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Magda Campanini
Giuliana Giusti

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Abstract

This special issue explores how food discourse constructs cultural identities, ethical values and consumer practices across institutional, commercial and digital contexts. Through corpus-assisted, critical and multimodal discourse approaches, the contributions examine representations of traditional and novel foods, from Italian culinary heritage and gastronationalism to alternative proteins and sustainable consumption. Together, they reveal how language and visual communication negotiate authenticity, health, innovation and responsibility, shaping contemporary food cultures and perceptions of what constitutes desirable food.

Keywords Food discourse. Cultural identity. Multimodal communication. Food marketing. Sustainability.

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edited by
Daniela Cesiri, Michele Sala, Stefania M. Maci

Edible narratives. An Introduction

Daniela Cesiri, Stefania M. Maci, Michele Sala

1 Food Discourse and Culture: Interconnected Multimodal Narratives

Food functions¹ as a complex semiotic system of cultural values, social practices, and ideological representations through which societal meaning is continually constructed and negotiated (Montanari 2006). Biological survival provides the foundational necessity for eating, but human societies have transformed food as a means for mere survival into a whole set of meaningful practices through which multisemiotic ritual and symbolic systems become the expression of communities around the world (Counihan, Van Esterik 2013). In food studies, edibility and naturalness are not fixed biological attributes; rather, food items acquire meaning through shared cultural consensus within a given community. What one culture views as a staple delicacy, another may categorize as taboo or inedible, demonstrating that human appetite is mediated by historical context, institutional structures, and discursive frameworks (Montanari 2006).

Analyzing institutional, corporate, and consumer communication through Critical Discourse Analysis, for instance, reveals how food narratives reinforce or challenge dominant power structures,

1 This Introduction was jointly written by the three Authors.

market hegemony, and socio-cultural identities. Language does not merely describe food: it actively constructs what food represents to the consumer. When regulatory bodies publish dietary guidelines, when corporate campaigns launch new products, or when digital communities debate ethical choices, they engage in discursive practices that establish norms of taste, safety, and morality (Cesiri 2025). These communicative acts rely on underlying cognitive models that structure how individuals perceive health, risk, and tradition. By unpacking these texts, researchers can observe the subtle mechanisms through which economic interests and cultural ideals align to shape everyday consumption habits.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis further reveals how non-verbal cues, such as visual design, color theory, and spatial arrangement, combine with textual language to redefine boundaries between the human and humane. In contemporary media, food is rarely presented through plain text alone. Modern food communication spans packaging, social media imagery, video advertisements, and digital interfaces. Symbolic meanings embedded within these visual and textual modes frame food in diverse ways: food as medicine, food as art, food as high technology, or food as a moral duty. These figurative constructions guide consumer sentiment, transforming physical products into carriers of complex sociopolitical ideals (Chen, Eriksson 2019).

Ultimately, the study of food discourse provides a vital lens through which to observe societal transformations. As environmental degradation, supply chain instability, and demographic change place increasing pressure on global food systems, the ways we talk about food become crucial battlegrounds for competing visions of the future. Linguistic choices determine whether technological interventions are welcomed as sustainable solutions or rejected as unnatural distortions. By grounding the analysis of food in established theoretical frameworks of discourse and culture, scholars can better understand how public perception is shaped, how resistance is mobilized, and how cultural traditions adapt to an increasingly complex global landscape.

2 The Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Traditional vs. Novel Foods

The interaction between traditional and emerging food choices creates a dynamic conflict in contemporary foodscapes. On the one hand, traditional foods carry deep historical resonance and are bound to specific geographies, culinary techniques, and community memories. Regional culinary traditions and iconic national foods, such as specialized productions of certain territories, and traditional dishes, act as key signifiers of collective identity, local heritage

and, therefore, authenticity (Graham 2014). These items are often protected by legal classifications and regional designations selected to preserve cultural heritage against industrial dilution. The discourse surrounding traditional foods emphasizes continuity, ancestral wisdom, and an intimate connection to the land, constructing a narrative where eating is an act of preserving history and affirming communal belonging (Counihan, Van Esterik 2013; Graham 2014). These traditional foodways frequently resist, co-exist, or are even altered by globalization dynamics such as standardized mass production and institutional protectionist discourses often termed gastronomical nationalism (Ichijo 2020).

On the other hand, novel foods present a distinct set of communicative and cultural challenges. Novel foods – ranging from insect-based proteins and plant-based meat substitutes to cellular agriculture and lab-grown products (Patinho et al. 2021) – challenge standard gastronomic paradigms and regulatory standards. These products disrupt established categories of what constitutes real or authentic food. Where traditional food relies on history to establish legitimacy, novel foods rely on scientific innovation, environmental urgency, and ethical progress. However, introducing these technological innovations into the marketplace requires navigating deep-seated consumer anxieties regarding artificiality, safety, and cultural disruption (Domaneschi 2024).

Marketing and media discourses surrounding novel foods have to actively counteract consumer neophobia and pervasive stigmas associated with technological intervention in the diet. Indeed, when novel foods are perceived as unnatural, consumers often express disgust or hesitation (Tuorila, Hartmann 2020; Günden 2024). To overcome these barriers, marketers construct narratives where choosing novel foods does not mean compromising on taste, comfort, or social enjoyment (Pozharliev et al. 2023).

3 Perspectives from the Special Issue: Integrating Communicative Perspectives

Against this background, contributions within this Special Issue investigate how culinary narratives reflect and shape modern cultural, ecological, and ethical trends across various communicative perspectives. Together, the papers collected in this Special Issue aim to analyze the mechanisms through which public institutions, commercial brands, digital communities, and media platforms narrate the foodscape emerging from the intersection between traditional and novel foods. By examining diverse communicative domains, this Special Issue offers a comprehensive look at how

discourse mediates the relationship between consumer values and food production methods.

Moreover, the Special Issue also considers institutional and protectionist discourses, shedding light on how governmental bodies and agricultural associations frame food-related policies. Analysis of official policy documents and public campaigns reveals a frequent conflict between health-oriented risk prevention and protectionist gastronationalism. While public health authorities focus on safety regulations, dietary guidelines, and disease prevention, agricultural lobbies often emphasize local heritage, economic sovereignty, and national pride. These competing priorities lead to distinct discursive strategies, where food policy is framed either through scientific risk management or through the defense of local cultural identity against external influence.

Other papers focus on corporate glocalization and modern market messaging. Global brand communications must carefully balance localized traditional heritage with contemporary demands for corporate social responsibility. Major food corporations frequently adapt their marketing strategies to resonate with regional cultural norms while maintaining a unified global identity. In doing so, they construct narratives that highlight sustainable sourcing, community engagement, and environmental stewardship. This delicate balancing act demonstrates how commercial entities utilize discourse to maintain consumer trust in an era marked by heightened scrutiny over industrial supply chains and corporate ethics.

The emerging market for alternative proteins forms another central theme within the collection. Research in this area explores how plant-based and cultivated meat brands market ethical luxury and sensory indulgence, reframing alternative proteins as desirable lifestyle choices rather than sacrificial alternatives. Complementing these commercial perspectives, studies on digital platforms investigate how online communities debate and negotiate the moral acceptability of novel practices like cellular agriculture. Furthermore, multimodal analyses of social media content reveal how visual narratives contrast traditional tourism imagery with ecological themes, while corporate marketing strategies work to de-stigmatize novel proteins such as edible insects.

4 Overview of the Special Issue

The papers collected in this Special Issue are specifically organized as follows. Opening the issue, **Stefania Maci** and **Michele Sala** analyze Italian institutional and sectoral promotional discourses, contrasting the Ministry of Health's risk-preventive framing with the agricultural association Coldiretti's protectionist rhetoric of gastronationalism. **Daniela Cesiri** expands on corporate branding strategies by examining how global companies balance localized culinary traditions with global corporate social responsibility disclosures, taking Nutella® as a central case study of glocalization.

Shifting the focus to alternative protein markets, **Gianmarco Vignozzi** utilizes a corpus-assisted approach to explore how plant-based and novel meat brands reframe ethical eating as a 'guilt-free indulgence', merging luxury with consumer morality. **Elena Mattei** applies multimodal corpus analysis to Instagram tourism reels, examining how host communities construct authentic, plant-conscious relationships with food in contrast to traditional tourist representations. **Francesco Nacchia** investigates online vegan discussions surrounding lab-grown meat, uncovering how digital discourse negotiates the ethical and philosophical boundaries of whether cultivated cellular products align with vegan principles. Finally, **Walter Spezzano** and **Stefano De Cantis** use Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) to analyse how 137 Italian restaurant websites in Miami discursively construct 'Italianness'; to do so, they study the official websites of Italian restaurants in Miami. Their findings reveal that these websites transform food into a symbolic medium for identity, collective memory, and cultural continuity within multicultural digital food discourse.

Across these diverse cases, the contributions included in this Special Issue explore how traditional and novel food marketers employ competing tropes of naturalness, authenticity, and humaneness to capture consumer trust and shape our future of eating.

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Promoting 'Good' Food in Italy Positive Evaluation and Fear Appeal in Promotional Discourse

Michele Sala

Università degli Studi di Bergamo, Italy

Stefania M. Maci

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italy

Abstract This paper examines how Italian food is promoted in non-commercial institutional and sectoral discourse, comparing two sub-corpora: the website of the Italian Ministry of Health and that of Coldiretti. Combining word-frequency output with qualitative discourse analysis, it investigates the interplay of positive evaluation and fear appeal across health, cultural identity, sustainability and economic value. Both actors construct Italian food as 'good', yet differently: the Ministry integrates risk awareness into public-health education, whereas Coldiretti reserves conflictual framing for external threats.

Keywords Promotional discourse. Food discourse. Positive evaluation. Fear appeal. Gastronationalism.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Food as Culture and the Culture of Food. – 3 Analytical Framework: Methodology, Materials, Scope. – 4 Results and Discussion. – 5 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

Food is a central component of culture and one of its most visible expressions.¹ As widely argued in cultural and sociological studies, food practices play a crucial role in shaping and expressing cultural identity (Hall 1997; Mintz, Du Bois 2002; Katan 2014). What people eat, how they eat, and when they eat are not merely matters of individual preference or biological necessity but are embedded in systems of meaning that reflect shared values, social practices, and collective histories. At the same time, contemporary food practices are increasingly shaped by accelerated modern lifestyles characterised by limited time for eating and the erosion of eating as a family or communal ritual. These transformations have contributed to a growing homogenisation of food products and practices, often privileging convenience, speed, and standardisation over local specificity. One of the most frequently cited manifestations of this process is the so-called hamburgerisation of eating habits, whereby traditional culinary practices are progressively displaced “in favour of the queue-to-be-served hamburger” (Katan 2004, 32). Closely related to this is the phenomenon of McDonaldisation, defined – as far back as the early 90s – as “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant come to dominate more and more sectors of society” (Ritzer [1993] 2019, 1). Another aspect contributing to the homogenisation of contemporary foodscapes is the widespread availability of ethnic food venues (e.g. kebab shops, sushi bars, or Chinese, Thai, and Mexican restaurants) which, while suggesting cultural openness, often involve the simplification and standardisation of culinary traditions to suit global tastes and market logics (Wilk 2006; Askegaard, Linnet 2011; Johnston, Baumann 2015).

Nevertheless, alongside these globalized practices, there persist food-related places, rituals, dishes, and material objects that retain culturally specific meanings and continue to function as sites of collective belonging and identification (Counihan, Van Esterik 2013; Fischler 2011; Sutton 2001). Many societies continue to value traditional dining establishments that are deeply embedded in local cultural life (e.g. *diners* in the United States, *fish-and-chip* shops in Britain, Italian *osterie*, Spanish *tascas*, French *bistros*, etc.) and that function not merely as places of consumption but as social spaces where community ties are reinforced and cultural norms are enacted (Oldenburg 1999; Scarpato, Daniele 2003; Ray 2016).

¹ The paper has been jointly conceived and written by the authors. The individual contributions of the authors are identified as follows: Section 1 has been written by Maci, while Sections 2, 3 and 4 have been written by Sala and revised by Maci and Sala. Section 5 has been jointly written by both authors.

Similarly, certain dishes remain strongly associated with specific cultural and national identities (e.g. *pasta* in Italy, *paella* in Spain, *sausages* in Germany, *sushi* in Japan, and *curry-based dishes* in India), thus functioning not merely as items of consumption but as symbolic markers through which cultural belonging, tradition, and continuity are expressed (Fischler 1988; Anderson 2005; Ichijo, Ranta 2016). This identity dimension can take an explicitly ideological form, as in *gastronationalism*, that is the use of food to construct and defend national identity and economic sovereignty against perceived external threats (DeSoucey 2010). Their persistence demonstrates that food culture – understood both as ‘food as culture’ and as ‘the culture of food’ – remains a meaningful domain of social life. While equating culture with food risks an overemphasis on surface manifestations (Katan 2014), food can nevertheless be approached as a productive entry point into the deeper structures of a community’s beliefs, practices, and social organisation. When analysed critically, food offers insight into how cultural values are negotiated in everyday life (Mintz 1996; Counihan 1999; Pilcher 2012).

Against this background, this paper qualitatively analyses how Italian food and eating values are framed and validated in Italian institutional and sectoral promotional communication, focusing on Italian food culture and the way in which notions of quality, authenticity, and health are constructed through language. Promotional discourse is not understood here solely as a marketing or advertising type of language (in other words, as commercial promotion) but as a strategy used across institutional, professional, and academic contexts to advance a product or idea by foregrounding its value or importance (Bhatia 1993; 2004; Hyland 2005).

The paper is structured as follows: after this introductory Section, the cultural backgrounds and research aims are introduced in Section 2. The methodological approach can be found in Section 3, while data analysis is offered in Section 4, followed by the Conclusion.

2 Food as Culture and the Culture of Food

2.1 Food as Culture

If culture is understood as a complex system in which ideas shape practices, which in turn generate material products, food emerges as a particularly revealing analytical domain (Hall 1976; Katan 2014). Food is directly connected to cultural ideas that define what is considered edible, healthy, tasty, acceptable, or more generally ‘good’ (Douglas 1966; Fischler 1988; Mintz 1996). These ideas inform food-related practices, including rituals, meal structures, temporal patterns of consumption, and modes of preparation and serving

(Goody 1982; Counihan, Van Esterik 2013). Food also materialises in products and objects: dishes, ingredients, and the tools used to prepare and consume them (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987). These ideas, practices, and objects are often assimilated subconsciously within a given culture and become habitual, forming part of what 'goes without saying' (Bourdieu 1977; Hall 1983), but they may also be accompanied by varying degrees of awareness or reflexivity, particularly when individuals can explicitly articulate that a certain way of eating is 'the best', the healthiest, or the most appropriate in a given context (Fischler 2011; Johnston, Baumann 2015). This distinction aligns with Hall's differentiation between formal culture and technical culture (Hall 1976). Formal culture is acquired implicitly through socialisation and operates largely below the level of conscious awareness, whereas technical culture involves explicit codification and instruction. In the food domain, technical culture emerges when practices are normalised through guidelines and pedagogy; institutionalised through regulations such as nutritional labelling, certifications of origin, and sell-by dates; and promoted through expert discourse and policy frameworks (Scrinis 2013; Katan 2014; Ichijo, Ranta 2016). Food thus becomes not only a cultural habit but also an object of conscious management, regulation, and ideological framing.

2.2 The Culture of Food

Individuals are continuously exposed to food-related discourse through a wide range of popular and informal channels, including films, television cooking shows, food blogs and influencer accounts, lifestyle journalism, and advertising. Through repeated exposure, food-related terms and evaluative frameworks become familiar and taken for granted, contributing to shared assumptions about what constitutes 'good', 'normal', or desirable food. Food practices are also promoted in a more structured manner at the institutional level, where public bodies and sectoral organisations communicate food-related values, benefits, risks, and norms. This form of promotion is oriented toward the normalisation and regulation of food practices through guidelines, campaigns, and policy-oriented communication, and the associated discourse is typically structured around recurring rationales, namely: health concerns - through which food and food choices are framed in terms of risk, prevention, and well-being (Crawford 2006; Lupton 2013; Scrinis 2013); authenticity, tradition, and local or national identity - whereby food is interpreted as a symbol of collective memory and national belonging (Fischler 1988; Sutton 2001; Ichijo, Ranta 2016); environmental concerns - which relate food to biodiversity and sustainable food systems (FAO

2010; Goodman et al. 2012; Johnston, Baumann 2015); and, finally, economy-related considerations – where food is considered in terms of production systems, market relations, and social structures (Mintz 1996; Wilk 2006; Johnston, Szabo, Rodney 2011).

2.3 The Aim of This Research

This paper examines promotional discourse surrounding Italian food and eating practices, focusing on how food-related values and concerns are articulated and legitimised by institutional and sectoral actors.

Italian cuisine occupies a distinctive position in global food culture, as it is strongly associated with the Made in Italy label. This label functions not merely as an indication of geographical origin but as a symbolic marker of quality, authenticity, and cultural value, particularly in relation to food and agri-food products, taken to embody superior taste, artisanal knowledge, and territorial embeddedness. In the Italian context, non-commercial promotional discourse is produced primarily by public institutions (such as ministries and public-sector bodies) and by food-system organisations and sectoral associations. These actors play a central role in shaping normative understandings of food, health, quality, and cultural heritage. Public institutions operate within a regulatory and protective framework aimed at safeguarding public health and social welfare. Their discourse addresses individuals primarily as citizens and emphasises education, prevention, and collective responsibility. Food-system organisations and sectoral associations, by contrast, promote specific production systems, territories, and professional interests, often drawing on notions of authenticity, tradition, and quality to legitimise particular food practices.

For the selection of the material, we considered websites of institutional and sectoral organisations with a clear orientation toward promoting or explaining Made in Italy: such an orientation was considered to be foregrounded when the prominence of the Made in Italy label was evident on the organisation's homepage, either through direct reference to the expression or through easily accessible links in the homepage menu leading to a dedicated Made in Italy section. On the basis of this criterion, the Italian Ministero

della Salute² and Italy's leading agricultural organisation known as Coldiretti³ (Confederazione Nazionale Coltivatori Diretti) were selected. These actors were chosen because they occupy distinct and yet complementary positions within the food promotion landscape: the Ministry of Health is the key public actor in relation to the promotion of healthy eating; Coldiretti is a key sectoral actor in relation to the economic and territorial valorisation of food.

Because the promotion of 'good' food frequently entails the implicit marginalisation of 'bad' or undesirable alternatives, promotional discourse often operates through contrast rather than solely through affirmation. In consideration of this, this study examines how food is framed in the non-commercial promotional discourse of both the Italian Ministry of Health and Coldiretti, focusing on the interplay between positive evaluation – especially concerning health, cultural identity, sustainability, and economic value – and the construction of risky or inferior alternatives, notably by considering and comparing lexical occurrences on the official websites of the two organisations.

3 Analytical Framework: Methodology, Materials, Scope

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic approach to examine how food is framed in non-commercial promotional texts produced by institutional and sectoral actors. The analysis focuses on two complementary persuasive strategies: the enhancement of positively valued attributes and the problematisation of negatively framed alternatives.

Promotional discourse frequently relies on the enhancement of positive values. Drawing on framing and evaluation studies (Chong, Druckman 2007; 2013; Johnston, Szabo, Rodney 2011), the analysis identifies recurrent domains in which food is positively framed, namely, as already mentioned above, health and well-being, cultural identity and territorial belonging, environmental sustainability

2 Official webpage here: <https://www.salute.gov.it/new/it/alimentazione/>. Although the Ministero dell'Agricoltura could have been a potential candidate, its Made in Italy section constitutes only a minor subsection of the website, is not easily retrievable from the Ministry homepage, and its available content, published in 2016, consists mainly of static PDF documents focusing on regulations, programs, and conventions. By contrast, Made in Italy as food and food-related practices plays a central role in the institutional discourse of the Ministero della Salute.

3 Official webpage here: <https://www.coldiretti.it/>. Coldiretti is a sectoral organisation representing and protecting the interests of farmers, particularly small and medium-sized producers, at local, national and European levels. Although it is formally oriented towards agriculture, its scope also extends to fisheries and animal husbandry, as well as to other food-related domains, thus going beyond the strict boundaries of agriculture and encompassing Made in Italy food in a broader sense.

and ecological responsibility, and economic value. These positive associations function to render specific food practices desirable, legitimate, and socially valued.

Alongside these strategies, promotional discourse may also make use of fear appeal, a well-established persuasive mechanism in communication studies (Witte 1992; Witte, Allen 2000; Ruiter et al. 2014), which operates by foregrounding potential threats and suggesting – implicitly or explicitly – that adherence to certain behaviours can prevent or mitigate negative consequences (Cap 2017). In food-related discourse, such threats may concern health (e.g. disease or contamination), cultural identity (e.g. loss of tradition or authenticity), the environment (e.g. ecological degradation or climate change), or socio-economic justice (e.g. exploitation or unfair trade). As previous research has shown, these framings do not merely inform audiences but contribute to the normalisation and regulation of consumption practices by defining what is considered safe, responsible, and acceptable (Crawford 2006; Lupton 2013).

A related but distinct mechanism is *proximization* (Cap 2017), whereby discourse constructs a deictic centre (typically the in-group audience or its values) as under threat from entities positioned as spatially, temporally, or axiologically 'distant' but drawing nearer (e.g. external competitors, counterfeit practices, or foreign actors). Unlike Witte's (1992) Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM), which centres on the individual's own risk perception, *proximization* foregrounds the discursive construction of a third-party antagonist and is therefore particularly suited to analysing promotional discourse that frames threats to a collective identity or economic interest rather than to personal health. Both *proximization* and *EPPM* frameworks are applied in the analysis below to characterise, respectively, the Ministry's health-oriented and Coldiretti's identity/economy-oriented fear-appeal strategies.

The analysis focuses on content published on the Italian Ministry of Health's official website under the *Alimentazione* (Food) menu – where the emphasis on Made in Italy is more evident – specifically the subsections *Nutrizione* (Nutrition) and *Dieta mediterranea* (Mediterranean diet).⁴ For the *Nutrizione* section the analysis concentrates on the subsections *Mangia sano* (Eating healthy), *Sicurezza nutrizionale* (Nutritional security), and *Maestra Natura* (Nature, the teacher), which align with the study's focus on food promotion, while in the *Dieta mediterranea* section all three entries – *Dieta mediterranea*, *dieta sana e sostenibile* (Mediterranean

⁴ Other sections – such as those dedicated to foods for special medical purposes, breastfeeding, food labelling, iodine prophylaxis, and food allergies – were excluded, as they fall outside the scope of this study.

diet, healthy and sustainable diet), *Benefici per la salute* (Health benefits), and *Come seguire la dieta mediterranea* (How to follow the Mediterranean diet) – were considered. This sub-corpus counts a total of 3,040 words.

The analysis also draws on texts published on Coldiretti's official website within the subsection *In difesa del Made in Italy* (In defence of Made in Italy), located in the broader *Istituzionale* (Institutional) area, as well as on selected materials from the *Notizie e approfondimenti* (News and insights) section, chosen on the basis of explicit lexical references to Made in Italy-related products, preparation, and culinary practices. Institutional and news-genre materials were deliberately combined because the study's object is Coldiretti's overall public-facing promotional voice, of which press releases and news items are an integral and organisationally sanctioned channel, not an external or incidental source; restricting the corpus to the institutional section alone would exclude a substantial part of how Coldiretti actually communicates with the public. The selection of texts for the Coldiretti corpus was guided primarily by discursive and functional criteria rather than by strict numerical equivalence with the Ministry corpus. In order to ensure comparability, we included only materials that explicitly promote food-related values, excluding texts mainly concerned with policy instruments, labour issues, training initiatives or consumers' reactions. This resulted in a corpus of 7,163 words.

Methodologically, attention is paid to lexical choices, including denotative, connotative, and figurative meanings that convey evaluative positioning. This focus allows for a systematic comparison of promotional strategies across institutional and sectoral discourses.

Although the materials gathered constitute a thematically coherent and workable dataset, organized here into a two-part corpus (the Ministry and Coldiretti), this study does not adopt a fully corpus-driven or quantitative approach – when quantitative observations are present, they are based on normalized frequencies (per 10,000 words [henceforth p10kw]) to provide an indicative sense of the relative salience of selected items across the dataset. This choice is motivated by differences in both size and communicative orientation between the two sub-corpora: the Ministry sub-corpus is smaller and thematically more homogeneous, while the Coldiretti sub-corpus is larger and more heterogeneous, comprising texts that range from informational content to advocacy-oriented material. Moreover, the two actors differ in institutional positioning: the Ministry of Health adopts a *super partes* stance, providing normative guidance intended to apply across contexts, whereas Coldiretti explicitly represents sectoral interests and adopts a more defensive and partisan tone.

On this basis, the analysis is conducted in two interrelated stages. The first stage is exploratory and descriptive, using word-frequency

lists to identify recurrent lexical items and dominant semantic fields across the two sub-corpora. The second stage is qualitative and interpretive. Lexical items carrying positive or negative evaluative meaning are examined in context in order to analyse how value, risk, and legitimacy are constructed in promotional food discourse. The evaluative classification of lexical items as positive or negative is grounded in the Appraisal Theory's Attitude system (Martin, White 2005), which distinguishes three sub-systems of evaluation: Affect (emotional response), Judgement (evaluation of human conduct and character against social norms, encompassing social esteem (normality, capacity, tenacity) and social sanction (veracity, propriety)), and Appreciation (evaluation of things, products, processes, and phenomena, encompassing reaction, composition, and valuation). Polarity (positive/negative) cuts across all three sub-systems rather than constituting a separate category. Given that the object of promotion in both sub-corpora is primarily food, diets, and agricultural processes, Appreciation is expected to predominate; Judgement becomes relevant whenever discourse explicitly credits or blames human or institutional actors, as will be shown to occur asymmetrically between the two sub-corpora.

Frequency outputs (generated with Voyant Tools)⁵ are used in an auxiliary way, to orient close contextual qualitative reading, which remains the primary mode of analysis. No stopword list was applied at this stage; content words up to the 100th frequency rank were identified and manually verified against Voyant Tools output, as described above. Counting was performed on unlemmatised word forms rather than on lemmatised output. This choice reflects two considerations specific to Italian: first, grammatically inflected forms of the same adjectival lemma (e.g. *sano/sana*) were manually checked individually rather than automatically merged, since gender agreement in Italian is grammatically obligatory rather than optionally variable, and collapsing such forms risks obscuring genre- or register-specific agreement patterns; second, apparent morphological relations across word classes (e.g. *tutela* [noun] and *tutelare* [verb]) do not correspond to a single lemma in standard Italian lemmatisation and were therefore correctly retained as distinct items.

Together, these stages allow for a systematic yet interpretive examination of how food is framed by different promotional actors.

5 Available at: <https://voyant-tools.org/>.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Word Prominence and Semantic Orientation

The results of the word frequency analysis in the two sub-corpora, generated through Voyant Tools, are visualized in the word clouds below, which enable dominant terms and semantic tendencies to be readily identified.



Figure 1 Word cloud representing the Italian Ministry sub-corpus

The comparison between the two word-clouds shows clear differences in priorities, concerns, and interests across the two sub-corpora. The Ministry's discourse is primarily oriented toward citizens' health (the three most prominent words being *dieta* (diet), *salute* (health) and *mediterranea* (Mediterranean)), whereas Coldiretti's discourse places greater emphasis on the quality of food products and production systems (the prominence being given to Coldiretti itself, *qualità* (quality) and *prodotti* (products)). Given these general orientations, it becomes analytically relevant to move from a synoptic overview to a more fine-grained examination of how such concerns are articulated in the two sub-corpora, and, more broadly, how Italian food is promoted in relation to them.

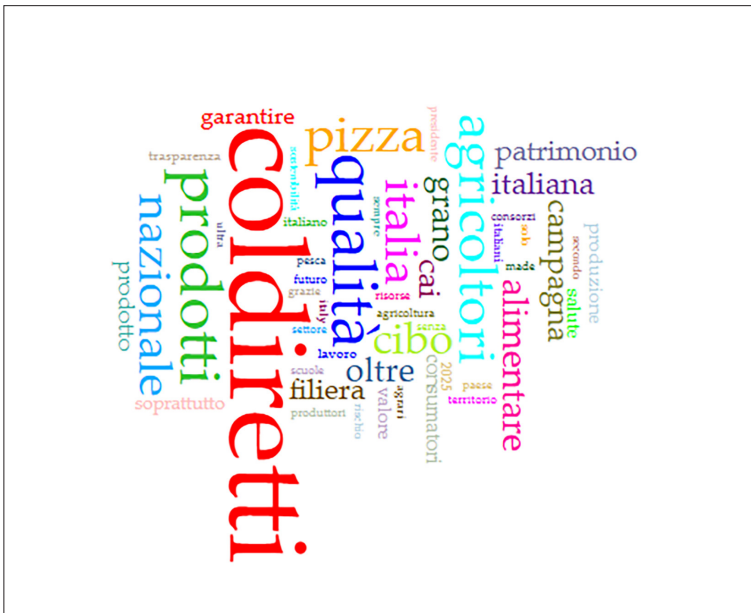


Figure 2 Word cloud representing the Coldiretti sub-corpus

4.2 Positive and Negative Lexicalization

For this stage of the analysis, lexical items – notably, content words – up to the 100th frequency rank⁶ were identified through Voyant Tools. Of these, the majority were topic-denoting nouns referring to institutions, products, sectors, or temporal/geographic markers (e.g. Coldiretti, pizza, filiera (supply chain), campagna (countryside), settore (sector), territorio (territory)) and thus carried no inherent positive or negative evaluative charge; only items expressing explicit evaluative meaning were retained for classification, which accounts for the comparatively small subset reported in Tables 1 and 2 (21 items for the Ministry, 15 for Coldiretti) relative to the full top-100 list. Positive terms include words carrying positive denotation (e.g. *qualità* (quality), *risorsa* (resource), *amica* (friendly)), positive evaluation (e.g. *importante* (important), *garantire* (to guarantee), *valore* (value)), or carrying positive meaning associations by referring to values, attributes, or benefits (e.g. *sano* (healthy), *trasparenza* (transparency), *patrimonio* (heritage)). Negative or fear-inducing evaluation is here understood as being conveyed both by terms with

⁶ Available at: <https://voyant-tools.org/>.

openly negative referents (e.g. *malattia* (disease), *diabete* (diabetes)) or negative meaning associations (*rischio* (risk), *pericolo* (danger)), and by neutral - or seemingly positive - items that nonetheless presuppose undesirable conditions or threats to be prevented or contrasted (e.g. *prevenzione* (prevention), *tutela* (protection)).

A further clarification is needed for items that, like *prevenzione* (prevention) and *tutela* (protection), presuppose a threat yet were coded as negative, as opposed to items such as *garantire* (guarantee) and *sicurezza* (safety), which likewise presuppose a threat yet were coded as positive. The distinguishing criterion is not the presence of a threat at the lexical-semantic level, but the immediate co-textual behaviour of each item: terms were coded as negative when their co-text explicitly names or foregrounds the danger, pathology, or condition being counteracted, keeping it discursively salient (e.g. *prevenzione... contrastando il rischio di insorgenza di importanti patologie croniche*, which can be found in ex. 1); conversely, terms were coded as positive when their co-text foregrounds an achieved or promised benefit, typically through coordination with unambiguously positive attributes, without lexicalizing the underlying threat in the same clause (e.g. *garantire sicurezza, origine, genuinità e qualità*, as seen in ex. 9). This co-textual criterion was applied consistently across all occurrences of the items concerned, consistent with corpus-linguistic approaches to semantic prosody (Sinclair 1991; Louw 1993; Stubbs 2001).

The resulting lists for the two sub-corpora are presented below in Tables 1 and 2. The reported raw frequencies and normalized values (per 10,000 words) are intended as indicative measures of distribution and salience, rather than as statistically significant indicators of quantitative relevance or lexical keyness. Because Tables 1 and 2 represent two independently analysed sub-corpora, gender-inflected forms of the same lemma occurring in different sub-corpora (e.g. *vero* in the Ministry sub-corpus, *vera* in the Coldiretti sub-corpus) were not merged across tables, as doing so would conflate frequency counts belonging to distinct discursive sources.

Table 1 Positive and negative lexicalization in the Italian Ministry sub-corpus

Ministero della Salute					
Positive lex.	Raw fr.	Norm. fr. p10kw	Negative lex.	Raw fr.	Norm. fr. p10kw
<i>salute</i> (health)	25	82.2	<i>malattie</i> (diseases)	15	49.3
<i>vita</i> (life)	18	59.2	<i>rischio</i> (risk)	10	32.9
<i>nutriente</i> (nutritive)	9	29.6	<i>prevenzione</i> (prevention)	8	26.3

Ministero della Salute					
Positive lex.	Raw fr.	Norm. fr. p10kw	Negative lex.	Raw fr.	Norm. fr. p10kw
<i>sana</i> (healthy)	8	26.3	<i>patologie</i> (pathologies)	6	19.7
<i>sostenibile</i> (sustainable)	6	19.7	<i>diabete</i> (diabetes)	4	13.2
<i>equilibrata</i> (balanced)	6	19.7	<i>tutela</i> (protection)	3	9.9
<i>regolare</i> (regular)	5	16.4			
<i>importante</i> (important)	5	16.4			
<i>corretta</i> (correct)	5	16.4			
<i>buona</i> (good)	5	16.4			
<i>sano</i> (healthy)	4	13.2			
<i>energia</i> (energy)	4	13.2			
<i>aiutare</i> (help)	4	13.2			
<i>vero</i> (true/real)	3	9.9			
<i>sicurezza</i> (safety)	3	9.9			
Total	110	361.7	Total	46	151.3

Table 2 Positive and negative lexicalization in the Coldiretti sub-corpus

Coldiretti					
Positive lex.	Raw fr.	Norm. fr. p10kw	Negative lex.	Raw fr.	Norm. fr. p10kw
<i>qualità</i> (quality)	58	81.0	<i>rischio</i> (risk)	9	12.6
<i>patrimonio</i> (heritage)	14	19.5	<i>tutelare</i> (protect)	6	8.4
<i>garantire</i> (guarantee)	13	18.1			
<i>valore</i> (value)	12	16.8			
<i>salute</i> (health)	12	16.8			
<i>trasparenza</i> (transparency)	11	15.4			
<i>sostenibilità</i> (sustainability)	10	14.0			
<i>risorse</i> (resources)	10	14.0			
<i>importante</i> (important)	8	11.2			

Coldiretti					
Positive lex.	Raw fr.	Norm. fr. p10kw	Negative lex.	Raw fr.	Norm. fr. p10kw
<i>rispetto</i> (respect)	7	9.8			
<i>amica</i> (friendly)	7	9.8			
<i>vera</i> (true/real)	6	8.4			
<i>valorizzazione</i> (valorization)	6	8.4			
Total	174	243.2	Total	15	21.0

As shown by the data in the tables, the Italian Ministry of Health tends to promote Italian food and related concepts through a relatively balanced distribution of positive and negative aspects. By contrast, Coldiretti places much stronger emphasis on highlighting positive aspects of Italian food and related practices, with negative lexical items playing a marginal role. Not only does the range of positive and negative elements differ between the two sub-corpora, but the ratio between the most frequent positive and negative items is particularly revealing. In the Ministry sub-corpus, the most frequent positive term (*salute*, 82.2 p10kw) and the most frequent negative terms (*malattie* and *rischio*, 49.3 and 32.9 respectively) show a relatively contained gap (with a ratio of approximately 1.7:1), suggesting a discourse that combines positive promotion with caution and risk awareness, while in the Coldiretti sub-corpus the imbalance is considerably more pronounced – where the most frequent positive item (*qualità*, 81.0 p10kw) far outweighs the most frequent negative one (*rischio*, 12.6), producing a ratio of over 6:1. This disproportion is evident across the Coldiretti frequency list, where negative lexicalization is both quantitatively scarce and semantically less diversified. When negative terms do appear, they tend to serve a defensive or mitigative function, while the discourse overwhelmingly foregrounds and articulates positive attributes. This single-item contrast is corroborated when frequencies are aggregated across all coded items rather than compared item-by-item: summing the normalized frequencies reported in Table 1 (*Total* row) yields a positive:negative ratio of approximately 2.4:1 for the Ministry sub-corpus, while the equivalent sum in Table 2 (*Total* row) yields a ratio of approximately 11.6:1 for the Coldiretti sub-corpus. The aggregate figures confirm, and sharpen, the asymmetry already suggested by the single most frequent items.

For a broader view of the prosodic choices characterising the two sub-corpora, if less frequent negative lexical items are also considered, namely those occurring three to five times in the corpus – albeit succinctly and without systematic distributional

analysis – it can be observed that negativity in the Ministry of Health sub-corpus remains relatively homogeneous and thematically focused, primarily centred on health risks and undesirable effects that can be prevented or mitigated through appropriate dietary practices (e.g. *prevenire* (prevent), *cancro* (cancer), *protezione* (protection), *sorveglianza* (surveillance)). By contrast, the Coldiretti sub-corpus presents a more diversified and heterogeneous negative lexicalization, often involving explicitly constructed antagonistic agents (e.g. *sleali* (unfair), *traffickanti* (traffickers)), morally charged representations (e.g. *spazzatura* (garbage), *frodi* (frauds), *follie* (follies), *danni* (damages)), and forms of opposition directed against them (e.g. *battaglia* (battle), *combattere* (fight)). Therefore, whereas negativity in the Ministry discourse remains largely impersonal and preventive, in the Coldiretti corpus it increasingly takes the form of personalized conflict and opposition. In Appraisal terms (Martin, White 2005), this asymmetry can be reformulated with greater precision. Positive and negative lexicalization in the Ministry sub-corpus is consistently realized as Appreciation – valuation of diets, foods, and health outcomes (e.g. *sana*, *equilibrata*, *rischio*, *patologie*) – with no clear instance of Judgement directed at human or institutional actors. Coldiretti's discourse, by contrast, remains Appreciation-dominant in its positive lexicalization (e.g. *qualità*, *patrimonio*, *valore*), but introduces a layer of Judgement absent from the Ministry sub-corpus, concentrated precisely where negativity personalizes into antagonistic agents. Expressions such as *chi spaccia per italiani prodotti che non hanno nulla a che fare con la realtà nazionale* invoke negative Judgement of veracity against unnamed counterfeiting actors, while *agricoltori custodi* and *una battaglia sostenuta da Coldiretti* construct positive Judgement of capacity and tenacity for Coldiretti and the farmers it represents. Negativity in the Coldiretti sub-corpus therefore does not merely personalize in a generic sense: it specifically shifts part of the evaluative burden from Appreciation of processes to Judgement of social actors, a resource the Ministry discourse does not draw on. It should be noted that the application of the Appreciation/Judgement distinction in this study is based on manual, qualitative reading rather than on a systematic coding protocol with pre-defined category boundaries and inter-rater reliability checks. The classification proposed here is therefore interpretive and illustrative of a broader analytical pattern, rather than a validated quantitative annotation; it is adopted to sharpen the qualitative contrast between the two sub-corpora rather than to support corpus-wide statistical claims.

