

CULTURAL TOURISM THROUGH PEER-TO-PEER GASTRONOMIC EXPERIENCES: A CASE STUDY FROM EATWITH TÜRKIYE

TURISMO CULTURAL ATRAVÉS DE EXPERIÊNCIAS GASTRONÔMICAS ENTRE PARES: UM ESTUDO DE CASO DO EATWITH TÜRKIYE

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

Abstract

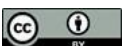
There is a transformation in tourism where experiences come to the fore and gastronomic cultural experiences become important. In this transformation, it has become important to identify gastronomic experiences. For this purpose, the aim of this study is to examine the gastronomic experiences of tourists through sharing platforms and to identify the prominent values in these experiences. The sample of the study consists of the EatWith sharing platform. 125 online reviews of 75 different gastronomic experiences were analyzed using MAXQDA 2022 program with content analysis technique. As a result of the study, it was found that tourists gave only positive evaluations of their gastronomic experiences and that the participants had good and memorable positive experiences from the experiences offered on the sharing economy platform EatWith. The top 5 themes most frequently mentioned in online reviews were “first EatWith experience” (n=125), “great food” (n=112), “amazing” (n=91), “hospitality” (n=90), “memorable” (n=67), respectively.

Keywords: Peer-to-Peer Gastronomic Experiences. EatWith. Sharing Economy. Gastronomic Tourism. Cultural Tourism.

Resumo

Há uma transformação no turismo, onde as experiências ganham destaque e as experiências gastronômicas e culturais se tornam importantes. Nessa transformação, tornou-se importante identificar as experiências gastronômicas. Para tanto, o objetivo deste estudo é examinar as experiências gastronômicas de turistas por meio de plataformas de compartilhamento e identificar os valores predominantes nessas experiências. A amostra do estudo consiste na plataforma de compartilhamento EatWith. Foram analisadas 125 avaliações online de 75 experiências gastronômicas diferentes utilizando o programa MAXQDA 2022 com a técnica de análise de conteúdo. Como resultado do estudo, constatou-se que os turistas deram apenas avaliações positivas de suas experiências gastronômicas e que os participantes tiveram experiências positivas, boas e memoráveis com as experiências oferecidas na plataforma de economia compartilhada EatWith. Os 5 temas mais frequentemente mencionados nas avaliações online foram, respectivamente, “primeira experiência com o EatWith” (n=125), “comida ótima” (n=112), “incrível” (n=91), “hospitalidade” (n=90) e “memorável” (n=67).

Palavras-chave: Experiências Gastronômicas entre Pares. Comer em Grupo. Economia



*Compartilhada. Turismo Gastronômico.
Turismo Cultural.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The sharing economy has been a rising trend with the impact of rapid changes in information and communication technology (Lee et al., 2018) and the consumption phenomenon of tourists has changed over time (Voytenko Palgan et al., 2017). Recently, people prefer to buy an experience rather than a product or service (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and therefore seek value in experiences (Michelini et al., 2018).

Tourism is an important tool for people to gain experience by creating stories during their travels. Touristic experience is the sum of individuals' fun, logical, emotional, intriguing and memorable memories of an event (Aho, 2001; Oh et al., 2007). During the period of rapid transformation, tourism has shifted from a service-based economy to an experience-based economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, Dotto et al., 2019). With the increasing importance attached to experience, the phenomenon of consumption has changed in gastronomy as in the tourism sector. Products and services are now offered as experiential value in the tourism sector (Purnami & Setyawan, 2024). Experiential value perceptions have come to the forefront as a selective criterion in tourists' destination selection (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017).

Gastronomic experiences have an important role in promoting the cultural heritage of destinations. As part of the cultural attractiveness of destinations, gastronomy is recognized as a cultural experience as well as playing a crucial role in memorable tourist experiences (Mkono et al., 2013). Creating gastronomic experiences and making these experiences unforgettable are among the new efforts of the tourism industry (Sthapit et al., 2020).

Services offered in the sharing economy facilitate cultural exchanges between parties and offer affordable authentic experiences for tourists through interactions (Privitera & Abushena, 2018, Atsız et al., 2021). Considered as the most important component of culture, gastronomy is seen as a concept that adds value to visitors' vacations (Cenni & Vásquez, 2020). Harrington & Michael & Ottenbacher, (2010),

gastronomic experiences can be beneficial in understanding and experiencing the culture of a particular region, as they provide a deeper understanding of the culture of the region and the ethnicity of the people.

Gastronomic experiences have a strategic importance in shaping tourists' travel preferences and influencing their motivations (Ullah et al., 2022). Tourists not only want to eat and drink during their travels, but also to gain value. For this reason, there has been a significant increase in gastronomic experience offerings for those seeking new and unusual experiences that add value to the tourist trip (Srinivasan et al., 2024).

