

Online Content Analysis Focusing on Local Ingredients and Food Culture: A Study of Selected Food Festival Websites

Online tartalomelemzés a helyi alapanyagok és gasztronómiai kultúra mentén: Gasztr fesztiválok weboldalainak vizsgálata

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The rising popularity of food tourism is fueled by a growing interest in destination-specific culinary experiences, with food festivals playing a crucial role in this trend. This article conducts a qualitative online content analysis of European and North American food festival websites to explore how these events promote local ingredients and preserve food culture through communication. The analysis reveals an increasing commitment by these festivals to showcase local food and traditions, supporting local producers and service providers. Additionally, the study categorizes food festivals based on their online representation's connection to local ingredients and food culture. Its significance lies in contributing to the understanding of communication patterns of local food culture, offering insights to support festival organizers in fostering local economies and communities.

A gasztrturizmus növekvő népszerűsége mögött a desztinációk nyújtotta egyedi kulináris élmények iránti bővülő kereslet áll, amelyben a gasztrómiai fesztiválok kulcsfontosságú szerep jut. Jelen cikk célja, hogy kvalitatív online tartalomelemzéssel azonosítsa, miként járulnak hozzá egyes európai és észak-amerikai gasztrómiai fesztiválok weboldalai a helyi alapanyagok népszerűsítéséhez és a gasztrómiai kultúra megőrzéséhez. Az eredmények alapján a gasztrómiai fesztiválok egyre elkötelezettebbek a helyi ételek és hagyományok bemutatása iránt, támogatva ezzel a helyi termelőket és szolgáltatókat egyaránt. Emellett a tanulmány kategorizálja is a fesztiválokat a helyi gasztrómiai kultúra és alapanyagok online kommunikációjukban betöltött szerepe alapján.

Keywords: local ingredients, food culture, local product, food festivals, food tourism.

Kulcsszavak: helyi alapanyagok, gasztrómiai kultúra, helyi termékek, gasztrómiai fesztiválok, gasztrturizmus.

1. Introduction

Recently, the appeal of food tourism has been steadily increasing, driven by the growing popularity of distinctive culinary experiences and a heightened appreciation for diverse food-related services (JANCSIK et al. 2019, ZARĘBSKI-ZWĘGLIŃSKA-GAŁECKA 2020). Food tourism events, such as food festivals, fairs, and exhibitions, have become an essential component of this trend, offering

visitors the opportunity to explore local food culture, sample regional specialties, and interact with local communities (CSAPODY 2022).

Recent studies have also explored the demand side of food festivals and the role of *locality* in motivating individuals to attend such events (TÓTH et al. 2020). Admittedly, local food-themed festivals draw participants of diverse demographics. However, for the main segments, it is an important motivation to purchase and try local food (KILIÇHAN-KÖŞKER 2020). The increasing interest in locally produced goods has resulted in their emergence as a new category of tourist attractions (MADARÁSZ et al. 2021). Thus, leveraging the concept of *locality* in communication (such as inclusion of place associations in the

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names of festivals) can serve as great marketing tools (KESGIN et al. 2021).

In this context, this article explores how food festivals promote food based on local ingredients and local food culture through their communication. The research question, this article seeks to answer is as follows: What role does the incorporation of local ingredients and the preservation of local food culture play in the online communication of food festivals? While this research aims to conduct a qualitative online content analysis on selected European and North American food festival websites to identify and examine exemplary practices, it does not intend to undertake a comparative analysis across the continents.

By highlighting and presenting some examples, this research also aims to provide insights that can support the efforts of event organizers to enhance local economies' and communities' development. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the role of local food culture and food festival management and its potential to inspire and guide organizers in adopting more practices connected to local food systems.

2. Literature review

2.1. WEBSITE COMMUNICATION CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOD FESTIVALS

The website communication strategies employed by food festivals exhibit a diverse array of distinctions, encompassing variations in update frequency, proportions of dynamic and static content, as well as thematic emphases within their messaging (KESGIN et al. 2020, CSAPODY et al. 2021). Food festival websites extend beyond the provision of functional information regarding the events. Rather, they convey detailed messages regarding food specialties, elucidate their objectives in seeking to influence patterns of consumption behavior, and engage in critical examinations of contemporary food cultures (FROST-LAINING 2013). Pre-event online communication plays a pivotal role in attracting a larger audience to food festivals. To this end, website communication strategies should align with tourists' preferences for high-quality and unique food offerings at the event (YANG et al. 2020).

In the context of implementing sustainable initiatives in online communication, DODDS et al. (2020) identify sustainable transportation alternatives and waste management as the most frequently communicated practices, while highlighting a lack in consistency and efficiency.

Addressing the aspect of locality, KESGIN et al. (2021) recommend the utilization of geographical associations by organizers to signify a connection with place, thereby enhancing the festival's image.

