant
- S4: The restaurant received an increase in business after being aired on the show
- S5: The restaurant’s ratings on online services (i.e. Yelp, Google) improved after the show aired
- S6: I am happy with the length of time the restaurant was featured on the show
- S7: The experience brought in long-term business for the restaurant

- S8: The experience increased the number of repeat customers
- S9: Customers frequently mention that they learned about the restaurant from the show
- S10: The show positively affected the businesses around my restaurant
- S11: I would recommend this experience to other restaurant owners
- S12: The experience on this show led to future business opportunities

After the 12 statements, participants were given a text entry box to answer the question “Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience?”

Results

Table 2. All gathered data from the 33 participants across 5 shows, as well as the average score (out of 7) that each restaurant rated the experience.

Show	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	Average
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	6	7	7	7	4	6	6	5	-	4	6	4	5.64
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	6	4	7	6	3	-	4	5	3	5.36
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	6	7	6	7	6	6	7	6	6	6	7	6	6.33
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	5	7	5	4	7	5	5	5	5	6	5	5.5
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	7	6	7	6	6	7	7	5	6	6.5
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	6	7	7	7	5	6	7	3	5	4	6	4	5.58
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	7	6	6	6	7	6.5
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	7	4	7	6	5	-	6	7	4	6.09
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	6	4	7	4	5.67

Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	7	4	6	7	6	5	4	6	4	5.83
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	6	5	6	7	6	6	4	6	4	5.92
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	4	6.75
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	6	6	6	5	2	2	2	2	6	4	6	4	4.25
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	7	6	7	7	6	6	6	7	5	6.5
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	7	5	7	6	4	5	6	7	4	6
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6	6.92
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	6	6	6	6	4	6	5	5	5	4	6	5	5.33
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	6	6	7	6	2	5	3	5	6	6	6	4	5.17
Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations	7	7	7	7	5	7	7	6	6	5	7	7	6.5
Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	5	4	4	7	7	6.08
Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations	6	6	6	5	5	6	5	5	4	6	6	5	5.42
Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations	6	6	6	5	4	4	5	5	6	6	6	2	5.08
Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations	7	7	7	6	5	6	5	6	6	4	6	4	5.75
Ugly Delicious	1	1	6	7	4	4	7	4	6	7	7	7	5.08
Ugly Delicious	6	6	6	6	4	6	4	4	2	4	6	5	4.92
Ugly Delicious	7	6	6	6	6	6	4	5	4	6	4	5	5.42

Worth It	7	5	7	4	4	7	4	4	1	1	7	4	4.58
Worth It	7	7	6	5	5	6	6	4	5	5	6	6	5.67
Worth It	6	6	5	5	4	5	4	3	3	4	5	4	4.5
Worth It	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6.75
Worth It	7	6	6	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	6	4	4.83
Worth It	5	5	6	5	4	7	2	2	5	2	5	4	4.33
F*ck, That's Delicious	6	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	1	1	5	4	3.92

Table 3. Average scores from each statement (out of 7) for each show, and overall average score (out of 7) for each show, as calculated from survey.

Show	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	Avg
Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations	6.6	6.6	6.6	6	4.6	6	5.8	5.4	5.2	5	6.4	5	5.77
Ugly Delicious	4.7	4.3	6	6.3	4.7	5.3	5	4.3	4	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.14
F*ck, That's Delicious	6	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	1	1	5	4	3.92
Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives	6.7	6.7	6.8	6.5	4.6	6.2	5.9	5.2	5.9	5.2	6.3	4.6	5.88
Worth It	6.5	6	6.2	5	4.2	6	4.5	4	4.3	3.8	6	4.8	5.11

Table 4. Calculates each show’s average survey score (see Figure 3), converts from a 7 to a 10-point scale, and averages this score with average audience score (see Figure 1) to create a total weighted average (out of 10)