The gastronomic richness of countries serves as a bridge between individuals of different nationalities and local cultures. In the sharing economy, gastronomic elements, which have started to be offered as experiences in the last few years, offer the story of each dish, each culture to tourists (Heo & Kim, 2024). EatWith is one of the best platforms for people-to-people food sharing, promoting gastronomic culture and offering unusual and unforgettable experiences. EatWith is a social experience platform that allows people to earn money using their cooking skills, meet new people, get to know each other and have authentic experiences at the same time (Ketter, 2019, Atsız et al., 2021). Thanks to this platform, which has rapidly spread all over the world since its inception, ordinary dining tables have become a social space. This platform, which continues to grow worldwide every day, offers different experiences based on the sharing economy.

Especially in Turkey, research on tourists' gastronomic experiences and food consumption emotions on sharing platforms is quite limited. Especially in Turkey, there is a significant gap in this field. Although there are studies on gastronomic experiences (Babolian Hendijani, 2016; Soltani et al., 2021; Sthapit et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2018), none of these studies are on determining the prominent elements of gastronomic experiences on sharing platforms. Although global interest in gastronomy experiences in the sharing economy is increasing day by day, research on this subject is quite limited. In this respect, the study differs from other studies in terms of determining the perceptions of gastronomic experiences valued in the sharing economy. The study aims to determine the perceptions of tourists visiting Turkey about the gastronomic experiences they have purchased within the scope of the sharing economy and which aspects of the experiences offered throughout Turkey are most valued. The study, which is planned as an exploratory study, examines the shaping of gastronomic experiences within the framework of the

sharing economy in line with the cultural heritage and authenticity preferences of international tourists. In this respect, the study differs from previous studies by examining the value perceptions towards gastronomic experiences in Turkey. By determining the elements that international tourists value most in gastronomic experiences, the statements that they emphasize the most in online evaluations were systematically coded and grouped in a thematic framework. The analyses were conducted through content analysis on 125 online comments on the EatWith platform in Turkey.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the beginning of tourism activities, there has been a strong relationship between tourism and gastronomy. The simple physiological need to eat and drink has turned into an experience (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2022). In recent years, almost all destinations have been using food identity and food culture to attract tourists (Sthapit et al., 2020). Food has become a source of motivation for tourism as a means to experience a different local cuisine culture and to accumulate unforgettable memories (Heo & Kim, 2024; Lai et al., 2020). Gastronomy is now referred to as an integral part of the tourist experience (Privitera & Abushena, 2018).

The concept of “gastronomic experience” is used to describe people's experiences with food (Sahin & Kılıçlar, 2022) It refers to the emotional state of the tourist after experiencing the cuisine in a destination (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2022).

Tourists are looking for unique experiences during their travels beyond just consuming goods and services (Lai et al., 2020). Gastronomy has an undeniable impact on making tourism travel unforgettable and accumulating different experiences. Gastronomy experiences make an important contribution to the overall travel experience, providing more than meeting daily physiological needs, they provide emotional stimulation for tourists (Sahin & Kılıçlar, 2022; Ullah et al., 2022). Therefore, gastronomy is seen as an important source of marketable images and experiences in tourism (Quan & Wang, 2004).

Today, food and beverages offered to tourists as an experience play an important role in providing new and unique experiences to tourists (Sthapit et al., 2020). However, experiences in the field of gastronomy have been researched on a destination basis (Atsız

et al., 2021; Babolian Hendijani, 2016; Quan & Wang, 2004; Soltani et al., 2021; Sthapit et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2018). Gastronomic exchanges to experience different types of food in a destination and accumulate unforgettable experiences are increasingly attracting international tourists (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2022; Sahrulrazi et al., 2024). For this reason, many destinations have started to emphasize their culinary culture to attract potential tourists (Mkono et al., 2013).

In the touristic experience literature, a significant number of studies have been conducted on food experiences in recent years (Soltani et al., 2021; Soonsan & Somkai, 2023; Sthapit, 2017; Sthapit et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2018). For gastronomy posts, mostly tourist experiences published on social media (Lei & Law, 2015; Onorati & Giardullo, 2020) have been analyzed. Quan & Wang, (2004), in their study investigating the prominent elements in gastronomic experience, examined tourist motivations for gastronomy experience in two groups as “peak” and “secondary”. While the peak experience constitutes the main motivations that shape the tourist's choice of a destination for gastronomy, it is observed that the secondary experience focuses on factors other than gastronomy. Soonsan & Somkai, (2023), examined the dimensions of gastronomic experiences that affect experience sharing and found that the length of stay in the destination has an impact on gastronomy experiences.

Although gastronomic experiences play an important role in the tourism industry, tourists' culinary experiences vary according to the culinary cultures of destinations (Lee et al., 2018). The diversity, richness and presentation forms of the culinary culture of the destination gain value in these experiences. Gastronomic experience can be influenced by many factors such as the history, traditions and cultural structure of the destination. Especially in the new economy, which is realized through the sharing economy and facilitates international food sharing, gastronomic experiences come to the fore. Tourists want to experience different types of food to learn about local culinary cultures, increase their knowledge and discover local foods that they have not experienced before in their daily routines, and at the same time share and spend time with other people (Mak et al., 2012). For this reason, different and unusual food experiences have recently started to be offered on sharing platforms.

The sharing economy is a rapidly developing market that attracts millions of users and large investments (Lee et al., 2018). Considered as the most important tool for sharing

experiences, the sharing economy has gained importance in tourism in recent years (Privitera & Abushena, 2018). Sharing economy-based platforms have enabled tourists to easily access information about the features of a destination and share their experiences through user-generated content (Atsız et al., 2021).

