Gastronomic image of Turkish baklava: analyzing user reviews on TripAdvisor

Türk baklavasının gastronomik imajı: Tripadvisor'daki kullanıcı yorumlarının incelenmesi

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the gastronomic image of Turkish baklava based on user reviews on the TripAdvisor review website. In this context, the adequacy and quality of the products and services offered by the restaurants producing and selling baklava in Türkiye, as well as the salient positive and negative aspects, were evaluated using the content analysis method. The data are based on the reviews made by users on the TripAdvisor user review website about restaurants in 2022 and 2023. The results of the research are presented by visualizing them with the word cloud method. As a result of the research, it was found that domestic visitors rate Turkish baklava as excellent, delicious, and expensive. Foreign visitors mainly evaluated Turkish baklava as the best, most delicious, and most expensive compared to its counterparts. The study suggests that restaurants, especially those operating in Gaziantep, should increase their promotional activities for Turkish baklava at national and international levels show more sensitivity to service quality, and production standards, and maintain the balance between price and quality.

ÖZET

Bu araştırmada, TripAdvisor yorum sitesindeki kullanıcı yorumlarına dayanılarak Türk baklavasının gastronomik imajının belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu kapsamda; Türkiye'de baklava üretimi ve satışı yapan restoranların sundukları ürün ve hizmetlerin yeterliliği ve kalitesi, öne çıkan olumlu ve olumsuz yönleri içerik analizi yönteminden yararlanılarak değerlendirilmeye çalışılmıştır. Veriler, TripAdvisor kullanıcı yorum sitesinde kullanıcıların 2022 ve 2023 yıllarında restoranlarla ilgili yapmış oldukları yorumlara dayanmaktadır. Araştırmada ortaya çıkan sonuçlar, kelime bulutu yöntemiyle görselleştirilerek sunulmuştur. Araştırma sonucunda; yerli ziyaretçilerin Türk baklavasını ağırlıklı olarak mükemmel, lezzetli ve pahalı olarak değerlendirdikleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Yabancı ziyaretçiler ise, ağırlıklı olarak Türk baklavasını benzerlerine göre en iyisi, lezzetli ve pahalı olarak değerlendirmişlerdir. Araştırmada, özellikle Gaziantep'te faaliyet gösteren restoranlara ulusal ve uluslararası çapta Türk baklavasına yönelik tanıtım faaliyetlerini artırmaları; hizmet kalitesine, üretim standartlarına ve fiyat-kalite arasındaki dengenin korunmasına daha fazla hassasiyet göstermeleri önerilmektedir.

1. Introduction

Gastronomy has an important place in shaping the image of destinations. Gastronomic image is one of the most important components of destination image (Chang & Mak, 2018). In addition to drawing attention to cultural difference and identity, gastronomy can also affect the positive shaping of the image of destinations. Digital communication tools can play an important role in positioning the gastronomic image of destinations in the minds of potential tourists (Fields, 2002). Wang (2015) found a positive relationship between gastronomic image and electronic word-of-mouth marketing tools. Today, one of the most important factors enabling the growth of the gastronomy tourism market is that gastro-tourist experiences can be delivered to masses through social media and digital media (Kendir, 2020). Online reviews reflecting consumer experiences have become central to consumers' purchasing decisions in parallel with the increasing prevalence of digital tools (Onorati & Giardullo, 2020). Since online reviews reflect the opinions of people who have personally experienced the product, they are generally considered more reliable than other sources of information by potential visitors in the purchase decision process. In this respect, it is possible to say that online consumer reviews made by consumers are effective in the purchasing decisions of potential visitors, based on the idea that they are honest and impartial (Erdoğan & Özkanlı, 2021). Consumer reviews have a significant impact on restaurant revenues as they create rankings that affect the reputation of restaurants, shape supply and demand, and significantly transform venues and destinations in line with consumer expectations (Onorati & Giardullo, 2020). It is predicted that positive consumer reviews on platforms such as TripAdvisor may lead to an increase in business revenues in the future (Živadinović, 2022).

