



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Journal of Destination Marketing &amp; Management

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jdmm](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jdmm)

## Marketing Istanbul as a culinary destination

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Istanbul

Food

Culinary

Tourism

Destination marketing

Turkey

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates whether and how Istanbul, Turkey is marketed and promoted as a culinary destination. Based on a critical literature review, a research framework was developed, and official brochures and websites for Istanbul, Turkey, were content-analyzed. The research findings suggest that although Istanbul has rich culinary resources and offers many domestic and international cuisines, the city is not well marketed and promoted as a culinary destination. This is one of the first studies discussing how far a leading urban destination in a developing country is not successfully marketed and promoted as a culinary destination. Based on the research findings, this study offers specific theoretical and practical implications on how Istanbul and similar destinations can better utilize their unique culinary resources.

## 1. Introduction

The attractiveness of a destination is often related to its capacity to satisfy tourists' needs and expectations. Alongside climate, accommodation, and scenery, experiencing foods (including beverages) is among the most important features when tourists evaluate a destination's attractiveness (Henderson, 2016; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Sotiriadis, 2015). Consumption of foods is not only a way of satisfying tourists' physical needs but also an opportunity to learn about different cuisines, people, culture, and traditions. While visiting a destination, tourists' food choices may vary (Almeida & Garrod, 2017). However, trying authentic foods can be one of the most desired activities for tourists (du Rand & Heath, 2006; Henderson, 2016; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; McKercher, Okumus & Okumus, 2008; Sotiriadis, 2015).

As an important element of tourism experiences, local foods, food experiences, and food tourism have received more attention in recent years (Kim & Jang, 2016; Lee & Scott, 2015; Ottenbacher, Harrington, Fauser, & Loewenhagen, 2016). Utilizing local cuisines has been an effective strategy for destination marketing (Okumus, Kock, Scantlebury, & Okumus, 2013; Robinson & Getz, 2014; Silkes, Cai, & Lehto, 2013). This is because food purchases constitute about one-third of overall tourist spending (Telfer & Wall, 2000; World Health Organization, 2015). Given this, local, regional and international cuisines available in a destination play a crucial role in destination selection and marketing efforts (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Getz, 2000; Okumus et al., 2013; Seo, Yun, & Kim, 2017; Silkes et al., 2013; Tellstrom, Gustafsson, & Mossberg, 2005). The reason for this is that tourists often spend considerable time searching, planning and

consuming foods in a destination (Robinson & Getz, 2014; Sotiriadis, 2015). Availability of local, regional and international foods is not only one of the main motivations for tourists to travel but also complements their travel experiences (Boyne, Williams, & Hall, 2002; Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016; Decrop & Snelders, 2005; Gyimothy, Rassing, & Wanhill, 2000; Henderson, 2016; Joppe, Martin, & Waalen, 2001; Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2015; Yolal, Chi, & Pesämaa, 2017).

With many scenic and historical landmarks, Istanbul is a leading destination for tourists globally. With a population of 17 million, Istanbul is the largest city in Turkey, containing 20% of the country's population (Turkstat, 2016). According to recent statistics, 22% of the country's GDP and 40% of tax revenues in 2016 came from Istanbul (Turkstat, 2016). In relation to tourism, 11.6 million international tourists visited Istanbul in 2016, making it the world's ninth most-visited city (McCarthy, 2017). Of this total, about a quarter of the nation's international tourists are concentrated on the European side, with 90% of the city's hotels also situated there (Multicity, 2017).

Istanbul is well known for its sophisticated culture and cuisine due to its rich historical background. Turkish cuisine is among the most popular global cuisines, enjoying a solid reputation alongside Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian, Greek, French and Italian cuisines (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007). Yet there is still limited empirical evidence and discussions on how far Turkey integrates local foods and gastronomic experiences into its marketing efforts. In particular, there has been no empirical study on whether and how Istanbul is marketed as a culinary destination. This is because it is the leading urban destination in Turkey and one of the

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leading destinations in Europe with its rich historical, cultural and culinary resources. Given this, this study aims to investigate whether and how far Istanbul, Turkey is being marketed and promoted as a culinary destination in official materials and websites from the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism (TMOCT), which culinary resources are utilized in promoting Istanbul. The paper also aims to discuss how Istanbul can better utilize local, regional and international culinary resources in its marketing efforts.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Food tourism

