

Conspicuous tastes online: Are gastronomic variety and symbolic status shaping local food choices?

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ABSTRACT

This inquiry elucidates the profound ramifications of conspicuous consumption upon local culinary selections, elucidating the mediating roles of gastronomic variety-seeking behaviors and perceived symbolic status. By conducting empirical research involving a substantial cohort of 390 participants, all aged 18 and above and possessing a habitual engagement in the digital sharing of gastronomic content, this study employs a quantitative methodology augmented by structural equation modeling to dissect the intricate interplay among consumption interests, image portrayal, and satisfaction derived from sharing experiences. The findings reveal a significant correlation between conspicuous consumption and preferences for local cuisines, underscoring that the pursuit of distinctive and culturally resonant dishes transcends mere nutritional sustenance, serving instead as vehicles for the dissemination of social prestige. Consequently, the research contributes to the burgeoning field of inquiry at the intersection of social media engagement and evolving gastronomic behaviors, proposing that regional culinary specialties may be strategically curated to optimize both consumer enjoyment and the perception of symbolic value. The study's use of structural equation modeling (SEM) and a relatively large sample ($N = 390$) further enhances the methodological robustness of these findings. Such insights not only deepen the academic discourse but also invite practitioners to reconsider the marketing paradigms surrounding local foods in the contemporary digital milieu.

1. Introduction

Culinary practices transcend mere sustenance; they function as significant indicators of social status, cultural capital, and individual identity (Levy, 1981; Belk, 2013; Kuksov and Xie, 2012; Mendelberg, 2022). In an era marked by globalization and rapid technological advancement, the decisions individuals make concerning their dining preferences and the manner in which they share culinary experiences have evolved into critical signifiers of cultural sophistication and collective identity (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017). The advent of the digital age, particularly the proliferation of social media platforms, has further exacerbated this phenomenon, transforming food from a private indulgence into a public exhibition of taste and identity (Marder et al., 2016); a trend with potential downsides such as visual addiction and waste (Hassan et al., 2024).

The revolutionary impact of social media on the dissemination and

enjoyment of culinary experiences cannot be overstated (Kietzmann et al., 2011). These platforms afford users the opportunity to immediately document and broadcast their gastronomic exploits, engendering a dynamic dialogue within the realm of gastronomic culture (Molz, 2004; Belk, 2013). Such interactions transcend geographical constraints, granting individuals the capability to showcase their culinary aptitude and to weave a broader socio-cultural narrative surrounding food consumption (Boz and Saçılık, 2017). Therefore, food has metamorphosed into a multifaceted phenomenon, embodying both tangible pleasures and profound symbolic meanings that resonate with one's socio-economic status.

Local cuisines emerge as pivotal elements within this intricate landscape, frequently regarded as embodiments of authenticity and repositories of cultural heritage (Kim et al., 2009; Chang et al., 2010). As individuals increasingly pursue distinct culinary experiences aimed at deepening their cultural immersion, local dishes have garnered

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substantial attention (Jang and Feng, 2007; O'Regan et al., 2019). The allure of these traditional foods is further amplified through online promotion, sometimes leading to conformity pressures and irrational consumption patterns among tourists influenced by social media trends (Zhang et al., 2025); however, this visibility may inadvertently engender a sense of exclusivity that risks diluting their authentic origins. This predicament raises an essential inquiry: do these esteemed culinary traditions forfeit their authentic roots when refracted through the prism of social media?

Although extant research has initiated explorations into the cultural dimensions of local gastronomy, significant lacunae persist regarding the interplay between conspicuous consumption tendencies, the quest for gastronomic variety, and the perceptions of symbolic status that collectively influence digital consumption patterns (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Çetin and Yaylı, 2019; İflazoğlu and Ünlüönen, 2020). The current study aspires to bridge this gap by scrutinizing how conspicuous consumption enhances the visibility and desirability of local cuisines within online platforms. Additionally, it intends to investigate how the pursuit of variety and status perceptions mediate this relationship. By elucidating the intricate interconnections among these dimensions, the research endeavors to illuminate the complexities inherent in individual identity formation in the context of digital technology and culinary heritage.

This emphasis on digital interactions entails considerable ramifications for a variety of stakeholders, including cultural promoters, local producers, and market intermediaries who are dedicated to conserving traditional cuisines in the face of an increasingly globalized environment (Şengül and Türkay, 2015). Gaining insights into the mechanisms by which local foods are disseminated, celebrated, or commodified in the digital sphere can provide essential guidance in formulating strategies that not only preserve the authenticity of regional dishes but also acknowledge broader social dynamics. Such insights could facilitate the development of initiatives that celebrate culinary diversity while honoring heritage and tradition.

The study is underpinned by three core constructs: conspicuous consumption, gastronomic variety-seeking, and perceived symbolic status. Conspicuous consumption, as articulated by Veblen (1899), posits that individuals exhibit certain goods or behaviors to convey affluence, prestige, and social hierarchy. While Veblen's foundational theories predominantly addressed luxury items, contemporary interpretations have extended this concept to encompass intangible experiences such as gastronomic adventures, illustrating that conspicuousness flourishes wherever social distinction may manifest (Kuksov and Xie, 2012).