Show & Formula	Avg Survey Score	Avg Survey Score – Converted to 10-point scale	Avg Audience Score	Total Score, Weighted Average
“Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations” - Combination Host & Culture	5.77	8.16	8.38	8.27
“Ugly Delicious” - Focus on Culture	5.14	7.21	7.71	7.46
“F*ck, That’s Delicious” - Focus on Host	3.92	5.38	8.22	6.8
“Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” - Focus on Restaurant	5.88	8.32	7.20	7.76
“Worth It” - Combination Host & Restaurant	5.11	7.17	7.90	7.54

Limitations

The biggest limitation in this study is small response rate to the survey. Unfortunately, the restaurant industry took a hard hit from COVID-19. While researching restaurants to contact with the survey, I found that a majority of them had

been temporarily or permanently closed. This limited the pool of participants greatly. While I had initially hoped to reach out to at least 50 restaurants per show, some shows (such as “F*ck, That’s Delicious” and “Ugly Delicious”) only featured around 20 restaurants that were still open that I was able to contact via email. Because of this small pool of data, it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions. Furthermore, both the survey responses and the audience scores were not fully representative due to some shows receiving far less data than others. For example, “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” received thousands of audience votes, while “Worth It” only received a few hundred. Similarly, “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” received far more survey responses from restaurants than the other four shows. This lack of equal distribution makes the overall data less reliable.

Another limitation is the difference in tone of these five shows. While some, like “Diners, Drive Ins and Dives” are entirely positive, others are a bit more blunt, like “F*ck, That’s Delicious.” The difference in tone is likely a large factor in how the restaurant felt about their appearance on the show, and this study did not fully account for that. It would be interesting to do future studies which keep tone consistent, in order to minimize this limitation.

Discussion / Analysis

Best for restaurants

Food Network’s “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives” received the highest overall score (5.88 out of 7) from restaurants surveyed. This is not entirely surprising, as it supports my original hypothesis that the Focus on Restaurant formula would likely be the most valuable to restaurants. This type of show spends a large percentage of the

airtime focusing on restaurants, only mentioning positive aspects of it and intentionally showcasing their food and ambience.

A slightly surprising finding from the results is the rather low score that “Worth It” received from the surveys (5.11 out of 7 – second to last). Next to “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives,” “Worth It” spent the next largest percentage of airtime and average time at each restaurant. However, because “Worth It” is a web series rather than a TV program, it likely has a much smaller audience, therefore meaning that restaurants likely did not realize a significant increase in business the same way as those who were featured on some of the more well-known shows. However, it is important to note that “Worth It” still received some of the highest marks for overall experience (S1), portrayal of the restaurant (S3), amount of airtime (S6) and if the participant would recommend the experience to other restaurant owners (S11). The show lost points on its ability to bring in new customers and create long-term business and repeat customers (S4, S7, S8), gain recognizability from the show (S9), or aid neighboring businesses (S10). All of these categories where *Worth It* lost points suggest that it is likely due to its smaller audience base, rather than the way in which the show is run.

Also slightly surprising is the fact that “Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations” received the second highest survey score (5.77) despite having the lowest percentage of airtime dedicated to restaurants (only 41.4%). It seems plausible that there is a reverse effect of what happened with “Worth It.” Anthony Bourdain is an icon with a cult-like following of people who will go somewhere just because he went there. “No Reservations” has a very large, dedicated audience and there are countless blogposts and articles on the internet with all-encompassing lists of restaurants where Bourdain

has dined. This large fanbase is likely what led to such high overall scores in the show's ability to bring in new and long-term business, despite the lack of focus on the restaurants within the show.

Best for audience experience

In addition to receiving high marks from the survey, "Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations" also received the best average audience score (8.38 out of 10). As previously stated, Bourdain has a huge fanbase, likely leading to such high scores from the audience. In his show, Bourdain does much more than just go to restaurants. He engages in cultural activities, meets up with friends and locals and eats homecooked meals. This is precisely the opposite of what happens in "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives," which received the lowest overall audience score (7.2) of the 5 shows.

Similar to Bourdain, the hosts of "F*ck, That's Delicious" also do much more than just eat. The show focuses on the hosts themselves, who, like Bourdain, have large followings outside of the show. "F*ck, That's Delicious" also received the second highest audience rating (8.22) of the 5 shows.

