

## Inspecting the Prospects of Gastronomy Tourism in Bangladesh through Experience Economy and Actor-Network Theory

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### ABSTRACT

The gastronomic experience is a catalyst for flourishing tourism in the Global South since tourists seek local foods to taste while they are on a visit, opening new avenues for cultural exchange and creating memorable tourism experiences. Therefore, by adopting a dual-theory approach, experience economy theory and Actor-Network Theory (ANT), this discourse aims to explore the factors that significantly impact perceptions concerning Bangladeshi foods and to identify the best possible medium's role in promoting gastronomy tourism through circulating food-related information. To address these objectives, this study uses a qualitative research methodology approach where data collection methods were semi-structured in-depth interviews (fifty participants) and content analysis. The findings indicate that tourists are intrigued to engage in local food-related activities when they feel that there is a scope to gather distinctive experiences such as sensory feeling, authenticity, emotional and personal experience, service and environment experience, and cultural experience. Also, this study has generated new knowledge concerning how digital platforms, such as YouTube's food vlog content, motivate viewers, predominantly Millennials and Gen Z, to plan future journeys to experience traditional Bangladeshi cuisine. The findings of this study will assist in comprehending the essentials and practicality of YouTube food-vlogging as a promotional tool.

**KEYWORDS:** Gastronomy Tourism, Experience Economy Theory, Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Food Vloggers, Digital Platforms, YouTube, and Promotion.

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## 1. Introduction

Many destinations in the world are developing and flourishing based on the attractiveness of local food cultures, commonly known as gastronomy tourism. Gastronomy tourism stands as the core driver behind tourism expansion, both locally and globally, by generating experiential benefits such as sensory experiences (Dixit, 2019). Moreover, tourists are interested to learn about heritage food practices, tasting regional ingredients, and joining cooking classes organized by local authorities (Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Hence, compelling food-related experiences in destinations help to build positive images of several locations, to do effective destination marketing, and to encourage local cultural growth. As a consequence, tourists show interest in visiting a particular place that becomes a promising gastronomy tourism destination (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Beyond this, local food exploration reveals essential cultural and traditional practices of the host region that boost communal pride (Dixit, 2019). Evidently, several factors such as food culture, food sensations, quality, and price of local food items play an influential role in forming perceptions towards gastronomy tourism, which has a direct impact on the sustainable development of the destination (Chen et al., 2024).

On the other hand, this form of tourism is getting significant attention not only for its economic value but also for its strong cultural significance (Sujood et al., 2024). Plausibly, Bangladesh possesses all the elements required to establish itself as a distinct gastronomy tourism destination. For instance, this country upholds a marvelous food legacy featuring various local cooking methods and has gained international food appreciation (Hossain et al., 2025). The traditional cuisine of Bangladesh has earned global recognition and widespread praise (Amin & Roy, 2016). Likewise, Bangladeshi cooks have achieved recognition on the esteemed list through their performance to culinary excellence (Afrin, 2023). Previous studies by Amin and Roy (2016) found that the contemporary lifestyle and the rising trend of urbanization have transformed the practice of tasting various food styles into a recreational pursuit for Bangladeshi citizens. Evidently, to develop and flourish tourism nationally and internationally, gastronomy tourism can play an imperative role.

To highlight the significance of gastronomy tourism, several studies have been conducted. Some of these examples are the identification of factors that impact on creating perception regarding Bangladeshi foods (Amin & Roy, 2016), the impact of local food on creating destination brand image (Bujisic et al., 2014), fundamental issues regarding gastronomy tourism (Ellis et al., 2018), and significance of food tourism in sustainable tourism experience (Zhang et al., 2019) and few segregated study on food tourism and its marketing perspectives. However, there are a few areas where researchers still do not give focus and remain as gaps for future research, such as a limited understanding of factors that create gastronomy tourism perceptions (Park et al., 2024). Moreover, most of the studies have been conducted from the perspective of popular destinations, but most gastronomic regions, such as Bangladesh, remain unexplored (Zhou et al., 2025). To bridge the gap, this study draws attention to investigate the factors that shape the tourists' perceptions regarding gastronomy tourism through the lens of experience economy theory for several reasons. Firstly, experience economy theory highlights that the modern economy primarily focuses on the highest level of value creation through generating memorable experiences. In addition, people also seek

other types of experiences, such as escapist, aesthetic, sensory, and multidimensional experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Finally, the use of experience economy theory is justifiable to investigate tourists' perceptions concerning gastronomy tourism because it assists in explaining how factors related to gastronomic experience shape gastronomy tourism perceptions.

Essentially, gastronomic motivation, influenced by several external factors, should be prioritized for gastronomic tourism development. To promote gastronomy tourism among potential tourists, destination marketers emphasize continuous advertising activities (Buhalis & Costa, 2006). For instance, they use visual promotional activities to provide efficient sensory stimulations that activate the imagination and deliver virtual experiences. Additionally, destination marketers implement visual promotional methods effectively to stimulate the five senses through their ability to spark viewer curiosity and provide virtual demos alongside expert and visitor insights (Kim et al., 2018). Specifically, marketers use these promotional tools to develop positive market perception and strengthen customer return intentions (Lim et al., 2012). Therefore, the world is witnessing the emergence of digital platforms, including social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram, and streaming platforms: YouTube. Patel and Kumar (2023) have explored the role of digital platforms in promoting gastronomy tourism. They highlighted that digital platforms help to generate immersive experiences and support sustainable tourist habits (Patel & Kumar, 2023).

Furthermore, it helps to access information regarding local food culture, to discover unique cuisine, and to get the latest reviews and recommendations from fellow travelers. In addition, it creates an opportunity for virtual tours to enrich food worlds (Buonincontri et al., 2022). Several studies also found that digital platforms are playing a catalytic role in ensuring the effectiveness of marketing strategies. Digital platforms as a promotional tool increase food sale, bring visibility of the gastronomy business, enable direct interaction with tourists, create opportunities to gather feedback, and foster strong relationships (Bela et al., 2024). Arguably, digital platforms have a direct and immense influence on tourist behavior, but still, there is a research gap in the role of digital platforms in developing and promoting gastronomy tourism in developing countries (Chen & Chen, 2023; Li et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2025).

To address the above-mentioned concerns, as a theoretical lens, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is the best fit for this study because it gives priority to the identification of actors, including both human and non-human, and their roles in tourism development and management (Bilodeau & Potvin, 2018; Latour, 2005). Initially, researchers conducted human-centric research primarily and neglected non-human actors. Therefore, ANT as a theory emerged to give priority to both human and non-human actors (Walsham, 1997). However, ANT is still criticized for neglecting non-human actors and prioritizing human actors (Wang & Xiao, 2020). Nevertheless, several researchers have adopted ANT in different tourism studies, such as health tourism (Yan & Hee, 2020), tourism destination development (Wang & Zhu, 2020), wildlife tourism (Rodger et al., 2009), volunteer tourism (Tomazos & Murdy, 2023), and tourismscapes (Van der Duim, 2007). However, the application of ANT in other areas of tourism studies, including gastronomy tourism, is missing. Hence, to fill this gap, this discourse uses ANT to explain one of the non-human actors, namely, technology in gastronomy

tourism. This study also revealed its role in making perceptions regarding gastronomy tourism and the significance of digital applications in promoting gastronomy tourism.

Therefore, to fill these research gaps, this research aims to explore the answers to these questions. Primarily, what are the experiential dimensions that have significant impacts on creating perceptions concerning gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh? Then, how do digital platforms play a role in promoting gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh? In doing so, this study makes several contributions to theory and knowledge by adopting a dual-theory framework, experience economy theory, and ANT for studying gastronomy tourism within the context of the Global South.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Gastronomy Tourism: A Growing Phenomenon**

Gastronomy tourism, a form of recent tourism development where tourists visit a place to taste the local cuisine, is becoming an integral part of the travel and tourism industry (Garibaldi & Pozzi, 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). This form of tourism is closely associated with cultural distinctiveness, economic development, and community building, which makes it a point of discussion as a contemporary trend (Roy & Roy, 2024). Additionally, a pleasant gastronomic environment helps to create a positive destination image, which leads to positive destination branding (Everett, 2008; Everett, 2016; Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Furthermore, the interactive nature of the indigenous food traditions and global culinary trends promotes cultural exchange and cross-cultural understanding among tourists (Kabir et al., 2024; Talukder & Kumar, 2025). Food interactions enhance host-guest relationships and foster sustainable tourism growth as they offer authentic experiences that tourists usually search for (Richards, 2003; Sims, 2009). Hence, tourists are increasingly interested in creating gastronomic experiences. In this regard, food is considered a central component in improving visitor satisfaction and enhancing tourism service quality through several food-related activities and experiential benefits (Dixit, 2019; Dixit & Prayag, 2022). For instance, experiential benefit is still a key notion for stimulating rural gastronomic development, where traditional regional products and nostalgic connections to rural lifestyles add value to the tourist experience (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Richards, 2009). Thus, experience economy theory can be better aligned with an in-depth investigation of the relationship between the nature of gathered experiences and perception regarding gastronomy tourism. However, the use of experience economy theory in studying gastronomy tourism is still limited (Bilgihan et al., 2018).

