

## **Social Media, Destination Framing and its Impact on Culinary Heritage Tourism from the Traveller's Perspective**

**Muhammad Safuan Abdul Latip<sup>1\*</sup>, Siti Aisyah Tumin<sup>2</sup>, Alexander Trupp<sup>3</sup>, Ahmad Shuhaib Hamali<sup>4</sup>**  
*\*Corresponding Author*

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Terengganu, Malaysia.

<sup>1</sup> Asia Pacific Centre for Hospitality Research, School of Hospitality and Service Management, Sunway University, Malaysia.

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Geography, University of Innsbruck, Austria.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Tourism, Kolej Komuniti Sarikei Cawangan Sibul, Malaysia.

Email of All Authors: [safuanlatip@uitm.edu.my](mailto:safuanlatip@uitm.edu.my), [aisyahtumin@uitm.edu.my](mailto:aisyahtumin@uitm.edu.my), [alexander.trupp@uibk.ac.at](mailto:alexander.trupp@uibk.ac.at), [shuhaibhamali@kksarikei.edu.my](mailto:shuhaibhamali@kksarikei.edu.my)  
Tel: +609-840 0400

---

### **Abstract**

The study aims to explore how the framing of culinary heritage destinations influences travellers' perceptions, with a specific focus on social media platforms. Qualitative research was conducted through in-depth, face-to-face, and semi-structured interviews with twelve participants in Malaysia who were active on social media. The research findings highlighted the significant role of social media and emphasised the importance of utilising effective platforms and strategic framing to promote culinary heritage destinations and traditional foods. The study also suggests that framing culinary heritage destinations within the context of social media can influence travellers to visit these destinations for their culinary offerings.

Keywords: Culinary Heritage; Destination frame; Social media; Tourism

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2024. The Authors. Published for AMER and cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), College of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.  
DOI:

---

### **1.0 Introduction**

In today's digital landscape, social media has dramatically reshaped how travellers discover, experience, and share their journeys. This shift is particularly significant in the realm of culinary heritage tourism, where a destination's diverse and rich gastronomic traditions have become central to the tourist experience. Culinary heritage tourism, defined as travel with the specific intent of exploring and enjoying the food and beverages unique to a region, has grown in popularity as modern travellers increasingly seek authentic, immersive cultural experiences (Hjalager & Richards, 2002).

Social media's role in shaping travellers' perceptions and decisions regarding culinary destinations is undeniable. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook continuously expose users to curated images, reviews, and stories that create specific narratives about destinations. These narratives influence not only travellers' expectations but also their choices of where to visit (Javed et al., 2020).

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2024. The Authors. Published for AMER and cE-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers), and cE-Bs (Centre for Environment-Behaviour Studies), College of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia.  
DOI:

Destination framing on social media involves emphasizing certain features of a location while possibly omitting others. This selective portrayal can significantly influence how travellers perceive and choose their destinations (Hunter, 2016). For instance, a location that is often depicted as a culinary hotspot, filled with vibrant markets, traditional cooking classes, and delectable street food, is likely to attract food enthusiasts eager to explore its offerings (Mkono & Tribe, 2017). Conversely, if these culinary aspects are not highlighted, the same destination might seem less appealing to those specifically interested in culinary tourism, leading them to choose other locations.

However, there is a significant gap in understanding how these social media portrayals influence travellers' intentions to visit destinations as important culinary heritage sites. The issue lies in the potential for some destinations, despite having rich culinary heritage products, to be inadequately framed on social media, which hinders their ability to reach their full potential. This research seeks to address this issue by exploring the impact of social media framing on travellers' intentions and how it affects their perceptions of and decisions to visit culinary heritage destinations.

