

WITH A ‘BEAT’ OF SALT The evolution of recipes as a genre in the TikTok era

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Abstract - Recipes provide a compelling illustration of how genres are conventionally understood and exemplify this concept in a clear and structured manner. In addition to serving as culinary instructions, they exhibit distinctive linguistic features and clearly defined communicative tasks, with a structure that has remained remarkably stable for several centuries. However, changes in the communicative landscape have brought about significant transformations, not only in the contexts in which cooking recipes are created and shared but also in their textual design and organization. The paper examines the evolution of recipes as a genre in relation to the media through which they are realized and disseminated. Specifically, it examines how the genre has been influenced by digital mediation, focusing on the video-sharing platform TikTok, an influential hub for entertainment content that was launched globally in 2018 and gained widespread popularity in 2020. The paper employs a multimodal analysis of a qualitatively selected dataset of TikTok cooking recipes to investigate how semiotic resources are distributed across the various affordances and constraints offered by the digital platform. Additionally, it examines whether the ‘semantic regime’ of the media environment – which articulates its communicative and ideational aims – shapes the overarching purpose of this procedural genre.

Keywords: cooking recipes; genre analysis; multimodality; social media; TikTok.

1. Introduction

Cooking recipes represent a well-established procedural genre, with the primary aim of providing clear, step-by-step instructions for preparing dishes. Over the years, the essential structure and purpose of recipes have remained remarkably consistent. Traditionally, recipes have been composed of a title and a body of text, offering sequential guidance on the cooking process. Since at least the Medieval period, the layout and use of color in recipe books have helped to organize these elements, typically resulting in a two-part visual structure that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

The advent of digital media has introduced new dimensions to the production and sharing of cooking recipes. Online platforms and social media have expanded the reach and accessibility of recipes, allowing for a more dynamic and communal exchange of culinary knowledge. These digital transformations have also enabled the incorporation of elements such as moving images, soundtracks and hyperlinks that have enriched the user experience and made instructions more accessible to a broader audience.

One of the most prominent examples of this evolution is the worldwide spread of TikTok, a video-sharing social app that has significantly reshaped the landscape of global communication. The TikTok platform has become a popular platform for entertaining content, with “cooking/recipes” establishing itself as one of its most popular categories. Through the multimodal analysis of a qualitatively selected dataset of TikTok cooking recipes, the paper explores the ways in which the genre may have been affected by the digital mediation provided by the platform. It investigates how semiotic work is

distributed among the different resources offered by the digital platform configuration in terms of affordances and constraints. Additionally, the paper examines whether the ‘semantic regime’ – that sets the communicative and ideational goals of the media environment – influences the overall scope of this procedural genre.

The paper begins by examining the defining characteristics of recipes as a genre and traces their evolution in response to some main changes in the communicative landscape. It then reflects on the main characteristics of TikTok as a platform from a semiotic point of view. After outlining the theoretical and methodological framework used, selected case studies are analyzed and discussed.

2. Recipes as a genre

Recipes exemplify a prototypical genre, demonstrating the key characteristics that define genre-specific discourse. They are characterized by a clear social function, that is to provide instructions for the preparation of food. Recipes systematically separate essential communicative components, such as the listing of ingredients and the procedural instructions and often employ distinctive linguistic forms and structures (see Culy 1996; Diemer 2013; Taavitsainen 2001). Historically, recipes have been integrated into larger collections, such as cookbooks, which Hoey (1986; 2001) describes as “discourse colonies” since their components are mainly autonomous and can be understood without references to prior parts.

In terms of genre stability, recipes have demonstrated remarkable consistency in their structural format for several centuries (Görlach 1992; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013). Traditionally, the standard format of a cooking recipe has included a title followed by a body of text detailing the preparation instructions. This enduring formula is exemplified by manuscripts such as *The Forme of Cury* (see Hieatt and Butler 1985), compiled by the master cooks of King Richard II of England in the 14th century, as illustrated in figure 1. Since at least Medieval times, the layout of recipes has facilitated the division of text into distinct sections, employing a typical two-part visual structure. Such a layout aids in the process of “scanning by title and then reading a single recipe” Carroll (2010, p. 64), a practice which enhances both readability and usability in recipe texts.



Figure 1

Pages from *The Forme of Cury*, a 14th-century cookbook being digitized for online viewing. Photograph: University of Manchester John Rylands University Library.

Despite this long-standing stability, the genre has evolved in response to various factors and motivations. Since the advent of printed cookbooks, the audience for recipes has expanded from professional chefs to, progressively, the general public: a broader lay readership that necessitated enhancements to the traditional title/body-of-the-text formula (Notaker 2017). As a result, recipes began to feature a separate list of ingredients preceding the method section. In addition, some recipes started to include background information about the dish, providing context and enhancing the reader's understanding (e.g., Arendholz *et al.* 2013). The latter half of the 20th century saw further transformations in recipe presentation, largely due to advancements in printing technology and a reduction in production costs. These changes facilitated the inclusion of visual elements within recipe texts. Visual representations such as photographs of finished dishes, functional illustrations of preparation steps and depictions of utensils became increasingly common. These visual components not only served to illustrate the cooking process but also aimed to enhance the readability and appeal of recipes. Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate these modifications, highlighting both the visual and structural changes that have been integrated into the traditional recipe format.