Food tourism refers to traveling to taste local and authentic foods, join food festivals and experience local and international cuisines (Hall & Sharples, 2003). It is also referred to culinary, gastronomy and gourmet tourism (Okumus et al., 2007). Food tourists are profiled under different groups ranging from those who are not interested in food to those who travel exclusively to taste local and unique cuisines (Andersson & Mossberg, 2017; Boyne et al., 2002; McKercher, Okumus, & Okumus, 2008). For example, previous studies have found that the majority of travelers recognize local cuisines as a major factor that effect their destination selection, travel experience and decision to return to the same destination (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Silkes et al., 2013).

The culinary products, services and food culture at a destination can be seen unique strategic resources, with few substitutes that cannot be easily imitated by other destinations (Hornig & Tsai, 2010; Okumus et al., 2007). First, food as a defining social marker represents the region and its local citizens (Anderson, 2005; Gillespie, 2002). Second, tourists may seek indigenous, ethnic and local foods. Although some travelers may avoid eating local foods (i.e. food neophobia), they may still be curious about the local foods and food experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Tangible elements of local and international foods (e.g. taste and ingredients) can contribute to cognitive and affective elements (e.g. emotions and experiences) of the destination image (Silkes et al., 2013).

There are different levels of interest in local and authentic cuisines. For tourists, local foods carry social, psychological, cultural and experiential meanings (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Williams, 1997). According to Frochot (2003), by consuming local foods, tourists can satisfy their needs, such as relaxation, excitement, escapism, status, education, and lifestyle. While the reasons for consuming local and international foods may vary (e.g. satisfying hunger, experiencing local cultures, social interaction), the availability of local and international foods can affect tourists' travel experiences and intention to return (Henderson, 2009).

Experiencing local foods can be a cultural experience and form of entertainment since it involves trying new things and experiencing the local traditions (Fields, 2002; Quan & Wang, 2004; Ryu & Jang, 2006; Sparks, Bowen, & Klag, 2003). Foods associated with a particular region can attract tourists to this destination if strategically marketed at periodical events, festivals or on the right social media platforms (Viljoen, Kruger, & Saayman, 2017). While some food enthusiasts may not believe they possess the qualities of a gourmet, they may still consider local foods as an important factor in their decisions to visit and revisit that destination. Therefore, the food tourism segment should be more than just an elite niche segment (Boniface, 2003; McKercher et al., 2008).

### 2.2. Using local cuisines in destination marketing

Foods at a destination reflect a sense of place (Bessiere, 1998; Jolliffe, 2016; Sims, 2009). The culinary resources and culture (e.g. ingredients, cooking styles and presentation) are location-specific and can play an important role in destination image formation (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Silkes et al., 2013). Foods represent

geography, climate, authenticity, history, culture, and nostalgia (Lee & Scott, 2015). Given this, identifying and promoting traditional foods and culinary experiences related to a specific destination can be influential in destination marketing efforts (Hornig, Liu, Chou, & Tsai, 2012; Okumus et al., 2013; Sims, 2009).

With an increasing interest in authentic foods, leveraging local cuisines is recognized as an effective tool in destination marketing, differentiation and branding (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Choe, Kim, & Cho, 2017; Hornig & Hu, 2009; Kim, Choe, & Lee, 2016; Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Kivela & Crofts, 2005; Lee, Sung, Suh, & Zhao, 2017; Okumus et al., 2013; Tsai & Wang, 2017). Even basic foods can be a major attraction if marketed well, as with truffles in Alba, Italy, and Napa Valley, California. Reflecting this, many destinations now focus on local foods as a tool to promote their destination and develop various events and festivals to highlight their cuisines (Jalis, Che, & Markwell, 2014; Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011; TanSiew & Hashim, 2013; Viljoen et al., 2017). Cooperation among public and private stakeholders in creating and sustaining a consistent image of a destination is also important when promoting local and regional foods (Ottenbacher et al., 2016)

Destination images are formed by various sources and considered a salient aspect of tourist decision making process (Gursoy, Chen & Chi, 2014; Nelson, 2016). Based on this, it is suggested that destinations should not include food and food experiences as part of destination experience but position local cuisines as a key aspect of destination image and advertising themes (Henderson, 2009). Jalis Che and Markwell (2014) particularly suggest that a destination should build up and strengthen a clear and distinct cuisine image to differentiate itself from its competitors. Local foods and beverages as place-based distinct assets are also considered sources of competitive advantage for destinations (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Truong, Lenglet, & Mothe, in press). Consistent with the above discussions, du Rand and Heath (2006) proposed a framework to promote a culinary destination. These authors suggest that each destination should particularly identify its unique culinary resources and images and focus on such food tourism enhancers. Their framework includes four main tasks, which are: (1) prioritizing culinary products and markets, (2) positioning and branding the destination, (3) theming, packaging and routing, and (4) promoting the culinary destination.

