

Article

Digital Gastrodiplomacy: A Multimodal Semiotic Analysis of How YouTube Food Travel Vlogs Construct Destination Image in Uzbekistan

Iroda Mukhammadieva ^{1,2}

¹ Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, International Graduate School, Namseoul University, Cheonan 31020, Republic of Korea; iroda@nsu.ac.kr

² Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Sejong University, Seoul 05006, Republic of Korea

Abstract

This study investigates how YouTube food travel vloggers semiotically construct destination images and potentially function as informal culinary ambassadors through gastrodiplomacy mechanisms, using Uzbekistan as a case study of emerging tourism markets. Although digital content creators are increasingly recognised as shaping tourism flows, a systematic understanding of the multimodal semiotic mechanisms through which food travel vlogs construct destination meanings remains limited. Using multimodal discourse analysis, this study examines six YouTube food travel videos on Uzbekistan (over 28 million combined views) from two prominent creators. The analysis integrates Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, van Leeuwen's sound semiotics, and Norris's multimodal interaction analysis to code a 60-segment corpus. Comparative analysis reveals 25 notable differences in semiotic features between the two creators, identifying two distinct semiotic profiles. Vlogger 1 primarily follows a parasocial intimacy model marked by direct gaze (89.2%), frequent second-person address (78.4%), and comparatively minimal editing. In contrast, Vlogger 2 adopts a cinematic documentary model characterised by first-person narration (56.5%), constructed visuals (60.9%), and gastro-nomic heritage narratives (34.8%). Despite these divergences, shared conventions centred on food composition, upbeat music, positive evaluation, and sharing gestures indicate a stable semiotic grammar of food travel vlogging. Analysis further reveals that orientalist dynamics and resistance to orientalism coexist within the same representational practice phenomenon termed 'layered orientalism', with distinct implications for how emerging destinations are mediated to international audiences. These findings suggest that digital content creators may employ distinct semiotic strategies that could function as informal culinary ambassadors through gastrodiplomacy mechanisms, potentially constructing destination awareness and cultural meaning for international audiences. This study contributes to theory on multimodal destination image construction and offers implications for how emerging tourism destinations might leverage multi-creator strategies to build culturally grounded destination brands.



Academic Editor: Lewis Ting
On Cheung

Received: 12 March 2026

Revised: 28 April 2026

Accepted: 29 April 2026

Published: 5 May 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the author.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and

conditions of the [Creative Commons](#)

[Attribution \(CC BY\)](#) license.

Keywords: gastrodiplomacy; food tourism; multimodal discourse analysis; destination image; YouTube food vlogs; parasocial interaction; social semiotics; Uzbekistan; cultural representation; nation branding

1. Introduction

The tourism sector has been deeply influenced by digital media, which now plays a central role in shaping how destinations are explored, evaluated, and ultimately experienced by potential travellers (Jansson, 2018; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Among today's travel-related digital media, YouTube food travel vlogs represent a distinct and influential form of destination mediation. These videos, particularly those centred on food tourism, have emerged as influential mediators of cultural experience and destination perception. Travel vlogs can shape tourists' perceptions of a destination's authenticity by presenting personal narratives that resonate with viewers (Font & McCabe, 2017; Koens et al., 2018). As a form of user-generated content, these videos provide accessible and seemingly unfiltered glimpses into local life, shaping destination image in ways that conventional marketing campaigns rarely achieve (Cox et al., 2009; Marine-Roig, 2021).

Despite this demonstrated influence, relatively limited research has systematically examined how food travel vloggers construct authenticity and desirability through multimodal semiotic strategies. Existing studies have approached travel vlogs through parasocial interaction frameworks (Dewantara et al., 2025), cultural and power-dynamic analysis (Rauf & Pasha, 2024), destination image assessment (Mirzamurodova Kizi et al., 2025), or multimodal city image construction (Chen et al., 2024). But few have analysed how visual, verbal, aural, and gestural resources interact simultaneously to produce meaning in audiovisual travel content. Comparative research investigating how different creators represent the same destination through distinct semiotic choices remains particularly scarce, leaving important questions about creator-specific representation strategies unexplored. Moreover, tourism scholarship increasingly recognises the need to critically examine how digital content mediates cultural representation, yet the specific semiotic mechanisms remain understudied.

The concept of gastrodiploacy, or the strategic use of national cuisine to shape a country's international image and enhance foreign perceptions (Rockower, 2012), provides a productive lens for examining these dynamics. Food can be understood as a communicative resource through which cultural identity and national narratives are articulated to international audiences. Examples include South Korea's Hansik globalisation campaign (Pham, 2013) and Peru's Cocina Peruana para el Mundo initiative, where the government built an entire national brand around its culinary heritage (Wilson, 2013). Nations increasingly recognise food culture as a distinctive asset for nation branding (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). Cabral et al. (2024), in their systematic review of 86 studies at the intersection of food and diplomacy, confirms that gastrodiploacy has matured into an established area of public diplomacy scholarship. However, this body of work has focused largely on state-led or institutional initiatives and has given comparatively limited attention to independent digital creators who reach large international audiences through platforms such as YouTube. This gap matters because highly followed food travel vloggers can function as informal gastrodiploacy actors, shaping destination images through multimodal semiotic choices that warrant systematic investigation.

Uzbekistan, a Central Asian nation with a culinary heritage shaped by Silk Road trading traditions, offers an ideal case for investigating these dynamics. Since liberalising its visa regime in 2018, the country has experienced sustained tourism growth, welcoming 6.6 million foreign visitors in 2023 (National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2024), and has actively positioned its cuisine as a distinctive national asset most prominently through plov (Uzbek pilaf), inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2016 (UNESCO, 2016). In parallel, Uzbekistan has facilitated visits by prominent YouTube food travel creators as part of its broader destination promotion strategy. Vlogger 1 (10.8 million subscribers) and Vlogger 2 (11.2 million subscribers) have produced

content that generated a combined viewership exceeding 28 million views. The analytical focus on two creators rather than one enables a comparative dimension rarely present in existing multimodal tourism studies, where most scholarship examines single creators and treats findings as representative of the genre without testing whether different creators construct systematically different destination images. For Western audiences with limited familiarity with Central Asian cuisine, such food travel vlogs may play a disproportionate role in shaping initial destination perceptions, making Uzbekistan an analytically rich case for examining how digital content constructs destination images (Campelo et al., 2014; Uzbekistan Tourism, 2025).

This study addresses these gaps by examining how YouTube food travel vloggers construct destination images through multimodal semiotic choices and how, in doing so, they may function as informal agents of digital gastrodiploacy. With a focus on Uzbekistan's culinary landscape, this study analyses six YouTube videos and codes 60 segments using a systematic multimodal framework across four semiotic dimensions. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do different YouTube food travel creators employ distinct multimodal semiotic strategies when representing the same destination (Uzbekistan), and how do these strategies differ in visual, verbal, aural, and gestural representation?

RQ2: What shared semiotic conventions characterise the food travel vlog as a genre, and how do different creators strategically employ or deviate from these conventions?

RQ3: In what ways do these multimodal representational strategies potentially function as informal gastrodiploacy mechanisms that shape destination image formation?

To answer these questions, this study makes three contributions. First, it provides a systematic multimodal semiotic analysis of food travel vlogs in the Central Asian context, which remains underrepresented in tourism media research. Second, through comparative multimodal analysis, it identifies two distinct creator-specific semiotic profiles that characterise different representational approaches to the same destination. Third, it demonstrates that shared genre conventions, together with creator-specific stylistic variation, suggest different informal gastrodiploacy potential, with implications for how emerging destinations might consider their digital representation strategies.

By addressing these research questions through systematic multimodal analysis and comparative investigation, this study seeks to advance the understanding of how digital content creators may contribute to destination image formation. While influencer effects on destination image, parasocial interaction mechanisms, and multimodal analysis approaches have each received scholarly attention in recent years, their combined application in the context of emerging, non-Western destinations and food-focused travel content remains limited, particularly for Central Asian tourism contexts.

This study addresses four specific research gaps:

- (1) **Comparative Analysis:** Most multimodal tourism studies examine single creators. Comparative analysis of how different creators represent the same destination through distinct semiotic strategies is rare.
- (2) **Informal Gastrodiploacy:** Gastrodiploacy scholarship focuses predominantly on state-led culinary diplomacy initiatives; the role of independent digital creators as informal gastrodiploacy agents has received limited scholarly attention.
- (3) **Central Asian Representation:** Multimodal tourism research concentrates heavily on East Asian destinations; Central Asian tourism destinations remain understudied in this scholarly tradition.
- (4) **Theoretical Integration:** While individual theoretical frameworks have been applied separately to tourism contexts, the specific combination of multimodal semiotic analy-

sis, parasocial interaction theory, and comparative creator analysis within food-focused digital tourism from Central Asian emerging destinations remains underexamined.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Tourism Semiotics and Destination Image*

While tourism is often described as a semiotic practice in which destinations become meaningful through the interpretation of signs and symbols (Jansson, 2018; MacCannell, 1976) research has only recently begun to examine how multimodal semiotic resources—visual, verbal, aural, and gestural—work together to shape destination image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Semiotic analysis reveals that destination image is not a fixed attribute of a place, but rather emerges through the strategic arrangement and interpretation of signs by both content creators and audiences (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Marine-Roig, 2021). Digital media, particularly YouTube, has become a primary site where these semiotic meanings are constructed and circulated, potentially reaching millions of international viewers (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Jansson, 2018). However, most research treats semiotic choices as relatively standardised or generic, overlooking the critical question of whether different content creators deliberately employ distinct multimodal strategies to construct different versions of the same destination (Cox et al., 2009; Gretzel, 2018).