## 1.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Culinary heritage and tourism

Culinary heritage food plays a vital role in shaping the tourism industry by offering a unique opportunity for visitors to immerse themselves in the local food culture (Galati et al., 2023). In the context of Malaysia, with its rich and diverse ethnic and cultural background, culinary tourism takes on even greater significance. It serves as a gateway for tourists to explore and experience the vast array of traditional dishes and cooking styles that reflect the country's multicultural identity (May et al., 2021). The influence of culinary tourism on the economy cannot be overstated, as it represents a substantial contribution to the nation's overall economic landscape. Furthermore, it serves as a cornerstone of the local economy, influencing various sectors and contributing to the growth and sustainability of businesses involved in food production, hospitality, and tourism services (Wondirad et al., 2021). By leveraging its unique culinary heritage, Malaysia can continue to position itself as a desirable destination for travellers seeking an authentic and immersive cultural experience.

### 2.2 Social media and tourist behaviour

In the rapidly evolving landscape of today's world, the impactful integration of social media into the fabric of our daily lives has garnered immense significance. This pervasive influence extends its reach not only to the tech-savvy millennials and younger generations but also resonates deeply with adults and the elderly. Social media has transcended its role as a mere platform for interaction and now plays a vital role in facilitating communication, information acquisition, and social connectivity. It's not surprising that an increasing amount of information is now sought through digital platforms, marking a noticeable shift away from traditional printed materials such as newspapers and books. From a tourism perspective, the pervasive and influential use of social media within communities and among travellers has led to a rapid transition, elevating it to an indispensable platform for the promotion of tourism products and destinations.

### 2.2 Culinary heritage destination image

The image of the destination is a crucial factor that significantly influences tourists' decision-making process and behaviour. Thus, it contributes to the importance of destination framing (Yilmaz et al., 2020). Gastronomy tourism, a rapidly expanding sector within the travel industry, provides destinations with a unique platform to showcase their cultural uniqueness and diverse culinary offerings, setting them apart from their competitors. By leveraging their gastronomic attributes, destinations can effectively communicate their cultural identity while simultaneously appealing to the evolving tastes and preferences of an increasingly diverse traveller demographic. In order to maintain a competitive edge and establish a strong destination image, it is imperative for destinations to proactively identify and emphasise the attributes that contribute to their unique identity. This requires a strategic approach that involves highlighting the distinctive gastronomic features, culinary traditions, and local flavours that encapsulate the essence of the destination.

For prospective travellers, the process of forming a perception of a destination's image involves seeking relevant information that enables them to align their personal preferences and interests with the specific cultural and culinary offerings of the destination. This alignment allows travellers to develop a holistic impression of the destination's image, thereby influencing their travel intentions and decision-making process. Nevertheless, the task of identifying and projecting the desired destination image through its gastronomic characteristics is a multifaceted challenge that necessitates a comprehensive exploration of the attributes emphasised by destination stakeholders and authorities (Yilmaz et al., 2020). By integrating the perspectives derived from social media and the representation of a destination's culinary heritage, a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between food, culture, and the destination image can be achieved as supported by previous scholars (Asif & Fazel, 2024; Zhu et al., 2023). This holistic approach allows for a more nuanced comprehension of how a destination's unique culinary heritage contributes to shaping its overall image and appeal, thereby providing valuable insights for tourism stakeholders, policymakers, and industry professionals.

## 2.0 Methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach with purposive sampling and conducted face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol (Aspers & Corte, 2021). These interviews took place in various states across Malaysia to ensure the representation of different geographical areas and enhance the generalizability of the findings. The study included 12 active participants who were 18 years or older and had active social media accounts, which were used in the data analysis. The interview protocol was carefully designed and validated with input from five field experts.

The data was collected, transcribed, and analysed using NVivo software, which helped with thematic analysis. This involved identifying and coding key themes and patterns within the data to draw meaningful conclusions. The use of NVivo enabled a systematic approach to data management and interpretation, ensuring a thorough and accurate analysis of the interview content.

### 3.0 Findings

In the analysis, four significant findings emerged from the interview session. The study identified four distinct themes within the study context as discussed later.