### **2.2 Experience Economy Theory: A Lens to Investigate Gastronomy Tourism**

Experience economy theory was formally introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1999), who claimed that the world is moving towards an experience economy era, where unforgettable or memorable experiences will be crucial for flourishing tourism and will be considered an essential issue of research in the tourism field. Thus, experience acts as an effective tool for memory creation in people's minds, and arguably, positive experiences lead to the creation of positive perception and vice versa (Tsai, 2016). Also, some notable dimensions of experience are entertainment, education, physical activity, escapism, emotion, cognitive, sensory, and aesthetics. These

dimensions have both close and direct relationships in forming perceptions (Kim et al., 2010). Hence, the application of experience economy theory provides a powerful tool to explain the nexus between individual experiences and memories. It also helps to analyze how these memories create competitive advantages through experiential value (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Besides this, by using several experiential dimensions, this theory attempts to explore how people form attachment and loyalty towards a sure thing (Zhang et al., 2018). Substantially, this theory offers a structured way to analyze how experience instigates long-term value creation (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Therefore, this theory has gained considerable attention in recent times in tourism studies, like many other disciplines (Kim, 2018). For instance, it has already been applied in destination brand building, cultural and heritage tourism, event and festival tourism, digital tourism, and gastronomy tourism, although in tiny numbers (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016a).

Previous studies showed that food tourists assess their experiences based on several dimensions, such as functional food quality, service quality, and physical dining environment, and each of them plays a very imperative role in their overall satisfaction and experience (Bilgihan et al., 2018; Bujisic et al., 2014; Ha & Jang, 2010). Beyond this, participatory experiences through engagement in food production and cooking classes create an emotional bond with gastronomy tourism (Folkvord et al., 2020). Emotional attachments through food consumption go beyond satisfaction of senses and include nostalgia, family memories, and hospitality, key determinants of tourist loyalty and word-of-mouth referrals (Talukder & Kumar, 2025). On the other hand, the overall experiences related to the five senses through the appearance, aroma, texture, flavor, and sound also contribute to the overall gastronomic experience and satisfaction (Pellegrino & Lockett, 2020). Moreover, the physical environment or servicescape, such as ambience, cleanliness, and decor, also determines the dining experience and customers' behaviors in the hospitality settings (Fu & Parks, 2001; Ghobadian et al., 1994; Newman, 2007). Furthermore, authentic food experiences, in addition to nutritional content and health dimensions of local cuisine, positively impact gastronomy tourism experiences (Zhang et al., 2019).

### ***2.3 Digital Platform: An Emerging Tool for Promoting Gastronomy Tourism***

With the increasing significance of gastronomy tourism, nations are persuaded to leverage their potential in their market offerings as well as marketing strategies to increase the appeal of a destination (Amin & Roy, 2016; Talukder & Kumar, 2025). For example, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) increasingly use visual promotional strategies to convey sensory and cultural dimensions of a local cuisine so as to increase market image and customer return intentions (De Vries et al., 2012; Lim et al, 2012). As a result, digital platforms, such as social media and video-sharing platforms such as YouTube, have become practical promotional tools that provide immersive virtual experiences and direct contact between destinations and tourists (Bela et al., 2024; Folkvord et al., 2020). Specifically, as one of the digital platforms, YouTube has transformed into a leading platform for communication and marketing activities since its inception as a streaming platform. For example, YouTube is the most popular website for users to upload, share, and watch videos worldwide. It also leads the global market for video streaming services (Kim et al., 2009).

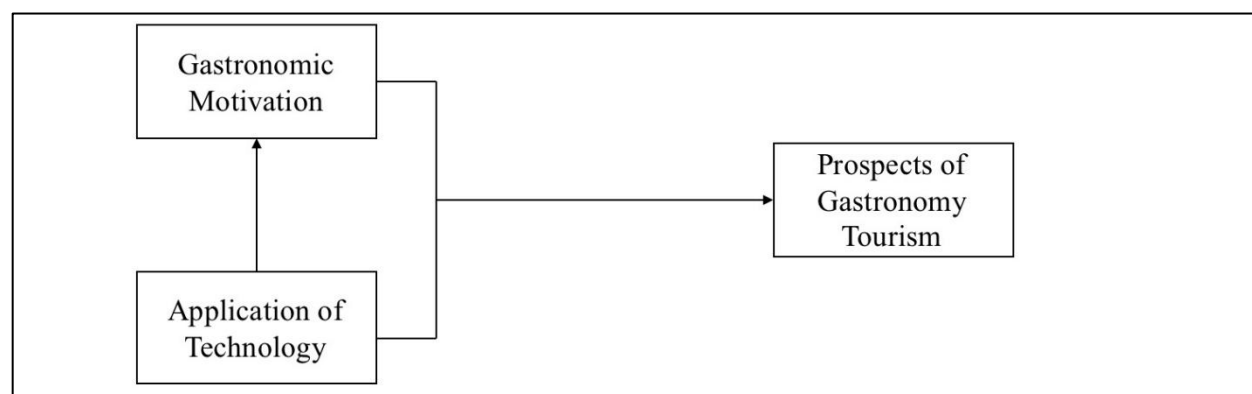
Moreover, this platform also helps to create positive stereotypes in the minds of tourists by actively involving them. In some cases, tourism organizations and tourists show opposing views about applying YouTube as a marketing strategy in their field (Reino & Hay, 2011).

YouTube channels are widely used by destination marketers to communicate information through the visual presentation of local cuisine among tourists, which is commonly known as vlogging. Vlogging is considered one of the most popular methods for exchanging ideas, thoughts, and feelings about certain daily life events (Lofgren, 2013). Additionally, vlogs can be compared to personal websites; users typically post details about their hobbies, vacations, and other unique events. Notably, the food sector uses vlogs adequately to reach desired audiences (Hajli, 2014). A gastronomic vlog consists of vivid descriptions of the vlogger's encounters alongside reviews that pertain to the region's drinking customs and food choices (Richards, 2015). Folkvord et al. (2020) highlighted that vloggers produce new content and build social ties between followers and fellow vloggers. Unequivocally, food vlogs have gained wide popularity alongside the creation of new market opportunities and boosted competition across media platforms and adjacent industries (Rousseau, 2012). Hence, the food industry and media have sought ways to engage with and manage the growing food vlogging communities. This also indicates the significance of both YouTube as a digital platform and the YouTube vlogger as a content creator to shape people's gastronomy tourism perceptions. Arguably, the above discussions underline the relevance of using Actor-Network Theory (ANT) here as the theory considers and signifies both human and non-human actors equally (Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011).

#### ***2.4 Actor-Network Theory (ANT): A Mechanism to Understand Actors and their Dynamics***

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) was first used in the 1980s in the area of science and technology to study both nature and society at the same time, and later it was adopted in other disciplines (Rodger et al., 2004). ANT is a theoretical lens that helps to identify heterogeneous actors categorically, to describe the associations and relationships among relevant actors, to explore the ways relationships form and work, and the ordering of relations (Bilodeau & Potvin, 2018; Latour, 2005). Precisely, it is a practice-oriented theory that explains the roles of actors and their relationships that develop within the network (Beard et al., 2016). ANT consists of four components: actors, relationships among actors, network, and action (Rodger et al., 2009). Here, actors are those who act and form an actor-network (Tatnall & Burgess, 2002). Actors can be human, such as people, organizations, and businesses, or non-human. For instance, human actors are people, organizations, and businesses, among others, and non-human actors, such as objects, physical and cultural artefacts, ideas, technology, infrastructure, policy and regulation, documents, and environmental elements, among others (Dolwick, 2009). ANT is also known as a process of translation with several phases: problematization, Obligatory Passage Point (OPP), Interessement, enrolment, mobilization, and black-box (Rodger et al., 2009). On the other hand, a network is an entity that is made of different actors, such as an individual or a group of objects. In contrast, action refers to the activities of the network, which consists of both human and non-human actors (Dolwick, 2009). The strength of the theory lies in its several principles, such as agnosticism, generalized symmetry, and free association (Tatnall & Gilding, 1999).

