

The Rise of the Recipe Reactor

- 1 THE RECIPE SOLD itself as “unique.” Toward the end of March, an anonymous blonde woman appeared on the TikTok page @foodfuns3 and committed a culinary crime. First, she poured an entire box of angel hair pasta into a blender, then she blitzed it into dust, added a couple of eggs, and rolled the resulting dough into new pasta strips. Eagerly, she took a bite of the thick, grainy pasta after cooking it. She ended the video with the words “Mmm! It’s like the perfect consistency.” Despite this onscreen bite, it’s safe to assume this pasta dish ended up in the bin.
- 2 It’s no longer news that disgusting food videos on TikTok are intentional rage bait, designed to rile up viewers and gain comments, shares, and views for creators. Yet while no one eats the food in these ridiculous recipe videos, they do 23. Thanks to the sheer number of hideous recipes that now populate TikTok, a new job has emerged on the internet: recipe reactor.
- 3 Chef Reactions (see photo) is such a recipe reactor. Multiple times a week, Chef Reactions, who has more than 3 million TikTok followers, picks an online recipe video and – it’s in the name – reacts to it. He is known for his deadpan delivery and very evident culinary knowledge. (He really is a chef with almost 20 years’ experience.) The 40-year-old content creator reacts to everything from genuinely delicious-looking chocolate sculptures to people cooking inside their toilet bowls. His angry reactions are unscripted and authentic: “I come from a background of not wasting food, both in my professional life and my personal life. When I was a kid, I was forced to sit at the kitchen table until I finished everything on my plate, so wasting food is a pet peeve of mine.”
- 4 Chef Reactions created his TikTok account in May 2022 because, he says, “a dishwasher that worked for me had a video go viral ... and it was really stupid, it was maybe the dumbest thing I’ve ever seen in my life.” Deciding that if she could do it, he could do it too, the chef created his first video, a silly three-second clip in which he makes eyes at some butt-shaped dough. His channel then grew quickly. He recently quit his job; brand deals, merchandise sales, and supporters enable him to recipe-react full time. “I’ve been a chef for so long that it’s hard for me to think of what I do now as work, because I worked so very hard before,” he says. He notes that while he is by no means rich or “set for life,” he could afford a year off to be with his family if he stopped making videos right now. “This has changed my life in ways that I never thought were possible,” he says.

- 5 Yet in the year Chef Reactions has been creating his videos, he says the number of rage bait recipes on TikTok has grown. “These accounts are multiplying like gremlins,” he says, “And now people say that I’m partially to blame for that.” Some viewers believe that gross food creators are making videos specifically for the chef to react to, meaning he’s taking the bait and feeding the baiters. While he says it would be “egotistical” for him to believe that videos are made specifically for him, he does acknowledge his part in this strange new environment. “Without them, I wouldn’t be where I’m at today, so it’s kind of a double-edged sword,” he says. Equally: “I’m not the only person that does food reactions.”
- 6 It’s unclear how long recipe reactions will continue to be popular. Chef Reactions says, “I think of myself always as on my 14th of 15 minutes of fame.” But being uncertain about the future doesn’t trouble him too much. “If you were to ask me a year ago what my retirement plan was, I would have said, ‘Hovering over an empty deep fryer.’ I didn’t have a retirement plan,” he says. He still doesn’t, but he does now have a flourishing online career. “If it all goes away tomorrow, I can always fall back onto my skill set and continue being a chef.”

wired.com, 2023