Thailand, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, Singapore and Vietnam (Henderson, 2009; Hornig & Tsai, 2010) are countries that highlight their culinary resources and clearly position their destinations alongside more established culinary destinations such as France, Italy and Spain. Moreover, destination management organizations (DMOs) such as the Australian Tourist Commission, Canadian Tourism Commission and Hong Kong Tourism Board concentrate on culinary resources in their destination marketing efforts (Hornig & Tsai, 2012). There are specific examples of destinations developing gastronomy clubs and tours and use them as promotional materials for their destinations. For example, the Catalan Tourist Board developed 'Gastronomic Club' and the 'Gastroteca' initiatives and promoted them as tourist routes for visitors aiming to test local foods and drinks (Londoño, 2011).

### 2.3. Promoting culinary tourism through published materials and websites

Tourists' decision making to travel a destination and trying local cuisines would be greatly influenced by information sources (Pawaskar & Goel, 2016). Given this, food-related content on websites and in brochures have gained in importance. Marketers and DMOs value and utilize images and a textual description of food in their destination marketing efforts (Dieck, Fountoulaki, & Jung, 2018; Jalis et al., 2014). When integrated into marketing a destination, such promotional materials are effective in informing and attracting culinary tourists (Silkes et al., 2013). Local foods are often featured in text and images in promotional materials. Distributing promotional materials (e.g. brochures, booklets, maps, video clips, and flyers) is a traditional method of

promotion frequently used by destinations (Okumus et al., 2007). Promotional materials are widely used in travel fairs, visitor centers, and direct marketing campaigns.

A more contemporary tool in destination promotion is the destination website (Kim, Yuan, Goh, & Antun, 2009). Particularly with developments in information and communication technology (ICT), on-line marketing has become a significant tool for destination promotion. Travelers frequently search the internet for information about the destination because of its convenience, accessibility, and ability to make reservations. Given this, online marketing is frequently used by DMOs.

Both official websites and printed material are important and trusted sources of information for potential tourists (Horng & Tsai, 2012). Visual and written materials used in destination marketing efforts can provide relevant, detailed and timely information about the representation of food and influence travelers' decision-making behavior (Lin et al., 2011). For example, Jalis et al. (2014) content-analyzed texts and images promoting Malaysian cuisine and found that Malaysia's cuisine is promoted using ten themes which were a sensory appeal, recognition, creating desire, healthiness, culinary heritage, religious, novelty, price, adventures and paradise. The Hong Kong Tourism Board launches events such as 'Hong Kong Great November Feast', 'Hong Kong Food and Wine Festival' and 'Hong Kong Dining Delights' (HKTB, 2017), which actively promote local foods and beverages in international cuisines in Hong Kong and also improve tourists' visitation experiences.

#### 2.4. Turkish food

Several factors make Turkey attractive in food tourism. Turks have interacted with diverse cultures throughout history. Middle-Eastern, Asian, African, Indian and European cuisines have influenced Turkish cuisine. The Ottoman Empire controlled important trade routes in Europe, North Africa, and the Silk Road. The Silk Road was the main route between the East and West. The tradesmen followed this route were offered free lodging for up to three days in facilities called Caravanserais (O'Gorman, 2009).

Turks who immigrated to Anatolia from central Asia were nomadic and developed skills to adjust to available local ingredients in the different places they traveled to. This resulted in the invention of various dishes. For example, the first ready-made soups (i.e., tarhana) and yogurts were invented by the Turks (Biringen Löker et al., 2013; Ozdemir, Gocmen, & Yildirim Kumral, 2007). Anatolia was first occupied by the Romans and was one of the main routes to the holy lands of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. People on pilgrimages and crusades passed through Anatolia. These people interacted with locals and created a rich background for traditional food culture to emerge. Consequently, Turkey is home to various sub-cultures (e.g. Arabs, Armenians, Greeks and Jews) with different gastronomic practices (Güler, 2008).

