



Digital Food Content Marketing in Tourism: An Integrated Conceptual Framework of Informational, Emotional, Social and Identity-Based Content Dynamics.

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ABSTRACT

Digital food content has increasingly become a key driver of tourist decision-making; however, theoretical explanations of how different content types shape tourists' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses remain fragmented. This conceptual paper introduces a comprehensive framework for digital food content marketing in tourism. It does so by extending four fundamental content dimensions, which are informational, emotional (entertainment), social interaction, and identity-based content, into a comprehensive system of content dynamics that impact tourist engagement. Digital food content extends beyond the simple transmission of factual information and is increasingly embedded in how tourists make sense of their experiences. Engagement with this content often possesses emotional and social significance and, at times, embodies the manner in which individuals articulate their identity. These interpretations are shaped by the affordances of digital media and by persuasive visual elements commonly used in food-related content, as discussed in the digital consumer psychology literature. As tourists interact with different forms of content, a range of psychological responses may emerge, rather than a single, uniform process. Interactions with digital food content shape how individuals evaluate experiences, form emotional attachments, and relate socially. These responses gradually shape destination perceptions, influence preference development, and affect the likelihood of experience sharing in online spaces. This framework offers a clearer understanding of how these processes operate in digitally mediated and socially networked travel contexts.

Keywords: Food Tourism, Digital Media, Social Influence, Tourist Behaviour, eWoM

INTRODUCTION

Digital material is a major influence on how tourists identify, evaluate, and interact with food places. According to Martins et al. (2025), visually engaging, narrative-rich content on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook now influence travel decisions by reducing uncertainty and inspiring curiosity about culinary experiences. The internet landscape has transformed food experiences into socially mediated cultural exchanges where users produce, share, and engage with content that shapes destination perceptions and behaviours (Mandagi et al., 2024). Tourism academics increasingly recognise that digital food content is a sophisticated communication system that conveys emotional cues, meanings, and social signals that influence expectations and tourist behaviour (Latip et al., 2024). Though they are well recognised, theoretical studies of how different types of digital content affect tourists' responses are scarce.

Tourism studies have focused on digital content features such as informativeness, visual appeal, influencer persuasion, and destination imagery. Visual aesthetics and content quality significantly affect tourist trust and destination image formation (Sutrisno et al., 2024), and user-generated content shapes destination imagery and tourist intentions through cognitive and affective processes. Digital content in tourism is a complex system that sends informational, emotional, and symbolic signals that shape how people think and act. This dual focus makes it harder for theories to emerge (Sujatmiko et al., 2025). Tourists view different types of content as interconnected signals that influence their attention, emotional reactions, identity formation, and decision-making. In this sense,



there is a need for a more complete understanding of how to explain the different parts of digital food content marketing and how they affect tourists' thinking, feelings, and behaviour.

The impact of digital content on travellers' psyche is a significant gap in the study. The mechanisms by which food-related content stimulates feelings of connection, cognitive assessment, social belonging, and identity expression remain unclear, despite its ability to entertain, connect, educate, and empower users (Guo et al., 2025; Widaningsih & Putranto, 2025). Informational content can reduce uncertainty and improve cognitive clarity, whereas entertaining or emotionally charged content can influence intentions and preferences through feelings of excitement and hedonic engagement. Identity-based content lets users express or reinforce their self-concept in food or travel narratives (Vu et al., 2025), but comments, shared experiences, and discussions on social platforms can foster community and belonging (Widaningsih & Putranto, 2025). Current conceptualisations that treat these content dimensions separately often oversimplify the complex ways digital content attributes interact within digital tourism ecosystems, leaving an incomplete understanding of how these mechanisms shape tourist experience and behaviour.

Furthermore, digital food content today is shaped not only by human communication practices but also by technological structures such as algorithmic recommendations and platform affordances that determine content visibility and dissemination. Research on social media algorithms shows that platforms systematically prioritise and personalise content based on user interactions and engagement metrics, leading to some posts being more visible than others (Huang & Liu, 2025). Tourists' interpretations and reactions to food-related narratives on social media platforms are influenced by these technological mechanisms, which frequently magnify visually arresting or highly engaging content. The tourism literature has not yet fully integrated these digital processes into conceptual models of content marketing, despite the clear impact of these algorithmic and platform-level dynamics on user exposure and content reception. Consequently, theoretical gaps exist in our understanding of how digital food content spreads, gains influence, and ultimately shapes the behavioural intentions of tourists.

Another major issue with the tourist literature is that digital information is still mostly seen as a marketing tool rather than as a psychological stimulus with symbolic meaning. In reality, digital content about food often conveys lifestyle depictions, cultural narratives, identity indicators and aesthetic ideals, influencing tourists' self-perception and their views of places beyond the mere informational function of the content (Richards, 2015). These perceptual and symbolic cues can influence the creation of meaning, emotional attachment, and personal identity, all of which are significant components of contemporary culinary tourism experiences (Moura et al., 2025). Existing conceptual frameworks only partially explain why digital food content is so compelling and impactful in tourism settings when these symbolic levels are ignored.

