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EXPERIENCING GASTRONOMY THROUGH THE SCREEN: CULTURAL REPRESENTATION AND FOOD NARRATIVES IN TRAVEL VLOGS

Abstract

Digital tourism, as a concept that enables faster and easier access to tourism through digital technologies, also holds the potential to transform the structure and form of tourism itself. This study examines how travel videos, as a form of digital tourism activity, address food and gastronomy. It focuses on how food narratives are presented as part of tourism experiences in the videos of both Turkish and foreign vloggers and how these narratives are conveyed to viewers. The study is based on data obtained from travel vlogs uploaded to the YouTube platform by Turkish and foreign content creators. While selecting the research sample, the keywords “sokak yemeği,” “etnik yemek,” and “etnik mutfak” were used for Turkish content on YouTube, while the phrases “Turkish street food,” “Turkish cuisine,” and “Turkish ethnic food” were used for foreign content. The five most-viewed videos uploaded by Turkish content creator focusing on non-Turkish cuisine and the five most-viewed videos uploaded by foreign content creators about Turkish cuisine were taken into consideration. As a result of the analysis, it was found that in travel vlogs, food is not only presented as something to be tasted but also as a cultural element emphasized through the vlogger's narrative. In addition to introducing the local cuisine of a destination, these videos offer viewers a gastro-tourism experience. In this context, the videos go beyond being mere entertainment content and instead serve as representations of the local cuisine.

Keywords: Digital Tourism, Digital Gastro-tourism, Tourism Sociology, Gastronomic tourism, Travel vlog, Street food, Ethnic food.

EKRAN ARACILIĞIYLA GASTRONOMİ DENEYİMİ: SEYAHAT VLOGLARINDA KÜLTÜREL TEMSİL VE YEMEĞE DAİR ANLATILAR





Öz

Dijital turizm, dijital teknolojiler aracılığıyla turizme erişimin daha hızlı ve kolay olmasını içeren bir kavram olarak turizmin yapısını ve şeklini değiştirme potansiyeli de taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma dijital turizm faaliyet olarak seyahat videolarının yemek ve gastronomiyi nasıl ele aldığını incelemektedir. Çalışmada hem Türk hem de yabancı vloggerların videolarında yemek anlatılarının turizm faaliyet kapsamında nasıl ele alındığı ve izleyicisine nasıl aktarıldığı ele alınmıştır. Çalışma Türk ve yabancı içerik üreticilerinin Youtube platformuna yüklediği seyahat vloglarından elde edilen verilere dayanmaktadır. Araştırma örneklemini belirlenirken YouTube platformunda Türkçe içerikler için “sokak yemeği”, “etnik yemek” ve “etnik mutfak” anahtar kelimeleri kullanılmış, yabancı içerikler için ise “Turkish street food”, “Turkish cuisine” ve “Turkish ethnic food” ifadeleriyle arama yapılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, Türk mutfağına odaklanmayan Türk içerik üreticilerinin yüklediği ve en çok izlenen 5 video ile Türk mutfağına odaklanan yabancı içerik üreticilerin yüklediği ve en çok izlenen 5 video araştırmanın örneklemini oluşturmuştur. Bu kapsamda araştırma sonucunda seyahat vloglarında yemeğin sadece deneyimlenerek aktarılan bir unsur olmadığı, vloggerların anlatılarında yemeğin aynı zamanda kültürel yanına da vurgu yapıldığı görülmüştür. Ayrıca videolar gidilen bölgenin mutfağını tanıtmaya işlevinin yanı sıra izleyicisine bir gastro-turizm deneyimi sunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda söz konusu videolar vakit geçirmek için bir izlenme aracı olmaktan çıkmakta, bunun yerine yerel mutfağı temsil eden bir hal almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Turizm, Dijital Gastro-turizm, Turizm Sosyolojisi, Gastronomi Turizmi, Seyahat Vlogu, Sokak Yemeği, Etnik Yemek.

Introduction

Digital technologies have now become a crucial part of travel planning and have made travel more accessible. With these technologies, individuals can organize various aspects of their trips—such as acquiring information, accommodation, and even before they arrive at their destination. In this regard, mobile applications, in particular, have evolved to enhance user experience and shape the tourism experience itself. Similarly, social media platforms can influence and shape the tourism experience even before travelers reach their destination, affecting their plans and expectations.

