

Chinese firm serves up 'smart chopsticks' for food-wary diners

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From recycled cooking oil to fox meat and chemicals, a litany of food scandals have turned Chinese diners' stomachs, but a new "smart chopsticks" concept by Internet search giant Baidu could put the answer in their hands.

The device, which the firm says can tell consumers whether the food in front of them is safe to eat, was born of an April Fool's video, a spokesman said Thursday.

Baidu at the time had "no serious intention of actually pursuing this", the spokesman told AFP of the stunt it released earlier this year. "But it generated a lot of excitement both internally and externally."

The latest stage of development was revealed this week, with a new video released by the company showing a user placing the electronic chopsticks in three different cups of [cooking oil](#).

Sensors in the implements detect the oil's temperature and its fitness for consumption, with the findings displayed on a [smartphone app](#).

The chopsticks flash a red light when cooking oil has a higher than 25 percent level of TPMs, or total polar materials, an indicator of freshness, the spokesman said.

Poor food safety is a major concern in China, with one of the country's worst food scandals seeing the industrial chemical melamine illegally

added to dairy products in 2008, killing six children and making 300,000 people ill.

"Gutter oil" is a particular concern—cooking oil illegally made by reprocessing waste oil or by dredging up leftovers from restaurants and marketing it as new.

Health authorities last year launched a crackdown on the use and manufacture of such oil, with more than 100 people arrested and 20 imprisoned—two of them for life—as part of the campaign.

It was not clear whether the "smart chopsticks" would go into commercial production. The company has only made a limited run of prototypes, the spokesman said, and no release date or price has been set.

China's social media users lauded the company's innovation Thursday, but lamented the need for the device in the first place.

"Is it really a good thing that they invented these?" wrote one user. "Can we still enjoy our food?"

"If I carried these chopsticks around with me everywhere, I think I'd die of hunger," wrote another.

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