To address these deficiencies, this conceptual paper proposes an expanded framework for digital food content marketing that integrates identity-based, social, emotional, and informational content into a single system of content dynamics. The suggested framework demonstrates how each content dimension activates unique but related psychological mechanisms that influence emotional reactions, tourists' cognition, social orientation, and identity expression. It draws on insights from platform affordance research, graphic and engagement-based influence, and digital consumer psychology. Rather than operating independently, these mechanisms interact within digital environments, influencing how tourists interpret, feel about, and relate to food-related destinations (Guo et al., 2025). Through the conceptualisation of digital food content as a multifaceted ecosystem of cognitive, affective, social, and symbolic stimuli, this approach advances existing scholarship beyond fragmented content classifications and offers a more holistic explanation of how digital food content collectively influences tourist behaviour.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital food media has become a central force shaping contemporary tourism behaviour, influencing how travellers discover culinary experiences, interpret destination meanings, and develop food-related consumption preferences. Unlike earlier tourism marketing approaches that relied heavily on static and one-way promotional messages, digital food content today functions within an interactive and visually driven media environment, where travellers actively engage with, interpret, and share food narratives online (Xiang et al., 2017). In tourism contexts, digital food media method goes beyond only presenting food; they increasingly play a role in the symbolic construction of destination, culture, lifestyle, and identity (Richards, 2015).



Scholars studying tourism have come to understand that digital material influences travellers' decisions in a variety of ways, which influences both how they act once they arrive and how people assess locations prior to travel. For example, research indicates that by offering rich, user-generated insights and emotional cues at various stages of the travel process, social media content greatly influences tourists' expectations, encourages additional exploration, and increases the likelihood of experience sharing (Martins et al., 2025). However, many of these studies focus on specific qualities of content, such as informativeness, aesthetic appeal, or influencer credibility, without considering how these elements interact within broader digital ecosystems of platforms, algorithms, and social engagement. Consequently, theoretical elucidations of the effects of digital content frequently remain disjointed, focusing on singular variables instead of providing comprehensive models that encapsulate the intricacies of modern digital communication within tourism contexts (Keelson et al., 2024).

Because digital content is often viewed as a static message characteristic rather than a dynamic stimulus created by several platform affordances, research is constrained. Users' interactions with interpretations of and sharing content on digital platforms are influenced by interactive elements such as engagement signals, personalised suggestions and visual modifications. Technology has an impact on what shows up in users' feeds, as well as how travellers evaluate and incorporate information into their cognitive and emotional experiences. Algorithmically driven recommendation systems prioritise high-engagement material, enhancing the visibility of intriguing or socially validated information and reinforcing feedback loops (El Archi et al., 2023).

Another significant gap is the psychological processing of digital food content. Tourism research has focused on cognitive responses, such as the utility of information or authenticity, rather than emotional, social, and identity-based reactions to culinary content in digital environments. Digital food content often transcends conventional information, embodying symbolism and sentimentality. Social interaction creates a sense of belonging, self-expression allows people to express themselves, cultural narratives give meaning, and visual aesthetics arouse emotion. These complex reactions indicate that digital food information is understood through multiple psychological pathways rather than a straightforward cognitive process (Moura et al., 2025).

Moreover, existing studies rarely examine how informational, emotional, social, and identity-based content operate together within integrated content systems. While identity-based material encourages self-expression and symbolic alignment, emotional content promotes enjoyment and sensory anticipation, social content builds connection and shared meaning, and informational content can lessen uncertainty and improve decision clarity. But in reality, visitors don't only come across these aspects of the content. Rather, information, emotion, social cues, and symbolic meanings are all processed concurrently as part of a singular engagement experience when it comes to digital food content. Yet this reality, a significant portion of contemporary literature persists in regarding these dimensions as independent variables instead of integrated content dynamics, so constraining theoretical progress and inadequately representing the complexity of tourists' actual engagement with digital information (Martins et al., 2025).

Additionally, the contribution of digital food content to processes of meaning-making and cultural interpretation has not yet been sufficiently addressed in tourist research. In tourism contexts, food is widely acknowledged as a cultural artefact that communicates identity, tradition, lifestyle, and social belonging. In digital spaces, food representation goes beyond just factual communication about cuisine; it actively influences cultural interpretations of places by constructing narratives of authenticity, aesthetics, and local identity. Digital culinary content affects how travellers perceive a location and derive meaning from their experiences through symbolic representation and visual storytelling. If these cultural and symbolic elements are not specifically included in conceptual frameworks, the persuasiveness of digital food content in tourism is only partially explained (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019).

According to research, digital food content is a multimodal, psychologically complex, platform-driven kind of communication that influences contemporary traveller behaviour. Despite its growing importance, there is little theoretical integration across different types of content; research on identity-based, emotional, social, and informative material is conducted independently. As a result, the literature lacks a comprehensive framework that explains how various forms of information function as interconnected pathways in digital environments.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a conceptual research design, employing theory-driven reasoning and systematic synthesis of contemporary literature rather than empirical data collection. Conceptual research has received increased



recognition as a robust methodological framework for theoretical advancement, the synthesis of many perspectives, and the resolution of disparate data within complex digital consumer landscapes (Jaakkola, 2020). A conceptual framework is especially appropriate for generating thorough theoretical insights since this study aims to understand the impact of digital food content marketing on tourist informational, emotional, identity, and behavioural responses.