ANT has several strengths, such as explaining how non-human actors shape human collaboration and contribute to the formation of social structures and practices (Van der Duim, 2007). However, the theory has some apparent limitations. Few researchers have criticised ANT as it is too light on theory, managerialist, unclear, inconsistent, and incorporates material agency (Fine, 2003; Law, 1999). Besides, it sheds light only on the tangible elements and ignores intangible elements, such as values and norms, emotion, memory, language, and metaphors (Cressman, 2009; Murdoch, 1997). Moreover, Doolin and Lowe (2002) posited that ANT gives equal importance to both human and non-human actors, which reduces the significance of human actors (Doolin & Lowe, 2002). However, Wang and Xiao (2020) argued that ANT gives higher priority to human actors and overlooks non-human actors (Wang & Xiao, 2020). Nevertheless, ANT has been widely used to describe tourismscapes, the role of multidimensionality in tourism development, impacts of tourist-wildlife interactions, relational effects on knowledge creation, the development process of tourism, impact of climate change, and unpacking power relations (Deason et al., 2021; Ren et al., 2010; Rodger et al., 2009; Van der Duim, 2007; Van der Duim & Caalders, 2008). Hence, to reduce this debate of ANT's application, this discourse considers the role of both human and non-human actors in promoting gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework** (Source: Authors)

Figure 1 exhibits that gastronomic motivation and the application of technology drive the development, promotion, and flourishing of gastronomy tourism in a country. Also, technology-based application plays a role in motivating people to form perceptions about gastronomy tourism. Existing studies suggest that gastronomic motivation largely depends on different experiences such as entertainment, education, physical activity, cognition, escapism, emotion, sensory, and aesthetics. These factors are the building blocks of experience economy theory, which suggests the practicality of the selection of this theory for this study. On the other hand, elements of digital platforms, including streaming platforms such as YouTube and its food vlogging content and reputation of vloggers, influence people significantly to perceive regarding gastronomy tourism. Therefore, this discourse chooses ANT to better reflect the contribution of both human and non-human actors. Lastly, several other theories, such as Authenticity Theory, Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory, Expectation-Confirmation Theory, Structuration Theory, Social Network Theory, and Systems Theory, were considered, but the context and scope of the study led to choosing the above-mentioned theories.

### **3. Methodology and Methods**

In South Asia, Bangladesh has a rich and unique culinary tradition. The traditional gastronomic dishes, Hilsha fish curry, Kacchi biryani, Varta, and various other dishes, along with the seasonal foods, such as Pitha (cake), have a significant impact on the daily life and cultural manifestations of the people living in it. Bangladesh has six different seasons and is rather heterogeneous in the food industry. Invasions by the Mughals, Persians, and the British have left their mark on the modern culinary tradition of this nation. With the growing interest in experiencing traditional food, scholarly research on Bangladeshi gastronomy is indeed a possibility. This can be utilized as a tourist resource and, therefore, as a tool to achieve sustainable tourism even at the local level.

#### **3.1 Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative research methodology to explore the factors that significantly shape perceptions of Bangladesh food tourism. Also, to investigate the effects of digital platforms, such as YouTube food vlogging, on the development and promotion of gastronomic tourism. Qualitative research methodology helps explore the in-depth meaning of phenomena in natural settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and focuses on the description of words rather than numbers (McLeod et al., 2011). It also emphasizes the creation of new concepts through in-depth discussion of real-world scenarios (Viswambharan & Priya, 2016). Hence, the aims of this research align closely with the qualitative research methodology.

#### **3.2 Methods**

##### **3.2.1 Interview process**

This research used primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were obtained using semi-structured interviews and systematic content analysis of food vlogs on YouTube. Secondary data were peer-reviewed journal articles and existing research on gastronomic tourism.

A Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select fifty informed respondents with culinary experience and knowledge in tourism. Arguably, since there has been no predetermined sample size in this field (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013), several scholars have argued that a qualitative study requires from five to fifty respondents (Dworkin, 2012). The respondents were comprised of young adults (students and tourists) because this group tends to use more digital content, including food tourism. The interview sessions lasted thirty minutes to one hour at a time convenient to the participants. The adopted semi-structured in-depth interviews enable a synthesis of the adaptive character of the open-ended query with the rigor of thematically organized analytical protocols. This method helped in doing an analysis of the experiential narratives and perceptual constructs of participants, and at the same time provided coherence to its methodological framework.

##### **3.2.2 Selection of interviewees**

The study aimed to produce descriptive data on the study population; hence, purposive sampling was used to conduct fifty semi-structured interviews. Participants' selection criteria were based on their expertise in gastronomy tourism and relevant experience. A diverse group of students, young adults, and tourists was brought together to ensure a range of perspectives. Saturation is reached

when no new themes emerge during data collection (Saunders et al., 2018). In this study, when saturation was achieved, no further data were collected.

The following table shows participants' nature in brief:

**Table 3.1: Demographic analysis of research participants**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25 (Gen Z)	28	56%
	26–35 (Younger Millennials)	15	30%
	36–45	7	14%
Gender	Male	27	54%
	Female	23	46%
Work Status	Students (Tourists)	32	64%
	Employed professionals (Tourists)	18	36%
Education Level	Undergraduate	24	48%
	Graduate (Master's or above)	26	52%

Source: Field data

The age bracket was chosen to be between eighteen and forty-five years old to cover a diverse spectrum of opinions of the respondents who are expected to be active in digital media concerning food tourism. Young adults, or those falling under the eighteen to thirty-five age group, are more likely to use digital platforms, like YouTube, a trend that is in accordance with the focus of the study on food vlogging and online advertisement of tourism. Furthermore, this age range includes students and young professionals, thus providing information about the views of both the new generations and those with an initial professional background in gastronomic tourism.

### **3.2.3 YouTube Content Analysis**

Content analysis is an effective method to manage large volumes of data and to identify patterns in a systematic manner. However, the process is time-consuming and requires subjective interpretative decisions, which can bias researchers during coding, theme generation, and analysis phases. Stemler (2000) posited that substantive depth of content analysis is measurable, and it is efficient in managing large volumes of data. In this paper, the reviews of YouTube videos about Bangladeshi food by international and local food vloggers were analyzed. Five hundred comments were analyzed to understand audience discourse about the featured dishes. The reviewed clips had accumulated at least 50,000 views each, ensuring a broad audience. The review was conducted on food-related video posts between 2020 and 2024. Equally, the research used video review of Bangladesh domestic food-vlogging video channels like Khai-dai.com, MetroMan, Bangladeshi Food Reviewer, Petuk Couple, Khudalagse, Rafsan The ChotoBhai, Adnan Faruque, AroundMeBD, and foreign food vloggers documenting the culinary landscapes of Bangladesh, including Mark Wiens, Best Ever Food Review Show, The Food Ranger, Strictly Dumpling, Khalid Al Ameri, Bald and Bankrupt, and the Foodka Series. Some of these vlogs have between 592 and 9.48 million YouTube followers.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, a reliable data source is compulsory in order to produce widely accepted findings through the analysis of rich data. The intercoder reliability analysis was used by researchers to assess the strength of data interpretation (MacPhail et al., 2016). Initially, the interview transcript subsample was coded by coders, and it continued until reaching a common ground. This working-together procedure validated the emergent themes. Therefore, it has been confirmed that the identified themes are the best representative of the data.

#### **3.3.1 Coding and Thematic Analysis**

Participants' views were transcribed, and the transcripts were coded along with YouTube comments to generate a comprehensive set of themes through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an analytical method that can be used in a continuum of qualitative studies. To achieve the intended goal, the following thematic analysis procedures were followed:

##### **A. Becoming Familiar with the Data**

The researcher reviewed the transcribed interviews alongside comments from YouTube to develop an insightful view of the gathered information. Besides, the researcher also found recurrent linguistic patterns and allusions to particular foods or cultural activities in the commentaries of international YouTube users.