Various climate and geographic characteristics in Turkey provide plentiful sources of raw materials for unique gastronomy to develop. Homogenous mass food production, which many undermine the quality of ingredients, is still a relatively new concept related to Turkish cuisine. Most raw materials are still bought from individual farmers, who grow their foods and breed their livestock using traditional methods rather than utilizing technology and chemicals (Talas, 2005), which can also be a strength.

Over 100 Turkish food items are patented, some of which are registered as UNESCO Cultural Heritages items, including Mesir Macunu, Turkish Coffee and Ceremonial Keskek (UNESCO, 2015). Mezes including dolma, kebabs and baklava and yogurt are other globally renowned Turkish foods. Previous studies acknowledge Turkish food as an imperative attraction and regard the country as a potential destination in food tourism (Baloglu & Mungaloglu, 2001; Okumus et al., 2007; Okumus, Avci, Kilic, & Walls, 2012; Surenkok, Baggio, & Corigliano, 2010; Yuksel, 2001).

As a major trade center for centuries, the 8000-year-old city of Istanbul was the capital of the East Roman, Latin, and Ottoman empires. It hosts about 17 million people and many Turkish natives from other cities in Turkey immigrated and elected to live in Istanbul (Ergun, 2004). As a result, the city reflects multi-cultural foods of different traditions and ethnic groups. However, while regional, national and international foods are widely available in Istanbul, concerns remain whether Istanbul can effectively market itself as a culinary destination. Official large-budget promotional strategies (Alvarez, 2010) have been criticized as being short-sighted, improper, ad-hoc and mainly high-lighted sea, sun and sand tourism rather than unique characteristics such as culture, heritage, traditions and food in Turkey (Okumus et al., 2012; Turizm Guncel, 2015; Turizmdebusabah, 2015a, 2015b).

### 3. Methodology

This study aims to investigate utilization of local foods in marketing efforts of Istanbul through a case study analysis (Yin, 2014). The case study method is widely used to investigate the characteristics of phenomena by analyzing single or multiple cases (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). It refers to a qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method analysis of written messages and photos to provide insights into the research focus (Neumann, 2003). Moreover, it is a proven technique to categorize verbal and visual data used in marketing (Lin et al., 2011). For this study, a case study approach through content analysis of brochures and web pages was believed to be suitable. The analysis focused on: (1) The share of representation of food (frequency), and (2) Contents of food (including beverages) related materials (intensity) in the official brochures and web pages of Istanbul.

The authors first developed a coding scheme based on an in-depth literature review (Horng et al., 2012; Jalis et al., 2014; Okumus et al., 2013), which included three main areas: (1) origin of the food, (2) atmosphere it was depicted by, and (3) content of the representation. Printed official promotional materials in English, Turkish, German and other languages were collected from the Istanbul DMO by one author. Additional printed materials were also collected from information centers at various tourist attractions (e.g. Hippodrome and Dolmabahçe Palace), in Istanbul, Turkey. The authors also visited the Istanbul Culture and Tourism Office website (<http://www.istanbulkulturturizm.gov.tr/>) to collect online materials. Most materials were produced after 2012 and online materials were more up-to-date and produced in recent years.

After the initial analysis of the collected materials, the authors analyzed materials in English and Turkish as the authors are fluent in these languages. Materials in German were also analyzed by one author who is fluent in German but some noted that textual descriptions and images of materials in English and German were 95% similar. Following this, the collected materials in English and Turkish were content analyzed. About 317 pages of brochures, 83 webpages and seven videos were reviewed and coded based on the scheme developed earlier. As aforementioned, the coding scheme was developed based on an in-depth literature review (Horng et al., 2012; Jalis et al., 2014; Okumus et al., 2013), which included three main areas: (1) /origin of the food, (2) atmosphere it was depicted by, and (3) content of the representation. Each of the three areas included several subareas. For example, origin of food category included regional food, national food and international food, atmosphere category included scenery, people and entertainment. Finally, content category included raw food, ingredients, entries, main courses, deserts and drinks. As suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013), after following this deductive approach, the authors also analyzed the collected materials inductively when and where the initial coding scheme was limited. The frequency, dimensions and intensity of local foods' representation were also noted. Each author analyzed and interpreted the coded data, and discrepancies were discussed among the authors to reach consensus. Based on these discussions, the research findings were finalized.