Gastronomic variety-seeking (GVS) denotes the drive among consumers to pursue culinary novelty, satisfying their curiosity regarding unfamiliar flavors and experiences, which often compels them to venture beyond established gastronomic preferences (Van Trijp and Steenkamp, 1992; Kahn, 1995; Boz and Saçılık, 2017). This phenomenon underscores the psychological and cultural motivations that propel individuals toward the exploration of regional cuisines, indigenous ingredients, and distinctive culinary methods (Kim et al., 2009; Çakıcı and Yıldız, 2019). As consumers engage in this quest for gastronomic variety, they concurrently seek experiences that further augment their personal narratives and social identities.

Perceived symbolic status (PSS) encapsulates the conception that certain foods or dining experiences operate as proxies for social prestige or lifestyle alignment. Individuals frequently ascribe considerable symbolic value to their culinary experiences, perceiving them as reflections of personal sophistication and cultural capital (Levy, 1981; Mendelberg, 2022; Şahin, 2018). The higher the perceived prestige of a dining experience, the greater the social validation that it bestows upon the individual disseminating it (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Wright, 2006).

As these constructs converge within the arena of social media, an expanding corpus of literature reveals their interconnectedness. Empirical research has indicated that social media serves as a critical

facilitator, augmenting the significance of conspicuous consumption and further entrenching the complex interplay between gastronomic experiences and the pursuit of social distinction (Thoumrungroje, 2014; Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Marder et al., 2016; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017); often amplified by the influence of social media personalities who model such behaviors (Dinh and Lee, 2024).

In light of these discussions, this study aims to examine the effect of conspicuous consumption on individuals' local food preferences, particularly within the context of social media platforms where such consumption behaviors are prominently displayed. It seeks to explore whether local foods are used as tools for conspicuous display and whether the pursuit of gastronomic variety (GVS) and the perception of symbolic status (PSS) serve as mediating factors in this process. Although these concepts have gained attention in recent literature, their combined influence on local food consumption (LFC), especially within digital environments, has not yet been sufficiently examined. This gap highlights the relevance and originality of the present research in contributing to the understanding of contemporary food behaviors shaped by online social dynamics.

2. Materials & methods

2.1. Research design

In the present study, conspicuous consumption on social media was identified as the primary independent variable, while individuals' propensity to consume local foods served as the main dependent variable. Additionally, two mediating variables were incorporated—gastronomic variety seeking and perceived symbolic status—aiming to better examine the underlying mechanisms at play (Hayes and Rockwood, 2016). The data were gathered with an emphasis on logical coherence and clarity, thereby adhering to high academic conventions. Incorporating mediating variables enabled a deeper investigation into the direct impact of conspicuous consumption on local food preferences, underscoring the study's complexity and highlighting the joint influence of psychological and social-symbolic factors on behavior. The relationships among these constructs are illustrated in Fig. 1.

2.2. Hypotheses development

The visual representation is essential for comprehending the intricate relationships among the variables in this study. Following a systematic literature review (Hair et al., 2019), the subsequent hypotheses have been established.

H1. It was hypothesized that the tendency towards conspicuous consumption on social media significantly affects individuals' inclination to consume local cuisine.

- H1a: It was posited that Consumption Interest has a positive and significant effect on individuals' inclination to consume local cuisine (Ilhan and Uğurhan, 2019).

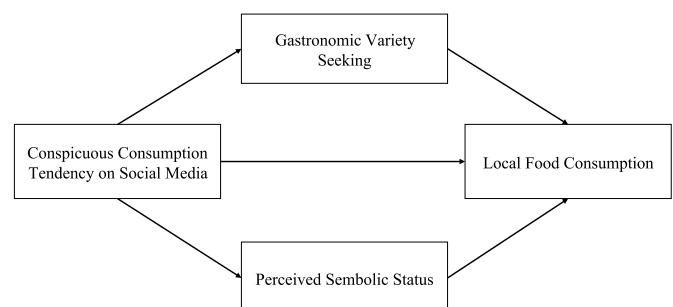


Fig. 1. Research model.

- H1b: It was proposed that Image Representation exerts a positive and significant effect on individuals' inclination to consume local cuisine (Ilhan and Uğurhan, 2019).
- H1c: It was asserted that Sharing Satisfaction positively and significantly affects individuals' inclination to consume local cuisine (Ilhan and Uğurhan, 2019).

H2. It was hypothesized that gastronomic variety-seeking mediates the relationship between the tendency towards conspicuous consumption on social media and the inclination to consume local cuisine.

- H2a: It was posited that gastronomic variety seeking mediates the relationship between Consumption Interest and the inclination towards local cuisine consumption (Van Trijp and Steenkamp, 1992; Kahn, 1995).
- H2b: It was proposed that gastronomic variety seeking mediates the relationship between Image Representation and the inclination towards local cuisine consumption.
- H2c: It was asserted that gastronomic variety seeking mediates the relationship between Sharing Satisfaction and the inclination towards local cuisine consumption.