#### 4.1 Social media and destination framing

The informants generally agree that social media provides a platform for culinary heritage destinations to engage directly with audiences and share their unique food cultures. It assists in information sharing and developing the destination's frame, shaping how a location is perceived and appreciated by potential visitors. The findings highlight social media's pivotal role in indirectly promoting destinations and traditional foods. Society can leverage their phones to collectively promote locations for free, effectively sharing messages with a global audience and enhancing the reach and impact of the promotion. Social media exposes people to various foods and their origins, encouraging them to visit those places and creating curiosity and a desire to experience these foods firsthand. People often decide what to eat and which new foods to try based on what they see shared on social media, influencing their dining experiences and preferences. Social media is a powerful tool for promoting and framing destinations to attract potential visitors, significantly enhancing the visibility and appeal of a destination when used effectively. Collectively, these insights emphasise the importance of social media in promoting and preserving traditional foods and destinations, ensuring broader exposure, engagement, and interest in culinary heritage and cultural locations.

*By using our phones, we can promote the location through the collective efforts of society for free. The message can be effectively shared with a global audience, "Informant 5".*

*Social media exposes people to foods and their origins, which encourages them to visit those places "Informant 1".*

*When traditional food programs are advertised on social media, the attraction and sharing happen more frequently, drawing in many visitors, "Informant 10".*

*Social media is definitely a powerful tool. If used effectively, it can help promote and frame the destination to attract potential visitors, "Informant 5".*

#### 4.2 Information sharing and destination framing

Through discussions with informants, several key insights about the role of social media in information sharing and destination framing have been revealed. Social media platforms offer more interactive search results with features like videos and music, making the experience both easy and entertaining. One advantage is that social media provides up-to-date information, in contrast to guidebooks that may only be published semi-annually or annually, risking outdated information. Social media helps users discover new foods and places, such as the must-try dish Asam Pedas in Melaka, which people often search for online and contribute to a destination frame related to culinary heritage. These insights underscore the critical role of social media in providing timely, engaging, and relevant information, effectively framing and promoting destinations and their unique food cultures.

*If we use social media, the search results are more interactive. For example, TikTok provides videos with music and other features, making it easy and entertaining for me, "Informant 11".*

*Information on social media is also up-to-date and latest, unlike guidebooks which might be published every 6 months or once a year. Therefore, the information could be outdated, "Informant 10".*

*Social media plays a role in helping us find information about foods we've never tried and places we haven't visited. For example, in Melaka, Asam Pedas is a must-try dish that people often search for on social media "Informant 11".*

*Young people prefer foreign foods and trends from social media, often overlooking local traditional cuisine. Thus, focusing on social media is crucial "Informant 2".*

#### 4.3 Culinary heritage destination's influence on travelers

The findings highlight the importance of using effective platforms and strategic framing to promote and preserve traditional foods. It is crucial to provide accessible information and exposure to draw attention to and underscore the significance of traditional foods. Promoting Malaysian food is essential as it shares cultural ties with countries like Indonesia, contributing to the preservation and celebration of traditional cuisine. When used effectively, social media can significantly promote and showcase destinations to attract potential visitors. In addition, traditional culinary tourism should be clearly positioned as a key product for each state, as not all states currently emphasise their traditional foods as significant tourism products. Considering the growing trend of food tourism, all states should promote their local cuisine as a major attraction. These insights collectively underscore the importance of strategic information sharing and framing in promoting traditional foods and leveraging culinary heritage as a key aspect of cultural tourism.