**Table 1**  
Representation of food in official marketing materials.

	Printed material	Electronic material	Total
<b>Origin</b>	Percentage of promotional material		
Regional food	1%	2%	2%
National food	4%	6%	6%
International food	1%	1%	1%
<b>Atmosphere</b>	Percentage of food-related content in promotional material		
Scenery	34%	51%	44%
People	18%	24%	22%
Entertainment	5%	16%	12%
<b>Content</b>	Percentage of food-related content in promotional material		
Raw food	8%	30%	21%
Ingredients	0%	16%	7%
Entrees	21%	15%	17%
Main Courses	18%	9%	15%
Deserts	11%	9%	12%
Drinks	31%	37%	34%

Printed materials refer to all hard copy brochures whereas electronic materials refer to the official websites and CDs of TMOCT. After analyzing data collected from official electronic and printed materials, food-related information was categorized based on three themes: origin, atmosphere, and content. All food-related content was categorized under *regional*, *national* and *international* (origin). Moreover, the atmosphere was referred to in the text and in photos. The content was then grouped under *scenery* such as heritage, sunset, and seashore, *people* such as tourists, couples, locals, and social interactions, and *entertainment* such as nightlife and belly dancers. The foods highlighted were grouped under *raw food*, *ingredients*, and *spices*, *starters*, *main courses*, *deserts* and *drinks*.

#### 4. Findings

Table 1 presents the distribution of food-related content in both printed and electronic promotional materials for Istanbul. It was found that around 8% of the total materials was related to food (including beverages). Recent brochures covered foods and culinary resources to an extent greater than older versions of the same brochures. For example, an examination of the Istanbul brochure revealed that 6% of the content in the latest brochure was related to local foods, compared to 2% in the older version. This finding implies that there is an increased recognition of the importance of culinary resources in destination marketing for Istanbul. No matter the cultural background and motivations of tourists, electronic materials of the TMOCT website were translated from Turkish into multiple languages (e.g. English, German, Russian and French). However, the Istanbul DMO had only three web pages available in English, and no other foreign languages were available. In 2014, TMOCT introduced a new website called <http://www.goturkeytourism.com>, which includes significant professional content related to local foods.

With regard to the overall representation of food, national offerings emerged as the most highlighted category. Regarding the food atmosphere and environment, the text and images often featured natural scenery (e.g. Bosphorus) and historical buildings. However, people (both locals and tourists) were a less-observed aspect. The atmosphere was mostly depicted as relaxed, with peaceful messages involving natural and historical heritage sites. The entertainment dimension was not highlighted, except for a few images that included cocktails served at nightclubs. As for local foods, graphics focused on traditional Turkish coffee, tea, and starters such as mezze plates and raw food (e.g. nuts, figs, grapes, and watermelon). A short explanation about each food item was available both as printed and electronic materials.

The rest of the printed and electronic content was related to 3S tourism, heritage tourism, and MICE tourism. Food was not mentioned once alongside activities such as shopping, camping, cruise, and sports.

Food received limited coverage under various other main headings; it was largely treated as a secondary resource rather than a major attraction to visit Istanbul, despite the country's potential to become a culinary hotspot. Of the 317 total pages, only seven pages focused solely on food and were found under the 'Dining Out' heading. It was also surprising to see that the only pictured gastronomic region of Istanbul was the 'French Street' area, which, as the name reflects, offers limited authentic dishes, if any.

While local foods were expressed in some brochures as an attraction, this segment only constituted 5% of the overall content. There were brochures and videos about cultural tourism, golf tourism, and MICE, no brochures were available specifically focusing on food tourism. Instead, food-related materials were highlighted under cultural tourism. Local foods were expressed in convenience rather than desirability. They were presented as alternative food options rather than highlighting them as important food experiences that travelers should consume. The information provided about these local foods was limited and written in a general manner, presenting local food as a supplementary product rather than a major activity at the destination. Both printed and electronic materials did not recognize food tourism as an important tourism to a great extent, and the representation of food was observed to be limited.