An integrative and deductive reasoning approach guided the literature synthesis. Through iterative comparison of existing models in tourism marketing and digital communication research, logical linkages were developed between informational, emotional, social, and identity-based content and tourists' evaluative and communicative outcomes. This theory-driven approach enables a structured explanation of how digital food content functions as an integrated stimulus shaping tourist perceptions and behaviours, while providing a foundation for future empirical validation.

The conceptual framework was developed by a systematic analysis of peer-reviewed literature. The review concentrated on four principal research domains: (i) digital content marketing and social media communication within tourism, (ii) media affordances and platform-based content design, (iii) informational content, emotional content, social content and identity-based, (iv) destination self-congruence, perceived destination attractiveness, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM). Through the examination of academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, to identify high-quality papers relevant to the theory in these areas.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The conceptual synthesis of this study yields several important insights into how digital food content marketing operates as a multidimensional influence mechanism within tourism contexts. Although no empirical data were collected, a systematic integration of recent tourism literature indicates consistent patterns, showing that different content dimensions work jointly, rather than independently, in shaping tourists' psychological responses, destination evaluations, and eWoM behaviour. In particular, prior research synthesising food tourism and digital media highlights that tourists' engagement with food-related content is influenced by a combination of informational cues, experiential meanings, and social interaction, reinforcing the need for integrative theoretical perspectives rather than isolated variable-based explanations (Park & Widyanta, 2022).

First, the research shows that informational food content has a considerable impact on tourists' cognitive assessments by reducing ambiguity and encouraging mental models of gastronomic experiences. In addition to straightforward factual claims, informational content on digital platforms often includes sensory cues conveyed through pictures, narratives, and structured explanations. These elements enable tourists to imagine ambience, taste, and authenticity prior to visitation, thereby strengthening their perceptions and enhancing their decision confidence. Second, the findings demonstrate that emotional content enhances affective engagement and experiential anticipation. Visually rich food imagery, immersive storytelling, and emotionally evocative narratives stimulate sensory imagination, pleasure, and desire, encouraging tourists to form emotionally positive evaluations of food destinations. This process has been made even more intense by the emergence of short-form video platforms, which allow users to quickly experience destinations through sensory-driven content exposure, allowing them to sense elements like atmosphere and flavour even before they arrive. Emotional engagement thus emerges as a key driver of perceived destination attractiveness, reinforcing the affective foundations of food tourism decision-making and highlighting the importance of emotional and sensory cues in shaping consumer engagement with digital content (Xiao et al., 2023).

Third, the synthesis highlights how important social content is for the creation of social validation and relational meaning in digital tourist settings. Interactive elements that promote community interpretation strengthen a sense of shared significance around culinary places. These interactions result in the integration of digital culinary content into networks of communal significance, where the perception and evaluation of destinations are influenced by peer endorsement and popularity. Social content, therefore, functions as more than mere interaction, acting as a social cue that helps frame the attractiveness of food destinations in the eyes of prospective visitors. These socially embedded signals amplify perceived destination appeal and can influence engagement and visit intentions, particularly in digital ecosystems where content visibility and user engagement shape what travellers encounter and value on social platforms (Hussain et al., 2024). Fourth, the conceptual analysis shows that destination self-congruence is significantly shaped by identity-based content. In digital



environments, identity-oriented content allows tourists to evaluate whether a culinary destination is consistent with their self-concept or aspirational identity by means of visual storytelling, curated aesthetics, and symbolic narratives. When destinations reflect personal values or desired lifestyles, this sense of self-congruence is strengthened, fostering deeper psychological attachment and personal relevance for the traveller (Cruz-Milán & Castillo-Ortiz, 2023).

Fifth, the results indicate that digital food content dimensions function as interconnected rather than separate stimuli. Tourists do not separately process factual, emotional, social, and identity-based content; rather, these aspects concurrently interact to influence attention, emotional responses, identity alignment, and evaluative judgments. This integrative processing highlights the need for more thorough explanations that more accurately depict how consumers perceive digital food information in today's digital environment and demonstrates the shortcomings of single-dimension content models. Finally, the synthesis demonstrates that destination self-congruence and perceived destination attractiveness function as key psychological pathways linking digital food content to eWoM behaviour. When tourists see a place as both appealing and a good fit for their own identity, they are more likely to share their experiences online. In this sense, eWoM represents a system that supports and maintains digital influence cycles within food tourism ecosystems as well as the outcome of content-driven assessment.

Theoretical Foundation

Digital food content marketing is influenced by several theoretical frameworks that elucidate how consumers perceive, understand, and react to content in digitally mediated contexts. Theories about media affordances, visual persuasion, and digital consumer psychology establish a robust framework for comprehending the multifaceted. By integrating these perspectives, the study establishes a coherent theoretical basis for examining how digital food content influences tourist perceptions, experiences, and behavioural outcomes.

The media affordance theory asserts that digital platforms are technologically mediated environments that both enable and constrain behaviours, perceptions, and interactions based on their design. Visibility, interactivity, persistence, and association affect user engagement with and understanding of digital content, hence influencing the perception of online stimuli (Evans et al., 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). These affordances enhance visually striking, emotionally captivating, or socially acknowledged elements in food tourism, influencing tourists' perceptions of culinary destinations. Informational affordances offer culinary details, while interactive affordances facilitate real-time exchanges, dialogues, and collaborative production. Online food-related information enables individuals to convey their values, hobbies, and lifestyle preferences.