Recent studies have expanded multimodal perspectives on tourism discourse in several ways. Chen et al. (2024) demonstrate how city images are constructed through coordinated visual, verbal, and aural resources in transnational travel vlogs. Lacsina (2023) applies multimodal discourse analysis to food vlogging, revealing how different communicative modes interact to construct culinary authenticity. These studies establish the methodological value of examining multiple semiotic modes simultaneously (Bateman & Tseng, 2023). However, they tend to examine either single creators or single destinations without comparing how different creators represent the same place through distinct semiotic profiles (Chen et al., 2024; Torjesen, 2024). This comparative dimension is essential because if destination image emerges through semiotic construction, then understanding creator-specific variation in semiotic strategies becomes fundamental to understanding how digital media mediates destination perception (Bulumulla et al., 2023; Sandel & Wang, 2022).

The implication is significant. Destination image in digital contexts is not uniformly constructed but potentially variable across creators (Chen et al., 2024; Mirzamurodova Kizi et al., 2025). Yet empirical comparative studies examining how different creators employ different multimodal semiotic strategies to construct different destination images remain rare, particularly for non-Western emerging destinations (Rauf & Pasha, 2024). This gap motivates the present study's focus on comparing two prominent YouTube food travel creators and their distinct semiotic approaches to representing Uzbekistan.

2.2. *Gastrodiplomacy: State-Led and Informal Mechanisms*

Gastrodiplomacy is the strategic use of national cuisine to shape a country's international image, operating as a communicative mechanism through which cultural identity and national narratives are articulated to international audiences (Rockower, 2012; Chapple-Sokol, 2013). Food functions as both substance and symbol, carrying embedded meanings about place, history, cultural values, and national character (Bessière, 1998; Parasecoli, 2022). Existing gastrodiplomacy scholarship has established the importance of culinary practices in nation branding, with prominent examples ranging from South Korea's Hansik globalisation campaign to Peru's Cocina Peruana para el Mundo initiative,

where governments built entire national brands around culinary heritage (Pham, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Cabral et al. (2024), in their systematic review of 86 studies at the intersection of food and diplomacy, confirm that gastrodiploacy has matured into an established area of public diplomacy scholarship (Forman, 2024).

However, this body of work focuses predominantly on state-led or institutional initiatives that examine how governments deliberately position national cuisines as cultural assets through policy, marketing campaigns, and official programmes (Cabral et al., 2024). This institutional focus represents a significant scholarly gap: independent digital creators who reach millions of international viewers may function as equally powerful, if less formally recognised, agents of gastrodiploacy. Highly followed YouTube food travel vloggers potentially shape international perceptions of culinary destinations through their content choices, their narrative framing, and their embodied responses to food experiences (Rauf & Pasha, 2024; Roy & Attri, 2026). Yet their role in informal, creator-driven gastrodiploacy remains largely unexamined in the tourism literature.

For Uzbekistan specifically, gastrodiploacy is particularly relevant because the country's culinary heritage offers a highly visible and culturally resonant basis for international image-building. The country's culinary heritage, rooted in Silk Road trading traditions and centred on dishes such as plov, samsa, and lagman, provides a rich repository of cultural content (UNESCO, 2016; Dadabaev, 2018). Uzbekistan's approach to gastrodiploacy has evolved since the country's tourism reforms began in 2016, when visa liberalisation opened the country to international visitors. The government's strategy of inviting prominent food and travel content creators represents an informal variant of gastrodiploacy, one that operates through commercial facilitation rather than direct editorial control. This approach differs from the highly structured programmes of Thailand and South Korea, where government agencies developed explicit culinary branding guidelines. In the Uzbekistan case, the gastrodiploacy function is emergent rather than planned. Content creators exercise creative autonomy within the framework of government-facilitated access, producing representations that serve nation branding purposes without being formally coordinated as diplomatic instruments (Rockower, 2012; Chapple-Sokol, 2013; Pham, 2013).

The distinction between state-led and informal gastrodiploacy matters theoretically and practically. State-led initiatives operate through formal policy instruments and centralised messaging, whereas informal creator-driven gastrodiploacy operates through distributed, individual creator choices that accumulate into powerful collective effects (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). Understanding how independent digital creators function as informal gastrodiploacy agents through what semiotic mechanisms they construct a destination's culinary appeal, how they negotiate sponsorship while maintaining perceived authenticity, and what implications their representation strategies hold for the destination's image and tourism development is essential for comprehending contemporary destination mediation in digital contexts (Bulumulla et al., 2023; Sandel & Wang, 2022).

Uzbekistan's case exemplifies this emergent form of informal gastrodiploacy, where government facilitation and creator autonomy interact to produce destination representations that shape international perception.

2.3. Parasocial Interaction and Influencer Effects

Parasocial interaction, a one-sided relationship viewers develop with media figures, characterised by a sense of personal connection and intimacy despite the absence of mutual interaction, has emerged as a powerful framework for understanding viewer engagement with digital content creators (Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956; J. Cohen, 1988). The persistent presence, personality-driven style, and perceived authenticity of YouTube creators cultivate a sense of relationship that transcends traditional advertiser–audience relationships.

This parasocial bond not only influences whether viewers choose to watch content but also fundamentally shapes how they interpret both the creator's narrative voice and the destinations being represented (Gretzel, 2018).

For travel vlogs specifically, parasocial relationships shape viewers' evaluation of destination authenticity and desirability. YouTube is widely used for travel inspiration and trip planning, and travel-related videos attract substantial global viewership. Travel vlogs function as influential mediators of destination perception because they present personal narratives and embodied experiences that viewers perceive as authentic (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). Dewantara et al. (2025) demonstrate that parasocial attachment to travel vloggers significantly influences viewer intentions to visit represented destinations. Li et al. (2026), developing a storytelling scale specifically for travel vlogs, established that verbal narrative techniques, including direct audience address and personal disclosure, operate through parasocial mechanisms to enhance viewer engagement and destination desirability. These studies confirm that parasocial dynamics are central to how travel content shapes destination perception and tourist behaviour.

Critically, the specific semiotic mechanisms through which parasocial interaction is activated matter significantly. Atad and Cohen (2024) conducted a controlled experiment with 255 participants demonstrating that direct address, looking into the camera, and speaking to "you" produce significantly stronger parasocial experiences than indirect address, and that this intensified experience directly enhances viewers' perceptions of the speaker's credibility. This finding has direct relevance for understanding creator-specific variation. Different deployments of direct-address semiotic resources should theoretically produce different intensities of parasocial engagement. Moreover, Xu et al. (2024) demonstrate that audience involvement in travel vlogs is multidimensional rather than unitary, operating through three distinct pathways: narrative involvement (immersion in the unfolding story), media persona identification (affective alignment with the vlogger as a persona), and parasocial interaction (the perceived experience of direct address). Each pathway exerts differential effects on travel intention, suggesting that creators who privilege different pathways will construct different viewer experiences and destination perceptions.

However, existing research tends to treat parasocial engagement as a relatively uniform phenomenon, as if all creators cultivate similar parasocial relationships and all viewers respond similarly. This approach overlooks a critical insight: different creators may deliberately employ distinct semiotic strategies, different levels of personal disclosure, different narrative voices, different emotional registers, and different embodied responses to experiences to cultivate systematically different forms of parasocial engagement (Sandel & Wang, 2022; Torjesen, 2024). This variation in creator strategy likely produces different effects on how viewers perceive and desire specific destinations. A creator who emphasises personal intimacy and emotional vulnerability may cultivate a different viewer relationship and interpretation of a destination than a creator who maintains documentary distance and analytical commentary. Yet comparative analysis of how parasocial engagement interacts with distinct creator semiotic strategies and how different creators use parasocial mechanisms differently remains underdeveloped in tourism research (Bulumulla et al., 2023; Roy & Attri, 2026). Understanding these variations is essential for comprehending not just what influences affect destination image but how different influences affect destination image differently through distinct engagement pathways and semiotic mechanisms.

2.4. Multimodal Semiotic Analysis in Tourism Video Research

Multimodal discourse analysis examines how different communicative modes—visual, verbal, aural, and gestural—interact to create meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013;

Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). In tourism contexts, multimodal frameworks have proven valuable for revealing how destinations are represented through coordinated semiotic choices. Visual composition and editing choices, narrative voice and linguistic register, background music and sound design, and embodied expressions (facial expressions, gestures, and physical interactions) work together to construct particular interpretations of place (Norris, 2004; Bateman & Tseng, 2023). The analytical toolkit for studying tourism videos has developed unevenly across semiotic modes. Visual analysis is the most developed, with established frameworks for analysing composition, colour, and framing (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Verbal analysis draws on systemic functional linguistics to examine how language constructs meaning and positions viewers (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Aural analysis, including music and sound design, remains less developed in tourism research, though van Leeuwen's (1999) sound semiotics framework provides foundational tools.

Recent research has begun applying multimodal approaches specifically to food and lifestyle vlog content. Lacsina (2023) applied multimodal discourse analysis to food review vlogs, revealing how different communicative modes interact to construct culinary authenticity. Rauf and Pasha (2024) examine how vlogging practices in gastronomic tourism construct Global North–South dynamics through coordinated semiotic resources. These studies establish the methodological value of examining multiple semiotic modes simultaneously. However, they tend to examine either single creators or single destinations without comparing how different creators represent the same place through distinct semiotic profiles (Chen et al., 2024; Torjesen, 2024). This single-creator approach limits the understanding of creator-specific variation. Are differences in semiotic choices random variation, or do different creators employ coherent, creator-specific semiotic strategies?

Despite these advances, few studies have integrated visual, verbal, aural, and gestural modes within a single systematic framework when analysing tourism content (Du & Cheong, 2025). This fragmentation prevents a comprehensive understanding of how multimodal coordination produces destination representations. By integrating visual, verbal, aural, and gestural analysis within a unified analytical framework, researchers can move beyond examining isolated semiotic resources toward understanding how multimodal coordination produces coherent destination representations. Yet this integrative approach remains rare in tourism research, particularly in comparative analysis of how different creators construct the same destination through distinct multimodal semiotic profiles.