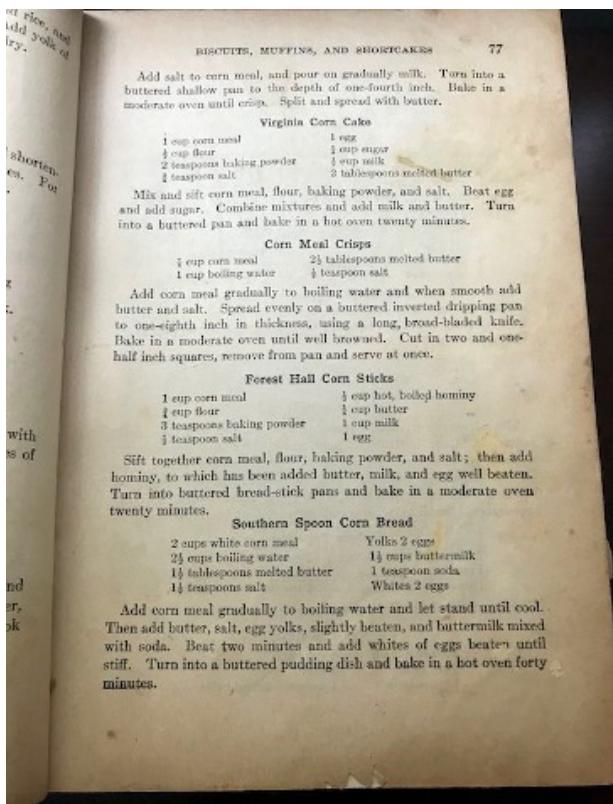


Figure 2
Fannie Merritt Farmer, *The Boston Cooking School Cookbook*, 1896.



Figure 3
Cake Secrets Cookbook by General Foods, 1953.

In contemporary contexts, recipes frequently include photographic commentaries that serve multiple functions. These images can be descriptive, providing clear depictions of the finished dish, or aesthetic, enhancing the visual appeal of the recipe (Notaker 2024). Additionally, modern recipes often feature photographs of the chefs involved, the cooking environment, or other contextual elements designed to convey the ideational tone of the communicative event. An illustrative example of such contextualization is presented in figure 4, where *The Nordic Cookbook* (Nilsson 2015) showcases New Nordic cuisine within its broader cultural and geographical setting, employing an Instagram-inspired aesthetic (Leaver *et al.* 2019) to enhance its visual appeal. Such additions reflect a shift towards a more immersive and engaging presentation of recipes, catering to the evolving preferences of readers and viewers. Indeed, these multimodal elements should not be regarded merely as editorial embellishments, but as resources that seem to contribute to shaping the ideational tone itself. By situating the recipe within a broader cultural and aesthetic frame, they may help embed it in contemporary media environments, where visual immersion and lifestyle cues increasingly accompany textual instructions.



Figure 4
Extracts from *The Nordic Cookbook* by Nilsson Magnus, 2015.

3. Genre development through medial shifts

In order to track how the recipe genre has evolved in response to medial shifts, it is useful to explicitly delineate its overall structure. Adopting Hasan's notation (1978, 1994) for Generic Structure Potential, the recipe genre can be succinctly characterized as follows:

Title^Ingredients^Method^(Illustration)^Background Information)

This framework underscores the core elements that define the genre while accommodating the variations introduced by technological and media changes. The inclusion of visual and contextual elements represents a departure from the traditional format, reflecting broader trends in media and communication. As will be explored in the paper, the evolution of recipes as a genre has been significantly influenced by transformations in communicative contexts and channels of communication. These changes illustrate how genres adapt over time in response to technological advancements and modifications in what the audience looks for.

Among the most notable transformations that have occurred in the way cooking recipes are produced and shared is the emergence of channels of communication such as television or digital media, which have profoundly affected the context in which cooking recipes are made and shared. For example, television shows have evolved from early informative programs led by home economists and nutritionists into entertainment-driven formats that are personalized and gamified (Collins 2009). These transformations in media have not only expanded the audience for cooking content but also affected the genre's presentation and purpose, starting to blend instruction with entertainment. Another significant development in the dissemination of cooking recipes has been the rise of food blogs, which have become iconic artifacts within the digital landscape. Food blogs facilitate communication between culinary experts and non-experts, creating interactive spaces where knowledge is both shared and constructed (Cesiri 2020). The aesthetics of food blogs have increasingly gravitated towards standardization (Adami 2014), a trend driven by the affordances provided by content management systems like WordPress, that offer streamlined tools for layout design and content presentation, promoting a uniform visual style across numerous blogs (Kvåle 2017).

Nevertheless, as Garzone (2017, pp. 47-48) highlights, the genre of cooking recipes per se appears to have remained largely unaltered as food blogs or cooking shows tend to "embed" cooking recipes through many examples of both "manifest" and "constitutive" intertextuality (Fairclough 1992). This means that recipes are often presented within contexts that reference or build upon other texts or genres, but their fundamental components tend to remain intact. Even in early video recipes, including those posted on YouTube, the genre largely maintained its two core stages – the list of ingredients and the method – and the fundamental structure remained intact despite the redistribution of semantic work across various semiotic resources. While these early video recipes on platforms such as YouTube appeared to preserve the traditional genre structure, Cesiri's studies on food blogs (2020; 2024) show how, thanks to the affordances of digital media, the recipe genre has become increasingly more overtly "narrative". In the following sections, it will be examined whether and to what extent, the rise of TikTok has challenged the ways in which the stages of cooking recipes are presented and realized.