In this context, digital tourism refers to a concept that influences a wide range of tourist activities—from choosing a travel destination to planning the trip, accessing the region, and experiencing the location. Platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube play an important role in sharing information about destinations with potential visitors who have not been there yet. Visuals, short videos, and vlogs uploaded by content creators help shape the tourist experience. These digital materials can influence many aspects of a trip—from deciding on the destination, to choosing where to visit, what to eat, and which activities to participate in.





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For travelers who are unfamiliar with a destination, social media content is vital in providing early information and familiarity. YouTube travel vlogs, in particular, allow viewers to prepare in advance by offering insights similar to those of actual tourist experiences. While producing such content, vloggers often record every step of the journey, from beginning to end, providing viewers with a kind of pre-prepared guide. These videos can also provide ideas about local-foreigner interactions, intercultural exchanges, and culturally specific customs.

Travel vlogs not only offer information about places to visit, but also serve as rich sources for understanding the culinary culture of a destination by presenting detailed information about ingredients, preparation methods, and eating styles, in addition to covering aspects such as border crossing, accommodations, and the overall journey. Within this scope, the study investigates the narrative techniques employed by content creators in gastronomy themed videos, the themes through which local cuisines are depicted, and how these representations present a destination's culinary identity.

Web 2.0 refers to a period in which internet users moved beyond being mere consumers of content to become active content creators. Through platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, and Blogger, information sharing and online collaboration have become possible; thus, the web has been reshaped into a participatory environment where individuals engage in social interaction, write, and read content (McHaney and Sachs 2016: 10). In this context, travel vlogs often include the presentation of the local cuisine of the destination, highlight traditional ingredients and their significance within the culinary culture, reflect the content creator's personal perceptions of the food, and explore what is considered edible from a cultural standpoint in the destination visited. Furthermore, practical information such as which venues to visit and the approximate costs of dining at each location is also shared with viewers in these videos.

Before discussing the content of travel vlogs, it is essential to first consider the concept of vlogs, which were preceded by and evolved from blogs as their original form. The term "blog" is a shortened form of "web log," which refers to an online journal. The word "log" typically denotes a form of diary writing, but instead of focusing solely on personal thoughts and emotions, it usually centers around a specific topic or area of interest. "Vlog," derived from "video log," is the video-based version of a blog, presented in video format rather than written text (Barrington 2017: 6). It is important here to address the nature of travel-related blogs. In travel blogs, the city is no longer merely a virtual image but becomes a space where centuries-old traditional knowledge is preserved and transmitted (Çetinkaya 2020: 151). When it comes to blogs on gastronomy, they have been shown to influence a destination's food image and travelers' behavioral intentions (Evliyaoğlu 2023).





1. Research Method

This study aims to examine travel vlogs, which can be considered within the scope of digital tourism activities, from the perspective of gastro-tourism. It specifically focuses on how the cultural dimension of food is represented in vlog content produced on the YouTube platform. In this context, the study analyzes the narrative strategies adopted by vloggers in gastronomy-themed videos, the themes through which local cuisines are represented, and how these representations present a destination's culinary identity.

Digitalization has brought about a profound transformation in the tourism sector, replacing traditional promotional tools with user-generated content. Within this transformation, vloggers producing content on digital platforms such as YouTube are not only individuals who share their personal experiences but also serve as cultural intermediaries. In this respect, digital gastro-tourism presents a unique intersection between tourism studies and digital culture. This study aims to contribute to the literature on digital gastro-tourism by offering a new perspective on how digital content production shapes cultural representations. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is local culinary culture represented through narrative strategies in food-themed YouTube travel vlogs?
2. How do foreign vloggers represent Turkish cuisine and its cultural context in their YouTube travel videos?
3. How do Turkish vloggers portray foreign cuisines in their gastronomy-themed content?

In this study, the qualitative content analysis method was used. According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009: 308), qualitative content analysis involves examining the meanings and contexts of texts and speeches in a holistic manner. This method goes beyond merely counting words; it aims to explore both explicit and implicit meanings, themes, and patterns within the texts. In this way, social reality can be analyzed through both a scientific and subjective approach. The sample consisted of videos by Turkish content creators and vlog entries by foreign creators focusing on Türkiye. During the sampling process, the keywords "*sokak yemeği*," "*etnik yemek*," and "*etnik mutfak*" were used for Turkish content on YouTube, while the phrases "Turkish street food," "Turkish cuisine," and "Turkish ethnic food" were used for foreign content. Based on the search results, the five most-viewed videos by Turkish content creators focusing on non-Turkish cuisine and the five most-viewed videos by foreign content creators about Türkiye were selected for analysis. These video contents (approximately eight and a half hours of data) were examined using the content analysis method.