This comparative dimension is essential because if destination image emerges through multimodal semiotic construction through the coordinated arrangement of visual, verbal, aural, and gestural resources, then understanding how different creators make different choices becomes fundamental to understanding destination mediation in digital contexts. Comparative multimodal analysis has the potential to reveal not just that creators differ, but how they differ in their meaning-making strategies across multiple communicative modes and what implications these differences have for destination image formation, viewer engagement, and tourism development. Understanding creators' specific multimodal semiotic profiles requires a systematic comparison that existing research has not yet undertaken.

2.5. Integrated Research Gap and Study Positioning

While destination image research, multimodal semiotic analysis, parasocial interaction theory, and gastrodiploacy scholarship have each developed as relatively independent scholarly traditions, their combined application within the same research context remains limited. More critically, their intersection has received almost no scholarly attention in the specific context of food-focused digital travel content from emerging, non-Western desti-

nations. This fragmentation leaves significant gaps in understanding how digital content creators might function as cultural mediators and potential informal nation-branding agents and what implications their strategic semiotic choices may hold for tourism development and destination image formation.

First, multimodal tourism research typically examines single creators without comparing how different creators represent the same destination through distinct semiotic strategies (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Gretzel, 2018). This single-creator approach limits understanding of creator-specific variation and whether different semiotic profiles may produce genuinely different destination images. Most multimodal tourism studies treat findings as representative of genre conventions without investigating how different creators construct distinct destination representations (Cheng et al., 2024). Comparative multimodal analysis is important for understanding not just that creators differ, but how their differences matter for destination image formation and what semiotic mechanisms may explain these differences (Chen et al., 2024; Du & Cheong, 2025).

Second, the gastrodiploacy scholarship focuses predominantly on state-led culinary diplomacy initiatives, overlooking the role of independent digital creators as potential informal gastrodiploacy agents (Rockower, 2012; Chapple-Sokol, 2013; Cabral et al., 2024). Highly followed YouTube creators may potentially influence international perceptions of destinations through their content choices, semiotic strategies, and embodied engagement with food experiences, although this influence has not been directly measured (Rauf & Pasha, 2024; Roy & Attri, 2026). Exploring how informal creator-driven content might operate through multimodal semiotic strategies could inform how emerging tourism destinations understand their digital representation and how their culinary heritage is mediated to international audiences (Parasecoli, 2022; Forman, 2024).

Third, multimodal tourism research concentrates heavily on East Asian destinations, leaving Central Asian destinations substantially understudied in this scholarly tradition (Stronza, 2001; Wang & Feng, 2023). This geographical gap is significant given the region's growing tourism importance, distinctive culinary heritage, and emerging role in global tourism markets. Research on Central Asian destination representation through digital media would expand the geographical scope of tourism media scholarship and understand how emerging destinations are constructed in digital contexts. Uzbekistan's case is particularly relevant. The country has invested substantially in tourism development and digital creator facilitation, yet scholarly understanding of how these creators represent the destination remains limited (Uzbekistan Tourism, 2025).

Fourth, while individual theoretical frameworks have been applied separately to tourism contexts, the specific combination of multimodal semiotic analysis, parasocial interaction theory, and comparative creator analysis within food-focused digital tourism from Central Asian emerging destinations remains underexamined (Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956; Rockower, 2012; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). This gap in the literature means that understanding of how digital content creators might function as mediators of destination image through both semiotic and relational mechanisms remains incomplete, particularly in understudied cultural and geographical contexts (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Marine-Roig, 2021).

This study addresses these gaps by examining how two prominent YouTube food travel creators employ distinct multimodal semiotic strategies to represent the same destination (Uzbekistan). By comparing creator-specific patterns across visual, verbal, aural, and gestural modes, this study identifies both shared genre conventions and creator-specific variation, a distinction that existing research rarely emphasises (Bateman & Tseng, 2023). Specifically, this study identifies 25 notable differences in semiotic features between creators across multiple dimensions and identifies two coherent, creator-specific semiotic profiles

that may activate different engagement pathways and construct different destination representations (Atad & Cohen, 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

By examining these semiotic patterns in relation to gastrodiploacy concepts, this study extends gastrodiploacy scholarship beyond state-led initiatives and suggests how independent creators might function as informal cultural mediators (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021; Sandel & Wang, 2022). The comparative approach reveals that informal creator-driven representation is not monolithic but varied; different creators employ different semiotic strategies to construct different representations of a destination for international audiences, with potentially different implications for how destinations are perceived. By focusing on a Central Asian case, this study contributes to expanding the geographical scope of multimodal tourism research and understanding how emerging, non-Western destinations are mediated in global digital contexts (Lacsina, 2023; Torjesen, 2024). By applying multiple theoretical frameworks within a single analytical study, this research demonstrates how the combined application of different frameworks can produce insights that emerge from careful engagement with all traditions (Norris, 2004; van Leeuwen, 1999).

The analysis contributes to understanding how digital content creators function as mediators of destination representation. This study reveals that creator-driven destination representation operates through coordinated deployment of multimodal semiotic resources that may differentially activate parasocial, narrative, and persona-identification engagement pathways, which could contribute to destination image formation. These findings suggest implications for how tourism stakeholders might consider destination marketing strategies and digital representation in the era of digital mediation, particularly for emerging destinations exploring how to work with digital creators as potential cultural mediators.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Corpus

This study applies multimodal discourse analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Norris, 2004; van Leeuwen, 1999) to YouTube food travel vlogs that feature Uzbekistan. Using purposive sampling (Patton, 2015), six videos from two high-profile creators were selected: Vlogger 1 (10.8 M subscribers; three videos) and Vlogger 2 (11.2 M subscribers; three videos). All videos analysed in this study are publicly available on YouTube. Videos were included if they (1) focused primarily on Uzbekistan, (2) treated food and culinary experiences as the central theme, (3) came from channels with more than five million subscribers, (4) were at least 10 min long to enable detailed multimodal analysis, and (5) were available in full, unedited form at the time of analysis. All video URLs remain publicly accessible and are cited solely for verification purposes.

The Vlogger 1 corpus (10.8 M subscribers) includes three videos:

1. "Street Food in Uzbekistan-1500 KG. of RICE PLOV (Pilau) + Market Tour in Tashkent!" Duration: 31:39. URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3xHJzNNM2A> (accessed on 1 March 2026).
2. "Central Asian Food-TEARDROP SOMSA (SAMOSA) and HUGE UZBEK DINNER in Tashkent, Uzbekistan!" Duration: 25:21. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDc31yi-AIU&t=31s> (accessed on 1 March 2026).
3. "Ultra-Tender TANDOORI LAMB!! | Food Tour + Attractions in Bukhara-Silk Road Uzbekistan!" Duration: 21:05. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ubXA6PbxU8> (accessed on 1 March 2026).

The total corpus is approximately 78 min and has generated over 15 million views.

The Vlogger 2 corpus (11.2 M subscribers) includes three videos:

1. “Asia’s Biggest Frying Pan! Over 3000 POUNDS of Rice and Meat Cooked Each Day!” Duration: 14:44. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9OGQNaUoJY> (accessed on 1 March 2026).
2. “WAGYU LAMB!!! Uzbekistan’s UNKNOWN Nomad Mountain Meat.” Duration: 16:28. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fjQmhFN7T0> (accessed on 1 March 2026).
3. “Death by Meat! Street Food in Tashkent, Uzbekistan!” Duration: 14:38. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IcyUtkrEQ> (accessed on 1 March 2026).

The entire Vlogger 2 corpus is approximately 45 min and has generated over 13 million views. Together, the two corpora offer substantial reach while reflecting clearly different production styles. Both creators operate in the top tier of YouTube food travel content. Vlogger 1 is known for an enthusiastic, highly personal on-camera style, whereas Vlogger 2 relies more heavily on narrative structuring, professional cinematography, and post-production editing. Notably, both channels disclosed facilitation by Uzbekistan’s Ministry of Tourism in their Uzbekistan content, an important contextual factor for interpreting how authenticity is constructed. Across the six videos, total viewership exceeds 28 million views, providing a substantial empirical basis for examining how food travel vlogs construct destination representations for large international audiences.

3.2. Analytical Framework

The analytical framework structures the coding process around four semiotic modes, each grounded in established theoretical resources. The visual mode draws on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2021) grammar of visual design, codes for contact (direct gaze/demand vs. indirect gaze/offer), social distance (intimate close-up vs. public long shot), involvement (frontal vs. oblique angle), composition (centred vs. polarised), and visual naturalness (handheld vs. highly edited). The verbal mode applies systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013), coding for evaluative language (positive evaluation, superlative expressions), modality (assertive vs. tentative), pronominal address (direct ‘you’, first-person ‘I’, inclusive ‘we’), and topical focus (food description, local people references, place-specific naming). The aural mode follows van Leeuwen’s (1999) sound semiotics framework, coding for music (upbeat, traditional, none), sound effects (amplified eating sounds, environmental ambient), and tonal quality. The gestural mode uses Norris’s (2004) multimodal interaction analysis, coding for facial expressions (surprise, satisfaction, smile), body movements (pointing, leaning), and food-related gestures (sharing, savouring). A fifth analytical dimension, thematic analysis, operates across all modes to identify overarching narrative patterns, including spectacle, authenticity, heritage, personal discovery, and orientalist framing.

3.3. Segmentation and Coding Procedure

Each video was divided into analytically discrete segments following established procedures in multimodal video analysis (Baldry & Thibault, 2010; Bateman & Tseng, 2023). A segment boundary was marked only when two criteria occurred simultaneously: a visible scene transition (such as a change in location, camera setup, or editing cut) and a clear topical shift in the verbal narration.

This procedure resulted in 60 segments across the six-video corpus (Vlogger 1: $n = 37$; Vlogger 2: $n = 23$), with individual segments typically ranging between two and four minutes. The uneven distribution reflects substantive differences in narrative structuring. Vlogger 1 produces longer videos characterised by frequent scene transitions, whereas Vlogger 2 tends to sustain extended sequences focused on a single cooking process or cultural encounter.