4. TikTok as a semiotic platform

TikTok is an app dedicated to short-form videos created for and consumed by users. The app in its present form was launched in August 2018 by the Chinese technology company ByteDance. It combines an AI-powered feed of news content and Musical.ly, a social video app acquired in 2016, where users could create short videos in which they lip-synched trending songs (Fannin 2019). As Zeng, Abidin and Schäfer affirm (2021, pp. 3161-3162), TikTok has emerged as a “hub for creativity and playful sociality” that “specifically targets teenagers and preteens from the onset”. Currently, TikTok is the fifth most-used platform, with over 1.5 million monthly active users at a global level (Dixon 2024). According to Statista Research Department (2021) “cooking/recipes” is among the most popular contents categories overall with around 18 billion hashtag views worldwide as per July 2020.

In terms of affordances and constraints, the platform allows users to create, share and view videos that typically last between 15 and 60 seconds, although video lengths of up to 60 minutes are now supported¹. The brevity of content on TikTok, coupled with its algorithmically curated feed, has fundamentally shaped the platform’s unique communicative environment. One of TikTok’s major appeals lies in its ability to filter out unwanted content, thereby maintaining an uninterrupted flow of videos that keeps viewers engaged (Guinaudeau *et al.* 2022). This seamless viewing experience is largely facilitated by the “For You Page” (FYP), which goes beyond being just a content feed. The impact of TikTok’s algorithm on user experience is so profound that Faltesek *et al.* (2023) have described TikTok as “television, not a social media”, emphasizing its primary communicative goal of continuously delivering content designed to foster binge-watching.

While TikTok offers features like profile creation, friend-following and direct messaging, these interpersonal connections are often secondary to the platform’s main aim, that is content consumption. In this regard, TikTok bears more resemblance to Vine, which, as Faltesek *et al.* (2023, p. 4) observe, also centred around looped short videos, prioritizing continuous viewing over social interaction. On TikTok, this emphasis on content creation goes even further, where creative interaction takes precedence over traditional discursive interaction. The platform’s focus on video production fundamentally shapes how social connections are formed and expressed, making creativity the central mode of sociality. Zulli and Zulli highlight that the essence of TikTok is rooted in mimesis: “imitation and replication are digitally and socially encouraged by the TikTok platform, positioning mimesis as the basis of sociality on the site” (Zulli and Zulli 2022, p.1873).

This foundational focus on mimesis is part of a broader legacy that TikTok inherited from its predecessor, Musical.ly, which also emphasized memetic practices (not just mimetic imitation, but meme-based repetition, variation and circulation). Along with this, TikTok adopted several other key elements from Musical.ly, including a strong focus on teenage users (Pham 2016) and a central emphasis on entertainment as its primary communicative function. In addition, TikTok carried forward Musical.ly’s distinctive focus on aural components, making sound integral to the user experience. Indeed, the platform offers a vast array of sounds and effects that enhance video creation, underscoring how different content types diverge in their use of aural resources. As explored in subsequent sections, these affordances and communicative functions are

¹ <https://support.tiktok.com/en/using-tiktok/creating-videos/camera-tools#> (last accessed in October 2025).

pivotal in understanding the evolution of recipes on TikTok, particularly in how aural resources are strategically employed to achieve various communicative effects.

5. Research question, approach, methodology

The main research question of this study revolves around the impact of the TikTok mediation on the generic form of recipes. To investigate how the use of digital affordances has affected the realization of this procedural genre, the theoretical perspective that has been adopted merges Genre Theory with Multimodal Studies (Bateman 2008; 2014; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001) and Semiotic Technology (see Poulsen *et al.* 2018) since such an approach allows for a nuanced examination of how TikTok's structural features and user practices influence the way recipes are communicated on the platform taking into account the features of the genre alongside the main digital semiotic affordance and constraints provided by the platform.

In terms of methodology, the first ten most popular hashtags related to food recipes have been selected. This choice was motivated by the need to capture the most visible and widely circulated examples of the genre on TikTok, as popularity indexes provide a reliable proxy for the content that is most likely to be encountered by users in their "For You" feed. By focusing on highly ranked hashtags, the dataset reflects material that has achieved significant algorithmic traction and audience engagement, rather than marginal or idiosyncratic instances. While this focus appears to ensure that the analysis targets highly relevant and widely consumed texts, it may also imply a limitation, since less popular or niche forms of recipe videos are not represented. Nevertheless, privileging visibility and engagement provides a meaningful snapshot of how the genre is most commonly encountered on the platform.

In detail, the data were collected in July 2023. At the global level, videos tagged with the ten most popular food-recipe hashtags accumulated, between July 2022 and July 2023, approximately 95% of the total views in the broader "food" category (see Table 1). For each hashtag, the first ten entries from the most popular choices suggested by the platform have been chosen, ensuring a representative sample of high-engagement content. The analysis of this dataset revealed four distinct categories of texts, each reflecting different communicative strategies. Notably, the fourth category diverged from traditional recipe formats and did not fit the conventional definition of a recipe (e.g. review of a restaurant, promotion of a food product), so it has been categorized as "not a recipe". The other three categories, however, revealed significant variation in the use of aural resources, which appears to be a key differentiator in how recipes are presented on TikTok. The following text categories have been outlined:

1. Music-Centric Texts: In the first text type, music plays a central role, often driving the rhythm and pace of the video, with no verbal explanation of the recipe.
2. Original Sound: The second text type is characterized by the use of the original sound, where the creator's voice provides a step-by-step oral explanation of the recipe.
3. Original Sound + Music: The third text type combines original sound (including verbal explanation) with a soundtrack.

Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the distribution of the different text types identified in the dataset, while figure 5 offers a visual representation of how these categories of texts are distributed across the sampled entries. To assess whether the

observed distribution significantly deviates from what would be expected by chance, a Chi-square test was conducted to assess whether the distribution of these categories was statistically significant. The Chi-square test produced a highly significant result ($\chi^2 = 122,40$ and p is equal to 4.2×10^{-14} , which is much lower than 0.05), indicating that the observed distribution is not due to chance. This result indicates that the difference between the expected and observed frequencies is statistically significant, suggesting that the distribution of text types is not random but rather reflects meaningful patterns in how recipes were presented on TikTok at the time data were collected. Although this study is not primarily quantitative and the dataset is relatively small, the significant distribution observed here merits further investigation. It may be beneficial to repeat this study with a larger dataset to gain additional insights into patterns and trends identified, thus possibly supporting the validity of these findings across a broader range of content. In the following section, examples from each relevant text type will be analyzed in order to gain a deeper understanding of how resources are used in food recipes mediated by TikTok.

Hashtags	Nº of posts in the last 12 months	Total Posts	Nº of views in the last 12 months	Views	Total Views top 10
#recipe	0,97	2,00	39.000,00	82.000,00	188,00
#foodtok	1,00	2,00	36.000,00	61.000,00	283,00
#recipesoftiktok	0,15	0,32	5.000,00	8.000,00	306,00
#cookingrecipes	0,01	0,02	0,30	457,00	258,00
#cooktok	0,05	0,10	2.000,00	3.000,00	376,00
#foodtiktok	3,00	6,00	80.000,00	162.000,00	197,00
#easyrecipe	0,51	1,00	24.000,00	44.000,00	227,00
#tiktokfood	1,00	3,00	53.000,00	122.000,00	558,00
#quickrecipe	0,01	0,03	309,00	693,00	77,00
#myrecipe	0,04	0,08	350,00	829,00	191,00
Total	6,74	14,55	239.659,30	483.979,00	2.661,00
#food	8,00	24,00	252.000,00	576.000,00	172,00
	84%	61%	95%	84%	

Table 1
Most popular hashtags and related views in millions (July 2022-July 2023)².

² Source: TikTok Analytics – Hashtag Counter (July 5, 2023) <https://ads.tiktok.com/business/creativecenter/hashtag/count/pc/en?countryCode=US&period=7>.

Hashtags	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	T1 Exp	T2 Exp	T3 Exp	T4 Exp
#recipe	8	2	0	0	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
#foodtalk	2	1	2	5	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
#recipesoftiktok	9	1	0	0	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
#cookingrecipes	5	1	2	2	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
#cooktalk	7	1	1	1	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
#foodtiktok	7	1	1	1	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
#easyrecipe	7	3	0	0	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
#tiktokfood	5	4	0	1	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
#quickrecipe	4	6	0	0	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
#myrecipe	9	1	0	0	2,5	2,5	2,5	2,5
Total	63	21	6	10	25	25	25	25

Table 2
Distribution of the different text types.

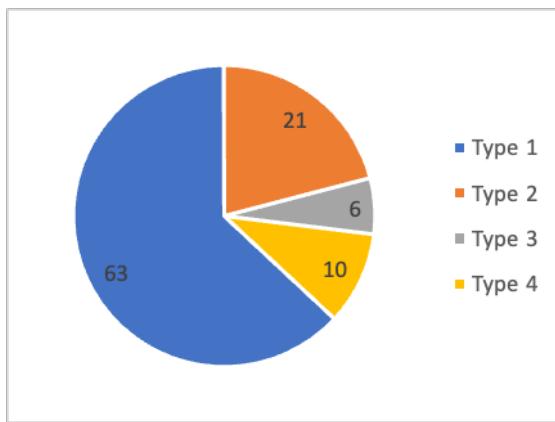


Figure 5
Visual representation of the distribution of the different text types.

6. The case studies

The first case study, the video entitled “BREAKFAST😊,” exemplifies what we classified as “Music-Centric Texts”, by far the most prevalent format in our sample, accounting for over 60% of the dataset. Uploaded on August 13, 2021, by the user “simplefood4you”, the video presents a breakfast recipe (see figure 6) and is tagged with metadata such as #breakfast, #recipe, #cooking, #foodie, #foodtiktok, #food, #foryou and #fyp, signaling both its topical category and its intended visibility within TikTok’s recommendation feed. As such, this post is representative of the textual tendencies that dominate our dataset.

Playing the video version of the recipe, we can readily notice that some stages are missing and that the semiotic resources that are used to realize stages are not solely verbal. Indeed, the list of ingredients is absent and the procedural steps are visually encoded in a series of passages that show the method. In all the video, aural and visual resources are given salience and there are no verbal components other than the title, the hashtags and the lyrics of the song that function as soundtrack. The communicative scope of the recipe itself seems to combine an informative function (i.e. to illustrate how to create the sandwich) with an experience that is both sensory and entertaining. We see that the

perspective magnifies the size of the represented item and the full color saturation highlights its materiality, thus affecting the sensorial relationship with the viewers. It is an informative/emotional kind of recipe, where the representation of food is spectacularized by the association with a song that sets the mood of the communicative event. The volume of the song, like the visual perspective, increases the emotional temperature of the video in a form of sensory overload. Moreover, the edited sequence of frames seems to follow the rhythm of the tune as in fan-generated music videos, where the actual leading semiotic mode is music (Moschini 2016). Here, music is the central semiotic resource that structures the text since the visual cuts, zooms and transitions are timed to the beat of music, thus transforming the preparation of an everyday sandwich into a micro-spectacle reminiscent of a fan-edited music video.