- **Interview example:**

Participant RP\_03 said, "The taste of mustard oil in the Kacchi Biryani reminded me of my hometown." "It was so real, it made me feel like I had experienced the real essence of Bangladeshi cuisine."

As we can see in the quote above, it conveys the themes of Authenticity and Flavors of Bangladeshi Cuisine, which are primary considerations in Gastronomy Tourism.

##### **B. Determining Codes**

Following the first stage, the first round of codes was determined using specific segments of data to address each of the research questions. As with coding, these codes are short phrases or single words that describe the basic idea or interpretation of the section of data.

- **Coding example:**

Using the above quote, some possible codes would be:

- Authenticity
- Flavor
- Cultural Connection

These codes were used to further examine other interview or comment responses that reflected a common theme of immersion into the culture or references to local ingredients.

### **C. Grouping Codes into Themes**

Following initial coding, a comprehensive set of themes was established by organizing similar information from different units of data that had identical content and were mapped onto one another in each code. This was when the meaning and context of the data became apparent.

Example of grouping codes:

- **Authenticity**, local ingredients, and traditional recipes were considered as codes of a higher order - coded under cultural heritage.
- **Other codes** relevant to flavor, spices, and taste properties were combined into the Sensory Appeal theme.

These themes were used to build and integrate the data, creating coherence out of the varied range of experiences and perspectives expressed by participants and commenters.

### **D. Refining Themes**

The themes were analyzed and narrowed down to make sure that they are aligned with the study data and goals. This was done through going back to the themes repeatedly to ensure they were broad enough to cover the range of views, and to come to requisite decisions with regard to the unification or division of the themes to ensure transparency. For example, having measured the codes of authenticity and local ingredients, it has been concluded that the renaming of the theme to Authentic Food Experiences was more appropriate in describing the focus of the participants on authentic local food skills and ingredients.

### **E. Ensuring Consistency and Reliability in the Coding Process**

To improve the reliability of the coding procedure, some of the coded data were reviewed by the researchers. Each researcher was invited to code an independent sample of the interview(s) and YouTube comments. This enabled any differences in the data interpretation to be exposed.

- **Cross-check example:**

After coding a subsection of interviews is complete, one researcher may have grouped “authenticity” with “cultural exchange,” while another researcher may place them both in the larger category “Heritages.” Researchers read and discussed these policy issues to reach a consensus. The theme of authenticity was agreed upon as a stand-alone theme after discussion, and the subtheme of Cultural Exchange was added.

### **F. Example of Final Themes and Sub-themes**

The final themes that emerged from the thematic analysis were as follows:

- ✓ **Authenticity Experience:** Focused on the special food of Bangladesh (including regional diversity and traditional methods of cooking).

Sub-themes: Local Ingredients, Traditional Recipes

- ✓ **Sensory Experience:** Reflected the way participants experienced food via the senses (taste, smell, and texture).

- ✓ **Emotional and Personal Experience:** Examined how food evokes emotions and memories (family memories, comfort food).

This study was also conducted in accordance with ethical standards. In doing so, the purpose of this study and the consent process were explained to the interviewees beforehand. The identities of commenters on YouTube are kept confidential by using pseudonyms.

## 4. Analysis and Findings

### 4.1 Factors Shaping Perceptions of Gastronomy Tourism in Bangladesh

Gastronomy tourism is a relatively new form of tourism in Bangladesh. This form of tourism has significant prospects and is gaining popularity day by day due to several pivotal factors. Therefore, based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews and the comments section of YouTube food vloggers, this study has identified several themes that have an influential impact on developing gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh. Some of these themes are sensory experience, authenticity experience, emotional and personal experience, service and environment experience, and cultural experience. The following section elaborates key features of these themes within the context of Bangladeshi cuisine, which appeal to participants and commenters and encourage others who want to explore Bangladeshi dining experiences.

#### 4.1.1 Sensory experience

Several factors are playing significant roles in creating sensory experiences that have a significant impact on the creation of perception regarding gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh. Some of these are diversity, rich flavor, uniqueness, delicious foods, and sensory appeal. For example, the extensive diversity of Bangladeshi cuisine arises from its six distinct seasons and historical development, together with regional differences. The yearly cycle brings new seasonal dishes to Bangladeshi cuisine, including traditional rice cakes locally called Pitha during the winter months and plenty of tropical fruits in the summer. The traditional cuisine shows traces of Mughal, Persian and British cooking traditions. Besides, promotion of diversity through YouTube vlogs also helps to form a favorable impression of Bangladeshi cuisine.



The findings of the Business Standard Report validate the image comment by demonstrating that Bangladesh possesses a diverse gastronomical landscape that occupies position 43 in global rankings during 2022. Fuchka, bharta, chomchom, halim, and jilapi are some of the top 20 delectable meals in the nation. The user expresses astonishment at the vast combination of dishes because these represent the deep culinary traditions of Bangladesh. Moreover, seasonal variation (Bangladesh is widely known as a six-season country) is also playing a role in the availability of diversified foods.

The rich flavor of Bangladeshi foods attracts many people to taste it in site. One of the reasons would be the use of different herbs and spices in combination with vegetarian and non-vegetarian items, which enrich the flavor. In this regard, some unique flavored dishes of Bangladeshi cuisine include hilsa fish curry and kacchi biryani and bharta, whereas the popular street foods such as fuchka along with chotpoti demonstrate its preference for spicy and tangy tastes. These rich-flavored foods are highly promoted by the large number of content creators, as a food vlogger (RP\_01) stated that:

*“Once, I went to old Dhaka for the first time and based on the recommendation of my friends, I ate for the first time one of the signature items of old Dhaka, namely, kacchi biryani. It was so delicious and seemed like a firework of spices in the mouth – so aromatic and rich!”*

A tourist (RP\_04) also highlighted the traditional cooking practices behind this rich aroma:

*“People in Bangladesh use mustard oil in smashed items, which gives an extra bit of punch to the flavor. Interestingly, I did not find this kind of practice in other countries. It is so cozy that the memory remains with me for a long time.”*

Moreover, Bangladeshi foods are also special and delicious. Bangladeshi dish finds their taste through bold flavor combinations, which derive from rich spice pastes that create depth and warmth in each bite. Households use a flat stone pestle and mortar called "Shil-pata" to turn spices into a prepared paste. A local community member (RP\_05) shared that:

*“There is a sense of magic when my mother grinds the spices on the shil-pata: it’s not only cooking, it’s like she is making a sacred thing.”*

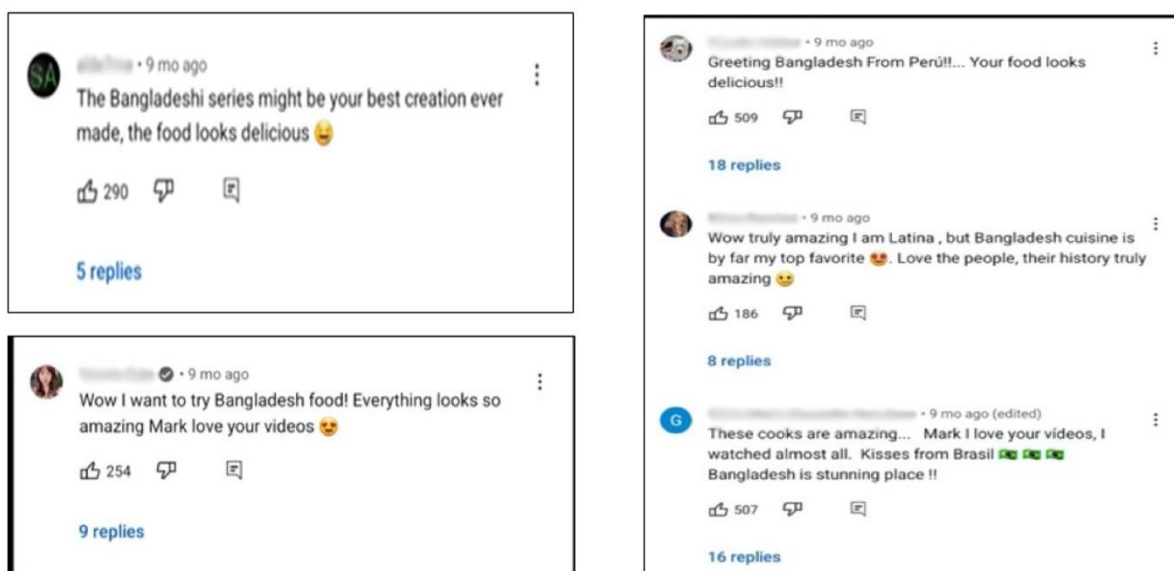
Traditional cooking begins with spice paste preparation, which uses a combination of fresh and dried ingredients such as ginger, garlic, onions, turmeric, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, and mustard. The intense spiciness of green chilies intensifies a wide range of dishes and maintains a prolonged heat sensation in the mouth. People use mustard oil to make the food unique and delicious, although recently many modern consumers increasingly rely on vegetable oils as they offer a combination of contemporary cooking practices and enhance flavor flexibility. A tourist (RP\_06) highlighted the benefits of local cuisine:

*“The aroma of mustard oil that is heating up in a pan is the smell of home for me. No other thing compares to that authenticity.”*

However, the legacy of traditional cooking methods is continuing by Bangladeshi families despite the continuously changing cooking techniques. People still use a clay stove for cooking. Different tourism sites are also encouraging tourists to visit their site and enjoy live cooking in front of them.