Sharing economy platforms are recognized as the most important means of sharing tourists' experiences in tourism (Demir & Bertan, 2025; Privitera & Abushena, 2018). In addition to providing economic benefits to tourists, the sharing economy also allows people to share their tourism experiences, feelings and thoughts with other users (Gera & Hasdell, 2020). Tourists make comments and evaluations in the sharing economy to express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the product or service.

With the sharing economy, one of the most popular topics of recent years, people provide temporary access to products or services and pay for the experience of using them instead of buying or owning them (Michellini et al., 2018). In addition to areas such as accommodation in tourism, gastronomy experiences have also moved to sharing platforms (Cankül et al., 2024; Fang et al., 2016). With these different experiences, people can eat their meals at more affordable prices instead of paying high prices for luxury restaurants, and they can also learn about the culture of the destination by communicating with local people.

In the sharing economy, a different type of experience that is accessible to everyone has emerged with the provision of interpersonal food sharing (Geissinger et al., 2019). While gastronomic experiences in the sharing economy facilitate cultural exchange between locals and tourists, they also offer authentic experiences for tourists (Kattiyapornpong et al., 2022; Privitera & Abushena, 2018).

Food sharing platforms allow tourists to learn about the culinary culture of the destination and interact with locals (Demir, 2020). The most comprehensive site for peer-to-peer food sharing is EatWith, which offers numerous experiences around the world. EatWith is a real-time food app that allows tourists to spend time with locals, share and eat at a restaurant or at home (Atsız et al., 2021). EatWith, which provides direct peer-to-peer interaction known as the “sharing economy”, allows people to share meals for a fee (Savas & Karagöz, 2024). EatWith is a platform that brings together people who want to produce and share food and beverage services and those who want to consume these services.

The first EatWith experience emerged when a tourist named Guy Michlin, the co-founder of the company, went on a trip to Greece in search of an extraordinary experience (EatWith, 2024b; Uzut, 2023). In the last days of his trip to Greece, he got bored of eating in restaurants and felt that restaurants were tourist traps, so he sought a real dining experience in the home of a stranger (EatWith, 2024a). Through a friend, she was invited to a Greek family's house for dinner (EatWith, 2024b).

EatWith serves as the world's largest food community offering authentic culinary experiences with locals in more than 130 countries, bringing together people seeking unique and immersive experiences (EatWith, 2024b). EatWith is a platform where users can bring together food lovers in their own homes or in exclusive venues for a fee. It offers a dinner of carefully selected dishes, special menus for customers with dietary requirements, and the opportunity to meet at a common table with people from all over the world and share the same bread.

On the EatWith sharing platform, thousands of people come together globally every day and hundreds of experiences that emphasize interpersonal cultural exchange take place (EatWith, 2024a). Privitera & Abushena, (2018) stated in their study that tourists use sharing economy platforms to experience local cultures and authenticity. As of 2015, EatWith, which started to serve in Turkey, brings people together with many different experiences.

Ketter, (2019), in his study, based on EatWith, a global sharing economy marketplace that offers food experiences on a sharing economy platform, investigated the motivations that shed light on the values, lifestyles and consumption preferences of people who purchase services on this platform. The study concluded that users prefer these platforms to express their ideals, achievements and motivations. Atsız vd., (2021) examined the factors affecting the experiences of tourists traveling to Istanbul in a study aiming to determine the dimensions of the food experience on two sharing economy platforms created by EatWith and Withlocals. As a result of the research, it was found that information, authenticity, hospitality and social interaction were among the factors affecting tourist experiences.

In EatWith, users first publish a dining experience they have created. People who decide to participate in the dining experience first make their payments through online payment methods and then participate in the experience (Uzut, 2023). During the

experience, the user prepares and serves the food either at home or in a restaurant. With the slogan “Unforgettable, immersive culinary experiences” (EatWith, 2024a) it offers dining experiences in many countries around the world.

In cooking classes, tourists can learn not only how to cook a dish, but also its history, composition and preparation processes (Ketter, 2019; Uzut, 2023). The cooking courses offered on the EatWith platform offer tourists the opportunity to learn about local culture as well as cooking, and at the same time provide an unforgettable gastronomy experience with the active involvement of the participants (Atsız et al., 2021).

With the idea that connecting with the world is more valuable than ever, gastronomy tours are offered by experienced EatWith guides in many countries around the world to users who care about food and culture on this platform. These tours, which have an important place in the promotion of local cuisine culture, are preferred by more and more users every day (EatWith, 2024a).

Tourists can learn about local cuisine culture as well as touristic destinations by being at the main center of the event in the gastronomy tour (Heo & Kim, 2024; Purnami & Setyawan, 2024; Uzut, 2023). With peer-to-peer food sharing, this platform provides users with the opportunity to have unique experiences with many options ranging from dinners with local cuisine culture to unique breakfasts. For tourists who do not have much information about the destination and are bored with the ordinary, it mediates in learning the culture of the region.