H3. It was hypothesized that perceived symbolic status mediates the relationship between conspicuous consumption tendencies on social media and the inclination to consume local cuisine.

- H3a: It was posited that perceived symbolic status mediates the relationship between Consumption Interest and the inclination towards local cuisine consumption (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Wright, 2006; Şahin, 2018).
- H3b: It was proposed that perceived symbolic status mediates the relationship between Image Representation and the inclination towards local cuisine consumption.
- H3c: It was asserted that perceived symbolic status mediates the relationship between Sharing Satisfaction and the inclination towards local cuisine consumption.

These hypotheses collectively reflect the multidimensional nature of conspicuous consumption behavior. It is proposed that conspicuous consumption on social media exerts both direct and indirect effects on local food preferences, facilitated through individuals' pursuit of gastronomic variety and their desire for enhanced social standing (Mendelberg, 2022).

2.3. Participants

The target population was composed of individuals aged 18 years and older, residing in Türkiye, who actively shared content related to food and beverages on various social media platforms. A convenience sampling method was utilized, and individuals who provided voluntary consent to complete the online questionnaire were included in the final sample (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Of the 1362 individuals who accessed the survey link, 390 participants met the initial screening criterion ("Yes, I do share food and beverage posts on social media") and provided valid responses. Consequently, the sample comprised users demonstrating significant engagement on social media and a distinct interest in culinary-related content.

To evaluate the adequacy of the sample size ($N = 390$) for testing indirect effects in the mediation model, a priori power analysis was conducted using a Monte Carlo simulation with 5000 replications. Standardized path coefficients from the structural model were used as input parameters, and the results indicated power values ranging from 0.88 to 1.00 across six mediation paths. This result indicates that the

sample size was sufficient to detect the hypothesized indirect effects with a high level of statistical confidence (Schoemann et al., 2017).

Furthermore, potential common method variance (CMV) was examined. Harman's single-factor test indicated that the first unrotated factor accounted for 26.47 % of the total variance, falling below the common threshold of 50 %. While this suggests CMV is unlikely to be a pervasive issue, it is acknowledged that Harman's test is a diagnostic check with known limitations (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, greater emphasis was placed on *ex ante* procedural remedies to minimize potential bias during data collection. These included ensuring participant anonymity, randomizing the order of scale items within the questionnaire, and utilizing previously validated measurement scales, all of which are considered effective strategies for mitigating CMV (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

2.4. Data collection

A quantitative research design was employed to investigate the study variables. Primary data was obtained through a structured survey instrument, which was administered electronically via Google Forms. The final questionnaire was organized into five sections, containing 37 items in total, each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). All items were designated as mandatory to avert missing data.

The initial section evaluated conspicuous consumption behaviors on social media using the 14-item scale developed and validated in Turkish by İlhan and Uğurhan (2019). This instrument comprises three dimensions—namely, "Consumption Interest" (5 items), "Image Representation" (5 items), and "Sharing Satisfaction" (4 items). Given that the scale was originally constructed for Turkish-speaking respondents, no translation procedures were required.

Gastronomic variety seeking was measured using the scale first introduced by Van Trijp and Steenkamp (1992) and subsequently adapted into Turkish by Çakıcı and Yıldız (2019). As reported by these authors, the adaptation process included systematic back-translation to achieve both linguistic and conceptual equivalence, followed by validation analyses confirming the scale's appropriateness within the Turkish context. The adapted version comprises eight items under a single factor.

In the present investigation, the same three items were utilized and labeled PSS1, PSS2, and PSS3, thereby ensuring terminological consistency with the broader measurement framework. This configuration was reevaluated through CFA, producing excellent model fit indices: $\chi^2(2) = 5.740$, $\chi^2/df = 2.870$, GFI = 0.990, NFI = 0.991, TLI = 0.991, CFI = 0.994, RMSEA = 0.069, and SRMR = 0.013 (Table 4). Factor loadings were robust (PSS1 = 0.776, PSS2 = 0.886, PSS3 = 0.860), as shown in Table 2. The construct displayed strong convergent validity, evidenced by an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value of 0.709, exceeding the 0.50 benchmark. Composite reliability (CR) was 0.879, and internal consistency was similarly high, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.879 (Table 2). Assessment of normality revealed skewness and kurtosis values of 0.207 and -1.075 , respectively, well within acceptable limits (Table 3). Although Şahin (2018) did not explicitly detail back-translation or related linguistic validation steps, the robust psychometric outcomes reported in both the original and current studies provide convergent evidence of the scale's conceptual integrity and empirical validity for measuring perceived symbolic status in the Turkish setting.

Food consumption preferences, specifically the inclination toward local cuisine, were assessed using the "local cuisine eating tendency" sub-dimension of the Food Consumption Preferences Scale developed and validated in Turkish by Karamustafa et al. (2016). While the full instrument encompasses additional sub-dimensions, only the 12-item local cuisine dimension was retained in the current study, as it aligns with the research objectives. Its reliability and validity (Cronbach's alpha = 0.934) were firmly established in the original publication

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the samples (N = 390).