It can be said that Turkish baklava is among the first gastronomic products that come to mind in the world when it comes to Turkish cuisine (Bezirgan, 2019; Sari & Nazli, 2019;

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Türker, 2018). However, what positive and negative aspects of Turkish baklava stand out, especially from the point of view of foreign visitors, and whether it is liked by visitors as it is thought to be, are questions that arouse curiosity. In addition, whether baklava is truly recognised as being of Turkish origin, whether it is branded and whether it has distinctive features that enable it to compete with similar products are also questions that need to be answered. Although Turkish baklava is among the most recognised gastronomic products in the world, it is important to make the necessary improvements by taking visitor opinions into account in order to strengthen its competitive position and further increase its attractiveness. According to Agüero-Torales et al. (2019), online evaluations of consumers allow businesses to improve their image, products and services by taking into account consumer experiences. Accordingly, this study, which will be a resource for food and beverage businesses and Turkish gastronomy, aims to determine the gastronomic image of Turkish baklava based on user reviews on the TripAdvisor review platform. When the literature was analysed, it was determined that there is no study directly related to the subject. On the other hand, there are a limited number of studies indirectly related to the subject (Erdoğan & Özkanlı, 2021; Eren, 2016; Eren & Kuvvetli, 2017; Eren & Demir, 2019; Kaya et al., 2022). In the studies conducted on this subject, only data on the frequency of repetition of the word baklava were included. In this study, positive and negative reviews about Turkish baklava were analysed to determine the gastronomic image of Turkish baklava offered for sale in restaurants in Türkiye. In addition, this study analysed the general image of all types of baklava produced with different techniques in Türkiye. Therefore, in this study, baklava is associated with its Turkish origin rather than a specific region. In these aspects, this study differs from similar studies.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Gastronomic Image and Online Consumer Reviews (OCRs)

Food and beverage establishments are one of the most important elements of the gastronomy tourism phenomenon. In addition, food and beverage establishments are one of the strategic points where the consumption experience is shaped and the gastronomic image is carried to different channels. Consumers' experiences in food and beverage establishments and the gastronomic image of the destination are nowadays mainly transferred to other consumers through online consumer platforms (Marine-Roig et al., 2019). The gastronomic image of a destination refers to tourists' holistic impression of the destination's gastronomic flavours and culinary culture. The cognitive elements of the gastronomic image consist of the most well-known dishes of the destination, table manners, etiquette and food habits. Symbolic meanings are related to the affective aspects of the gastronomic image of the destination (Chang & Mak, 2018). According to Lin et al. (2022), the factors of gastronomic image obtained after a quality service in food and beverage establishments are divided into two as technical quality and functional quality and environment. Technical quality includes food and beverage quality. Within the scope of functional quality and environment; business equipment,

service performance and ambience. Service performance can be measured by the performance of the kitchen chef and other staff. In this context, according to Büyükeke and Özsoy (2021), it is important to monitor the post-purchase reviews and behaviours of consumers in terms of determining the basic characteristics of the local flavours to be offered and the restaurant atmosphere that will affect the service quality in food and beverage establishments. This information constitutes a source for brand image and loyalty studies. According to Barrera-Barrera (2023), online restaurant reviews have three main components. The first is the general evaluations of customers about the restaurant; the second is customer evaluations of different features of the restaurant such as food quality, services provided to the customer, restaurant ambience, and whether the price paid is received; and the third is the positive or negative reviews made by customers as a result of their experiences with the restaurant.

Online consumer reviews, which are one of the tools of electronic word of mouth marketing (eWOM), can be made about a good or service, brand or person. Online consumer reviews are positive reviews shared with other consumers in an unstructured format, thought to be made by former users, or in a structured format published on an independent consumer review site such as TripAdvisor, a commercial website such as Booking.com, or a corporate website such as Thomson.co.uk. or it can be expressed as negative, neutral reviews, ratings, rankings (Filieri, 2016: p. 47). Users can not only share their gastronomic experiences on online platforms, but also show their feelings through likes through some social media channels such as Facebook. On some travel sites such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com, users can express their satisfaction with their experiences by making positive or negative reviews (Yu & Zhang, 2020). Online consumer reviews offer a different perspective on accountability and responsiveness. Online reviews, which reflect consumers' evaluations of the goods and services offered in food and beverage establishments, are an alternative source to the evaluations of restaurant guidebooks and food columnists (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2024).