2. Digital Tourism and Digital Gastro-Tourism

Digital tourism signifies a significant change in the way travel experiences are promoted, accessed, and enjoyed, largely influenced by the progress in digital technology. It includes various tools and applications that enhance each phase of the travel process, from planning before the trip to experiencing and providing feedback afterward, all through digital platforms. Digital tourism refers to the incorporation of digital technologies into the tourism sector to enhance tourist experiences and improve the efficiency of tourism services. It involves the use of online platforms, mobile applications, and digital tools for travel planning, bookings, and various tourist activities including eating.

The use of technological devices in an inclusive way within tourism activities has transformed the scope of tourism. Some studies in the literature indicate that tourist behavior has changed through the use of certain devices (Reverte and Solis 2020; Zbucnea 2018; González-Padilla 2022). The significant point here is the impact of media and digital tools on tourists and tourism. In a study conducted by Reijnders (2011), the impact of books on tourism was discussed, while Beeton (2005) highlighted the influence of television on tourism and introduced the concepts of 'TV tourism,' 'movie tourism,' 'movie-induced tourism,' or 'film-induced tourism.' The use of the internet and mobile phones in tourism is also highly important for discussions on digital tourism (Adeola and Evans 2019; Dickinson, Hibbert, and Filimonau 2016; Costa Liberato, Alén-González and Azevedo Liberato 2018). Another dimension of digital tourism involves the content created by individuals on social media platforms. In other words, people following these platforms are experiencing a form of digital tourism. There are claims in the literature that content shared on social media is gaining increasing importance in the field of tourism (Gretzel 2019; Xiang and Gretzel 2010; Xu, Lovett, and Law 2022). In addition to these, virtual reality has also become a usable tool for digital tourism activities (An, Choi, and Lee 2021).

As a hybrid platform combining entertainment, information, and personal experience, YouTube has become a significant space for travel-related content, particularly through vlogs. There are various studies indicating that the YouTube platform influences tourism activities (Belanio, Apostol, Barrera and Mandigma 2022; Briciu and Alexandru Briciu 2020; Wadhwa and Bansal 2022; Dewantara, Gardiner and Jin 2023; Reino and Hay 2011). According to Choi, Hickerson, and Kerstetter (2018), videos on YouTube featuring a tourist destination provide viewers with sets of information about the area, which has an impact on tourism.

A study conducted by Silaban, Chen, Nababan, Eunike, and Silalahi (2022) examined the information-seeking behavior of individuals as consumers and tourists through travel vlogs. The research found that consumers seeking information tend to prefer more educational content and that the sense of social presence increases during the information-seeking process.





Additionally, while highlighting that these vlogs are watched for entertainment purposes, the study also revealed that consumers driven by entertainment are emotionally influenced by the vlogs. Furthermore, the research emphasized that vlogs create a sense of satisfaction in consumers and strengthen their perception of social presence. One of the key findings of the study is that the emotions evoked while watching vlogs significantly impact the intention to travel.

Another study conducted by Chen, Guo, and Pan (2021) examined the characteristics of travel vlogs and the impact of these characteristics on travel behavior. According to the research findings, vlogger attractiveness, perceived interactivity, perceived entertainment, and perceived usefulness are associated with travel intention. Additionally, travel vlogs have a positive effect on viewers' intention to travel. In their research, Bai, Lee, Wu, and Wong (2023) investigated how short travel videos influence familiarity with travel destinations and the intention to visit. According to the research findings, these short travel videos significantly impact the level of familiarity with the destination and have a substantial effect on travel intention. Şahin (2021: 61) found in his study that the novelty and informativeness of travel vlog content influence the intention to visit the tourist destination.

A similar study by Islam, Hussin, Kumar, Ragavan, and Yee (2024), based on interviews with 231 participants in Bangladesh, examined the impact of vlogs on tourists' intentions to visit destinations. According to the findings, tourists perceive travel vlogs as trustworthy based on the quality and reliability of their content and adopt the vlog information. Accordingly, the study concludes that vlogs have a significant influence on travel decision-making. A study conducted by He, Xu, and Chen (2021) examined the practice of travel vlogging in light of its growing popularity. The study is based on interviews with 12 vlog creators and an analysis of their vlog content. The study concluded that travel vlogging has an impact on tourist experiences. Through travel vlogs, tourists can establish a distinction between the self and the other.