On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative contrasts observed in this section, it is useful to proceed with a contextual analysis of lexical items in their discursive environments.

4.3 Lexicalization in Context

By examining the texts of the two sub-corpora more closely through manual analysis, it becomes evident that, despite their different orientations, the promotion of Italian cuisine is organized around four main thematic threads, namely: health; culture and tradition; sustainability and environmental care; and economic value. Assessing lexical items – at this stage, irrespective of their high or low frequency – within their contexts of occurrence allows us to observe not only how food is framed, but also how evaluation is realized and, more specifically, how positive and negative evaluations are often interwoven within the same textual segments. In this perspective, negativity does not simply oppose positivity but may function strategically to reinforce it, for instance by framing risks, threats, or undesirable practices as a backdrop against which Italian food products and practices are positively constructed.

4.3.1 Promotion in the Ministry of Health Sub-corpus

Positive promotional elements relating Italian food or cuisine to health are, expectedly, quite frequent in the Health Ministry sub-corpus and present the Mediterranean diet and Italian food as beneficial to overall well-being, as in the following extract:

(1) [...] *ad oggi la Dieta Mediterranea (DM) rappresenta un vero e proprio modello di dieta sana e sostenibile, in grado di anteporsi come fattore determinante di prevenzione, contrastando il rischio di insorgenza di importanti patologie croniche come diabete, ipertensione arteriosa ed obesità.*

To date, the Mediterranean Diet (MD) represents a true model of healthy and sustainable diet, capable of acting as a determining factor in prevention, counteracting the risk of onset of significant chronic diseases such as diabetes, arterial hypertension, and obesity.

(2) [...] *la dieta mediterranea [...], attraverso un sano profilo di grassi, bassa percentuale di carboidrati, basso indice glicemico, alto contenuto di fibre alimentari, composti antiossidanti ed effetti anti-infiammatori, riduce il rischio di insorgenza di alcune patologie, come il cancro e malattie cardiovascolari.*

The Mediterranean diet, through a healthy fat profile, low percentage of carbohydrates, low glycemic index, high content of dietary fiber, antioxidant compounds and anti-inflammatory

effects, reduces the risk of onset of some diseases, such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

Positive promotion may also link the diet to cultural heritage and identity:

(3) Nel 2010 l'UNESCO ha riconosciuto la DM come Patrimonio Culturale Immateriale dell'Umanità in quanto esempio di ricchezza culturale legata al territorio, alla convivialità, alla società con l'alimento che si trasforma in un vero e proprio atto di relazione e condivisione.

In 2010 UNESCO recognized the Mediterranean Diet as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as an example of cultural richness linked to territory, conviviality, and society, with food that transforms itself into a genuine act of relationship and sharing.

(4) [...] le produzioni agricole e agroalimentari, infatti, insieme alla tradizione culinaria da un lato assicurano la qualità dal punto di vista organolettico e, dall'altro, garantiscono il rispetto di criteri etici e ambientali.

Agricultural and agri-food productions, in fact, together with culinary tradition on the one hand ensure quality from an organoleptic standpoint and, on the other, guarantee respect for ethical and environmental criteria.

The Ministry also positively frames the diet in terms of environmental value.

(5) Orientare le proprie scelte alimentari alla dieta mediterranea fin dalla giovane età può aiutare chiunque a prevenire i problemi di salute e a comprendere le notevoli potenzialità che essa offre, sia dal punto di vista economico che ambientale.

Orienting one's food choices toward the Mediterranean diet from a young age can help anyone prevent health problems and understand the remarkable potential it offers, both from an economic and environmental point of view.

(6) Contestualmente la DM si presenta anche come modello di dieta sostenibile con i suoi effetti positivi in ambito ambientale ed economico.

At the same time, the Mediterranean Diet also presents itself as a model of sustainable diet with its positive effects in the environmental and economic fields.

An interesting finding concerns economic value, which is never positively evaluated in isolation but only in relation to other positive aspects, as shown in examples (5) and (6).

Another remarkable finding is that elements in the Ministry's dietary discourse that function as fear appeals – when present – tend to be implicit rather than direct or sensationalist. Rather than operating as explicit scare tactics, they take the form of risk-focused framing, invoked to justify policies and recommendations, as can be observed in the following excerpt (as well as in examples (1), (2), and (5)).

(7) [...] *con i suoi prodotti tipici diventa espressione della storia e della cultura la cui riscoperta rappresenta un'importante occasione per sottrarsi alla omologazione delle abitudini alimentari, salvaguardando così la biodiversità alimentare.*

[...] With its typical products it becomes an expression of history and culture whose rediscovery represents an important opportunity to escape the homogenization of eating habits, thereby safeguarding food biodiversity.

As shown here, the Ministry implicitly frames the traditional diet as a protective response to potential risks. Mapped onto Witte's (1992) EPPM constructs, examples (1), (2), and (5) build threat severity through named but non-sensationalized chronic conditions (diabetes, hypertension, obesity, cancer, cardiovascular disease), while perceived susceptibility remains diffuse and universalized (*chiunque* (anyone), rather than a targeted at-risk group). Response efficacy, by contrast, is framed explicitly and strongly – the Mediterranean diet is presented as *un fattore determinante di prevenzione* (a determining factor in prevention), whereas self-efficacy is left implicit, assumed rather than argued. This high response efficacy, low/diffuse severity and susceptibility, unaddressed self-efficacy configuration is consistent with a public-health register that avoids alarmism while still motivating preventive behaviour.

4.3.2 Promotion in the Coldiretti Sub-Corpus

While promotional discourse in the Ministry of Health sub-corpus is largely structured around health education and prevention [tab. 1], promotion in the Coldiretti sub-corpus appears more varied and

explicitly evaluative, and more evenly distributed across different thematic domains [tab. 2]. Concerning the health dimension, in Coldiretti discourse health tends to be more tied to quality, safety, and standards than to nutrition in general, as can be seen in the following examples emphasizing food quality and well-being:

(8) *La dieta italiana è, infatti, sinonimo di cibo salutare: una verità elementare confermatissima anche nel dopo pandemia.*

The Italian diet is, in fact, synonymous with healthy food: a basic truth confirmed even after the pandemic.

(9) *Gli obiettivi sono [...] garantire sicurezza, origine, genuinità e qualità ai consumatori italiani.*

The objectives are to guarantee safety, origin, genuineness and quality to Italian consumers.

Unlike the Ministry discourse, where references to tradition are primarily linked to cultural heritage and conviviality, Coldiretti frames tradition as a strategic asset and a source of competitive advantage, as in the two examples below:

(10) *Il legame con il territorio e la distintività fondata su un mix unico e irripetibile di asset (cibo, cucina, arte, cultura, turismo, paesaggio) rappresentano la vera leva competitiva con cui il Made in Italy può affrontare i mercati globali.*

The link with territory and the distinctiveness founded on a unique and unrepeatable mix of assets (food, cuisine, art, culture, tourism, landscape) represent the true competitive lever with which Made in Italy can face global markets.

(11) *Il ruolo dell'agricoltura familiare [...] può generare non solo ricchezza e occupazione, ma anche coesione sociale [...] valorizzando i prodotti locali [...] e promuovendo pratiche commerciali leali e prezzi equi.*

The role of family agriculture [...] can generate not only wealth and employment, but also social cohesion [...], valuing local products and promoting fair commercial practices and prices.

Environmental promotion in the Coldiretti sub-corpus is closely – and expectedly – associated with agricultural practices and technological solutions, rather than with dietary models alone:

(12) *Il digestato ottenuto negli impianti di biogas [...] rappresenta una risposta concreta [...] valorizzando così una risorsa naturale rispetto ai fertilizzanti di origine chimica.*

The digestate obtained in biogas [...] plants represents a concrete response [...] thus enhancing a natural resource compared to chemical fertilizers.

(13) *La multifunzionalità dell'impresa agricola è la sua capacità di produrre non solo cibo ma anche servizi ai cittadini. Ne sono un esempio [...] agribenessere, la cura del paesaggio, la produzione di energie rinnovabili.*

The multifunctionality of the agricultural enterprise is its capacity to produce not only food but also services for citizens. Examples include [...] agri-wellness, care of the landscape, production of renewable energy.

Economic framing is considerably more explicit and central in the Coldiretti discourse than in the Ministry sub-corpus, where agriculture is framed not only as a key element for health, the environment and cultural identity, but as an indispensable economic and strategic sector.

(14) *Il cibo è diventato la prima ricchezza del Paese, con una filiera agroalimentare allargata che vale 707 miliardi, dai campi all'industria fino alla ristorazione e alla grande distribuzione, un valore pari a quello di oltre venti manovre finanziarie.*

Food has become the country's primary wealth, with an extended agri-food supply chain worth 707 billion, from the fields to industry and on to catering and large distribution, a value equal to more than twenty financial maneuvers.

(15) *Contratti di filiera [...] si confermano uno strumento decisivo per assicurare stabilità ai redditi agricoli, investimenti condivisi in innovazione, garanzia di qualità e continuità occupazionale.*

Supply chain contracts [...] are confirmed as a decisive instrument to ensure stability of agricultural incomes, shared investments in innovation, guarantees of quality and occupational continuity.

Compared to the Ministry discourse, Coldiretti's promotional strategies also incorporate negative prosody, notably explicit risk-oriented and conflictual elements, particularly when external threats to Italian food, agriculture, or economic sustainability are

foregrounded. While not sensationalist, these elements function as problem-framing devices that personalize responsibility and construct antagonistic agents, thereby reinforcing positive values through contrast. This can be seen in the following examples, where negative prosody is used to emphasize the link between food and, respectively, health, tradition, the environment, and the economy.

(16) *Una battaglia sostenuta da sempre da Coldiretti [...]. L'obiettivo è quello di formare dei consumatori consapevoli per valorizzare i fondamenti della Dieta Mediterranea e fermare così il consumo del cosiddetto junk food.*

A battle long supported by Coldiretti [...]. The aim is to educate informed consumers in order to enhance the foundations of the Mediterranean Diet and thereby curb the consumption of so-called junk food.

(17) *Tale patrimonio viene però messo a rischio dalla mancanza di trasparenza che favorisce chi spaccia per italiani prodotti che non hanno nulla a che fare con la realtà nazionale.*

This heritage is, however, put at risk by a lack of transparency, which favours those who pass off as Italian products that have nothing to do with the national reality.

(18) [...] *prodotti che rischiavano di scomparire [...] oggi sono stati salvati grazie al lavoro degli agricoltori custodi.*

[...] products that were at risk of disappearing [...] have today been preserved thanks to the work of custodian farmers.

(19) *In questo modo – conclude Coldiretti – i ricavi non coprono più le spese, mettendo a rischio le semina futura e la tenuta economica delle aziende agricole.*

In this way – Coldiretti concludes – revenues no longer cover costs, putting future sowings and the economic viability of agricultural enterprises at risk.

As we can see, within Coldiretti's discourse negative framing operates through what Cap (2017) terms proximization: a deictic centre constituted by Italian producers and consumers is discursively threatened by peripheral antagonistic entities (such as *junk food*; *chi spaccia per italiani prodotti che non hanno nulla a che fare con la realtà nazionale*; etc.), rhetorically drawn into the in-group's space to construct urgency and legitimize Coldiretti's advocacy stance.

Unlike the Ministry's implicit, process-oriented fear appeal, this is spatial and axiological proximization operating on discrete external entities, which explains why Coldiretti's negative lexis reads as more antagonistic despite being quantitatively marginal.

5 Conclusion

This study has shown that promotional discourse surrounding Italian food relies on a dynamic interplay between positive evaluation and fear appeal. Both the Italian Ministry of Health and Coldiretti construct Italian food as essentially and openly 'good', yet they do so through distinct communicative logics shaped by their distinctive institutional roles.

The Ministry of Health adopts a regulatory and preventive approach. Positive evaluation is closely integrated with risk awareness, and fear appeal operates implicitly, supporting public-health objectives without overt dramatisation. Food is generally framed as a matter of collective responsibility, and risks are presented as manageable through adherence to Ministry guidelines, through which the Ministry actively promotes its public-health objectives by encouraging specific eating practices and nutritional choices.

Coldiretti, by contrast, places greater emphasis on positive lexicalisation, which is more visible and widely distributed across its discourse. Within this broadly positive framing, negative evaluation operates on two levels. At a more general level, overtly negative lexical items primarily serve a contrastive function, providing the backdrop against which positive representations of Italian food and agriculture are enhanced. At a more local level, however, negative evaluation can take the form of explicit fear-inducing appeals, especially in contexts where threats are linked to malevolent agency and conflictual dynamics are foregrounded. In these instances, fear appeal serves to mobilize support, reinforce defensive positioning, and legitimize sectoral interests, possibly contributing to forms of gastronationalism that link food practices to economic sovereignty and cultural identity.

Despite the limitations posed by the relatively small corpus considered here and by the genre heterogeneity of the Coldiretti sub-corpus, which combines institutional and news-genre material and may inflate certain lexical items (e.g. Coldiretti itself, frequently used in news texts to attribute quoted statements) without this necessarily reflecting a thematic pattern, these findings may contribute to research on framing and food discourse by demonstrating that both positive evaluation and fear appeal do not operate uniformly but are instead shaped by institutional positioning and communicative purpose. Examining the interplay between these evaluative strategies

offers insight into how food ideologies are normalized, contested, and strategically mobilized in contemporary society.

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A Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis of Nutella®'s Website in English and in Italian Representing Corporate Advocacy Between Traditional Values and Innovation

Daniela Cesiri

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italy

Abstract Food brands with a long-standing tradition strive to balance heritage with modern trends and sustainability goals. As a case in point, Nutella® seeks to promote its brand through two distinct strategies: glocalization and corporate advocacy. This study presents a corpus-based discourse analysis of Nutella®'s web pages in English and Italian, exploring how the brand expresses corporate advocacy across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Findings show that Nutella® varies its discourse: the Italian web page focuses on socio-agricultural governance, labor ethics, and supply-chain value to protect brand heritage in its home market. On the other hand, the English web page emphasizes glocalized traceability, regional provenance, and circular economy commitments to build global brand legitimacy among international consumers.

Keywords Corporate advocacy. Glocalization. Food branding. Corpus-based discourse analysis. Nutella.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Nutella®: Between Tradition and Glocalization. – 3 Corpus Composition and Method of Investigation. – 4 Findings. – 5 Discussion of Results: Negotiating Heritage, Glocalized Traceability, and Corporate Advocacy. – 6 Conclusions.



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1 Introduction

Economic studies on corporate longevity show that the food and beverage manufacturing sector dominates the list of the most long-standing industries (Hudson 2014). In addition, the food manufacturing sector alone generates such large revenues that it is considered one of the largest industrial segments in the worldwide economy. Depending on how broadly researchers define the sector (i.e., more narrowly as packaged/ultra-processed goods or more broadly as all agricultural processing; see Kaur, Chauhan 2026, and Guja et al. 2026, respectively), global revenues typically range between \$2.2 trillion and \$9.5 trillion.¹

Hence, food brands that originate from family businesses and hold a long-standing legacy tend to operate at the intersection of globalization and local identity, seeking to carefully balance established tradition with modern commitments to sustainability and technological evolution (Balderas-Cejudo et al. 2025). In this regard, Nutella® can be considered a case in point: first produced by a local family-run confectionery business in 1946, today it is produced worldwide, so the brand² strives to find its balance between a global-scale production and distribution, on the one hand, and promotional messages of local intimacy, on the other (Cova, Pace 2006; Cesiri 2025). Nutella® seems to frequently promote itself through two distinct strategies: glocalization (i.e., adapting global brands to local cultures; Cova, Pace 2006) and corporate advocacy (namely, when a company publicly supports social and environmental issues; Cova, D'Antone 2016).

This study presents a corpus-based discourse analysis of Nutella®'s official websites, in English and Italian, in order to explore how Ferrero, the company behind the Nutella® brand, expresses corporate advocacy across different linguistic and cultural landscapes. By contrasting the results from the sub-corpus in Italian and the sub-corpus in English, the study aims to investigate how the company communicates its corporate identity. The research specifically addresses two central research questions (RQs):

1 Global data available at <https://www.statista.com/outlook/cmo/food/worldwide/#revenue>.

2 According to marketing studies, a product is “anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a want or need” (Kotler, Keller 2016, 168), while a brand is a trademark attached to a product that defines it as a multi-dimensional mental representation, personality, and relationship (Stern 2006). So, Nutella® – created as a product – has now become a brand with its own dedicated line of Nutella®-based products (e.g., muffins, biscuits, etc.), websites, and product-inspired gadgets, cafés (Cesiri 2025), and communities (Cova, Pace 2006). In this study, it is investigated as a brand, not as a product, and will be referred to in this sense throughout the paper.

RQ1: How do the discursive strategies of corporate advocacy differ between Nutella®'s Italian and English websites?

RQ2: In what ways do advocacy strategies used in the two versions of the websites interact with glocalization and the preservation or adaptation of brand heritage across local and international target audiences?

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents Ferrero's flagship product Nutella®, framing its brand history against the state-of-the-art on glocalization and food studies; Section 3 presents the corpus and the methodology used to investigate it in the present study. Section 4 provides the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the corpus data, while Section 5 discusses the findings. The paper concludes with Section 6, which also offers directions for future research.

2 Nutella®: Between Tradition and Glocalization

Literature studying Nutella® is surprisingly not abundant.³ The few works consulted are from marketing or communication studies, and their findings all tend to highlight the complex dynamics that Ferrero's flagship product always tries to achieve between preserving a deeply rooted cultural heritage and implementing flexible glocalization strategies across diverse international markets. For instance, Padovani (2004) has established the brand's foundational myth as a symbol of post-war Italian ingenuity and socio-cultural identity, forming the traditional core upon which Nutella®'s global brand equity rests. Building on this heritage, Cova and Pace (2006) have also demonstrated how a mass-marketed convenience product successfully fostered bottom-up consumer empowerment through platforms like 'my Nutella® The Community', where passionate fans actively co-created brand meaning while reinforcing traditional emotional attachments.

This resilient brand iconicity is further analyzed by Cova and D'Antone (2016), who have examined how Nutella®'s deeply entrenched traditional status helped Ferrero navigate severe anti-consumption pressures and public health debates, such as the global

³ However, it seems that the product is popular as a case study for students writing their BA and MA dissertations, since many case studies are available that explore the brand's marketing and advertising strategies. However, these dissertations are quite repetitive and do not add much to existing literature on Nutella®. For this reason, they were not included in this overview, except for Gioia and Blaas (2014), here cited as representative of the category.

palm oil controversy, by counterbalancing institutional critiques with entrenched consumer affection and trust. As the brand expanded internationally, this traditional core was systematically paired with glocalization strategies to achieve cross-cultural resonance. Gioia and Blaas (2014) have illustrated this digital 'think global, act local' approach by analyzing how Nutella® adapts its online web presence across five distinct national markets, balancing standardized global attributes with localized aesthetics, recipes, and narrative themes.

Extending this cross-cultural focus to market adaptations, Piscopo (2024) has explored the discursive and identity mutations that international agrifood brands undergo in Franco-Italian contexts, showing how Nutella® recontextualizes its messaging to align with local gastronomic expectations without diluting its core identity. In emerging and non-Western markets, Retnowati et al. (2021) have demonstrated that localized packaging variations, controlled product variations, and strong overarching brand equity are critical determinants in cultivating consumer trust within distinct regional settings. Finally, Cesiri (2025) has provided a linguistic and socio-cultural perspective on how food products are communicated to younger audiences, emphasizing how Nutella®'s traditional narrative as a wholesome family staple is discursively adapted to navigate varying international regulations and cultural norms regarding child nutrition and advertising.

This short overview of the literature on the topic has highlighted that the studies available converge in showing that the dominance of Nutella® on the global market relies on a constant balance among several promotional strategies, namely: connecting its identity with nostalgic, consumer-driven tradition, continuously recalibrating its packaging, digital presence, discursive strategies, and tailoring its communications to fit local socio-cultural landscapes.

However, the lack of research concerning the connection between Nutella®'s socio-cultural heritage, community dynamics, and international marketing strategies, also emphasizes the gap in the literature that could help us understand how brand discourse specifically integrates corporate advocacy with glocalization across digital channels, the medium whose affordances are most extensively exploited by the brand.

The present study seeks to fill this very gap by employing a corpus-based discourse analysis of Nutella®'s official websites in both English and Italian to examine - quantitatively and qualitatively - how the brand combines corporate advocacy with its glocalization strategies across distinct linguistic and cultural contexts. By contrasting these two sub-corpora, the study aims to investigate possible differences and/or similarities between marketing-driven glocalization and transparent corporate communication, thus offering new empirical insights into how a long-standing food brand discursively negotiates

the balance between tradition, global adaptation, and modern commitments to social and environmental responsibility.

3 Corpus Composition and Method of Investigation

The corpus was collected by extracting the verbal components of the web pages from specific sections of the website dedicated to Nutella® (<https://www.nutella.com>). These sections were those dedicated to the description of the history of the product, its ingredients, packaging, and sustainability. Then, two sub-corpora were created: one for the pages in Italian (taken from <https://www.nutella.com/it/it/>) and one for those in English (available at <https://www.nutella.com/int/en/>).⁴ The sections were accessed from the main website's homepage: next to the product's logo – on the left-hand side of the web page – a drop-down menu bar allows users to visit the sections 'Scopri Nutella®' (lit. Discover Nutella®)/'Inside Nutella®', which contains all the sub-sections investigated in this study. The sections and sub-sections included in this main 'drop-down menu bar' are illustrated in Table 1.⁵

Table 1 Sub-sections in Nutella®'s website (Italian and English versions)

Sections and Sub-sections (Italian)	Sections and Sub-sections (English)	Contents
Le nostre azioni (lit. Our actions):	Our Commitment for sustainability:	Description of the company's commitment and the brand's characteristics in terms of environmental sustainability

⁴ A comparison of the English and Italian versions of the web pages revealed a few stylistic and thematic differences. Because it was not possible to ascertain whether they were parallel texts or translated texts edited after translation, the two versions of the websites were not considered source-target texts, but rather as parallel, independent texts, and were analyzed as such in the study.

⁵ For copyright reasons, it was not possible to provide screenshots of the web pages in this paper since the copyright holder did not respond to the author's requests. Being a corpus-based investigation, this did not affect the contents of the analysis. However, the web pages could be reproduced here to illustrate how the author accessed the data. A description and hyperlinks were provided to compensate for the lack of images. The titles of the sections are provided in Italian and in English, respectively.

Impegno per la sostenibilità (lit. Commitment for sustainability):	The Nutella® Palm Oil	Sub-section dedicated to describing the characteristics of the specific ingredients in terms of nutritional values and their environmental impact
Il nostro impegno in ogni ingrediente (lit. Commitment in every ingredient):	The Nutella® Cocoa	As in the previous sub-section
olio di palma (lit. palm oil)	The Nutella® hazelnuts	As in the previous sub-section
cacao (lit. cocoa)	The Nutella® sugar	As in the previous sub-section
nocciole (lit. hazelnuts)		
zucchero (lit. sugar)	Recycling the Jar	Instructions on how to re-use the jar
Qualità e Ingredienti (lit. Quality and Ingredients)	Our Quality & Ingredients	Other ingredients used to make Nutella® are listed and explained in terms of their nutritional value
Ricicla il vasetto (lit. Recycle the jar)	Recycling the Jar	Instructions on how to re-use the jar
Il nuovo look (lit. Our new look)	New Look	Description of the new look of the Nutella® Jar and label
La nostra storia (lit. Our story)	Our Heritage	History of the Nutella® product and brand (it starts with a timeline of Ferrero)
FAQ	FAQ	FAQ section mostly dedicated to answering allegations and concerns about risks and hazards to consumers' health regarding palm oil and the use of other ingredients

As Table 1 shows, the sections contain comparable thematic content, differing primarily in how the information is structurally distributed across the two sub-corpora. Future research will consider cultural differences concerning the organization of the drop-down menu bar that allows users to access the different sections and the multimodal visual composition of the web pages, as well as how the visual and verbal components of the web pages interact to convey specific meanings (whether literal or symbolic).

Once gathered into the two sub-corpora, the verbal components of the sections were then investigated using Sketch Engine,⁶ an online platform that integrates functions for corpus construction, management, annotation, and analysis. In addition to enabling users to upload corpora of their own compilation, the platform provides web-based access to an extensive library of pre-built multilingual corpora (Kilgarriff et al. 2014; Kovačević 2026).

The texts were collected, manually cleansed by removing hyperlinks, formatting inconsistencies, and visual elements that were not to be included in the analysis, and saved as text-only files. The aim of this part of the analysis was to examine differences and/or similarities – in terms of discursive strategies – between the two sub-corpora that could be considered as indicators of how the brand combines corporate advocacy, glocalization and the promotion of traditional values across the two different cultural contexts. For this reason, the sub-corpora were uploaded to Sketch Engine's corpus query system, which automatically generated a list of keywords. In fact, Sketch Engine can be used to extract single-word and multiword units from a corpus that define the content or topic of the corpus itself (Kilgarriff et al. 2014).

Drawing on corpus linguistics methods of investigation (e.g., McEnery et al. 2006), Sketch Engine considers keywords as any individual words that occur significantly more frequently in a target corpus than in a reference corpus. Although this statistical threshold applies to all parts of speech, keyword extraction predominantly highlights content words, given that function-word frequencies remain relatively static across varied corpora. Therefore, for both sub-corpora, two reference corpora were selected from the library available in Sketch Engine: the 'Italian Web 2020' and the 'English Web 2021' corpora were used for the Italian and the English sub-corpora, respectively, since they are both general corpora from web sources, thereby reflecting the characteristics of the texts in the sub-corpora under analysis. Table 2 summarizes the composition of the two sub-corpora.

Table 2 General quantitative composition of the two sub-corpora

Sub-corpora	Italian	English
Tokens	5,772	6,497
Words	5,073	5,623
Lemmas	1,202	1,235
Sentences per document	231	242
Average words per sentence	22	23

6 Available at: app.sketchengine.eu/.

This general overview reveals that the two sub-corpora are similar in terms of size and stylistic complexity. The similar figures in terms of Tokens and Words seem to confirm a comparable structural significance (Kovačević 2026) between the Italian and the English versions. Even though the sub-corpora were not lemmatized for POS tagging analysis,⁷ the automatic calculation of the lemmas generated by the platform also indicates very similar figures, suggesting that the sub-corpora – albeit small – are lexically dense and stylistically rich.

The Sketch Engine query function generated two lists of keywords. As sub-corpora contain significantly fewer words than the reference corpus, comparing raw counts (absolute frequency) may give misleading results (Kilgariff et al. 2014). When producing its output, like any application or software for corpus linguistics, Sketch Engine normalizes its data into relative frequencies by calculating a ‘Keyness Score’ (KS). The KS highlights which words appear particularly often in the sub-corpus compared to the reference corpus: the higher the KS, the more characteristic that word is to the corpus under investigation (*ibid.*). For this reason, the keywords selected from the output generated by Sketch Engine were those that presented a KS of at least 100 – which was deemed suitable considering the general size of both sub-corpora. 128 keywords were selected for the Italian sub-corpus, while 118 were selected for the English one.

A further selection was then conducted among these keywords to perform a Concordance Analysis and examine the specific co-text and context of occurrence of these keywords in the two sub-corpora. The keywords were selected from lexical words that corresponded to recurrent themes observed in the sub-corpora. To ensure analytical transparency and avoid subjective cherry-picking, the subset of keywords chosen for Concordance Analysis was filtered according to three explicit, replicable criteria. First, items were required to meet a minimum absolute frequency threshold of 2 within their respective sub-corpus to ensure structural presence across texts. Second, items were evaluated for semantic relevance to the core research themes (i.e., supply-chain governance, environmental sustainability, labor ethics, and geographical provenance; see Section 4). Third, purely functional linguistic items, grammatical markers, and generic non-domain-specific adjectives (e.g., standard intensifiers or general evaluative terms lacking thematic specificity) were excluded. This systematic filtering yielded the targeted lexical items analyzed in detail in Section 4 below.

7 Part-of-Speech (POS) consists in automatically assigning a grammatical category (e.g., noun, verb, adjective, modifier) to each token in a text (Kilgariff et al. 2014).

4 Findings

4.1 Keyword Analysis

For space constraints, not all the keywords extracted can be shown here: Table 3 and Table 4 show only the keywords used for the Concordance Analysis. In both Tables, the column 'Keyword' contains the keyword analyzed; 'Frequency' indicates the number of hits in the sub-corpus; 'Relative frequency' indicates the normalized frequency calculated automatically restricting it for the specific sub-corpus and in proportion to its size; KS indicates the 'Keyness Score'. In Table 3, moreover, translations into English are provided after each keyword in Italian, except when they originally occurred in English in the sub-corpus.⁸

Table 3 Keywords used for concordance analysis (Italian sub-corpus)

Keyword	Frequency	Relative frequency	KS
agroforestazione (lit. agroforestry – n.)	5	866,25085	856,161
deforestazione (lit. deforestation)	11	1905,75195	834,068
coltivatore (lit. farmer)	21	3638,25366	819,666
piantagione (lit. plantation)	12	2079,0022	464,027
farming	3	519,75055	380,634
sustainable	4	693,00067	344,432
earthworm	2	346,50034	342,731
tracciabilità (lit. traceability)	9	1559,25159	323,402
idrogenazione (lit. hydrogenation)	2	346,50034	304,936
coltivatori (lit. farmers)	2	346,50034	303,743
approvvigionamento (lit. supply)	10	1732,50171	225,291
tracciabile (lit. traceable)	2	346,50034	217,419
minorile (lit. minor – adj.)	6	1039,5011	184,442
filiera (lit. supply chain)	19	3291,75317	176,226
redditività (lit. profitability)	1	173,25017	173,7
coltivazioni (lit. crops)	1	173,25017	160,373
sostenibilità (lit. sustainability)	22	3811,50391	159,27
agroforestali (lit. agroforestry – adj.)	1	173,25017	153,884
deodorare (lit. [soil] deodorization)	1	173,25017	145,726
erbicida (lit. herbicide)	1	173,25017	130,723
disboscare (lit. deforestation)	1	173,25017	128,583

⁸ Keywords in Tables 3 and 4 and the Examples in the Concordance Analysis were not edited; thus, non-standard spellings and/or typographical errors present in the original website source texts have been retained *verbatim*.

mugnai (lit. millers)	1	173,25017	116,969
eradicare (lit. eradicate)	1	173,25017	115,886
resiliente (lit. resilient)	1	173,25017	113,847
conservation	1	173,25017	110,311
emisfero (lit. hemisphere)	3	519,75055	108,141
disboscamento (lit. deforestation)	1	173,25017	106,754
coltivazione (lit. cultivation)	14	2425,50244	106,3

Table 4 Keywords used for concordance analysis (English sub-corpus)

Item	Frequency	Relative frequency	Score
traceability	11	1693,08911	800,388
agroforestry	5	769,58594	494,496
deforestation	10	1539,17188	482,342
hydrogenation	3	461,75159	378,327
smallholder	5	769,58594	373,503
recyclable	6	923,50317	311,39
agrifarms	2	307,83438	308,824
campania	2	307,83438	244,154
lazio	2	307,83438	183,437
earthworm	2	307,83438	174,977
traceable	2	307,83438	173,269
mauritius	3	461,75159	159,228
orchard	7	1077,42029	154,653
cultivation	8	1231,33752	152,85
rainforest	5	769,58594	152,036
deodorise	1	153,91719	150,302
value-chain	1	153,91719	146,023
child-centered	1	153,91719	142,444
non-certified	1	153,91719	141,766
plants	3	461,75159	121,324
unmistakable	2	307,83438	119,198
sustainable	35	5387,10156	118,638
piedmont	2	307,83438	118,343
sustainably	2	307,83438	114,268
recycle	8	1231,33752	113,458
agronomist	1	153,91719	111,913
foodborne	1	153,91719	106,798
eco-system	1	153,91719	106,316
chile	7	1077,42029	106,249
remediate	1	153,91719	106,046
farmer	35	5387,10156	104,332
multi-stakeholder	1	153,91719	103,566
auditing	2	307,83438	100,417

An analysis of the keywords selected for Concordance Analysis suggests how Nutella® appears to strategically balance corporate advocacy and marketing-driven glocalization depending on its target audience. In the Italian sub-corpus [tab. 3], the highest-ranking keywords exhibit an intense focus on structural supply chain integrity, labor dynamics, and environmental risk management, as evidenced by terms such as *agroforestazione*, *deforestazione*, *coltivatore*, and *filiera*. The presence of terminology from other domains such as *minorile* (administration) and *redditività* (business and finance) suggests that Nutella®'s corporate discourse in its home market directly confronts sensitive, high-stakes supply chain issues. For instance, the presence of these keywords may indicate reference to broader industry concerns, such as the EFSA evaluations on contaminants in palm oil,⁹ to which Ferrero responded by mitigating health risks and lowering thermal processing temperatures,¹⁰ while simultaneously launching the so-called '*Progetto Nocciola Italia*' (lit. 'Project Hazelnut Italy') to reduce reliance on Turkish hazelnut imports.¹¹ The reference to workers, their age and working conditions may also be interpreted as a defense against allegations and a hint at solutions enacted by the company¹² to reinforce the brand's image and maintain trust among its consumer base (Amine 1998; Keller 1999). However, in the Italian sub-corpus, we also notice localized agricultural terms (e.g., *mugnai*, *erbicida*, *disboscamento*) that seem to construct an image of transparent corporate advocacy designed to safeguard brand trust and tradition among an audience intimately familiar with the brand's origins.

On the other hand, the English sub-corpus [tab. 4] shows preference for keywords that seem to frame glocalization and focus on the brand's action-oriented commitments. For instance, this is indicated by keywords such as *traceability*, *sustainable*, *recyclable* alongside geographic markers (*Campania*, *Lazio*, *Piedmont*, *Chile*, *Mauritius*). It is interesting to notice that these placenames were not present in the list of keywords for the Italian sub-corpus, not even in the lowest-ranking positions. Their presence in the English sub-corpus, therefore, may suggest a corporate effort to provide international consumers with verifiable provenance to mitigate anti-consumption skepticism

9 Please check the following link: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/180110>.

10 Please check the following link: <https://www.reuters.com/article/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/nutella-maker-fights-back-on-palm-oil-after-cancer-risk-study-idUSKBN14V0MG/>.

11 Please check the following link: <https://channels.ft.com/en/foodrevolution/hazelnut-sourcing-spreads-discontent-for-italys-nutella/>.

12 Please check the following link: <https://www.osservatoriodiritti.it/2020/09/16/ferrero-lavoro/>.

regarding raw materials, while simultaneously referencing specific Italian regions alongside global hubs to discursively link traditional Italian 'heritage' with an international supply chain model. Traceability systems, in fact, serve as a critical corporate mechanism to eliminate information asymmetry between producers and skeptical consumers, transforming credence attributes (such as ethical sourcing) into verifiable facts (Aung, Chang 2014). In the English sub-corpus in particular, Nutella® appears to focus in particular on the traceability of its supply chain and the local origin of its ingredients; this may be used by the brand to connect its strategy of disclosing a transparent supply chain with the perception of the product's authenticity (Duong 2024), reassuring ethically conscious global markets about the quality of its product while ensuring at the same time its international consumers' trust (Garaus, Treiblmaier 2021).

4.2 Concordance Analysis

The Concordance Analysis of these keywords produced a total of 158 concordances for the keywords in the Italian sub-corpus, and 175 concordances for the keywords in the English sub-corpus.

The qualitative Concordance Analysis of the Italian sub-corpus can be conducted by grouping together semantically aligned keywords into distinct conceptual clusters. This method suggests specific communicative patterns revolving around themes such as institutional accountability, structural risk mitigation, and socio-environmental ethical management. The first semantic cluster that could be identified is represented by keywords such as *filiera* (19 occurrences), *approvvigionamento* (10 occurrences), *tracciabilità* (9 occurrences), *tracciabile* (2 occurrences).¹³

1) Ci impegniamo per migliorare costantemente e garantire l'approvvigionamento responsabile delle nostre materie prime lungo tutta la filiera (lit. We are committed to continuous improvement and to ensuring the responsible sourcing of our raw materials throughout the entire supply chain).

2) Nutella® è il risultato degli sforzi quotidiani di ogni singolo individuo lungo la filiera (lit. Nutella® is the result of the daily efforts of every single person throughout the supply chain).

13 The examples provided in this Section are all representative instances of the corresponding concordances found by Sketch Engine in the sub-corpus for that specific keyword. For this reason, only one example is provided for each keyword to illustrate its usage in the corresponding sub-corpus. The examples were selected by using the first concordance for each keyword.