Different electronic media and platforms live telecast these events. Therefore, people are getting interested in visiting the place and gathering pleasant experiences of traditional live cooking practices.

Finally, sensory appeals such as appearance, aroma, flavor, texture, and even sound come into action to perceive particular foods. These factors significantly impact the first impression and overall satisfaction. This is usually applicable for traditional foods when people rely on their senses to determine freshness, quality, and appeal. However, sensory appeal differs from individual to individual. People not only see food as a meal but also consider it a source of excitement and experience, according to the following comments:



Evidently, Bangladeshi foods offer exceptional sensory appeals because of their diverse colors and textures, appetizing aromas, and authentic flavors.

#### **4.1.2 Authentic experience**

The traditional food in Bangladesh presents a diverse and enriched collection of dishes that differ across several regions. The foundational ingredients used in Bengali cooking remain similar across recipes, but regional differences insert cultural elements to produce separate, distinct dishes. Exploring the various regions of Bangladesh becomes essential for tasting authentic local dishes prepared using local cooking techniques. People who love to experience cuisine traditionally believe authentic food tastes best when you eat it in its original location. For example, the city of Chattogram specializes in 'Mejbani beef' as its distinguishing dish, but Chandpur gains recognition through its 'Hilsa fish' preparations. The city of Cumilla showcases Matrivandar 'Rashmalai' while Cox's Bazar stands out for 'Dried fish' cuisine. The towns of Tangail and Pura Dhaka offer visitors 'Chamcham' and 'Bakorkhani' respectively, amongst numerous special regional dishes. These culinary examples show that Bangladesh's food culture emerges from its regions and serves as a key attraction for tourists who love dining experiences. An international tourist (RP\_15) emphasized local cuisine authenticity:

*“You have to taste each dish in its hometown to get the real flavor. Mejbani beef in Chattogram was not like what I have had anywhere else. It was like tasting the soul of the city.”*

Organic ingredients are also enhancing the authenticity of foods. Bangladeshi cuisine stands out through its various spices and homegrown products, as well as its particular cooking methods, which strengthen the distinctive food traditions of this diverse nation. The traditional regional ingredients and cooking practices in Bangladesh led to an extensive array of special dishes that express authentic local traditions. The dining choices of many travelers depend heavily on both food quality and authenticity when they travel. The data from interviews demonstrated that 70% of travelers believed spending money on restaurant or hotel dining was worth it when they discovered organic and top-quality ingredients. A traveler insisted on organic food:

*“I always look for organic ingredients in my meals because I just don’t get the same flavors from genetically modified foods. I have been searching for the taste that reminds me of the way my mother used to cook when I was a child, and searching for that same experience for so long.” (RP\_16)*

Additionally, reviews indicate that international visitors discover satisfaction deeper in Bangladesh’s dining experience upon learning about restaurant dishes containing organic local ingredients. The emphasis on fresh local ingredients enhances dining experiences while creating a strong desire for customers to visit again.

#### **4.1.3 Emotional and personal experience**

Primarily, preserving physical health and mental state depends on well-balanced meals. Nutrient-rich foods both quench appetite and provide health benefits to people’s bodies. Many people prepare meals for their family members primarily to show their affection and care for others and to gain personal contentment seeing their loved ones happy. People are emotionally attached to meals made by particular loved ones, as these meals bring back fond memories and create a feeling of togetherness. A tourist (RP\_35) reflected on the warmth of Bengali hospitality and said that:

*“As an international visitor, I was surprised by the number of things that were not only food but the Bengali hospitality that made me feel like I was a part of the family, and every meal was an opportunity to create meaningful connections and forge life-long friendships.”*

Hospitality represents a core value in Bangladeshi customs because the culture prioritizes caring deeply for guests and ensuring their well-being. Several international food vloggers strongly expressed their gratitude because of their hospitality experiences from the people of this very land. International visitors discover both Bangladeshi food aromas and cultivate genuine friendships with the local people through interacting physically, which opens the door for co-creating value.

The co-creation experience determines Word-of-Mouth (WoM) patterns between customers who participate in leisure activities. The activity of eating at a local restaurant delivers a less dynamic form of food-centered leisure, whereas dining experiences that include cooking courses and food events fall into the active category (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Cooking classes provide co-created culinary experiences that allow consumers to learn local Bengali culinary history and

discover unique developmental methods and distinctive food items. Underlining the deeper experience of culinary tourism, an international tourist (RP\_20) stated that:

*“When I attend cooking classes, it is not only about the recipes but also about getting into the culture and really understanding the traditions and techniques that make every dish so special”.*

Food-related leisure activities become increasingly essential, yet marketing scholars, along with food health researchers, strangely fail to focus on their experiential design aspects (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009). Service providers need to approach co-creation and co-design of participatory events through imaginative and thoughtful processes. The service requires complete customer collaboration through extensive participation that focuses on boosting gastronomic customer well-being (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Visitors who opt to live with local families spend their time exploring both the societal traditions and daily customs of the destination area. Viewers who watch content from food vloggers Mark Wiens and Sonny frequently decide to join cooking activities when travelling to Bangladesh. Participating actively in food preparation enables visitors to develop better knowledge of traditional cooking methods and strengthen their admiration for the culture.

On the other hand, allocentric travelers have a natural preference for experiencing different cultures, so they eagerly try local dishes when travelling. Culture and food exploration give travelers the experience to fully participate in the traditional heritage and distinctive flavors of their destination. However, people with psychotic personality traits show high sensitivity to unfamiliar foods. In this regard, consuming unknown foods opens two major doors: it expands culinary knowledge while deepening understanding of the cuisine histories and food production customs of different nations. People now enjoy trying both traditional and new types of food as their main leisure activity.

#### **4.1.4 Service and environment experience**

The location and surroundings of eating foods alongside service personnel also play a role in creating perception regarding Bangladeshi cuisine. In this regard, service-oriented businesses such as restaurants, hotels, and retail establishments require a well-designed servicescape that creates meaningful experiences for their customers. Some key features of servicescape are physical layout, ambience, and interior design. The strategic selection of these elements enables service providers to build welcoming spaces that improve customer experiences and shape customer conduct while boosting service provider success. In addition, service quality is another influential factor. As customer expectations continue to evolve, diners increasingly evaluate restaurants not only based on food quality but also on the overall ambience, hygiene standards, and the warmth of the service they receive. Furthermore, Bengali traditional foods provide both delicious aromas and valuable nutritional content. Bengali cuisine stands out due to its dense nutritional content, due to multiple essential factors. The traditional fish and rice cooking methods, alongside a diverse range of vegetables and protein-rich meat and lentil soup, characterize traditional Bangladeshi culinary practices. The natural combination of ingredients has created a healthy eating pattern characteristic of traditional Bengali food preparation. Gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh needs proper maintenance and emphasis on these factors to achieve greater development.