2.2. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF FOOD FESTIVALS SERVING LOCAL FOOD

Food tourism events can play a significant role in promoting environmental preservation (CSAPODY et al. 2021). The importance of the local character of an event and the utilization of local products is considered a crucial component of the sustainability indicators for festivals (LÓRINCZ et al. 2023). The definition of local ingredients stands out as the foremost challenge, influenced by geographical, political, and economic aspects (CSAPODY 2023). In line with this, TRIVETTE (2015) identified two distinct methodologies for characterizing local food: the *local by proximity* approach taking into account geographical and political boundaries, and the *local by relationship* concept, which builds on social factors.

Culinary tourism events can motivate local chefs and vendors to utilize regional products and adopt sustainable food production practices, such as composting food waste and employing biodegradable packaging (CSAPODY et al. 2021). Similarly, CHENG (2023) asserted that food festivals foster sustainable practices by incorporating locally sourced ingredients, thereby encouraging sustainable food production methods and supporting local farmers. This not only affects the local economy but also shortens supply chains, reduces fuel consumption associated with food transportation, and improves environmental conditions (ZARĘBSKI-ZWĘGLIŃSKA-GAŁECKA 2020).

2.3. FOOD FESTIVALS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Traditionally, food-related events, such as fairs and festivals, exhibited a strong connection between local communities and regional agriculture. The promotion of food at these festivals served the dual purpose of stimulating consumption and highlighting the economic prosperity achieved by agricultural industries (HAYNES 2015). Nevertheless, logistics and communication with local producers pose notable challenges, as both the quantity and quality provided by small-scale producers are unpredictable and subject to fluctuations. Given the season-dependent nature of demand in the hospitality sector, small-scale producers frequently encounter difficulties in

meeting the increased raw material requirements during peak periods (CSAPODY 2023).

Contemporary food festivals, however, have a broader range of economic opportunities for local communities (JÁSZBERÉNYI 2016). These events generate employment opportunities for locals, from event staff to food vendors and producers. Furthermore, food festivals have the potential to stimulate local food businesses and service providers in tourism industry (CHENG 2023).

However, destinations show variability in terms of the economic potential of their food festivals. Food festivals' impact is more pronounced in areas with high tourism capital, equipped with developed accommodation and other service amenities (YANG et al. 2020). Beyond engaging with the festival's offerings, attendees also avail themselves of other services, thereby contributing supplementary income to the local economy (ZAREBSKI-ZWEGLIŃSKA-GAŁECKA 2020).

2.4. PROMOTION OF LOCAL FOOD HERITAGE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Memorable tourism experiences are not solely derived from innovative culinary encounters; they are equally propelled by an exploration of local heritage flavors, which involves the incorporation of indigenous ingredients. In this context, storytelling emerges as a valuable tool, guiding visitors to consciously seek and appreciate these authentic values (BENE-PISKÓTI 2019). In this sense, food festivals can contribute to local community development by showcasing traditional cuisine, thereby promoting and preserving local food culture and heritage (AYDIN et al. 2022). HJALAGER and KWIATKOWSKI (2023) argue that festivals positively impact local community development by offering visitors the opportunity to explore local food culture, participate in cooking classes, and try regional cuisine. Additionally, food festivals serve as platforms for the continuous reinvention of local traditions, identity, and the concept of belonging.

The primary objective of most food festivals is to provide a platform for communities to unite and engage in an environment that fosters a sense of community through shared food preparation and dining experiences (HAYNES 2015). Organizing festivals serves as an effective means to foster and engage the local community. Such initiatives not only instill a sense of pride within the local populace but also present a valuable opportunity to enhance awareness and promote the positive image of the destination (YANG et al. 2020, LÓRINCZ et al. 2023).

CHENG (2023) argues that food festivals, featuring innovative dishes rooted in culinary

traditions, contribute to the promotion of place-images and rural lifestyle. The way foods are showcased reflects the community's narratives and aspirations in presenting themselves to both external observers and fellow community members (HAYNES 2015). By opening to tourists and offering diverse programs and culinary offerings, these festivals assist in promoting the popularity of the *locality* (TÓTH et al. 2020). Thus, food festivals also contribute to reducing the social and cultural gap between rural and urban areas (CHENG 2023).

3. Methodology and sample

3.1. OVERVIEW: QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

In tourism studies, a frequently employed method is content analysis, however, they mainly adopt a quantitative approach (LARMOLENKO-SCHNEIDER 2016, MOHAMED et al. 2020). Contrary to high number of studies conducted with quantitative methodology, researchers argue in favor of the qualitative approach due to the utilization of non-statistical and exploratory methods (CSORDÁS et al. 2018). Qualitative studies serve as useful tools for exploring intricate and nuanced phenomena that cannot be adequately captured solely through quantitative methods. One of the key power elements of qualitative research is its ability to generate rich, detailed data that captures the experiences, perspectives, and meanings that participants attach to their social world (KIBISWA 2019).