3) In altri paesi, invece, è stato più semplice raggiungere alti livelli di tracciabilità (lit. In other countries, however, it has been easier to achieve high levels of traceability).

4) L'olio di palma che utilizziamo per produrre Nutella® è 100% sostenibile, tracciabile fino ai mulini e proviene principalmente dalla Malesia (lit. The palm oil we use to make Nutella® is 100% sustainable, traceable all the way back to the mills, and comes mainly from Malaysia).

Examples (1) to (4) show how these keywords collocate with evaluative modifiers such as *responsabile* (Example 1), *alti livelli* (Example 3), and *sostenibile* (Example 4). By referring to the management of a transparent supply chain, the Italian sub-corpus appears to discursively frame the production process as a highly structured and transparent one that can be verified by the consumers, thus increasing their trust in the brand itself (Sakthivel et al. 2024).

The second cluster focuses on agro-ecological management and the prevention of deforestation. It is represented by keywords such as *deforestazione* (10 occurrences), *disboscamento* (1 occurrence), *agroforestazione* (5 occurrences), *agroforestali* (1 occurrence), *piantagioni* (11 occurrences), *coltivazione* (11 occurrences).

5) 100% certificato RSPO e derivante da pratiche con obiettivo zero deforestazione (lit. 100% RSPO-certified and sourced from practices aimed at zero deforestation).

6) No al disboscamento aree con valori elevati di stock di carbonio (lit. No to deforestation in areas with high carbon stocks)

7) L'agroforestazione è un sistema di gestione delle risorse dinamico ed ecologico (lit. Agroforestry is a dynamic and ecological resource management system).

8) 5,4 milioni di alberi non da cacao, a sostegno dei progetti agroforestali (lit. 5.4 million non-cocoa trees to support agroforestry projects).

9) Attraverso questo sistema, il nostro olio di palma può essere tracciato fino ai mulini, garantendo che non provenga da piantagioni soggette alla deforestazione (lit. Through this system, our palm oil can be traced back to the mills, ensuring that it does not come from plantations involved in deforestation).

10) il miglioramento delle loro [delle popolazioni locali] condizioni di vita e incentivare pratiche di coltivazione sostenibili (lit.

improving their [local populations'] living conditions and encouraging sustainable farming practices).

In Examples (5) to (10), the brand seems to link its communicative strategies to expressions typical of environmental discourse in concrete land-management initiatives (Steffensen, Fill 2014). In these examples, the keywords co-occur with action-oriented premodifiers and goal-directed targets such as *obiettivo zero deforestazione* (Example 5), *sostegno ai progetti agroforestali* (Example 8), and *pratiche [...] sostenibili* (Example 10), projecting active ecological intervention rather than abstract greenwashing (de Freitas Netto 2020).

The second cluster, however, still contains keywords that refer to more abstract processes. In the third cluster, we can include keywords whose semantic content partially overlaps with that of the second cluster but refers to more concrete actors and concepts. This cluster, in fact, includes keywords that address socio-economic governance, labor rights, and community welfare, and is represented by keywords such as *coltivatori/coltivatore* (hence the partial overlap with the second cluster; 22 occurrences), *minorile* (6 occurrences), and *redditività* (1 occurrence).

11) migliorare le condizioni di vita dei coltivatori e delle loro comunità e promuovere pratiche sostenibili per proteggere le risorse naturali (lit. improve the living conditions of farmers and their communities and promote sustainable practices to protect natural resources).

12) ciò significa adottare misure per contrastare il lavoro minorile e migliorare l'accesso all'istruzione e alle risorse primarie (lit. this means taking steps to combat child labor and improve access to education and basic resources).

13) creare un equilibrio tra le questioni sociali e ambientali da un lato e la redditività dall'altro (lit. striking a balance between social and environmental issues on the one hand and profitability on the other).

Examples (11) to (13) illustrate how the keywords appear to reflect a corporate discourse of protection and institutional intervention alongside markers such as *migliorare* (Example 11), *misure per contrastare* (Example 12), *creare un equilibrio* (Example 13) that suggest the brand's active role in supporting the countries from which it sources its ingredients, thereby answering allegations (see Section 4.1) and building consumer trust, as already seen in the second cluster.

Concerning the English sub-corpus, as already noticed for the Keyword Analysis, some similarities but also some differences could be found in the Concordance Analysis. In this case, four semantic clusters could be identified for the English sub-corpus, whose communicative strategies appear to be oriented toward transparent globalization, brand provenance, socio-ecological responsibility, and circular economy commitments.

The first semantic cluster that could be identified seems to focus on geographic traceability and is represented by keywords such as *traceability* (10 occurrences), *traceable* (2 occurrences), *Piedmont* (2 occurrences), *Lazio* (2 occurrences), *Campania* (2 occurrences), *Chile* (7 occurrences), *Mauritius* (3 occurrences), *Agrifarms* (2 occurrences), *value-chain* (1 occurrence).

14) In **Chile** and the USA, for example, Ferrero has achieved full **traceability**.

15) The palm oil we use in Nutella® is 100% sustainable palm oil, **traceable** back to the mills.

16) this fruit goes back to its roots in Italy, as supply can also be found in **Piedmont**.

17) historically this has been in the regions of **Piedmont, Lazio and Campania**, therefore taking care of the sustainable value chain development and preservation in these areas is key.

19) to improve and enhance the economic, environmental and social sustainability of small sugarcane producers in **Mauritius**.

20) Ferrero has established hazelnut farms (**Agrifarms**) in Chile, Argentina, South Africa and Australia.

21) we will continue working to strengthen our cocoa sustainability program with a positive and lasting impact on the cocoa **value-chain**.

Examples (14) to (21) illustrate how Nutella®, in the web pages in English, appears to discursively connect historical brand heritage with a globalized supply chain: domestic Italian placenames are collocated with brand identity and heritage preservation (Examples 16 and 17), whereas international sourcing locations seem to be framed around verified provenance and full supply-chain transparency to reassure consumers regarding raw materials (Examples 14, 15, and 20). The shared element in these examples is the continued used of markers such as 'sustainability' and 'traceability' that, as already

seen in the Italian sub-corpus, may be interpreted as an attempt at addressing allegations and building consumer trust.

The second cluster appears to focus on agro-ecological management and forest protection and is represented by keywords such as *agroforestry* (5 occurrences), *deforestation* (9 occurrences), *rainforest* (5 occurrences), *cultivation* (8 occurrences), *orchards* (7 occurrences), *eco-systems* (1 occurrence).

22) Our ever-growing support to **agroforestry**. We encourage cocoa farmers to diversify their farms by mixing cocoa.

23) We are aware that the palm oil supply-chain faces environmental challenges, particularly concerning its impact on **deforestation**.

24) All the cocoa we buy for Nutella® comes from **Rainforest** Alliance Certified farms.

25) These criteria aim to enforce sustainable practices in the **cultivation** of palm oil.

26) The hazelnuts used in Nutella® come from hazelnut **orchards**, which are mainly found in Mediterranean type climates.

27) responsible sugarcane production creates lasting value for the people, communities, businesses, economies and **eco-systems** involved.

Similarly to the sub-corpus in Italian, the English sub-corpus appears to link the brand's environmental discourse to quantifiable conservation targets, collocating keywords with active commitments such as collaboration with local cocoa farmers (Example 22), and protecting specific environments (Examples 23, 24 and 27). Again, the common elements suggest the idea that the company is particularly aware of these issues and acts accordingly in the preservation of local biodiversity systems as well as sustainable cultivation practices.

The third cluster addresses welfare and human rights protection. It is represented by keywords such as *farmer/farmers* (34 occurrences), *smallholder/smallholders* (5 occurrences), and *child-centered* (1 occurrence).

28) Momboye Célestin, one of many cocoa **farmers** who have participated in **farmer** trainings organized by Ferrero's partner ECOOKIM.

29) The vast majority of the world's cocoa is produced by **smallholder** farmers, most of whom live in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

30) Remediation can vary from individualized support to children and parents to broader **child-centered** community development programs.

In this cluster, illustrated in Examples (28) to (29), keywords feature in contexts in which the brand describes its actions to support local communities in the field of education (Example 30), income enhancement (Example 28), and multi-stakeholder partnerships aimed at mitigating social risks in agricultural communities (Example 29). All these examples may be seen as the brand's intention of demonstrating its commitment to local communities, at the same time addressing allegations and building international consumers' trust (see Section 4.1.).

Finally, the fourth cluster shows semantic themes connected to circular economy, sustainable packaging, and processing integrity, as represented by keywords such as *recyclable* (6 occurrences), *recycle* (7 occurrences), *sustainable* (34 occurrences), and *hydrogenation* (3 occurrences).

31) The iconic Nutella® jar that preserves the delicious taste of Nutella® is **recyclable**.

32) our raw materials along our supply-chain, enhance the living conditions of farmers and their communities and foster **sustainable** practices to protect natural resources,

33) most importantly, it does not go through the **hydrogenation** process, which produces 'trans fats' that have been recognised by the authorities and the scientific world as particularly harmful to health.

Through the keywords representing the fourth cluster, the brand seems to emphasize its environmental commitment through the recyclable jar (Example 31). At the same time, it also appears to retain its usual role in terms of brand responsibility in the case of ingredient selection, workers' conditions, and supply chain (Example 32), while assuring food quality and safety through technical disclosures (Example 33). If the last two examples may be considered as a continuation of what was interpreted as an answer to allegations and strategies to build the international consumers' trust, already seen in the previous clusters and the keyword analysis (see Section 4.1), Example (31) and its reference to recycling add another element, namely, consideration for the environment at home. In this particular case, responsibility seems to be placed not only in Nutella's® hands, in providing a recyclable jar, but the brand appears to shift agency towards its consumers who are now solely responsible for the actual

recycling of the jar. This may in turn be interpreted as a strategy to enhance the brand's own image in order to construct a more favorable corporate image through building a sense of community involvement by means of recycling behavior (Rondinelli, Berry 2000; Mee, Clewes 2004).

Beyond the lexical and semantic clustering, a discourse analysis perspective reveals a few patterns of agency and nominalization across both sub-corpora. For instance, corporate commitments seem to be predominantly constructed through first-person plural agency ('ci impegniamo' in Example 1, and 'we will continue working' in Example 21), framing Ferrero as an active, ethically driven institutional leader company taking direct responsibility for sustainable governance (Klettner, Clarke, Boersma 2013). Goal-oriented dynamic verbs are also used to convey agency, as in 'garantire' in Example 1, or 'enforce' in Example 25, which present corporate commitments not as abstract aspirational ideals, but as concrete, active institutional practices designed to instill trust.

Finally, systemic socio-environmental challenges appear to be expressed through nominalization (e.g., 'deforestazione' in Example 5 or 'lavoro minorile' in Example 12, and 'deforestation' in Example 23) or through passive constructions (e.g., 'piantagioni soggette alla deforestazione' in Example 9). This grammatical shift seems to strategically dissociate the brand from original industry-related damages while foregrounding its voluntary interventions.

5 Discussion of Results: Negotiating Heritage, Globalized Traceability, and Corporate Advocacy

The Keyword and Concordance Analyses conducted in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 have provided quantitative and qualitative data to understand how Nutella® discursively constructs its brand discourse on its web pages in English and in Italian. Both parts of the analysis have clearly indicated that instances of corporate advocacy emerge in both languages.

Management and marketing studies have defined corporate advocacy as the explicit public promotion of social, environmental, or political causes by a commercial enterprise, extending beyond traditional brand promotion to position the firm as an active, responsible institutional actor within societal governance (Dodd, Supa 2014; Wettstein, Baur 2016). In the consumer goods sector, and especially in the global food industry, corporate advocacy has become an essential instrument to address consumers' scrutiny, supply chain controversies, and anti-consumption skepticism regarding raw material sourcing, environmental degradation, and fair labor standards (Du et al. 2010).

By contrasting the results of the qualitative analyses of the Italian and the English sub-corpora, corpus data suggests that Nutella® does not necessarily adopt a unified approach to corporate advocacy. Instead, the brand appears to strategically implement 'glocalization' – i.e., the integration of global corporate standards with localized cultural expectations (Sorge 2005) – to express distinct modes of corporate advocacy tailored to the socio-cultural expectations of each market segment (Robertson 1995). In the 'domestic' Italian sub-corpus, in fact, keywords seem to be directly linked to structural supply-chain governance, agricultural labor dynamics, and socio-economic risk management indicated a more localized, defensive stance of corporate advocacy (Bochenek 2019). This may be interpreted as reflecting the fact that domestic consumers in Italy possess a historically longer and culturally deeper connection with the brand Nutella®, which is considered not only a cultural symbol but also an emblem of national industrial pride (Padovani 2004; Cesiri 2025). Consequently, in its home market, corporate advocacy appears to rely less on superficial branding or generalized environmental slogans; instead, it seems to prefer explicit socio-agricultural disclosures and potential reputational vulnerabilities associated with raw material extraction, labor fairness, and child protection in global supply chains. By employing explicit, specialized agricultural terminology (as shown in Examples 5 to 8), discourse in the Italian sub-corpus seems to be grounded in the brand's transparency and detailed socio-agricultural governance. This strategy aligns with what Du et al. (2010) describe as legitimization through concrete corporate social responsibility substance, where corporate advocacy acts as an institutional shield designed to preserve brand heritage and the trust of domestic stakeholders in the face of allegations (see Section 4.1).

On the other hand, the English sub-corpus suggests a slightly different market context where Nutella® needs to construct global brand legitimacy (Huang, Shi, Deng 2026) among international consumers who may view the product primarily through the lens of a global brand rather than a domestic heritage icon (Cova, Pace 2006). In fact, in the English sub-corpus the concepts of systemic transparency, standardized circularity, and geographical origin appear to prevail. From a corporate advocacy perspective, this emphasis on traceability may function as a proactive communicative countermeasure against anti-consumption sentiment, particularly surrounding the allegations discussed in Section 4.1. regarding controversial ingredients such as palm oil and imported hazelnuts (Aung, Chang 2014; Garaus, Treiblmaier 2021). By emphasizing the verifiable provenance of Nutella®'s ingredients and raw materials, the English sub-corpus appears to address the skepticism of international consumers through the institutional language of supply-chain mapping (Muratore, Marques 2022). Furthermore, the explicit

inclusion of Italian regional placenames alongside foreign, exotic production locations may be an attempt at discursively connecting traditional Italian heritage with an international, multi-origin supply model (Urde, Greyser, Balmer 2007). In doing so, Nutella®'s corporate advocacy in English-speaking – or generally international – markets could be used to frame sustainability not as an isolated local duty, but as a globally coordinated, standardized model (*ibid.*).

6 Conclusions

This study has shown that, while the two analyzed sub-corpora seemed to fulfil expectations in terms of corporate advocacy, they also appeared to implement it through fundamentally different discursive strategies. In the Italian sub-corpus, Nutella® appeared to ground its discourse in legitimizing its socio-agricultural governance and demonstrating ethical accountability to protect the brand's connection to the national heritage. In the English sub-corpus, on the other hand, the brand seemed to focus on glocalization by blending symbolic Italian origin markers with globally recognized sustainability and verifiable traceability standards in order to establish brand authority in the international market.

The study also shows some limitations represented by the limited size of the corpus. In addition, the study has considered only the verbal component of the web pages and only some of their sections. Future research will further expand this investigation, by analyzing the visual component of the website (in both its English and Italian versions, since no other language versions are available). Moreover, other Nutella®-related products could be included as well as other Ferrero products. Finally, other media could also be added to the analysis (e.g., the company's social media platforms), while comparative analyses could include similar brands originating in Italy or in other countries.

Notwithstanding the limitations already observed, the analysis conducted in this study contributes to research on corporate advocacy by showing that effective corporate advocacy in digital brand communication is inherently contextual: global brand legitimacy can be achieved not through standardized, uniform messaging, but through culturally aligning corporate disclosure with the specific expectations, and heritage connections of distinct audiences.

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Constructing Guilt-Free Indulgence

Discourses of Plant-Based and Cultivated Meat Marketing

Gianmarco Vignozzi
Università di Pisa, Italy

Abstract This paper examines how plant-based and cultivated meat are constructed in the promotional web discourse of twelve alternative-protein companies. Using corpus-assisted discourse analysis, it explores how brands combine sensory pleasure with ethical responsibility. Both product categories promote guilt-free indulgence, but through different strategies: plant-based brands normalize novelty through taste, familiarity, and lifestyle, whereas cultivated-meat brands legitimize it through science, safety, and animal-welfare claims. The findings show how marketing makes ethical consumption pleasurable, desirable, and compatible with eating practices.

Keywords Corpus-assisted discourse analysis. Evaluation. Plant-based meat. Cultivated meat. Guilt-free indulgence.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Background. – 3 Data and Methodology. – 4 Discourse Strands for Plant-Based Meat. – 5 Discourse strands for cultivated meat. – 6 Evaluative adjectives: taste-first and conscience-first patterns. – 7 Discussion. – 8 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

Alternative proteins, sometimes referred to as ‘novel meats’, have become a highly visible component of contemporary food culture. Plant-based burgers, sausages, mince, chicken pieces, seafood substitutes, and, more recently, even cultivated meat prototypes, are no longer presented only as niche products for vegetarians or vegans. They are promoted as attractive options for meat lovers, flexitarians, younger consumers, restaurants, but also food-service operators, investors, regulators, and environmentally conscious families. The ever-growing consumption of these novel foods has been linked to health, environmental, ethical, technological, and economic factors (Lindberg et al. 2022; Broucke et al. 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic also intensified attention to meat supply chains and to the vulnerability of conventional animal agriculture, creating further space for alternative protein brands to present themselves as part of a new food future.

The linguistic question raised by this development is not simply how these products are named, but rather how they are made meaningful to the potential consumers. Plant-based meat and cultivated meat both have to solve a marketing problem. They must persuade consumers that a product which is new, unfamiliar, or technically complex can still satisfy ordinary desires for taste, convenience, fullness, tradition, and social pleasure. At the same time, they must connect the product with much broader ethical claims, such as a lower environmental impact, less harm to animals, improved health, greater food security, or safer production. This double task makes the promotion rather challenging and complex. The brands must make their products seem morally better than conventional meat, but not less enjoyable. They must ask consumers to change, while also promising that little or nothing needs to be sacrificed. This paper elaborates on this tension through the idea of ‘guilt-free indulgence’. This expression captures a recurring discursive pattern in the corpus of texts under analysis, through which meat alternatives are marketed as products that allow people to continue enjoying meat-like foods while avoiding, reducing, or symbolically managing the guilt associated with conventional meat consumption.

More specifically, the study addresses two research questions. First, what are the main similarities and differences between the framing of plant-based and cultivated meat? Second, how are discourses around ethics and indulgence combined in the marketing language of ‘novel meats’? These questions are explored through a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of promotional web texts coming from twelve leading international alternative-protein brands whose websites provide English-language content. Quantitative evidence is used to identify salient lexical patterns, while qualitative close

reading is used to interpret how these patterns work in context. The paper does not evaluate whether the brands' claims are scientifically true or whether consumers accept them. Its aim is discursive: to examine how language constructs products as desirable, responsible, familiar, innovative, and morally attractive.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 outlines the theoretical background, focusing on the concepts of alternative hedonism, ethical luxury, and evaluation in discourse. Section 3 describes the corpus and method. Sections 4 and 5 present the main discourse strands in the plant-based and cultivated subcorpora. Section 6 focuses on evaluative adjectives, because adjectives are central to the way these products are made appetizing, trustworthy, or morally attractive. Section 7 discusses the findings in relation to guilt-free indulgence and the research questions. The conclusion summarizes the contribution and suggests directions for future research, especially multimodal work on images, colors, typography, and webpage layout.

2 Theoretical Background

A central concept to frame the analysis carried out below is that of alternative hedonism. In consumer research, alternative hedonism describes a form of consumption in which pleasure and ethical concern are not treated as opposites. Caruana, Glozer and Eckhardt (2020, 143) argue that contemporary moral markets increasingly allow consumers to experience "morality and pleasure concurrently". This is important for alternative protein marketing because the consumer is rarely asked to give up pleasure in a heroic or ascetic way. Instead, the consumer is told that pleasure can be redesigned. A burger can remain juicy, a chicken piece can remain tender, and seafood can remain premium, while the social and environmental costs attached to conventional production are reduced or removed.

Recent work on veganism and dietary conflict also helps frame the present study. Nacchia (2023) shows, from a socio-cognitive discourse analysis of YouTube comments on vegan, vegetarian, reducetarian, and meat-eating groups, that eating practices are not only market choices but also social identities and moral positions. This is relevant because alternative protein brands speak to consumers in a field already shaped by moralization, intergroup tension, and anxiety about judgement. The point is supported by research on politicized diet as social identity (Chuck, Fernandes, Hyers 2016), dietarian identity (Rosenfeld, Burrow 2018), and the moralization of meat consumption (Feinberg et al. 2019). It also connects with work on bias and negative attitudes between meat eaters and meat avoiders (MacInnis, Hodson 2017; Bagci, Rosenfeld, Uslu 2022; Pabian et al. 2023). Finally, Piazza et al.'s (2015) account of the '4Ns' (i.e., the idea that meat consumption

is often rationalized as ‘natural’, ‘normal’, ‘necessary’, and ‘nice’) is especially useful for the present analysis. Novel meat marketing does not simply reject these four rationalizations. It often reworks them by presenting alternatives as equally nice, increasingly normal, nutritionally necessary or sufficient, and ethically more acceptable.

Another pivotal concept for this study is that of ethical luxury. Athwal et al. (2019) discuss sustainable luxury marketing as a field in which exclusivity, quality, status, and ethical responsibility can be combined. This idea is usually applied to sectors such as fashion, travel, cosmetics, and high-end lifestyle products. In food marketing, it is less often discussed, but it is nonetheless relevant. Many novel meat brands do not simply present themselves as substitutes for ordinary meat. They present themselves as upgraded, future-facing, first-rate, or technologically superior versions of meat. For example, Mosa Meat, one of the companies whose website was used to compile the corpus under analysis here, speaks of real beef that “oozes and sizzles with real fats and juices” while also being kinder to animals and the planet. These are not only claims about substitution, but they are claims about a better, more refined, more responsible form of pleasure. In this study, ‘guilt-free indulgence’ functions as an analytic label developed from recurrent patterns in the corpus, rather than as a predefined category imported from the literature. It captures the discursive association of sensory enjoyment with claims of reduced harm and ethical responsibility. Alternative hedonism and ethical luxury inform the interpretation of this pattern, without determining the individual discourse strands identified through the corpus-assisted procedure. The term thus connects the empirical findings to a broader interpretation of how promotional discourse reconciles pleasure and responsibility.

A third concept central to the linguistic analysis is evaluation. Hunston (2010) defines evaluation as the expression of attitude, stance, value, and judgement by means of language. In marketing discourse, evaluation is central because products must be positioned as good, desirable, useful, safe, innovative, or morally preferable, thus making ample use of different aspects of evaluation. It therefore goes without saying that evaluative adjectives such as ‘delicious’, ‘juicy’, ‘ethical’, ‘cruelty-free’, etc. are not neutral descriptors as they contribute to framing what consumers are clearly invited to notice. Moreover, they also attach affect to products. For instance, ‘a juicy burger’ activates appetite; ‘a cruelty-free meat product’ activates conscience; ‘a clean production environment’ activates reassurance. The present study, therefore, treats evaluative adjectives as powerful signals of broader discourse strategies that need a more critical evaluation.

The analysis also draws on corpus-assisted discourse studies, or CADS. CADS combines quantitative corpus tools with qualitative discourse analysis (Partington, Duguid, Taylor 2013; Baker et al.

2008; Baker, Gabrielatos, McEnery 2013). Corpus tools can reveal lexical patterns that are difficult to see through close reading alone, such as collocations, unusually frequent words, and contrasting keyness across subcorpora. (Critical) discourse analysis can then explain why these patterns matter socially and rhetorically (for an overview of Critical Discourse Studies, see Wodak, Meyer 2015). This combination is useful for studying marketing and corporate texts because promotional and business discourse is often strategic, conventionalized, and characterized by recurrent evaluative patterns (Bhatia 2004; Delin 2005; Crawford Camiciottoli 2018).

3 Data and Methodology

The corpus was built from the websites of twelve international alternative-protein brands whose websites provide English-language content. It was then divided into two subcorpora: one for plant-based meat and one for cultivated meat. The plant-based subcorpus includes Beyond Meat, Impossible Foods, THIS, Meati, Daring Foods, and Moving Mountains. The cultivated subcorpus, instead, includes Upside Foods, GOOD Meat, Vow Foods, BlueNalu, Mosa Meat, and Believer Meats. The text types retrieved from the websites of these companies include product descriptions, mission statements, FAQs, blog posts, food-service pages, press releases, and related brand materials. Tables 1 and 2 offer an overview of the corpus compiled.

Table 1 Corpus overview

Subcorpus	Companies	Sketch Engine tokens	Number of documents
Plant-based meat	6	91,210	33
Cultivated meat	6	60,696	34
Total	12	151,906	67

Table 2 Brands included in the corpus

Company	Origin	Subcorpus	Website
Beyond Meat	USA	Plant-based	https://www.beyondmeat.com
Impossible Foods	USA	Plant-based	https://impossiblefoods.com
THIS	UK	Plant-based	https://this.co
Meati	USA	Plant-based	https://meati.com
Daring Foods	USA	Plant-based	https://www.daring.com
Moving Mountains	UK	Plant-based	https://www.movingmountainsfoods.com
Upside Foods	USA	Cultivated	https://upsidefoods.com

Company	Origin	Subcorpus	Website
GOOD Meat (Eat Just)	USA	Cultivated	https://www.goodmeat.com
Vow Foods	Australia	Cultivated	https://www.vowfood.com
BlueNalu	USA	Cultivated	https://www.bluenalu.com
Mosa Meat	The Netherlands	Cultivated	https://mosameat.com
Believer Meats	USA	Cultivated	https://www.believermeats.com

As can be seen, the plant-based subcorpus contains six companies, 91,210 tokens and 33 documents; the cultivated-meat subcorpus contains six companies, 60,696 tokens and 34 documents. The total corpus comprises 151,906 tokens in 67 documents.

From a procedural point of view, the analysis followed a corpus-assisted procedure. First, the corpus was uploaded to Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014) and divided into the two subcorpora. Second, each subcorpus was compared against the other in order to identify distinctive keywords and key two-word expressions. The analysis used frequency and log-likelihood keyness scores to identify salient items. Third, keywords and key multi-word expressions were grouped manually into different discourse strands. A strand was considered as such when at least five words or two-word expressions pointed to the same broader framing. Potentially overlapping items were assigned according to their dominant contextual function as established through concordance analysis. For example, an item referring to an ingredient was classified under health and nutrition when it primarily foregrounded nutritional value, and under naturalness when it emphasized simplicity, purity, or proximity to nature. Where these functions were closely intertwined, as in the plant-based subcorpus, the corresponding strands were interpreted jointly. Concordance lines were thus examined closely so that classification reflected contextual use rather than decontextualized lexical meaning alone. Finally, evaluative adjectives (see Hunston 2010 for the notion of evaluation) referring to the products were extracted through the Sketch Engine wordlist feature and the ten most frequent items in each subcorpus were then examined qualitatively.

4 Discourse Strands for Plant-Based Meat

Generally speaking, the plant-based subcorpus is characterized by a discourse of normalization. Plant-based products are repeatedly positioned as familiar meat foods that happen to be made differently, in a better way. Therefore, the promotional challenge for these brands is mainly to reduce the distance between a plant-based product and the consumer's existing food routines. The product must not appear

strange, clinical, or morally austere. Instead, it is presented as a burger, sausage, hot dog, mince, cutlet, chicken piece, or beef product that fits existing meals and existing desires. From the analysis of the first fifty keywords for this subcorpus, five major discourse strands emerge, namely: i) brand identity and market familiarity; ii) meat equivalence; iii) nutritional ingredients and health rhetoric; iv) naturalness; v) trend and lifestyle alignment. Table 3 introduces the keywords and key two-word expressions that constitute these five strands. Each item is listed with its absolute frequency and, between round brackets, with its keyness score.

Table 3 Main plant-based discourse strands and selected salient items

Discourse strand	Selected key items with frequency and keyness score
Brand identity and market familiarity	beyond meat 210 (2,303.3); meati 180 (1,974.4); beyond burger 110 (1,207.0); THIS meat 57 (625.9); daring foods 49 (538.2); impossible beef 42 (461.5)
Meat equivalence	mince 52 (571.1); cutlet 48 (527.2); ground beef 41 (450.5); hot dog 39 (428.6); plant-based chicken 35 (384.7); burger patty 18 (198.3)
Health rhetoric and nutritional ingredients	pea protein 48 (527.2); soy protein 43 (472.4); nutrient-packed 26 (286.1); vitamin 18 (198.3); protein concentrate 18 (198.3); dietary fiber 16 (176.4)
Naturalness	plants 52 (571.1); natural 20 (220.3); natural flavors 17 (187.4); minimal processing 16 (198.3); earth-friendly 13 (143.5); simple ingredient 12 (132.9)
Trend and lifestyle alignment	Gen Z 22 (242.2); KFC 19 (428.6); Starbucks 17 (483.4); Pizza Hut 12 (461.5); balanced lifestyle 19 (198.3); positive choice 11 (121.9)

4.1 Brand Identity and Market Familiarity

The first plant-based strand concerns brand identity. Items such as “Beyond Meat”, “Beyond Burger”, “Impossible beef”, “Meati”, “THIS meat” and “Daring Foods” occur with very high frequency and high keyness. This suggests a pattern in which the brand name becomes almost equivalent to the product category. In ordinary food language, consumers might say burger, mince, chicken, or hot dog. In this corpus, branded forms such as ‘Beyond Burger’ or Impossible Beef simply join the brand name to a familiar meat noun. The result is a hybrid lexical form that hints at novelty through the premodifier, while preserving recognizability through the noun that represents a traditional food category. This strategy is relevant because plant-based meat to be appealing must be made easy to understand. Hence, the brand does not ask consumers to learn an entirely new cuisine. It offers a branded version of a food they already know. For

example, Beyond Meat describes a burger that “looks, cooks, and satisfies like beef” (from Beyond Meat product page). This simple sentence contains three verbs of equivalence, “looks, cooks and satisfies”, through which the product is not only visually similar, but it is also usable in the same way and expected to produce the same bodily satisfaction as normal meat. In “Daring Foods” web page, the same logic appears in the claim that “Daring Plant Chicken looks, cooks, and tastes uncannily chicken-y” (Daring food service page). The adverb “uncannily” acknowledges imitation while turning both imitation and register humor into a strong selling point.

The branded meat expressions also create what can be called lexical naturalization in that repetition, reflected in the high frequency values, makes the new expressions feel ordinary. The high keyness of Beyond Meat and Beyond Burger is not only a statistical finding, but it indexes a marketing practice. The more often these names appear beside familiar food nouns, the more the brand becomes a possible everyday category. A consumer does not encounter an abstract plant protein product. They are instead faced with a burger, beef, chicken, mince, or hot dog with a recognizable brand identity attached to it.

4.2 Meat Equivalence and Mimetic Naming

The second plant-based strand is meat equivalence and mimetic naming. Words and word combinations such as “ground beef”, “minced beef”, “cutlet”, “hot dog”, “burger patty”, “plant-based chicken”, and “plant mince” show that plant-based products are named through the vocabulary of conventional meat. This is a clear mimetic strategy that reduces cognitive distance by mapping the alternative product onto pre-existing culinary forms. Hence, a consumer does not have to imagine a new food practice, they can just imagine replacing one ingredient in a familiar recipe with a comparable, almost identical, one.

The corpus contains many examples of this substitution logic. Daring Foods presents its product as “a true 1:1 swap in any dish” (Daring food-service page). Moving Mountains writes that its products are “made from plants for people who love meat, plants and everything in between” (Moving Mountains product page). The wording here is inclusive and transitional as it does not construct a strict opposition between meat eaters and plant-based eaters, instead, it addresses consumers who may occupy several positions at once such as flexitarians. The same brand describes “Plant-based beef you wouldn’t believe isn’t meat” (Moving Mountains landing page), which, again, foregrounds perceptual equivalence rather than real difference.

This mimetic framing also makes indulgence easier to preserve. If the product is still a burger, hot dog, mince, or chicken piece, the consumer is not being asked to move from pleasure to discipline. They are just being asked to move from one version of pleasure to another. This is why sensory and format-based language often co-occurs. Plant-based chicken tenders are, for example, described as “crispy and crunchy on the outside, and juicy and savory on the inside” (Beyond Meat blog). Such phrasing does not moralize the product first, but it makes the food appetizing first and then allows ethical or environmental value to sit behind the sensory appeal.

4.3 Health Rhetoric and Nutritional Ingredients, and Naturalness

The third and fourth plant-based strands concern respectively health rhetoric and nutritional ingredients and naturalness, which are neighboring semantic domains, hence they are treated together here. As for health rhetoric and nutritional ingredients, the keyword list contains ingredient related combinations such as “soy protein, pea protein, vitamin, protein concentrate”, and “dietary fiber”. These terms help build a technical but familiar nutritional frame. Unlike the cultivated subcorpus, for which technical vocabulary points toward cell culture and production environments, the plant-based technical vocabulary tends to point toward ingredients that consumers may recognize from food labels. The brands present plant-based meat not only as tasty, but also as protein-rich, nutrient-dense, cholesterol-free, or fiber-rich.

This pattern is visible in claims such as “100% plant-based, high in protein (THIS landing page) and packed with 19g of protein” (Beyond Meat blog). Meati’s materials describe its product as an “excellent source of complete protein” and connect mycelium mushroom to “earth-friendly nutrition” (Meati sell page; Meati about page). Daring Foods says its plant chicken is made from a “short list of simple ingredients” (Daring FAQ). Hence, these examples show how health and naturalness are combined. “Protein” functions as a performance claim, “simple ingredients” and “plants” are purity claims and, together, they position the product as both functional and morally clean.

As for naturalness, it is especially important because processed plant-based meat can be vulnerable to criticism as artificial or industrial. The corpus responds to this risk through keywords and expressions such as “plants, natural, natural flavors, minimal processing, simple ingredient, and earth-friendly”. Beyond Meat says its ingredients are “simple and made from plants” (Beyond Meat FAQ). Daring Foods refers to simple ingredients and a soy protein

base. Meati links mycelium to nature and whole-cut nutrition. These lexical choices create what may be called naturalness as a moral quality. Plant-based meat is framed as closer to the earth, less harmful, and more transparent than conventional meat. At the same time, naturalness does not replace indulgence, but it supports it. The consumer is reassured that the product can be enjoyable without becoming morally suspicious. In this sense, plant-based marketing frequently presents health and naturalness as enabling pleasures rather than restricting them. The message is not that consumers should eat the product because it is virtuous despite being less pleasurable. It is closer to a promise that the product is pleasurable and also supports a better lifestyle. This is a central mechanism of guilt-free indulgence in the plant-based subcorpus.

4.4 Trend, Lifestyle, and Mainstream Culture

The fifth plant-based strand links meat alternatives to lifestyle and mainstream culture. Keywords such as “KFC”, “Pizza Hut”, “Starbucks”, “Gen Z”, “balanced lifestyle”, “positive choice”, and “visionary” show that plant-based meat is presented as socially current, accessible, and culturally embedded. The presence of major food-service brands, such as “Starbucks” or “Pizza Hut”, matters because it positions plant-based products as normal options in ordinary public eating. They are not hidden in a specialist shop; they appear in chains, delivery menus, restaurants, and fast-food environments.

Beyond Meat’s material explicitly connects the product with large brands and with everyday lifestyle. One press-text example refers to consumers continuing to eat what they love “without compromising on taste, a balanced lifestyle or the environment” (Beyond Meat newsroom). The expression tells us as consumers that taste, lifestyle, and environment are placed side by side as compatible goals. Another Beyond Meat mission text states that “positive choices we make every day can have an impact”. This turns consumption into small-scale ethical agency where the consumer does not need to become an activist and choosing a product can be framed as a positive daily act.

The “Gen Z” references also help frame plant-based meat as future-facing and value-driven. Young consumers are often represented in marketing as more open to innovation, environmental concern, and flexible eating. In the corpus, the generational frame gives plant-based meat cultural momentum. It becomes not only a product but a sign of being modern, aware, and open to change. However, because the product remains tied to burgers, chicken, pizza, and fast-food chains, this modernity is not presented as radical disruption. It is more of a mainstream lifestyle adjustment.

5 Discourse Strands for Cultivated Meat

The cultivated meat subcorpus is generally characterized by a different problem. Unlike plant-based meat, cultivated meat is not primarily a plant-based imitation of meat. It is promoted as real meat produced through a new technological process. Its marketing, therefore, has to legitimize novelty, explain production, manage possible anxiety, and, in general, construct trust. This explains why the most salient strands concern i) technique and science, ii) safety and cleanliness, iii) ethics and animal welfare, iv) corporate or technological brand identity (Table 4).