*Yes, to make traditional foods famous and preserved, there needs to be a platform where information about these foods is accessible and exposed to users. Effective framing of this information is crucial to capture attention and highlight the significance of the traditional foods, "Informant 8".*

*Promoting Malaysian food is crucial as it's shared with countries like Indonesia. It highlights our connection to traditional cuisine, "Informant 5",*

*Social media is definitely a powerful tool. If used effectively, it can help promote and frame the destination to attract potential visitors, "Informant 5".*

*Traditional culinary tourism should be clearly framed as a key product for each state. Not all states highlight their traditional foods as significant tourism products, but all should promote their local cuisine as a key attraction. Nowadays, people are more interested in food when travelling, with food hunting becoming a major trend in the tourism industry, "Informant 9."*

#### 4.4 Underframe destination and loss of potential

The discussion brings attention to a gap in the promotion of traditional foods across different states. Not all states prioritise their traditional foods as important tourism products, with some focusing more on other aspects of their attractions. For instance, while states like Penang, Melaka, and Kelantan prominently feature their traditional foods, Pahang's local cuisine does not receive the same level of attention. Instead, Pahang's tourism promotion often highlights its nature and highland attractions. This inequality results in some traditional foods being underrepresented and not frequently appearing on diverse social media feeds. To address this, there needs to be a more balanced approach to promoting traditional foods, ensuring they receive the visibility and recognition they deserve alongside other attractions.

*Not all states highlight their traditional foods as significant tourism products. All states should promote their local cuisine as a key attraction. Nowadays, people are more interested in food when travelling, with food hunting becoming a major trend in the tourism industry, "Informant 9".*

*Some states or tourist locations don't highlight their traditional foods, even if they have them. The promotion often focuses on other aspects. For example, Pahang's traditional food isn't as emphasised as a major attraction compared to places like Penang, Melaka, and Kelantan. While all states have their traditional foods, not all are fully promoted as key attractions. This lack of emphasis means there isn't enough sharing to appear frequently on diverse social media feeds, "Informant 8".*

*The lack of content showcasing local Malaysian traditional food results in limited exposure to the public, "Informant 9".*

## 4.0 Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role social media plays in promoting culinary heritage destinations and traditional foods. Social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram offer unique opportunities for engaging directly with audiences, sharing distinctive food cultures, and shaping how destinations are perceived by potential visitors. These platforms allow for the creation and dissemination of engaging content, such as videos and music, which makes promoting culinary destinations both easy and entertaining. Unlike traditional guidebooks that can quickly become outdated, social media provides timely and up-to-date information, making it a more reliable source for potential travellers. One significant advantage of social media is its ability to reach a global audience at no cost, as users collectively promote destinations by sharing posts. This grassroots promotion method exposes a wider audience to various traditional foods and their origins, fostering curiosity and a desire to experience these foods firsthand. The visual and interactive nature

of social media content strongly influences people's dining decisions and preferences, encouraging them to try new foods they see online.

Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of effective platforms and strategic framing to promote and preserve traditional foods. By providing accessible and engaging information, social media ensures broader exposure and interest in culinary heritage and cultural locations. This is especially crucial for promoting Malaysian food and contributing to the preservation and celebration of traditional cuisine. However, the study reveals an imbalance in the promotion of traditional foods across different states. This disparity results in some traditional foods being underrepresented on social media feeds. To address this, there needs to be a concerted effort to promote traditional foods from all states, ensuring they receive the visibility and recognition they deserve alongside other attractions. Coordinated campaigns highlighting the unique culinary offerings of each state could leverage social media's power to reach and engage a global audience. By positioning traditional culinary tourism as a key product for each state, tourism authorities can harness the growing trend of food tourism to attract more visitors. This approach enhances the visibility of traditional foods and contributes to their preservation and appreciation as integral aspects of cultural heritage.

### 5.1 Implications of study

The academic implications of this study highlight the necessity for further research on the strategic use of social media in tourism marketing, particularly in the context of culinary heritage. It suggests a need for deeper exploration into how different social media platforms can be optimised to target specific demographics and cultural segments. Academics can investigate the long-term effects of social media campaigns on destination popularity and visitor satisfaction, as well as how these platforms can be integrated into broader tourism marketing strategies.