Variable	Categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–26	217	55.6
	27–35	65	16.7
	≥36	108	27.6
Gender	Female	264	67.7
	Male	126	32.3
Education Level	Primary education	8	2.1
	High School	63	16.2
	Bachelor's Degree	189	48.5
	Graduate Education	53	13.6
Monthly Income	<10,000 TRY ^a	169	43.3
	10,001–20,000 TRY	151	38.7
	≥20,001 TRY	70	17.9
Social Media Usage^b	Facebook	139	35.6
	Instagram	370	94.8
	Twitter (x)	210	53.8
	WhatsApp	318	81.5
	Pinterest	120	30.7
	Tiktok	81	20.7
	Reddit	16	4.1
	Snapchat	116	29.7
	You Tube	246	63.0
	Other	9	2.3
Profession	Public employee	121	31
	Private Sector	80	20.5
	Tradesmen	11	2.8
	Student	141	36.2
	Housewife	19	4.9
	Self-employment	9	2.3
	Other	8	2.1

^a TRY: Turkish Lira.^b Participants were able to tick more than one option.**Table 2**

Scale reliability and convergent validity.

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Number of Items
Conspicuous Consumption	0.927	0.603	0.954	14
Consumption Interest	0.869	0.563	0.865	5
Image Representation	0.917	0.705	0.923	5
Sharing Satisfaction	0.816	0.528	0.817	4
Gastronomic Variety Seeking (GVS)	0.792	0.538	0.890	8
Perceived Symbolic Status (PSS)	0.879	0.709	0.879	3
Local Food Consumption (LFC)	0.870	0.428	0.857	12

Table 3

Normality analysis results (N = 390).

Dimensions	Min.	Max.	Centre	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gastronomic Variety Seeking	1.00	5.00	3.59	0.94	−0.471	−0.398
Consumption Interest	1.00	5.00	2.18	1.10	0.910	−0.004
Image Representation	1.00	5.00	2.29	1.22	0.659	−0.708
Sharing Satisfaction	1.00	5.00	3.38	1.05	−0.330	−0.525
Perceived Symbolic Status	1.00	5.00	2.70	1.25	0.207	−1.075
Local Food Consumption	1.00	5.00	3.87	0.74	−0.673	0.179

(Karamustafa et al., 2016).

The questionnaire concluded with a demographic section, which gathered information on participants' age, gender, educational attainment, and income. It also elicited details on social media usage patterns, especially the frequency and type of shared food and beverage content, to verify the suitability of the sample for the study.

Prior to the main data collection phase, a pilot study involving 161 respondents was conducted to gauge the clarity, usability, and preliminary reliability of the survey items (Hair et al., 2019). Input received from this pilot phase prompted minor revisions to the wording of ambiguous items and led to the finalization of the questionnaire. The refined survey was disseminated online through various social media platforms—including Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp—from 1 to May 31, 2023. A screening query verified whether participants regularly shared food or beverage content on social media; only those who answered affirmatively (n = 390) were permitted to complete the full survey, thus constituting the final analytic sample.

2.5. Data analysis

The dataset was transferred to SPSS and AMOS for statistical analyses, where reliability assessments were conducted using Cronbach's alpha and validity evaluations were performed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was carried out to test the proposed hypotheses.

- **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA):** The theoretical dimensionality of the scales was examined to ensure alignment with established constructs (Hair et al., 2019).
- **Mediation Analysis:** The mediating roles of gastronomic variety seeking and perceived symbolic status on the relationship between conspicuous consumption tendency and local cuisine consumption were investigated using the procedures outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Hayes and Rockwood (2016). Bootstrap methods were employed to evaluate the significance of indirect effects.
- **Model Fit Indices:** As recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), the overall model fit was assessed using key indices such as chi-square, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), GFI (Goodness-of-Fit Index), and NFI (Normed Fit Index). Following SEM, the direct and indirect effects of conspicuous consumption on local cuisine tendency were compared and discussed in detail to provide a comprehensive view of both the main and mediating effects.

2.6. Ethical and quality assurance

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Sivas Cumhuriyet University Social Sciences Research Proposal Ethical Evaluation Committee (Decision Date: April 17, 2023; Number: 2023/20). Participants' confidentiality and voluntary participation were upheld throughout the research. Personal data were anonymized, securely stored, and utilized exclusively for academic purposes, thus adhering to established scientific ethical principles and copyright regulations (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020; SCU Publication Ethics Guideline, 2017). Rigorous methodological standards were ensured through the

Table 4
Confirmatory factor analysis goodness of fit values of the scales.