Table 4 Main cultivated meat discourse strands and selected salient items

Discourse strand	Selected items with frequency and keyness score
Technique and science	cultivated 451 (7,431.5); cell 423 (104.4); cell-cultured 50 (824.8); feed 42 (693.0); bioreactor 22 (363.5); cultivator 22 (363.5); bioprocessing 19 (312.3)
Safety, control, and cleanliness	safety 61 (2.692); approval 42 (692.973); regulation 29 (8.578); controlled 25 (412.889); clean 11 (1.647); inspection 9 (149.28); sterile 6 (99.853)
Ethics and animal welfare	slaughter 37 (610.6); ethical 29 (478.8); conventionally grown 27 (445.8); conventionally farmed 11 (182.2); slaughter-free 10 (165.8); cruelty-free 9 (149.3)
Corporate/tech brand identity	BlueNalu 90 (1,483.8); Mosa 56 (923.6); Upside 51 (495.3); Vow 23 (379.9); Vowzer 7 (116.3)

5.1 Technique and Science

The most striking cultivated strand is the prominence of technical language. Words such as “cultivated”, “cell”, “cell-cultured”, “cell-based”, “bioreactor”, “cultivator”, “feed”, “processor”, “technology”, and “bioprocessing” foreground how the product is made. This is clearly a process-first lexicon and it differs from the plant-based subcorpus, where product names often reproduce conventional meat categories. Cultivated meat companies also use familiar food terms, but they repeatedly return to the production process because this process is the basis of the product’s novelty and legitimacy. Examples from the corpus show how companies simplify the science for non-specialist readers. Believer explains that “cultivated meat is grown directly from animal cells in a controlled environment” (Believer our meat page). GOOD Meat says, “We feed cells in a clean, sterile environment” (GOOD Meat process page). The technical explanation is also made accessible through familiar comparisons. For example, GOOD Meat’s FAQ describes production as taking place in a “safe

and controlled environment that looks like a beer brewery” (GOOD Meat FAQ). The brewery analogy is important because it translates biotechnology into a known food-production setting, hence making the process industrial but not alien.

The process vocabulary also creates a sort of discursive shift from agriculture to cultivation. Traditional meat is associated with farms, livestock, feedlots, slaughterhouses, and animal bodies. Cultivated meat replaces this field with cells, media, vessels, cell banks, bioreactors, and controlled environments. The word “cultivated” itself is central to this shift. It keeps a connection to growth and care, but it detaches meat production from raising and killing whole animals. In this sense, “cultivated” represents a strategic lexical substitution. It softens the laboratory frame while still signaling a certain innovation. Therefore, this scientific strand is not purely descriptive, but it also functions as reassurance. By explaining the process, companies claim transparency and by naming the equipment and stages, they suggest expertise. When they describe cells as fed, selected, grown, and harvested, they turn a potentially strange process into a manageable sequence. The reader is invited to trust not only the final product but the system that produces it.

5.2 Safety, Control, and Cleanliness

The second cultivated-meat strand is safety, control, and cleanliness. Words such as “approval”, “inspection”, “regulation”, “controlled”, “sterile”, “clean”, “cleaner”, and “safety” create a discourse of institutional and hygienic reassurance. This strand responds to a very likely consumer concern: if meat is produced through a new cellular process, is it safe? The marketing answer is to emphasize oversight, scientific testing, and clean production.

GOOD Meat’s process page states that because there is no slaughter, there is “no risk of fecal contamination or pathogens like *E. coli*” (GOOD Meat process page). This declaration clearly works through contrast. Conventional meat is associated with contamination risks, cultivated meat, instead, is associated with a cleaner process. Believer’s regulatory discussion similarly refers to products being “safe, sanitary, and properly labeled” (Believer blog). The three adjectives link safety to legal and institutional order. They do not simply say that the product tastes good, but they say that the product has been, or will be, checked, categorized, and approved.

Safety discourse is especially prominent in cultivated meat because the product’s novelty creates a need for explanation. Plant-based meat may be questioned for taste or processing, but consumers already understand plants as a safe food. On the contrary, cultivated meat asks consumers to accept animal cells grown outside

an animal's body. For this reason, safety and cleanliness become a pivotal part of the product's moral appeal. The product is not only kinder to animals, but it is also framed as more controlled, more transparent, and less exposed to some risks of conventional production. This is one of the reasons why cultivated meat discourse often sounds more institutional than plant-based discourse. It has to speak not only to casual consumers but also to regulators, investors, chefs, policymakers, and food-service professionals. Words like "approval", "pre-market consultation", "inspection", "framework", and "regulation" belong to a public legitimacy frame. The reader is thus encouraged to see cultivated meat as emerging from scientific governance rather than from mere novelty or experimentation.

5.3 Ethics and Animal Welfare

The third cultivated strand revolves around ethics. While plant-based discourse often uses softer ethical cues through plants, naturalness, and positive choice, cultivated meat discourse more directly names the ethical problem of conventional meat. The keyword list includes "slaughter", "slaughter-free", "cruelty-free", "ethical", "cruelty", "conventionally grown", and "conventionally farmed". These terms create a moral contrast between old and new systems of meat production.

GOOD Meat describes itself as "real meat, made without tearing down a forest or taking a life" (GOOD Meat about page). Believer states that "No animals are raised, harmed, or killed in the process" (Believer our meat page). These examples show how cultivated meat claims ethical superiority while keeping the category of meat. The product is not a vegetable alternative to meat, but it is real meat without the morally troubling parts of conventional meat production. This is a stronger form of guilt-free indulgence than the plant-based one because it addresses the guilt directly: taking life, slaughtering animals, and damaging the planet are explicitly named or implied.

The corpus also contains consumer-oriented phrases such as "buying cruelty-free meat and enjoy slaughter-free meat" (Believer blog). These expressions are significant because cruelty-free and slaughter-free directly modify meat. This particular expression is rhetorically powerful. It joins a term associated with animal bodies and appetite to terms associated with ethical relief. The phrase "cruelty-free meat" is almost paradoxical in conventional terms, because meat usually implies animal death. In cultivated marketing, the paradox is turned into the product's main promise.

Mosa Meat offers another version of this ethical frame. Its landing page speaks of "the world's kindest beef burger and of Feel-good indulgence" (Mosa Meat landing page). Its mission page states: "just

replace beef with beef” (Mosa Meat mission page). The message is that the behavior does not need to change dramatically: consumers can keep eating beef, but the process and moral meaning of beef can be redesigned. This is a clear way to express alternative hedonism, as pleasure is preserved, while the ethical conditions of that pleasure are just reimaged.

5.4 Corporate and Technological Brand Identity

The fourth cultivated strand concerns corporate and technological brand identity. Names such as “BlueNalu”, “Mosa”, “Vow”, and “Upside” do not sound like conventional meat products. They are abstract, future-oriented, and often closer to the language of start-ups, laboratories, or innovation platforms. This differs from plant-based brand expressions such as ‘Beyond Burger’ or “Impossible Beef”, which combine a brand name with a familiar meat category. Cultivated brands more often present themselves as agents of a more radical transformation.

BlueNalu’s landing page begins with “Indulge in a blue future” and describes the company as “reimagining the future of food” (BlueNalu landing page). It also uses the heading “Seafood without compromise” and promises “delicious seafood without taking fish out of the sea” (BlueNalu landing page). The language is clearly visionary and the product they produce and sell becomes a way of protecting ocean life while continuing to enjoy high-value seafood. BlueNalu’s phrase “Toro you can trust” (BlueNalu our seafood page) condenses this promise into a memorable slogan: the indulgence of toro (a premium type of tuna fish) is paired with the assurance of trust.

Vow uses a more playful and provocative voice. It says it creates meats that consumers choose selfishly and ends a sequence of production claims with “NO GUILT-TRIP” (Vow landing page). This is an unusually explicit articulation of guilt-free indulgence. The consumer is not asked to apologize for appetite; on the contrary, appetite is accepted as a starting point. The brand then claims that technology can redirect selfish desire toward better outcomes. Vow’s career text similarly describes food as “good for your tastebuds, your health and your planet and as both nutritious and delicious” (Vow team page). The three-part formulation tastebuds, health, planet is a compact but very effective version of the broader discourse.

Upside Foods also joins sensory and moral language, but with a more corporate-friendly tone. It claims to make “the chicken chickens dream about and says there is no need to raise and slaughter billions of animals” (Upside landing page). The phrase is noteworthy because it gives chickens an imagined preference. It makes the ethical contrast vivid, almost humorous, while remaining easy to understand. Hence,

across these brands, cultivated meat is framed not only as food but as a platform for redesigning meat systems.

6 Evaluative Adjectives: Taste-First and Conscience-First Patterns

In order to study how these products are evaluated, a more focused analysis was carried out on adjectives that express evaluation. This analysis seems to support the broader contrast between plant-based normalization and cultivated legitimization. In both subcorpora, adjectives help attach value to meat and meat products. However, the adjective families differ. Plant-based meat relies more heavily on sensory-hedonic adjectives that activate appetite. Cultivated meat uses more ethical and assurance adjectives that activate conscience and trust, although sensory adjectives remain present. Tables 5 and 6 summarize the ten most frequent evaluative adjectives in the two subcorpora.

Table 5 Top 10 evaluative adjectives referring to plant-based meat

Rank	Evaluative adjective	Raw frequency	Normalized per 10,000
1	spicy	23	1.00
2	new	19	0.82
3	delicious	16	0.69
4	juicy	9	0.39
5	tasty	6	0.26
6	meaty	6	0.26
7	innovative	5	0.22
8	savory	4	0.17
9	nutritious	3	0.13
10	best	3	0.13

Table 6 Top 10 evaluative adjectives referring to cultivated meat

Rank	Evaluative adjective	Raw frequency	Normalized per 10,000
1	good	96	5.98
2	ethical	13	0.81
3	delicious	11	0.69
4	cruelty-free	9	0.56
5	sustainable	8	0.50
6	slaughter-free	7	0.44
7	better	5	0.31

Rank	Evaluative adjective	Raw frequency	Normalized per 10,000
8	best	5	0.31
9	new	4	0.25
10	savory	2	0.12

In the plant-based subcorpus, the most frequent adjectives include “spicy”, “delicious”, “juicy”, “tasty”, “meaty”, and “savory”. These adjectives are strongly sensory. They describe taste, texture, flavor intensity, and meat-like satisfaction. Beyond Meat’s blog, for instance, describes the Beyond Burger Jalapeno as “tasty, juicy, plant-based meat, with a slow-burning spicy kick” (Beyond Meat blog). The same brand states that a burger has “all the juicy, meaty deliciousness of a traditional burger” (Beyond Meat blog). Another example invites consumers who “crave a tasty new burger” (Beyond Meat blog). These phrases show the appetite-first structure of plant-based discourse. The product is made morally acceptable partly because it remains sensorially exciting.

The adjective “new” also appears frequently in the plant-based list, but it does not replace the sensory core. On the contrary, novelty supports appetite. New products are presented as “new flavors, new formats, new restaurant offerings”, or “new ways” to enjoy familiar dishes. Similarly, “innovative” appears, but it is not as central as “delicious” or “juicy”. “Nutritious” is present but relatively low. This suggests that plant-based products in this corpus are not marketed primarily as medical or dietary objects. They are marketed as pleasurable foods with health and sustainability benefits attached.

In the cultivated subcorpus, “good” is the most frequent evaluative adjective. It should be interpreted carefully because it may include generic positivity as well as uses connected to the GOOD Meat brand name. More revealing are adjectives such as “ethical”, “cruelty-free”, “sustainable”, “slaughter-free”, and “better”. These items directly construct cultivated meat as a responsible choice. Believer uses phrases such as “access to healthy, delicious meat, buying cruelty-free meat, and enjoy slaughter-free meat” (Believer careers page, Believer blog). Here, taste is present, but ethical assurance is more prominent than in the plant-based adjective list.

The cultivated-meat list also contains “delicious” and “savory”, which shows that cultivated marketing cannot ignore appetite. In other words, the product still has to be desirable as food. However, in many examples, sensory adjectives are embedded within an assurance frame. BlueNalu says its seafood has the “same sensory qualities and nutritional value” as traditional seafood, while also being safe, consistent, and supportive of ocean health (BlueNalu our seafood page). Upside describes cultivated meat as “flavorful, tasty, tempting” and then immediately links it to a controlled environment

and the absence of slaughter (Upside landing page). The pattern is therefore conscience-first, but not pleasure-free.

What emerges from this analysis of the construction of evaluation through adjectives is central to the paper's argument. Plant-based discourse seems to describe taste in order to make ethical substitution feel easy. Cultivated discourse, instead, defines conscience in order to make technological novelty feel safe and desirable. Both product categories sell enjoyment, but they support enjoyment with different adjective families. Plant-based meat says, in effect, that this tastes like what you already love, and it is better for you as well as for the planet. Cultivated meat says, in effect, this is real meat made in a safer and kinder way, and it can still be delicious.

7 Discussion

As emerging from the analysis, the main similarity between plant-based and cultivated meat discourse is that both promise no-compromise enjoyment. Neither subcorpus frames ethical consumption as abstinence. Instead, both treat pleasure as necessary for ethical change. Consumers are repeatedly told that they can continue to enjoy familiar foods while reducing harm, improving health, supporting sustainability, or participating in the future of food. This is why guilt-free indulgence is an appropriate label for the broader discourse.

The main difference lies in the way guilt-free indulgence is built. Plant-based meat normalizes itself by mirroring meat. Its discourse is chiefly grounded in brands that become product categories, familiar formats such as burger and hot dog, sensory adjectives like “juicy” and “tasty”, and lifestyle references to mainstream chains and younger consumers. Its ethics are often ambient rather than confrontational. Words and multi-word expressions such as “plants, natural, earth-friendly, positive choice”, and “balanced lifestyle” imply responsibility without always placing slaughter or animal suffering at the center. The moral appeal is softened through everyday consumer language.

Cultivated meat legitimizes itself by explaining and governing novelty. Its discourse is grounded in cells, bioreactors, controlled environments, regulatory approval, food safety, and explicit animal-welfare contrast. It is more likely to name “slaughter”, “cruelty”, and “conventionally farmed meat” as problems. It is also more likely to speak in a voice that addresses institutions as well as consumers. This makes sense because cultivated meat is more technically unfamiliar and, in many markets, still emerging through regulatory and investment processes. Its marketing must therefore reassure consumers that the product is real, safe, controlled, and ethically superior.

Resorting to the concept of ethical luxury helps explain why these novel foods are often framed as upgrades rather than mere alternatives. Plant-based brands may use everyday formats, but they also claim better nutrition, cleaner ingredients, and alignment with modern lifestyles. Cultivated brands may use institutional language, but they also claim premium sensory value, especially in seafood and beef examples. For instance, think of BlueNalu's emphasis on "premium bluefin tuna toro, Mosa's Feel good indulgence", and Vow's "NO GUILT-TRIP", which all show that guilt-free indulgence can become a form of ethical luxury. The product is not only less bad, but it is better, smarter, more future-oriented, and sometimes more exclusive. These discourses also manage the construction of a consumer identity. The implied consumer is not necessarily vegan or fully committed to avoiding meat. In fact, many examples explicitly address meat lovers. Plant-based brands speak to people who enjoy burgers, chicken, and fast food. Cultivated brands speak to people who love meat but are troubled by the consequences of conventional production. This is important because the corpus does not primarily construct ethical consumption as conversion, but it constructs it as form of continuity that leads to an improvement. Hence, consumers can remain meat lovers while changing the material basis or production process of meat.

There is also a temporal dimension that surfaces. Plant-based meat is often framed as already mainstream: it appears in menus, chains, recipes, and familiar retail contexts. Cultivated meat is often framed as the future arriving, as it is associated with regulatory pathways, scaling, first approvals, scientific milestones, and future food systems. This difference helps understand and explain the tone of each subcorpus. Plant-based language is more immediate and consumer-facing. By contrast, cultivated-meat language is more anticipatory and institutional. However, both point toward a future in which ethical responsibility is supposed to become easier, tastier, and more convenient.

Therefore, the concept of guilt-free indulgence should not indicate that guilt disappears entirely. Rather, guilt remains as the background condition that gives the marketing its force. References to slaughter, forests, contamination, antibiotics, land use, ocean depletion, and animal welfare remind consumers why meat consumption is morally charged. The brands then offer a way to continue consuming meat-like or meat-identical products without carrying the same burden. In this sense, the discourse does not reject guilt, but it separates relief from guilt.

8 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper shows that both product categories combine pleasure and responsibility, but they do so through different linguistic strategies. Plant-based meat promotes the familiar as virtuous and tasty. It uses brand saturation, meat-format naming, sensory adjectives, nutritional claims, naturalness, and mainstream lifestyle references to make plant-based substitution appear easy and enjoyable. Cultivated meat promotes the new as safe and kinder. It uses technical vocabulary, regulatory and cleanliness discourse, explicit animal-welfare contrasts, and future-oriented corporate branding to make cellular production appear trustworthy and desirable.

The adjective analysis sharpens this contrast. Plant-based meat is more taste-first: spicy, delicious, juicy, tasty, meaty, and savory are central to its appeal. Cultivated meat is more conscience-first: ethical, cruelty-free, sustainable, slaughter-free, safe, and controlled are central, even though taste remains present. These patterns show that ‘guilt-free indulgence’ is not a single discourse but a flexible structure. It can be built through sensory familiarity supported by nature and health, or through ethical reassurance supported by science and safety.

The study also suggests several directions for future research. A multimodal analysis of brand webpages, for example, would show whether images, color palettes, typography, video, and layout reinforce the lexical patterns identified here. Comparative research could examine differences across national markets, especially where regulation and cultural attitudes toward meat vary. Diachronic work could also track whether cultivated meat discourse becomes more taste led as products become more commercially available. For now, the corpus shows that alternative protein marketing does not ask consumers to choose between morality and pleasure. It asks them to believe that the future of meat can be both pleasurable and morally improved.

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Cultured Meat is (not) Vegan Meat Discursive Boundary-Making in User Comments

Francesco Nacchia

Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Italy

Abstract The production of cultured meat is gaining regulatory approval in countries worldwide, with the global market being estimated to grow substantially over the next few years. However, its recognition as an effective technology in tackling issues concerning human health, the environment, and animal welfare has been received with mixed feelings across different countries. Given its defining principles, the issue is particularly relevant to the vegan community, which has embraced opposing perspectives on it. Based on these premises, the paper aims to explore the attitudes towards cultured meat within discussions of its vegan status in a corpus of YouTube comments posted in response to a documentary-style video. The analysis draws upon the analytical tools of Critical Discourse Studies, showing that cultured meat is predominantly accepted when veganism is framed primarily as an ethical commitment to reducing animal suffering, while it is rejected when vegan identity is grounded in health or dietary concerns, thereby contributing to the emergence of new ideological boundaries within the vegan community.

Keywords Social media critical discourse studies. Food discourse. Veganism. Cultured meat. Ideology.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Literature Review. – 3 Theoretical Framework. – 4 Corpus and Method. – 5 Analysis. – 6 Discussion and Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

As the global population approaches 10 billion, a dietary shift towards plant-based diets is considered necessary (Willett et al. 2019); this need is driven by environmental motivations, as well as concerns about animal well-being and human health. From an environmental perspective, the agri-food sector plays a particularly significant role, among the sectors that pose the greatest challenges to sustainability. In particular, the animal-sourced foods sector, which “require[s] more resources and cause[s] higher emissions than plant-based alternatives” (UNEP¹ 2010, 79), has been shown to have a significant impact on climate change, biogeochemical flows, land-use change, freshwater use, and biodiversity loss (Godfray et al. 2018; Poore, Nemecek 2018; Bowles, Alexander, Hadjikakou 2019). As for ethical considerations regarding cruelty to animals, research has shown that “livestock species possess sophisticated cognitive capacities that are not yet sufficiently acknowledged in welfare legislation” (Nawroth et al. 2019, 11). Although animal abuse often remains socially tolerated, as it largely occurs out of public sight in slaughterhouses (Perry, Brandt 2008), an ASPCA² (2020) survey reports greater interest in animal welfare. Finally, as far as human health is concerned, excessive consumption of livestock products has been associated with a range of adverse human health effects, such as diet-related diseases, exposure to antibiotic residues and other pharmaceuticals in food, increased antibiotic resistance, the spread of foodborne illnesses, the risk of developing non-communicable diseases, and the risk of epidemics.³

Despite growing evidence of these impacts, the meat market has expanded to the point that one-third of the land used for crop production is now devoted to livestock farming (Hillier et al. 2011), thereby slowing down the transition to plant-based food. The main reason is that meat is considered a primary source of protein and nutrients (Fraeye et al. 2020), an element closely connected to cultural and culinary identity (Potts 2017), and is often seen as necessary, natural, normal, and nice (Piazza et al. 2015). In fact, the protein transition (Aiking, de Boer 2020) is being fuelled primarily by meat alternatives that emulate the taste and texture of actual meat; while these products can contribute to addressing the ethical challenge, they may have a significant environmental impact and

1 The United Nations Environment Programme.

2 The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

3 O'Neill 2015; Wolk 2017; Willett et al. 2019; Espinosa, Tago, Treich 2020; Qian et al. 2020; Rulli et al. 2021.

serious health consequences just like other ultra-processed foods (Estèvez et al. 2024).

Alongside these products aimed at reducing meat consumption, a new type of food was introduced more than ten years ago (Mead 2013), which, unlike other foods resembling meat, is actual meat at the molecular level. Cultured meat⁴ is developed in controlled laboratory or industrial environments through *in vitro* techniques that include cell isolation, proliferation or expansion, differentiation, harvesting, and final processing.⁵ The process currently relies on stem cells extracted via biopsy from live skeletal muscle, which are then cultured in bioreactors (Datar, Betti 2010) using a growth medium enriched with foetal bovine serum (Catts, Zurr 2014; Post 2014). The production of cultured meat is being increasingly allowed in countries worldwide, with the global market estimated to reach \$593 million by 2032 (MarketsandMarkets 2019). This “[m]eat that never died [...] and [...] never properly lived” (Wurgaft 2020, 2) can be seen as part of Agriculture 4.0 (Lezoche et al. 2020) and a “realistic and sustainable solution” (Böhm, Ferrari, Woll 2018, 211) which might have an impact on the environment, animal welfare, the well-being of workers in the meat industry, as well as human health (Evans, Johnson 2021).

The emergence of novel food technologies such as cultured meat is expected to influence culturally shaped perceptions of what food is and how it should be produced and consumed (Wurgaft 2020). The issue is particularly relevant to the vegan community, given the central role food plays in the construction of vegan identity, as well as veganism’s commitment to animal welfare. More specifically, while vegetarianism can be understood primarily as a dietary regime in which the consumption of animal flesh is forbidden while permitting the consumption of products of animal origin – such as honey and dairy products –, veganism extends to various aspects of a person’s identity and not just a dietary habit; in particular, it is founded on a major concern – the rejection of animal exploitation – and two correlated aspects – human welfare and the environment.⁶ Compared

4 This brand-new meat has been alternatively labeled as ‘biofabricated animal material’, ‘cultivated meat’, ‘(cell-)cultured meat’, ‘lab-grown meat’, ‘in vitro meat’, ‘clean meat’.

5 Ben-Arye, Levenberg 2019; Ong, Choudhury, Naing 2020; Wang et al. 2020; Li et al. 2021; Treich 2021.

6 “Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude – as far as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals” (The Vegan Society, s.d.).

with other groups, vegans have been shown to display their activist identity, play a major political role, be more active in animal rights, and have more positive experiences within their group (Stuart et al. 2013; MacInnis, Hodson 2017; Kalte 2021).

Against this backdrop, the way cultured meat is produced and consumed may prompt reflection and debate, especially when attempts to label it as ‘vegan’ are made.⁷ Recently, despite PETA’s (2023) explicit endorsement of ‘slaughterless’ meat, an opposing narrative has emerged from a share of vegans who criticise cultured meat for symbolically violating animal dignity (see Chauvet 2018). This division echoes broader tensions within the vegan movement regarding compromise and moral consistency (Wrenn 2016). This paper, therefore, aims to explore the attitudes towards cultured meat in discussions of its vegan status by analysing a corpus of 392 YouTube comments posted in response to the popular amateur video *VEGAN Tries Lab Grown Meat for the First Time*. The analysis draws on selected analytical tools of Critical Discourse Studies – including van Leeuwen’s (1996) social actor framework, Martin and White’s (2005) Appraisal Theory and van Dijk’s (2011) socio-cognitive framework – to address three research questions:

- RQ1: How are vegan identities discursively constructed in relation to the acceptance of cultured meat (focus: animal welfare, health, and environment)?
- RQ2: Do these discursive constructions contribute to the emergence of new ideological boundaries within veganism?
- RQ3: What attitudes are expressed towards these emerging vegan identities?

In so doing, the study aims to shed light on the diverging perspectives that shape the ongoing dialogue around cultured meat and the potential emergence of new boundaries between different constructions of vegan identity.

2 Literature Review

The aim of this section is to provide a brief overview of the growing body of research that has examined public discourse around cultured meat, with a particular focus on online comments and discussions on social media platforms.

Laestadius (2015) identified five key themes in U.S. online news blog comments about cultured meat: animal welfare, environmental

⁷ In this paper, single inverted commas (‘’) are used when discussing terms and expressions. Excerpts from the comments are reported in double inverted commas (’’’’).

sustainability, equity and fairness, naturalness in the food system, and the efficient use of resources. While benefits were framed in global or societal terms, concerns such as health risks and poor taste were mostly individual. Building on this line of research, Laestadius and Caldwell (2015) found that the overall tone of online news commentary was predominantly negative, focusing on the unnaturalness of cultured meat, the decline of traditional agriculture, and fears of corporate dominance. Positive reactions, though less frequent, echoed media narratives around environmental, health, and ethical benefits. Moving beyond the U.S. context, Ryyänänen and Toivanen (2023) analysed 662 Finnish online news comments to investigate the emerging meanings of cultured meat. Using qualitative content analysis, they identified competing public interpretations, namely necessity, characteristics, and societal impact. Overall, awareness of the phenomenon was limited and often accompanied by negatively biased perceptions. Guo and Wiwattanadate (2024) have shown that online comments on social media platforms in China often focused on price, tradition, taste, and even longevity. In contrast, animal welfare issues were mentioned less frequently. The product was also commonly referred to as ‘artificial meat’, revealing a general lack of knowledge about cultured meat.

Perceptions of cultured meat have also been analysed by Specht, Rumble, and Buck (2020) in a sample of 2,763 tweets, through which they showed that Twitter debate on cultured meat is news-driven and event-dependent. They identified eight recurring themes – legality and marketing, sustainability, acceptance, business, animal concerns, science and technology, health concerns, and timeline – and four main communities – news/tech influencers, vegan/animal-rights advocates, agricultural actors, and food/paleo-oriented individuals. Likewise, by analysing a corpus of 36,356 tweets, Pilařová et al. (2022, 1) identified three communicated characteristics of cultured meat, namely, ‘clean’, ‘future’, and ‘sustainable’ meat, and five communication topics:

- (1) clean and sustainable products, (2) comparisons with plant-based protein and the impact on agribusiness, (3) positive environmental aspects, (4) cultured meat as an alternative protein, and (5) the regulation of cultured meat. (Pilařová et al. 2022, 1)

More recently, a study based on social media data examined the influence of media framing on public attitudes toward cultured meat, by analysing over 23,000 Twitter posts and 38,000 user comments (Kouarfate, Durif 2023). While not focused on the analysis of comments, their findings suggest that ethical, informational, and intrinsic framing positively influence the acceptability of cultured meat.

Although these studies have attempted to advance the understanding of public discussions surrounding cultured meat, little attention has been paid to how online users discursively construct identities and negotiate group boundaries in response to its association with vegan ideals. The present study seeks to fill this gap.

3 Theoretical Framework

This section provides a brief overview of Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) and Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS), which constitute the theoretical framework underpinning the present study.

First, the study draws on van Dijk's (2011; 2012) conceptualisations of ideology, identity, and the role of attitude. Ideology, understood as a form of social cognition, is defined as a set of

socially shared beliefs that are associated with the characteristic properties of a group, such as their identity, their position in society, their interests and aims, their relations to other groups, their reproduction, and their natural environment. (van Dijk 2012, 8)

Ideologies are linked to ideological practices, which are grounded in specific mental models, through which we produce or interpret a text. When we act as members of a group, these mental models embody instances of its ideology. Discourse thus has the capacity to reproduce ideologies, and an analysis of its surface structures can therefore provide insights into their development and transformation. The same applies to identities, which van Dijk (2008, 70) conceptualises as “an interactional accomplishment”, emerging through the negotiation of the meanings associated with that identity within discourse; in this respect, Stibbe's (2015) definition of identity as “a story in people's minds about what it means to be a particular kind of person, including appearance, character, behaviour and values” (107) is also useful in informing the present study, as it highlights the narrative dimension through which identities are constructed and negotiated.

In addition, the analysis is informed by Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS), which extends the principles of Critical Discourse Studies to digital environments by “implement[ing] the principal parameters of the CDS movement” (KhosraviNik 2022, 120) while accounting for “the specific mediation technology and its impact in terms of shaping discourses and power” (Esposito, KhosraviNik 2024, 7). In particular, this study considers online discourse as a space of affiliation, negotiation, boundary construction, and ideological stance-taking (Zappavigna 2012).

4 Corpus and Method

This section describes the corpus and the method adopted in the study. It explains the motivations for considering YouTube as a platform and selecting that specific video, outlines the criteria used to compile the corpus, and presents the analytical steps.

First, YouTube was regarded as well suited for an analysis aimed at identifying emerging ideologies and attitudes within groups with divergent perspectives. Zappavigna (2021) claimed that the large-scale unfolding of comments on YouTube applies “the notion of ‘community’ as a way of conceiving of the recurrent sharing of values, opinions and concerns in YouTube discourse” (23). Then, as regards the selection of the data, the video titled *VEGAN Tries Lab Grown Meat For The First Time*, published on 28 December 2022, in which U.S.-based content creator Merle Shane O’Neal (198,000 YouTube subscribers as of August 2026) tastes three types of cultured chicken, was selected. The video was considered well suited for the analysis because the content creator explicitly asks the vegan community for their views on the acceptability of cultured meat in the video description – *Those of you who are vegan/vegetarian I am especially curious if you think this falls within the “cruelty-free” or vegan umbrella* – and it is therefore reasonable to expect that the prompt encouraged discussion of this issue in the comment section. Comments were then extracted using the *Mozdeh* software. The comments were then exported from *Mozdeh* using the software’s export function, which stores the retrieved comments in the ‘raw’ folder as an Excel file. At the end of the extraction process (Date: 8 August 2025), the corpus comprised 898 comments and 33,798 tokens. The data were treated as publicly accessible, since online discussions on news and magazine websites and their related social media pages are openly available. To protect commenter privacy, all identifying details and pseudonyms were removed from the dataset during anonymisation. The analysis followed a theory-driven, deductive approach, whereby the analytical categories were drawn from the theoretical frameworks adopted in the study rather than inductively derived from the data. Specifically, the analysis relied on van Leeuwen’s (1996) socio-semantic inventory of social actor representation, van Dijk’s (2011) semantic and formal structures of discourse, and Martin and White’s (2005) system of Attitude. The analytical procedure involved the following stages. First, the initial corpus was lexically filtered in Excel in light of the research questions to include only those comments containing at least one of the terms ‘vegan’ or ‘veganism’, resulting in a final corpus of 392 comments and 22,372 tokens. These comments were then manually screened to identify cases in which vegan(ism) was categorised in a certain way in relation to cultured meat. Occurrences in which ‘vegan’ or

'veganism' did not involve categorisation were excluded, resulting in a final analytical dataset of 257 comments. Given the study's understanding of ideology as socially shared, only types of social-actor categorisation that occurred at least three times in the analytical dataset were retained for detailed analysis and discussion. Thus, the analysis did not include a categorisation type unless at least three instances of the same type could be identified across the dataset. This recurrence threshold was adopted to avoid basing the identification of broader discursive patterns on isolated occurrences. All comments included in the final analytical dataset were systematically coded using the same analytical procedure. First, the representation of vegan social actors was analysed according to van Leeuwen's socio-semantic inventory to examine "the ways in which social actors can be represented" (van Leeuwen 1996, 32) and how "social practices [are] transformed into discourses about social practices" (35). The same comments were then examined for the semantic and formal structures identified by van Dijk (2011) and, to account for the evaluative dimension, the study drew on Appraisal Theory (Martin, White 2005). In particular, the Attitude system provides a framework for categorising the language of evaluation into three subsystems: AFFECT, referring to personal emotional states; JUDGEMENT, associated with the social or ethical appraisal of others' behaviour; and APPRECIATION, concerned with the evaluation of phenomena. As regards the coding procedure, Attitude resources were annotated using *UAM CorpusTool 6.2* through its Annotation function and the Appraisal layer, focusing exclusively on the Attitude system relevant to the present study. Social actor representations and semantic and formal discourse structures were instead coded manually in Excel. To enhance analytical reliability, the author coded the dataset twice, about one year apart. The first coding was conducted in preparation for a conference presentation in September 2025, while the second was carried out during the preparation of the present article, using the same theory-driven analytical categories. Cases for which the coding remained ambiguous were recorded separately and subjected to a third round of analysis, after which a final coding decision was made.

5 Analysis

The following subsections (5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4) present representative comments illustrating the main findings of the analysis. The selected comments were organised into four (out-)/(sub-)groups.⁸

5.1 Vegetarianism

The following comments (1-8) share a common thread: they all invoke vegetarianism.

1. I mean... it is indeed meat. It tastes and looks like meat, because it is animal tissue. So it is definitely not plant based. I wouldn't say either that it is cruelty free, since you have to 'extract' the stem cells somehow from an animal. On my kindest guess maybe I would say vegetarian... (not sure on that tho). I guess it works for people who is vegan for the climate but not for those vegans for the animals.
2. Don't think I'll ever eat this but I'm definitely not going to cancel you 🙄 I think that by consuming this though puts a person as a vegetarian more than a vegan.
3. If it's vegan. It's not plant based. But definitely vegetarian. No animals died for your food. Animals were not harmed (if I understood it correctly). It's not vegan but has the same value towards animals. I think. I'm vegan by the way. I would not be mad if you eat this and still call yourself a vegan. 🙄
4. Personally, I think you could make the case that this is vegetarian, but not vegan. Vegetarian because the animals aren't killed in order for you to get the product. Not vegan because you still had to extract something from an animal for personal pleasure. Like honey, or eggs.
5. I would classify cultivated meat in the vegetarian category. You are eating animal cells, not plant cells so I don't see how you can

⁸ Due to space constraints, when a categorisation occurred in a large number of comments, only a selection of excerpts was included in the article in order to avoid redundancy. Preference was given to comments providing sufficient contextual and argumentative information, while highly similar instances, comments consisting primarily of the relevant label, and comments presenting substantially the same argument as an excerpt already selected were not reproduced.

call this vegan. Even vegetarian is a big of a stretch. That being said I have no problems with it from an ethical perspective.

6. I would consider this meat vegetarian and not vegan, it still comes from an animal...
7. I'm guessing this was pointed out already, but anyway, by definition this would not be vegan because it still technically comes from an animal. However it could fall under vegetarian. On a different note though, as a cook I think this is quite intriguing and would love the chance to use it.
8. Please shut up. Being vegetarian still contributes to multiple forms of animal suffering. There is a clear definition of veganism for a reason and I'm not about the 'baby steps' shit. It takes cells from animals, it is still animal exploitation. It's reducetarian, not vegan. Tell the chickens and cows not to get hung up on definitions when you pay for them to be exploited and slaughtered for your selfish taste pleasure. No, sorry fuck vegetarians, go vegan.

In comment 1, by asserting the animal nature of the product – “it is indeed meat [...] it is animal tissue” – and excluding it from the plant-based category – “So it is definitely not plant based” –, its ethical nature is also denied – “I wouldn't say either that it is cruelty free”. Although the expressions “indeed” and “definitely” produce a dialogic contraction, the commenter still leaves room to position the product within the vegetarian category, albeit with marked hesitation (“On my kindest guess”). In the final part, however, the comment also extends to vegans, albeit only to a specific subgroup (“works for people who is vegan for the climate but not for those vegans for the animals”). A similar positioning emerges in comment 2, where, without particular argumentation, the product is defined as “as a vegetarian more than a vegan”. Here, however, the accompanying ‘face blowing a kiss’ emoji also conveys a more positive attitude towards both cultured meat and the influencer. In comment 3, an even more conciliatory stance appears: the author marks their own belonging (“I'm vegan by the way”) and attributes a positive evaluation to cultured meat in terms of animal welfare (“No animals died” and “Animals were not harmed”). This allows them to bring it closer to a status similar to veganism in terms of respect for animals (“It's not vegan but has the same value towards animals”), while still technically categorising it as vegetarian because of its non-plant-based nature. Also in this case, although a boundary is maintained, a positive attitude emerges through the negation of negative emotional states (“I would not be mad”), reinforced by the ‘beaming face with smiling eyes’ emoji,

as well as through the attribution of positive qualities to cultured meat. In comment 4, a similar line of reasoning is adopted, based on the distinction between ethical and technical aspects. In addition, the vegetarian classification is supported through analogies with products traditionally excluded from veganism, such as honey and eggs. Cultured meat is therefore assimilated to animal derivatives, even if not technically identical. A positive property is attributed to cultured meat (“animals aren’t killed”), while at the same time highlighting the motivation underlying its existence, namely “personal pleasure”, a reference to human self-interest. The use of “Personally” functions as an epistemic hedge, signalling the commenter’s awareness of the sensitivity of the issue and mitigating their commitment by avoiding any claim to expertise. A similar logic is found in comment 5, where the distinction is drawn at a more granular level, namely on the type of cells being consumed (animal cells vs plant cells), which would classify the product as vegetarian. At the same time, however, its ethical dimension is acknowledged, and the overall attitude appears to remain positive. In comment 6, the technical aspect is made explicit through the recognition of the animal component: “it still comes from an animal”. The same pattern emerges in comment 7, with the addition of “technically”, which frames the discussion in purely technical terms, excluding the ethical dimension (“it still technically comes from an animal”). The expression “by definition” invokes an authoritative source to support the commenter’s position, thereby closing down the dialogic space. At the same time, “as a cook” explicitly foregrounds the commenter’s professional identity, legitimising their interest in cultured meat from a culinary perspective. This positive positioning is further reinforced by the AFFECT resource “love”. In one case, the discourse becomes more radical. An oppositional construction appears in comment 8, where vegetarians are framed as direct accomplices in animal exploitation and suffering for mere “taste pleasure”, for which they are also openly offended (“fuck vegetarians”). Vegetarianism is therefore seen as unable to promote the same vegan values and as part of the problem, especially when this happens through “baby steps”, a way of approaching vegetarianism commonly defined as ‘reducetarianism’. A strong granularity is found in describing the acts of violence committed by humans against animals through words belonging to the same semantic category – “contributes to multiple forms of animal suffering”, “animal exploitation”, “exploited and slaughtered” – which are the main vehicle for attributing negative moral traits to the vegetarian community. Very strong assertiveness and absolutism emerge through the use of imperatives (“Please shut up”) and emphatic repetitions (“still contributes” and “still animal exploitation”). A rhetorical question with ironic intent, such as “Tell the chickens and cows not to get hung up on definitions”,

personifies chickens and cows by attributing to them the human capacity to understand and care about linguistic definitions. This ironic move highlights the perceived absurdity of the arguments advanced by supporters of cultured meat and of their reliance on semantic distinctions. Vegetarians are consequently positioned as an outgroup to vegans, with dialogic space effectively closed through the attribution of negative JUDGEMENT to the principles underlying their dietary practices.