The 60 segments were coded using a binary presence/absence protocol across 28 codes distributed over five analytical dimensions. The visual mode comprised seven codes: contact type (demand/direct gaze vs. offer/indirect gaze), social distance (intimate close-up vs. public long shot), camera angle (frontal vs. oblique), composition (centred vs. polarised), visual naturalness (handheld vs. stabilised), camera movement style, and editing intensity.

The verbal mode also included seven codes. Pronominal address was disaggregated into three distinct variables (direct “you,” first-person “I,” and inclusive “we”), alongside evaluative language, modality level, topical focus, and place-specific naming.

The aural mode comprised four codes: background music type, amplified eating sounds, ambient environmental sound, and added sound effects.

The gestural mode included five codes covering facial expressions, body movement, pointing or indicating behaviours, food-related gestures (e.g., tearing, presenting, savouring), and sharing actions.

In addition, five cross-cutting thematic codes—spectacle and grandeur, cultural authenticity, gastronomic heritage, personal discovery, and orientalist framing—operated across all modes to capture overarching narrative patterns. A binary coding protocol inevitably simplifies the density of multimodal meaning within any single segment. For example, a moment in which Vlogger 1 locks eyes with the camera while tearing into lamb *samsa* may simultaneously involve visual demand, positive verbal evaluation, amplified eating sounds, and an expression of satisfaction. The coding framework records the presence of each semiotic resource but does not attempt to model their dynamic interaction within that moment. This trade-off is intentional; while nuance at the micro-level is reduced, the binary structure enables systematic comparison between creators, which is central to the study’s comparative design. The codebook was developed iteratively rather than imposed rigidly from the outset. An initial coding scheme was derived from the four theoretical frameworks (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Norris, 2004; van Leeuwen, 1999).

The final codebook specifies operational definitions and boundary conditions for each code. “Direct eye contact,” for example, required the vlogger’s gaze to be directed at the camera lens for at least three consecutive seconds within a segment. “Amplified eating sounds” required audible enhancement of chewing, crunching, or cooking sounds above ambient levels.

Because the primary coding was conducted by a single researcher, reliability was enhanced through iterative refinement, systematic boundary testing, and repeated review of ambiguous cases rather than through independent dual coding. Two full rounds of pilot coding were completed, each followed by clarification of code definitions and resolution of uncertainties. Although this approach does not yield a formal intercoder reliability coefficient, it aligns with qualitative multimodal research traditions (Baldry & Thibault, 2010), where interpretive consistency is established through transparent methodological documentation and reflexive rigour rather than statistical agreement alone.

3.4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

To address the research questions, this study employs a descriptive comparative frequency analysis combined with an interpretive analytical framework. RQ1 and RQ2 are examined through a systematic comparison of 107 coded features across visual, verbal, aural, and gestural modes, with frequencies and percentages calculated separately for each creator. This comparative approach reveals both creator-specific variation (addressing RQ1) and shared genre conventions (addressing RQ2).

The study's central argument proposes that destination representation emerges through a dynamic interplay between individual creator agency and genre-level constraints. To evaluate how observed patterns support this, the analysis distinguishes between high-variation patterns (>20 percentage points, used here as a pragmatic threshold for identifying substantively meaningful variation in small-sample descriptive data) and convergent patterns, interpreting what each type reveals about destination representation.

High-variation patterns indicate creator-specific semiotic strategies. Vlogger 1 maintains direct eye contact in 89.2% of segments versus Vlogger 2, who maintains direct eye contact in 39.1% of segments, a difference indicating substantively different choices about audience engagement. Similarly, Vlogger 1 uses direct address ("you") in 78.4% of segments compared to 21.7% for Vlogger 2, reflecting opposed strategies about viewer positioning. The 53.8-percentage-point difference in first-person narration (Vlogger 1: 2.7% vs. Vlogger 2: 56.5%) indicates differing narrative foci; Vlogger 1 prioritises the destination while Vlogger 2 foregrounds the creator's journey. These patterns are analytically evaluated as evidence of how individual creators shape destination representation through deliberate semiotic choices.

Convergent patterns reveal genre-level constraints. Both creators employ upbeat music at similar frequencies (67.6% vs. 78.3%), centred composition (59.5% vs. 69.6%), and intimate close-up framing (56.8% vs. 65.2%), suggesting these are genre requirements rather than individual choices. This shared semiotic core indicates that creators operate within recognisable genre parameters while exercising agency in other domains. The simultaneous presence of high variation in some codes and convergence in others directly supports the study's central argument: destination representation emerges through situated creativity within genre parameters.

RQ3 is addressed through thematic analysis connecting semiotic patterns to gastrodiploacy frameworks. Rather than inferring causal impact, the analysis interprets how specific semiotic configurations function as informal cultural mediation mechanisms. The high-variation patterns in parasocial intimacy and documentary approaches are analytically evaluated as two distinct informal gastrodiploacy strategies. Vlogger 1's parasocial approach operates through emotional connection and embodied enthusiasm, functioning as what might be termed affective gastrodiploacy, where Uzbekistan becomes appealing through the creator's visible emotional response. In contrast, Vlogger 2's documentary approach operates through cultural knowledge and historical contextualization, functioning as epistemic gastrodiploacy, where Uzbekistan becomes meaningful through the explanation of cultural significance and historical roots. These represent distinctly different semiotic mechanisms for mediating destination meaning.

For each coded feature, frequencies and percentages were calculated separately for each creator and compared to identify notable patterns. This study employs descriptive comparative analysis rather than inferential statistics for several methodologically important reasons. First, binary-coded data from nested sources (segments within videos within creators) violates assumptions underlying many statistical tests, particularly the assumption of independent observations. With segments clustered within specific videos and creators, standard significance tests produce *p*-values that may not reliably indicate genuine group differences. Multilevel or mixed-effects models would theoretically provide more conservative estimates by explicitly accounting for this nested structure. However, the modest number of underlying videos (six total; three per creator) and the coherence of creator-specific patterns across videos mean that pursuing such approaches would yield similar substantive conclusions while introducing additional analytic complexity (Patton, 2015; Neuendorf, 2017).

Second, the analysis is based on a relatively small sample of 60 segments drawn from six videos, with an uneven distribution between the two creators (37 vs. 23 segments) and a limited number of underlying videos per creator. This suggests that the analysis is exploratory and descriptive rather than confirmatory. As J. Cohen (1988) notes, such samples are appropriate for intensive qualitative analysis of multimodal texts, but not for statistical generalisation to broader populations. This study analyses six videos in systematic detail across 28 coded features per segment, a depth analysis that is valuable for understanding representational patterns but does not support confident statistical inference.

Third, in multimodal analysis, coding decisions involve interpretive judgement, particularly for visual, aural, and gestural modes. While single-coder reliability can be enhanced through systematic procedures (detailed codebook, pilot coding, consistent application, and documented decision-making), it cannot be fully verified without independent inter-rater assessment. This interpretive dimension means that reported frequencies represent one coder's application of the coding scheme rather than objective measurements. The binary coding protocol further simplifies multimodal complexity. A moment with brief, peripheral direct address is coded identically to one with sustained, central direct address. This trade-off between reliability and nuance is acknowledged here rather than obscured by statistical language.

Fourth, the study's primary contribution is to demonstrate how two creators employ distinct semiotic strategies and to identify patterns in these strategies. This is fundamentally a contribution to understanding representation patterns, not to proving statistical relationships or predicting outcomes for broader populations of creators or destinations.

For each of the 28 codes, frequencies and percentages are reported for each creator separately. Differences are described in terms of magnitude (e.g., "50 percentage point difference between creators") rather than statistical significance. Patterns are examined across semiotic modes to identify clusters of co-occurring features (e.g., direct gaze, close framing, and direct address co-occurring frequently in one creator's videos but rarely in the other's). These clustered patterns are interpreted as coherent semiotic strategies characteristic of each creator.

The analysis examines which codes show substantial differences between creators (>20 percentage points) and which codes show similar frequencies, suggesting shared genre conventions. This mixed pattern—some divergence, some convergence—indicates that creators employ both differentiated and shared semiotic strategies rather than showing either complete systematic difference or complete similarity. This analytically meaningful variation is reported and interpreted descriptively.

The descriptive findings are specific to these two creators, these six videos, and this specific time period. They are not intended to generalise to all food travel vloggers, all YouTube creators, or all representations of Uzbekistan. Rather, they provide insight into how these specific creators construct destination representations through multimodal semiotic choices and what patterns characterise their distinct approaches.

The findings describe creator-specific patterns in a multimodal representation of what creators do visually, verbally, aurally, and gesturally. However, the data does not directly measure viewer effects. That is, this analysis does not demonstrate that these semiotic strategies actually shape international perceptions, influence destination preferences, or produce concrete tourism outcomes. To reach such conclusions would require additional empirical evidence from viewer reception studies (examining how audiences interpret these videos) or tourism impact analysis (measuring actual changes in visitation or destination perception). Future research combining multimodal analysis with viewer studies would clarify the relationship between semiotic strategies and actual audience effects.

Similarly, while the analysis reveals two distinct creator-specific profiles, it does not establish whether these differences reflect individual creator choices versus structural factors such as channel production format, audience expectations, available technical equipment, team structure, or platform algorithms that reward particular aesthetics. The data clearly shows semiotic divergence that can be characterised and compared, but determining whether this stems primarily from deliberate creator strategy versus external production constraints would require additional information (e.g., creator interviews about their intentionality and channel format specifications).

Despite these limitations, descriptive comparative multimodal analysis contributes valuable knowledge. By systematically comparing how two creators construct the same destination across multiple semiotic modes, this study illuminates representation patterns, identifies both shared genre conventions and individual creator variation, and demonstrates methods for examining multimodal digital content in tourism contexts. The descriptive findings support future research that might pursue measurement of viewer effects, tourism impacts, or creator intentionality.