Scales	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	GFI	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Conspicuous Consumption on Social Media	257.288	72	3.573	0.911	0.928	0.932	0.947	0.080	0.058
Gastronomic Variety Seeking	37.494	13	2.884	0.974	0.972	0.970	0.982	0.070	0.028
Perceived Symbolic Status	5.740	2	2.870	0.990	0.991	0.991	0.994	0.069	0.013
Local Food Consumption	60.848	17	3.579	0.961	0.949	0.938	0.962	0.080	0.039

χ^2 : Chi-Square, df: Degrees of Freedom, χ^2/df : Chi-Square Divided by Degrees of Freedom, GFI: Goodness of Fit Index, NFI: Normed Fit Index, TLI: Tucker-Lewis Index, CFI: Comparative Fit Index, RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, SRMR: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

implementation of procedures, which included the pilot testing of instruments and stringent monitoring of data collection processes in accordance with ethical guidelines.

3. Results

The demographic characteristics of the 390 participants are summarized in Table 1. The average age of the respondents was 28.6 years (SD = 7.2), with 57 % identifying as female and 43 % as male. A significant portion of the participants reported frequently sharing food and beverage-related content on platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. These findings indicate high engagement levels with digital media in the context of gastronomy-related content.

To ensure methodological rigor in the evaluation of the principal constructs—namely, conspicuous consumption, gastronomic variety seeking (GVS), perceived symbolic status (PSS), and local food consumption (LFC)—the reliability and convergent validity of these constructs were scrupulously assessed. As presented in Table 2, the analysis reveals that all constructs yielded Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.70, thereby satisfying established standards of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). In parallel, the Composite Reliability (CR) values similarly surpassed the 0.70 criterion, affirming the robustness of the internal consistency exhibited by the measures. It is noteworthy that the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the LFC dimension, although slightly below the 0.50 threshold (0.432), retained a CR value above 0.70, thereby allowing for the scales to be classified as both reliable and valid for forthcoming structural analyses. These findings resonate with prior psychometric literature that posits the acceptability of constructs under such conditions (Hair et al., 2019).

In the pursuit of validating the suitability of parametric analyses, a series of normality tests were implemented. The Shapiro–Wilk W and

Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests, despite yielding significant p-values ($p < 0.05$), indicated skewness and kurtosis values residing within the accepted ± 1.5 range for all variables (as elucidated in Table 3). Such results substantiate the premise that the data approximate a normal distribution sufficiently to warrant the application of parametric procedures, thus subsequently facilitating the implementation of structural equation modeling (SEM). This finding underscores the inherent resilience of SEM methodologies, which can accommodate moderate deviations from the assumptions of multivariate normality (Hair et al., 2019).

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to verify the factor structures of the key constructs. The conspicuous consumption scale confirmed a three-factor structure (consumption interest, image representation, and sharing satisfaction), while the remaining scales exhibited unidimensionality. All factor loadings exceeded 0.60, and model fit indices met conventional thresholds (see Table 4), validating the construct dimensionality for subsequent SEM analyses.

A structural equation model was tested to evaluate the hypothesized relationships among the variables of conspicuous consumption, gastronomic variety seeking (GVS), perceived symbolic status (PSS), and local food consumption (LFC). The standardized factor loadings are shown in Fig. 2, and the model’s overall fit indices are summarized in Table 5 ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.681$, CFI = 0.918, RMSEA = 0.066). Although the Non-Normed Fit Index (NFI) fell slightly below the 0.90 threshold, all factor loadings were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating adequate convergent validity and a satisfactory overall model fit (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013).

The findings related to the structural model are presented in Tables 6 and 7. As shown in Table 6, significant positive effects were found between the dimensions of conspicuous consumption and gastronomic variety seeking (GVS): Consumption Interest ($\beta = 0.281$, $p = 0.001$),

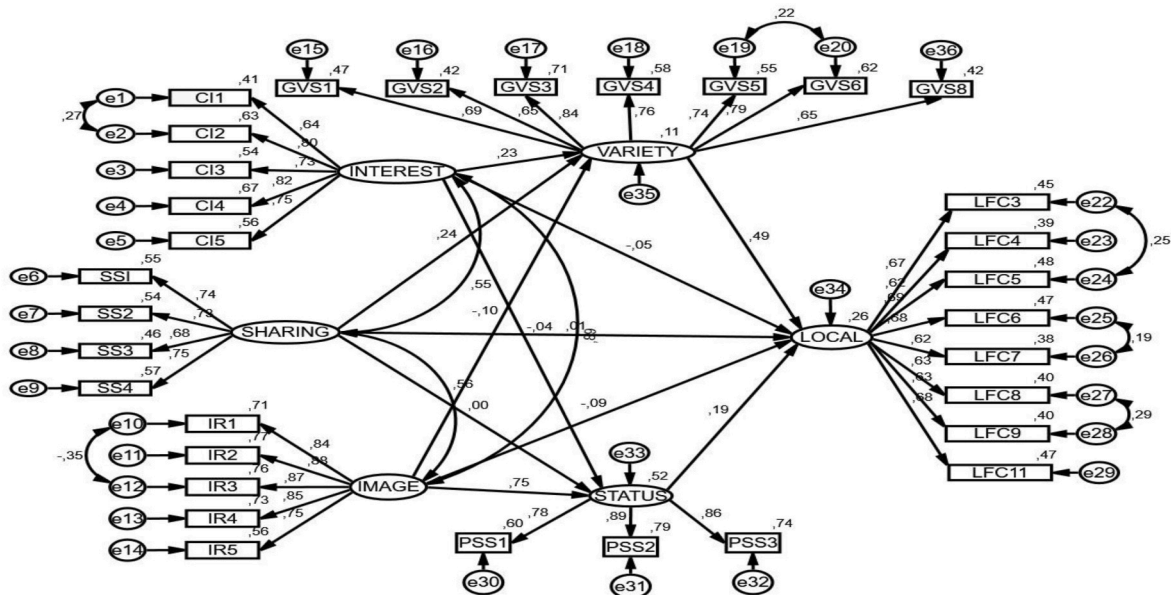


Fig. 2. Path analysis results for the research model.