Although Istanbul offers a rich assortment of regional foods, these were not mentioned, as only national foods already associated with Turkish cuisine in the international arena were instead represented. As such, mezze plates, dolma, pastries, fish, fresh fruits, vegetables, sweets and deserts were frequently highlighted. Although fish is less of an element used in Turkish kitchens, it was listed more often than authentic foods. Sometimes, traditional beverages such as Raki, specially-brewed Turkish coffee and freshly-brewed Turkish tea with a caydanlik (unique tea kettle), Ayran, local wine and beer were all called 'local beverages'. In relation to promoting international cuisines, despite many popular restaurants featuring western menus in Istanbul, international cuisines were not highlighted either. It is possible that besides consuming local foods and beverages, especially for longer stays, travelers to Istanbul may prefer other cuisines including their own during their visits.

Concerns were observed regarding the translation of content at the TMOCT official website into different languages. Instead of being written in multiple languages from the beginning, the content appeared to be translated from Turkish into other languages and uploaded from sources written by multiple authors. One may question whether the content of promotional materials should also be tailored to the motivations and needs of potential tourists reflecting their beliefs, food preferences and country of origin. Rather than translating the same content in different languages, the content should be customized to fit into readers' cultural background. The food-related content appeared mostly as text on the webpage, and the partial use of photos made it challenging to connect with the content.

The official TMOCT webpage included several videos about micro-destinations available and associated activities. Seven promotional videos of Istanbul lasted 91 min and 39 s. Cultural tourism was the predominant theme, and 3S tourism was also highlighted. There were separate videos for sports and shopping-related tourism. Heritage landscapes, nature, and boat tours were also reflected. Although several niche types of tourism (e.g. honeymoon and youth tourism) were mentioned under alternative tourism on the website, gastronomic tourism was not included among them.

Promotional photos were provided under the concept of 'the home of' at the TMOCT website. Of the 75 total images on the site, six were dedicated to food. These images consisted of baklava, chestnut desert, figs, Turkish tea, Turkish coffee, and hazelnuts. However, these items were raw food, desserts, and simple drinks. Starters, main courses, or other unique items were not mentioned, which can better highlight the diversity and eminence of local cuisines in Istanbul. This is perhaps because local foods are offered as an intangible heritage rather than a

distinctive tangible resource and an important tourist attraction. Another research finding is that no links were provided to restaurants owned by local government or private restaurants. For example, the local government in Istanbul owns and operates about 15 restaurants that serve quality local foods for locals and tourists.

Finally, official brochures and websites were not consistent, as more detailed information was available on websites than on brochures. Unlike the websites, the space in brochures is limited; this might be a reason that less space was allocated to food in brochures. Although more information was available on websites, the content was not consistent and created confusion about Istanbul's culinary identity. The content about food was obviously adopted from different sources mostly created for other purposes, with limited harmony or vision. Food only mentioned alongside other tourism types as a supporting activity rather than a major motivation also resulted in this confusion and fragmentation.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

This study investigated to what extent the city of Istanbul, Turkey is being marketed and promoted as a culinary destination. Official brochures and websites for Istanbul were content analyzed. This is one of the first studies to investigate how far a leading urban destination in a developing country is marketed and promoted as a culinary destination. The research findings offer specific theoretical and practical implications. This study discusses the representation of local foods in official promotional materials that aim to market Istanbul as a culinary destination. Local foods in Istanbul in particular and in Turkey are an important resource that can enhance not only tourist experience but also the destination's image.

Foods in destination reflect a sense of place (Bessiere, 1998; Jolliffe, 2016; Sims, 2009). Foods and culinary resources in a destination also represent geography, climate, authenticity, history, culture, and nostalgia (Lee & Scott, 2015). However, the research findings suggest that although Istanbul has rich culinary resources and offers many domestic and international cuisines, the city is not sufficiently marketed and promoted as a culinary destination. Destinations like Istanbul offer many alternative tourism attractions and local foods may still be secondary to other aspects of marketing communications. However, integrating local foods in destination marketing is still important for local, authentic gastronomy to counter the homogenization of food (Everett & Slocum, 2013).

As presented in Table 2, the research findings suggest that foods were represented in official marketing materials for Istanbul under five closely related categories: (1) foods, (2) beverages, (3) dining, (4) festivals, (5) atmosphere, and (6) content of foods and beverages. Each category includes further sub-categories. As one of the first typology of food representation in Istanbul, it can also be utilized in future studies evaluating DMOs' official food marketing efforts in different destinations with similar challenges.