5.2 (Un)ethical Veganism

These comments (9-20), though with different nuances, share a common thread: they distinguish veganism motivated by moral reasons (reducing exploitation and animal suffering and respecting the environment) from that guided by other motivations, such as personal health, dietary preferences, and spiritual purposes.

9. Depends on if the vegan diet is doing it for morals or nutrition. Morals, I'd say mostly vegan. But other's doing it for health reasons, wouldn't.
10. I've come back to this, and one thing I'll add is - you shouldn't be asking 'is this vegan?' In the same vein, it's not 'technically' chicken, it literally IS chicken. They didn't 'sneak in and switch it with 'actual' chicken.' It is literally, 100% chicken. People are getting hung up on the idea that it's somehow not 'real' chicken because of the way it was produced. But this is no more 'not-really-chicken,' than a plant grown in a greenhouse from cultivated seed is somehow not-really-plant.' Asking 'is this vegan' only muddies the waters and confuses the definition without cause. It's meat, and it is meat derived directly from an animal, therefore no, it is not vegan. Instead of quibbling over technicalities around that label, we should address what actually is relevant - which is: does it work toward the goal that most iterations of ethical veganism advocates for? And the answer is, yes it does.
11. I would eat it. I'm vegan for ethical reasons, but I do like the taste of meat, and especially while travelling, I feel like food is such a big part of cultures and I'm missing out on immersing myself in that. I hope that this type of meat becomes commonplace, so we can sustain taste and culture, and harm less animals
12. I think its still vegan for ethical reasons not for dietary

13. I wouldn't say it a vegan diet but I would say it's ethical eating
14. It depends on your reasons for being vegan. If you are vegan for the health of the earth and animals then this is not 'cheating'. If you are vegan for personal health reasons then it would be cheating, since within your body it is still processed just like meat.
15. If you are vegan for health related reasons or don't like the taste of meat, I don't think this will help. But if you are vegan for ethical reasons, this is a great way to eat what you like without feeling guilty.
16. I agree that cultivated meat is fine for some people who are ethical, and realistic, vegans. But it does make me wonder whether it would be cannibalism if it were possible to cultivate human cells for food.
17. Ethically, I'd say this is still vegan. I personally would be afraid to try it because I don't know if my stomach can handle meat anymore, but I'm so glad this is happening and I hope it can become widespread very soon.
18. I would say it's vegan in the sense that it's doing the least amount of harm and exploitation to animals but isn't plant-based. For me, it doesn't matter that it's meat since I'm in it for ethical and environmental reasons and this just seems like the way to go for the majority of people, at least once it becomes more readily available at a reasonable price. The future is cultivated meat!!
19. I could see cultivated meat fitting into a lot of vegan/vegetarian lifestyles pretty well. Really depends on why the individual has that diet. If it's for ethical or environmental reasons, then cultivation address a lot of those issues. I'm excited to see more products like this so I can incorporate it into my cooking.
20. I think it's ethically vegan. It probably wouldn't pass for spiritual vegan purposes, like abstaining from flesh and its facsimiles out of reverence of other animals. But as far as alleviating pain and suffering and manufactured death and eating your cake too, I think it's great.

The distinction between ethical and nutritional motivations, albeit articulated in different ways, emerges in comment 9 ("morals or nutrition" and "health reasons"), comment 12 ("vegan for ethical reasons not for dietary [reasons]"), comment 13 ("vegan diet" and

“ethical eating”), comment 14 (“the health of the earth and animals” and “for personal health reasons”), comment 15 (“health related reasons” and “ethical reasons”), and comment 17 (“Ethically” and “my stomach”). In comment 15, cultured meat is positively appraised as “a great way to eat what you like without feeling guilty”. Similarly, comment 17 contains the positive AFFECT resources “glad” and “hope”, both associated with the wider adoption of cultured meat, despite the presence of the personal negative AFFECT marker “afraid”. In the more articulated comment 10, an integrated view emerges: on the one hand, the vegan nature of the product is denied (“It is literally, 100% chicken [...] therefore no, it is not vegan”), but on the other hand, its value in pursuing the goals of ethical veganism is acknowledged. The expressions “technically”, “actual”, “real”, “not-really-chicken”, and “not-really-plant” are enclosed in single inverted commas to foreground these lexical items, drawing attention to the role of language in avoiding conceptual confusion and highlighting the importance of terminological precision. Based on ethical veganism, membership does not depend on what one eats but rather on the impact of the product on the goals of the cause – reducing animal suffering and environmental sustainability. This produces a semantic movement of exclusion/inclusion and, at the same time, an ideological redefinition of the group from within. In comment 11, the ethical dimension of cultured meat is recognised (“harm less animals”), combined with the possibility of experiencing food as a cultural element, even when it is animal-based. A positive attitude is conveyed by the positive AFFECT marker “hope”. Comment 16 uses hypothetical reasoning and produces an implicit *reductio ad absurdum* involving cannibalism to highlight the fragility of the moral boundaries of cultured meat. Comments 18 and 19 also support cultured meat as vegan but not plant-based, in line with the values of vegans motivated by ethical and environmental reasons; in comment 18, cultured meat is positively framed as “The future”, while comment 19 expresses a positive affective stance through the marker “excited”. Comment 20 introduces spiritual motivations as possible factors guiding the choice to adopt a vegan lifestyle. Two denominations are thus distinguished (ethical vs spiritual), where cultured meat could satisfy the ethical dimension but not the symbolic-religious one. The presupposition is that spiritual veganism regards the mere ‘simulacrum of meat’ – explicitly referred to as “facsimiles” – as equally morally problematic. At the same time, it is taken for granted that the primary aim of ethical veganism is the reduction of pain and death (“alleviating pain and suffering and manufactured death”). The comment is not phrased assertively but is instead mitigated through the repeated use of “I think”. Like the remaining comments, comment 20 displays a positive attitudinal positioning realised through the APPRECIATION resource “it’s great”.

5.3 Fake Veganism

Another category is represented by ‘fake vegans’ (21-23).

21. Your A Fake Vegan Now O’Neal How could you? Merle O’Neal, in my opinion, you have now become a disgrace to the Vegan community. Cultivated meat is still meat. I am so disgusted with your promotion of and consumption of cultivated meat that I am seriously considering canceling my subscription to your channel. I can and will no longer consider you a vegan. What is next for you? Honey. Leather. Eggs. Animal based cheese. Shrimp on the barbe. Sad to see you start down the slippery slope of starting to consume animal products and contributing to their exploitation. We do not need to eat meat to live a healthy life. True and real vegans know this.
22. Fake vegans smh
23. Merle the fake vegan

In comment 21, the negative other-presentation conveyed through “disgrace” and the negative APPRECIATION of reaction expressed by “disgusted” are accompanied by references to “Honey. Leather. Eggs. Animal based cheese. Shrimp on the barbe”, namely products associated with vegetarian rather than vegan lifestyles, which are rhetorically linked to cultured meat. The strong assertiveness – “I can and will no longer consider you a vegan” – is reinforced by the use of the interlocutor’s surname instead of the first name. This choice marks social distance between the two and clearly identifies the agent responsible for the betrayal and the slide toward animal oppression. Nomination through overdetermination is also evident in comment 21 with the use of both “O’Neal” and “Merle O’Neal”, foregrounding the individual as a salient social actor. The comment further conveys negative AFFECT through the expression “Sad to see”, while the JUDGEMENT “contributing to their exploitation” morally condemns the consumption of cultured meat by framing it as incompatible with vegan principles. The same label, ‘fake vegan(s)’, reappears in comments 22 and 23 without any substantial supporting argumentation, functioning instead as a delegitimising nomination. In comment 22, the abbreviation “smh” (shaking my head) expresses a negative APPRECIATION of reaction, signalling disapproval, while comment 23 reinforces the personalised nature of the criticism through the nomination “Merle”.

5.4 Novel Veganism

The following comments (24-31) share the tendency to propose or discuss new subcategories within veganism, arising from the confrontation with cultured meat. Unlike earlier cases, where consumers of cultured meat were positioned within pre-existing groups, here the idea is that entirely new subgroups may emerge due to the inadequacy of current categories.

24. It's non-plant-based-vegan
25. I would say you did break your vegan diet. I guess there needs to be a new type of diet for people who are vegan + eat lab grown meat...
26. In my opinion, I think that cultivated meat shows the individuals that are really committed to being vegan and those so called vegans that just want a excuse to eat meat.
27. I think you raise a really good question on whether you're still vegan if you eat cultivated meat. I think there's going to be a whole new name for it. Like how we have pescetarian for vegetarians who eat fish. Maybe cultivated vegans is the new name or cultivators or C-veg. Haha
28. There doesn't need to be a new name. It's NOT vegan and I'm getting frustrated with the folks in comments saying it is. There shouldn't be any question there. This stuff is meat. Real, actual, verifiable meat. Therefore it is NOT vegan and it never will be. There are plenty of people in the world who are neither vegan nor vegetarian but do their damndest to eat ethically sourced meat. They don't have a special name. This doesn't need a special name. It's literally just ethically sourced meat. It's perfectly okay for vegans who want to embrace this to just say that. That they stopped being vegan when ethically sourced meat became accessible. Or something like 'I eat vegan most of the time but if lab-grown meat is available I'm willing to eat it.'
29. Thank you so much for doing this! It was so interesting. I've been vegan (for the animals) for more than 10 years, but I do like the taste of meat. Always have, always will, but I love animals more than I love eating them. Lab-grown (or cultivated) meat does present a unique dilemma for us vegans, so either the definition of 'vegan' will have to change or we'll have to come up with a new term. But it's just words. The most important thing will always be saving the animals.

30. Longtime vegan here – I support lab grown meat for all of the harm reduction reasons you stated. If we can't get people to stop eating meat I'd rather they eat this. At the same time, I wouldn't feel comfortable eating it or calling it vegan because it still originates from animals and I feel that it perpetuates the idea that they're here for our consumption. Ultimately, I think it's something that each person will have to figure out for themselves. Maybe in 5-10 years there will be some new term for people who eat plant-based diets and lab grown meat. It could be the start of a whole new food movement that couldn't have existed until now. Thanks for making this video and for everything you do!
31. Honestly, this is the best thing that we can do in this moment to not only reduce harm to animals, but reduce harm to our environment as a whole. Pollution, land destruction, overfishing, the whole lot... reduced by almost 100%?! If that's not the most vegan thing ever, I don't know what is! My spouse and I are ethical vegans (and I was easy to convince since I never liked the taste of meat, anyway) and were talking after this video about how we would even define "vegan" if this and other cultivated animal products obliterated food-based animal cruelty. Like, everyone would be vegan, right? We'd have to find alternatives to leather and other animal byproducts, but those are already up and coming and would find a much bigger market share if factory farming went away. Then there'd be us, the vegans-because-meat-is-weird vegans, who would be... "plant-based vegans"?! I don't know, but man, I'm all for this kind of identity crisis. 😂 Glad you tried it!! Is cultivated milk next on the list of things to try? (Oh, and if they ever come up with cultivated eggs and scallops, game over, I'll be all over that shit. 🤪)

Comment 24 introduces the hybrid label 'non-plant-based vegan', lexicalising a concept that had already emerged implicitly in previous comments but had not yet been explicitly named. This enables a reformulation of vegan identity based on the technical characteristics of the product: it is not plant-based, yet it satisfies some of the ethical criteria associated with veganism.

Others hypothesise a new type of diet for those who combine veganism with cultured meat. In comment 25, for example, the stance is less accommodating ("you did break your vegan diet"), framing consumption as a violation of the norm. The proposal of a new label ("a new type of diet") thus marks alterity with respect to the vegan group, in a discursive re-bordering that nevertheless retains the term 'vegan', despite the accusation of transgression.

A more explicitly negative denomination appears in comment 26, where vegans who consume cultured meat are portrayed as unable to adhere to vegan ethics and as using cultured meat as an excuse to eat meat. The binary opposition (“really committed” vs “so-called”) thus constructs a ‘pure’ subgroup against a ‘corrupt’ one, splitting the community internally.

In comment 27, the need for a new term is emphasised to describe those deviating from the vegan norm, though not with an entirely negative attitude. The assumption is that dietary categories are fixed and clearly bounded, and that every deviation requires a distinct name – recalling the case of ‘pescetarians’. The proposed labels (“cultivated vegans”, “cultivators”, “C-veg”) function as identity markers for an internal subgroup, yet remain separate from ‘true’ veganism. The closing “Haha” makes the comment less aggressive and more ironic.

Comment 28 highlights the confusion and threat to identity clarity caused by calling cultured meat ‘vegan’. Starting from the presupposition that ‘vegan’ excludes animal products, it stresses the animal origin of meat with expressions such as “Real”, “actual”, and “verifiable”. The commenter therefore rejects the need for newly coined categories, arguing that “ethically sourced meat” is a more appropriate label. Distance is marked from the “folks in comments” who misapply the term ‘vegan’ and are blamed for creating confusion. This is expressed through the dissatisfaction marker “frustrated”. While denying group membership to these consumers and the necessity of a new name, the comment nonetheless suggests a discursive redefinition that maintains the use of ‘vegan’ (“I eat vegan most of the time but if lab-grown meat is available I’m willing to eat it”).

In comment 29, explicitly positioning themselves as “vegan (for the animals)”, the commenter aligns with an ethical-animalist subgroup and introduces the need to redefine ‘veganism’ or to coin a new term, given the novelty represented by cultured meat, described as “a unique dilemma for us vegans”. With an inclusive stance, they not only accept cultured meat but also acknowledge the need to redefine the boundaries of veganism, while relegating these semantic distinctions to a secondary role relative to animal welfare. A positive reaction (APPRECIATION) is expressed by way of “interesting”.

In comment 30, the author self-identifies as a “Longtime vegan” signalling both membership and discursive authority, and reiterates the distance from the ‘vegan’ category when applied to consumers of cultured meat, which “still originates from animals”. They attribute a negative ideological trait to cultured meat (“perpetuates the idea that [animals] are here for our consumption”), through which they reinforce the same paradigm of exploitation that veganism seeks to dismantle. Thus, the issue is not only the absence of animal suffering but also the ideological implications. The comment ultimately

envisioning the future possibility of a new term for a food movement not necessarily tied to veganism. The overall attitudinal positioning remains favourable, as reflected in the positive AFFECT resource “support”, directed toward the collective benefits of cultured meat. At the same time, the commenter expresses personal insecurity in the statement “I wouldn’t feel comfortable eating it”, revealing a distinction between support for the technology in principle and willingness to consume it personally.

In comment 31, listing the environmental benefits of cultured meat, the author defines themselves as an ‘ethical vegan’ and describes cultured meat as the “most vegan thing ever”, overturning the narrative that it is ‘non vegan’. The presupposition here is that the mission of veganism is to reduce animal cruelty and environmental harm; cultured meat is therefore framed as consistent with vegan ethics. The use of intensifiers and hyperboles (“almost 100%” and “game over”) reinforces the sense of inevitability about this future. At the same time, the comment acknowledges that cultured meat creates a vegan identity crisis, but evaluates it positively in light of the benefits it brings. This favourable positioning is realised through the positive APPRECIATION resource “best thing”, which evaluates the phenomenon in terms of quality, the positive JUDGEMENT of propriety in “reduce harm”, and the AFFECT resources of inclination in “I’m all for this kind of identity crisis” and “Glad”, both expressing support for the broader implications of cultured meat. This crisis could lead to the emergence of two subgroups: “the vegans-because-meat-is-weird vegans” and “plant-based vegans”.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to analyse the discursive construction of veganism and the related identities when associated with cultured meat on the assumption that the symbolic meanings of these novel foods will increasingly be “constructed and negotiated in both public discourses and people’s everyday encounters with the subject” (Ryynänen, Toivanen 2023, 593). Drawing on analytical tools of Critical Discourse Studies, including van Leeuwen’s (1996) inventory of social actors and Martin and White’s (2005) Appraisal Theory, the study adopted van Dijk’s (2011) ideological framework as its primary analytical lens to address three research questions.

- RQ1: How are vegan identities discursively constructed in relation to the acceptance of cultured meat (focus: animal welfare, health, and environment)?
- RQ2: Do these discursive constructions contribute to the emergence of new ideological boundaries within veganism?

- RQ3: What attitudes are expressed towards these emerging vegan identities?

As for RQ1, ethical considerations make cultured meat acceptable from a vegan perspective, but not for those who adopt veganism for health or dietary reasons, because of the technical aspects that still define it as meat. Many of these comments therefore view the current method used to produce cultured meat as ethically acceptable, aligning with the claims made by Chauvet (2018) in a study grounded in ethical theory and conceptual analysis, where the author concludes that there is no violation of animal dignity in consuming cultured meat and therefore “no possibility for creating an us and them by eating cultured meat when this consumption is grounded in animal rights” (408). However, some commenters support the opposite perspective, although less frequently, arguing that it is ethically wrong because it still symbolically violates the animal. Indeed, the use of foetal bovine serum is costly, ethically controversial, and subject to contamination risks – factors that are pushing research toward serum-free alternatives (Gottipamula et al. 2013; Garrison, Biermacher, Brorsen 2022). In response to these limitations, scientists are also exploring the development of genetically modified immortal cell lines, which would only require a one-time extraction from animals (Genovese, Desmet, Schulze 2017), thereby drastically reducing the overall use of animals in cultured meat production (Soice, Johnston 2021).

Beyond this perspective, among the strongest critics of vegans who accept cultured meat are those who argue that it could represent a step towards cannibalism. In contrast, others claim that vegans who accept it are merely using it as an excuse to eat meat. Although the study does not pursue quantitative aims, negative identity representations are considerably less frequent. In fact, with reference to RQ2, within the macro-label of categorisation, processes of classification are frequent alongside processes of differentiation (van Leeuwen 1996). This suggests a tendency to recognise the identity value of the label ‘vegan’ and to identify out-groups by assigning them specific labels. Indeed, vegans tend to internalise their way of being as a significant part of their moral identity (Chuck, Fernandes, Hyers 2016), as they often make deliberate decisions to deviate from carnist norms for moral reasons (Rosenfeld, Burrow 2018). Furthermore, the label ‘vegan’ can foster a sense of group pride, aid in the establishment of cooperative groups, and function as a means of moral identity-signalling (Feinberg et al. 2019). The analysis has shown that cultured meat provides a site for the construction of ideological boundaries between distinct representations of vegan identity, particularly in relation to whether its consumption is considered compatible with veganism. The most straightforward

opposition is between true and fake vegans, where the legitimacy of those willing to consume cultured meat is openly challenged. It should be noted that the adjective 'fake' is also frequently used in relation to cultured meat (Hallman, Hallman, Hallman 2023), attributing to it the traits of something artificial and unnatural (a negative connotation when it comes to food); as a result, the same adjective is echoed here to identify those who decide to consume it. This is reinforced by the fact that the influencer herself uses the term fake in the video. At the same time, the traditional divide between vegans and vegetarians is reinforced, as cultured meat is frequently compared to products such as milk, honey, or eggs rather than to conventional meat. Beyond these established oppositions, cultured meat also appears to foster new internal divisions based on different interpretations of veganism. Some commenters promote a spiritual understanding of veganism, rejecting cultured meat on religious or spiritual grounds. In contrast, others adopt a narrower definition of ethical veganism, restricting the label to those primarily motivated by animal welfare and environmental concerns. With the introduction of cultured meat, ethical veganism becomes a useful marker to distinguish more clearly between a form of veganism grounded in the reduction of animal suffering and other forms motivated by health or dietary reasons, which instead tend to reject it. Rather than creating this distinction *ex novo*, cultured meat appears, within the discourse analysed, to bring to the fore an already documented tension between forms of vegan identity grounded primarily in ethical commitments and those more closely associated with health or dietary motivations (see Nacchia 2025; Bagci, Rosenfeld, Uslu 2022; Pabian et al. 2023). Finally, some users try to accommodate these differences by proposing new identity labels, suggesting a reconfiguration of the movement rather than simple exclusion. Turning to attitudinal positioning (RQ3), the analysis shows that Attitude resources are relatively limited across the corpus. This suggests that, although commenters display a clear tendency to construct distinct identity groups and ideological boundaries, this process does not generally rely on the strong evaluative polarisation. With only a few exceptions, the construction of competing identities is achieved more through classification and labelling than through highly attitudinal language. This finding also differs from that of Laestadius and Caldwell (2015), who reported that negative comments predominated in online discussions of cultured meat. In the present corpus, by contrast, explicit attitudinal language remains relatively limited and strongly negative evaluations are rare. Although the two studies examine different online contexts, this may suggest that discussions taking place within, or explicitly addressed to, the vegan community are not necessarily characterised by highly negative evaluative language.

The main limitation of this study concerns the difficulty of determining commenters' group membership. Although it is possible to infer their ideological position from the content of their comments, it cannot be established with certainty unless they explicitly self-identify (e.g., "I'm vegan for ethical reasons", comment 11). For this reason, given the limited number of cases of explicit self-identification, the analysis should be regarded as reflecting an unspecified audience, which may not be directly involved in vegan communities. A second limitation concerns the nature of online comments, which are inevitably shaped by the specific content to which they respond. While this represents a methodological advantage, as it grounds interpretations to a clearly identifiable communicative stimulus, it also limits the generalisability of the findings. The discursive patterns identified here should therefore be interpreted in relation to the specific video analysed. Finally, a third limitation lies in the restriction of the corpus to comments containing explicit references to ideological categories. While this criterion is consistent with the aims of the study, it may exclude other relevant positions that engage with the same issues without explicitly assigning individuals to a particular ideological category. Future research could address these limitations by analysing larger corpora and/or multiple case studies, where recurring users across multiple discussions and platforms may provide stronger evidence of their ideological positioning and community affiliation.

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From Farm to Table Measuring Host Communities' Relationship with the Plant World in Instagram Tourism Reels

Elena Mattei

Università degli Studi di Bergamo, Italy

Abstract Regenerative tourism claims to move beyond sustainability by restoring ecosystems and communities, but whether its communication enacts that claim has not been measured. The article annotates ten Instagram reels and captions from five regenerative, sustainable and neoliberal accounts, across 34 nodes and 261 values, yielding 1,737 multimodal and 565 linguistic annotations. Regenerative reels foreground producers, production settings and food as living matter; neoliberal reels foreground tourists, dining and prepared food and show no producers, a pattern the sustainable account shares. Where the corpora do not differ is in grammatical agency.

Keywords Regenerative Tourism. Multimodal Fine-Grained Annotation. Instagram Reels. Ecolinguistics. Food Discourse. Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Framing Regenerative Food and Tourism Discourse. – 3 Data and Method. – 4 Results. – 5 Discussion: Food as *Living Matter* and *Finished Product*. – 6 Conclusions: Limitations and Future Work.



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1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest organized transfers of people, money and appetite on the planet, and almost all of it passes through food. Where food comes from, who grows it and who is shown eating it are the terms on which a destination proposes a relationship between its visitors, its residents and the land that feeds both. Food-systems research has argued for a decade that those terms must change: sustaining a food system is no longer enough, and what is needed are systems that actively rebuild the soils, communities and ecosystems they depend on (Duncan, Carolan, Wiskerke 2021, 4).

Regenerative tourism now names a post-sustainability, post-industrialized position within the industry, but whether it reaches the industry's communication is a separate question: in the food-systems literature, tourism appears first as a threat, among the pressures eroding Indigenous food systems through cultural commodification (Dwiartama 2021, 34), in light of Cole's (2007) finding that communities present themselves as representatives of an ethnic, exotic way of life in order to remain an attraction. The question is therefore whether a practice (the food practice) that current literature identifies as a mechanism of commodification can communicate post-industrial principles instead of simply commodifying them.

Two recent changes make that question answerable: Instagram's shift to video content, and advances in fine-grained multimodal annotation. This article applies that combination to food, by analyzing ten Instagram reels and their captions. Specifically, two reels from each of five accounts paradigmatic of four tourism orientations (Mattei, forthcoming b) were annotated in full: 105 shots, 1,737 multimodal annotations from a template of 34 categories and 261 values, and 565 linguistic annotations over the matched captions. The design is deliberately contrastive and small, a pilot illustrating the types rather than estimating the populations behind them.

Three contributions follow: countable differences between regenerative and neoliberal food discourse; an annotation instrument specified in full and available on request, so that it can be reapplied, contested or extended; and a caution, in that two of five pre-specified hypotheses failed.

Section 2 defines the framework, the six regenerative food-system principles and what each would look like in communication, and states the criteria on which the regenerative, sustainable and neoliberal orientations are attributed to accounts; Section 3 the corpus, instrument and protocol; Sections 4 and 5 report and discuss the results; Section 6 states the limitations and conclusions.

2 Framing Regenerative Food and Tourism Discourse

2.1 From Sustaining to Regenerating

Sustainability entered the public and policy domain through the Brundtland formulation, which defined sustainable development as development meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (WCED 1987), and was subsequently consolidated in the 2030 Agenda and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; Duncan, Carolan, Wiskerke 2021). In both, the underlying logic remained broadly one of maintenance: the aim is to hold a system at a level at which it can continue, not to restore what it has lost (Bellato et al. 2022). Regeneration, by contrast, tends to reposition humans as integral components of ecological processes, calling for concepts and narratives that situate us “not as sustainers of nature, but as active participants in an integrated cycle of regeneration” (Duncan, Carolan, Wiskerke 2021, 4), so that the distinction would seem to be rather more than terminological. Some support for that reading can be drawn from the trajectory of the past decade: since the SDGs were adopted, hunger has returned to the levels of a decade earlier, with undernourishment rising to 815 million by 2016, while negative externalities have continued largely unchecked and corporate consolidation and financial speculation in the food chain have, if anything, intensified (Ferrando 2021). On this evidence, doing the same thing more efficiently or more ‘sustainably’ would appear to be less a transition than “more of the same but with a nicer face” (Ferrando 2021, 262).

Six principles have accordingly been proposed for food systems to be considered truly regenerative: 1) acknowledging and including diverse forms of knowing and being; 2) taking care of people, animals, and the planet; 3) moving beyond capitalist approaches; 4) commoning the food system; 5) promoting accountable innovations; and 6) long-term planning of rural-urban relations (Boyd, Prudham, Schurman 2001; Duncan, Carolan, Wiskerke 2021, 5). Each of these draws on a substantial and partly independent body of work. Political economy, for its part, supplies the analytic questions of who owns what, who does what and who gets what, although it has been criticized for insufficient engagement with feminist, postcolonial and critical race theory and for largely omitting non-human actors (Galt 2013; Levkoe, Moragues-Faus, Duncan 2021, 14). Work on Indigenous food systems, meanwhile, documents dietary and ecological diversity that appears to exceed by some margin that of industrial diets (Kuhnlein, Receveur 1996). Care ethics, finally, contributes much of the relational vocabulary that the more technical literature tends to lack, defining care as everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world (Tronto 1993, 103),

a formulation subsequently extended by Hassink and colleagues into caring for places and caring with people in places (2021, 128-9).

At least two of these strands bear on tourism in ways that are not especially favorable to it. The first is Chesnais's argument, after Polanyi (2001), that the imposition of capitalist relations to land tends to displace relational ontologies in which land and water are kin rather than stock, and that recovering them would require something like the pluriverse Escobar (2018) describes (Chesnais 2021, 52, 59). The second is the commodification argument already introduced in § 1, since tourism appears in this literature among the threats to Indigenous food systems, alongside state regulation and the introduction of cash values (Dwiartama 2021, 34).

2.2 Regenerative Tourism, and What It Claims

Regenerative tourism has nonetheless emerged as a post-sustainability, post-capitalist position within the industry, holding that all sectors bear responsibility for their effects on the capacity to thrive on a finite planet, and that tourism should reinvest in people, communities and environments so as to support the long-term vitality of social-ecological systems (Dredge 2022).

Because such change is seen to require a reorientation of mindset rather than procedural adjustment, attention consistently turns to partnerships between Western scientific and Indigenous/local epistemologies and to the foundational notion of interdependence across living systems (Bellato et al. 2022; 2023) – a non-dualistic view increasingly reflected in Indigenous and spiritual tourism (Butler, Carr 2024; Walia, Jasrotia 2021).

Food is arguably where the two perspectives meet most directly: local culinary practice anchors regional identity, shortening supply chains and sustaining the farming landscapes tourists come to look at (Brulotte, Di Giovine 2014; Falter et al. 2025), while circular gastronomy imports waste minimization and resource recovery into culinary practice, with food sovereignty as its political counterpart (Amo 2023; McGregor 2018). The principles are therefore not foreign to tourism scholarship, and what appears to be missing is rather the evidence that they reach its communication.

2.3 What the Principles Would Look Like in Communication, and What is Known Instead

Nowadays, tourism is encountered as promotional discourse long before it is encountered as an operation, and here the ecolinguistic literature returns something close to the opposite of what the principles

would require. Stibbe's account of erasure describes the progressive removal of the more-than-human world from the discourses that shape action toward it (2015), and tourism discourse has been documented as one site of that removal: promotional language tends to render landscapes as objects of anticipatory consumption (Dann 1996; Mocini 2013), metaphor casts nature as pristine resource or idyllic retreat (Jaworska 2017), and Appraisal analysis suggests that quantification and upscaling normalize the idea that natural worth can be conveyed through abundance (Martin, White 2005; Isti'anah, Suhandano, Winarti 2024). Since the 1970s, Kosatica and Smith argue, resources signifying pristine or endangered nature have diverted attention from structural unsustainability and relocated responsibility to the consumer, in what they describe as "a marketing ploy that remains widely in use today" (2025, 11).

The platform-specific literature is by now substantial, encompassing Instagram's capitalization of landscape and the semiotics of pristine nature (Smith 2021; 2025), the discourse circuit that portrays wildlife as spectacular commodities in ecotourism and the framing of wildlife encounters as hospitality (Lamb 2021; 2024), normative sustainability in chefs' Instagram discourse (Mapes, Ross 2022), and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) claims in luxury brands' posts within the same social-semiotic framework used here (Nervino, Choi, Wang 2025). Three findings from previous studies extend this work in the direction the present corpus requires, and together they suggest that the pattern is neither uniform nor inevitable. The first establishes the baseline: Instagram tourism promotion has been found to depict nature as consumable spectacle in contexts where an environmental reference corpus shows stewardship instead (Mattei 2026; Mattei, forthcoming a). The second narrows that finding to food, where economic discourse tends to construe the object through cost, shelf life and profit rather than through nourishment, so that waste registers as an efficiency failure rather than as a nutrient returning to a cycle (Mattei, Capoani 2025). The third, however, indicates that a community-oriented framing can foster stewardship in place of commodification (Mattei, Maci 2025), which is what makes it worth asking whether accounts that describe themselves as regenerative do so consistently, and in which modes.

Kosatica and Smith supply the term that arguably holds these findings together, in that 'sustainability' now circulates so widely, and is appropriated by such divergent interests, that it operates as a floating signifier whose banality can reinforce the status quo (2025). The methodological consequence would seem to follow fairly directly, since if the label floats free of the practice, self-description cannot safely be trusted as a classifier, and what an account calls itself must instead be tested against what it shows.

Set against the six principles, the ecolinguistic findings can then be restated as expectations that are countable rather than impressionistic. If diverse knowledges are acknowledged, producers should appear and should appear as agents rather than as scenery or as the object of a visit. If care is enacted, the relation between hosts, guests and the more-than-human should be reciprocal rather than one-directional. If, in addition, capitalist approaches are moved beyond, food should be construable as living process, grown, harvested and transformed, and not solely as finished dish. And if food is treated as a commons, the settings shown should extend to the places of production and sharing rather than being confined to those of consumption and lodging.

The comparison pole needs specifying with the same care, since ‘neoliberal’ is otherwise a residual label for whatever is not regenerative. The political-economy strand of the food-systems literature supplies the criteria, asking of any food system who owns what, who does what and who gets what (Galt 2013; Levkoe, Moragues-Faus, Duncan 2021, 14), and neoliberal food discourse is here defined by its answers to those questions in communication: food is produced for exchange and shown as a finished commodity; provenance, where it appears, functions as brand value rather than as a relation to a place; the visitor is addressed as a consumer and the host as a service provider; and responsibility for sustainability, where it is mentioned at all, is relocated to that consumer (Kosatica, Smith 2025). Set against the six principles, this yields the mirror image of the regenerative expectations: producers absent or present as scenery, food as dish rather than as process, settings confined to consumption and lodging, and the relation between hosts and guests one-directional. The sustainable orientation occupies the position Kosatica and Smith describe, in that the label is claimed but the practice is not specified, and it is retained here as an intermediate case rather than as a third pole.

2.4 The Gap

Two conditions make such expectations testable now. The first concerns the object: Instagram has shifted to a video-driven platform whose reels are multimodally complex artifacts not covered by existing descriptions, and which therefore call for a correspondingly fine-grained analytical framework (Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2026, 115, 119). A recent scoping review of video analysis within hospitality research would seem to confirm that the field has not yet caught up with this shift, since, of the 37 studies it surveys, 25 draw on YouTube, 20 rely on qualitative content analysis conducted, as the authors observe, “without establishing standardized protocols

specifically designed for video data analysis”, and only four examine textual, visual, auditory and metadata components together, while Instagram does not figure among the platforms sampled at all (Xu et al. 2026, 71, 73). The second concerns method: multimodality research has arguably reached the limits of what observation and case studies can establish, and annotation is what allows small-scale qualitative description to be carried over into procedures capable of supporting more robust generalization (Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2026, 126). A multi-level, stand-off annotation scheme for short video, continuing the tradition of multimodal transcription (Baldry, Thibault 2006), is by now available (Grzenkiewicz, Wildfeuer 2025; 2026), and comparable corpus-based work across channels has established the design (Mattei, Wildfeuer 2026). Regenerative tourism has itself been approached multimodally on Instagram (Mattei, Maci 2025), though without moving image and without a comparison set.

Taken together, the literature would seem to stop one step short of the question pursued here. It specifies what regenerative food systems require, records that regenerative tourism claims those requirements as its own, establishes that tourism promotion has historically worked against them, and warns that the label may float free of the practice; what it has not yet done is to measure whether the communication of regenerative tourism enacts the principles it invokes, across modes and against a comparison set drawn from the sustainable and neoliberal tourism against which it defines itself. That is what this article sets out to do, asking who acts, who is acted upon, where and what food is allowed to be.

3 Data and Method

3.1 Theoretical Positioning

This study operationalizes a multi-level multimodal annotation framework to model how food, plants and host communities are construed in regenerative reels as against those of the neoliberal and sustainable orientations. In doing so it draws on three research strands, each contributing a distinct component. Systemic Functional Linguistics supplies the modeling of meaning as systemic choice with a motivated function in context (Halliday, Matthiessen 2014; Martin, White 2005); empirical multimodality supplies the stand-off, multi-level architecture through which that choice can be recorded across simultaneous modes (Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2017; Pflaeging, Wildfeuer, Bateman 2021); and corpus-assisted ecolinguistics supplies the guiding critical interest in the erasure or restoration of the more-than-human world (Stibbe 2014; 2015; Mattei, forthcoming a).

A stand-off architecture (Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2017, 11) is one in which annotation, rather than partitioning the data along a single dominant structure, is distributed across independent parallel layers, each anchored to its own time-span in the reel. Such an arrangement appears necessary given the asynchronous character of short-video communication, where a voice-over may run across several shots, on-screen text may persist independently of the depicted action, and music may continue uninterrupted while the visual material changes. No single segmentation could accommodate all three at once, and the parallel layers are what allow each to be recorded on its own terms.

Following Grzenkowicz and Wildfeuer (2025), the framework distinguishes two analytic levels. The first is the shot, understood as the formal unit: the continuous segment of footage running between two cuts, at which the camera-level categories are anchored. The second is the eventuality, understood as the functional unit: a state of affairs represented on screen, comprising participants engaged in a process within a setting. The term is adapted from Discourse Representation Theory (Kamp, Reyle 1993) and was operationalized for multimodal artifacts by Wildfeuer (2014); it is at this level that represented participants, their semiotic resources, processes, Transitivity roles, setting and modality are annotated.

In the framework as originally stated the two levels are independently segmented, so that one eventuality may run across several cuts and one shot may contain several eventualities. In the present corpus, however, that independence was not always exercised, as the shot was taken as the domain within which the eventuality-level categories are applied. This is reported as an empirical property of these particular reels rather than as a design decision. In this corpus, shots are short, at a median of 1.67 seconds, and every annotated shot carries exactly one Setting value and one configuration of human participants, so that the represented situation does not change within it. Setting is a circumstance of the eventuality, and two eventualities within one shot would in time produce two setting values, which never occurs. What varies within a shot is therefore not the segmentation itself but the number of tags of a given type and the sub-interval each of them covers, and this multiplicity is internal to a single situation, rarely evidence of several. The point holds even in the very few shots (nine) where an action process and a reaction process co-occur between different participants. Figure 4 illustrates the two levels on the first six shots of Playa Viva reel 1, and Table 1 sets this out node by node, giving the level at which each node is applied, the unit over which it repeats, the largest number of tags observed in any single shot, and the median proportion of the host shot that is covered.