3 METHODS

3.1 Data collection

The main purpose of the study is to discover the dimensions of the gastronomic experience elements that international tourists visiting Turkey attach importance to from the comments they make as a result of their experiences. The research aims to identify and explore the dimensions of gastronomic experience that have gained importance in the sharing economy. Therefore, qualitative method was preferred for the research design. In order to identify gastronomic experiences in the research, the EatWith sharing platform, which provides global services in peer-to-peer food sharing and has the highest number

of users, was preferred. It was aimed to examine the experiential elements by examining the positive and negative comments made by tourists on the food sharing platform. However, it was observed that the dataset consisted only of positive reviews (from the authors' point of view) and no online reviews that were thought to contain negative statements were found. This is thought to indicate that Eatwith users do not share their negative experiences, that they have had any negative experiences, or that reviews containing negative statements may have been filtered by the platform.

As a result of the developments in information and communication technologies, unforgettable memories have become easier to share between people and the importance of experiences that create a memory has gradually increased (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Pine & Gilmore, 2013). With the technological developments, valued experiences have become important in sharing unforgettable memories. EatWith, which is the best example of the sharing economy in terms of gastronomy, offers people different experiences at more reasonable prices outside of traditional restaurants. In order to buy the most ideal experience, users examine the reviews of people who have already purchased the service (Wu & Liang, 2009). Considering the number of users and the online experiences it offers, EatWith was determined to be the most suitable platform for the food experience category and was therefore included in the study population. International food sharing platforms such as *BlueApron* and *Mealsharing*, which offer services in Turkey, could not be included in the population of the study due to their inadequate service, the fact that they consist of food sharing that emerged as a result of organizations, and the limited experiences they offer.

The research was structured and elaborated considering the objectives of the study. Online reviews on the EatWith platform were meticulously analyzed during the data collection process. The online reviews were analyzed in their entirety to represent the diversity of gastronomic experiences offered on the platform in Turkey. In the analysis process, they were analyzed by content analysis using MAXQDA 2022 software, and meaningful categories were created by coding frequently repeated expressions in online reviews. In order to maximize reliability in the coding process, the authors coded the codes separately and the codes were compared and their consistency was compared. Considering that the online evaluations on the platform are open to the public, ethical rules were followed in the analysis process.

With the rapid spread of platforms such as EatWith, supporting gastronomic experiences with cultural content and presenting them in natural environments, it has become necessary to examine the interaction gained in these experiences in depth (Wu & Liang, 2009). However, the most important limitation of the study is that it was designed based on online reviews. This will only be able to identify the gastronomic experiences of users who prefer to comment.

In order to reach the best results in the research, qualitative research method was preferred. Qualitative research is a comprehensive approach to exploring problems encountered in social and human fields (Creswell, 2017: 4). Content analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was preferred to reach the best results in the research. Content analysis is a method used to make valid inferences by analyzing written, oral or visual communication messages (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019). In the study, a coding method was used as a data reduction strategy to organize the data obtained by the authors into meaningful classifications. After the coding of the data, the online assessments were reviewed by the authors and a code scheme was created in the qualitative data analysis program “MAXQDA 2022”. Within the scope of the study, the most frequently repeated words were coded separately and frequency distributions were made. Based on the most frequently used expressions in the coding, it was aimed to determine the elements of gastronomic experience and the expressions used in coding were developed based on Sökmen, (2006) classification of guests' first impressions.

The online evaluations used in the research include the comments of 75 different experiences accessed by using the “Turkey” filter in the search button on the “<https://www.eatwith.com/>” website. It was determined that these experiences, which were presented in different date ranges, were presented as only 75 separate experiences across Turkey. All 125 online reviews of the experiences offered on the EatWith sharing platform across Turkey were included in the scope of the study.

Research data were obtained between 29.01.2024-05.03.2024. The research data were obtained from online reviews of experiences offered on the EatWith sharing platform, published in the 2015-2024 time period. All comments were analyzed without limitation. Separate codes were obtained from the most frequently repeated words from the analyzed online comments and analyzed by frequency distributions. During the data collection process, all comments on the EatWith sharing platform were collected by the

authors. Some of these experiences received between 80-90 comments from users, while many of them received no comments at all.

3.2 Data collection and sampling strategy

The research data was obtained between January 29, 2024 and March 5, 2024 using the “Turkey” filter on the EatWith platform. 125 online reviews of 75 different gastronomic experiences offered to users in different cities, especially big cities such as Istanbul, Muğla, Nevşehir and İzmir, were analyzed. The research was designed in line with the global tourism literature, especially considering the experiences of international tourists.

3.3 Data pre-processing

Within the scope of the study, it was planned to include both positive and negative comments on the EatWith platform. For this purpose, all comments on the platform were evaluated within the scope of the research. Including actively offered experiences and experiences offered in the past, 75 different experiences were found on the EatWith platform across Turkey. Table 1 shows the distribution of experiences offered on the EatWith sharing platform across Turkey by province and the number of experiences that received online reviews. Only 24 of the experiences offered by 17 different hosts across Turkey received online reviews.