While vlogs provide information about specific regions, they do not only focus on tourist destinations; they also offer valuable insights into the local cuisine and food culture. The concept of gastro-tourism, which refers to the experience of a region's culinary traditions and food culture, has also emerged as a central theme in many vlogs. According to Hall and Sharples (2003: 9), gastro-tourism, also referred to as food tourism, is defined as travel to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and specific regions. The main motivation behind such travel is food tasting and/or experiencing the characteristic features of a specialized food production region. Hall and Mitchell (2005: 86) regard gastro-tourism as a rapidly growing area of niche tourism. However, various elements of supply and demand contribute to the creation of a complex business environment. Nevertheless, due to changes in consumption habits, food and beverages are no longer seen merely as sources of





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nutrition but as components of a lifestyle, which in turn creates significant opportunities for producers. This experiential journey within gastro-tourism is associated with a particular lifestyle that involves experimentation, learning from different cultures, acquiring knowledge, and understanding the qualities or attributes related to tourism products. At the same time, this journey also enables the acquisition of knowledge and insight through the consumption of culinary specialties unique to that region (UNWTO 2012: 6).

According to Richards (2002: 12), when gastronomy can be linked to specific countries or regions, it becomes a powerful tourism marketing tool. Authenticity has always been considered an important aspect of tourism consumption, and the desire to discover “authentic” “ and regional foods can turn into a strong motivation for visiting a particular destination. In a study conducted by Fox (2007), the importance of gastronomic identity for Croatian tourism is emphasized. According to this study, gastronomic heritage holds significant value as it provides an opportunity for self-promotion and offers a competitive advantage on a global scale.

When studies on the digitalization of gastro-tourism are examined, it is generally observed that the research focuses on the digitalization efforts of restaurants (Martin, Garcia, and Romero 2022; Blöcher and Alt 2021). In a study conducted by Yayla, Göde, and Ekincek (2024), the food preferences of digital nomads as gastronomic tourists were examined. Based on data obtained from digital nomads’ comments, videos, and semi-structured interviews, the study revealed that digital nomads take gastronomy into account when selecting destinations. As a result, five distinct gastro-tourist profiles were identified: “Local Flavor Hunters, Gastronomy Adventurers, Budget-Conscious Food Lovers, Cultural Explorers, and Health and Sustainability Focused People”.

Rauf and Pasha (2024) examined how YouTube vlogs on gastro-tourism reflect Global North–South relations and how international audiences respond to this content. The study is based on data obtained from a total of nine vlog videos by three popular Northern YouTube vloggers and more than 128,000 comments on these videos. According to the findings, YouTube vlogs offer viewers authentic cultural experiences and hold the potential to soften the Global North–South divide. The study positions food as a cultural artifact and reveals that, through gastro-tourism, the interaction between locals and foreigners holds the potential to bridge global divides. This is exemplified by tourists from the global North expressing appreciation for local cuisine and learning new ways of living from the local context. Such vlogs also evoke expressions of global friendship among international YouTube audiences and contribute to reshaping the image of a destination (Rauf and Pasha 2024: 422-423).





3. Findings

3.1. Vlogs as a Digital Tourism Experience

The videos made by the vloggers included in the study cover a complete tourism experience from start to finish. During a trip, a tourist goes through various stages such as traveling to the airport, check-in process, passport control, arrival in the destination country, acquiring a SIM card or internet access, arrival at the accommodation, using public transportation, visiting tourist attractions, and returning to their home country. Vloggers include all these stages of a tourist experience in their videos. They record the entire journey, from the moment they leave for the airport to the point when they return home, and share it with their followers. This allows their followers to experience a digital tourism journey with all aspects of an ordinary tourist experience.

In the past, partial tourist experiences were provided to viewers through video documentaries, where information about a region was shared through videos. However, these documentaries were generally produced to promote a country or city and usually contained comprehensive information about the area. On the other hand, vlogs offer viewers the opportunity to experience a complete tourism journey from start to finish from the view point of an ordinary individual not an expert. The differences between documentaries and vlogs are not limited to this. These differences can be observed in several key aspects, including the following:

1. Change in the Source of Information: While video documentaries often provide important information about a region with the help of tour guides or experts, vloggers tend to gather information from ordinary people they meet during their travels.