Table 5

Goodness of fit values for the model.

Goodness of Fit Values	Good Fit	Acceptable Compliance	Model Values
χ^2/df	$\chi^2/df \leq 3$	$\chi^2/df \leq 5$	2.426
GFI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.85	0.850
NFI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90	0.862
CFI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90	0.913
TLI	≥ 0.95	≥ 0.90	0.903
RMSEA	≤ 0.05	≤ 0.08	0.061
SRMR	≤ 0.05	≤ 0.08	0.061

χ^2 : Chi-Square, df: Degrees of Freedom, χ^2/df : Chi-Square Divided by Degrees of Freedom, GFI: Goodness of Fit Index, NFI: Normed Fit Index, TLI: Tucker-Lewis Index, CFI: Comparative Fit Index, RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, SRMR: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

Image Representation ($\beta = 0.235$, $p = 0.001$), and Sharing Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.311$, $p = 0.001$). GVS was also found to have a direct positive effect on local food consumption (LFC) ($\beta = 0.503$, $p = 0.000$). Each dimension of conspicuous consumption additionally exhibited direct effects on LFC, which were further examined through mediation analyses.

Mediation analysis was conducted using bootstrap resampling ($n = 5000$). The results, as detailed in Table 7, indicated full mediation by both gastronomic variety seeking (GVS) and perceived symbolic status (PSS) in the relationships between each dimension of conspicuous consumption and local food consumption (LFC) (Hayes and Rockwood, 2016). For example, the initially significant direct effect of Consumption Interest on LFC ($\beta = 0.138$, $p = 0.021$) became non-significant ($\beta = -0.004$, $p = 0.929$) after the inclusion of GVS. Similar patterns were observed for Image Representation and Sharing Satisfaction. The indirect effects remained statistically significant, with confidence intervals that did not include zero (e.g., 0.067–0.241 for the path from Image

Representation via PSS).

4. Discussions

The findings of this investigation indicate that conspicuous consumption in social media contexts exerts an indirect influence on local food preferences through two principal mediators: gastronomic variety seeking (GVS) and perceived symbolic status (PSS). These outcomes, generated through structural equation modeling (SEM) and mediation analyses, illuminate the impact of symbolic motives and novelty-driven behaviors on consumers' engagement with local gastronomy in digital environments.

4.1. Summary of key findings

An examination of descriptive statistics (Table 1) revealed a digitally engaged sample, predominantly female and relatively young, with frequent sharing of food-related content. These results corroborate the notion that social platforms function not merely as communication channels but also as spaces for gastronomic self-expression and identity performance (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Marder et al., 2016). The patterns observed are consistent with Belk's (2013) thesis that consumption behavior in digital arenas is closely intertwined with symbolic identity construction.

Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results (Table 4) confirmed the reliability and structural validity of the measurement model. The robustness of the measured indicators in representing the latent constructs supports the SEM outcomes, demonstrating methodological rigor (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016).

The structural model (Tables 5–6) further verified that all three dimensions of conspicuous consumption significantly predicted both GVS and PSS, which, in turn, exhibited positive effects on local food

Table 6

Regression analysis results showing the relationship between independent, mediator and dependent variables.

PATH	χ^2/df	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMSA	SRMR	B	β	SH	cr	p
CI → GVS	2.831	0.901	0.922	0.933	0.069	0.057	0.306	0.281	0.064	4.775	0.001
IR → GVS							0.225	0.235	0.054	4.173	0.001
SS → GVS							0.328	0.311	0.064	5.084	0.001
CI → PSS	3.102	0.904	0.923	0.946	0.074	0.055	0.667	0.630	0.066	10.146	0.001
IR → PSS							0.702	0.723	0.059	11.831	0.001
SS → PSS							0.447	0.397	0.069	6.465	0.001
GVS → LFC	3.104	0.905	0.918	0.933	0.074	0.061	0.430	0.503	0.057	7.584	0.001
PSS → LFC	2.196	0.953	0.963	0.973	0.055	0.039	0.174	0.216	0.048	3.621	0.001
CI → LFC	2.681	0.893	0.930	0.918	0.066	0.054	0.123	0.138	0.053	2.309	0.021
IR → LFC							0.101	0.127	0.046	2.210	0.027
SS → LFC							0.141	0.157	0.055	2.541	0.011

LFC = Local food consumption tendency dependent variable, SS= Sharing Satisfaction Dimension (independent variable), CI= Consumption Interest Dimension (independent variable), IR= Image Representation Dimension (independent variable), GVS= Gastronomic Variety Seeking (mediating variable), PSS= Perceived Symbolic Status (mediating variable), (B= Regression coefficient, β = Standardised regression coefficient, SH= Standard Error, cr = Critical Ratio, p = Significance χ^2 : Chi-Square, df: Degrees of Freedom, χ^2/df : Chi-Square Divided by Degrees of Freedom, GFI: Goodness of Fit Index, NFI: Normed Fit Index, TLI: Tucker-Lewis Index, CFI: Comparative Fit Index, RMSEA: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, SRMR: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.