Through a content analysis of official marketing materials, this study investigated whether and how far Istanbul, Turkey is marketed and promoted as a culinary destination. The research findings suggest that food was rarely presented in the marketing communications for Istanbul, and it was often called a supplementary product rather than a major destination attraction. Utilizing local foods and other culinary resources in tourism development and destination marketing in a developing country can prevent local foods from becoming standardized or internationalized. As local foods are usually pure outputs of the local raw materials and labor, they can, directly and indirectly, support sustainable regional development (Richards, 2002; Spilková & Fialová, 2013) and help reduce tourism's carbon footprint (Gössling, Garrod, Aall, Hille, & Peeters, 2011). Although local foods were utilized in the promotional materials of Istanbul, they were primarily placed under other cultural dimensions rather than as an important market segment.

Promotional materials might transform foods consumed at the

**Table 2**

Representation of food in official marketing materials.

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<b>I. Foods</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Local (Istanbul) cuisine (local dishes-recipes, seafood, snacks, local cuisine crafts)</li> <li>● Other regional cuisines in Turkey (e.g. Antep, Urfa, Hatay)</li> <li>● Historical cuisines (Ottoman cuisine), recipes, shows</li> <li>● International cuisines</li> <li>● Organic food/dishes</li> </ul>
<b>II. Beverages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● General beverages</li> <li>● Turkish alcoholic beverages such as Raki and Turkish bear</li> <li>● Turkish traditional drinks such as Turkish coffee and tea, ayran and boza</li> </ul>
<b>III. Dining</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Local restaurants</li> <li>● Culinary lessons by Turkish chefs</li> <li>● Cooking shows by Turkish chefs</li> <li>● Gastronomy tours</li> </ul>
<b>IV. Festivals</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Local food-related festivals</li> <li>● Local beverage festivals</li> <li>● International food and beverage festivals</li> </ul>
<b>V. Atmosphere</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Food markets</li> <li>● Sceneries reflecting foods and drinks</li> <li>● People (chefs, locals and other tourists consuming food and interactions)</li> <li>● Entertainment related to foods and drinks</li> </ul>
<b>VI. Content of Food and Beverages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Raw foods</li> <li>● Ingredients</li> <li>● Entrees</li> <li>● Main Courses</li> <li>● Deserts</li> <li>● Local fruits and vegetables</li> <li>● Local beverages</li> </ul>

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destination from a basic necessity into a cultural gastronomic experience. As noted by McKercher et al. (2008), food tourism for destinations like Istanbul should be given special attention as a product that destination offers rather than merely a physical need. In other words, Istanbul should be positioned as a culinary destination and specific marketing and promotional materials should be developed for this purpose.

Silkes et al. (2013) suggest the incorporation of cultural symbols into local foods in destination marketing. The ways in which messages should be crafted is also an important consideration. The research findings suggest that Istanbul currently has a weak and unclear food identity. Promotion of food in destination marketing efforts for Istanbul appears to be in its infancy stage. To incorporate food into destination image for Istanbul, a clear and consistent message (Lin et al., 2011) should be presented across all communication mediums and connections should be established between printed and electronic materials.

It is evident from the research findings that a greater emphasis should be placed on local foods to promote Istanbul as a culinary destination. Local foods are considered a supplementary product rather than a stand-alone attraction in official destination marketing efforts. This emphasis can help Istanbul establish a stronger destination image for various tourism types such as heritage tourism, religious tourism, MICE, sports tourism, and other tourism alternatives. Failing to exclude food tourism may be attributed to it being perceived to be less important of an activity compared to more well-established tourism alternatives.

Destinations may select and highlight specific culinary areas with the greatest potential and cooperation among public and private stakeholders (Ottenbacher et al., 2016). According to the research findings, no culinary regions or routes were formally established and promoted for Istanbul. Development of a gastronomy map of Istanbul can be a useful marketing tool to offer an outline of local foods and the best areas to locate them. This map can highlight various culinary areas and routes. To achieve this, a clear and collective vision should be established among different stakeholders and the content of promotional

material should be aligned based on this vision. It emerges that there is no clear and collective vision established for Istanbul among different stakeholders on how Istanbul should be positioned and promoted as a culinary destination.