2. Change in the tone of language/Informal Language: Video Documentaries typically use more formal language, whereas vloggers tend to use a more informal and casual tone.

3. Change in the Content of the Information: Documentaries usually focus on topics such as the history and cuisine of a country or city, whereas vloggers provide information about what viewers can do and how they can experience a city when they visit including very personal aspects. An important example here is budget management. Vloggers often create videos about how much they spend in the places they visit, offering valuable information to their viewers on managing their budget, which is a key factor in tourism activities, and influencing their tourism experiences.

4. The Change in Filming and Narrative Style: While traditional documentaries rely more on narration over visuals of the region and specific locations, vloggers tend to use more personal filming techniques, such as recording themselves with action cameras.





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The rise of vlogs as a new form of digital tourism has transformed the way people experience and engage with travel content. Unlike traditional documentaries that often present formal, expert-driven insights about a destination, vlogs offer a more engaging and relatable experience by following a tourist's journey through all stages of travel. From practical information about airport processes and local transportation to personal insights on budget management, vloggers provide their viewers with a comprehensive, real-time travel experience. This shift toward informal, on-the-ground reporting allows viewers to gain a deeper, more authentic understanding of what it's like to visit a particular destination.

3.2. Vlogs as a Gastro-tourism Experience

In recent years, one of the most influential factors shaping tourism activities has been the cuisine and food culture of a destination, which has also begun to manifest itself on digital platforms. Vloggers who produce digital content, particularly those who focus on travel and food, experience and share the culinary specialities of different regions they visit with their audiences. Within the scope of this study, a total of 10 videos that offer a digital gastro-tourism experience were analyzed. Information regarding these videos is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Information on the Analyzed Videos

Youtube Channel	Title of Video	Code of the Video	Video Duration	Total Views	Upload Date
Emre Durmuş	İran'ın Efsane Sokak Yemeklerini Deniyorum - 1 Kilo Safran 1000 Dolar	V1	13:58	5.1 Million	2 January 2020
Emre Durmuş	Hindistan'ın İlginç Sokak Yemeklerini Deniyorum! (Acayip Yemekler)	V2	16:12	5.1 Million	25 April 2019
Emre Durmuş	Burada At Eti Satıyorlar (Çok Değerli) – Kazakistan Fiyatlar ve Sokak Yemekleri	V3	19:57	4.6 Million	19 August 2018
Alper Rende	Suriye'nin Garip Sokak Lezzetleri!	V4	24:21	4 Million	21 October 2023
Alper Rende	Pakistan Sokak Yemeklerini Denedim!!	V5	21:50	3.2 Million	10 August 2024
Mark Wiens	Best STREET FOOD in Türkiye!! 49 Turkish Meals - Istanbul to Gaziantep! [Full Documentary]	V6	3:24:14	5.3 Million	17 August 2024





Luisito Comunica	Tasting street food in TURKEY : The origin of tacos?	V7	10:46	24 Million	9 December 2017
Flying the Nest	We Tried Turkish Street Food in Istanbul	V8	18:01	5.4 Million	6 September 2018
Wanderers Hub	Eating only TURKISH Food for 24 HOURS *SATISFYING*	V9	9:49	4.8 Million	23 May 2022
Luke Martin	36 Turkish STREET FOODS Across Turkey!! GAZIANTEP Baklava, ISTANBUL Döner + ADANA Kebab	V10	1:03:33	5.3 Million	16 January 2022

3.2.1. Exploring the new taste: “Now we will experience what is in here”

Experiencing the local cuisine of a destination has become a significant aspect of tourism, particularly as part of a broader travel experience. In some cases, culinary experiences themselves constitute the primary motivation for travel, thus transforming such trips into gastro-tourism activities. Travel vlogs are not exempt from this trend; while some focus on the daily routines of travel, others are entirely dedicated to local food experiences. In the analyzed videos, trying the local cuisine is portrayed as a meaningful touristic endeavor. Since vloggers themselves are engaged in tourism activities, they tend to view and present these culinary experiences from the perspective of a tourist. In V1, exploring Iranian cuisine, the vlogger says, “Since I’m in Iran, I want to see what kind of flavors there are (Emre Durmuş 2020).” Similarly, in V8 on Turkish cuisine, the statement “Since we’re in Istanbul, we should go out and search for traditional dishes (Flying the Nest 2018)” is made. Such remarks indicate that the touristic aspect of these videos cannot be separated from actual tourism practices. The individuals in the videos are actively seeking out the local cuisine, and this intent becomes a central component of the narrative. By sharing their culinary experiences, vloggers allow viewers to engage with tourism indirectly through digital means. In short, regional cuisine is presented as a touristic experience and made available to viewers through visual media.