Table 7

Mediation analysis results.

Relationships	Direct Impact	Indirect Impact	Bootstrap Confidence Interval (95 %)		p value	Hypothesis Acceptance-Rejection
			Low	High		
CI→GVS→LFC	−0.005	0.126	0.082	0.184	0.001	H2a Accepted
IR→GVS→LFC	0.005	0.095	0.048	0.146	0.001	H2b Accepted
SS→GVS→LFC	−0.003	0.140	0.095	0.202	0.001	H2c Accepted
CI→PSS→LFC	0.13	0.112	0.019	0.211	0.020	H3a Accepted
IR→PSS→LFC	−0.048	0.148	0.067	0.241	0.004	H3b Accepted
SS→PSS→LFC	0.077	0.064	0.016	0.121	0.008	H3c Accepted

LFC = Local food consumption tendency, SS= Sharing Satisfaction Dimension, CI= Consumption Interest Dimension, IR= Image Representation Dimension, GVS= Gastronomic Variety Seeking, PSS= Perceived Symbolic Status, Bootstrap sample is 5000. Unstandardised coefficients are reported.

consumption (LFC). These findings highlight the pivotal role of social media-driven behaviors—particularly those oriented toward image management and symbolic engagement—in shaping gastronomic preferences (Van Trijp and Steenkamp, 1992; Şahin, 2018).

In addition, the robust direct effect of GVS on LFC ($\beta = 0.503$, $p < 0.001$) underscores the importance of curiosity and novelty as drivers of consumer engagement with local foods (Chang *et al.*, 2010). Mediation analysis (Table 7) showed that GVS and PSS fully mediate the relationship between conspicuous consumption and LFC. The disappearance of direct effects following the inclusion of these mediators suggests that food choices in digital spheres are more strongly driven by psychological and symbolic incentives than by utilitarian considerations (Levy, 1981; Mendelberg, 2022).

4.2. Theoretical and practical contributions

These findings substantially advance the body of knowledge on symbolic consumption by extending its theoretical scope to digital gastronomy. The outcomes corroborate the work of Kim *et al.* (2009), who underscored the pivotal roles of symbolic, cultural, and identity-oriented motivations in shaping local food preferences within tourism contexts. In a similar vein, Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) highlighted the experiential and symbolic functions of food among culturally engaged consumers. The present study reinforces these perspectives by illustrating how they manifest in virtual settings, thereby demonstrating the applicability of symbolic consumption constructs to social media platforms.

These insights carry important ramifications for local food marketers, tourism practitioners, and digital content creators. It was observed that conspicuous consumption, as exhibited on social media, exerts a pronounced influence on local food preferences by way of gastronomic variety-seeking and perceived symbolic value. Strategies that spotlight culinary heritage, sensory distinctiveness, and cultural authenticity are thus likely to fortify consumer engagement and amplify the symbolic and social capital ascribed to local foods. Such approaches may ultimately stimulate sustained consumer interest and confer competitive advantages in an increasingly dynamic market landscape.

4.3. Strengths of the study

This investigation offers several noteworthy strengths. First, four key constructs—conspicuous consumption, GVS, PSS, and LFC—were integrated into a single structural equation modeling (SEM) framework, thereby addressing a gap that has been insufficiently explored in extant literature. Second, the use of rigorous statistical techniques, including confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and mediation analysis, alongside a robust sample size ($N = 390$), enhances the reliability and interpretative clarity of the findings. Third, the measurement instruments were either developed in Turkish or had undergone prior adaptation, thereby ensuring linguistic fidelity and cultural congruence within the target population. Taken together, these methodological and conceptual strengths bolster the internal validity and applied significance of the study.

4.4. Limitations and future research Directions

Notwithstanding these strengths, several limitations warrant attention. The reliance on a non-random sampling technique may restrict the representativeness of the sample and thus limit the broader generalizability of the results. In addition, the self-reported nature of the data introduces a degree of subjectivity that may obscure deeper insights into the motivational mechanisms of conspicuous consumption (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Although no data were missing—owing to the mandatory response format in Google Forms—the collected responses remain perception-based and may not fully capture behavioral realities.