Online consumer reviews about gastronomic products can positively affect purchasing decisions by providing tourists with information about local foods (Lim et al., 2020). On the other hand, although online consumer reviews help restaurants to improve their services, some of the restaurant owners may feel uncomfortable with the reviews. It is stated that some restaurant owners and managers offer consumers to write reviews, try to improve their rankings by responding to reviews or making fake reviews on relevant platforms (Beuscart et al., 2016), or they can carry out negative propaganda about rival businesses by making negative reviews about their competitors (Harris, 2018). Therefore, although online consumer reviews provide consumers with useful information and different choices about the services offered by restaurants, it is useful to approach the relevant reviews with caution and make a general evaluation of all reviews made, as the reviews are open to manipulation.

It seems that readers of online consumer reviews are generally highly educated, have high incomes, travel frequently, use the internet frequently, and act in a planned manner. Readers pay

more attention to the reviews made by other consumers than other information because they find them up-to-date, reliable and enjoyable. Online consumer reviews are used not only to reduce options at the purchasing decision stage, but also to generate ideas (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008).

2.2. TripAdvisor Online Review Platform

TripAdvisor is an information advisory platform that appeals mainly to potential consumers. It is one of the very few online resources where consumers' generally unbiased opinions and experiences are tried to be reflected. The website provides information about hotels, restaurants, etc. so that customers can get more information. It also functions as a search engine by providing links to platforms (Law, 2006). TripAdvisor contains positive and negative evaluations of consumers about restaurants and similar services. These evaluations constitute recommendations for services. In these aspects, TripAdvisor also has a social network feature that enables interaction between tourists (Ramírez-Gutiérrez et al., 2021). Nowadays, consumers express their opinions by commenting on the level of satisfaction they get from the services through online environments such as TripAdvisor. Reviews on online platforms are also considered valuable for businesses as they can increase the popularity of their products (Laksono et al., 2019). In the reviews, consumers can also express their dissatisfaction with the service. Food and beverage businesses can obtain improvement opportunities by identifying factors that cause dissatisfaction through TripAdvisor and similar online platforms. Therefore, these platforms are important information sources not only for customers but also for businesses to benefit from to increase customer satisfaction and improve brand image (Aydın, 2016; Cassar et al., 2020). Hotels and restaurants can also determine their market share comparatively based on reviews on TripAdvisor (Kim et al., 2016).

TripAdvisor is a web-based platform where users freely create published information. On this platform, users comment, evaluate and rate the services provided by destinations, hotels, restaurants or travel attractions. Users can not only comment on the services they receive, but also share photos and videos of their service experiences and maps of their travels. Users can also participate in web-based applications that provide a discussion environment on a particular topic (Miguéns et al., 2008). TripAdvisor platform has the feature of being both a social network, a virtual community and a blog. TripAdvisor's most important feature that creates value is the reviews and ratings made by users about touristic products and travel experiences. In addition to reviews, users rate their service experiences on a scale of 1 to 5. When rating, users are expected to evaluate issues such as check-in, location, room quality and comfort in accommodation establishments. Commenters are asked questions such as whether they would recommend their travels to others and whether the service received is suitable for families (O'Connor, 2008, 2010). When rating restaurants on TripAdvisor, four dimensions are taken into account. These are service, food, value and atmosphere (Gebbels et al., 2021; Lei & Law, 2015).

TripAdvisor has a reputation management system that increases the reliability of reviews. In this context, potential consumers can view the reviews and ratings of people who have experienced the service. Users can also view photos, badges, and the number of helpful votes from other users who have experienced the service. Users can thus decide whether reviews and commentators are useful or not (Yoo et al., 2016). In this context, a badge system is implemented on TripAdvisor that indicates the different levels of expertise of reviewers (Filieri et al., 2015). In this system, according to the number of reviews and posts published, reviewers receive new reviewer, reviewer, senior reviewer, participant, senior participant, and top-level participant badges, respectively (TripAdvisor, 2024).