The theory of visual persuasion elucidates the impact of visual stimuli on visitor behaviour in digital food content. Visuals influence evaluation and ambition by prompting viewers to imagine flavour, ambience, and environment (Scott, 1994; McQuarrie & Mick, 1999). Visual representations convey cultural identity, aesthetic allure, authenticity, and lifestyle implications, shaping tourists' expectations and promoting engagement with destinations. Images that elicit pleasure, excitement, curiosity, and desire are essential for stimulating interest in new cuisines (Krishna, 2012). Platform dynamics that prioritise highly engaging and emotionally resonant material enhance the visibility of visually striking food narratives in digital contexts. Thus, consistent visual exposure amplifies the symbolic importance in digital food media, forming a crucial theoretical foundation for understanding its emotional and identity-related effects.

Digital consumer psychology elucidates the cognitive and emotional responses individuals have towards digital stimuli in mediated environments. Digital content simultaneously stimulates multiple psychological pathways, rather than a singular one. Cognitive assessment evaluates knowledge and reduces uncertainty, while emotional processes invigorate, satisfy, and anticipate. Concurrently, social and identity frameworks govern belonging, self-expression, and symbolic association with content and places. This perspective illuminates the multifaceted influence of digital food content. Informational content improves cognitive assessment and reduces uncertainty, while emotional content increases hedonic pleasure and sensory anticipation. Social content promotes community affiliation and relational bonds, and identity-oriented content promotes self-expression and personal values. In addition to message quality, the contexts of interactive platforms and social environments influence psychological reactions (Zhao et al., 2024).



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Media affordance, visual persuasion, and digital consumer psychology are utilised to establish a coherent theoretical framework for multivariate digital culinary content marketing. These perspectives show how digital culinary information activates connected mechanisms to change tourists' perceptions, interpretations, and actions as a technological, visual, and psychological stimulation. Significantly, this theoretical integration supports the extension of digital content marketing into four fundamental dimensions, which are informational, emotional, social, and identity-based content, which constitute the basis of this paper's integrated conceptual framework.

Reconceptualising Digital Food Content Dimensions

Due to this change, this article reframes four core dimensions of informational, emotional, social, and identity-based content as interconnected routes via which digital food content influences tourists. These qualities activate cognitive, emotional, relational, and symbolic processes rather than acting as message types. The dimensions refer to a variety of content functions that are influenced by the visual dynamics, platform affordances, and social interaction mechanisms of digital ecosystems. In ways that unidimensional content models are unable to explain, digital culinary content influences the perceptions, motivations, and behaviours of travellers.

Digital food marketing uses educational content to help people plan their vacations by reducing ambiguity and letting them think about their options. By utilising accurate information, travellers can reduce their options, establish realistic expectations, and increase their confidence in their assessments (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018). User-generated reviews, automatic rankings, and organised explanations of food experiences all make the information on digital platforms better. Graphics, narratives, and structured summaries are now included in instructional content to assist individuals in visualising their experiences prior to their visit, in addition to text. (Kamaluddin et al., 2023).

Emotional content, often presented through entertainment-oriented formats, plays a significant role in stimulating affective engagement in digital food tourism. Emotional resonance emerges from visual aesthetics, storytelling, humour, sensory suggestions, and mood cues embedded in food-related digital content. With the growing prominence of short-form video platforms, emotional content is increasingly designed to maximise sensory immersion and hedonic experience, enabling users to “feel” destinations before visiting them. Unlike purely informational stimuli, emotional content appeals primarily to hedonic motivations and influences tourists through affective pathways that shape mood, preference, and desire, reinforcing affective attachment and experiential anticipation in food tourism contexts (Zhou & Wang, 2024).

Social content reflects the interactive and relational aspects of digital food media through features such as comments, discussions, sharing, co-creation, and creator–audience engagement, enabling tourists to socially engage with food-related narratives and develop perceptions of popularity and collective endorsement. In tourism, social presence and parasocial engagement mediated by social media affordances affect how tourists perceive destination pictures and emotions (Liu et al., 2024). By fostering a sense of connection and community, social content also strengthens perceived social presence and encourages engagement behaviours in food-related conversations. Furthermore, interactions with social media influencers can build parasocial relationships that enhance trust, credibility, and attachment to food destinations, translating into increased engagement and visit intention among followers (Saini et al., 2023).

Identity-based content is digital food media's most symbolic and psychologically complex. Digital culinary content transmits cultural narratives, lifestyle values, aesthetic identities, and markers of personal expression, helping tourists develop or reaffirm their social media self-concept. Such information impacts travel intentions

and perceived symbolic value by prompting tourists to assess destinations according to their identity and self-congruence instead of sensory attributes (Wang & Yan, 2022). Food places can have symbolic meanings that fit with who you are and how you like to live, such as stories of authenticity, inventiveness, nostalgia, or legacy. Visual storytelling, curated images, and stylistic presentation facilitate the internalisation and projection of identities through culinary experiences that align with self-congruity and symbolic motivations in digital contexts (Silitonga et al., 2025). This dimension illustrates how visitors select dining establishments based on identity alignment, lifestyle suitability, and the aspiration to cultivate meaningful digital self-representations.