4. Results

4.1. Aggregate Frequency Distribution Across Semiotic Modes

Analysis of the 60-segment corpus revealed systematic multimodal patterns across the six videos, indicating that food travel vlogging operates through coordinated deployment of semiotic resources across multiple communicative modes. These patterns demonstrate both consistent genre-wide conventions and substantial variation in how creators combine these elements, revealing that the food travel vlog genre is characterised by a stable semiotic core alongside significant creator differences. In the visual mode, direct eye contact with the camera appeared in 70.0% of segments, while centred composition (63.3%) and intimate close-up framing (61.7%) were also highly frequent. In addition, scale emphasis through salient sizes, such as large cooking vessels or expansive food displays, appeared in 61.7% of segments. These visual strategies frequently co-occurred to suggest dual orientation toward interpersonal intimacy and visual spectacle. Close-up shots reduced spatial distance and created a sense of interpersonal proximity, whereas wide shots of massive plov cauldrons and bustling bazaars constructed scenes of abundance and scale.

In the verbal mode, direct audience address using the second person 'you' appeared in 56.7% of segments, making it the dominant interpersonal strategy. Food-related discussion dominated topical content (51.7%), with vloggers consistently naming dishes, describing flavours, and commenting on preparation methods. High-certainty modality (40.0%) and positive evaluative language (36.7%) together constructed Uzbek cuisine through categorical, emphatic endorsement rather than hedged or tentative assessment.

In the aural mode, upbeat background music (71.7%) functioned as a pervasive affective design element. Amplified eating sounds appeared in 46.7% of segments at a high frequency, reflecting deliberate sonic design. The amplification of crunching, sizzling, and slurping transforms eating from a visual event into a multisensory experience, inviting viewers to imaginatively participate in the tasting. Ambient environmental sounds (market chatter, kitchen clatter, and street noise) appeared in 30.0% of segments, contributing what [van Leeuwen \(1999\)](#) describes as 'provenance', the sonic trace of a real, specific location that authenticates the depicted environment.

In gestural mode, sharing gestures (66.7%) and surprise expressions (45.0%) were most prominent. Physical offers of food toward the camera, inclusive hand movements, and demonstrations of communal eating construct the vlog as a participatory encounter rather than a detached observation. Pointing and indicating gestures appeared in 35.0% of segments, typically accompanying references to specific dishes or cultural

features. These deictic gestures direct the viewer's attention and position the vlogger as a knowledgeable guide.

Thematic analysis revealed spectacle and grandeur (65.0%) as the dominant narrative frame, followed by memorable food moments (53.3%), sensory richness (50.0%), personal discovery (41.7%), and cultural authenticity (36.7%).

Cross-modal coordination analysis identified three primary clusters: an Intimacy Cluster combining direct gaze, close-up framing, and direct verbal address; an Authenticity Cluster combining naturalistic visuals, ambient sound, and references to local people; and a Spectacle Cluster combining edited visuals, upbeat music, and superlative language.

The identification of these clusters reveals that semiotic resources often operate in coordinated patterns within food travel vlogs. A segment coded for direct gaze was frequently more likely to also feature close-up framing and second-person verbal address, suggesting that creators may deploy coordinated multimodal ensembles rather than make independent choices within each mode. This coordination appears to produce coherent communicative effects. The Intimacy Cluster creates a sense of personal connection with the viewer, the Authenticity Cluster provides evidence of genuine cultural engagement, and the Spectacle Cluster generates excitement and visual memorability. Most segments in the corpus combined elements from multiple clusters, reflecting the hybrid nature of the food travel vlog as a genre that must simultaneously entertain, inform, and build parasocial relationships.

4.2. Comparative Creator Analysis

Across the 107 codes examined, 25 codes show notable differences of 20 percentage points or more between creators. These substantial differences cluster into patterns that characterise creator-specific semiotic approaches, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Notable differences in semiotic features between creators.

Semiotic Code	V11 (%)	V12 (%)	Diff.
Visual Mode			
Direct eye contact	89.2	39.1	+50.1
Offer/indirect gaze	8.1	60.9	−52.8
Edited/constructed visuals	16.2	60.9	−44.7
Cooking action	32.4	73.9	−41.5
Walking action	64.9	34.8	+30.1
Handheld camera	40.5	17.4	+23.1
Verbal Mode			
Direct address (you')	78.4	21.7	+56.6
First-person 'I'	2.7	56.5	−53.8
Inclusive 'we'	13.5	39.1	−25.6
Superlative language	35.1	13.0	+22.1
Local people reference	24.3	52.2	−27.8
Gestural Mode			
Satisfaction expression	32.4	4.3	+28.1
Pointing/indicating	51.4	26.1	+25.3
Thematic Mode			
Gastronomic heritage	8.1	34.8	−26.7

Note. Differences of 20 percentage points or greater are presented.

The identification of 25 notable differences and two distinct semiotic profiles contributes to understanding destination representation through food travel vlogs in three important ways.

First, these findings reveal representational variation. Destination images in food travel vlogs are not monolithic or standardised but emerge through creator-specific semi-

otic choices. Vlogger 1 and Vlogger 2 construct distinctly different versions of Uzbekistan through coordinated deployment of visual, verbal, aural, and gestural resources. This variation matters because it suggests that destination representation is not determined by the destination itself but is substantially shaped by the creator's deliberate representational strategy.

Second, the findings illuminate specific semiotic mechanisms through which creators construct destination meaning. The differences operate systematically across modes. Direct gaze and intimate framing often co-occur with second-person address, while constructed visuals often co-occur with first-person narration. These clustered patterns suggest that creators employ coordinated multimodal ensembles rather than make independent choices within each mode. Understanding these mechanisms clarifies not just what is represented, but how representations are constructed through the strategic coordination of multiple semiotic resources.

Third, the simultaneous presence of shared conventions and vlogger-specific strategies reveals tension between genre standardisation and individual creativity. Both creators employ centred composition, intimate close-up framing, upbeat music, positive evaluation, and sharing gestures at similar frequencies, suggesting these constitute core genre conventions. Simultaneously, they differ substantially on contact type, camera work, narrative voice, and thematic focus, demonstrating that creators exercise deliberate choice within genre parameters. This balance between convention and variation characterises how the food travel vlog genre operates; the standardised semiotic core enables audience recognition and engagement, while creator-specific variation provides distinctiveness and personal voice.

These patterns address a key gap in tourism media research: understanding not just that creators influence destination perception, but specifically how different creators construct different destination representations through distinct multimodal strategies.

4.3. Two Distinct Semiotic Profiles

The pattern of notable differences is not random but reveals two coherent, internally consistent representational strategies. Vlogger 1's profile is defined by direct interpersonal engagement; he maintains eye contact with the camera in 89.2% of segments (vs. 39.1% for Vlogger 2) and addresses the audience using 'you' in 78.4% (vs. 21.7%). His gestural repertoire reinforces this orientation; satisfaction expressions (32.4% vs. 4.3%) and pointing gestures (51.4% vs. 26.1%) function as embodied communication directed primarily toward the viewer rather than toward co-present participants. He favours superlative evaluative language (35.1% vs. 13.0%) and employs handheld, minimally edited cinematography (40.5% vs. 17.4%; editing: 16.2% vs. 60.9%). Together, these features construct what may be termed a parasocial intimacy model, an aesthetic of spontaneous, seemingly unmediated personal experience shared directly with the viewer.

Vlogger 2 deploys a different semiotic logic. First-person narration ('I'; 56.5% vs. 2.7%) and inclusive ('we'; 39.1% vs. 13.5%) position the experience as the vlogger's journey that the viewer observes rather than participates in. The visual strategy relies on the indirect gaze (60.9% vs. 8.1%) and heavily edited sequences (60.9% vs. 16.2%), producing a more cinematic quality. Vlogger 2 foregrounds cooking processes (73.9% vs. 32.4%) and references local people more frequently (52.2% vs. 24.3%), positioning Uzbek culinary practitioners as the central subjects rather than the vlogger himself. Heritage narratives appear frequently (34.8% vs. 8.1%) nearly four times more often than in Vlogger 1's content. This configuration constitutes a cinematic documentary model that privileges cultural documentation over direct parasocial engagement.

The identification of two distinct profiles is analytically significant because it demonstrates that destination representation through food travel vlogs is not predetermined or uniform. Rather, different creators construct substantially different destination meanings through deliberate semiotic choices. A study examining only Vlogger 1 would characterise food travel vlogging as parasocial intimacy; examining only Vlogger 2 would characterise it as documentary analysis. Only through comparison do we recognise that these represent distinct creator strategies rather than genre requirements. This comparative perspective illuminates how creators exercise agency in destination representation and shows that understanding digital destination mediation requires attending to creator-specific variation alongside genre conventions.

It is important to note that these distinct patterns may reflect multiple factors beyond individual creator preference. The observed differences could relate to channel production format, audience expectations for different viewer demographics, available technical equipment, team structure, or platform algorithms that reward particular aesthetics. While the analysis demonstrates clear semiotic divergence that can be characterised and compared, determining whether these differences stem primarily from deliberate creator strategy versus external production constraints would require additional information, such as creator interviews or documentation of channel format specifications.

4.4. Shared Genre Conventions

Not all semiotic resources showed substantial differences between creators. Several high-frequency features show similar frequencies between creators: centred composition (Vlogger 1, 59.5% vs. Vlogger 2, 69.6%), intimate close-up framing (56.8% vs. 65.2%), upbeat music (67.6% vs. 78.3%), positive evaluation (35.1% vs. 39.1%), sharing gestures (62.2% vs. 73.9%), and surprise expressions (43.2% vs. 47.8%). These features appear to constitute genre conventions, a shared semiotic core of the food travel vlog that operates regardless of individual creator style. Placing food centrally in the frame, filming it in close-up shots, accompanying it with upbeat music, and expressing positive surprise and enthusiasm appear to be requirements of the genre rather than individual choices. These shared conventions suggest that the food travel vlog genre has established recognisable semiotic patterns that creators employ, even when they differ in other representational strategies. Table 2 summarises the stable semiotic core shared by both creators.

Table 2. Shared semiotic features between creators.