2.3. Turkish Baklava Culture and Characteristics

Desserts have a significant place in Turkish cuisine, which spreads over a wide geography and has a very rich and ancient culinary culture (Güldemir, 2022). Among these desserts, baklava is one of the indispensable desserts of Turkish culinary culture. Baklava is a Turkish word and a dessert originating from Central Asia. It is stated that it is derived from the words baklağu or baklağı. The word baklava emerged with the change of the word bayla, which means to bind in Mongolian, over time (Özbay, 2019). Baklava is a pastry prepared by adding nuts such as hazelnuts, pistachios, and walnuts, cutting the very thin dough into various shapes, cooking it, and finally pouring sherbet on it. Baklava took its current form as a result of the interaction of Turkish cuisine with different cultures. Baklava was prepared with flour, water, and sugar in its simplest form due to the lack of agriculture in Central Asia. With the settlement of Turks in Anatolia and the influence of Iranian culture, products such as walnuts, hazelnuts, and pistachios began to be added to the intermediate layers of baklava phyllo. While baklava was an ordinary dessert during the Seljuk period, it turned into an important delicacy served to guests during Ramadan, holidays and celebrations during the Ottoman period (Akkaya & Koç, 2017).

When Turkish cuisine is mentioned in the world, one of the first flavors that comes to mind is Turkish baklava (Sari & Nazli, 2019). The Turkish baklava that has succeeded in becoming a brand in baklava production in the world is Gaziantep baklava. Thanks to the successful promotional activities carried out by the province of Gaziantep around the world and the unique taste of Gaziantep baklava, Gaziantep baklava has become one of the most well-known Turkish desserts in the world (Coşan & Seçim, 2019). Gaziantep province is the center of Turkish baklava production in Türkiye and the world. Gaziantep baklava also has national and international geographical indication registration (Gözükara, 2021). Craftsmanship is of great importance in the production of Gaziantep baklava. For this reason, the training of baklava masters as baklava masters from the cradle (nucleus training) is very important for the continuity of the profession and the protection of the title of Gaziantep baklava. In the tradition of training baklava masters from the cradle, the profession of baklava-making begins to be taught to apprentices from a very young age, and the learning process takes place by transferring knowledge from father to son and from master to apprentice. This tradition, which has been maintained for generations, allowing Gaziantep baklava to

Table 1. Descriptive Information about the Restaurants

Restaurants	City of Location	Number of Reviewed Reviews		Average Score
		Local	Foreign	
R1	Gaziantep	29	2	4.5
R2	Gaziantep	20	2	4
R3	İstanbul	10	60	4.5
R4	Gaziantep	43	0	5
R5	İstanbul	125	168	4.5
R6	Gaziantep	18	3	4
R7	Gaziantep	9	1	4.5
R8	Ankara	5	0	4
R9	Gaziantep	6	0	4
R10	Ankara	4	2	4
Grand Total		269	238	Overall Average= 4.3
		507		

Source: Table created by author

differ from home-made baklava with its production method and taste (Tufan, 2022). Today, baklava, which is recognized as a valuable handicraft, is produced in modern production facilities. Modern baklava is made of wheat flour, pistachios and other nuts, clarified butter, wheat starch, water, sugar, eggs, salt and lemon juice. The main ingredients that determine the quality of baklava are pistachios and clarified butter. The color, type, and aroma of pistachios are important. The clarified butter must be boiled at low heat and thoroughly filtered to remove water and solids (Acar & Koksel, 2023). Although the ingredients used in baklava in Türkiye, the amount of ingredients used, and the production process vary from region to region, the above-mentioned criteria are generally taken into consideration in the production process of Gaziantep baklava. Considering Türkiye in general, it is quite difficult to give a standard recipe for baklava. For example, pistachios in the Southeastern Anatolia Region, walnuts in the Central Anatolia Region, almonds in the Aegean Region, hazelnuts in the Black Sea Region, and sesame in Thrace can be used as baklava filling ingredients (Akyürek, 2021).

Although Gaziantep baklava has a very important place in Türkiye and in the world, baklava is a dessert that is widely produced in food and beverage establishments and patisseries, especially in rural areas of Türkiye and has many varieties. It is a common custom in Anatolia to make baklava to serve guests on special occasions such as festivals, engagements, and weddings. This study investigates consumers' general perceptions of all types of baklava offered in food and beverage outlets in Türkiye, regardless of region.

3. Methods

3.1. Purpose and Importance

The main purpose of the research is to have an idea about the general image of Turkish baklava, based on the reviews about Turkish baklava on the TripAdvisor review platform. Additionally, determining whether domestic and foreign user reviews have differences in their perceptions of Turkish baklava is among the sub-objectives of this research. Another sub-objective of the research is to determine on which themes the positive and negative reviews about Turkish baklava are concentrated, to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of food and beverage businesses, and to make suggestions to businesses within the framework of these strengths and weaknesses.