The research findings reveal that the website of Istanbul DMO offered limited information. It had only three pages of content which provided contact details, general information and the director's resume. The strategic role of DMOs in destination marketing is recognized in the field (Pike, 2015). In the era of decentralization in destination marketing efforts, the role of local DMOs appears to be even more important, especially in utilizing local foods and culinary resources. For example, local foods are often well-known by residents and repeat visitors. However, their awareness at an international level can be limited. Therefore, DMOs should refocus their marketing efforts, better highlight local foods and culinary resources and periodically update their online and published content on local, regional and international foods and beverages.

Promotional materials are effective tools in influencing tourists' decisions when choosing a destination (Dieck et al., 2018; Gursoy et al., 2014). Therefore, to attract culinary tourists and use local foods as a supporting experience, the representation of foods in official brochures and websites should be professionally designed by experts not only knowledgeable about tourism marketing but also local foods. It is acknowledged that food photography is a distinct area of expertise (Okumus et al., 2007). Images of foods and beverages are frequently used in destination marketing and acknowledged to be more effective than words (Neal, Quester, & Hawkins, 2000). For example, Frochot (2003) found that food-related images are extensively used in the representation of local gastronomy in regional brochures of France. Istanbul should analyze similar destinations in other countries, and better utilize images of local and international food and beverages in its official brochures and websites. This is because the content of the promotional materials of Istanbul was expressed mostly in text. Images of food and beverages were rarely utilized, and the images depicted were often of low quality. For example, in one of the promotional images entitled 'home of hospitality', a Turkish lady in her daily dress was shown offering beverage on a small plate, presumably a cup of Turkish coffee. However, it is evident from the background this was a mock-up design rather than an authentic kitchen (i.e. the fireplace supposedly used for cooking was white). Therefore, DMOs should be more cautious when designing and approving such promotional materials.

Recipes with cooking videos and cook-it-yourself options can also enhance the experiential attributes of webpages. Horng and Tsai (2012) acknowledge the importance of restaurants in marketing gastronomy tourism and advise offering a list of suggested restaurants. There should be an advanced search function so tourists can select restaurants based on their preferences and location. A quality certification for restaurants can be introduced, just as Hong Kong Tourism Board has created as part of its Quality Tourism Services scheme; the businesses under this program are subject to an annual audit and inspection to certify the quality of their services and products. There are already restaurants certified by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, they were not listed on the website either. Restaurants might also be encouraged to offer local specials and market them in the website of TMOCT. Interfaces with other websites (e.g. culinary schools and restaurants) and hyperlinks can also be integrated.

### 5.1. Limitations and future research

This exploratory study has several limitations. First, it only focused on Istanbul. Istanbul is an important destination for international visitors and ranks among the top ten urban destinations in the world (McCarthy, 2017). It offers unique and rich gastronomic experiences. However, there are other destinations in Turkey that also have rich culinary resources such as Antalya, Adana, Bolu, Bursa, Hatay, Gaziantep, and Mardin and Urfa. In other words, there are many

destinations seeking to incorporate food with their respective images. Future research studies may investigate whether and how these cities in Turkey are marketed as culinary destinations.

During field research, the authors of this study came across numerous unofficial promotional materials developed by the private sector (e.g. hotels, tour operators) and professional associations. The content shared over social media by tourists about local foods (e.g. atmospherics, experience, entertainment) can highlight important factors that differentiate Istanbul from other destinations. Future studies may explore this purported gap between official and unofficial promotional efforts, showcase best practices for a more coordinated design of marketing strategies.

There is still a need to analyze the ideal dimensions of promoting food in destination marketing materials. The five categories and sub-categories in Table 2 can be utilized and expanded in future studies. Tourists' eating patterns may be analyzed to determine which signature dishes to feature in marketing efforts. Future studies can also focus on defining the characteristics of Turkish cuisine from the perspective of tourists. The findings of such a study can provide additional insights into segmenting and targeting the right market and design of associated promotional materials. Finally, the research findings revealed there were differences between recent brochures and older versions of the same brochures in coverage of food tourism. Given this, future research studies can content analyze destination marketing brochures and other materials chronically for several destinations to explore whether there have been differences in focusing on specific culinary resources in their marketing efforts.

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