Table 1: Distribution of EatWith Experiences by Provinces

Provinces	Experiences	Online Reviews
Istanbul	51 Experience	11 Online Reviews Available
Nevşehir	5 Experience	5 Online Reviews Available
İzmir	3 Experience	3 Online Reviews Available
Muğla	16 Experience	5 Online Reviews Available
Total	75 Experience	24 Online Reviews Available

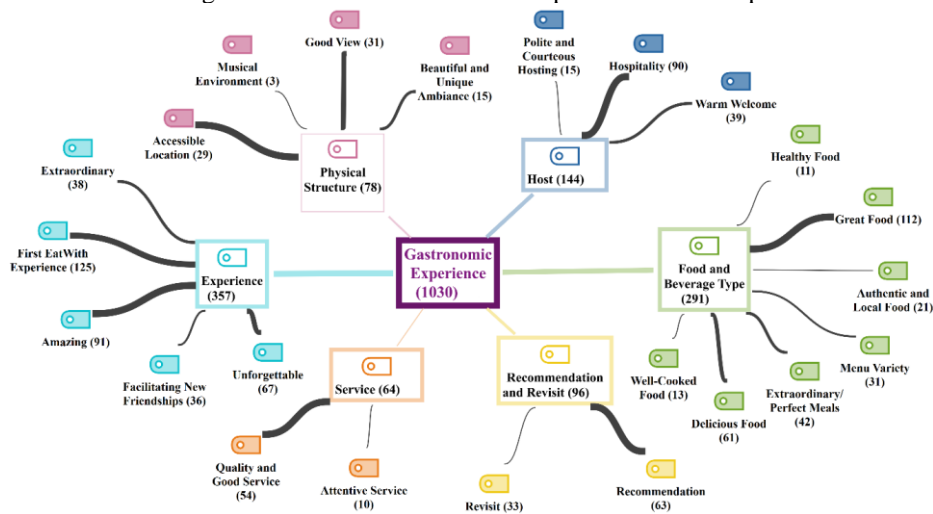
Source: Authors

Within the scope of the research, it was tried to determine the common experience criteria of the gastronomic experiences offered on the sharing platform with the expressions consisting of 2149 words reached on the EatWith sharing platform. In order

to determine user satisfaction, these criteria were formed within the framework of the themes suggested by Sökmen's (2006) and frequently expressed by users.

In terms of food and beverage type and menu, comments were evaluated in the categories of diversity of menus, whether healthy products were offered or not, preference for original and local dishes, taste of products, great food, excellent food and magnificent food. In the service category, the quality of the service and the attentive service of the host were categorized separately. The host was evaluated separately in terms of hospitality, good hospitality, warm welcome, kindness and politeness. In terms of physical structure, whether the place has a beautiful and different ambiance, whether the place has a view, whether the place is accessible in the category of music and location. These comments were also examined and coded in terms of revisit and recommendation status, and the comments obtained were categorized. Figure 1 shows the code scheme created by the authors.

Figure 1: EatWith Gastronomic Experience Code Map



Source: Authors

As shown in Figure 1, 6 different themes emerged from the data analysis. These themes are “experience”, “food and beverage type”, “recommendation-revisit”, “service”, “host” and “physical structure”.

4 RESULTS

The number of codes for each relevant theme in the analysis process is shown in Table 2. By providing a view of the frequency distribution of the codes that make up the research environment, Table 2 helps to understand the trends towards the EatWith experience by presenting the themes and subheadings that users frequently emphasize in their online evaluations.

Table 2: Comments on EatWith Platform Homes and Hosts

Dimensions	Sub-Dimensions	Number of Codes per Theme
Experience	First EatWith Experience	125
	Facilitating New Friendships	36
	Extraordinary	38
	Amazing	91
	Unforgettable	67
Recommendation and Revisit	Recommendation	63
	Revisit	33
Physical Structure	Good View	31
	Beautiful and Unique Ambiance	15
	Accessible Location	29
	Musical Environment	3
	Food and Beverage Type	Great Food
Delicious Food		61
Extraordinary/Perfect Meals		42
Menu Variety		31
Well-Cooked Food		13
Authentic and Local Food		21
Healthy Food		11
Service	Quality and Good Service	54
	Attentive Service	10
Host	Hospitality	90
	Polite and Courteous Hosting	15
	Warm Welcome	39

Source: Authors

When Table 2 is analyzed, it is seen that the code repeated with the highest number of comments in the online evaluations related to the “Experience” code is “first EatWith experience” (n=125). It was determined that the people who participated in the EatWith experience were satisfied with this experience and most of them experienced this experience for the first time. Another frequently repeated topic among the comments with the code “Instrumental in making new friends” (n=36) was the contribution of EatWith

in making new friends and friendships. Other prominent codes in the gastronomic experience category were “extraordinary” (n=38) and “incredible” (n=91). In the comments with these codes, comments were frequently made that the EatWith experience provided different extraordinary acquisitions for the people who participated in this event and that the experience was incredible for them. Under the experience code, the term “unforgettable” (n=67) was frequently mentioned. These evaluations show that the users who purchased experiences at EatWith found their experiences extraordinary, experienced incredible things and accumulated unforgettable memories.