This research is important because it aims to provide a source of information for food and beverage businesses and Türkiye's gastronomy tourism policies and planning by determining on which concepts or issues the positive or negative judgments about Turkish baklava are concentrated. In addition, the importance of this research is that it will draw attention to the points that need to be developed especially in food and beverage businesses. On the other hand, no study analyzing the gastronomic image of Turkish baklava was found in the literature. For this reason, it is thought that the research will fill an important gap in the literature.

3.2. Population and Sample

The research sought to determine the gastronomic image of Turkish baklava based on user reviews on TripAdvisor. The population of the research consists of the restaurant establishments that TripAdvisor users have made reviews about their Turkish baklava experiences. The data was obtained from a specific sample group in accordance with the purpose of the research. The sample of the research was determined according to the criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods. According to Yıldırım & Şimşek (2018), in the criterion sampling method, all situations that meet certain criteria determined by the researcher or prepared in advance are included in the sample. The main criterion determined in sample selection in this research is that the restaurants whose reviews are examined are among the top 10 restaurants with the most reviews about Turkish baklava in 2022 and 2023. In this regard, the sample of the research consists of the 10 restaurant establishments that users commented the most on TripAdvisor. The reason for analyzing the reviews made in 2022 and 2023 is that they consist of recent reviews and have a sufficient sample size for analysis. It has been determined that there are a total of 507 reviews in Turkish and English on TripAdvisor, directly or indirectly related to Turkish baklava. In general, it was revealed that the users who commented in Turkish were domestic visitors, and the users who commented in English were foreign visitors. In the study, it was tried to comparatively evaluate whether the image of Turkish baklava differs between users commenting in Turkish and English. With this evaluation, it will be determined whether the perceptions of domestic and foreign visitors towards Turkish baklava differ.

Figure 1. Positive Reviews of Domestic Visitors

Source: Figure created by author

3.3. Data Collection Process

Research data was obtained from the TripAdvisor consumer review site. First of all, the "restaurants" option on the home page of the TripAdvisor review site was selected, and then the keyword "baklava" was scanned in the search engine. The reviews made by consumers about the restaurants reached as a result of the scan constitute the main data source of this research. As Chang et al. (2019) stated, the reason for examining user reviews on TripAdvisor in this research is that it is a well-known travel company and a lot of highly reliable content is regularly produced by users on this platform. In this regard, reviews on TripAdvisor were taken into account as they would increase the possibility of collecting rich and sufficient data during the data collection process. In addition, the site is one of the important information sources that consumers frequently refer to in their restaurant preferences. This can be stated as one of the reasons for examining the reviews on TripAdvisor.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data related to the research were examined with content analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis methods. Content analysis is a qualitative analysis technique that aims to make repeatable and valid inferences from the obtained items or texts (Krippendorff, 2004). In other words, in content analysis, it is tried to reveal the basic consistencies and meanings in the texts (Patton, 2018). In content analysis, similar data are brought together according to certain concepts and themes. These concepts are organized and interpreted in a way that the reader can understand. In short, by using content analysis, data is tried to be defined and the facts hidden in the data are brought to light. Content analysis consists of four stages. These stages include coding the data, identifying themes, arranging the codes and themes, and defining and interpreting the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). A similar method was followed in this study. First of all, the sub-themes for coding were determined. Domestic and foreign visitors generally make their evaluations in two main frameworks: positive and negative. For this reason, the reviews of both domestic and foreign visitors were divided into two sub-themes, positive and negative, and the prominent expressions were coded under appropriate themes. After the coding was completed, the results of the coding were visualized through the word cloud method and presented in the findings section. According to Williams et al. (2013), with word cloud analysis, it is possible

Figure 2. Positive Reviews of Foreign Visitors in English

Source: Figure created by author

Figure 3. Negative Reviews of Domestic Visitors

Source: Figure created by author

to understand the general structure of frequently repeated words related to a certain topic or to determine the main themes of the text. In this research, word cloud was used to reveal frequently repeated expressions in user reviews. Data related to the research were analyzed using the 2020 version of the MAXQDA package program.

4. Results

The study looked at a total of 507 reviews of the top 10 restaurants with the most reviews of Turkish baklava on TripAdvisor in 2022 and 2023. The review was carried out on reviews directly or indirectly related to Turkish baklava. Other reviews about restaurants were excluded from the review because they were about products other than baklava. Information about the city where the restaurants whose reviews were examined, the total number of reviews, and their average scores are given in Table 1.