A further limitation arises from the exclusive focus on participants

from Türkiye, which may reduce the cultural generalizability of the findings. Given that symbolic food behavior is often shaped by socio-cultural factors, future investigations are encouraged to replicate and extend this model in diverse geographical and cultural contexts. From a methodological perspective, studies employing more rigorous sampling frameworks, as well as experimental or longitudinal designs, could provide a richer understanding of the temporal dynamics and causal mechanisms of identity-driven consumption (Hayes and Rockwood, 2016).

5. Conclusions

The present study elucidates the multifaceted interplay between conspicuous consumption and evolving digital sociocultural dynamics, especially within social media platforms. The findings indicate that conspicuous consumption tendencies are closely aligned with individuals' preference for culturally distinctive goods. A salient aspect of this investigation is the observation that an orientation toward locally sourced products serves as a conspicuous marker of both variety-seeking and social differentiation (Van Trijp and Steenkamp, 1992; Jang and Feng, 2007). Such an orientation, fortified by pronounced mediating influences, suggests that the impulse to display exclusive or idiosyncratic preferences is substantially magnified by social media, which not only spotlight the novelty of these items but also heighten their symbolic significance (Mendelberg, 2022).

This research contributes to the extant body of knowledge by illuminating the psychological and behavioral underpinnings of conspicuous sharing in digital environments. It offers insights into the nuanced role of social visibility and perceived status in shaping consumer motivations. Moreover, it contends that personal aspirations and cultural considerations coalesce to stimulate interest in regionally distinct offerings, thereby enriching current discourse on consumer behavior in contemporary societies. This conclusion aligns with prior investigations in gastronomy and tourism, where local foods have been conceptualized as embodiments of cultural identity and personal distinction, particularly when evaluated through the lens of symbolic consumption and digital visibility (Boz and Saçılık, 2017; Belk, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2009).

From a practical standpoint, the reported findings bear implications for marketing and branding strategies in digital spheres, where individuals' food choices are frequently displayed as components of personal identity (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; O'Regan *et al.*, 2019). The relationships described indicate that consumers who place a premium on symbolic value and variety may exhibit greater enthusiasm for local foods that underscore cultural heritage or sensory authenticity (Kuksov and Xie, 2012). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the present study did not examine the direct effects of such marketing efforts. Although these propositions are consistent with the literature and align with the variables investigated, they should be interpreted as theoretically informed suggestions rather than empirically corroborated outcomes. Future inquiries could test these hypotheses through experimental designs or through qualitative methods such as interviews with consumers and marketers (Levy, 1981; Wright, 2006).

Despite the valuable insights provided, caution is warranted in interpreting these results due to the reliance on non-random sampling and self-reported data. Additionally, cultural context remains a limiting factor, as the research was conducted exclusively in Türkiye. Such considerations may affect the broader applicability of the findings.

In conclusion, this study underscores the intricate interdependencies that manifest when social visibility, novelty-seeking inclinations, and status-related perceptions coalesce. The data demonstrate that conspicuous impulses within virtual realms have a considerable influence on consumer preferences for distinctive offerings, primarily through the mediating effects of variety-seeking motivations and cultural salience. By presenting a more holistic perspective on the influence of digital engagement on consumer tendencies, this investigation provides a critical foundation for further scholarly exploration in an increasingly

interconnected global environment. One of the study's notable strengths lies in its integration of symbolic status, variety-seeking behavior, and conspicuous consumption into a unified framework, an approach that remains relatively uncommon in the current literature. The deployment of structural equation modeling (SEM) and the inclusion of a comparatively large sample ($N = 390$) enhance the credibility and robustness of these findings.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Esra ÖZKAN ÖNEM: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Sema AYDIN:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Conceptualization. **Ramazan İNAN:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Data curation.

Implications for gastronomy

The present study investigated how conspicuous consumption tendencies manifesting on social media influence local food consumption. The findings indicate that gastronomic variety-seeking behavior and symbolic status perception serve as pivotal mediators that intensify individuals' interest in local cuisine. By enabling users to display local food choices as markers of social standing, social media platforms reinforce the role of conspicuous consumption within gastronomic contexts. Although this research focuses on local cuisine—a cornerstone of gastronomy—it further illuminates how conspicuous consumption propensities transform the experience of consuming regional dishes. In this regard, the analysis reveals gastronomy's intricate interplay with cultural, psychological, and social dimensions. The foundational constructs of conspicuous consumption, variety seeking, and symbolic status perception thus contribute a novel perspective to the evolving discourse in gastronomy.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

In an effort to maintain conceptual clarity and stylistic coherence, the authors employed Grammarly (an AI-assisted linguistic tool) to refine grammar, spelling, and lexical accuracy in this manuscript. Iterative revisions were conducted to ensure that the text remained accessible and engaging for the intended readership. It should be noted that the foundational insights, empirical findings, and intellectual contributions are exclusively those of the authors, with the tool merely facilitating enhancements to the manuscript's presentation. The authors assume complete responsibility for the content, underscoring their commitment to academic rigor and integrity. Moreover, all contributors have thoroughly reviewed and approved the final version.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors confirm that no financial interests or personal connections exist that could have influenced the outcomes or interpretation of the research presented in this paper.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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