#### **4.1.5 Cultural experience**

In Bangladesh, eating with one's hands is a deeply rooted cultural practice that reflects tradition, hospitality, and a strong connection to food. The Bangladeshi tradition of using the right hand during dining follows social standards across the entire nation. Bangladeshis combine food ingredients with their hands by mixing rice with lentils and vegetables together alongside curries to achieve better flavor and balanced nutrition. Visitors to Bangladesh find this eating practice both fascinating and immersive during their stay. A popular international food vlogger stated that:

*"I loved the fact that locals encouraged me to eat with my hands. It wasn't only a meal; it was a cultural moment in the life of each of us that we will never forget." (RP\_11)*

Another food vlogger (RP\_12) said that:

*"The experience of eating with my right hand while sitting on the floor and being part of a Bengali family meal was one of the most unforgettable things I had during my trip".*

The traditional eating method receives broad admiration from food admirers and travelers visiting Bangladesh. For example, renowned food vlogger Mark Wiens documented this cultural aspect in his Bangladesh visit by showing locals welcoming foreigners to join them in traditional "local style" eating. According to Wiens, the finger-mixing-eating approach he experienced was called "mix and smash," while openly embracing the hands-on eating practice. Traditional eating with hands remains an important tradition within Bangladeshi culture and stands as a notable part of the nation's diverse food heritage.

#### **4.2 Technology-Enabled Promotion of Bangladesh Gastronomy Tourism**

In contemporary technological advancement, digital platforms such as streaming platforms and social media are increasingly being used to promote gastronomy tourism. Therefore, this study tries to investigate the role of technology, specifically, a digital platform, namely, YouTube, to create perception about gastronomy tourism and to promote it both nationally and globally. Based on the analysis of semi-structured interview data and online user interaction, this discourse tries to uncover how different thematic facets of Bangladeshi cuisine can be promoted to a global audience via experiential content. In doing so, several themes were identified, such as awareness creation, experience enhancement, motivation and decision-making and collaborative promotion.

##### **4.2.1 Awareness creation**

YouTube opens the doors for online search for the availability of food around the world. In this regard, some of the famous food-vlogging YouTube Channels are Rafsan TheChotoBhai, The Metro Man, RB Kitchen, Food BD and Deshi Food Channel. In these channels, food vloggers promote the seasonal and regional diversity of Bangladeshi cuisine by showcasing unique dishes from various regions and seasons. Their videos show local delicacies, such as Pitha in winter or tropical fruits in summer, which can depict the high culinary diversity that is based on Bangladesh's six seasons. Moreover, these visual narratives reflect the impact of past culinary practices (e.g., Mughal, Persian, British) on contemporary Bangladeshi food culture. In this regard, one of the respondents (RP\_11) stated that:

*“I love to roam around to eat food. But previously, there was a limited source of information. Mainly, I depended on the recommendations of my friends. But when people started to make videos on YouTube, I started to receive a huge amount of information about Bangladeshi cuisine. These videos are also motivating me to taste different kinds of food.”*

This indicates that food-vlogging not only spreads information but also helps to create a positive perception about Bangladeshi foods. Besides exposure, these channels are popularizing Bangladeshi cuisine both nationally and internationally. Also, people follow popular food vloggers mostly.

#### **4.2.2 Experience enhancement**

YouTube also gives scope to create engaging video content by highlighting the rawness and flavor of Bangladeshi food, characterized by mustard oil, strong spices, and traditional cooking techniques. One local tourist (RP\_22) stated that:

*“I like that food vlogs focus on the factual portrayal of our food, especially in the use of organic produce and application of the traditional methods, which serves in the glorification of our food culture.”*

Food vloggers also use sensory-based storytelling to increase audiences’ perceptions with the aid of close-up visuals, background noise, and vivid tasting reactions. Another tourist (RP\_25) remarked that:

*“Impression on sensory narrative and emphasis on communal meals are some of the aspects that I am impressed by and are summaries of the main narratives of our food culture. This type of interaction is more than consumption and emphasizes shared experiences.”*

Emphasis on iconic dishes such as the hilsa curry or kacchi biryani also creates strong cultural ties between the cuisine and national identity. Beyond this, content with real, homemade meals prepared from organic ingredients helps to build credibility and trust. Vloggers who eat with locals, visit village kitchens, and showcase farm-to-table trips bring transparency and a focus on sustainability. Such genuineness appeals to audiences seeking authentic culinary experiences rather than commercialized versions of traditional dishes. Additionally, active experiences like cooking classes or street food preparation can be a central part of vlogging content. Participatory formats that incorporate traditional methods (e.g., grinding spices on a shil-pata, preparing bharta) enable viewers a sense of belongingness by engaging in the process. One of the international tourists (RP\_33) stated that:

*“The focus on the local experience and sustainability has attracted my attention. These visual videos give a real picture of the food culture of Bangladesh, hence inspiring me to visit the country on my own.”*

These experiences help promote Bangladesh not only as a place to eat but also as a place where culinary experiences are shared and preserved. Moreover, food vloggers are usually keen to note the emotional appeal of food – from nostalgia and family memories to the warmth of Bengali hospitality. These affective dimensions add to the perceived value of dining experiences. Videos that show local

families cooking, eating together, or inviting guests to sit on the floor and eat with their hands suggest emotional attachment and inclusive cultural traditions.

#### **4.2.3 Motivation and decision-making**

As cooking becomes a pastime activity, vloggers act as intermediaries of culture. Their travel-related food stories motivate food lovers and allocentric travelers to visit lesser-known places such as Chattogram for Mejbani beef or Chandpur for hilsa. A tourist (RP\_35) living in Dhaka stated that:

*“I have never travelled outside Dhaka. However, the food vlogs help me value the unknown places like Chattogram and Chandpur much more. As a result, I am more likely to travel to these locations and taste the original tastes of Mezbani beef and hilsa.”*

By making food an adventure, vloggers are contributing to the worldwide phenomenon of gastronomy as a form of hobby tourism. Conversely, the multi-sensory characteristics of Bangladeshi cuisine, such as aromas, textures, sounds, and colors, provide captivating visual content. Vloggers can effectively showcase sensory richness by utilizing high-quality video techniques, such as slow-motion shots, close-ups of cooking, and ambient sound recording. These videos create sensory experiences for viewers, generating anticipation and a desire to visit. Furthermore, food vloggers also tend to review the quality of services and ambience of eating places, such as restaurants and food stalls. An international tourist (RP\_36) remarked that:

*“The vlogs can be regarded as a useful exploration tool of the food scene in Bangladesh. The sensory experience accompanied with open restaurant reviews is a confidence booster in my intention to visit. I expect to taste the local cuisine and immerse into the cultural atmosphere to the full extent.”*

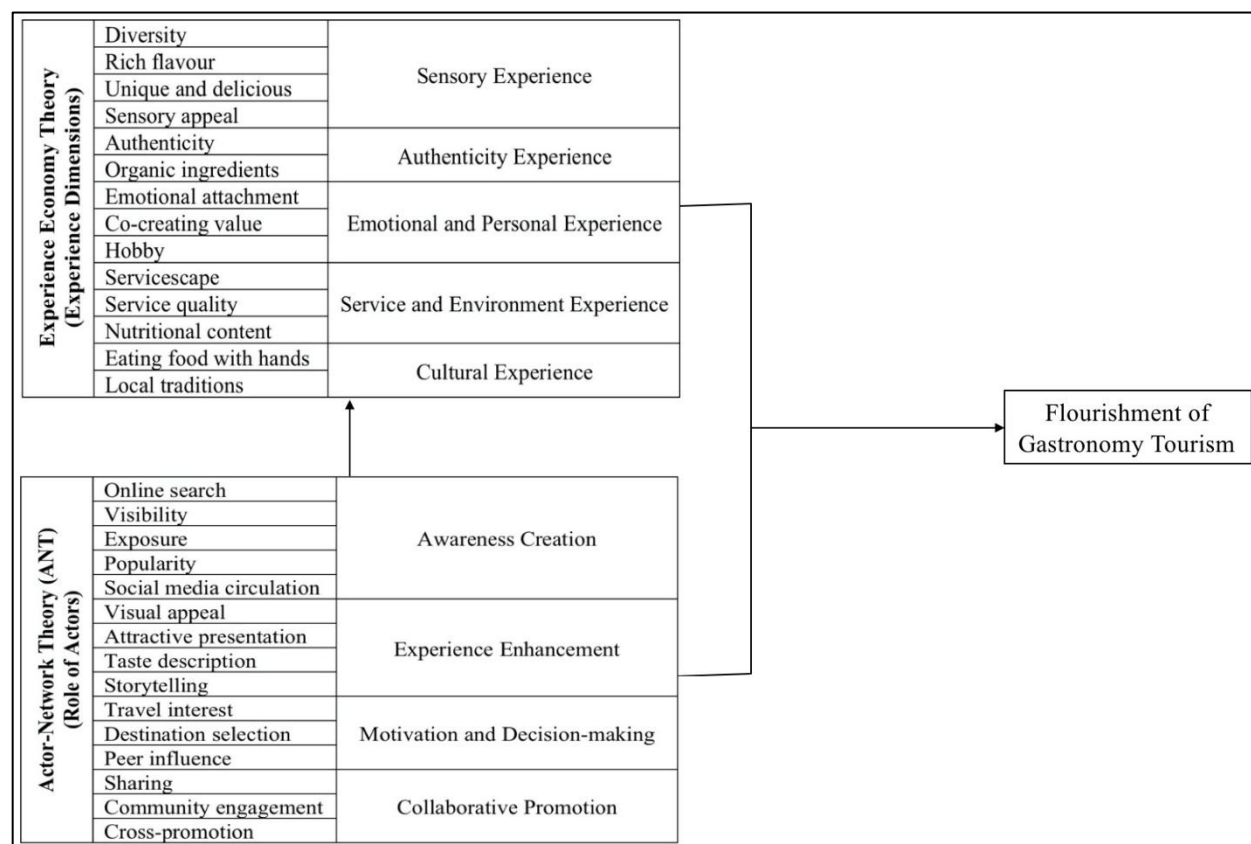
The visualization of elements such as cleanliness, hospitality, decor, and the authenticity of servicescapes allows viewers to see the whole picture. This is especially effective for foreign audiences who are unfamiliar with local standards and surroundings. Vloggers act as agents of word-of-mouth, providing credible, firsthand accounts that shape travel decisions. Their recommendations, particularly when backed by sincere reactions, emotional storytelling, and co-experienced meals, create trust and generate tourism interest.