From this information, we can deduce that the audience is likely to rate the show higher when there is an interesting host (or hosts) engaged in activities beyond simply traveling from restaurant to restaurant.

The development of a mutually beneficial framework for food and travel programming

Overall, the data suggests that in order to generate the highest scores from both the audience and the restaurant, the Combination of Host and Culture formula works best. "Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations" received the highest overall score (8.27 out of 10) and combines the focus on culture with the focus on host. However, I presume

that a large part of this show's success is attributed to its one-of-a-kind host, making it difficult to replicate in a different show and a bit of an outlier. Essentially, we cannot say with confidence whether the success of "No Reservations" is due to the formula that it follows, or rather the allure of Anthony Bourdain himself.

"Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives" and "Worth It" received the second and third highest weighted average score (7.76 and 7.54, respectively), and these both share a focus on restaurant, while "Worth It" also combines a focus on host. The fact that these two shows rated second and third could imply that an overall focus on restaurant can lead to higher scores than focus on culture or host individually.

While "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives" received the highest overall survey scores, the show received the lowest overall audience scores. Perhaps the key to boost audience scores is to shift to more of a Combination model, combining the focus on restaurant with a focus on host or culture as well. This is basically what "Worth It" aims to do. It seems likely that, if given a larger audience base such as that of "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives," "Worth It" might be able to achieve higher scores from participating restaurants.

In order to discuss what *does* work for food and travel shows, we should also look at what does not work. It is hard to draw strong conclusions about both "F*ck, That's Delicious" and "Ugly Delicious," due to the small number of survey responses. However, the fact that they received the two lowest average survey scores (3.92 and 5.14, respectively) seems telling. Both shows scored fairly low on length of time that restaurants were featured (S6) and the show's ability to bring in long-term and repeat business (S7, S8). Of the five shows, "Ugly Delicious" spent the least amount of time

on average at each restaurant (see figure 1), and the second lowest percentage of airtime at restaurants. Perhaps in order to improve their survey ratings, they would benefit from incorporating more of a focus on the restaurant. This could look like spending more time at the restaurant, interviewing more owners, employees and customers, talking more about the food and perhaps showing cooking demonstrations.

Because “F*ck, That’s Delicious” only received scores from one participant, it is almost impossible to pinpoint places for improvement. According to the data, the show scored lowest on the statements that have to do with increasing new and long-term business. Like “Worth It,” this might have to do with a smaller overall audience. “F*ck, That’s Delicious” is a show with very mature content, from language to drug use. Even the title of the show is probably enough to be off-putting to a large audience, and likely prevents it from being aired anywhere besides streaming services such as Hulu. However, judging by the fact that Action Bronson is such a fan of doing things his own way, it seems unlikely that he would cut back on any of the shows vulgarity in order to open it up to a wider audience. And I am not suggesting that he should, considering that the brashness of the show is part of what makes it so unique, and could be why the show received the second highest audience rating of the five shows.

Conclusions / Future Areas of Study

Overall, it appears that there is not just one right way to run a food and travel show. What works for one show might not work for another, and it is clear that what entices an audience might not be what is best for the restaurant. From the research, it seems that the best approach is to meet in the middle, combining a focus on the restaurant, culture and host.

Going forward, a study with far fewer variables and far more participants should be conducted in order to obtain provable, repeatable results. One study could look at what an audience primarily looks for in food and travel television. This could include a study in which participants are shown a few different “test” shows (not shows that are already in existence, but rather are made for the study with the sole purpose of exemplifying the different types of food and travel shows). After viewing these episodes, the participants would then answer questions about what they did and did not like about the shows, and why.

It would also be useful to study far more than just five shows, and survey hundreds or even thousands of restaurants rather than just 33. From there, we would have much more clarity about what works best for restaurants and why. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to study the restaurants featured internationally, to see if the findings are consistent.

In the end, it is evident that food and travel shows can be a great source of entertainment and also a huge support for restaurants when done right.

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