Semiotic Code	Vlogger 1 (%)	Vlogger 2 (%)
Centred composition	59.5	69.6
Intimate close-up	56.8	65.2
Eating action	56.8	65.2
Upbeat music	67.6	78.3
Positive evaluation	35.1	39.1
Sharing gestures	62.2	73.9
Surprise expressions	43.2	47.8

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretive Dimensions of Single-Coder Analysis

Because this study relied on single-coder analysis, interpretive judgement inevitably shaped some coding decisions, particularly within visual, aural, and gestural modes. Acknowledging these influences strengthens methodological transparency and clarifies how findings should be interpreted.

The distinction between “direct gaze” and “indirect gaze,” for instance, involves the interpretation of eye direction, the camera angle, and the intensity of viewer address. A different coder might assess the intentionality and prominence of these choices differently, potentially affecting whether a segment is coded as direct or indirect. This difference is particularly relevant to characterising Vlogger 1’s parasocial intimacy strategy, which depends substantially on direct gaze coding. While Vlogger 1’s substantially higher frequency of direct gaze (89.2% vs. 39.1%) is striking, a different coder might establish slightly different thresholds for what constitutes “direct” engagement, which could affect the magnitude of the difference or the characterisation of the strategy itself.

Similarly, coding emotional expressions, particularly “satisfaction expressions,” involves interpreting facial cues and embodied responses. Vlogger 1 exhibits satisfaction expressions far more frequently than Vlogger 2 (32.4% vs. 4.3%). This stark difference likely reflects a real distinction in embodied engagement style. However, the specific coding involved judgement about which expressions constitute “satisfaction” versus mere eating actions, and a different coder might apply these criteria differently, potentially affecting the magnitude of the difference.

The thematic coding dimensions, particularly interpretations of “authenticity,” “orientalism,” and “heritage,” involve the most explicit interpretive judgement. These codes captured how segments function narratively and what cultural meanings they construct, not merely observable features. The identification of “layered orientalism,” for instance, emerged from the interpretation of how spectacle and heritage narratives interact, not from directly coded features. A different coder might interpret these narrative patterns differently, potentially identifying different conceptual patterns.

These limitations mean the identified semiotic profiles represent this coder’s analytical interpretation of how these specific creators construct destination representations, shaped by the coder’s frameworks and interpretive choices. The broad patterns that Vlogger 1 emphasises, parasocial intimacy, and that Vlogger 2 emphasises, documentary observation, likely represent genuine creator differences given their consistency and coherence across multiple semiotic modes. However, specific percentages and precise characterizations carry inherent interpretive uncertainty. Future research with inter-coder verification would clarify which patterns are robust across different analytical perspectives and which reflect this coder’s specific interpretive framework.

5.2. Parasocial Engagement vs. Documentary Observation as Paths to Destination Image

The comparative findings reveal that Vlogger 1 and Vlogger 2 employ distinct semiotic approaches to representing Uzbekistan. Vlogger 1 employs a parasocial intimacy model that positions the viewer as a real-time companion. The combination of sustained eye contact, frequent second-person address, and visible emotional reactions creates what Horton and Richard Wohl (1956) described as the “illusion of face-to-face closeness with a media performer.” Atad and Cohen (2024) provide experimental evidence for why these matter. Direct address strengthens parasocial experience and increases perceived credibility in media interaction. Vlogger 1’s consistent reliance on direct gaze and the “you” address (89.2% and 78.4% of segments, respectively) functions as a deliberate strategy for intensifying viewer connection through parasocial mechanisms. These patterns clearly show that through parasocial intimacy, Uzbekistan is presented in ways that emphasise enthusiasm, strong endorsements, and embodied satisfaction. Roy and Attri (2026) show that parasocial bonding with vloggers predicts tourist engagement and willingness to share recommendations, suggesting that Vlogger 1’s approach could potentially be effective for generating word-of-mouth interest in destinations unfamiliar to global audiences.

Vlogger 2 operates through a different representational logic closer to the cinematic documentary model. The viewer is positioned as an observer of a structured journey rather than a conversational partner. First-person narration, indirect gaze, and heavy editing redirect attention from the host's immediate feelings toward cooking processes, local practitioners, and cultural detail. Vlogger 2 constructs destination representation through cultural knowledge and historical contextualization. [Xu et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrate that viewer involvement unfolds through distinct pathways—parasocial interaction, narrative involvement, and media persona identification—each of which may influence travel intentions differently. Vlogger 2 appears to privilege narrative involvement and cultural identification over direct parasocial intensity. This distinction may have practical significance. [Cheng et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrate that travel vlogs activate different engagement pathways depending on whether they emphasise personal immersion or informational framing. [Dewantara et al. \(2025\)](#) similarly suggest that travel vlog appeal may depend partly on how the destination is mediated through the vlogger's performance and presentation style.

These distinct representational approaches suggest different pathways through which viewers might engage with Uzbekistan. Parasocial intimacy emphasises emotional connection and embodied experience, while documentary observation emphasises cultural knowledge and historical understanding. These represent different semiotic strategies rather than necessarily different levels of effectiveness. Whether different semiotic strategies actually serve different strategic goals in tourism marketing would require empirical investigation of viewer reception and actual tourism outcomes. Destination marketing professionals might consider that creator selection involves semiotic strategy, with different approaches potentially producing different types of viewer engagement, though measuring such effects would require additional research beyond multimodal analysis.

5.3. Authenticity Construction Through Different Semiotic Pathways

The two semiotic profiles construct authenticity through distinct multimodal pathways. In Vlogger 1's case, authenticity appears to be primarily performative. His spontaneous reactions, handheld camera work, and relatively minimal editing create the impression of immediacy and unfiltered experience. [Torjesen \(2024\)](#) describes this aesthetic as "professional amateurism," a strategic display of informality that signals realness rather than production sophistication. Vlogger 1's lower editing rate (16.2% vs. 60.9%) and higher use of handheld camera work (40.5% vs. 17.4%) are consistent with this strategy. [Sandel and Wang \(2022\)](#) similarly demonstrate that YouTubers construct a multimodal discourse of "realness" through choices related to camera positioning, setting, and personal expressiveness. In this model, authenticity appears to emerge from the visibility of lived, embodied experience.

Vlogger 2 constructs authenticity differently, grounding it more explicitly in cultural depth than in personal immediacy. The emphasis on cooking processes (73.9%), local people (52.2%), and gastronomic heritage (34.8%) suggests engagement with Uzbek culinary culture. [Rauf and Pasha \(2024\)](#) identify two authentic pathways in gastronomic tourism vlogs, personal embodied experience, and cultural–historical documentation. The comparative findings here may closely reflect that distinction. Vlogger 1's profile aligns with embodied authentication, while Vlogger 2 corresponds more closely to documentary-style cultural authentication. [E. Cohen and Cohen's \(2012\)](#) distinction between "hot" and "cool" authenticity further clarifies this contrast. "Hot" authenticity is grounded in immediate, affective, seemingly unmediated experience; "cool" authenticity rests on contextualisation, expertise, and cultural framing. Vlogger 1 constructs authenticity through bodily performance and emotional intensity; Vlogger 2 appears to build a cooler, documentary

form of authenticity centred on cultural process and heritage. These distinct pathways suggest different potential value propositions. The first emphasises intimate connection and emotional resonance, while the second emphasises informed cultural understanding and heritage representation.

5.4. *The Sponsorship Paradox*

Both channels disclosed facilitation by Uzbekistan's Ministry of Tourism, creating what this analysis frames as a sponsorship paradox. Official acknowledgment can simultaneously enhance and undermine perceived authenticity. While disclosure requirements are mandated by platform policies and advertising regulations, they challenge the authenticity central to influencer marketing (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021; Steils et al., 2022). However, the specific mechanisms by which disclosure affects viewer perception of authenticity remain under-examined in the tourism literature. Both vloggers explicitly stated sponsorship in their video descriptions or opening statements, yet their multimodal semiotic strategies, visual framing, narrative voice, and embodied responses present strikingly different relationships to this sponsorship, with potentially different implications for how viewers might interpret destination authenticity.

The sponsorship disclosure mechanism warrants critical interrogation as a particular form of strategic authenticity (E. Cohen & Cohen, 2012). From a transparency perspective, disclosure demonstrates honesty and aligns with advertising regulation and platform policy (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). However, from a parasocial and semiotic perspective, sponsorship creates a tension. If a creator is being financially facilitated by a government tourism ministry, can the experience be considered "authentic"? Can spontaneous enthusiasm coexist with official facilitation? Vlogger 1's strategy of sustained personal intimacy, direct gaze, and emotional vulnerability may appear to negotiate this paradox by positioning the creator's authentic response as independent of sponsorship: "Yes, I was facilitated, but my genuine emotional reaction to the food is mine alone." This semiotic strategy could potentially allow viewers to compartmentalise the sponsorship disclosure and focus on perceived individual authenticity (E. Cohen & Cohen, 2012). By contrast, Vlogger 2's documentary-style approach operates differently; by emphasising cultural knowledge, historical context, and expert observation, the value proposition becomes informational authenticity rather than personal authenticity (Sandel & Wang, 2022). Sponsorship disclosure becomes less potentially problematic within this framing because the creator's value rests on expertise, rather than claimed personal emotion.

Both strategies represent different semiotic negotiations between official facilitation and presentation of authenticity (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021; E. Cohen & Cohen, 2012). The finding that two prominent creators employ fundamentally different semiotic approaches to the same sponsorship disclosure suggests that the relationship between sponsorship, authenticity, and parasocial engagement may not be deterministic. The sponsorship itself does not necessarily undermine authenticity uniformly; rather, the semiotic strategies through which creators frame the sponsorship relationship shape how viewers potentially interpret authenticity and construct parasocial bonds. This suggests implications for destination marketing practice. The strategic use of creator sponsorship is not simply a matter of disclosure compliance but of semiotic strategy; how creators frame the sponsorship relationship (implicit vs. explicit; bracketed vs. central) may shape its perceived implications for authenticity.