#### **4.2.4 Collaborative promotion**

YouTube also creates a scope for sharing content on other digital platforms. For example, food vloggers can share their videos on other platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram after uploading to their channel. This also opens the door for creating a network for interconnected actors such as food vloggers, content creators, viewers, restaurant owners and authorities who are connected in different streaming and social media platforms. A local tourist (RP\_38) stated that collaborative efforts can be regarded as an important mechanism for spreading the culinary traditions of Bangladesh.

*“Food vloggers in Bangladesh are making it very easy to present the local cuisine. Such people create a bridge between viewers and real-life cooking experiences via YouTube and Instagram and, thus, make the appreciation of culture more palpable.”*

In the context of Bangladesh, the network of relationships among these actors mobilize the promotion of gastronomy tourism as well as drive to shape the perception regarding Bangladeshi cuisine. In brief, gastronomy tourism is promoted in Bangladesh through human actors such as food-vloggers and content creators who take the help of non-human actors such as technology, specifically, digital platforms like YouTube.



**Figure 3: Findings of the study in a nutshell** (Source: Authors)

## 5. Discussion

This discourse critically examines the factors forming perception regarding gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh by applying five experiential dimensions, such as sensory, authenticity, emotional and personal, service and environment, and culture-derived, through experience economy theory. These factors tended to align with the findings of previous studies, specifically those that contributed to understanding the role of local cuisine in shaping destination perceptions (Amin & Roy, 2016; Talukder, 2020). Also, this study investigates the role of actors such as human and non-human-derived by adopting Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in shaping the perception of gastronomy tourism. Eventually, the focus of this study was to find out how the combination of these factors influences the development of gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh. The findings of this study align with and contradict the existing literature, and on the other hand, generate a few new findings as well.

Previous findings suggest that sensory experience influences perceptions of gastronomy tourism (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). This study also identified that Bangladeshi foods are diverse, popular for their

rich flavor, and the use of many herbs and spices makes the foods unique and delicious. These all have a significant impact on perception creation. Research by Kim et al. (2009) also identified that these factors of food help to build a loyal customer segment of food tourism, and Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016b) supported that sensory experience motivates tourists to actively engage in gastronomy tourism. However, a study conducted by Mak et al. (2012) warned that inconsistent standards and a lack of presentation standards can negatively impact the sensory experiences. Besides this, authentic food culture remains a debated issue in the literature of gastronomy tourism because there are no fixed criteria to determine whether the food is authentic or not. This further heated the topic by raising issues like whether non-patent food will be called authentic or not (Mkono, 2012). However, findings of this study suggest that the use of organic ingredients in food preparation makes the food authentic, and people perceive it positively when they feel the food is authentic. Findings are also aligned with Zhang et al. (2019), who stated the importance of authentic culinary experience to tourist satisfaction. Likewise, Kim and Iwashita (2016) found that authentic foods play a significant role in influencing tourists' desire to visit a destination. In contrast, previous findings also argued that sometimes people perceive authentic food culture as usual, normal and regular, and it does not create a notable impact on perception creation (Cohen & Cohen, 2012).

Aligning with the experience economy literature (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013), participants of this study were asked about the significance of emotional and personal experience in shaping their perception regarding gastronomy tourism. The findings reveal that they perceive positively when they can emotionally attach with foods that correspond with Tung and Ritchie's (2011) findings. They found that emotionally charged experiences help to build long-term memory (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). In addition, Sthapit (2017) also added that emotional resonance significantly enhances perception. The findings also reveal that emotional resonance in Bangladesh is created through informal interaction with food suppliers. This also creates scope for gathering good personal experiences. Therefore, this study emphasizes creating more personal experiences while people visit to taste the local cuisine. However, there are some contradictory findings in past literature. Personal experiences through interaction with others, in some cases, create misunderstandings and miscommunication that lead to negative personal experiences (Richards, 2015). Hence, findings of this study also suggest that focus should be given on balanced interactions among service receivers and providers. Based on the findings, most of the respondents stated that one of the most influential and significant factors that shape perception regarding gastronomy tourism is service quality and the service environment. Evidence from servicescape literature supports that service quality and physical environment decisively influence perception (Bitner, 1992). Identified factors that shape the service quality and physical environment are location and surroundings of eating foods, food quality, overall ambience, hygiene standards, and the warmth of the service. These factors are aligned with the findings of Su and Swanson (2017). Service creates a negative perception, although service quality is a subjective issue; it is difficult to assess. This outcome echoed the finding of Mkono (2012). Cultural and gastronomic tradition in Bangladesh is observed by respondents as a very immersive activity. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Choe and Kim (2018), which highlights the fact that the experiential value of food consumption extends beyond the sensory to

encompass cultural practices. Eating with hands was not only appreciated but also strongly associated with Bangladeshi hospitality, which is consistent with the research of Talukder and Kumar (2025), who emphasized the emotional bond developed through sharing food.

In brief, the answer to the first research question demonstrates that several experiential dimensions, such as sensory, authenticity, emotional and personal, service and environment and cultural experience, play an influential role in creating perception regarding gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh. This answer also contributes to the study by demonstrating that the five dimensions are not isolated but rather interconnected. Besides, gastronomic experience depends on collaboration between both tangible and intangible elements.

This study also aimed to investigate the role of YouTube food vloggers in gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh, with a particular focus on exploring the factors that attract tourists to Bangladeshi cuisine. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) highlights how actors such as technology and people play an influential role in creating gastronomic perception and shaping the promotion of gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh. Findings suggest that technology, more specifically, digital platforms play several roles in tourism promotion, such as awareness creation, experience enhancement, motivation, decision-making, and collaborative promotion. These themes not only shape the perception but also promote gastronomy tourism, where they combine to help move Bangladesh's gastronomy tourism forward.