Practically, this study offers valuable insights for tourism authorities and marketers. It underscores the importance of utilising social media to its fullest potential by creating engaging and up-to-date content that resonates with a global audience. Tourism boards should consider implementing coordinated social media campaigns that highlight the unique culinary offerings of each state, ensuring that underrepresented regions receive adequate promotion. By leveraging the power of social media, tourism authorities can attract more visitors, enhance the visibility of traditional foods, and contribute to the preservation of culinary heritage. This balanced and strategic approach to promotion can ultimately drive greater interest and investment in culinary tourism, benefiting local economies and preserving cultural identities.

## 6.0 Conclusion

This qualitative study highlights the role of social media in framing culinary heritage destinations and promoting traditional foods from the traveller's perspective. Social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram provide avenues for sharing unique food cultures and shaping destination images. The study stresses the need for a balanced approach to promote traditional foods across all Malaysian states, addressing disparities in their current representation. Effective use of social media can enhance visibility and global interest, and drive culinary tourism. For tourism stakeholders, these findings emphasise the need for strategic social media campaigns to preserve culinary heritage and bolster local economies.

## Acknowledgements

The project is funded by Universiti Teknologi MARA MyRA Fund 600-RMC/GPM LPHD 5/3 (104/2022).

## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper addresses the gap in how social media framing impacts travelers' decisions to visit culinary heritage destinations. It offers insights for better marketing strategies, supports sustainable tourism by promoting lesser-known areas, and contributes to academic research on social media's role in tourism.

## References

- Asif, M., & Fazel, H. (2024). Digital technology in tourism: a bibliometric analysis of transformative trends and emerging research patterns. In *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*. Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-11-2023-0847>
- Galati, A., Testa, R., Schifani, G., & Migliore, G. (2023). Tourists' motivation toward culinary destination choice: targeting Italian tourists. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 26(4), 647–668. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15378020.2021.1948295>
- Hjalager, A., & Richards, G. (2002). *Tourism and Gastronomy Edited by Anne-Mette Hjalager and Greg Richards Published by Routledge , London , May 2002 (Issue February 2002).*

- Hunter, W. C. (2016). The social construction of tourism online destination image: A comparative semiotic analysis of the visual representation of Seoul. *Tourism Management*, 54, 221–229. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.11.012>
- Javed, M., Tučková, Z., & Jibril, A. B. (2020). The role of social media on tourists' behavior: An empirical analysis of millennials from the Czech Republic. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 12(18). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187735>
- May, R. Y. Y., Aziz, K. A., Latif, R. A., Latip, M. S. A., Kwan, T. C., & Kadir, M. A. A. (2021). The success factors affecting street food stalls for gastronomic tourism competitiveness: A case of Petaling Jaya Old Town. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*, 13(1), 241–256. <https://doi.org/10.9756/INT-JECSE/V13I1.211026>
- Mkono, M., & Tribe, J. (2017). Beyond Reviewing: Uncovering the Multiple Roles of Tourism Social Media Users. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(3), 287–298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287516636236>
- Wondirad, A., Kebete, Y., & Li, Y. (2021). Culinary tourism as a driver of regional economic development and socio-cultural revitalization: Evidence from Amhara National Regional State, Ethiopia. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.100482>
- Yılmaz, G., Kılıçarslan, D., & Caber, M. (2020). How does a destination's food image serve the common targets of the UNESCO creative cities network? *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 6(4), 785–812. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-07-2019-0115>
- Zhu, C., Fong, L. H. N., Liu, C. Y. N., & Song, H. (2023). When social media meets destination marketing: the mediating role of attachment to social media influencer. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 14(4), 643–657. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-04-2022-0119>

**Note: Online license transfer**

All authors are required to complete the E-B Proceedings exclusive license transfer agreement before the article can be published. This transfer agreement enables e-IPH, Ltd., UK to protect the copyrighted material for the authors, but does not relinquish the authors' proprietary rights. The copyright transfer covers the exclusive rights to reproduce and distribute the article, including reprints, photographic reproductions, microfilm or any other reproductions of similar nature and translations. Authors are responsible for obtaining from the copyright holder, the permission to reproduce any figures for which copyright exists.