Table 1 The scheme by unit of application: the analytic level at which each node is applied, the unit over which it repeats, the maximum number of tags observed in one shot and the median proportion of the host shot covered

Node or group	Applied at	Unit of repetition	Max per shot	Median coverage
Angle · Framing · Movement · Dynamicality · Transition · Provenance · Activity	shot	one per shot	1	0.989
Setting	eventuality	one per shot, with combined umbrella values in parallel	1	0.956
Human beings	eventuality	one per participant type, with combined co-presence values in parallel	1	0.990
Food · Plant/Natural world · Objects/Tools · Animals · Body parts · Drinks	eventuality	one per shot	1	0.98-0.99
Gaze · Facial expression · Reaction processes	eventuality	one per shot	1	0.95-0.99
Posture · Gesture · Action processes	eventuality	repeats where two participants are present	2	0.93-0.96
Demographics: age · biological sex	eventuality	one per human participant	4	0.90-0.93
Modality	eventuality	one per modality instance	3	0.493
Function	eventuality	one per participant role, over the sub-interval in which that participant is engaged in the process	8	0.440
Music · Sound · Spoken language · Written language	independent layers, each diegetic / non-diegetic	one per instance	–	–

Source: Author's table, © the Author

The category system applied in this study extends Grzenkowicz and Wildfeuer's scheme developed for TikTok (2025; 2026), with three substantive adaptations grounded in prior work on still imagery (Mattei 2024; Mattei, Wildfeuer 2026). First, eventuality-level participant categories are tourism-specific, with Human

beings sub-categories foregrounding host-guest reciprocity and Plant/Natural world bundling botanical participants with natural materials under an ecosystemic umbrella. Second, Action and Reaction processes are extended with a three-way transactional typology (Human-Nature, Human-Animal, Human-Human) plus Non-transactional. Third, the diegetic/non-diegetic distinction, applied by Grzenkiewicz and Wildfeuer (2025) to distinguish live from post-edited sound, is extended to spoken and written language, which is what supports the comparison between on-screen voice, text *and* post-edited storytelling or text overlays.

3.2 Annotation Environments

The reels annotation system is described in full in a codebook, available from the author on request, and was built as well as applied on GRAPEMARS (Multimodal Analysis Research Software).¹ GRAPEMARS is a web-based environment in which the analyst defines a library of the modes to be analyzed and their typologies, and annotates them on time-aligned layers, which supports the detection of co-occurrence between modes and the export of the resulting counts for quantitative analysis. Annotations are organized as father nodes (categories) and child nodes (values); multiple annotations may share or overlap a time-span, which is what realizes the parallel-layer architecture. Linguistic annotation of post captions was conducted in CATMA (Computer-Assisted Textual MarkUp and Analysis).²

The reels coding scheme comprises 34 father nodes distributed across ten color-coded label families and subsuming 261 child nodes, of which 142 carry at least one annotation in this corpus. Since the remaining values were available to the analyst but were never assigned, structural absence can itself be treated as a finding, and is reported as such throughout. Figure 1 shows the tagging system as it appears on the software, while Table 2 gives the instrument by label family.

The scheme is organized along two hierarchies that are orthogonal to one another, and the distinction governs how the counts should be read. The first is the label hierarchy of the annotation environment: ten label families (e.g. *Visual_Camera_Shot_perspective*, *Visual_Eventuality*, *Music*, *Sound*, *Spoken Language* and *Written Language*) subsume the father nodes (i.e. *angle*, *movement* and *framing* for *Visual_Camera_Shot_perspective*), which subsume the child values

¹ GRAPEMARS software, GRAPE research group, Universitat Jaume I: www.mars.grape.uji.es.

² CATMA software: <https://catma.de/>.

(i.e. *Bird's eye*, *Eye-level*, *Frog's eye* for the father node *angle*; *very long*, *long*, *medium*, *close*, *very close* for *framing*), and every annotation is one child value. The second is the analytic hierarchy of the artifact: a reel segments into shots, eventualities are annotated within them, and within an eventuality individual participants and modality instances carry their own tags over sub-intervals. The two do not correspond one-to-one. The four camera families anchor at shot level by definition, the Visual Eventuality family at eventuality level, and the audio and language families run on independent layers that may cross both. Table 1 gives the correspondence node by node.

The scheme is inherited in part and new in part, and the codebook records which for every node. Eleven of the 34 father nodes are taken from Grzenkiewicz and Wildfeuer (2025), some without modification and some simplified or extended, and they cover camera perspective, non-perspectival properties (i.e. shots devoid of perspective, e.g. charts, screen captures, infographics), dynamicity/staticity (moving image such as footage versus static, i.e. photographs), cut (the techniques with which footage is divided into shots, i.e. through hard cuts or fading), visual form (extradiegetic, i.e. external graphics that are superimposed on the footage, e.g. stickers, comment quotes, emojis) and sound layers. The remaining cluster mostly in the Eventuality layer, and they are where the tourism- and food-specific commitments of the study sit: the participant (human, animal, plant, object), process (material, mental, etc.), setting (natural, cultural-historical, commercial accommodation, urban and agricultural), modality (visual, audial, verbal and combination of these), process and participant function.

The Function node applies the participant roles of Halliday's Transitivity system to visible participants rather than to clause constituents, assigning one tag per participant per role over the sub-interval in which that participant is engaged in the process. Ten values are defined, distributed across the four process types that are recoverable from the image. Material processes, those of doing, supply Actor for the participant from whom a vector of action departs (53 annotations), Goal for the one that vector reaches (50), and Scope for a domain over which the process ranges without affecting it (8). Mental processes, those of sensing, supply Sensor (16) and Phenomenon (13), the latter assigned only where what is perceived is itself visible in the shot. Relational processes, those of being, are covered by the single merged value Carrier/Attribute (28), which does not separate the entity from the quality ascribed to it. Verbal processes, those of saying, supply Sayer and Target, together with Receiver/Recipient. Behavioral and existential processes, and the identifying subtype of the relational, are not represented, since distinguishing them would require grammatical rather than visual evidence.

Additionally, this study expands categories at the father (adding to *entity type, function, gesture* elements like *facial expression or gaze*) and child level (adding sub-categories detailing the variety of entities and relationships between them, e.g. the type of human roles such as tourists or Indigenous people; animal and plant species; cuisine). The final column of Table 2 gives the provenance by family.

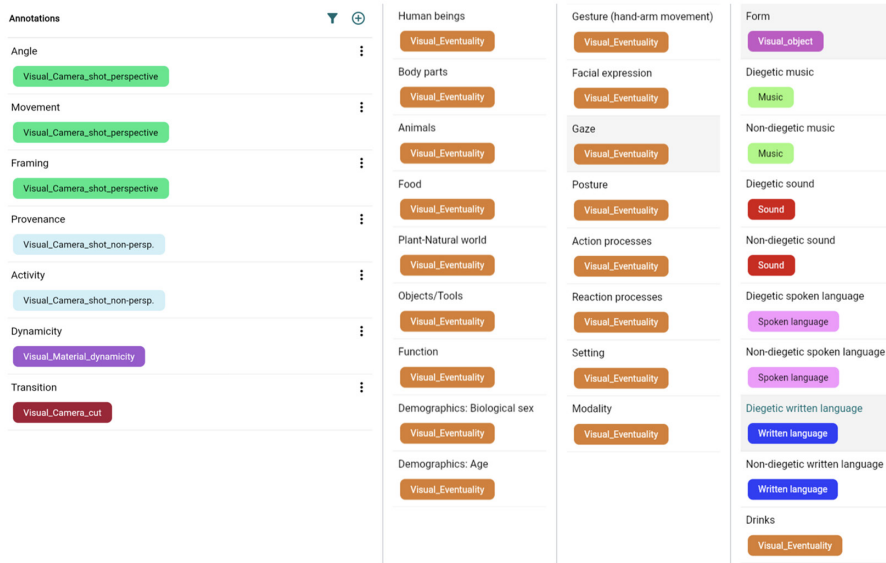


Figure 1 Author, The reels tagging system on GRAPEMARS, showing the ten color-coded label families and their father nodes. 2026. Screenshot of the GRAPEMARS annotation environment; interface © GRAPE research group, Universitat Jaume I

Table 2 The annotation system by label family: father nodes, child nodes defined, child nodes carrying at least one annotation, and annotation load in this corpus

Label family	Father nodes	Nodes	Children	Active	Annotations	Source
Visual_Camera_shot_perspective	Angle, Movement, Framing	3	21	19	313	Grzenkowicz, Wildfeuer 2025
Visual_Camera_shot_non-persp.	Provenance, Activity	2	6	1	1	Grzenkowicz, Wildfeuer 2025
Visual_Material_dynamicity	Dynamicity	1	2	2	105	Grzenkowicz, Wildfeuer 2025

Label family	Father nodes	Nodes	Children	Active	Annotations	Source
Visual_Camera_cut	Transition	1	6	3	105	Grzenkowicz, Wildfeuer 2025
Visual_Eventuality	Human beings, Body parts, Animals, Food, Plant-Natural world, Objects/ Tools, Function, Demographics: Biological sex, Demographics: Age, Gesture, Facial expression, Gaze, Posture, Action processes, Reaction processes, Setting, Modality, Drinks	18	145	94	1,115	new
Visual_object	Form	1	8	5	39	Grzenkowicz, Wildfeuer 2025
Music	Diegetic music, Non-diegetic music	2	19	6	10	mixed
Sound	Diegetic sound, Non-diegetic sound	2	12	1	1	Grzenkowicz, Wildfeuer 2025
Spoken language	Diegetic, Non-diegetic	2	12	5	15	new
Written language	Diegetic, Non-diegetic	2	30	6	33	new
Total		34	261	142	1,737	
Source: Author's table, © the Author						

3.3 Corpus and Sampling

The pilot corpus comprises reels from five Instagram accounts selected as paradigmatic of four tourism orientations: Playa Viva (@playaviva, Mexico; regenerative),³ The Farm at Byron Bay (@thefarmatbyronbay, New South Wales, Australia; regenerative

³ Playa Viva, Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/playaviva/>.

agrifood; hereafter Regenerative Farm),⁴ Gaia Retreat & Spa (@gaiaretreat, New South Wales, Australia; sustainable; hereafter Gaia Retreat),⁵ Elements of Byron (@elementsofbyron, New South Wales, Australia; neoliberal)⁶ and Destination New South Wales (@visitnsw, state destination-marketing organization (DMO); neoliberal).⁷ Data span 2023 to 2025.

Orientation was attributed on three criteria applied to the account as a whole, and not to any reel: how the operator describes its own offer in the listing from which it was drawn and on its own channels; whether that description is tied to a named practice, such as permaculture, regenerative agriculture or a certified environmental standard, or remains at the level of a label; and the operator's position in the food system, as producer, hospitality provider or destination-marketing body. Playa Viva and The Farm describe themselves as regenerative and tie the description to named agricultural practice, the second as a working farm. Gaia Retreat & Spa describes itself as sustainable and as an 'eco-conscious retreat lodge', without naming a practice. Elements of Byron is a luxury resort whose food communication is organized around dining, and Destination New South Wales is the state marketing organization, whose brief is competitive promotion; neither claims an environmental orientation and both meet the neoliberal criteria set out in § 2.3. These last two are treated as one comparison arm, called the neoliberal corpus throughout, and are distinguished by name where a difference between a hospitality operator and a destination-marketing body is itself of interest.

Account selection proceeded in three stages, and the screening is reported in full because its difficulty is itself informative. Playa Viva was fixed first, as the only account identified in the regenerative tourism literature with sustained regenerative storytelling across video, image and caption together with an active posting record. A comparison set was then sought that would hold as much constant as possible apart from the tourism orientation itself: an English-speaking context, marketed through a comparable exoticized repertoire, and already documented, so that the discursive baseline against which any difference would be read was known rather than assumed. Instagram accounts were mapped across the English-speaking

4 The Farm at Byron Bay, Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/thefarmatbyronbay/>.

5 Gaia Retreat & Spa, Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/gaiaretreat/>.

6 Elements of Byron, Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/ElementsOfByron/>.

7 Destination New South Wales, Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/visitnsw/>.

destinations for this purpose, and Australia emerged as the closest match on both counts. It is marketed through the same repertoire of pristine nature, wildlife and encounter on which Playa Viva's Mexican positioning draws, and its tourism discourse is documented in a prior monograph (Mattei 2026).

Australia is also where the object of this study is most likely to be found. Agriculture is one of the country's major export sectors and agrifood an expanding one, and agritourism, the deliberate combination of visitor experience with food production, has been identified by national research and industry bodies as a growth area.⁸ If regenerative food discourse were reaching tourism communication anywhere in the English-speaking world, it would be reaching it here.

Candidate accounts were assembled by cross-mapping published listings of four kinds: eco-lodge and eco-resort directories,⁹ luxury-lodge and gourmet-travel rankings,¹⁰ agritourism guides issued through the national tourism board, and Instagram-influence rankings for Australian accommodation.¹¹ Twelve accounts were screened against three criteria: an active posting record within the collection window; food content amounting to at least ten reels; and caption-based storytelling rather than dish photography with a hashtag string. Three were retained: Elements of Byron, The Farm at Byron Bay and Gaia Retreat & Spa, all in New South Wales state. No eco-lodge among the candidates satisfied all three criteria at once, so that the sustainable position is held by a wellness retreat rather than by an eco-lodge proper; and the three retained accounts turned out, by coincidence rather than by design, to lie not only in the same state but in the same district, the Byron Bay area of the North Coast.¹²

Destination New South Wales was added as the state destination-marketing account because the New South Wales board promotes conventional, ecological and pioneering regenerative operators alongside one another, which makes it the appropriate site for the question of what the mainstream, institutionally sanctioned discourse is.

⁸ CSIRO, agritourism as a growth area: <https://research.csiro.au/foodag/premium-interactions/experiences-and-tourism/>.

⁹ Eco-resort directory consulted for candidate accounts: <https://www.greengetaways.com.au/eco-resorts-in-australia/>.

¹⁰ Luxury-lodge and resort rankings consulted for candidate accounts: <https://www.gourmettraveller.com.au/travel/accommodation/best-resorts-australia/>; <https://www.australia.com/en-us/things-to-do/luxury/best-all-inclusive-resorts.html>; <https://www.timeout.com/australia/hotels/australias-most-incredible-resorts-and-lodges-for-your-next-getaway>.

¹¹ Instagram-influence ranking for Australian accommodation: <https://www.hermesthemes.com/instagram-leaders/australia/>.

¹² Destination NSW, Byron Bay area page: <https://www.visitnsw.com/destinations/north-coast/byron-bay-area/byron-bay>.

Three features of that screening are themselves findings. First, food content is rare in Australian resort and eco-lodge accounts: of the twelve accounts screened only three carried food storytelling at all, and the ten-reel threshold excluded most candidates before any question of orientation arose. Second, destination-marketing accounts do promote food businesses, but the businesses they promote are wineries, and when they promote resorts it is not for their food. Food appears not to be treated as culture at the institutional level, which is itself a finding about the mainstream discourse this study set out to characterize. Third, the exception is agricultural rather than hospitality-based: working farms with a visitor offer are both growing in number and markedly more likely to narrate food, and it is from that segment, not from the accommodation segment, that the regenerative agrifood account in this corpus was found.

One consequence of that scarcity has to be stated plainly. No Australian account met the criteria for the regenerative pole, which is why the regenerative exemplar is Mexican and the comparison set Australian. National context is therefore not held constant across the two arms, and any difference between them is confounded with it to a degree this design cannot resolve. What limits the damage is the regenerative agrifood account, which is Australian: where it and Playa Viva agree against the Australian neoliberal accounts, the difference cannot be a national one.

Hashtag-based sampling was excluded, since a hashtag records only what a post claims about itself and offers no control over greenwashing. Orientation was instead assigned at account level, on the basis of how each operator positions its own offer in the directories and guides from which it was drawn, so that the claim to be regenerative, sustainable or conventional is the criterion of entry and its enactment in the reels is the outcome under test; none of the features counted in § 4 played any part in selection. Reels were downloaded with a third-party downloader (Apify Scraper) within the 2023-25 collection window. Fifty reels make up the corpus assembled so far, of which the two most recent food-related reels per account were annotated in full. Recency was chosen over random draw because it fixes each account at its current editorial practice, which is what the comparison is about; the cost is that the sample records that practice at one moment and cannot show whether it has changed, a limitation returned to in § 6. No duration threshold was applied, reel length being a property of the genre rather than of the sample: videos produced for Instagram are usually no longer than ninety seconds (Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2026, 119), and a minimum would have removed the shortest and most heavily edited material, which is precisely where pacing differences between the orientations become visible. The longest reel here runs to 50.3 seconds and the shortest to 8.9.

All reels were publicly accessible at the time of collection and were produced and published by the account holders as promotional content. No contact was made with the people represented, no personal data were collected beyond what the accounts themselves publish, and the downloaded material is held in the annotation environments under a private research account and is not redistributed. The figures reproduce single frames at the resolution needed to illustrate the annotation and do not include frames in which individuals are identifiable beyond what the public post already shows.

Ten reels, two per account, were fully annotated, running to 216.3 seconds (3 min 36 s) and 105 shots and carrying 1,737 annotations; Table 5 gives the distribution by account. Annotating a single reel required approximately one hour.

The ten post captions accompanying these reels form the linguistic sub-corpus. Caption and reel are matched by source filename, which Instagram builds from the opening of the caption; all ten match at complete string overlap, giving a one-to-one correspondence between the two layers, and three further captions collected from the same accounts have no annotated reel and are excluded, so that the visual and linguistic analyses address the same ten objects. The sub-corpus comprises 100 finite ranking clauses (64 regenerative, 29 neoliberal, 7 sustainable), carrying the 565 annotations reported here. The annotation file holds 625 annotations in all; the remaining 60 fall in a single excluded caption and are counted nowhere in this article.

3.4 Annotation Procedure

Annotation¹³ followed a multi-pass protocol over each reel, and began with shot segmentation and labeling of features such as angle, framing, movement, dynamicity, followed by modality, audio

13 Four rules govern what is and is not tagged, and are stated here because they determine how the resulting counts should be read. A strategy that is present and listed in the scheme is tagged; a strategy that is not present is not tagged, so that a zero represents a real absence rather than a missing value; a strategy that is present but not listed, which occurs very rarely, is tagged Other; and two strategies used synergetically are tagged More/Combined, where that combination is not itself frequent enough to warrant a node of its own. More than one tag per segment is permitted only for Function, Demographics: Biological sex, Demographics: Age and Modality, and this restriction is verifiable in the exports. Function carries up to eight tags in a single shot and Demographics up to four, while Modality reaches three, the co-occurrences being exclusively Visual with Written-verbal and Spoken-verbal with Visual; Setting, Human beings, Food, Plant/Natural world, Objects/Tools, Animals, Body parts, Gaze, Facial expression, Reaction processes and Drinks never exceed one tag per shot. In the residual cases, where Posture, Gesture and Action processes reach two tags in between 2% and 6% of shots, the shot in question contains two human participants, so that these nodes follow the same one-per-participant logic.

and language annotation that distinguishes between diegetic and extradiegetic materials. The Eventuality layer annotation – the most complex – was the final step of each video annotation, in which each participant was labeled according to nature and function; actions and reactions were distinguished, and setting was coded. Figure 2 shows a reel under annotation.

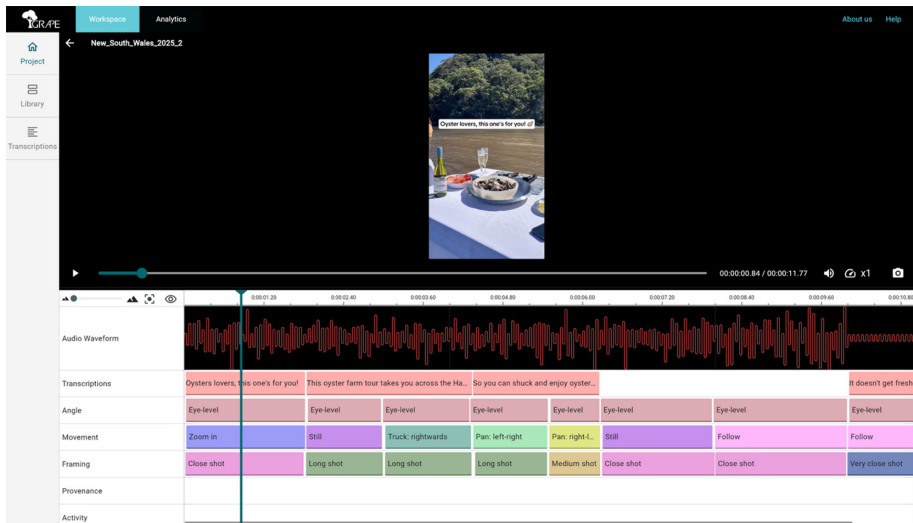


Figure 2 Author, A reel under annotation in GRAPEMARS, showing the time-aligned parallel layers. 2026. Screenshot of the GRAPEMARS annotation environment; annotation content by the Author, interface © GRAPE research group, Universitat Jaume I. Video still © [atvisitnsnw]; reproduced for the purpose of scholarly analysis

Specifically, category assignment for Human beings and Objects/Tools proceeded by triangulation of multiple cues: clothing or dress, behavior, activity or role in the reel, and contextual anchoring in the caption, hashtag or account identity. A singular category is assigned only where at least three cues converge; where they do not, the tag is left unassigned rather than guessed. Three of the producer categories are separated not by cue convergence but by a joint output-and-setting criterion: a farmer yields raw material in a field, an artisan a transformed ingredient in a workshop or outdoor specialized space, a cook a prepared dish in a kitchen. Human beings and Setting both carry combined values (Tourists & locals and Tourists & service providers at the first, three natural-with-cultural, natural-with-historical and natural-with-facility umbrellas at the second), annotated on a parallel layer in addition to the singular tags rather than instead of them: the singular value records what is there, the combined value that a convergence obtains. Counts at

these two nodes therefore exceed the number of entities on screen and are read accordingly. Table 3 gives the nine Human beings values and their disambiguating criteria.

Table 3 The Human beings node: the nine values, the role each records, the criterion that disambiguates it from its neighbors, and its frequency in this corpus

Value	Role recorded	Disambiguating criterion	no.
Local/Indigenous farmers	producer of food and raw materials	labor cue, farm or field setting, work or traditional dress, contextual anchoring; ≥ 3 converge	22
Chefs/traditional cooks	preparer of meals	output is a prepared dish AND setting is a kitchen; both required	1
Community leaders/elders	cultural keeper, host, narrator	age, authority, community belonging, transmission; ≥ 3 converge	4
Indigenous/local food artisans	transformer of ingredients	output is a transformed ingredient AND setting is a workshop or outdoor specialized space, not a kitchen	2
Indigenous/local artisans	–	duplicates the preceding node; deprecated, no annotation anywhere in the corpus	0
Service providers	paid mediator of the experience	commercial cue (uniform, badge, branded dress), mediation behavior, hospitality setting, provider identity; ≥ 3 converge	7
Tourist/traveller	receiver of the experience	dress distinct from local norms, observing/tasting/learning, receiver role, caption framing; ≥ 3 converge	22
Tourists & locals	co-presence pattern	≥ 1 Tourist and ≥ 1 of the first four values in the same eventuality; added in parallel to the singular tags	9
Tourists & service providers	co-presence pattern	≥ 1 Tourist and ≥ 1 Service provider in the same eventuality; added in parallel	0
Total			67

Source: condensed from the codebook (§ 3.2); Author's table, © the Author

Concurrently, caption annotation was carried out in CATMA. Annotation in CATMA is span-level: a tag is anchored to a stretch of caption text identified by character offsets, rather than to a time interval as in the visual instrument, and spans carrying tags from different tagsets may overlap freely. That capacity is used extensively here, since 81 of the 421 annotated spans carry tags from more than one tagset, so that a stretch such as the farm is recorded simultaneously as a Circumstance of place and as an item of the experiential food-and-nature taxonomy. CATMA also encodes hierarchical tagsets, and attaches Properties to tags, so that the

Appraisal tags carry Attitude or Graduation and the Transitivity tags carry Experiential.

In the caption analysis, five tagsets were applied, each answering a distinct question of the caption. Transitivity, the largest at 280 annotations, records the ideational configuration of the clause through four branches: Process for the type of process realized by the main lexical verb; Participant for the roles its participants occupy; Circumstance for augmentations of place, time, manner, cause and accompaniment; and Animation for the semiotic class of the entity that fills a participant slot, which is what makes it countable whether a plant or an animal is ever construed as a participant at all. Appraisal (74) records the interpersonal resources of evaluation, distinguishing Attitude, as Affect, Judgement and Appreciation, from Graduation, as Force and Focus. Experiential meaning, Food and Nature (68) is a domain taxonomy of what the caption names, covering foods, drinks, plants, people, food-related activities and settings, and answers the question of presence rather than of grammatical role. Tourism tropes and strategies (90) records the promotional move a stretch of text performs, which is not the same question as how it evaluates, so that a single span may carry both a trope and an Appraisal tag. Digital affordances (53) records the platform-specific resources of the caption as a post, namely hashtags, location tags and the register markers of platform writing.

Seven rules govern the count. One finite ranking clause counts as one process, assigned by its main lexical verb; coordinated finite clauses are counted separately; embedded and non-finite clauses are not counted; and projection counts both the projecting and the projected clause. Hashtag-internal lexemes are counted as Appraisal only where inscribed-evaluative, and emoji are not counted. Affect is tallied separately and excluded from the positive and negative Attitude totals. The ten matched captions comprise 100 finite ranking clauses and carry 565 annotations in all. Figure 3 shows the five tagsets applied to one caption, and Table 4 gives the tagsets with their attested values.

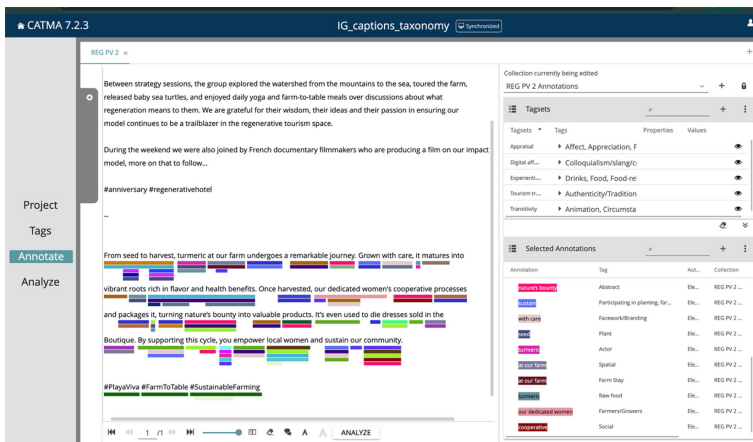
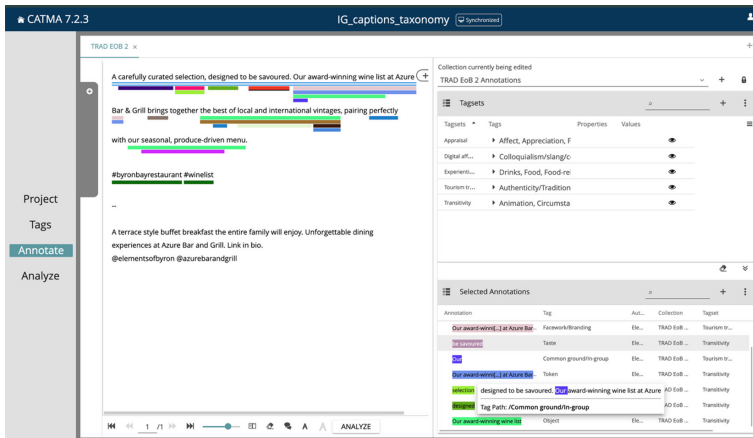


Figure 3 Author, The five caption tagsets applied in CATMA, project IG_captions_taxonomy. 2026. Screenshot of the CATMA annotation environment; annotation content by the Author. Author's screenshot

Table 4 The caption annotation scheme: the five CATMA tagsets of project IG_captions_taxonomy, the values attested in the ten matched captions with their frequencies, and the values defined but not used

Tagset	Second level	Values attested in the ten captions (no.)	Defined, not used
Transitivity	Animation	Human (16) · Abstract (7) · Food (4) · Object (4) · Plant (3) · Metaphor (2) · Animal (1) · Non-human, living (1)	–
	Circumstance	Extent/temporal (10) · Accompaniment (8) · Extent/spatial, natural (5) · Manner (4) · Extent/spatial, artificial (3) · Cause (2) · Contingency (2)	–
	Participant	Goal (31) · Attribute (27) · Carrier (17) · Actor (15) · Phenomenon (11) · Scope (4) · Sensor (4) · Token (3) · Value (3) · Receiver (1) · Sayer (1) · Verbiage (1)	–
	Process	Material (40) · Relational/attributive (18) · Behavioral (6) · Material/transformation (5) · Mental/affection (5) · Mental/cognition (5) · Mental/perception (5) · Relational/identifying (3) · Material/creation (2) · Verbal (1)	Existential
Appraisal	Affect (Attitude)	Satisfaction (4) · Inclination (2) · Happiness (1)	Disinclination · Dissatisfaction · Insecurity · Security · Unhappiness
	Appreciation (Attitude)	Valuation (22) · Reaction (10) · Composition (2)	Evoked valuation
	Judgement (Attitude)	Social esteem (11)	Social sanction
	Force (Graduation)	Up-scaling (20)	Downscaling
	Focus (Graduation)	Focus (2), no children	–
Experiential meaning (Food & Nature)	Food	Cooked dish (4) · Animal-based food (3)	Plant-based food
	Drinks	Drinks (4), used as a bare parent	Children not present in the export
	Plants	Natural element (5) · Raw food (3) · Crops (1) · Flowers (1) · Seeds (1)	Indigenous ingredients · Medicinal plants · Trees · Wild herbs
	Humans	Farmers/growers (6) · Indigenous/local (food) artisans (3) · Tourist/traveller (3) · Service providers (2)	Chefs/elders/ community leaders

Tagset	Second level	Values attested in the ten captions (no.)	Defined, not used
	Food-related activities	Tasting traditional dishes (5) · Interacting with locals or guides (4) · Harvesting (3) · Participating in planting, farming, seed sowing (3) · Preservation processes (2)	10 of the 15 values
	Settings	Organic farm (4) · Rivers/lakes (3) · Restaurant (2) · Festival, food (1) · Local market (1) · Ecolodge (1) · Mountains/forest (1) · Sea/beach/coastline (1) · Valley (1)	16 of the 25 values
Tourism tropes/strategies	–	CTA (13) · Ego-targeting (12) · Ecolexicon/green (12) · Authenticity/tradition (11) · Exclusivity (10) · Common ground/in-group (8) · Facework/branding (8) · Social (5) · Magic (3) · Play (3) · Rhetorical question (3) · Familiarity (1) · Proximity/intimacy (1)	Strangerhood
Digital affordances	–	Hashtag (31) · Colloquialism/slang/contraction (12) · Tagging location (10)	–

Source: computed from the caption annotation file; Author's table. © the Author

3.5 Analysis: Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

Raw counts were downloaded and exported from both software tools, which allowed for descriptive statistics such as within-corpus relative frequencies at category, annotation and sub-annotation level, with rates normalized per shot. Here, rates per unit of running time are reported only where pacing is itself at issue. Five comparisons between the regenerative corpora (Playa Viva + Regenerative Farm, $n = 1,003$ tags) and the neoliberal corpora (Elements of Byron + New South Wales, $n = 590$) were **specified in advance** and are the only inferential tests reported. Specifically, they compare:

- participant agency,
- human participant type,
- setting type,
- food portrayal,
- and reaction processes.

Gaia Retreat is retained as a single intermediate case, reported descriptively and never tested, since one account and two reels cannot support a third arm.

The five comparisons are reported first as descriptive contrasts: the counts on each side, the proportion, and the odds ratio with Woolf 95% confidence intervals, the Haldane-Anscombe correction being applied where a cell is empty. Fisher's exact test is then reported for each, with Holm-Bonferroni correction across the five, but under an assumption the data do not meet. Annotations are nested within shots

(Figure 4), shots within reels and reels within accounts, whereas the test treats the 1,593 annotations in the two arms as independent draws; the resulting p-values are therefore indices of how unevenly the annotations fall across the two arms, and they are not to be read as Type I error probabilities for a claim about regenerative and neoliberal discourse in general. With two accounts per arm, models that would correct for clustering (mixed-effects with account or reel as a random effect, or cluster-robust standard errors) are not estimable in any credible way. What the design does permit is a permutation check at the level of the reel, the smallest unit that is plausibly exchangeable between arms: the eight tested reels admit seventy assignments of four to each arm, the pooled odds ratio is recomputed under each, and the rank of the observed assignment among the seventy is reported alongside each comparison in Table 6. This check cannot reach conventional significance after correction for five tests, the smallest attainable value being one in seventy, and it is not offered as a test; it shows whether the association observed at annotation level survives when reels rather than annotations are the units. A supplementary distributional analysis reports adjusted standardized residuals per sub-annotation against expectation proportional to corpus size, the corpora differing in annotation volume by a factor of four.

Two counting decisions are stated here because they fix the tables in § 4.3. For the comparison of food portrayal, raw or growing matter comprises the values Plant-based food, Raw food, Crops, Seeds, Combined and Wild herbs/medicinal plants, and prepared food comprises Cooked meal/traditional dish and Animal-based food; drinks are excluded. For the comparison of reaction processes, the denominator is the whole Visual_Eventuality category of the scheme (1,115 annotations across the three corpora) and the numerator is the two human-to-human values, Reaction: Human-Human and Transactional: Human-Human; the three Human-Nature and two Non-transactional annotations belong to the same node but not to the tested subset.

Because a scheme of 261 values admits a very large number of possible two-by-two comparisons, and because a proportion of these would reach conventional significance by chance alone, the five tested here were fixed in advance and are the only inferential comparisons the article reports. Each derives from one of the countable expectations set out in § 2.3, which in turn derive from the six principles, so that what is compared was determined by the framework rather than selected from the results.

Playa Viva, reel 1: first six shots

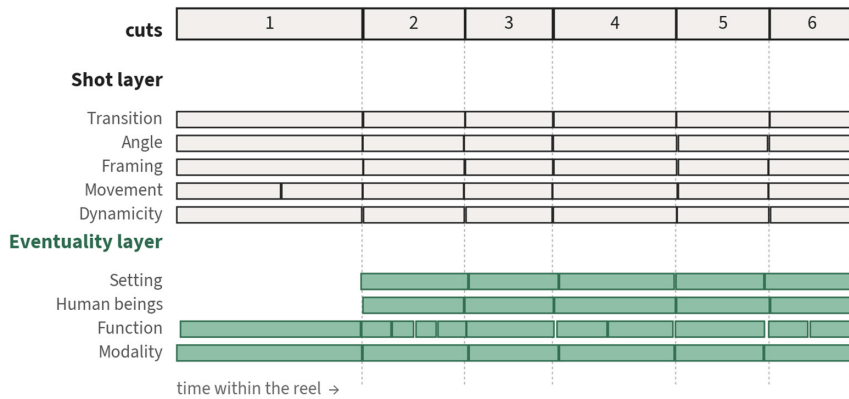


Figure 4 Author, The two annotation levels illustrated on the first six shots of Playa Viva reel 1. 2026. Diagram drawn from the GRAPEMARS annotation of the reel. Author's figure, © the Author

4 Results

Results are reported in five subsections. The corpus is described first, where a difference between two ways of normalizing the counts turns out to be a finding in itself. The distributional profile then shows which categories separate the groupings before any test is applied. The five pre-specified comparisons follow, three of which hold and two of which do not, and both nulls are reported. The captions and the cross-modal comparison close the section.

4.1 The Corpus

The ten reels comprise 216.3 seconds of footage, segmented into 105 shots and carrying 1,737 annotations; of the template's child nodes, 119 remain structurally empty. Table 5 gives the distribution across the five accounts.

Table 5 The pilot corpus: reels, duration, shots and annotations by account, with annotation density per shot and per ten seconds

	Playa Viva	Elements of Byron	Gaia Retreat	Regenerative Farm	New South Wales	Total
Reels	2	2	2	2	2	10
Duration(s)	42.5	25.1	41.9	84.8	22.1	216.3
Shots	25	13	10	32	25	105
Annotations	396	231	144	607	359	1,737
Annotations per shot	15.84	17.77	14.40	18.97	14.36	16.54
Annotations per 10 s	93.19	92.08	34.37	71.62	162.37	80.31

Source: Author's table, © the Author

Grouped for analysis, the regenerative corpus (Playa Viva and Regenerative Farm) contributes 1,003 annotations over 57 shots and 127.3 seconds, the neoliberal corpus (Elements of Byron and Destination New South Wales) 590 over 38 shots and 47.2 seconds, and Gaia Retreat, retained as a single intermediate case, 144 over 10 shots.

The two denominators tell different stories, and the difference is itself a finding. Per shot, the five corpora are closely comparable, ranging only from 14.36 to 18.97 annotations. Per unit of running time, they diverge by a factor of nearly *five*. Destination New South Wales is simultaneously the sparsest corpus per shot and by a wide margin the densest per second, because it cuts on average every 0.88 seconds; Gaia Retreat is the mirror image, at 4.19 seconds per shot the slowest in the corpus and the least dense per second. Neither corpus is more heavily annotated than the other in compositional terms; what differs is how much composed material is delivered to the viewer per unit of attention. Annotation rates are therefore reported per shot throughout, as the shot is the unit of segmentation, and the temporal measure is used only where pacing is itself at issue.