As seen in Table 1, 6 of the 10 most commented restaurants operate in Gaziantep, 2 in Istanbul, and 2 in Ankara. The restaurant code R5 has the most reviews (293 reviews). The restaurant with the least reviews is the restaurant coded R8 (5 reviews). The total number of comments reviewed from domestic visitors is 269, and the total number of reviews from foreign visitors is 238. The restaurant that visitors give the highest score is the restaurant with code R4 (5 points). The restaurants with the lowest scores are the restaurants coded R2, R6, R8, R9 and R10. These restaurants have an average rating of 4. The overall average score of the restaurants examined was determined as 4.3.

The word cloud method was used to determine the general impressions of domestic and foreign visitors about Turkish baklava. The word cloud results of the positive reviews of domestic visitors about Turkish baklava are given in Figure 1. According to the results; TripAdvisor users used the expressions of excellent (32 people), delicious (28 people), very delicious (26 people), very good (25 people), beautiful (24 people), wonderful (20 people), quality (19 people) respectively. The results show that Turkish baklava stands out with its flavor, complete aspects and quality from the perspective of domestic visitors.

Figure 2 shows the word cloud of the positive reviews made by foreign visitors who commented in English about Turkish baklava. According to the results of the word cloud; 48 of the visitors identified Turkish baklava with the words best, 37

with delicious, 21 with amazing, 17 with Istanbul, 16 with excellent, 15 with good and great, 13 with recommend, 12 with quality. It can be said that Turkish baklava stands out from the foreign visitors' point of view as being better than its counterparts, having distinctive features, being of high quality and delicious, and is generally positioned with this image in the minds of foreign visitors. As can be seen from the reviews, foreign visitors both comparatively evaluated their Turkish baklava experiences in restaurants in Türkiye and compared the baklava they have experienced in Türkiye with similar products they have experienced in other countries. As a result, foreign visitors mainly evaluated Turkish baklava as the best, delicious, amazing, excellent, good, great, and quality.

Figure 3 shows the word cloud results regarding the negative reviews made by domestic visitors about Turkish baklava on TripAdvisor. According to these results, 8 of the users emphasized that Turkish baklava is expensive, 6 of them were disappointing, 5 of them were very expensive, 4 of them were high priced, and 4 of them emphasized that the service quality was poor. When the word cloud results are evaluated in general, it is seen that restaurant visitors mainly express their complaints about the high prices of baklava.

Figure 4 shows the word cloud results of the negative reviews made by foreign visitors in English about their Turkish baklava experiences on TripAdvisor. According to the results, it was revealed that foreign visitors, like Turkish visitors, found the prices of Turkish baklava predominantly expensive (6 people). 3 of the foreign visitors described Turkish baklava as too sweet, 1 as disappointed, 1 as dry, 1 as little expensive, 1 as not crunchy, 1 as not delicious, and 1 as not fresh. In addition, 1 of the foreign visitors stated that it was overpriced, 1 overrated, 1 quite soggy, 1 tasteless, 1 too much sugar, 1 very buttery, 1 very expensive, and 1 worst.

When the findings obtained in the research were evaluated, it was determined that the general impressions of domestic (452 positive statements) and foreign (461 positive statements) visitors about Turkish baklava were predominantly positive. Additionally, foreign visitors' negative statements about Turkish baklava (only 23 negative statements) are much less than the negative statements of domestic visitors (90 negative statements).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to determine the gastronomic image of Turkish baklava by analyzing the positive and negative reviews made by users about Turkish baklava on the TripAdvisor review platform in 2022 and 2023. When the reviews on TripAdvisor were evaluated, it was revealed that domestic and foreign visitors generally had positive opinions about Turkish baklava and there were few negative reviews about Turkish baklava. Additionally, based on the results obtained, it was determined that foreign visitors' perceptions of Turkish baklava were more positive than domestic visitors. In their examination of foreign YouTubers' videos on the YouTube platform, Kaya et al. (2022) revealed that baklava is one of the most known and loved Turkish desserts by foreign YouTubers. In addition, in the study conducted by Eren and Demir (2019), they found that tourists took and shared the most photos of baklava among Turkish desserts in restaurants