This first example appears to be foregrounding some dimensions of the evolving social ecology in which the genre operates. In such a communicative context, prominence is given to the single recipe instead of to collections. The "discourse colonies" (Hoey 1986, 2001) the recipe belongs to are either highly fluid compilations of videos selected by algorithms (like the top choices for the food-related hashtags mentioned earlier) or the personal profile section of the sender, which can present a heterogeneous variety of contents. A recipe's visibility depends less on its thematic placement within a larger collection and more on its performance within the "For You" feed. Moreover, in this digitally mediated form, recipe as a genre features an interactive dimension since the app enables other users to endorse the text by liking and commenting it or sharing the video, as the icons of the standardized template show. It is in the replies section (see figure 7) that both written language as a mode and one of the basic stages of the genre return prominently, since many viewers, along with emotional reactions to the video, ask for detailed instructions and, in particular, they ask for the list of ingredients to prepare the dish ("What kind of bread is this?"/ "Where can I find the recipe?"/ "Can I get the recipe?"). Thus, enforcing a re-orientation to the original recipe genre. Indeed, such a re-anchoring of the genre in the comment space signals a form of collaborative completion where the procedural text is no longer contained within a single bounded unit but distributed across platform features, negotiated between creator and audience as a sort of 'distributed genre', understood as a form of discourse the canonical stages of which are no longer contained within a single text but are dispersed across video, captions and comments.

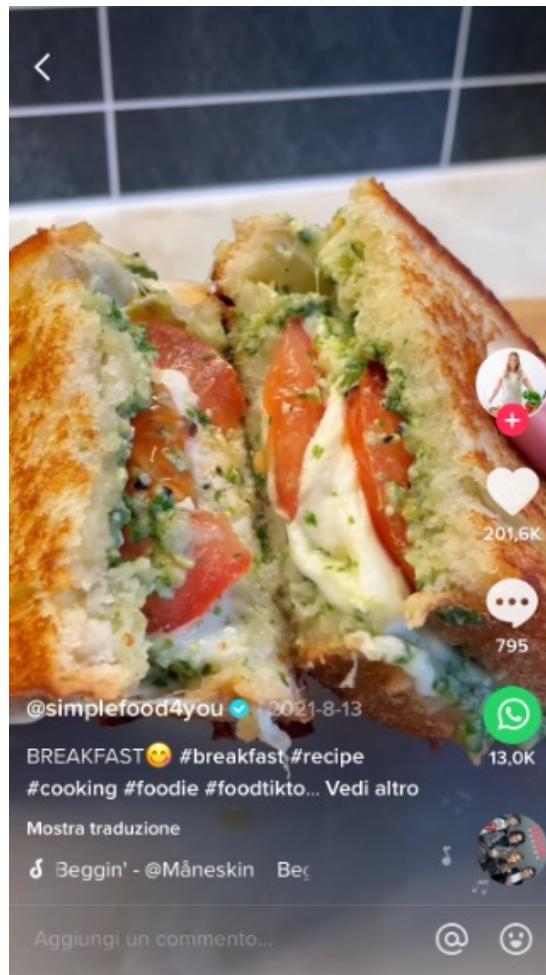


Figure 6
Screenshot of the TikTok Video “BREAKFAST😊”.³



Figure 7
Comments posted to the “Breakfast 😊” video.

³ https://www.tiktok.com/@simplefood4you/video/6995887371392699654?is_copy_url=1&is_from_webapp=v1