Together, these four expanded dimensions illustrate that digital food content functions as a psychologically rich ecosystem rather than a set of isolated message attributes. Informational, emotional, social, and identity-based content activate distinct cognitive, affective, relational, and symbolic processes. In practice, however, tourists experience these dimensions simultaneously, interpreting digital food content holistically as an integrated set of stimuli that shapes meaning-making and behavioural intention. Collectively, these expanded dimensions form the foundation for the integrated conceptual framework proposed in this paper.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Building on the reconceptualised structure of digital food content, this paper proposes an integrated conceptual framework that explains how informational, emotional, social, and identity-based content influence tourists' behavioural responses within digital food tourism contexts. The framework conceptualises digital food content as a multidimensional stimulus that operates through two key evaluative mechanisms, which are perceived destination attractiveness and destination self-congruence, subsequently shaping tourists' eWoM behaviour. The framework integrates concepts from media affordance theory, visual persuasion theory, and digital consumer psychology to offer a coherent theoretical explanation of the impact of digital culinary content on tourist assessment, meaning-making, and engagement in contemporary digital environments.

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework, illustrating the parallel influence of informational, emotional, social, and identity-based digital food content on tourists' evaluative processes and behavioural outcomes. The four content dimensions are conceptualised as complementary and contemporaneous stimuli that simultaneously affect perceived destination attractiveness and destination self-congruence. Informational content primarily engages a cognitive pathway by reducing uncertainty and supporting tourists' analytical judgement that enhances individuals' positive perceptions of a destination by augmenting its functional usefulness and perceived credibility, which contribute to both perceived destination attractiveness and self-congruence.

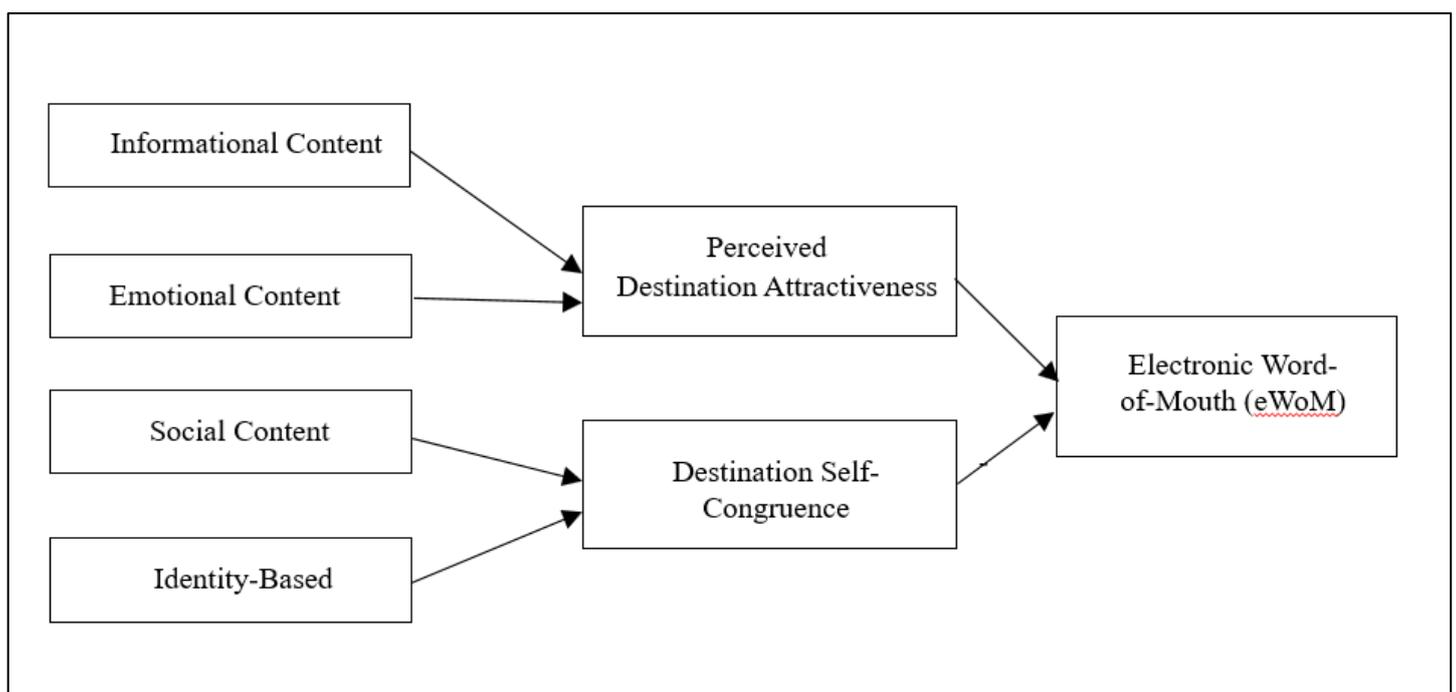


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Multidimensional Digital Food Content Marketing



Emotional content operates through an affective pathway that shapes experiential anticipation and hedonic motivation. Enhancing the appeal and emotional impact of dining experiences makes a place more alluring. Emotional content can indirectly influence destination self-congruence by supporting aesthetic choices or lifestyle alignment, especially when emotional signals convey valued symbolic meanings (Zhou & Wang, 2024).