in the Sultan Ahmet region. These results show that especially foreign visitors perceive Turkish baklava as an important symbol of Turkish cuisine and that the image of Turkish baklava on the international platform is quite good and strong. Within the scope of technical quality, which is among the factors of gastronomic image (Lin et al., 2022), the first distinguishing feature of Turkish baklava that comes to mind, in other words its positive image, is its taste. According to these results, it is possible to say that baklava is among the most well-known and appreciated foods of Turkish cuisine in the world. In fact, in the study by Erdoğan and Özkanlı (2021) where they examined the gastronomic image of Gaziantep cuisine, they similarly determined that baklava is among the first foods that come to mind when Gaziantep is mentioned. Eren (2016) also determined in his study that baklava is the third most repeated and known gastronomic product related to Turkish cuisine. In their study where they examined the gastronomic image of Turkish cuisine, Eren and Kuvvetli (2017) revealed that baklava was not mentioned much by visitors in the reviews made on TripAdvisor. On the other hand, the most emphasized negative aspect of Turkish baklava by domestic and foreign visitors is that it is expensive. Although it is not reflected in the word cloud since it is not a comment directly related to baklava, it is stated in the comments that some establishments have hygiene problems in common areas such as toilets, sinks, etc. It is noteworthy that complaints about service quality and employees' attitudes and behaviors, which are within the scope of functional quality, one of the factors of gastronomic image (Lin et al., 2022), were expressed in some reviews.

Figure 4. Negative Reviews of Foreign Visitors in English
Source: *Figure created by author*

The research found that foreign visitors' reviews were generally related to restaurants in Istanbul. It is noteworthy that the reviews of foreign visitors about the restaurants in Gaziantep and Ankara are much less compared to the restaurants in Istanbul. One of the main reasons for this may be that the number of foreign visitors is higher than in Ankara and Gaziantep, as Istanbul is one of Türkiye's most well-known tourist centers in the world. The fact that foreign visitors generally express positive opinions about Turkish baklava can be cited as one of the reasons for the generally positive perception of baklava restaurants in Istanbul. One of the reasons why foreign visitors make few reviews about restaurants in Gaziantep and Ankara may be that the number

of foreign visitors in these cities is low and the baklava restaurants in question are not well known by foreign visitors. In addition, there are many negative reviews, especially from domestic visitors, about restaurants in Gaziantep and Ankara. Negative reviews are generally related to the negative attitudes of restaurant employees towards visitors. A small number of negative reviews were made about the taste, freshness, quality, consistency, etc. of the baklava. The service quality, attitude and behavior of the employees, hygiene and sanitation etc. of the restaurants are one of the important criteria and reasons for preference by the consumers since they are the complementary of the general image.

5.1. Practical Implications

Restaurants in Istanbul, Gaziantep and Ankara, where Turkish baklava is sold, are generally praised for its taste, freshness, use of quality ingredients, etc. Although it has received positive reviews in many aspects, it is also noteworthy that some businesses have received a lot of criticism in terms of other criteria that are complementary to the general image of the restaurants. In order for restaurants to improve customer perception regarding the issues they are criticized for, they need to make the necessary improvements by taking into account the negative criticisms identified in this research. According to Kendir (2020), businesses that do not take tourist experiences into account seriously damage their own image in the first place and then the image of the city. When considered in the context of this research, businesses' insensitivity to customer expectations negatively affects the tourism image of the country in the long run.

A significant portion of foreign visitors stated that they found Turkish baklava incredibly good or excellent. If foreign visitors find Turkish baklava incredible or excellent, it is because they are encountering this type of taste for the first time or they have not experienced such a taste much. This result can be explained by the fact that the distinctive features of Turkish baklava that will enable it to maintain its positive image in the long term are quite numerous, difficult to imitate, and dominant. Among the expectations of today's gastro-tourists is the desire to experience authentic, traditional and unique gastronomic experiences. These features of Turkish baklava are capable of meeting the expectations of gastro-tourists. If Turkish baklava can preserve and maintain its unique and distinctive features, it will continue to be an important symbol of Turkish gastronomy at the national and international level for many years. In this research, it is recommended that Turkish baklava preserves and maintains some of the features that distinguish it from its competitors. In this context, it is very important to fully comply with the production and presentation standards of Turkish baklava, to pay attention to the supply and use of quality materials, to maintain the balance between price and quality, to avoid the fabrication of baklava and to maintain the traditional production approach as much as possible, to ensure the transfer of the profession to future generations by teaching the art of baklava to young generations and to continue to train good baklava masters. In addition, it can be suggested that entrepreneurship training should be provided to baklava masters, and especially the investment initiatives of young baklava masters should be supported by the state, all personnel

who are in direct and indirect contact with the customers should be subjected to comprehensive training on the rules of etiquette, all personnel should be given foreign language training and baklava restaurants should be regularly inspected in terms of hygiene and sanitation.