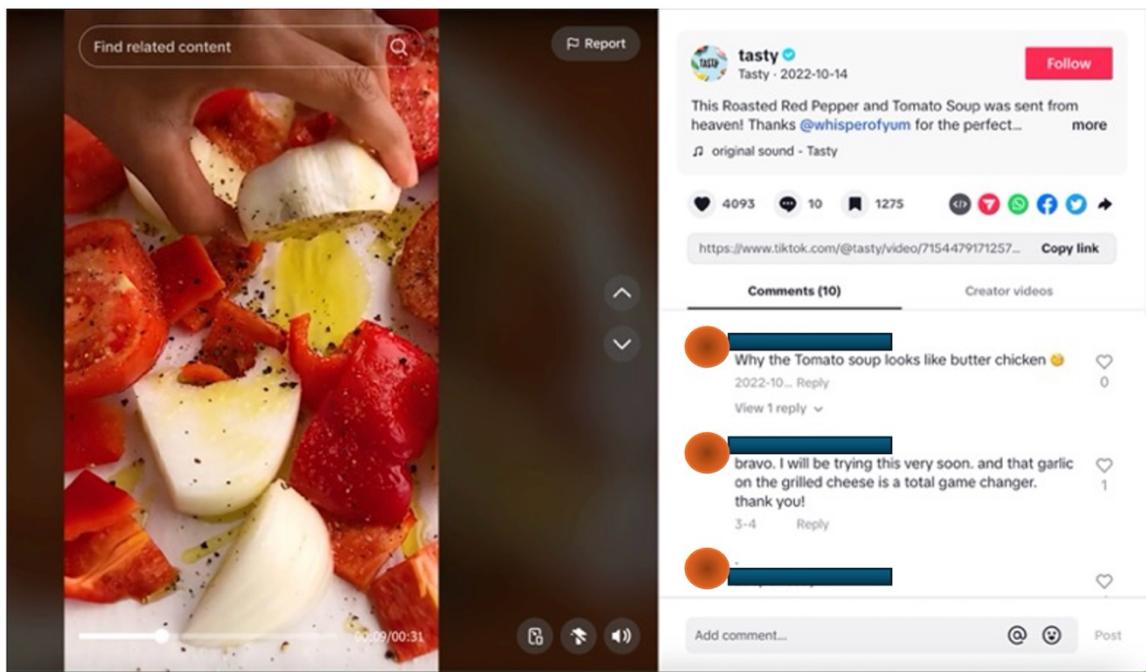


Figure 8
Screenshot of the TikTok Video “Roasted Red Pepper and Tomato Soup”.⁴

The second case study, “Roasted Red Pepper and Tomato Soup” by Tasty (figure 8), exemplifies the “Original Sound” category, that represents over 20% of the items of the sample and that reintroduces the creator’s spoken narration as the principal channel of instruction. Although these videos retain TikTok’s signature brevity and compositional sophistication, they foreground voice-over explanations instead of trending audio clips. In particular, the video was posted by the user “Tasty” on October 14, 2022, with the hashtags #fallrecipes #comfortfood #soup #tomatosoup #recipe #roastedredpeppers and shows the preparation of a soup accompanied by a step-by-step oral explanation of the method, provided by the creator’s voice. This is exemplified by the label “original sound – Tasty”, which accompanies the sound icon and effectively ‘hacks’ the platform’s native communicative function – originally associated with music, as inherited from its predecessor, Musical.ly.

In terms of generic stages, the list of ingredients is absent, while in other videos from the sample (around 30%) can be either presented verbally before the method or displayed as superimposed text. Background information is often provided by the author, where a narrative component (Cesiri 2024) introduces the recipe, as seen in the selected video. Regarding the illustration, like in the case of the previously examined video, close-up, detailed images of food stimulate sensory responses beyond just sight, evoking a sense of taste, recalling adverts. In the video, such a multisensory experience is accentuated by the amplified sounds of food preparation, similar to ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) videos, where sounds are brought to the forefront to evoke intense tingling sensations in the viewer-listener (Keating and Łapińska 2023, p. 324).

⁴ <https://www.tiktok.com/@tasty/video/7154479171257961774?lang=en&q=%22comfort%20food%22%20tomato%20soup%20original%20sound&t=1719236803767>

Such a sensory and evocative multimodal representation engages the listener's senses in a synesthetic manner (see van Leeuwen 2016), vividly conveying the soup's flavor through the aural, visual and verbal cues of sizzling garlic or the crunch of toasted bread. At a theoretical level, this case demonstrates how a familiar procedural genre can be recontextualized as an affectively charged audiovisual artefact, in which multimodal orchestration expands the communicative load. By reinstating voice while coupling it with immersive sound design, the video partially returns to the procedural norm, yet simultaneously embracing the entertainment-oriented 'semantic regime' of TikTok.

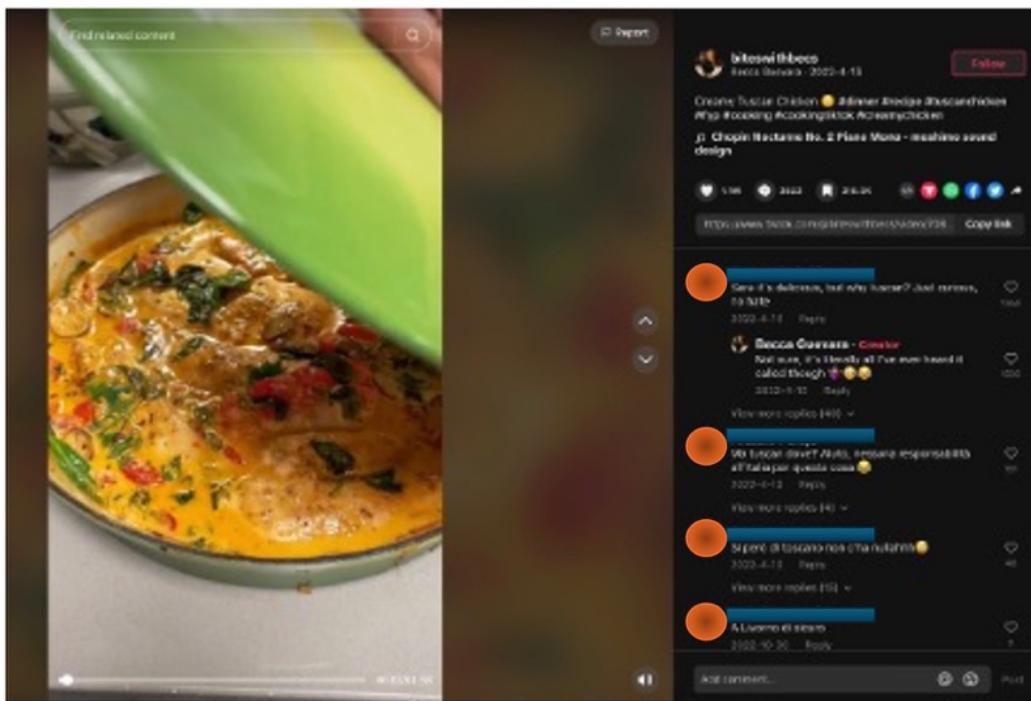


Figure 9
Creamy Tuscan Chicken 😊.⁵

The third case study, "Creamy Tuscan Chicken 😊" by BiteswithBecs (see figure 9), represents the least frequent but most complex text type ("Original Sound + Music") that accounts for about 6% of the reference sample and integrates original sound – including spoken explanations – with a carefully selected soundtrack. Such a combination of informative audio and aesthetic music serves to enrich the overall experience, making it not only more engaging but also more immersive. By blending these elements with music setting the emotional tone of communication, the text captures the audience's attention on multiple sensory levels, enhancing both the understanding of the content and the emotional impact of the presentation. The video "Creamy Tuscan Chicken 😊" was posted by the user "BiteswithBecs" on April 13, 2022, accompanied by the hashtags: #dinner #recipe #tuscanchicken #fyp #cooking #cookingtiktok#creamychicken.