5.5. *Orientalism, Representation, and Power in Digital Destination Mediation*

Said's (1978) concept of orientalism, the Western production of "the East" as an exotic, knowable other, offers a critical lens for interpreting the semiotic strategies observed in

this study. Orientalism is not simply bias or stereotyping; it is a system of representation through which Western knowledge claims authority over non-Western spaces, peoples, and cultures, rendering them knowable, desirable, and controllable within Western cultural frameworks (Said, 1978). The YouTube food travel vlog operates within this representational system; Western creators represent Central Asian destinations to primarily Western audiences, constructing particular interpretations of “what Uzbekistan is” for consumption. The multimodal semiotic strategies observed in this study, the visual framing, narrative voices, embodied responses, and engagement tactics, may function as representational mechanisms through which orientalist meaning-making either reproduces or resists conventional orientalist framings of Central Asia.

Both vloggers employ strategies that reference and potentially resist orientalist tropes, yet in distinct ways. The Spectacle and Grandeur cluster (65.0% in the combined corpus), emphasising visually striking dishes, monumental quantities, and extraordinary preparation processes, risks reproducing orientalist spectacle, framing Uzbek cuisine as exotic, visually overwhelming, and culturally distant (Stronza, 2001; Parasecoli, 2022). However, the Authenticity Seeking dimension and Historical Symbolism cluster (connecting food to labour, class history, and cultural resilience) may function as a counterweight. By contextualising dishes within labour narratives (“plov originated as laborers’ food”) and cultural–historical frameworks, creators provide knowledge that moves beyond pure exoticization (Dadabaev, 2018).

Vlogger 1’s parasocial intimacy strategy presents an orientalist tension; the emphasis on personal emotional response privileges the Western creator’s sensory experience as the primary focus, potentially marginalising Uzbek cultural meaning. This risks “affective orientalism”, framing non-Western cuisine primarily through Western observer response, rendering cuisine interesting because of how it affects the Western subject, not its autonomous cultural significance. The direct address and foregrounding of personal reaction may inadvertently reproduce orientalism: “Uzbekistan is fascinating because of how it makes me feel” rather than “Uzbekistan’s cuisine is significant within Uzbek cultural history.” By contrast, Vlogger 2’s documentary–analytical approach, emphasising historical context and Uzbek perspectives, appears to operate more explicitly in relation to orientalist structures, engaging more deliberately with cultural–historical framing (Dadabaev, 2018; Sandel & Wang, 2022). Phrases like “Plov is culturally significant with deep historical roots” locate meaning within Uzbek frameworks alongside the creator’s response. However, even this approach contains potential orientalist elements. Positioning non-Western culture as an object of knowledge-production for Western audiences can itself be an orientalist authority, the Western expert explaining the East to other Westerners (Said, 1978).

The data reveal a particularly notable pattern: orientalist dynamics and resistance to orientalism do not operate as opposing tendencies but coexist within the same representational practices. This concurrent presence of exoticization and contextualization characterises what this analysis terms ‘layered orientalism’ the simultaneous reproduction and critique of orientalist structures within digital destination representation.

This pattern emerges from the empirical observation of mixed semiotic strategies in both creators’ work. Spectacle and grandeur framing appear in 65.0% of the combined corpus, with creators emphasising visually striking dishes, exotic abundance, and extraordinary preparation processes. This dimension risks reproducing orientalist spectacle, framing Uzbekistan as an exotic, visually overwhelming cultural entity designed for Western consumption. Simultaneously, heritage and cultural–historical narratives appear in 29.3% of segments combined, with creators contextualising dishes within Uzbek cultural traditions, labour histories, and Silk Road heritage. This dimension attempts to position Uzbek cui-

sine within Uzbek cultural frameworks, resisting the reduction in non-Western culture to Western sensory experience.

Importantly, different creators emphasise these dimensions differently. Vlogger 1 privileges spectacle-driven framing (65.0% spectacle vs. 8.1% heritage narratives), constructing Uzbekistan primarily as visually extraordinary. Vlogger 2 emphasises heritage narratives far more heavily (34.8% heritage narratives vs. 16.2% spectacle in comparable analysis), attempting cultural–historical contextualization. Yet both creators employ mixed strategies that incorporate both dimensions. Neither strategy entirely avoids orientalism; rather, they negotiate it differently. Vlogger 1’s parasocial approach risks affective orientalism (fascination mediated through Western observer response), while Vlogger 2’s documentary approach carries the risk of epistemological orientalism (Western expert explaining the East to Western audiences).

“Layered orientalism” captures this simultaneity; representations operate through multiple semiotic layers that both reproduce and resist orientalist structures, and these layers coexist within the same texts. For viewers, Uzbekistan is simultaneously presented as an exotic spectacle and as a culturally grounded entity, as remarkable abundance and as historical heritage, as designed for Western consumption and as autonomous cultural practice. These representational layers create what might be termed orientalist depth: not a simple exotic surface but a complex, multidimensional representation that simultaneously exoticizes and contextualises.

These findings suggest that no representational strategy entirely escapes orientalist structures; rather, different strategies may negotiate orientalism differently, with potentially distinct political and cultural consequences (Parasecoli, 2022). The distinction between parasocial intimacy (risking affective orientalism) and documentary analysis (risking epistemological orientalism) represents two different negotiations with the fundamental orientalist dynamic of Western representation of non-Western space. The presence of both Spectacle-driven and Authenticity or Historical Symbolism elements in both creators’ work suggests that orientalist dynamics and resistance to orientalism may coexist within the same representational practices. Viewers encounter Uzbek simultaneously as an exotic spectacle and as a cultural–historical entity. The multimodal coordination of parasocial and analytical elements creates what might be termed “layered orientalism”, the simultaneous presence of orientalist reproduction and orientalist critique within the same representational practices.

For emerging destinations like Uzbekistan, government-facilitated creator participation may inadvertently reproduce orientalist structures by positioning non-Western destinations as sites of Western consumption, even with cultural–historical contextualization (Stronza, 2001; Dadabaev, 2018). However, multiple creators employing distinct semiotic strategies may provide a counterweight to monolithic orientalism. These findings suggest that rather than attempting to eliminate orientalist dynamics in Western-mediated tourism representation, a more realistic approach might involve deliberately cultivating diverse representational strategies, including counter-orientalist elements, historical context, cultural agency, and non-Western perspectives, alongside experiential and affective dimensions (Parasecoli, 2022; Said, 1978).

5.6. Implications for Sustainable Digital Tourism Marketing in Emerging Destinations

The finding that different creators employ distinct semiotic strategies in constructing destination images suggests potential practical implications for tourism stakeholders in Uzbekistan and other emerging markets. The six videos generated a combined viewership exceeding 28.2 million, indicating substantial reach for content that shapes destination representations through social media platforms (Bulumulla et al., 2023). The Ministry of Tourism’s investment in facilitating vlogger visits is likely to cost a fraction of equiv-

alent advertising campaigns while generating content with potentially enduring reach through platform algorithmic recommendation systems. YouTube food vlogs could function as instruments for destination branding with potentially lower production costs than conventional marketing.

The multi-creator approach may diversify destination representations beyond what single creators generate. Vlogger 1's parasocial model emphasises immediacy and personal connection; Vlogger 2's documentary model emphasises cultural understanding and heritage contextualization. Shared genre conventions may ensure representational continuity; both creators communicate aspects of Uzbekistan as an abundant food destination. Creator-specific differences may add representational texture and range, potentially producing more varied composite representations than any single creator would generate alone (Dewantara et al., 2025). For Uzbekistan, the gastrodiploacy dimension may be particularly relevant. Communal plov preparation and shared eating practices communicate values associated with hospitality, generosity, and social cohesion (Bessière, 1998; UNESCO, 2016). Vlogger 1's intimate framing makes Uzbek food appear personally accessible; Vlogger 2's documentary approach frames it as culturally significant and historically grounded. Together, they position Uzbekistan through representations that include both personal accessibility and cultural depth, potentially appealing to visitors interested in cultural experiences (Hall et al., 2017; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018).

However, considerations exist regarding how different representational strategies relate to sustainability outcomes. The dominant spectacle-and-grandeur theme (65.0% of segments) frames Uzbekistan through scale and visual abundance, which could encourage spectacle-focused tourism rather than culturally engaged visitation. The documentary model's heavier heritage framing (34.8% vs. 8.1%) may contribute to cultural understanding, though it also carries potential risks of exoticization (Section 5.4). For destination managers, this suggests that facilitating influencer content creation involves semiotic strategy considerations. Sustainability outcomes may depend partly on which representational strategies creators employ, which are shaped partly by platform incentives, as well as destination priorities.

Platform algorithms fundamentally shape semiotic choices that become visible in content. YouTube's algorithmic systems reward certain engagement signals (watch time, likes, comments, shares); many genre conventions identified here (centred food shots, close-ups, upbeat music, and positive evaluation) may persist partly because they reliably produce those engagement signals. Creator-specific differences may reflect different responses to platform incentives; a parasocial style may encourage relational engagement (comments), while documentary style may sustain attention through narrative and process footage (longer viewing sessions). Understanding food travel vlogs requires treating them as cultural texts shaped by platform economics, a key consideration for analysing how digital gastrodiploacy operates in practice. These findings highlight how influencer-mediated food travel vlogs function as representational spaces in which destination meanings are negotiated among creators, platforms, and audiences.

6. Conclusions

This study examined how two prominent YouTube food travel creators construct Uzbekistan as a tourism destination through multimodal semiotic strategies. By analysing six high-visibility food travel vlogs featuring Uzbekistan, this study revealed that destination representation in digital tourism media involves the coordinated interaction of visual, verbal, aural, and gestural resources.

The identification of 25 notable differences in semiotic features between creators suggests that food travel vlogs should not be treated as homogeneous promotional texts.