In digital food tourism, social content functions through a relational framework that highlights the importance of social interaction, group validation, and community involvement. These relationship cues strengthen perceived destination attractiveness, and at the same time, social content enables destination self-congruence, encouraging tourists to regard locations as compatible with their social identity, peer groups, or aspirational communities. Identity-based content represents the symbolic pathway within the framework and plays a central role in shaping destination self-congruence. By emphasising cultural history, lifestyle values, visual identity, and symbolic stories, identity-based material helps travellers determine whether a culinary destination aligns with their self-image or desired identity. Promoting personal relevance, perceived authenticity, and meaning-making are three important psychological factors that underlie assessments of locations and behavioural intentions, which this symbolic alignment enhances self-congruence (Gozen et al., 2023). Additionally, identity-based information can enhance a location's appeal by portraying it as a culturally meaningful and identity-expressive experience rather than merely a useful or enjoyable one.

The suggested conceptual framework exists within algorithmically mediated digital spaces, where platform features and content recommendation systems shape how tourists find, share, and understand digital food content (Evans et al., 2017). Platform affordances, including visibility, interactivity, persistence, and association, influence the prominence of informational, emotional, social, and identity-based content by dictating what content is highlighted, interacted with, and socially endorsed on digital platforms. Visibility is not limited to organisational settings, where information visibility is essential for the organisation's financial success. It also extends to social technologies, where information visibility can help users establish and sustain connections and share information with their networks.

Algorithmic visibility dictates which artworks or creative videos achieve notoriety and which remain obscured, since digital platforms serve as information gatekeepers, with the ability to shape social conditions by controlling the dissemination and amplification of ideas and information. This algorithmic gatekeeper wields significant power over creative visibility; if the system deems an art video unlikely to captivate viewers, it may fail to reach a broad audience, irrespective of its artistic value (Qi, 2025). Thus, the effects posited in this framework must be understood within platform-specific and algorithm-driven contexts, wherein digital food content influences through the interplay of psychological mechanisms and technological mediation.

Digital food content influences travellers' behaviour through perceived destination attractiveness and self-congruence. Tourists' holistic assessment of a destination's experience appeal includes cognitive, emotive, social, and symbolic judgements made through digital exposure. Jeong and Kim (2020) found that positive destination attractiveness ratings increase internet travellers' interaction intentions and behaviour. The degree to which a destination's image aligns with visitors' self-identities is measured by destination self-congruence, demonstrating how appraisal is influenced by personal relevance and identity fit. There is an increase in motivational participation and behavioural intentions, including online sharing and recommendations, when travellers feel a congruence between their self-concept and the destination image (Gozen et al., 2023). These evaluative techniques enable travellers to exchange experiences, articulate identities, and bolster socially significant culinary site interpretations online. Overall, the conceptual framework shows that rather than through isolated content effects, digital food content affects visitor behaviour through a multilayered evaluation process. By integrating multidimensional content stimuli with key psychological mediators, the framework provides a comprehensive explanation of how digital food content shapes destination evaluation and eWoM behaviour within contemporary food tourism contexts.

Conceptual Propositions

The proposed conceptual framework, informed by the multidimensional structure of digital food content and previously outlined theoretical pathways, categorises informational, emotional, social, and identity-based content as four distinct yet interrelated stimuli that shape tourists' perceptions and behaviours. Through cognitive appraisal, affective arousal, social reinforcement, and symbolic meaning formation, these content qualities



impact destination assessment. This section discusses the ideas that explain how each content factor affects self-congruence and place attractiveness, which in turn affect visitors' eWoM intents. These premises establish the theoretical connections of the model and offer a unified basis for empirical investigation into the impacts of digital food content in tourism.

The first propositions deal with the cognitive pathway that is engaged by information. When given thorough, trustworthy, and analytical information, tourists develop more vivid mental images and increase their faith in culinary destination ratings. High-quality informational content diminishes uncertainty and increases functional value, thereby enhancing destination appeal (Ukpabi & Karjaluoto, 2018). When information aligns with visitors' beliefs, expectations, or identity-related decisions, it is likely to enhance destination self-congruence, as it plays a crucial role in cognitive assessment. Digital tourism research indicates that the alignment of informational cues with self-concept enhances evaluative significance and motivation (Wang & Yan, 2022).

Emotional material appeals to tourists since it makes them feel positive and anticipate it. Travellers can be enticed to travel, feel thrilled, and have fun even before they arrive, thanks to digital culinary media with emotionally charged images, narratives, and immersive settings. Xiao et al. (2023) discovered that mediated visual information raises sensory anticipation and affective involvement, which raises the ratings of emotionally charged digital destinations. These affective responses enhance destinations' emotional appeal and experience resonance. By promoting aesthetic preferences and lifestyle compatibility, emotional content may have an indirect impact on destination self-congruence. When the emotional indicators in food content align with the ideas or aspirations of tourists, destinations become more meaningful and identity-consistent. Research on self-congruity in destination appraisal suggests that emotive and experiential alignment influences identity fit and evaluative responses (Gozen et al., 2023).

In the final set of premises, social content influences tourists through relationship cues, community engagement, and social validation. Studies indicate that social media affordances and interactive engagement enhance social presence and relational significance, hence affecting tourists' site assessments (Liu et al., 2024). Locations appear well-liked and fascinating because of these profoundly embedded indications in culture. In addition to being appealing, social material promotes destination self-congruence through social comparison and group affiliation. When travellers see places advertised by organisations they identify with or wish to join, they are more likely to believe that they align with their lifestyle or social identity. Previous research indicates that social media influencers and online communities might enhance identity alignment and motivational engagement, thereby influencing travel behaviour (Saini et al., 2023).