Another important finding relates to how vloggers choose which restaurants, markets, and dishes to feature. Some select venues at random, others rely on prior internet research, and some are guided by locals or tour guides they meet during their travels. In V6 and V10, the vloggers go beyond a single city and explore Turkish dishes across multiple regions. In V6, which is shot in Gaziantep, the vlogger is guided by someone who knows the local cuisine and refers to the city as the “culinary capital of Turkey”. In contrast, other foreign vloggers focus exclusively on Istanbul. Turkish vloggers, on the other hand, produce content about various international cuisines, including Iranian, Indian, Kazakh, Syrian, and Pakistani. These videos often feature a local guide or acquaintance who assists the content creator in navigating the local cuisine. However, spontaneous food choices made while wandering the streets also play





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a role. Sometimes vloggers are intrigued by unfamiliar foods, as seen in V1, when the vlogger expresses curiosity about a type of gum sold in the streets of Iran. In some cases, they even question why certain ingredients or dishes are absent from their own culinary traditions, such as in V1, the vlogger reflects on the underuse of coconut in Turkish cuisine.

The content of the videos are not limited to food tasting. Many also include visits to markets that sell ethnic products, an activity shared by both foreign vloggers exploring Turkish markets and Turkish vloggers examining those in other countries. Turkish content creators often emphasize shared cultural elements in these marketplaces. For instance, in V3, the vlogger describes such markets in Kazakhstan as spaces for “getting to know the region’s culture.” Through this lens, vloggers transform these physical spaces into digitally mediated cultural encounters.

The introduction of foods in the videos may occur by chance—when vloggers encounter unfamiliar dishes unexpectedly—or be planned in advance, with specific items or drinks targeted for tasting. Another key pattern is the effort to identify and explain ingredients during the tasting process. When guided by someone with local culinary expertise, vloggers share accurate ingredient information. In the absence of such a guide, they rely on guesswork. When the ingredients cannot be identified by taste or appearance, vloggers may describe them as “strange” or “weird.” Additionally, personal preferences or dietary restrictions can shape the culinary content. For example, in V9 the vloggers declare themselves vegetarians and refrain from trying meat-based dishes, which affects the direction of their content.

Beyond ingredients, vloggers also comment on cooking methods. While some perceive these methods as novel, others draw comparisons with their own cultural practices. In V1, for instance, the vlogger describes corn cooking techniques in Iran as unusual, whereas in V7 it is noted that corn preparation in Turkey is identical to that in Mexico. However, in V7, the differences in presentation are also pointed out, stating that while corn in Turkey is served with only salt, in Mexico it is commonly accompanied by mayonnaise, cheese, and chili peppers. This comparison suggests that even when the preparation process is similar, the evaluation of food remains embedded in the vlogger’s own cultural framework.

3.2.2. Presentation of the Cuisine/Food

Another significant aspect related to the featured dishes in the videos is the inclusion of visuals showing their preparation process. In many cases, detailed information about the stages of preparation and cooking is conveyed through visual content. The videos coded as V1, V5, V6, and V10 include segments that show how the dishes are prepared. In particular, V6 provides in-depth insights by documenting the entire preparation process and the food production areas. Relevant visuals from the content produced by this vlogger are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2.





Figure 1: Scene Depicting the Preparation of Baklava
(Mark Wiens 2024)



Figure 2: Scene Depicting the Preparation of Analı Kızlı (Mark Wiens 2024)



In Figure 1, a still image is taken from a video segment filmed at one of the prominent *baklava* production workshops in Gaziantep. In this part of the video, the content creator documents, step by step, the entire production process of *baklava*: from preparing the dough and rolling it out, to highlighting the key considerations during preparation, identifying the main ingredients, and explaining when and how they are incorporated into the dessert.