⁵ <https://www.tiktok.com/@biteswithbechs/video/7085881547580083498?lang=en&q=%22creamy%20tuscan%20chicken%22&t=1719235717817>

The video does not include environmental sounds and focuses exclusively on the author's voice. This stylistic choice creates an intimate and controlled atmosphere, where the tone of the voice, intentionally made gentle and soothing, harmonizes with the selected Chopin's sonata as background music. The sound of the piano, characterized by a slow and melodious rhythm, further contributes to generating a sense of relaxation and comfort. It is a combination of voice and music that not only facilitates the understanding of the recipe presented but also enhances the overall sensory experience, making it particularly pleasant and welcoming for the viewers. The choice of music frames the cooking process in a slow, melodious rhythm that contrasts with the high-energy pop tracks typically used on TikTok, creating a calming, almost cinematic atmosphere. The video's audience is gently lulled by the cook's soothing voice, which invites them to participate in the shared culinary project through the consistent use of the inclusive first-person plural pronoun "we". This pairing transforms the video into an intimate co-presence between creator and viewers. The repeated use of "we" rather than "you" reinforces the sense of collective participation, as if the audience were cooking alongside the creator in real time.

At the same time, the absence of a visible ingredient list (recurrent across all three categories) may indicate a tacit re-orientation toward an audience presumed to know, or be able to infer, or actively request the missing elements through interaction. In this respect, TikTok recipes function as aesthetic and social invitations rather than complete standalone instructions, foregrounding experiential co-participation and sensory atmosphere. It is a subtle shift that suggests that the procedural authority of the recipe is being dispersed into a networked performance, where emotional engagement, aesthetics and community take precedence over completeness.

Table 3 summarizes the distribution of multimodal communicative functions across the three case studies, mapping how each video realizes (or omits) canonical stages of the recipe genre and which semiotic modes become dominant in each instance. By analyzing three emblematic examples corresponding to the main text types identified in the dataset, it is possible to trace how this redistribution may occur and to identify some of the emergent tensions between genre stability and platform-driven reconfiguration. In all three cases, aural resources (music, the creator's voice or a deliberate combination of both) seem not merely to serve as supplementary embellishments but can be seen as organizational devices that help shape the rhythm, sequencing and communicative function of the videos, potentially contributing to a redefinition of what a "recipe" may do and how audiences might engage with it.

Case Study	Realization of Genre Stages	Semiotic Resources	TikTok Affordances	Communicative Orientation
“BREAKFAST 😊” (simplefood4you) – Music-Centric Text	<p>Title: Present as on-screen caption and hashtags.</p> <p>Ingredients: Absent from the video; only implied visually, requested in comments.</p> <p>Method: Entirely visual, synchronized cuts showing steps without narration.</p> <p>Illustration/Background: High color saturation, close-ups; no contextual narrative.</p>	<p>Visual: rapid editing, close-ups.</p> <p>Aural: music soundtrack drives pacing; no speech.</p> <p>Written: minimal (hashtags).</p> <p>Interactive: comment section used to reconstruct missing steps.</p>	Short-form video, trending audio, hashtags, high-speed editing.	Primarily aestheticization and multisensory performance; instruction displaced to paratextual interaction.
“Roasted Red Pepper and Tomato Soup” (Tasty) – Original Sound	<p>Title: Present in caption and hashtags with seasonal framing.</p> <p>Ingredients: Mostly absent as list; some ingredients verbally referenced.</p> <p>Method: Guided by creator’s voice-over in real time; steps shown visually.</p> <p>Illustration/Background: Narrative framing (“comfort food”); sensory close-ups of ingredients.</p>	<p>Visual: high-quality footage of preparation.</p> <p>Aural: creator’s voice plus amplified kitchen sounds (ASMR-like).</p> <p>Written: limited to captions/hashtags.</p> <p>Interactive: viewers comment with questions, clarifications.</p>	Voice-over (original sound), high-resolution visuals, ASMR sound design, hashtags, comment interaction.	Hybrid instruction and sensory immersion; partial restoration of procedural narrative while enhancing affect.
“Creamy Tuscan Chicken 😊” (BiteswithBecs) – Original Sound + Music	<p>Title: Present in caption with emojis (affective stance).</p> <p>Ingredients: Not listed visually.</p> <p>Method: Soft, inclusive voice-over guiding steps; slow, elegant editing aligned with Chopin’s sonata.</p> <p>Illustration/Background: Calming, cinematic atmosphere; affiliative stance.</p>	<p>Visual: slower, aestheticized shots of cooking.</p> <p>Aural: combination of original voice and classical music for emotional framing.</p> <p>Written: minimal (hashtags).</p> <p>Interactive: comment thread occasionally supplies missing details.</p>	Integration of original sound and curated soundtrack, inclusive narration.	Immersive co-presence: instruction as intimate experience, emphasizing community and atmosphere over completeness.

Table 3
Semiotic Resources and Communicative Functions across the Three Case Studies.