The fourth category of propositions includes identity-based information that aligns with tourists' self-concept through symbolic meaning-making. Travellers might use digital culinary content about cultural history, visual identity, lifestyle values, or personal expression to determine whether a location is in line with their aspirational or true selves. A visitor's sense of self-congruity increases when their perception of themselves aligns with the content of the location. Better behavioural intentions, increased engagement with the place, and more favourable evaluations result from this (Wang & Yan, 2022). In making the trip relevant and consistent with the individual's values, identity-based content may subtly increase the appeal of a destination. Self-congruence increases emotional investment and personal relevance. People are more inclined to select a website for its enjoyment and symbolic significance when it contains symbolic features that resonate with their sense of self.

Assessments of destination appeal encompass cognitive, emotional, social, and symbolic dimensions. People are more inclined to share information, express interest publicly, and advertise the trip through eWoM if the location is stunning, culturally significant, or worthwhile. According to studies, a place's attractiveness boosts online sharing and involvement, which reinforces positive perceptions and future trip plans. Amalia et al. (2023) revealed that location image beauty favourably affects tourists' pleasure and revisit intentions, which are commonly communicated through online recommendations and sharing.

As a mental and symbolic relationship, the model makes use of destination self-congruence. Travellers feel more authentic, sentimental, and symbolic when their destination mirrors their ideal or personal identity. Travellers employ eWoM to demonstrate how a destination aligns with their lifestyle objectives or self-image, which makes these identity-based assessments excellent for online sharing and constructive engagement. Recent tourism



research indicates that self-congruity enhances positive word-of-mouth behaviours, correlating self-identity alignment with tourists' online sharing of favourable experiences (Liu et al., 2024).

These ideas demonstrate how digital food content influences visitor behaviour through relational, symbolic, emotional, and cognitive pathways. Informational, emotional, social, or identity-based content can enhance the attraction of a trip and foster a sense of self-connectedness, which motivates tourists to post about their experiences online. These assertions delineate the causal relationships among fundamental conceptions, offering a theoretical foundation for empirical verification.

Theoretical Contributions

A redefined paradigm that integrates informational, emotional, social, and identity-based elements as multidimensional stimuli that influence tourists' perceptions and behaviours enhances the theoretical understanding of digital food tourism. Digital marketing research in tourism has mostly examined content characteristics, such as information quality and the effectiveness of social media marketing, as indicators of tourism outcomes (Wang & Yan, 2022). Although this research has improved understanding of the impact of certain digital content aspects on travellers, it frequently ignores the interaction of several content attributes in travellers' cognitive and affective evaluation processes. To overcome this constraint, this paper conceptualises digital food content as an all-encompassing psychological ecosystem impacted by cognitive, emotional, relational, and symbolic mechanisms that function simultaneously across digital settings.

The first major theoretical contribution is to expand content marketing theory beyond content categorisation. Digital content has been framed through basic constructs such as informativeness, enjoyment, and interactivity, especially within social media and tourism marketing (Wang & Yan, 2022). However, these models no longer reflect the complexity of contemporary digital landscapes, particularly in culinary tourism, where symbolic meanings and identity-based interpretations influence tourist engagement. This article employs identity-based content to illustrate the symbolic and culturally interconnected nature of digital food media. This reworking of content marketing theory improves it by emphasising identity development, lifestyle congruence, and cultural meaning-making, which are all understudied in the literature on digital tourism (Lima et al., 2025). Second, the paradigm makes it easier to theoretically integrate digital consumer psychology with content marketing research. Previous research has recognised the significance of cognitive and affective responses to digital content; however, these responses have seldom been analysed within a unified theoretical framework. This paper illustrates that digital food content induces multifaceted psychological effects by concurrently activating cognitive appraisal, affective arousal, social reinforcement, and symbolic interpretation. In explicitly linking these psychological pathways to specific content dimensions, the proposed model provides a more empirically grounded explanation of how visitors evaluate destinations and process digital stimuli. This integration enhances the theoretical coherence of digital marketing research and surpasses the linear and unidimensional models that have historically dominated the field.

Third, the framework enhances tourism theory by framing location attractiveness and self-congruence as dual mediating mechanisms that convert content impacts into behavioural outcomes. Prior research has predominantly analysed these characteristics in isolation and within constrained empirical frameworks, frequently failing to delineate their theoretical connection to digital material (Nguyen et al., 2025). The model explains how travellers combine informational, emotional, social, and symbolic elements to form a cohesive destination perception. This perception, in turn, drives behavioural intention by emphasising perceived destination attractiveness and self-congruence as critical evaluative processes. The model offers a more theoretically sound elucidation of how digital information affects eWoM through a comprehensive psychological assessment rather than just exposure.

Fourth, the research enhances theory by including platform affordances and digital environments into content influence theory. Traditional content marketing strategies have concentrated on messaging, neglecting the impact of digital platform components such as visibility, interactivity, and algorithmic curation on content engagement and interpretation (Hu, 2025). Content marketing theory is consistent with modern digital media ecosystems in that it acknowledges technological affordances as contextual influences that influence perception and interaction levels. Short-form video platforms illustrate the influence of visibility, algorithmic amplification, and interactive content aspects on engagement and behaviour (Rozaq et al., 2025). This viewpoint enhances the ecological validity of content marketing research and contributes to future theoretical development.