Figure 2 features a scene from Adana where the preparation process of *analı-kızlı* is shown. Similar to the first example, it includes information on the main ingredients, when they are added, and specific points of attention during cooking. Within this context, V6 provides highly detailed insights into Turkish cuisine, acquiring knowledge directly from local people and establishments in the regions where these dishes originate. Its content reveals the gastronomic potential of the region and offers viewers a level of cultural and culinary detail that they may not easily access even if they visited the same location as tourists.

In addition to the preparation process, the videos also include historical background on the dishes. For instance, in V2 which about India, the vlogger tries a dessert similar to ice cream called *kulfi*, and shares both how it is made and the traditional story behind it. In V2 it is stated that “They hollow out the fruit, boil the milk for a long time, pour it in while hot, and then freeze it. It freezes inside the fruit itself like this. The story behind it is that they developed this method to preserve food underground during winter (Emre Durmuş 2019).” This illustrates how the video communicates not only the technique but also the historical reasoning for the dish's consumption style.

Moreover, the videos frequently inform viewers about how specific foods should be eaten, especially when they involve culturally specific practices. For example, the pairing of *simit* with tea, eating *baklava* upside down, the proper way to eat *Adana kebab*, or dishes traditionally eaten by hand are all presented in videos made by foreign vloggers exploring Turkish cuisine.





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Figure 3: Scene Indicating Price Information 1 (Luke Martin 2022)



Figure 4: Scene Indicating Price Information 2 (Luke Martin 2022)



Another noteworthy aspect observed in the videos is that vloggers often include information about the prices of the foods they feature. These price details are provided for the benefit of viewers who may consider engaging in similar touristic activities. Sometimes, prices are shown on-screen as text, while in other cases, they are verbally conveyed by the vlogger. Additionally, content creators may evaluate the prices based on their own economic context or by comparing them to the prices of similar products in their home countries. For instance, in V3, the vlogger compares the price of a horse meat sausage in Kazakhstan with the price of a beef sausage in Türkiye.

When discussing food, vloggers also occasionally mention its relationship to health or its perceived effects on human well-being. The health benefits of certain foods are highlighted in some of the videos, such as the blood-enhancing properties of beets and the digestive benefits of a particular tea.

Figure 5: Presentation Scene of Testi Kebab (Luke Martin 2022)



Figure 6: Presentation Scene of Künefe Dessert (Mark Wiens 2024)



In the videos, especially those focusing on Turkish cuisine, vloggers often highlight performative aspects of food presentation. These performative elements—such as dramatic or culturally specific ways of serving dishes—are presented not merely as visual content but as integral parts of the gastro-tourism experience. Such performances draw attention to the theatrical dimension of food service and aim to enhance the appeal for the viewer. Figure 5





(from V10) and Figure 6 (from V6) show close-up scenes that illustrate these types of presentations in the videos. Another recurring element in Turkish cuisine-related videos is the playful presentation of Maraş ice cream, which is also portrayed as part of the performative aspect of food and framed as a cultural expression of the culinary tradition, as seen in the videos coded as V8 and V9.

The analyzed videos also show that vloggers frequently provide historical information about the places they visit. These venues, where the dishes are produced and served, are not just filming locations—they are also introduced as culturally significant spaces. In V6, the vlogger shares details about the establishment dates of the venues, how many generations have managed the business, and whether the operation is still family-run. In some scenes, the information is obtained directly from the owners themselves. For instance, in the video the following is stated:

At Le Master Bakers – yes, the brothers, the Master Chef brothers – with 50 and 30 years of experience each. That’s incredible! And yes, the new generation is still completely family-run. This is an amazing family enterprise that started back in 1930 – almost 100 years ago. What an excellent legacy. A true family heritage still run by the fourth generation today (Mark Wiens 2024).

Similar historical contextualization appears in V10 and V2. In V2, the story of a restaurant is stated as follows:

The story of this place is actually like this: Karimii dates back to the 16th–17th century. It all started when this man began selling food from a small stall and eventually became very famous. His special spices and cooking methods have never been fully known—he keeps it a secret (Emre Durmuş 2019).

These narratives contribute to a deeper understanding of culinary heritage and reinforce the cultural value of both food and the spaces where it is prepared and consumed.

3.2.3. Cultural Approximation of Food

Another notable aspect observed in the videos is the tendency of content creators to interpret and describe the food they try by referencing their own cultural background. In doing so, vloggers attempt to make the unfamiliar more relatable for their audience by comparing it to flavors, dishes, or experiences that are culturally familiar. This strategy allows them to bridge cultural distance and enhance viewer understanding.