The experiences offered on the EatWith site for peer-to-peer food sharing were analyzed under the main theme of “Physical Structure” with 4 different sub-codes in order to determine the effects of the places where the experience is offered on the users. When the comments made were analyzed, it was determined that “landscape” (n=31) was frequently mentioned under this theme. The areas where interpersonal food sharing was offered were highly evaluated by the users in terms of their views and evaluations were made that the views were good. Under the physical structure theme, views were followed by “accessible location” (n=29), “nice and different ambiance” (n=15) and “music” (n=3). The physical aspects of the spaces where EatWith experiences were offered were frequently mentioned in online evaluations and the view, location and ambiance of the space were evaluated positively.

Online evaluations of sharing economy-based peer-to-peer food sharing were also analyzed under the topic of “Revisit and Recommendation”. It was determined that online evaluations made by users were mostly on “recommendation” (n=63) under this theme. The number of users who would purchase the same service again is quite high (n=33). There were many online reviews of users who purchased services from the sharing platform, were satisfied with their experience and stated that they would purchase the same experience again, and recommended their EatWith experience to other users. It was observed from the comments that users liked the service and flavors offered in the EatWith experience and that they definitely want to experience this experience again as soon as possible.

Online reviews of the hosts were analyzed under the main theme of “Host” and it was observed that most online reviews were about the hospitality of the host (n=90). It was found that hospitality, which is the most appreciated aspect of Turkish society, is also

the most prominent attitude in the peer-to-peer food sharing offered by EatWith. The friendly attitude of the Turkish community differentiates the experiences offered. When the comments made about the host are analyzed, it is noteworthy that the hosts are found to be kind and polite (n=15) and the rates of warm welcome (n=39) are high on EatWith. It is observed that these codes and comments reflect the warmth of the hosts to the customers and that the high level of hospitality of the hosts serving on this platform attracts the attention of the users and is frequently mentioned in online evaluations.

The main theme of food and beverage type and the comments made on the meals were analyzed and it was determined that the code “great” (n=112) was frequently used in almost every comment. It was observed that the code “great” was followed by the term “delicious food” (n=61), which was also repeated very frequently, and the food was found to be delicious. In the online reviews examined within the scope of the research, it was found that most users used words full of praise for the taste of the food. In the food and beverage type category, it was determined that the code “Excellent-Excellent-Extraordinary Food” (n=42) was another topic that was mentioned at a high level and it was inferred that users found the food to be good at a high level. In the food and beverage type category, the codes “variety of the menu” (n=31) and “unique and local food” (n=21), which indicate that there are local and region-specific dishes, were also among the frequently mentioned online evaluations. In addition, in this category, the presentation of “healthy food” (n=11), which indicates that the meals are considered healthy, was used by users in the comments, albeit to a lesser extent. In the food and beverage type category, the foods offered on the EatWith platform were evaluated from different perspectives. When the online reviews in the food and beverage type category were analyzed in general, it was found that experiences supported by cultural elements were evaluated as more memorable and the food was found to be very good.

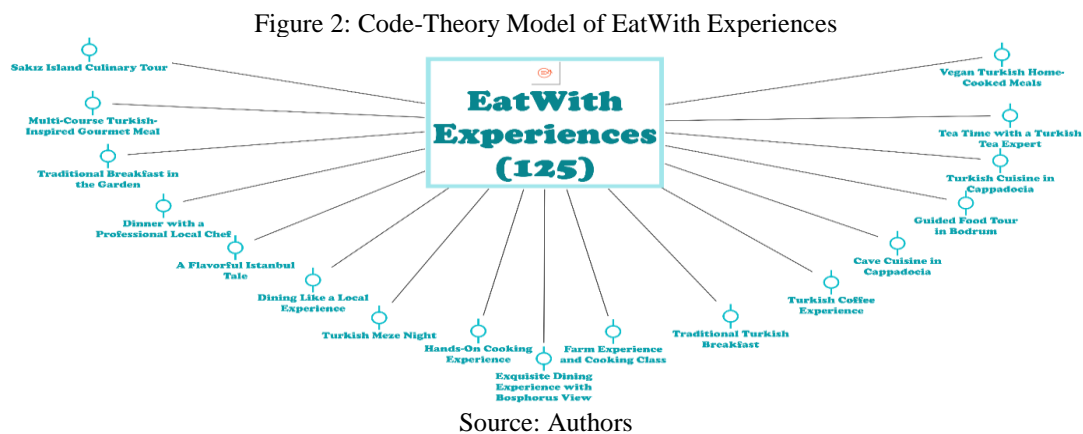
The code “attentive service” (n=10) is also an important criterion that received online evaluations by users. When the online evaluations under this main theme were analyzed, it was found that the food was carefully prepared and served well.

All the analyzed codes and comments indicate that the reviewers used words of praise for the hosts and the experience. Considering the importance of service quality in the sharing economy, the high level of praise for the extraordinary experiences offered by the hosts reveals the difference of the experiences offered. In the reviews, the friendliness

of the hosts and adding value to the experience, their interest during the experience, and the excellence of the experiences supported by local products were frequently mentioned in online reviews. The fact that the online reviews analyzed on the EatWith sharing platform are positive is an indication that the experiences offered are considered good and excellent by the users.