Two properties of the corpus appear to be constants of the genre rather than variables of the orientation. A shot carries a mean of 16.5 annotations, with a range across the five accounts of only 14.36 to 18.97, and roughly a third of what is annotated records the camera rather than the depicted world, at 31.6% in the regenerative corpus, 33.4% in the neoliberal and 34.0% in the sustainable. A single composed unit would therefore seem able to sustain a broadly fixed quantity of simultaneous semiotic material, whatever it depicts. What varies, and by a factor of nearly five, is the rate at which those units are delivered, with 70% of the 105 shots running under two seconds and 18% under one. This suggests that the three paradigms do not differ in how much semiotic work they invest in a shot, but in how

much time they allow the viewer to do that work. The figures are these. Destination New South Wales cuts every 0.88 seconds and delivers 162 annotations per ten seconds of viewing, the highest rate in the corpus. Gaia Retreat holds each shot for 4.19 seconds and delivers 34. The two regenerative accounts fall between, at 1.70 and 2.65 seconds per shot. Density of delivery is therefore where the paradigms first become visible and what may severely impact the conscious internalization of content, as discussed in § 5.

4.2 Distributional Profile

Which categories separate the groupings can to some extent be read off before any inferential hypothesis testing is conducted. Adjusted standardized residuals were therefore computed for every sub-annotation against an expectation proportional to corpus size, since the corpora differ in annotation volume by a factor of four and an expectation of equal distribution would have misallocated the surplus to the largest of them.

What emerges separates the groupings along substantive rather than technical lines, and does so twice over. The neoliberal corpus is distinguished by objects and by consumption, with the largest residuals falling on modern food utensils ($z = +4.88$, 27 observed against 12.9 expected), wine (+4.67), the tourist as represented participant (+4.32), cooked meals (+3.54), smiling (+3.28), the tasting of traditional dishes (+3.23) and fine dining restaurants (+2.90). The regenerative corpus is distinguished, conversely, by production and by producers: local or Indigenous farmers (+4.04, 22 against 12.7 expected), raw fruit, vegetables and herbs (+3.85), permaculture gardens (+3.21), farm stays (+2.67), harvesting (+2.57) and community and farmers' markets (+2.43). The negative residuals are arguably as informative as the positive ones, since harvesting, community markets and the tourists-and-locals co-presence category are observed zero times in the neoliberal corpus ($z = -2.16$, -2.03 and -2.16). Figure 5 illustrates the allocation of screen time across key stages of the food cycle (seeding, cultivation, harvesting, raw food, food preparation, cooked food and consumption) and participant categories (producers, tourists and staff).

A second separation is that formal and genre features fall the same way: the single largest regenerative residual is visual form, Other (+4.65), followed by middle-age participants (+3.05), on-screen keywords (+2.57) and female participants (+2.56), while on the neoliberal side stand rivers and waterfalls as setting (+3.20), emoji (+3.12), long shots (+3.01) and written-verbal modality (+2.65). Both lists are thematic selections from a larger set, and Figure 6 gives the full distribution of residuals, while Figure 7 gives the

relative frequencies of the most frequent sub-annotations across the three groupings. One result, finally, is stronger as a proportion than as a residual: every one of the ten facial-expression annotations in the neoliberal corpus is a smile, against three of sixteen in the regenerative corpus, so that 77% of all smile annotations fall in the neoliberal arm.

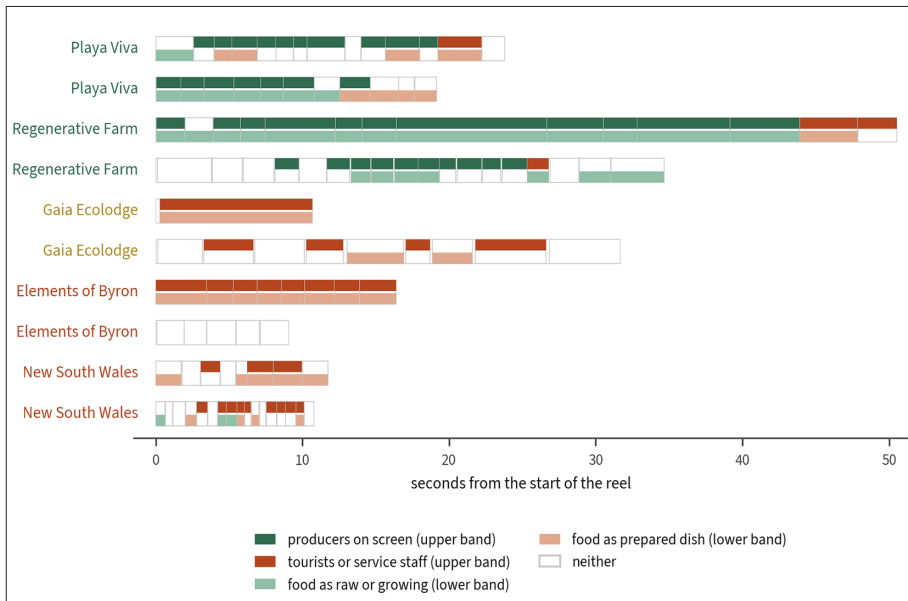


Figure 5 Author, The corpus in real time: producers, visitors and food across all ten reels. 2026. Chart generated from the GRAPEMARS project exports. Author's figure, © the Author

Gaia Retreat, though never entered into an inferential test, holds the two largest residuals in the entire corpus: interacting with locals (+5.82, 4 observed against 0.4 expected) and beach resorts or ecolodges as setting (+5.41, 7 against 1.2), followed by service providers as participants (+4.70) and spoken-verbal modality (+4.19). It also returns no Actor tags at all (−2.22). This profile is partly a genre artifact, its second reel being a talking-head interview with the property's Head of Food and Beverage, and is reported descriptively for that reason. Its participant-role profile is the clearest reason for holding it out: Carrier/Attribute and Sayer account for 40% each of its ten Function annotations and Actor for none, and four of its five human-participant annotations are service providers.

Two visual features that might typically be expected to differentiate these groupings fail to do so. Eye-level framing – often associated with viewer identification and egalitarian engagement with represented

participants – is proportionally more frequent in the neoliberal corpus (5.59% of annotations) than in the regenerative corpus (3.79%). However, as eye-level framing functions as the baseline angle across all sets, this difference yields little diagnostic value. Conversely, very close shots show the opposite pattern, appearing at 2.20% compared to 1.30%, though this margin is too minor to be statistically or analytically meaningful.

Two things follow from the shape of this distribution. Since visual form, framing, on-screen text and emoji separate the corpora as sharply as farmers and wine do, the orientations would seem to constitute distinct registers rather than one register applied to different content, the difference being realized in the manner of showing as much as in what is shown. The sustainable account is the clearest case, its four largest residuals falling on interacting with locals, beach resorts as setting, service providers as participants and spoken-verbal modality, a configuration that suggests a paradigm organized around mediated hospitality, in which a member of staff explains the destination to a guest already within it. The zero cells, finally, are absences rather than small values: an observed frequency of zero where five or six occurrences were expected.

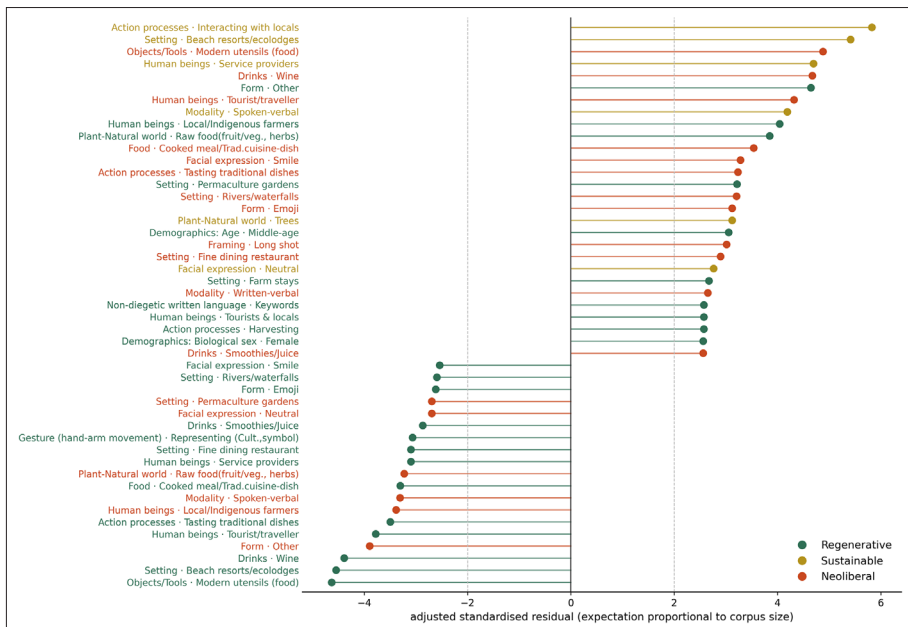


Figure 6 Author, Adjusted standardized residuals by sub-annotation and grouping, absolute value 2.5 and above. 2026. Chart generated from the GRAPEMARS project exports. Author's figure, © the Author

4.3 The Five Pre-Specified Comparisons: Inferential Hypothesis Testing

The analysis was limited to the five comparisons fixed in § 3.5, with no post hoc tests. Table 6 gives, for each, the counts and proportions in the two arms, the odds ratio with its confidence interval, the Fisher p-value under the independence assumption discussed in § 3.5, and the rank of the observed partition of reels among the seventy possible. The p-values are not what carries the findings, and they are not read below as evidence that the two discourses differ in general: with annotations nested in ten reels from four accounts, the descriptive contrasts and the two empty cells are the evidence, and the reel-level rank shows how far each contrast survives a change of unit.

Table 6 The five pre-specified comparisons: counts, odds ratios, 95% confidence intervals, Holm-corrected Fisher p-values and reel-level rank

	Comparison	Regenerative	Neoliberal	[Gaia]	OR	95% CI	p (Fisher, Holm)	Reel-level rank
H1	Actor against Goal	36/66 = 54.5%	17/35 = 48.6%	0/2	1.27	0.56-2.89	1.0 (n.s.)	14 of 70
H2	Local producers against visitors and service staff (the producer side includes the combined tourists-and-locals value)	38/42 = 90.5%	0/20 = 0.0%	0/5	350.8	18.0-6840	5.8×10^{-12}	1 of 70
H3	Production and commons settings against consumption and lodging	44/48 = 91.7%	1/16 = 6.2%	0/8	165.0	17.1-1594	1.4×10^{-9}	2 of 70
H4	Raw or growing matter against prepared dish	35/37 = 94.6%	5/19 = 26.3%	2/3	49.0	8.5-283	5.7×10^{-7}	2 of 70
H5	Human-to-human reaction processes against all other eventuality tags	7/646 = 1.1%	4/381 = 1.0%	0/88	1.03	0.30-3.55	1.0 (n.s.)	34 of 70

Source: Author's table, © the Author

Fisher p-values assume independence of annotations and are reported for completeness (§ 3.5). Reel-level rank is the position of the observed assignment of the eight tested reels among the seventy possible assignments of four to each arm, ordered by pooled odds ratio in the predicted direction; 1 of 70 means no other assignment produces a larger contrast.

Three of the five comparisons fall in the predicted direction, and the first of them, H2, needs no statistic to be seen. Across the neoliberal corpus, that is the two Australian accounts taken together, there is not one annotation for a local or Indigenous farmer, a traditional cook, a community elder or a food artisan: all twenty of their human-participant annotations are tourists (17) or service staff (3). In the regenerative corpus the proportion inverts almost completely, at 38 of 42. The 38 comprise local or Indigenous farmers (22), community leaders or elders (4), food artisans (2), a traditional cook (1) and the combined value recording tourists and locals in co-presence (9), counted on the producer side because a producer is present in the frame; the four remaining annotations are of tourists. This is erasure in the sense in which Stibbe (2015) uses the term, and the zero cell rather than the statistic carries the finding; at reel level, every regenerative reel returns a producer proportion of 0.84 or above and every neoliberal reel returns zero, and the observed partition is the one assignment in seventy that produces this contrast.

H3 makes the same point about place. Regenerative reels situate food in permaculture gardens, farmers' markets, traditional kitchens, farm stays, communal feasts and open-air kitchens, in 44 of 48 setting annotations, the remaining four being rooms of unspecified type; neoliberal reels situate it in restaurants, resorts and rooms, in 15 of 16. At reel level the contrast is nearly as sharp, six of the eight reels returning a proportion of 1.00 or 0.00 and the observed partition ranking second of seventy. Settings of natural landscape (beaches, rivers, forests and mountains) are still very present, but are neither production nor consumption sites; sixteen annotations fall there: seven regenerative, eight neoliberal and one sustainable. H4 supports the reading of food as living matter against food as finished product, though less sharply: raw or growing matter accounts for 5 of the 19 food annotations in the neoliberal corpus, and the observed partition ranks second of seventy.

Two of the five comparisons, conversely, do not. H1 is null, in that the balance of Actor to Goal annotations is statistically indistinguishable between the two corpora, so that the passivity which the neoliberal corpus undoubtedly conveys is evidently not carried by a shortage of agents (Elements of Byron, for example, records nine Actors against nine Goals, and New South Wales eight against nine, and the observed partition ranks 14 of 70), but rather by *who* the agents are and by *what they do*: in the reels, they are indeed tasting, sitting and looking rather than harvesting, cooking and giving. H5 is null for a different reason. Reaction processes of any kind number 16 in 1,737 annotations; the human-to-human subset tested here numbers 11, seven regenerative and four neoliberal, against 646 and 381 eventuality annotations respectively, so the rates are almost identical because the phenomenon is close to

absent everywhere. The reel-level rank, 34 of 70, says the same: the observed partition is indistinguishable from a random one. This is itself a finding: compared to static imagery (Mattei 2024), acts of static, perceptual consumption are close to absent from tourism reels of every orientation examined here.

To address potential coding ambiguity affecting H2, a sensitivity analysis was conducted regarding a boundary decision in the New South Wales oyster reel. Although the individuals depicted are oyster farmers, they were categorized under the *Service Provider* annotation. This decision rests on the absence of active farming, growing, or harvesting depictions, paired with the convergence of four distinct service-provider criteria (exceeding the required three-cue threshold): commercial branding on apparel, active mediation behavior, a staged hospitality environment (dining in the river), and a clear service role. Read as coded, H2 returns $OR = 350.8$ (95% CI 18.0-6840). With those annotations read as producers, it returns $OR = 53.8$ (95% CI 10.8-267.3, $p = 7.1 \times 10^{-9}$). The conservative figure is the one reported in the text; the effect is an order of magnitude smaller under the alternative coding and remains very large. The size of that shift is the point: a single boundary decision on three annotations moves the odds ratio from 351 to 54, which is the clearest argument this study can offer for a second coder, and it is taken up in § 6.

Read together, the three comparisons that fall in the predicted direction and the two that do not indicate where the difference between these five accounts lies, and, if the pattern holds beyond them, where the difference between the discourses would be found. It is not in grammar, the distribution of agentive and affected roles being indistinguishable between the corpora, nor in reciprocity of attention, which is close to absent everywhere. It lies in casting and in location. Humans appear in 67 of the 105 shots and in 42 of the 57 regenerative ones, so the corpora do not differ in whether people are shown but in which people, doing what, and where. Each paradigm returns a different answer to the question of what a destination is made of: producers in the regenerative corpus, where 29 of 42 human annotations are farmers, elders, artisans or cooks; visitors in the neoliberal, where 17 of 20 are tourists; and staff in the sustainable, where four of five are service providers. This suggests that the three are not points on a single scale running from commodification to regeneration, but three distinct constructions of the host-guest relation.

4.4 The Captions

The captions separate along the same axis. The ten captions were annotated for Transitivity, Appraisal, experiential meaning, tourism tropes and digital affordances, yielding 565 annotations: 339 regenerative, 169 neoliberal, 57 sustainable. Transitivity accounts for 57.8% of the regenerative annotations against 38.5% of the neoliberal; Appraisal runs the other way, 9.4% against 20.1%. Digital affordances take 28.1% of Gaia Retreat's, an artifact of fifteen hashtags on a 56-token caption.

Two lexical fields are in near-complete complementary distribution. Green-lexicon items (*regeneration, sustain, organic, minimizing waste, without chemicals, care for the soil, nature's bounty*) occur twelve times in the regenerative captions and not once in the neoliberal or sustainable ones. Conversely, every exclusivity marker (*award-winning, the best, famous, prized, signature, coastal gems*) and every magic marker (*charm, unforgettable, a floating tasting experience*) occurs outside the regenerative captions. Tested as a single pre-specified comparison, green-lexicon and authenticity markers against exclusivity and magic markers, the regenerative captions return 20 of 20 and the neoliberal 3 of 12 (Fisher's exact $p = 7.8 \times 10^{-6}$). A second pre-specified test, on whether producers rather than tourists and service staff are named, returns 7 of 7 against 2 of 4 and is not significant ($p = 0.109$) on these numbers.

The same asymmetry appears grammatically. Plants annotations (crops, raw food, seeds, natural elements, flowers, trees) number ten in the regenerative captions against one in the neoliberal; Food annotations (cooked dish, animal-based, plant-based) number five in the neoliberal against one in the regenerative. Material processes account for 9.1% of regenerative annotations against 4.7% of neoliberal, and the sub-type Material/Transformation occurs five times in the regenerative captions (*turning the paddock into a party, matures into vibrant roots, turning nature's bounty into valuable products, transforms local organic produce into probiotic-rich ferments, turning food waste into something worth savoring*) and never in the neoliberal ones.

Producers are named in the neoliberal captions twice, and on neither occasion as Actor, since *the farmers* is the Goal of the material process *meet* and *makers* sits inside a Circumstance; in the regenerative captions, by contrast, producers occupy the Actor role three times. The difference is therefore one of grammatical role rather than of presence.

The Appraisal layer separates the corpora by rate before it separates them by kind: evaluation accounts for 20.1% of the annotations in the neoliberal captions against 9.4% in the regenerative ones, so that the former evaluate roughly twice as densely. The architecture

of that evaluation, however, is close to constant, with Attitude and Graduation dividing 71% to 29% in the neoliberal captions and 72% to 28% in the regenerative. What differs is not which resources are used but what they are used on. Judgement of social esteem attaches in the regenerative captions to what producers do, in their wisdom, their passion, dedicated, empower and giving back, and in the neoliberal captions to the recognition a product has been granted, in award-winning and famous. Appreciation of valuation follows the same split, since the regenerative captions value intrinsic properties, as in rich in flavor and health benefits and valuable, whereas the neoliberal captions value comparative rank, as in the best, quality, signature and the true art. Graduation is likewise directed differently: Force up-scales duration in the regenerative captions, where 15 years and 10 years assert persistence, and up-scales superlative rank in the neoliberal ones, where award-winning, the best and plenty of assert distinction. Appreciation of reaction is the clearest case of all, participatory and sensory on one side, in vibrant, farm-yard fun and Farm-fresh vibes, and drawn from the vocabulary of the gaze on the other, in scenic, sweeping views, charm and rolling. The sustainable captions record no Judgement whatever, evaluating the experience through valuation and force alone and leaving no participant assessed as a social actor.

If evaluation is redirected rather than suspended, one caption in the corpus shows the redirection happening in a single move, and it does so against the design. The New South Wales reel explicitly disclaims the spectacular reading of its setting: the Hawkesbury River isn't just scenic, it's home to some of the freshest oysters in Australia. The disclaimer is nonetheless made in the vocabulary it disclaims, since scenic is itself annotated as Appreciation of reaction, and what replaces it is not a withdrawal from evaluation but an intensification of it. Within the same caption the oysters are famous, prized, unique, a delicacy and the freshest, of which freshest and unique carry Force of up-scaling as well as valuation, while famous, prized and coastal gems are annotated as exclusivity markers and coastal gems additionally as metaphor, the organism becoming a precious object. The caption closes by selling a floating tasting experience, annotated as magic. Naming the river as home to the oysters would therefore seem to raise the capital value of the commodity rather than to displace the commodity reading, and the two resources operate together: graduation supplies the intensity and the exclusivity markers supply the scarcity.

That the caption layer reproduces the axis found in the images, on a tool applied independently and with categories drawn from a different tradition, offers convergent support that neither layer could provide alone. The lexical evidence also places the sustainable account, and it does not place it in the middle: its most frequent trope is exclusivity,

at four annotations, which is the neoliberal corpus's most frequent trope as well, at six; it records no green-lexicon items whatever, where the regenerative captions record twelve; and it names no producers, against seven in the regenerative captions and two in the neoliberal. This suggests that on the lexical axis the sustainable paradigm aligns with the neoliberal rather than occupying a position between it and the regenerative, which is what the floating-signifier argument of § 2.3 would predict of a label adopted without the practice it names. The two modes are not equivalent resources, however, since language permits a producer to be named and simultaneously demoted to Goal, so that a caption can accomplish presence without agency in a single clause.

4.5 The Two Modes Compared

Because caption and reel are matched one-to-one, the two annotations describe the same ten objects. The regenerative reels both name producers in the caption and show them on screen (Playa Viva 3 named and 15 shown; Regenerative Farm 4 and 14), while showing few tourists or staff (1 and 3). The neoliberal and sustainable reels show tourists and staff and no producers (Elements of Byron 0 producers and 8 tourists or staff; Gaia Retreat 0 and 5; New South Wales 0 and 12, subject to the coding boundary described in § 4.3). What distinguishes the New South Wales caption is not that producers are absent from it but that they are grammatically demoted: named, and named as Goal.

Naming and showing thus emerge as separable resources rather than two channels carrying one message, and the paradigms use them differently. The regenerative accounts align them, naming in the caption those they show on screen; the neoliberal accounts align them too, but on tourists; the sustainable account aligns them on service providers, naming two and showing four. The New South Wales account is the only one in which the two come apart, naming producers whom the visual annotation, under the coding adopted here, does not record as such. This suggests that alignment between naming and showing is not itself diagnostic of a paradigm, and that what is diagnostic is rather which participants the two modes agree about.

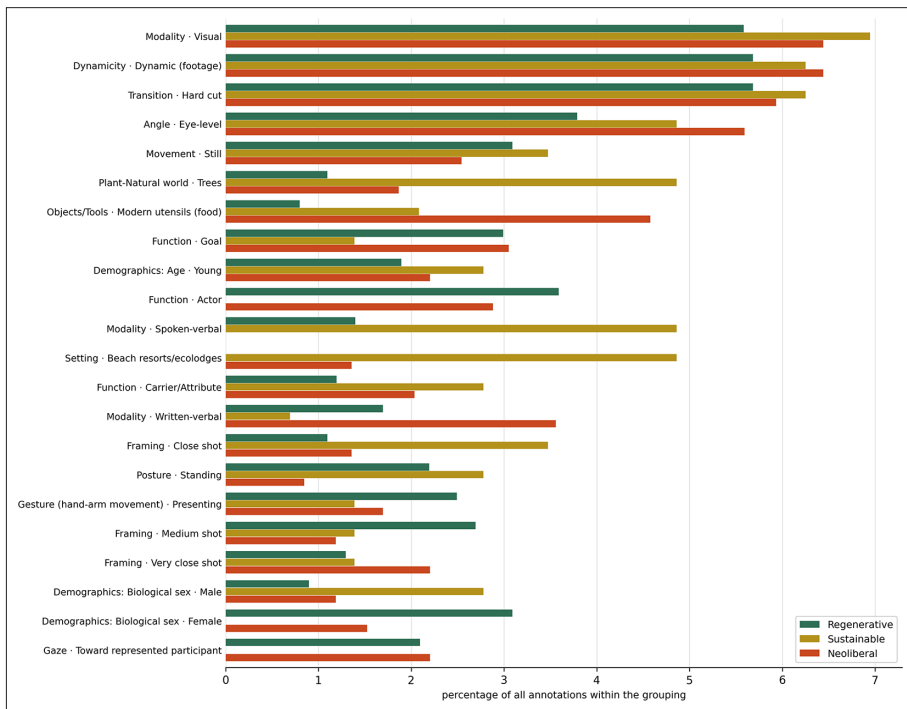


Figure 7 Author, Relative frequency of the most frequent sub-annotations across the three groupings. 2026.
Chart generated from the GRAPEMARS project exports. Author's figure, © the Author

5 Discussion: Food as *Living Matter* and *Finished Product*

The clearest axis in the data is not evaluative but experiential: what kind of thing food is allowed to be. In the regenerative corpus food appears overwhelmingly as matter in process (raw fruit, vegetables, herbs, crops, seeds and soil), situated where that process happens; in the neoliberal corpus, it is a prepared dish in restaurants, resorts and rooms (§ 4.3, Table 6). The residual analysis says the same in a different register, setting modern utensils, wine, cooked meals and the tasting of traditional dishes against local farmers, raw food, permaculture gardens and harvesting (§ 4.2).

This is the contrast Stibbe's account of erasure predicts (2015), and it is worth being precise about what is erased. It is not nature as scenery: trees are the single most frequent plant annotation in the corpus, and proportionally most frequent in the sustainable account. What disappears is nature as a process with a duration: growing, harvesting, transforming. A tree in a resort reel is a backdrop; a

paddock in a farm reel is a stage of production. The scheme separates the two because it annotates process and setting independently.

The comparisons reported above establish that the corpora differ in who appears, where and what food is allowed to be. They do not characterize how the more-than-human world is positioned in relation to human action, which is the question Stibbe's account actually poses. To address it, the nature- and food-referring nominal groups and clauses in the same ten captions were read again after the pre-specified analysis was complete, and sorted into seven semantic positions. The sorting is semantic rather than systemic, in that the positions are realized at different points in the lexicogrammar: two by the assignment of a participant role in transitivity, where nature is Medium or Actor of its own process, as in turmeric at our farm undergoes a remarkable journey, or Goal of a human material process, as in Once harvested; two by the selection of the Thing in the nominal group, where what is named is an ecological system, as in the watershed from the mountains to the sea, or a service format from which organism, place and producer are absent, as in A terrace style buffet breakfast; two by evaluative resources, where nature is appraised through Appreciation of reaction, as in sweeping views, or of valuation, as in valuable products; and one circumstantially, where a material process is qualified as care, as in Grown with care. Because the seven cut across the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions rather than falling within a single system, they do not constitute an annotation layer and are not offered as one. Forty-five expressions were sorted in this way, and Table 7 reports the distribution across the tourism paradigms.¹⁴

Table 7 How nature and food are positioned in relation to human action across the three groupings

	Regenerative	Neoliberal	Sustainable
Agent	2	0	0
Kin	3	0	0
Network	12	2	0
Object	5	0	0
Spectacle	0	2	0
Commodity	5	9	2
Absent	0	2	1
Total	27	15	3
Source: Author's table, © the Author			

14 The full categorization of each nature- and food-referring nominal group and clause is available on the same terms as the codebook (§ 3.1).

The distribution is polarized at four of the seven positions. Nature acts or becomes, and enters a relation of care, only in the regenerative captions; conversely, it is offered to the gaze, and food appears as service format alone, only outside them. The interdependency position is meanwhile the largest in the regenerative captions, at twelve occurrences, and characteristically links the organism to a cycle or a place rather than to a plate: a way of life rooted in seasonality, sustainability, and soil; stay connected to where our food comes from; food so fresh it's still got dirt on it.

Two qualifications keep the reading honest. The commodified position is the largest overall, at sixteen occurrences, and five of those fall in the regenerative captions, where turning the paddock into a party and Farm-fresh vibes guaranteed sell the produce as directly as any neoliberal caption sells a vintage; regenerative discourse does not stand outside the market it addresses. And the only two interdependency expressions outside the regenerative captions both come from the New South Wales oyster reel discussed in § 4.4, a further reason to treat that account as more complicated than the design allows.

If lexico-semantic as well as evaluative construal is where the corpora separate, grammatical agency is where they do not. The pre-specified comparison of Actor to Goal annotations returned no difference (54.5% against 48.6%, OR 1.27, CI 0.56-2.89). This matters because a plausible and frequently made argument, that neoliberal tourism discourse renders its participants passive and that this shows up as a shortage of agents, is not supported by these data (Mattei 2026). The neoliberal corpus is not short of agents. The caption layer returns the same null on an independently annotated instrument: Actor accounts for 12 of the 36 Actor-and-Goal annotations in the regenerative captions and three of the nine in the neoliberal ones, 33.3% on each side, an odds ratio of exactly 1.00. The counts are small and the comparison is descriptive, no inferential test having been specified for it, but the two modes converge.

The passivity that the neoliberal corpus conveys is nonetheless real, and appears to be carried differently: by who the agents are, namely tourists and service staff and never producers, and by what those agents do. The action processes with the largest positive residuals in that corpus are tasting traditional dishes and sitting, whereas in the regenerative corpus they are harvesting and preparing local food. A tourist tasting is grammatically as active as a farmer harvesting, and the difference lies rather in the fact that one act consumes an outcome while the other produces it.

Gaia Retreat was retained as a single intermediate case and never tested, and its profile is instructive precisely because it does not sit between the poles (§§ 4.2, 4.4). An account that brands itself sustainable holds the corpus's two largest residuals, for interacting

with locals and for beach resorts as setting, records no Actor annotations at all, places its three nature-referring expressions in the commodified and absent positions, and shows no producers, no production setting and no food in process.

Such multimodal constructions reach a viewer under particular conditions, and the pacing difference reported in § 4.1 bears on how they are likely to be received. A meta-analysis of 71 studies finds short-form video use associated with poorer attention and inhibitory control (Nguyen et al. 2025), and experimental work across electroencephalography, functional imaging and behavioral measures points the same way (Yan et al. 2024; Wei et al. 2026a; Chiossi et al. 2023), the mechanism being stated most directly by inter-subject correlation analysis: rapid switching heightens bottom-up attentional capture while weakening the top-down processes on which deep encoding depends (Wei et al. 2026b).¹⁵ If that mechanism operates at the cut rate observed in the destination-marketing reel, what fails to form is the integrated representation against which an absence could register as an absence, so that erasure in Stibbe's sense may meet less resistance in this genre than in the written promotional genres on which the ecolinguistic literature has largely been built. This is offered as a reading of the pacing evidence and not as a finding: no reception data were collected, and the question is returned to in § 6.

6 Conclusions: Limitations and Future Work

Returning to the framework with which the article began, four of the six principles were testable here, and this corpus answers them differently. Acknowledging diverse forms of knowing and being is enacted in the regenerative corpus and categorically absent elsewhere (H2); moving beyond capitalist approaches, read as the lexicogrammatical construction of food as process rather than product, is enacted on the same side (H4), as is commoning the food system, read as the visibility of shared and productive space (H3). Taking care of people, animals and the planet, read as reciprocity between represented participants, appears to be enacted nowhere,

¹⁵ Intracranial recording locates visual recognition within the first 300 ms after stimulus onset and shows the supporting networks shifting over that interval from a segregated to an integrated state (Kopal et al. 2023). Recognition is therefore accomplished within any shot in this corpus; a cut at 0.88 seconds falls in the integrative phase that follows. Learning from fragmented short videos, against a continuous video matched for duration and content, yields poorer memory accuracy with reduced activation and connectivity in integration networks (Wei et al. 2026a), and rapid context switching degrades the retention of intentions (Chiossi et al. 2023).

since the reciprocal-reaction floor is the H5 null and it applies to the regenerative corpus as much as to any other. One reading of that asymmetry is that food discourse of every orientation represents plants and animals as what is consumed rather than what is cared for, so that reciprocity has no represented participant to attach to; the corpus cannot decide between that account and a shortage of the relevant shots, but it makes the absence visible.

That asymmetry is arguably the most interesting thing to emerge from the study. The regenerative accounts have restored the producer, the production site and the living organism to view, but they have not restored reciprocity, and the relation between the people on screen remains as thin in regenerative reels as in neoliberal ones. If the ethics of care described by Tronto (1993, 103) and extended by Hassink and colleagues (2021, 129) is to become the substance of regenerative tourism rather than its vocabulary, that would appear to be where the gap lies. The annotation scheme and codebook used to reach these conclusions are available in full (§ 3.1), so that the analysis can be repeated, contested or extended; this is what a pilot of this kind can reasonably offer.

The statistical caution stated in § 3.5 belongs to the field as much as to this study. Empirical multimodality is recent, its methodological guides are still being written, its application to tourism communication is more recent still (Mattei 2024; Mattei, Wildfeuer 2026), and the analysis of moving image on social platforms is described in the most recent of them as one of two areas “at the current forefront of multimodal analysis for which many open issues remain” (Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2026, 189). Three of those issues are visible in the present data. The first is conceptual: a reel is a canvas that layers perspective material, non-perspective inserts, written overlays, speech and music, and the scheme has to represent that complexity before anything can be counted (Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2026, 105-17; Grzenkiewicz, Wildfeuer 2026, 294-9). The second is procedural: annotating and testing on such a scheme requires decisions about which unit is counted, since an annotation, a shot and an artifact are different things and the same corpus yields very different totals under each (Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2026, 151). The third follows from the second and is the one that matters for inference. A corpus of few artifacts can carry many annotations, ten reels here carrying 1,737 and sixty TikTok videos elsewhere carrying 44,931 (Grzenkiewicz, Wildfeuer 2026, 302), so that the number of observations available to a test bears no fixed relation to the number of independent units behind them. The practice followed in the field, including in Mattei (2026) on Instagram posts and websites, is to tabulate annotation or shot counts by corpus and to test them with chi-square and inspection of observed against expected cells (see the worked examples in Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2026, 171-2); the nesting of those counts in artifacts

and accounts is a question the field does not seem to have addressed yet, to the author's knowledge, and it is part of the work that remains to be done. What the present study does is to make the nesting explicit where the counts are reported, treat the counts as descriptive, and add the one unit-level check the design allows. The same guides ask that reliability be measured with chance-corrected statistics and that its absence never be hidden but explained (Bateman, Wildfeuer, Hiippala 2026, 25-7); the position taken here follows that instruction, and the protocol under which double coding is to be done is the one already established for comparable data (Mattei, Wildfeuer 2026, 206-7).

Four limitations qualify the findings. The first concerns scale and design, the corpus comprising ten reels from five accounts purposively selected as polar cases, so that the contrasts are illustrative of the types rather than estimates of the populations they represent. The second concerns non-independence, since annotations are nested within shots, shots within reels and reels within accounts, whereas Fisher's exact test treats the 1,593 annotations in the two tested arms as independent, which they are not; the p-values in Table 6 are accordingly reported as indices of association under an assumption the data do not meet, and it is the effect sizes, the confidence intervals, the two categorical absences and the reel-level ranks that carry the interpretation. A related limitation belongs to sampling: the two most recent food-related reels per account record each operator's current editorial practice and cannot show whether the pattern found here is stable over the account's history, and the national confound between the Mexican regenerative account and the Australian comparison set, discussed in § 3.3, is mitigated by the Australian regenerative farm rather than removed. The third, and most consequential, concerns reliability: the corpus was annotated by a single coder, no second coding or agreement statistic exists, and none is reported. The codebook specifies the criteria applied, which is a necessary condition for reliability without being a demonstration of it, and the sensitivity analysis in § 4.3 shows what is at stake, one boundary decision on three annotations moving the H2 odds ratio by an order of magnitude. A scheme of 34 categories and 261 values that resolves boundary cases by the convergence of at least three cues is exactly the kind of instrument whose counts need a second pair of hands before they are taken as fine-grained evidence.

A fourth limitation belongs to the instrument rather than to its application here, in that the Demographics node offers only two values for biological sex and so does not capture non-binary, trans or intersex identities; this would need addressing before the scheme is applied to corpora in which gender identity is itself at issue. Future work should engage above all with double coding, on a subset of the corpus in the first instance, following the protocol established for comparable data in Mattei and Wildfeuer (2026, 206-7), namely Krippendorff's

(2004) generalized metrics with partial agreement where multiple non-mutually-exclusive labels fall on the same unit, a trained second coder, and agreement computed separately for segmentation and for category assignment; and with more reels per account within the same food-related brief, so that the reel-level check in Table 6 can become a test; and, separately, with reception data, since whether the pacing contrast found here has the attentional consequences the neurocognitive literature would predict is a question for audience testing rather than for annotation.

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Italianness in the Digital Food Discourse of Italian Restaurants Abroad

A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis

Walter Spezzano

Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

Stefano De Cantis

University of Palermo, Italy

Abstract This study examines how Italianness is discursively constructed on the official websites of Italian restaurants abroad. Using a CADS approach, it compares English-language website texts from Italian and non-Italian restaurants in Miami. Keyword analysis reveals that the food discourse of Italian restaurants is characterized by keywords that mostly show limited lexical distinctiveness. Concordance analysis shows that, in context, these keywords collectively construct Italianness around three discursive dimensions: food as cultural heritage, authenticity and tradition as cultural ideologies, and Italianness as a lived cultural experience.

Keywords Corpus linguistics. Discourse analysis. Digital business communication. Gastronationalism. Food studies.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Background and Previous Research. – 3 Data and Methodology. – 4 Results. – 5 Discussion. – 6 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

The global diffusion of Italian cuisine has made Italian restaurants abroad key sites for the circulation of cultural meanings associated with Italy and Italians. Operating outside their country of culinary origin, these establishments have a dual role: they compete as businesses within local hospitality markets while simultaneously presenting a cuisine strongly associated with national identity (Giampiccoli 2017). Their business communication therefore involves more than the promotion of dishes and dining services, as it also contributes to shaping how Italian cuisine and culture are presented to consumers. Removed from the geographical context with which their cuisine is associated, ethnic restaurants can leverage references to places, traditions, and cultural values to establish a recognizable culinary identity for local and international consumers. Examining restaurant communication can therefore provide insights into how cultural identity is discursively adapted to commercial contexts beyond its place of origin.