7. Discussion and conclusions

Our overview of the evolution of recipes as a genre, combined with a qualitative analysis of their remediation through TikTok as a platform, prompts several reflections on the genre stages and their realization. One of the most salient patterns emerging from our study is the redistribution of semantic labor across different semiotic resources. In the historical trajectory of the recipe, the written list of ingredients and the step-by-step method have traditionally been the primary carriers of meaning, supported by typographic layout and, later, by photographs or illustrations. By contrast, on TikTok the verbal element often retreats to captions, hashtags and occasional on-screen text, while the heavy lifting of instruction is carried out by video, editing and sound. This inversion suggests not merely a formal change but a shift in the “modal hierarchy” (Bateman 2008, 2014), whereby aural and visual resources assume the lead role once reserved for written language. Such a shift exemplifies the genre’s adaptive capacity since rather than disappearing, the procedural function migrates to modes that are native to the platform, reconstituting the recipe as a hybrid performance of seeing and hearing.

The multimodal redistribution also highlights the process of aestheticization described by van Leeuwen (2015). Initially theorized in relation to advertising and branding, aestheticization refers to the incorporation of sensory appeal, stylized design and affective value into texts and practices once considered fundamentally functional. In TikTok recipes, aestheticization operates across modes – from color palettes, dynamic camera angles, and close-up shots to the soundscapes and musical choices that reframe the cooking process as entertainment. It is a move that outlines a shift from informational to sensory signification, where audiovisual composition evokes an almost synesthetic experience. Food is no longer simply shown, it is dramatized as it invites viewers to imagine texture and taste as much as to follow a procedure. In effect, the genre’s core “use value” (instructing the preparation of a dish) is joined or even surpassed by an “experience value” (immersing viewers in a micro-performance of cooking).

Methodologically, identifying the key stages of this process remains crucial for recognizing a text’s affiliation with a particular genre. However, this process necessitates an understanding that these stages are not necessarily linear and that they are constructed through the integration of diverse semiotic resources. Moreover, when addressing issues of genre demarcation, interdependency among genres and the influence of different media, it is essential to acknowledge the semantic labor performed by media. As demonstrated, social media platforms contribute to meaning making through their inherent affordances, which perform both technological and semiotic functions. In doing so, these platforms introduce additional semantic layers to the signification processes, influenced by the ideological underpinnings of their tools.

Platforms, like any form of media, are not neutral environments for meaning making. They embody specific worldviews that not only shape the form and substance of the textual products they host, but also configure the semiotic affordances, constraints, and communicative registers that sustain their preferred genres (Moschini 2022). Such a cultural dimension extends beyond situational contexts and discursive communities, encompassing what may be termed a ‘semantic regime’ – that is, a system that defines the communicative and ideational orientations of a media environment, shaping its content categories, textual genres, and corresponding “semiotic regimes” (van Leeuwen, as cited in Moschini 2014). In the case of TikTok, for instance, we have observed that the most popular content category is “entertainment”, aligning with TikTok’s mission to “inspire creativity and create joy” (TikTok 2022). These communicative goals seem to be broadly

embraced by both producers and consumers in their interactive processes of knowledge creation, even when these goals are ultimately subverted.

Seen through the lens of genre theory, these shifts demonstrate that genres are dynamic repertoires of communicative actions that adapt to socio-technological contexts. The recipe genre on TikTok retains its core procedural identity but fragments and redistributes its stages across multiple modalities and interactional spaces. This finding corroborates Bateman et al.'s (2024) argument that genre must be analyzed "beyond boundaries", accounting for multimodal convergence and media-specific affordances. It also resonates with Hasan's (1978, 1994) notion of Generic Structure Potential as the canonical stages – Title[^]Ingredients[^]Method[^](Illustration)[^](Background Information) – remain available but can be selectively realized, expanded or omitted depending on the platform's constraints and user practices. Indeed, the stages of recipe presentation are not necessarily linear, some (i.e., the list of ingredients) are missing in many of the texts in our sample and the communicative scope of recipes now extends beyond mere instruction, such as illustrating how to create a sandwich, to include a sensory and entertaining experience. Individual recipes gain prominence over collections, with the "recipe colonies" to which they belong consisting of fluid compilations curated by AI-powered algorithms. These recipes are constructed through a combination of diverse meaning-making resources, including pre-set technological affordances and there is a strong emphasis on aural resources, while written language and the list of ingredients re-emerge prominently in the replies section.

In particular, the analysis of the dataset has outlined how the three identified categories revealed substantial variation in the use of aural resources, which emerged as a leading semiotic resource in differentiating how recipes are presented on the platform. The first category, "Music-Centric Texts", is characterized by its reliance on music to drive the rhythm and pace of the video. In the second category, "Original Sound", verbal explanations are central, with the creator's voice providing a step-by-step guide to the recipe. The third category, "Original Sound + Music", combines spoken explanations with a soundtrack to create an immersive and emotionally resonant experience.

According to the analysis, TikTok recipes mainly emphasize sensory engagement, especially through audio resources, resulting in a space in which culinary knowledge is not only shared but also performed synesthetically. As mentioned earlier, although the dataset is relatively small, the significant distribution observed warrants further exploration. Reiterating this study with a larger dataset could provide more robust insights into the patterns and trends identified. In addition, this study could be replicated to examine how digitally mediated textual genres continue to reconfigure their semiotic and communicative patterns over time. Given the rapid pace of innovation and the fluid nature of content creation on digital platforms, longitudinal analysis will be essential to capture and interpret the ongoing transformations of procedural genres within an increasingly algorithmically curated multimodal environment.

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