The EatWith platform allows users who have previously purchased the service to rate these experiences out of 5. Users who have previously purchased experiences on EatWith can evaluate these experiences in the categories of “Atmosphere”, “Food” and “Value for Money”. It was found that users rated the hosts between 4.9 and 5.0 and a very high percentage of experiences received good scores.

All of the online evaluations were positive due to the effect of the close dialog between the hosts and the users and the high level of social communication during the experience. Due to the nature of the sharing economy, a general conclusion can be made that the warmer dialogues established one-to-one with the hosts and the fact that the hosts and users spend long hours together affect the online evaluations. In the Code Theory Model below, a few examples of the experiences described by the EatWith hosts are briefly presented. When the experiences offered on EatWith are analyzed, it can be observed that experiences that emphasize traditional cultural elements are mostly described.

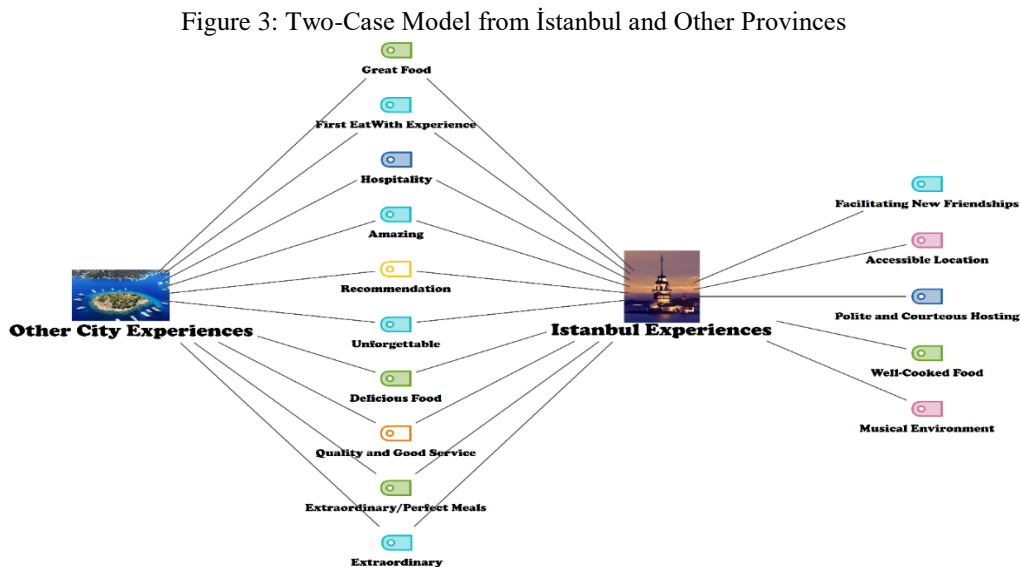


In EatWith, it can be observed that traditional dishes and appetizers, such as Turkish food, Turkish coffee, are mostly offered in experiences. In addition, guided gastronomy tours are also among the experiences frequently defined on the EatWith

Platform. Finally, it was also determined that foreigners participated in all of the experiences offered on the EatWith sharing platform.

Guided gastronomy tours are among the prominent experiences on the EatWith platform. While these tours offer participants the opportunity to learn about Turkish cuisine, they also provide the opportunity to explore the cultural elements of the destination visited. This platform contributes significantly to the revival of gastronomy tourism and increases the satisfaction level of users as it allows them to experience local cuisine culture.

In Figure 3, the themes coded in the experiences offered in different cities of Turkey (Izmir, Muğla and Nevşehir) and the themes of the experiences offered in Istanbul are compared with the Two-Case Model.



The Two-Case Model is used in qualitative research to compare two different cases within the framework of a specific topic. Within the scope of the research, the two-case model was created based on online user reviews to compare the frequency of coding of the prominent codes in the gastronomic experiences offered in Istanbul and the experiences offered in other cities such as Izmir, Muğla and Nevşehir. This model visually presents the similarities and differences between experience types from different perspectives by comparing the frequency of the themes analyzed in the study. The Two-Case Model includes the top 10 most frequently coded themes among the themes created

within the scope of the study. The codes in Figure 3 show the most frequently interpreted themes in Istanbul and other cities, in order from the highest frequency to the lowest frequency.

“Great food”, ‘first EatWith experience’ and ‘hospitality’ were the most frequently mentioned topics by users on the EatWith platform in Istanbul and other cities, respectively. While users mostly experienced the experiences for the first time, they found the food served in these experiences great and evaluated the hospitality of the hosts. In Istanbul, which has the highest number of gastronomic experiences in Turkey and received the highest number of online reviews, the themes of “a tool for making new friends”, “accessible location”, “kind and polite host”, “well-cooked food”, and “musical environment” were prominent in user comments. These themes were not mentioned by users in gastronomic experiences offered in other cities, which suggests that gastronomic experiences in Istanbul have unique characteristics.