Digital platforms such as YouTube and Facebook create awareness among people about Bangladeshi cuisine. Most of the respondents of the study emphasized that the responsibility of YouTube food vloggers in promoting gastronomy tourism has emerged as a meaningful trend. The study also revealed the prime importance of vloggers in shaping Bangladesh as a gastronomic destination in the minds of tourists through the creation of awareness, supporting the conclusions by Lim et al. (2012) and Reino and Hay (2011), who found YouTube to be a powerful tool for destination branding and awareness building. Hence, vloggers effectively utilize visual content to create virtual experiences that stimulate the senses and foster an emotional connection with potential visitors. This finding is consistent with that of Lalangan (2020), who emphasized the efficacy of digital platforms in promoting sustainable tourism behaviors and fostering local food cultures. This claim is also supported by Choe and Kim (2018). However, Mkono and Tribe (2017) argued that awareness creation can create both opportunities and challenges. For example, when people become more aware, more and more people will visit the place to taste the cuisine, while an excessive number of visitors can oversimplify the gastronomy tourism. Besides this, digital media can also play a role in experience enhancement. Ellis et al. (2018) in their study stated that when the experience of tourists matches the contents of food-vloggers, then they feel that their experience greatly matches what they gathered. This discourse also found that when tourists' experience is enhanced, then they contribute to promoting gastronomy tourism by spreading positive word-of-mouth and repeat visits. This also directly impacts their motivation and decision-making. Several recent studies have revealed the potential of co-creation of value between vloggers and their audiences (Binkhorst & Dekker, 2009; Richards, 2015), which corresponds with this research finding. Vloggers who share their cooking classes or street food events with their followers create strong

attachments to their viewers and motivate them to come to Bangladesh not only to eat but also to experience its culinary traditions. Such participatory experiences enhance the authenticity of food tourism experience, as evidenced by the strong preference of Millennials and Gen Z for interactive and experiential content (Kim et al., 2018). Hence, food is considered one of the prime motivators to visit a destination (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Collaborative promotion has emerged as one of the trends in promotion nowadays and is considered one of the critical factors for promoting gastronomy tourism also. The results of this study also highlight that promoting in a coordinated way has a significant impact, where digital platforms act as catalysts here. Baggio et al. (2010) showed that collaboration among actors strengthens the flourishing of gastronomy tourism. However, several other studies found some contradictory results, such as inconsistent messaging, lack of coordination among actors, and limited participation of stakeholders, weakening collaborative efforts (Richards, 2015).

Findings of the second research question highlight that the application of technology, specifically digital platforms, not only influences people's perception but also promotes gastronomy tourism. In doing so, the application of ANT demonstrates that non-human actors have a significant contribution to the outcome of positive perception and promotion to the overall prospects of gastronomy tourism. Besides, this theory also proves that both human and non-human actors accelerate the growth of the food tourism industry in Bangladesh. In brief, the flourishing of gastronomy tourism depends on the network of relationships among actors.

## 6. Implications of the Study

First, it is preferable that Bangladeshi food vloggers focus on the creation of substantial, deep-seated content and not copy the traditional patterns. The growth of gastronomy tourism can be enhanced by the vlogs, where specific analysis of local products, cooking methods, and exploration of the cultural meaning of the dishes can be done. The use of authenticity, interactivity, and excessive detail could help vloggers appeal to a wider audience around the globe than ineffective efforts, which will increase the perceived value of the platforms and cement the authenticity of the gastronomic experience. Besides, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, with the consultation of the relevant agencies, such as the Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) and Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), the government must take a more dedicated approach to promoting gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh through food vloggers. These organizations can provide resources, establish collaborations, and provide official incentives to ensure that the content created is a perfect reflection of the diversity of Bangladeshi food. This would place Bangladesh in a better position in the global market as an attractive food-tourism destination, where all the content would be presented in a way that resonates with the values of the local culture and its sustainability, and with the tastes and preferences of the modern food-tourism consumer.

## 7. Conclusion

In the world of food lovers, gastronomy tourism has emerged as one of the promising niche forms of tourism development around the world. As a country of the Global South, Bangladesh is also realizing its significance because of the availability of tourism resources. However, limited attention

has been given to the factors that can play a role as a catalyst for gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh. Supportably, most prior studies have concentrated on well-known gastronomic destinations, but limited research has been conducted in the context of lesser-known culinary destinations, such as Bangladesh (Zhou et al., 2025). Therefore, this discourse tries to fill this research gap by focusing on two issues: factors that influence the creation of perception regarding Bangladeshi cuisine and the role of technology in shaping the perception, alongside the promotion of this form of tourism in the context of Bangladesh. Findings of the study reveal that perceptions regarding gastronomy tourism create several experiential dimensions such as sensory, authenticity, emotional and personal, service and environment and cultural. Also, this study confirms the long-established idea of YouTube vloggers performing a function of tourism promotion. Furthermore, the emergence of digital platforms like YouTube food vlogs is a powerful tool that can be used to market gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh. Based on the available knowledge and integrative thinking, it is also clear that food vloggers on YouTube create a significant potential in fostering the gastronomy tourism industry in Bangladesh.

In line with this, in order to understand the applicability of these issues, this research attempts to enrich the existing knowledge by focusing on those determinants that play an important role in determining the success of gastronomy tourism and the processes underlying its growth. Hence, this discourse goes for the application of the dual-theory approach, where two applied theories were experience economy theory and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). In doing so, this study has made several theoretical contributions to the existing literature of gastronomy tourism and applied theories. For instance, using experience economy theory, it highlights how gastronomy tourism perception is shaped by the experiential dimensions. This discourse enriched the theory by empirically showing that dimensions of experiences are not isolated, but rather that these dimensions are interconnected. Besides this, ANT was enriched by highlighting the role of non-human actors in the context of gastronomy tourism. Specifically, this theory proves that non-human actors can be influential in creating perception and promoting gastronomy tourism.

Moreover, intervention between human and non-human actors is also crucial. This highlights that promotion of tourism should be considered as a network relationship. Importantly, integration of ANT and experience economy theory illustrates how tourism can flourish through the co-creation of experiential value. It is worth pointing out that this study has practical implications; to illustrate, destination marketers can use its findings to develop promotional techniques that facilitate food tourism and help in the development of a robust tourism industry. More specifically, tourism practitioners can design experience-based promotional strategies alongside the strategic use of digital platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook. In terms of empirical contribution, this study provides evidence-based findings about how interdependent multidimensional experiences in alignment with non-human actors influence to shape the perception. Methodological contribution highlights how a hybrid analytical approach can be used to analyze subjective and material dimensions of gastronomy tourism.

However, this study, despite offering several significant findings and contributions, has a number of significant limitations. To begin with, the study is mostly based on qualitative data, including semi-

structured interviews and content analyses of food vlogs. The methods are very much detailed in nature, but the level of subjectivity constrains the degree to which the results can be deemed as reflective of the perceptions of all tourists and other stakeholders involved. Secondly, the sample is mostly made up of young and digitally oriented people; therefore, the conclusions reached can hardly be generalized to fit elderly and less digitally oriented tourists. Furthermore, the explored food experiences are limited to urban locations, which raises questions about whether they can represent the broader culinary variety of rural areas across Bangladesh. The solution to these limitations in future studies would require a broader sampling approach that includes participants in a wider demographic and geographic range, such as those in non-urban settings. Moreover, as gastronomy tourism has prospects and promises to flourish in Bangladesh, the issue of governance and its related issues can be studied in the future. Furthermore, longitudinal research on the prolonged impacts of food vlogs on tourist behavior and local businesses would help to understand this phenomenon better. Lastly, as this research only prioritized investigating the role of YouTube in the creation of perception and promotion of gastronomy tourism, future research can be conducted on the broader impacts of YouTube as a streaming platform on gastronomy tourism.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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## Appendix 1

### Semi-structured Questions

#### Demographic Information

Age:

Gender:

Occupation:

Educational Background:

#### Must ask questions

1. What factors do you consider when evaluating the food experience in a destination?
2. Can you describe your experience with Bangladeshi cuisine? What aspects of the food stood out to you the most?
3. In your opinion, how important is it to engage with local food traditions when visiting a new destination?
4. Can you recall any emotional connections you have had with food while traveling? How did these experiences influence your perception of the destination?
5. How important is service quality in shaping your overall dining experience when traveling?
6. How does online content (videos, vlogs) enhance or change your motivation to explore local cuisines and cultural practices in a particular destination?
7. How do you define a "memorable gastronomic experience"? What factors contribute to making an experience memorable in the context of gastronomy tourism?
8. How do digital platforms (e.g., YouTube, Instagram) contribute to your awareness of gastronomy tourism destinations like Bangladesh?
9. In your opinion, how do social media influencers or content creators impact the image of a gastronomy destination?
10. How do you perceive the role of technology (specifically social media and video-sharing platforms like YouTube) in shaping tourist perceptions of food culture?
11. What are the strengths and weaknesses of Bangladesh's gastronomic offerings from a tourist perspective?
12. In your opinion, what is the potential for gastronomy tourism to grow in Bangladesh?
13. What strategies or actions could enhance the development and promotion of gastronomy tourism in Bangladesh?

If you'd like, you can share whatever you want.