This practice appears in various forms across the analyzed content. For example, in V1 about Iran, the vlogger compares a *bakla* dish he encounters on the street with a similar *bakla* dish from his own culture. In V2 about India, the vlogger describes *kala jamun*, a local dessert, as “similar to Turkish lokma, but darker in color (Emre Durmuş 2019).” The same pattern is evident in the videos of foreign vloggers as well. For instance, *lahmacun* is frequently referred to as





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"Turkish pizza," drawing comparisons to a globally known and easily recognizable dish. In V8, salep is presented as similar to a chai tea latte or a soup commonly consumed during Christmas, suggesting an effort to frame the unfamiliar dish through culturally familiar terms. In V10, simit, a dish from Turkish cuisine, is compared to bagel, a product found in another country's cuisine. In this case, the content creator draws a comparison not with a food from their own culture, but with a dish they had previously tried from another culture. Also in V6, içli köfte is described as similar to kibbeh, a dish from Arab cuisine. In V7, the content creator draws a comparison between döner and tacos from his own country. He expresses this in the video as follows: *"Something that fascinated me from the moment I arrived is that everywhere you go, you see kebab stalls, meat placed on a vertical rotisserie, just like the ones we see on street corners in Mexico. It's clear that this region of the world influenced the 'trompo' used for tacos al pastor (Luisito Comunica 2017)."* This illustrates how similar dishes can be associated with one another when experienced across different cultures. These examples indicate that food is not always defined strictly by one's own national cuisine but also through familiar experiences with other cultures' dishes.

Notably, such comparisons are not limited to taste or preparation methods; they are also informed by consumption patterns. For instance, in V4, it is explained that *falafel dürüm* is very common in Syria, just like *çiğ köfte dürüm* is in Türkiye. This form of cultural approximation is based not on ingredient similarity, but on the frequency and setting in which the food is consumed.

Conclusion

The analysis of videos within the framework of digital tourism and gastro-tourism activities reveals that gastronomy-themed content is not merely a form of entertainment, but also functions as a tool for cultural transmission and representation. The food experiences conveyed by vloggers are presented not only as flavor trials but also as integral components of touristic engagement—indicating that food culture has become an inseparable part of the travel experience. In this regard, the culinary experiences featured in the analyzed videos extend beyond consumption and embody cultural exploration and tourism.

Both Turkish and foreign vloggers tend to perceive the exploration of local cuisine as a natural part of their travel experience. These experiences are often shaped with the assistance of local people or guides. While there is an element of spontaneity in content production, the narrative flow and information provided are frequently guided by individuals familiar with the local context. This suggests that, although personal choices play a role, there is also a deliberate effort to convey local knowledge. In some cases, vloggers rely on online research to structure their culinary journeys and determine the information to share—highlighting how knowledge produced for digital platforms is often built through other digital means. This





dynamic demonstrates that such gastro-tourism content can be both spontaneous and systematically structured.

Elements such as preparation methods, ingredients, presentation styles, historical journey of dishes, and the heritage of specific food venues are commonly featured in these videos, serving as narrative devices that contribute to cultural transmission. These representations enable viewers to access gastronomic knowledge and experience digital forms of tourism. Vloggers use their own cultural references to communicate these food experiences, creating a shared frame of understanding with audiences from similar backgrounds. In doing so, they adopt a “strategy of cultural approximation,” aligning unfamiliar foods with culturally familiar counterparts. Visual depictions, demonstrations of presentation techniques, and footage of preparation processes enrich the audience’s experience by providing both verbal and visual engagement with the food.

In some cases, information about the historical background of food establishments further emphasizes the cultural heritage aspect of local cuisine, suggesting that food is more than an edible item and is also a bearer of historical and cultural meaning. This approach allows viewers, who might not otherwise access such information during a typical touristic encounter, to gain deeper insights. In addition, the association between food and health, which is culturally shaped, occasionally appears in these videos, illustrating the intersection between cuisine, well-being, and cultural belief systems.

Overall, these videos serve not only as tools for introducing local foods, but also provide viewers with a digital gastro-tourism experience. They act as informal cultural intermediaries, fostering intercultural interaction through food narratives. In this sense, gastronomy-themed vlogs function as both informative and mediatory practices within the broader landscape of digital tourism.

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