Vlogger 1's parasocial intimacy model and Vlogger 2's cinematic documentary model represent distinct semiotic approaches with different viewer positioning strategies, authenticity construction mechanisms, and representational implications, including different relationships to orientalist framing. Notably, the presence of both spectacle-driven and heritage-focused elements in both creators' work suggests that orientalist dynamics and resistance to orientalism may coexist within the same representational practices, which this analysis terms 'layered orientalism'. At the same time, shared genre conventions centred on food composition, upbeat music, positive evaluation, and sharing gestures indicate the presence of a stable semiotic core that characterises the food travel vlog as a recognisable media form. These findings suggest that semiotic strategies in food travel vlogs may be shaped not only by creator preference but also by the engagement incentives built into platform architecture.

For Uzbekistan and similar emerging tourism markets, the findings suggest that a multi-creator approach may offer distinct advantages compared to reliance on a single creator voice. Different creator styles construct different representational dimensions of destination, and their combination could potentially produce varied representations that might appeal to different audience segments through both affective and cognitive pathways.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The corpus of six videos from two creators, while enabling detailed multimodal analysis, limits generalisability to other creators and destinations. This study analysed representation strategies without examining viewer reception; future research investigating whether the parasocial and documentary models produce different effects on viewers' destination perceptions through viewer studies would strengthen understanding of the actual impact. Additionally, the binary coding protocol, while enabling systematic comparison, necessarily simplifies the density of multimodal interaction within individual segments. Comparative analyses across multiple emerging destinations would further strengthen the understanding of the broader applicability of the identified semiotic profiles. Despite these limitations, this study demonstrates the analytical value of integrating multimodal discourse analysis with systematic comparative methods in examining how digital media content constructs destination representations in contemporary tourism research.

These findings suggest implications for tourism marketing and stakeholder practice. First, the analysis indicates that multiple creators employing different content styles may construct more varied destination representations than a single creator approach, potentially offering broader appeal to diverse audiences. Second, the shared genre conventions identified here, such as centred food composition, close-up framing, upbeat music, positive evaluation, and sharing gestures, appear common across successful food travel content, suggesting these may be important features for content creators to consider. Third, the two identified semiotic profiles suggest different potential audience engagement pathways. The documentary model's heritage narratives may appeal to culturally motivated travellers, while the parasocial model's personal emphasis may resonate with audiences seeking emotional connection to destinations. Future research examining viewer reception and actual tourism outcomes would clarify these relationships and inform content strategy development.

Funding: Funding for this paper was provided by Namseoul University.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The YouTube videos analysed in this study are publicly available. The coded dataset can be made available on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- Arriagada, A., & Bishop, S. (2021). Between commerciality and authenticity: The imaginary of social media influencers in the platform economy. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 14(4), 568–586. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Atad, E., & Cohen, J. (2024). Look me in the eyes: How direct address affects viewers' experience of parasocial interaction and credibility. *Journalism*, 25(4), 465–484. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Baldry, A., & Thibault, P. J. (2010). *Multimodal transcription and text analysis: A multimedia toolkit and coursebook*. Equinox Publishing.
- Baloglu, S., & McCleary, K. W. (1999). A model of destination image formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(4), 868–897. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bateman, J. A., & Tseng, C.-I. (2023). *Multimodal analysis of video* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Bessière, J. (1998). Local development and heritage: Traditional food and cuisine as tourist attractions in rural areas. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 38(1), 21–34. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bulumulla, D. S. K., Epa, U. I., & Gamage, T. C. (2023). Effect of social media influencer involvement on tourists' travel intentions: Mediating role of traveler authenticity and destination image. *South Asian Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 3(2), 88–106. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Cabral, Ó., Lavrador, L., Orduna, P., & Moreira, R. (2024). Gastronomy as a diplomatic tool: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, 38, 101072. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Campelo, A., Aitken, R., Thyne, M., & Gnoth, J. (2014). Sense of place: The importance for destination branding. *Journal of Travel Research*, 53(2), 154–166. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chapple-Sokol, S. (2013). Culinary diplomacy: Breaking bread to win hearts and minds. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 8(2), 161–183. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chen, S., Zang, Y., & Yang, P. (2024). City images in transnational travel vlogs from a multimodal perspective: An investigation of 20 port cities worldwide. *Online Media and Global Communication*, 3, 82–107. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Cheng, W., Tian, R., & Chiu, D. K. W. (2024). Travel vlogs influencing tourist decisions: Information preferences and gender differences. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*, 76(1), 86–103. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Cohen, E., & Cohen, S. A. (2012). Authentication: Hot and cool. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(3), 1295–1314. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cox, C., Burgess, S., Sellitto, C., & Buultjens, J. (2009). The role of user-generated content in tourists' travel planning behavior. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 18(8), 743–764. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Dadabaev, T. (2018). "Silk Road" as foreign policy discourse: The construction of Chinese, Japanese and Korean engagement strategies in Central Asia. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 9(1), 30–41. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Dewantara, M. H., Jin, X., & Gardiner, S. (2025). What makes a travel vlog attractive? Parasocial interactions between travel vloggers and viewers. *Tourism and Recreation Research*, 50, 107–123. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Du, S., & Cheong, C. Y. M. (2025). Beyond the scenic view: A multimodal discourse analysis of sustainable tourism imaginaries on TikTok in Anhui, China. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12, 690. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Font, X., & McCabe, S. (2017). Sustainability and marketing in tourism: Its contexts, paradoxes, approaches, challenges, and potential. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 25(7), 869–883. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Forman, J. (2024). *Gastrodiplomacy*. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of food studies*. Oxford University Press. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Gretzel, U. (2018). Influencer marketing in travel and tourism. In M. Sigala, & U. Gretzel (Eds.), *Advances in social media for travel, tourism and hospitality* (pp. 147–156). Routledge.
- Hall, C. M., Gössling, S., & Scott, D. (2017). *The Routledge handbook of tourism and sustainability*. Routledge.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2013). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2018). Sustainable tourism: Sustaining tourism or something more? *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 25, 157–160. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Horton, D., & Richard Wohl, R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction. *Psychiatry*, 19, 215–229. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Jansson, A. (2018). Rethinking post-tourism in the age of social media. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 69, 101–110. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Koens, K., Postma, A., & Papp, B. (2018). Is overtourism overused? Understanding the impact of tourism in a city context. *Sustainability*, 10(12), 4384. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2021). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Lacsina, N. E. (2023). Unveiling the art of food vlogging: A multimodal discourse analysis of food review vlogs. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 4(2), 11–25. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Li, M. W., Kim, Y. R., Liu, A., Scarles, C., & Chen, J. L. (2026). Storytelling in travel vlogs: Scale development, validation, and application. *Journal of Travel Research*, 65(3), 786–811. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- MacCannell, D. (1976). *The tourist: A new theory of the leisure class*. Schocken Books.
- Marine-Roig, E. (2021). Measuring Online Destination Image, Satisfaction, and Loyalty: Evidence from Barcelona Districts. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 2(1), 62–78. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Mirzamurodova Kizi, I., Zielinski, S., Milanec, C. B., & Ahn, Y. (2025). Tourist destination image projected by YouTube travel videos: The case of Seoul. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 27(3), e70049. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan. (2024). *Tourism and recreation statistics 2024*. Available online: <https://stat.uz> (accessed on 20 January 2026).
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2017). *The content analysis guidebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Norris, S. (2004). *Analyzing multimodal interaction: A methodological framework*. Routledge.
- Parasecoli, F. (2022). *Gastronativism: Food, identity politics, and globalization*. Columbia University Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Pham, M. H. (2013). Food as communication: A case study of South Korea's gastrodiploacy. *Journal of International Communication*, 19(1), 1–16.
- Rauf, A. A., & Pasha, F. M. (2024). Vlogging gastronomic tourism: Understanding global north–south dynamics in YouTube videos and their audiences' feedback. *Tourism Geographies*, 26, 407–431. [CrossRef]
- Rockower, P. S. (2012). Recipes for gastrodiploacy. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 8(2), 131–139. [CrossRef]
- Roy, S., & Attri, R. (2026). I bond, I engage, I visit: Investigating the effects of vloggers' tourist engagement. *Journal of Travel Research*, 63(8), 1872–1891. [CrossRef]
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Sandel, T. L., & Wang, Y. (2022). Online content creators' self-disclosure: A multimodal discourse analysis of YouTubers. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 50, 100653. [CrossRef]
- Steils, N., Martin, A., & Toti, J.-F. (2022). The transparency paradox in influencer marketing. *Journal of Business Research*, 152, 148–166. [CrossRef]
- Stronza, A. (2001). Anthropology of tourism: Forging new ground for ecotourism and other alternatives. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30, 261–283. [CrossRef]
- Torjesen, A. (2024). Stylistic expressions of YouTube lifestyle influencers: Authenticity and professional amateurism in Norwegian YouTube content. *Social Semiotics*, 1–18. [CrossRef]
- Tussyadiah, I. P., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2009). Mediating tourist experiences: Access to places via shared videos. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36(1), 24–40. [CrossRef]
- UNESCO. (2016). *Palov culture and tradition*. Available online: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/palov-culture-and-tradition-01166> (accessed on 20 January 2026).
- Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2011). *The tourist gaze 3.0*. Sage.
- Uzbekistan Tourism. (2025). *Gastro tourism*. Uzbekistan National Tourism Committee. Available online: <https://uzbekistan.travel/en/v/food-tourism/> (accessed on 20 January 2026).
- van Leeuwen, T. (1999). *Speech, music, sound*. Macmillan.
- Wang, Y., & Feng, D. (2023). History, modernity, and city branding in China: A multimodal critical discourse analysis of Xi'an's promotional videos on social media. *Social Semiotics*, 33(3), 402–425. [CrossRef]
- Wilson, R. (2013). Cocina peruana para el mundo: Gastrodiploacy, the culinary nation brand, and the context of national cuisine in Peru. *Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy*, 2(1), 13–20.
- Xu, H., Zeng, B., Huang, Z., & Li, Z. (2024). How travel vlog audience members become tourists: Exploring audience involvement and travel intention. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 151, 108007. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.