Another finding of the study reveals that all of the individuals participating in the gastronomic experiences offered on the EatWith platform are international tourists. This result reveals the global appeal of Turkish cuisine and the role of the EatWith platform in promoting intercultural interactions.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Getting out of routines, learning new things about different cultures and gaining new experiences are just some of the reasons why visitors prefer to travel. For this reason, tourists are looking for unforgettable experiences during their vacations. One of the newest platforms that stands out in creating unforgettable gastronomic experiences is EatWith. Launched in Turkey in 2015, the EatWith sharing platform offers unique and personalized gastronomic experiences to its users. The high number of positive comments from international tourists indicates both the high service quality of the platform and its ability to meet users' expectations of authentic and culturally rich experiences. It is possible to say that this is due to the fact that the services are offered out of the ordinary, creating different experiences and that the experiences are offered in the homes of the hosts or in different environments by locals. Especially on platforms such as EatWith,

offering the experiences defined in the living spaces of the hosts increases the satisfaction level of users by providing a more intimate and flexible experience.

It was determined that the experiences offered in Turkey were concentrated in culturally significant destinations. It was observed that the 8 most used codes in the online reviews were “first EatWith experience” (n=125), “great food” (n=112), “amazing” (n=91), “hospitality” (n=90), unforgettable (n=67), “recommendation” (n=63), “delicious food” (n=61), “quality and good service” (n=54), respectively. It is noteworthy that users who have previously purchased experiences on EatWith have high recommendation rates for these experiences. Similar conclusions were reached with the study of Mora et al. (2021). It was determined that positive gastronomic experiences have an impact on repeat experiences and recommendation. The experiences offered on the EatWith sharing platform were characterized as highly memorable by users. Similar to the results of Martín et al. (2020), it was concluded that food and beverage satisfaction creates memorable gastronomic experiences.

As a result of the analysis, it was determined that all of the users who purchased services from the EatWith platform were foreigners. An interesting result of the research is that the EatWith experience was tried for the first time and that this experience was experienced for the first time. It was concluded that people who purchased an experience from EatWith for the first time were highly likely to either want to experience the experience again or recommend it to others. Similarly, Berbel-Pineda et al., (2019)’ concluded in their study that experiences with high satisfaction levels or new experiences are effective on repeat visits and recommendations. They also concluded that gastronomic motivation affects the choice of touristic destination.

In their study, (Soonsan & Somkai, 2023) concluded that in order to support gastronomy tourism, it is not enough just to provide food and beverages, but also the products offered should have a good gastronomic identity and leave a mark on tourists. Especially on sharing platforms such as EatWith, the experiences offered should also represent the local characteristics and authenticity of the products.

The findings of the research show that the experiences offered by the platform create high user satisfaction and the desire to participate in the same or similar experiences again is high. From this point of view, sustaining and expanding the service

quality offered on the platform and bringing local gastronomic identities to the forefront in international promotion plays a critical role for gastronomy tourism in Turkey.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The EatWith platform has brought a novelty to tourism activities by offering an innovative service model where Turkish hosts can highlight their hospitality and at the same time promote their local culinary culture. The fact that experiences supported by cultural content are often positively evaluated by international tourists provides an important advantage for the sustainability of gastronomy tourism. Therefore, sharing economy-based experiences provide significant advantages for both tourism and gastronomy tourism. The diversity and quality of services can be increased by focusing on topics such as the importance of hospitality and local cuisine culture, the advantages of differentiating experiences, and cultural storytelling through trainings for hosts. In addition, local governments can develop support programs to encourage more hosts to participate in such platforms, so that EatWith and similar initiatives can become widespread across the country.

5.2 Limitations and future research

As in any research, this study also has some limitations. The fact that the research data was obtained from a few cities in Turkey shows that the findings cannot be generalized. Future studies should examine the experiences offered on the EatWith platform in different countries in detail and investigate the prominent elements of user experiences.

In addition, comparing the EatWith platform with other food sharing platforms such as BonAppetour or VizEat will help to analyze the differences in user experiences and to evaluate the contribution of these platforms to gastronomy tourism in a more comprehensive way. The EatWith platform in Turkey was considered to represent the appropriate population for the study as it has a variety of experiences and the majority of users are international tourists. In future research, it is necessary to conduct more

comprehensive analyses on similar platforms that offer services based on the sharing economy and to look at the research topic from a broader perspective.

In short, in order to expand the importance of gastronomy tourism in recent years, it is necessary to better understand the effects of the sharing economy on gastronomy and to conduct more comprehensive research in this field. For this reason, the current study is a guide that aims to provide a basis for future research.

5.3 Research limitations, implications for practice and originality

5.3.1 Research limitations/implications

In the research examining interpersonal gastronomy experiences, the research was designed in a framework based on online evaluations made by users. Since it includes the evaluations made by users, the study is likely to create bias. Because the fact that comments that do not include satisfaction cannot be reached constitutes a limitation for the research. Since the findings are specific to the gastronomy experiences offered on the EatWith platform in Turkey, they cannot be directly generalized to other sharing economy-based experiences or experiences offered in different countries.

5.3.2 Originality/value

The research aims to contribute to the literature by focusing on peer-to-peer gastronomy tourism instead of an ordinary restaurant experience. By using qualitative research methods through digital content, it is aimed to gain a perspective on the experiences in the sharing economy and the values that stand out in these experiences.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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