Digitalization in business communication has become central to this process. Among the various available digital channels, official websites provide businesses with direct control over their self-presentation (Handler 2017). Homepages and “About Us” pages are particularly relevant in this context as they combine promotional purposes with narratives about the restaurants’ identities, core values, and distinctive characteristics (Breeze 2013; Petroni 2020). Official websites therefore provide a useful space for investigating how restaurants draw on linguistic resources to establish connections between their commercial offerings and the cultural meanings associated with a specific cuisine. From a business communication perspective, these connections are especially significant because culturally meaningful resources can simultaneously contribute to identity construction and market positioning (Mascia, Solano, Jacobs 2025).

Building on previous research examining perceptions and representations of Italianness in food discourse (Bandini, Corduas 2019), this study conceptualizes Italianness as a cultural repertoire of meanings, values, and identity attributes associated with Italy and being Italian. This repertoire is not geographically homogeneous; rather, meanings of Italianness are constructed through the interaction of city-level, regional, and national geographical associations (Rabbiosi 2019). Elements of this repertoire may be selectively foregrounded in restaurant communication, contributing both to cultural representation and to the construction and projection of a distinctive business identity.

While representations of Italianness have been investigated across different forms of food-related communication (Naccarato, Nowak,

Eckert 2017; Sassatelli 2019), the linguistic patterns through which Italian restaurants abroad construct cultural identity on their official websites remain comparatively underexplored. Furthermore, limited evidence is available concerning recurrent patterns across larger collections of digital texts. In this regard, a systematic comparison with the discourse of restaurants associated with other cuisines can further reveal which linguistic resources are comparatively characteristic of Italian restaurant communication rather than common features of restaurant promotion more generally.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the discursive construction of Italianness in the official websites of Italian restaurants abroad, specifically focusing on those in Miami-Dade County, Florida (hereafter Miami). Miami offers a relevant context for this investigation because its multicultural and internationally oriented restaurant landscape brings numerous culinary traditions into contact within the same geographical and commercial environment. This makes it possible to examine the discourse of Italian restaurants not in isolation but in relation to establishments operating within the same market while representing other cuisines.

The research adopts the methodological framework of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (Baker 2023; Gillings, Mautner, Baker 2023) and compares an English-language corpus of homepage and “About Us” texts from 137 Italian restaurants with a reference corpus comprising equivalent texts from 163 non-Italian restaurants in Miami. The study is guided by the following broad research question: how is Italianness constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami? By addressing this question, the study aims to contribute to ongoing debates on food discourse (Balirano, Guzzo 2019; Diemer 2025; Cesiri, Coccetta, Peruzzo 2026), shifting attention to official restaurant websites as business-produced spaces for the construction of cultural identity. It also demonstrates the value of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate discourse across a larger collection of texts.

2 Theoretical Background and Previous Research

Food-related communication plays a central role in the construction and negotiation of cultural identities, social relationships, and shared systems of meaning. It extends beyond the exchange of recipes, functioning as a discursive resource through which identities are constructed, communities are formed, and meanings associated with food are negotiated (Tovares, Gordon 2021). In contemporary digital environments, the ways in which food is represented and discussed have undergone profound transformation, as websites, social media platforms, blogs, and other online spaces have become key sites for

the circulation of culinary knowledge and cultural values (Cesiri, Coccetta, Peruzzo 2026). These digital environments facilitate the global dissemination of food practices while simultaneously providing spaces in which culturally specific understandings of food are continuously negotiated.

From this perspective, food discourse extends beyond references to food itself. Karrebæk, Riley, and Cavanaugh (2018) define food discourse as the dynamic interplay among food, language, and other semiotic resources across processes of production, circulation, and consumption. Rather than simply describing food, food discourse constructs meanings associated with cultural values, social identities, and economic practices, making digital environments particularly fruitful spaces for investigating how culinary identities are discursively produced.

Among the many culinary traditions represented in the digital food discourse, Italian cuisine occupies a particularly prominent position, as further reflected in its recent inscription on UNESCO's *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* (2025). The symbolic and economic value of the 'Made in Italy' label has contributed to the worldwide recognition of Italian food as an expression of tradition, craftsmanship, and quality (Temperini, Gregori, Palanga 2016; Cappelli et al. 2017). At the same time, globalization and waves of Italian migration have facilitated the international diffusion of Italian cuisine, making Italian restaurants one of the most widespread forms of ethnic dining worldwide (Giampiccoli 2017). Consequently, Italianness has developed beyond a national identity into a broader cultural construct strongly associated with food and culinary practices.

Central to this construct is the notion of authenticity. Rather than constituting an objective property of food itself, authenticity is increasingly understood as a socially and discursively constructed phenomenon. Karrebæk and Maegaard (2017) argue that authenticity is performed through cultural and communicative practices that attribute legitimacy and social value to particular foods and eating practices. Likewise, Gazzardi and Vásquez (2025) observe that authentic food is commonly represented as possessing identifiable geographical origins and historical continuity, whereas inauthentic food is associated with imitation, artificiality, and the absence of cultural provenance. Within dining contexts, authenticity also operates across multiple dimensions involving products, organizations, and consumers themselves (Le et al. 2019), highlighting its negotiated and relational character. Beyond individual dining experiences, authenticity assumes broader cultural significance through what DeSoucey (2010) terms 'gastronationalism', whereby food becomes a symbolic resource for expressing national identity and protecting cultural heritage. In the Italian context, this protective dimension

is also reflected in regulations governing the ‘Made in Italy’ label, which distinguish authentic Italian products from imitations and so-called ‘Italian-sounding’ alternatives (Gazzardi, Vásquez 2025).

These cultural meanings have increasingly become the object of scholarly attention within food discourse studies. Existing research demonstrates that Italianness is negotiated across a wide variety of digital genres and communicative settings. One strand of research has focused on representations produced by organizational and business actors. Federici and Bernardelli (2016) examine advertising campaigns and websites promoting Italian and Italian-American food products in the United States, showing how representations of Italian food are closely intertwined with cultural stereotypes, authenticity, migration, and Italian-American identity. Similarly, Corrizzato (2018) examines how the websites of Italian wineries reproduce the ‘Made in Italy’ label through values associated with authenticity, quality, and artisan craftsmanship. Corrizzato (2023) further investigates how Italian agri-food companies targeting international consumers employ borrowings, compounds, acronyms, and other forms of lexical innovation to promote Italian products and the ‘Made in Italy’ label.

A second strand of research has examined how individual culinary professionals and digital entrepreneurs construct and mediate representations of Italian food and culinary identity in digital environments. Rossolatos (2020) analyzes the digital travelogues of Jamie Oliver, showing how Italy is discursively appropriated as a place brand through lexicogrammatical and multimodal strategies that rearticulate Italianness within Oliver’s global brand identity. Focusing on digital entrepreneurship, Vásquez and Cenni (2025) examine the “Meet your Host” bios of Airbnb hosts offering Italian food ‘Online Experiences’, showing how hosts construct professional expertise and culinary authenticity through references to their education and work experience, passion for Italian cuisine, and, particularly, familial and ancestral lineages. Cenni and Vásquez (2025) extend this line of inquiry to the promotional videos of Italian food Online Experiences, demonstrating how hosts mobilize a range of multimodal resources to construct culinary identities and establish their professional expertise.

A third strand shifts attention from those promoting and mediating Italian food to consumers and their evaluations of Italian dining experiences. Nichele (2019) examines Tripadvisor reviews of Italian restaurants in the United Kingdom to investigate how consumers evaluate Italian dining experiences and the role played by perceived authenticity. Gazzardi and Vásquez (2025) further reveal that Italian tourists reviewing restaurants in the United States validate or contest claims of culinary authenticity through affectively charged and culturally situated evaluations, illustrating the role of consumers in negotiating understandings of authentic Italian food.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that meanings associated with Italianness, 'Made in Italy', and Italian culinary authenticity are constructed and negotiated by different actors across multiple forms of digital communication. Nevertheless, two important limitations remain. First, previous research has largely relied on qualitative analyses of small-scale datasets, providing relatively little evidence of the recurrent linguistic patterns through which Italianness is constructed across larger collections of business-produced texts. Second, although official restaurant websites constitute an important form of business-produced digital food discourse, limited research has examined how restaurant businesses use them to construct and communicate cultural meanings associated with Italian food. Addressing these gaps, the present study combines corpus linguistics and discourse analysis to investigate how Italianness is discursively constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami.

3 Data and Methodology

This study adopts the methodological framework of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) (Baker 2023; Gillings, Mautner, Baker 2023) to investigate how Italianness is discursively constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad. Specifically, the analysis draws on a corpus of official website texts from Italian restaurants in Miami, focusing on homepages and "About Us" pages, where restaurants communicate their culinary identity, cultural origins, food practices, and values. CADS combines the quantitative affordances of corpus linguistics with the qualitative interpretive approach of discourse analysis, enabling researchers to identify recurrent linguistic patterns while examining how meanings are produced within specific sociocultural contexts. This approach is particularly suitable for the present study because it allows for the investigation of food discourse across a large dataset while maintaining attention to the social and ideological dimensions through which cultural identities are represented.

3.1 Data Collection and Corpus Building

Data were collected through Tripadvisor, one of the most widely used digital platforms for hospitality-related information (Antonio, Correia, Ribeiro 2020). The platform was selected because its categorization system enables the identification of restaurants according to both geographic location and cuisine type. Using the filters 'restaurants' and 'Miami', an initial population of 6,077 restaurants was

identified in February 2024. Applying the additional filter ‘Italian cuisine’ reduced the population to 430 restaurants categorized as offering Italian cuisine. A 1:2 systematic sampling procedure was then applied, resulting in an initial sample of 215 establishments. Restaurants without an official website and duplicate listings were excluded, while chain restaurants sharing a single official website were considered only once. Following these exclusion criteria, the final sample consisted of 137 Italian restaurants. To create a reference corpus, the same procedure was applied to the non-Italian restaurants. A 1:20 systematic sampling procedure was applied to the remaining 5,647 restaurants, resulting in an initial sample of 282 establishments. After applying the same exclusion criteria, the final reference sample consisted of 163 non-Italian restaurants. In the present study, ‘Italian restaurants’ refers operationally to restaurants categorized by Tripadvisor as offering Italian cuisine, while ‘non-Italian restaurants’ refers to the sampled restaurants not categorized as offering Italian cuisine.

For each restaurant, its official website was examined, focusing specifically on homepage and “About Us” texts. Content unrelated to culinary and cultural discourse – such as contact information, opening hours, reservation instructions, and legal notices – was excluded. Subsequently, the relevant content was manually extracted and compiled into individual text files, maintaining a 1:1 correspondence between restaurants and files. Following a web-for-corpus approach (Lutzky, Kehoe 2022), the text files were compiled into two corpora using #LancsBox X (Brezina, Platt 2026): the **Italian** corpus, consisting of texts from Italian restaurants, was used as the corpus of interest; the **Non-Italian** corpus served as the reference corpus for identifying lexical patterns that were comparatively salient in the food discourse of Italian restaurants.

Table 1 provides an overview of the two corpora. The Non-Italian corpus is moderately larger than the Italian one in terms of files, tokens, types, and lemmas. This difference reflects the respective population sizes, together with the different systematic sampling intervals adopted for the two groups. Nevertheless, the corpora are comparable in terms of their geographical context, communicative domain, website sections, period of collection, and procedures of extraction and compilation. The difference in corpus size was taken into account through the use of a normalized effect-size measure in the keyword analysis (§ 3.2).

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for the Italian and Non-Italian Corpus

	Italian Corpus	Non-Italian Corpus
Files	137	163
Tokens	40,632	57,474
Types	5,994	7,924
Lemmas	5,546	7,289
Average number of tokens per file	296.58	352.60
STTR	147.52	137.87

The average document length is 296.58 tokens in the Italian corpus and 352.60 tokens in the Non-Italian one. Although the texts in the reference corpus are somewhat longer on average, both corpora consist of relatively short website texts. The standardized type-token ratio (STTR) values likewise indicate broadly comparable levels of lexical diversity. However, the Italian corpus displays a slightly higher value, which suggests a greater degree of lexical variation in the food discourse of Italian restaurants.

3.2 Keyword and Concordance Analyses

The analysis was conducted using #LancsBox X and focused on lemmas, combining keyword analysis with concordance analysis to identify recurring lexical patterns and examine how they contribute to the construction of Italianness in digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad.

Keyword analysis was first conducted by comparing the Italian corpus with the Non-Italian one. This comparison aimed to identify lexical items that were comparatively salient in the food discourse produced by Italian restaurants and that could therefore provide insights into the cultural meanings associated with Italianness. Keywords were identified using a measure of effect size: Cohen's *d* (Egbert, Biber 2023). A threshold of $d \geq 0.2$ was adopted in order to capture lexical items showing meaningful differences between the two corpora. Unlike measures based solely on statistical significance, effect-size measures indicate the magnitude of differences in lexical frequencies between corpora, thereby showing how strongly individual lexical items differentiate the corpus of interest from the reference corpus (Pojanapunya, Watson Todd 2018). The interpretation of Cohen's *d* adopted in this study follows the conventional classification presented in Table 2 (Cohen 1988).

Table 2 Standard Interpretation of Cohen's *d* Effect Sizes. Source: Authors' elaboration based on Cohen 1988

Cohen's <i>d</i>	Effect	Interpretation
0.20-0.50	Small effect	Indicates a subtle difference between corpora. While the lexical item may not be strongly exclusive to one corpus, its higher relative salience may reveal meaningful discourse patterns when examined in context.
0.50-0.80	Medium effect	Indicates a moderate and noticeable difference between corpora, suggesting that the lexical item has a more prominent role in distinguishing the discourse of one corpus from the other.
≥ 0.80	Large effect	Indicates a substantial difference between corpora, suggesting that the lexical item is strongly associated with one corpus and may represent a central feature of its discourse.

Because keywords alone cannot account for contextual meaning, concordance analysis was subsequently employed to examine the co-textual environments in which they occurred. Rather than treating keywords as isolated indicators of meaning, the analysis explored their semantic associations and pragmatic functions within broader textual contexts. A structured bottom-up approach (Gillings, Mautner 2024) guided the analysis, whereby recurring patterns were identified through the systematic qualitative interpretation of concordance lines and subsequently organized into broader thematic categories relevant to the discursive construction of Italianness.

4 Results

This section presents the findings of the corpus analysis. Consistent with the methodological procedure outlined in Subsection 3.2, the findings are presented in two stages. Subsection 4.1 reports the findings of the keyword analysis, providing an overview of the lexical profile of the Italian corpus in comparison with the Non-Italian one. Subsection 4.2 presents the results of the concordance analysis, exploring the co-textual environments of the identified keywords and highlighting the main semantic dimensions and pragmatic functions through which Italianness is constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad.

4.1 Keyword Analysis: Lexical Profile of the Italian Corpus

Keyword analysis identified 160 statistically salient keywords in the Italian corpus (Appendix), which together contribute to the discursive representation of Italianness. Of these, only three keywords ('Italian', 'Italy', and 'pasta') displayed medium or large effect sizes, whereas all remaining keywords fell within the small-effect range. This distribution indicates that the lexical distinctiveness of the Italian corpus does not depend on a limited number of highly salient lexical markers but instead emerges through the cumulative contribution of numerous moderately distinctive lexical items. Although the identified keywords occur more frequently in the Italian corpus than in the Non-Italian one, many also occur in the latter, indicating that the contrast primarily concerns their relative frequency rather than their lexical exclusivity.

The keyword profile of the Italian corpus encompasses a broad range of semantic domains. Beyond the highly salient references to national identity ('Italian', 'Italy'), the identified keywords include numerous lexical items associated with emblematic foods ('pasta', 'pizza', 'tiramisu'), ingredients and food preparation ('oil', 'flour', 'tomato', 'recipe', 'homemade'), traditional food establishments (*trattoria*, *pizzeria*, *osteria*), regional and geographical references ('Neapolitan', 'Sicily', 'Florence', 'Roman'), evaluative vocabulary ('authentic', 'genuine', 'traditional'), affective expressions ('memory', 'beloved', 'childhood'), and descriptors of dining environments ('cozy', 'homey'), among others. These semantic fields indicate that the representation of Italianness extends well beyond references to individual foods, encompassing broader geographical, cultural, emotional, and experiential dimensions.

While the keyword analysis provides an overview of the lexical profile that distinguishes the Italian corpus from the Non-Italian one, keywords alone cannot account for how these lexical items contribute to the construction of meaning. The following subsection therefore examines the identified keywords in their co-textual environments through concordance analysis, identifying the principal semantic dimensions and associated pragmatic functions through which Italianness is discursively constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad.

4.2 Concordance Analysis

Concordance analysis of the identified keywords shows that Italianness is discursively constructed through three interconnected semantic dimensions. Specifically, the analysis reveals that the digital discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami represents food as cultural

heritage, invokes authenticity and tradition as cultural ideologies, and constructs Italianness as a lived cultural experience. While analytically distinguishable, these dimensions frequently overlap in the corpus, collectively linking food to cultural identity, inherited practices, geographical rootedness, and everyday forms of social and emotional experience.

4.2.1 Food as Cultural Heritage

Concordance analysis reveals that the most salient lexical items identified through keyword analysis consistently converge in the representation of food as cultural heritage. Rather than presenting Italian cuisine simply as a collection of dishes or ingredients, the texts construct it as a repository of history, place, and cultural continuity. Across the corpus, references to food are systematically embedded within narratives that connect culinary practices with national identity, regional traditions, and inherited knowledge, thereby transforming food into a marker of collective cultural belonging.

A first recurring pattern concerns the representation of Italy as the legitimate source of culinary authenticity. References to 'Italian' and 'Italy' are repeatedly embedded within evaluative constructions such as 'authentic Italian cuisine', 'true Italian flavors', 'classic Italian traditions', 'imported from Italy', and 'the flavors of Italy'. In these examples, Italy is not merely presented as the geographical origin of food but as the cultural authority from which culinary legitimacy derives. The recurrence of these expressions frames Italian cuisine as historically grounded and culturally authenticated, positioning food within a broader narrative of national heritage.

Food itself is similarly represented through narratives of craftsmanship and cultural continuity. Rather than merely naming dishes, the corpus repeatedly embeds them within descriptions of artisanal preparation and family transmission. Expressions such as 'homemade lasagna from our family recipe' and 'traditional Neapolitan pizza' associate emblematic dishes with inherited culinary knowledge and long-established practices. The emphasis is therefore placed not simply on consumption but on the preservation and transmission of culinary traditions, representing food as an expression of cultural memory rather than a commercial product.

This representation is further reinforced through geographically specific references that anchor culinary practices within identifiable places, such as 'Florence-style steak' and 'flavors of Sicily'. These examples systematically associate foods with specific areas of Italy, foregrounding regional diversity while simultaneously reinforcing the coherence of a shared national culinary tradition. Rather than portraying Italian cuisine as culturally homogeneous, food discourse

presents regional variation itself as an essential component of Italian food heritage.

A further characteristic of this representation is the preservation of Italian linguistic forms within predominantly English-language texts. Dishes are frequently referred to through their original Italian names, as in *cacio e pepe* and *pizza napoletana*, while interpersonal expressions such as *buon appetito* also remain untranslated. The incorporation of Italian lexical items extends beyond simple naming conventions. Instead, these expressions function as linguistic markers of cultural continuity, maintaining an explicit connection between food, language, and place of origin while reinforcing the cultural specificity of the culinary narratives.

These patterns demonstrate that the discourse of Italian restaurants consistently constructs food as cultural heritage through the interaction of national identity, regional provenance, traditional culinary practices, and Italian-language resources. Rather than functioning independently, these elements combine to represent Italian food as a culturally embedded tradition whose value derives from historical continuity, geographical rootedness, and collective memory.

4.2.2 Authenticity and Tradition as Cultural Ideologies

Concordance analysis further reveals that Italianness is systematically constructed through references to authenticity and tradition. Rather than being presented as objective characteristics of food, authenticity and tradition are repeatedly invoked as culturally valued attributes through which Italian cuisine is legitimized. Across the corpus, restaurants employ evaluative language that positions culinary practices as faithful to inherited traditions, thereby transforming authenticity into a central organizing principle of food discourse.

This pattern is particularly evident in the recurrent use of evaluative expressions such as ‘crafted with authenticity’ and ‘traditional family recipes’. Rather than merely describing ingredients or cooking techniques, these expressions construct authenticity as a cultural ideal associated with fidelity to tradition and inherited culinary knowledge. Similarly, lexical items such as ‘true’, ‘genuine’, and ‘traditional’ repeatedly function as evaluative resources through which restaurants distinguish their cuisine from implicitly less authentic alternatives.

Authenticity is further reinforced through references to artisanal food preparation. Concordance lines repeatedly foreground practices such as ‘prepared daily’, ‘freshly made’, ‘ingredients sourced with care’, ‘homemade recipes’, and ‘handcrafted pasta’. Rather than emphasizing efficiency or innovation, these expressions consistently

highlight manual production, freshness, and careful ingredient selection. Food is therefore represented as the outcome of skilled craftsmanship, where culinary quality derives from artisanal labor and respect for traditional preparation methods.

References to traditional Italian food establishments similarly contribute to this ideological construction. The lexical items *trattoria* and *osteria* regularly occur in descriptions such as ‘a small Roman osteria’ and ‘family-owned *trattoria* with homemade recipes’. These expressions evoke culturally recognizable spaces associated with simplicity, tradition, and domestic hospitality. Rather than functioning simply as restaurant labels, they activate wider cultural narratives in which food is embedded within everyday social life and intergenerational continuity.

Authenticity is also strengthened through recurrent references to place-specific ingredients and culinary specialties. Expressions such as ‘imported from Italy’, *Parmigiano Reggiano*, and ‘traditional Neapolitan pizza’ connect food directly with geographical provenance. In these contexts, the origin of ingredients and recipes functions as evidence of authenticity, reinforcing the cultural legitimacy of the culinary practices being represented.

The recurrent association of authenticity with tradition, artisanal preparation, geographical provenance, and culturally recognizable food spaces constructs authenticity as a discursive achievement rather than an intrinsic property of food. Within the corpus, Italian cuisine is therefore represented as culturally legitimate because it is repeatedly anchored in inherited culinary practices and historically situated forms of knowledge. This representation, however, extends beyond authenticity alone. As will be shown next, food also functions as a medium through which Italianness is constructed as a lived cultural experience, through narratives of memory, interpersonal relationships, and sensory environments.

4.2.3 Italianness as a Lived Cultural Experience

Beyond representations of heritage and authenticity, concordance analysis shows that Italianness is also constructed as a lived cultural experience. Rather than presenting food exclusively through its ingredients or methods of preparation, the corpus repeatedly embeds culinary practices within narratives of memory, family, hospitality, and sensory environments. In doing so, food is represented not only as something to be consumed but also as a medium through which social relationships, personal histories, and everyday cultural practices are experienced.

A recurrent pattern concerns the use of affective vocabulary associated with memory and family life. Lexical items such as

'memory', 'history', 'life', and 'beloved' occur in expressions including 'dishes that bring back memories of home', 'sharing our family's beloved recipes', and 'celebrating life with Italian flavors'. Rather than functioning as purely promotional language, these formulations frame food as an emotional link between past and present, representing culinary traditions as repositories of shared experiences and intergenerational continuity. References to family recipes similarly reinforce the idea that culinary knowledge is transmitted across generations rather than acquired solely through professional expertise.

The experiential dimension of Italianness is further developed through representations of the dining environment. Concordance lines such as 'cozy vintage *trattoria*' and 'ambiance inspired by the Italian countryside' combine lexical items including 'cozy', 'homey', 'ambiance', and 'atmosphere' to construct dining spaces associated with familiarity and comfort. Other recurrent expressions referring to 'gardens', 'patios', and 'outdoor' spaces similarly contribute to idealized representations of Italian everyday life. Rather than merely describing restaurant interiors, these lexical patterns transform physical settings into symbolic extensions of Italian culture, where food is experienced within aesthetically and emotionally meaningful environments.

Interpersonal relationships also constitute a recurrent component of this experiential representation. Restaurants frequently employ inclusive and relational expressions such as 'we invite you to share our family's love for cooking' and 'the brothers grew up in Naples and brought their passion to Miami'. These narratives foreground hospitality, kinship, and personal engagement, presenting food as an activity centered on sharing rather than individual consumption. Culinary practices are therefore represented as inherently social, reinforcing the cultural association between Italian cuisine and communal experience.

An additional dimension concerns the incorporation of consumer voices in the restaurants' websites. Although the corpus consists exclusively of homepage and "About Us" texts, several restaurants embed excerpts from customer reviews originally published on platforms such as Yelp and Tripadvisor directly within these webpages. The keyword 'Yelp' reflects this practice, while the first-person pronoun 'I' frequently occurs in these embedded testimonials ('I had the best pasta...'), introducing customers' voices into the restaurants' self-presentation. By integrating these externally produced evaluations into their official websites, restaurants extend the construction of Italianness beyond business-produced discourse, allowing customers to participate in the discursive affirmation of authenticity, hospitality, and culinary quality. Italianness therefore emerges not only through restaurants' own narratives but also

through the strategic incorporation of external voices that reinforce and legitimize these representations.

Collectively, these discourse patterns shift the representation of food from a material product to a culturally situated experience. Culinary heritage and authenticity are not presented as abstract cultural values but are embedded within everyday practices of remembering, sharing, hosting, and inhabiting particular spaces. Through these interconnected narratives, Italianness is ultimately constructed as a way of experiencing food that simultaneously evokes place, emotion, and social belonging.

5 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Italianness is discursively constructed through a coherent system of cultural meanings in which food functions as considerably more than a culinary product. Across the corpus, references to dishes, ingredients, places, traditions, and interpersonal experiences systematically converge in representing Italian cuisine as a form of cultural heritage that embodies collective memory, historical continuity, and shared identity. In this respect, the study supports the view that food discourse is fundamentally concerned with the production of cultural meanings rather than the simple description of food itself (Karrebæk, Riley, Cavanaugh 2018). Rather than functioning as isolated lexical choices, the recurrent patterns identified through keyword and concordance analyses collectively construct a discourse in which food becomes a symbolic resource for representing Italian culture, thereby positioning Italian restaurants abroad as cultural ambassadors (Giampiccoli 2017).

A particularly significant dimension of food as cultural heritage concerns the role of regional diversity in the construction of Italian culinary identity. References to geographically specific traditions demonstrate that the corpus does not represent Italian cuisine as culturally homogeneous. Instead, city-level and regional traditions provide geographical specificity and historical depth while simultaneously being incorporated into a broader representation of Italian culinary heritage. Regional diversity therefore functions not as a source of fragmentation but as a constitutive resource in the discursive construction of Italianness. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the role of city-level, regional, and national geographical associations in the construction of Italianness through food (Rabbiosi 2019).

The analysis further demonstrates that authenticity is not represented as an inherent quality of Italian food but as a discursive achievement produced through recurrent linguistic patterns. References to traditions, artisanal preparation, and family recipes

repeatedly position Italian cuisine within narratives of historical continuity and cultural legitimacy. These findings resonate with Karrebæk and Maegaard's (2017) argument that authenticity is performed through communicative practices rather than residing in food itself, while also supporting Gazzardi and Vásquez's (2025) observation that authenticity is closely associated with provenance, tradition, and culturally situated expectations. Similarly, the recurrent association between Italian cuisine and identifiable places, traditions, and historically rooted culinary practices reflects what DeSoucey (2010) conceptualizes as 'gastronationalism', whereby food operates as a symbolic resource for expressing and safeguarding national identity. Within the corpus, authenticity therefore emerges as a cultural ideology through which Italian food is legitimized and distinguished from implicitly less authentic alternatives.

Beyond authenticity, the findings reveal that Italianness is constructed through narratives that transform food into a lived cultural experience. Rather than presenting culinary traditions solely through recipes or ingredients, the websites repeatedly embed food within stories of family, memory, hospitality, and sensory environments. These narratives extend representations of Italianness beyond material food practices by emphasizing the social relationships and emotional experiences surrounding food consumption. Such representations are consistent with research showing how digital food discourse provides a space for the construction and negotiation of identities and communities (Tovares, Gordon 2021). Likewise, the incorporation of customer testimonials into official restaurant websites illustrates how business-produced and user-generated discourse interact in constructing culturally meaningful representations of Italian cuisine. Although these reviews originate outside the restaurants themselves, their selective integration into official websites reinforces rather than challenges the dominant representations identified throughout the corpus, suggesting that the discursive construction of Italianness is co-produced through the interaction of businesses and consumers.

Methodologically, the study also contributes to research on digital food discourse by demonstrating the value of CADS for investigating culturally embedded food representations. Previous research has predominantly relied on qualitative analyses of individual texts or platforms (Federici, Bernardelli 2016; Cenni, Vásquez 2025; Vásquez, Cenni 2025); by contrast, the present study combines quantitative keyword analysis with qualitative concordance analysis to identify recurrent linguistic patterns across a relatively large corpus of digital texts. An important finding emerging from this approach concerns the distribution of keyword effect sizes. Only three keywords ('Italian', 'Italy', and 'pasta') displayed medium or large effect sizes, whereas the remaining statistically salient items exhibited relatively small

effects. Rather than indicating weak representations of Italianness, this pattern suggests that cultural identity is constructed cumulatively through the interaction of numerous moderately distinctive lexical choices. Italianness therefore emerges not through a limited set of emblematic cultural markers but through the accumulation of interconnected linguistic resources that collectively construct a coherent cultural discourse. This finding illustrates the importance of combining quantitative corpus techniques with qualitative discourse analysis, as the cultural significance of individual lexical items only becomes apparent when interpreted within their broader co-textual environments.

Overall, the findings suggest that the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants in Miami represents Italian cuisine as a culturally situated system of meanings in which food simultaneously functions as heritage, evidence of authenticity, and lived cultural experience. In doing so, the discourse transforms culinary practices into symbolic expressions of collective identity that extend beyond food itself. The study therefore contributes to food discourse research by demonstrating how digital communication participates in the ongoing discursive construction of traditional food, while also illustrating the potential of CADS for identifying recurrent cultural representations across large collections of digital texts.

6 Conclusion

This study has investigated how Italianness is discursively constructed in the digital food discourse of Italian restaurants abroad through a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of official restaurant websites in Miami. By comparing homepage and “About Us” texts from Italian restaurants with equivalent texts from non-Italian ones, the analysis has identified the lexical patterns that distinguish the food discourse of Italian restaurants and examined the broader cultural meanings produced through their co-textual environments. The findings demonstrate that Italianness is not constructed through isolated references to national identity or emblematic foods alone. Rather, it emerges through a network of interconnected linguistic resources that collectively position Italian food as cultural heritage, authenticate it through tradition and provenance, and embed it within narratives of lived cultural experience.

These three dimensions construct Italian cuisine as simultaneously rooted in cultural continuity and accessible through contemporary dining experiences. References to national and regional origins, inherited culinary knowledge, traditional dishes, and Italian linguistic resources represent food as cultural heritage, while family recipes, artisanal preparation, and geographical provenance establish

authenticity and tradition as sources of culinary legitimacy. At the same time, narratives of memory, family, hospitality, atmosphere, and social interaction extend Italianness beyond food itself, presenting Italian cuisine as a cultural world that consumers can temporarily experience.

Taken together, these patterns show how restaurant websites participate in the circulation and commodification of cultural identity while simultaneously presenting that identity as historically continuous and culturally legitimate. This is particularly relevant to Italian restaurants operating outside Italy, whose digital communication must establish a recognizable connection to the culture from which their culinary identity derives while positioning them within local markets. Italianness consequently operates both as a cultural identity and as a strategic symbolic resource in digital business communication. Importantly, its discursive distinctiveness does not depend primarily on lexical exclusivity. With the exception of 'Italian', 'Italy', and 'pasta', the keywords identified in the analysis displayed small effect sizes, indicating that Italianness emerges through the patterned accumulation and contextual deployment of multiple linguistic resources rather than through a limited set of highly distinctive lexical markers. This finding also demonstrates the value of CADS for investigating complex forms of cultural identity: keyword analysis identifies comparatively salient lexical patterns, while concordance analysis reveals the cultural and communicative meanings produced through their interaction in context.

Some limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The corpus is geographically restricted to Miami and focuses exclusively on restaurant homepages and "About Us" pages collected during a specific period. The findings should therefore not be interpreted as representative of Italian restaurant discourse across all international contexts. Moreover, the analysis concentrates primarily on verbal discourse, whereas restaurant websites are multimodal environments in which photographs, typography, color, layout, and other semiotic resources may contribute substantially to representations of Italianness. Finally, the study examines the discourse produced or strategically incorporated by restaurants rather than its reception by consumers.

These limitations provide several directions for further research. Comparative studies could examine whether similar constructions emerge in other cities or national contexts, particularly where Italian migration histories, consumer expectations, and culinary cultures differ. Multimodal research could investigate how verbal representations interact with visual and spatial resources, while further research could explore variation among Italian restaurants themselves, examining how differently they mobilize Italianness as a cultural and strategic resource in their brand communication.

Research combining business-produced discourse with consumer responses could further illuminate how claims to authenticity and cultural identity are accepted, contested, or reformulated by audiences.

Ultimately, the study shows that the digital representation of Italian food abroad involves considerably more than the promotion of dishes. Through recurrent references to place, tradition, craftsmanship, memory, family, and hospitality, restaurant websites transform food into a resource for communicating cultural identity. Italianness emerges from this discourse as both inherited and performed: rooted in narratives of cultural continuity yet continually reconstructed through contemporary digital business communication. Examining these processes contributes to understanding how food becomes a site where cultural identities are not simply represented but continuously constructed, negotiated, and commercially mobilized.

Appendix

Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness	Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness	Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness	Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness	Rank	Keyword_POS	Keyness
1	italian adj	1.20	33	authenticity n	0.28	65	naples n	0.24	97	again adv	0.22	129	historic adj	0.20
2	italy n	0.78	34	important adj	0.28	66	importance n	0.24	98	risotto n	0.22	130	fall n	0.20
3	pasta n	0.65	35	daily adj	0.27	67	acclaimed adj	0.23	99	neighborhood n	0.22	131	coast n	0.20
4	pizza n	0.48	36	unforgettable adj	0.27	68	reliable adj	0.23	100	invite v	0.22	132	book v	0.20
5	import v	0.41	37	quality n	0.27	69	buon adj	0.23	101	worth adj	0.22	133	childhood n	0.20
6	neapolitan adj	0.39	38	patio n	0.27	70	ravioli n	0.23	102	dining n	0.22	134	wood-burning adj	0.20
7	dough n	0.39	39	house n	0.27	71	really adv	0.23	103	cacio n	0.22	135	outdoor adj	0.20
8	atmosphere n	0.39	40	sourced v	0.27	72	allow v	0.23	104	district n	0.21	136	come v	0.20
9	selection n	0.36	41	touch n	0.26	73	freshly adv	0.23	105	executive adj	0.21	137	florence n	0.20
10	ambiance n	0.35	42	europe n	0.26	74	margherita n	0.23	106	vineyard n	0.21	138	oven n	0.20
11	trattoria n	0.34	43	famed adj	0.26	75	pepe n	0.23	107	i pron	0.21	139	roman adj	0.20
12	memory n	0.33	44	enthusiast n	0.26	76	vegas n	0.23	108	wide adj	0.21	140	artisanal adj	0.20
13	world n	0.33	45	host v	0.26	77	traditional adj	0.23	109	third adj	0.21	141	herb n	0.20
14	tiramisu n	0.32	46	appetito n	0.26	78	medium adj	0.23	110	satisfaction n	0.21	142	charcuterie n	0.20
15	true adj	0.32	47	originate v	0.26	79	history n	0.23	111	parmigiano n	0.21	143	suitable adj	0.20
16	italian n	0.32	48	prosciutto n	0.26	80	gourmet adj	0.23	112	walk v	0.21	144	hesitate v	0.20
17	di prep	0.32	49	gnocchi n	0.26	81	classic adj	0.22	113	bomb n	0.21	145	handcraft v	0.20
18	bolognese adj	0.30	50	high adj	0.26	82	trip n	0.22	114	napoletana adj	0.21	146	rigatoni n	0.20
19	brother n	0.30	51	friendly adj	0.25	83	genuine adj	0.22	115	life n	0.21	147	contemporary adj	0.20
20	oil n	0.29	52	dinner n	0.25	84	breeze n	0.22	116	homey adj	0.21	148	boy n	0.20
21	entire adj	0.29	53	cool adj	0.25	85	custom adj	0.22	117	inside adv	0.21	149	tomato n	0.20
22	key adj	0.29	54	miami n	0.25	86	ordinary adj	0.22	118	study v	0.21	150	osteria n	0.20
23	flour n	0.29	55	ingredient n	0.25	87	happen v	0.22	119	alla prep	0.21	151	refined adj	0.20
24	approach n	0.29	56	yelp n	0.24	88	dish n	0.22	120	restaurant n	0.21	152	dessert n	0.20
25	homemade adj	0.29	57	beach n	0.24	89	recipe n	0.22	121	harbor n	0.21	153	hidden adj	0.20
26	wine n	0.29	58	napoli n	0.24	90	gateway n	0.22	122	residential adj	0.21	154	regular adj	0.20
27	olive adj	0.28	59	garden n	0.24	91	olive n	0.22	123	seal v	0.21	155	customize v	0.20
28	pizzeria n	0.28	60	knowledgeable adj	0.24	92	save v	0.22	124	crown n	0.21	156	winner n	0.20
29	amazing adj	0.28	61	northern adj	0.24	93	lasagna n	0.22	125	connection n	0.21	157	craft v	0.20
30	be v	0.28	62	extra adj	0.24	94	directly adv	0.22	126	creamy adj	0.21	158	from prep	0.20
31	memorable adj	0.28	63	authentic adj	0.24	95	arugula n	0.22	127	fire v	0.21	159	extraordinary adj	0.20
32	cozy adj	0.28	64	beloved adj	0.24	96	sicily n	0.22	128	antipasti n	0.21	160	timeless adj	0.20

Keywords of the ITALIAN Corpus

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