The study improves food tourism theory by recognising the cultural, symbolic, and identity-related aspects of digital gastronomic encounters. Food is a cultural emblem of identity, custom, and social value in addition to being a product. The proposed concept posits that the development of digital identities influences the culturally expressive activity of food tourism. It accomplishes this by centring identity-based material and tying it to eWoM objectives and self-congruence. This idea goes beyond only functional or hedonic incentives to show how people acquire meaning and identity through food experiences in digital worlds. These contributions show how the suggested framework expands theoretical discourse by combining identity theory, digital consumer psychology, and content marketing into a coherent conceptual paradigm. The work lays a strong foundation for empirical research and enhances the idea of digital food tourism.

Managerial Implications

The conceptual framework proposed in this paper offers several meaningful managerial implications for destination marketers, tourism authorities, food entrepreneurs, and digital content strategists operating within the food tourism sector. By reconceptualising digital food content as a multidimensional system encompassing informational, emotional, social, and identity-based dimensions, the framework provides managers with a more structured and strategic basis for designing and evaluating digital food initiatives that go beyond conventional promotional messaging. Rather than viewing digital food marketing as a purely informational or aesthetic activity, managers are encouraged to recognise its broader psychological, relational, and symbolic roles in shaping tourists' perceptions, engagement, and behavioural responses.

From an informative standpoint, destination marketers should prioritise the diagnostic value of food related materials, clarity, and credibility. Travellers might feel more confident about their choices when selecting a location if they are given clear information about things like ingredients, how it is prepared, where it comes from, how much it costs, and where to eat. Additionally, managers should be aware that information can be effectively conveyed using visual narratives, storytelling formats, and creator-led explanations that help visitors visualise the event. When informative cues are strategically integrated across digital platforms, they can enhance perceived destination attractiveness and support more confident and informed travel decisions.

A crucial managerial tool for increasing affective engagement and creating anticipation for culinary encounters is emotional content. By emphasising elements like flavour, ambience, surroundings, and emotionally powerful events that occur during meals, managers should create food-related images and narratives that appeal to the senses, make people happy, and inspire them to learn more. Short-form videos, immersive imagery, and emotionally resonant storytelling formats are particularly effective in activating hedonic motivation and enhancing experiential desirability. When used effectively, emotional content can help managers differentiate culinary establishments in increasingly competitive digital environments and build stronger emotional connections with viewers.

Social content emphasises the value and importance of relational engagement and community involvement in digital food marketing. Managers should actively encourage participation by responding to comments, encouraging conversations, collaborating with content producers, and supporting user-generated content that captures group dining experiences. To convey popularity and legitimacy without compromising authenticity, social validation cues like engagement metrics, testimonials, and influencer endorsements should be handled carefully. Through the cultivation of online communities around food destinations, managers can foster a sense of social belonging, reinforce normative appeal, and extend organic reach through digital word-of-mouth.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This conceptual study presents a multifaceted framework that redefines content as an integrated system comprising informational, emotional, social, and identity-based elements, thereby improving understanding of digital food content marketing. To conceptualise digital food content as a complex stimulus that affects tourists' cognitive assessments, emotional responses, social perceptions, and symbolic interpretations, this paper combines ideas from media affordance theory, visual persuasion theory, and digital consumer psychology. Rather than treating digital content as a set of isolated attributes, the proposed framework highlights how these dimensions operate concurrently to influence perceived attractiveness, destination self-congruence, and subsequent electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM) behaviour.



The paradigm underscores the psychological and symbolic mechanisms via which content impacts digital environments, contributing to the literature on digital food tourism. Identity-based material fosters symbolic alignment and self-expression; emotional content heightens sensory anticipation and hedonic motivation; social content enhances relational engagement and collective validation; and informational content augments cognition and diminishes ambiguity. These paths illustrate how travellers assess sites not solely based on functionality, but also by considering emotional resonance, social significance, and identity relevance. The report integrates these attributes into a conceptual model to address theoretical fragmentation in digital content marketing research and clarify content-driven visitor behaviour more effectively.

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The framework has not undergone empirical assessment; hence, subsequent research should employ quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches to substantiate the proposed correlations. This work, despite its theoretical advancements, possesses notable shortcomings that indicate the necessity for further exploration. Structural equation modelling, experimental designs, and netnographic analyses can examine the influence of content elements on destination attractiveness, self-congruence, and eWoM across digital platforms. Examining contextual factors, including cultural background, travel motivation, platform type, and generational differences, can enhance the suggested paradigm. Cross-cultural research could examine how identity-based content differs in collectivist and individualist nations because culinary tourism is based on culture. Platform specific affordances, including algorithmic recommendation systems, short video formats, and immersive media technologies, should also be studied to understand how they affect content interpretation, engagement, and behaviour.

Finally, this research provides a theoretical framework for understanding digital food content marketing as a complex and psychologically rich phenomenon. By reconsidering the content dimensions and their combined influence on visitor evaluation and behaviour, the proposed method enhances theory and practice. It instructs academics to adopt digital approaches that are thorough, identity-sensitive, and participation-focused rather than just content classifications and culinary tourism experts.

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