The limited number of foreign visitors commenting on restaurants in Gaziantep and Ankara shows that the customer profile of restaurants in these provinces is generally based on domestic customers. It is especially important to increase the number of foreign visitors in Gaziantep, which is considered the center of Turkish baklava. In this sense, it is necessary to carry out a comprehensive promotional activity about Gaziantep, including Gaziantep baklava and other gastronomic products of Gaziantep. Gaziantep, which is among the gastronomically richest cities of Türkiye and also has the title of UNESCO gastronomy city, is seen as an important center of attraction in terms of gastronomy tourism in Türkiye and the world. However, the scope of existing international promotional activities related to Gaziantep cuisine needs to be further expanded.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

No study has been found in the literature examining the gastronomic image of Turkish baklava, which is among the symbols of Turkish cuisine. In the study of Erdoğan and Özkanlı (2021), which is indirectly related to this study, the image of food and beverages in Gaziantep on social media was examined, based on consumer reviews on TripAdvisor about restaurants in Gaziantep. In addition, the study also includes quantitative data regarding the frequency of repetition of the word Gaziantep baklava. However, a detailed examination of the positive and negative reviews about baklava and the gastronomic image of baklava has not been made. On the other hand, the data presented in the relevant study is limited to restaurants in Gaziantep. Another study on the subject belongs to Eren (2016). In this study, the gastronomic image of Turkish cuisine was examined with a survey data collection tool, and some data was obtained about the frequency of repetition of the word baklava. In the study, a comprehensive evaluation was not made examining the positive and negative reviews about baklava. In some studies, YouTubers' videos about baklava (Kaya et al., 2022) and baklava photos taken by visitors in restaurants were examined (Eren & Demir, 2019). In this research, reviews on TripAdvisor about restaurants that produce and sell baklava across Türkiye were analyzed to determine the general image of Turkish baklava. Therefore, it is possible to say that the research fills an important theoretical gap in the literature.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that the general perceptions of visitors regarding the culinary culture specific to a particular region or country are generally investigated. However, in the literature, the number of studies examining visitors' opinions about well-known specific gastronomic elements of country or city cuisines, such as baklava, is limited (Kendir, 2020). However, in the branding and competitiveness of countries and destinations, remembering and commemorating them with certain gastronomic elements is among the main objectives. In order for countries and destinations to identify with certain gastronomic elements,

prominent gastronomic elements must be determined based on consumer perception. The results of this research theoretically reveal that baklava can be an important gastronomic symbol of Turkish cuisine. In this regard, the research aims to create a widespread impact by inspiring future research that will evaluate the meaning of certain gastronomic elements for the cuisines in countries and destinations.

5.3. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Since the research was conducted only on secondary data on the TripAdvisor review site, the results of the research are limited. In future research, it is recommended to examine other review sites other than TripAdvisor. In addition, empirical research can be conducted by using data collection tools such as interviews, questionnaires, etc. including tourists visiting the relevant restaurants. On the other hand, the reviews examined in the research are limited to 2022 and 2023. In future research, it can be evaluated whether the restaurants have improved in terms of the current deficiencies revealed in this research by analyzing the user reviews of the coming years. In addition to baklava, which is one of the important symbols of Turkish cuisine, the international competitiveness and gastronomic image of Turkish cuisine in terms of gastronomy should be revealed by analyzing user reviews on foods such as döner, kebab, lahmacun, künefe, which come to mind first when Turkish cuisine is mentioned in the world. With the data to be obtained, it may be possible to determine the strengths and weaknesses of destinations, tourism enterprises, and other relevant institutions and organizations, to take initiatives to improve the weaknesses and to determine and implement gastronomy tourism development strategies based on the available data.

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