In this study, a qualitative approach was used to assess European and North American food festivals' online communication practices connected to local ingredients and local food culture. A qualitative content analysis (QICA) was undertaken to identify, assess, and synthesize information found on websites published by festival organizers. QICA is a research method conducted through either an inductive or deductive approach. In the deductive or *directed* method, it derives themes from existing theory to establish the framework guiding the research (KIBISWA 2019).

3.2. SAMPLE, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

First, existing studies and research in the field were explored. Based on these, the research question (RQ) was formulated: What role does the incorporation of local ingredients and the preservation of local food culture play in the online communication of food festivals?

Table 1

Sources for selection of food festival websites

Source	Article	Link
AllExciting	Food and gourmet festivals in Europe	https://allexciting.com/food-festivals-europe/
CNN Travel	Europe's best summer food festivals	https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/europes-best-food-festivals/index.html
TimeOut	11 great food festivals in the U.S.	https://www.timeout.com/usa/things-to-do/best-food-festivals-usa
Travel Triangle	10 Food Festivals In Canada For Those Who Love Food And Festivals	https://traveltriangle.com/blog/food-festivals-in-canada/

Source: own elaboration

For this study, the analysis unit is the textual content available on official website of the pre-selected food festivals. The compilation of the sample was based on online sources listing food festivals (Table 1), resulting in the exclusion of numerous festivals and the omission of smaller-scale events from the initial stage of sample formation, thus potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings. Based on the above-mentioned food festival listings, 65 food

festivals were initially identified. The screening criteria specified that the festivals must have (1) an official website available (2) in English. After this, pre-defined screening criteria were applied, thus 31 festivals were excluded: 2 duplications, 19 unavailable official websites, and 10 with no English-language website. In total, 34 festivals were included in the final sample (Table 3). The majority of the examined festivals are held in the United Kingdom (9 festivals),

Table 2

Distribution across countries, duration, and visitor numbers of analyzed festivals

		No. of festivals
Breakdown by country	Canada	8
	Denmark	2
	France	1
	Germany	1
	Ireland	2
	Italy	2
	Switzerland	1
	United Kingdom	9
	United States of America	8
Breakdown by duration	1-day event	1
	2-day event	7
	3-day event	8
	4-day event	7
	5-day event	3
	Event longer than 5 days	8
Breakdown by visitor numbers	up to 20 000 visitors	5
	20 001 – 40 000 visitors	4
	40 001 – 60 000 visitors	3
	60 001 – 80 000 visitors	3
	80 001 – 100 000 visitors	2
	more than 100 000 visitors	1
	No data available	16

Source: own elaboration

Canada (8 festivals), and the United States (8 festivals). Moreover, a notable observation was that most of these festivals spanned a duration of three days or extended beyond five days. Furthermore, it was observed that a significant proportion of these festivals drew attendance from fewer than 20 000 visitors (Table 2).

In the second stage, English versions of the websites were selected. To collect textual data, the researcher exclusively analyzed pages on the official websites, delving no more than two links deep on each site. Analysis of each festival's website began with an examination of the home page, followed by pages accessible from the homepage and main menu, and subsequently extended to all other sections. No external websites or social media platforms were subjected to analysis. Only

textual data was scrutinized. The data collection period extended from May 21, 2023, to July 15, 2023. During the third stage, websites' textual data underwent analysis. Initially, a coding scheme was developed in alignment with the identified research objectives (NEUMAN 2014). For this study, deductive coding was used, codes were predetermined based on prior literature (DODDS et al. 2020, CSAPODY et al. 2021). The final coding scheme consisted of three categories (local food and ingredients, seasonal food and ingredients, and local food culture) and 9 codes. Utilizing the *a priori* categories and indicators, the frequencies of information related to the categories were recorded. The researcher examined a moderately sized set of webpages, manually analyzing online content to comprehensively capture contextual features.

Table 3

Food festivals included in the analysis

Festival names (in alphabetic order)	Location	
Aarhus Food Festival	Aarhus	Denmark
Abergavenny Food Festival	Abergavenny	UK
Aspen Food and Wine Classic	Aspen	US
Atlanta Food & Wine Festival	Atlanta	US
Blenheim Palace Food Festival	Woodstock	UK
Butter Tart Festival	Midland	Canada
Castroville Artichoke Festival	Castroville	US
Cheese	Bra	Italy
Copenhagen Cooking	Copenhagen	Denmark
Cork on a Fork Food Festival	Cork	Ireland
Corn And Apple Festival	Morden	Canada
Dine Out Vancouver Festival	Vancouver	Canada
Dorset Seafood Festival	Weymouth	UK
Edinburgh Food Festival	Edinburgh	UK
Exeter Food and Drink Festival	Exeter	UK
Fête du Citron	Menton	France
Food Zurich	Zurich	Switzerland
Galway International Oyster and Seafood Festival	Galway	Ireland
Loch Lomond Food and Drink Festival	Loch Lomond	UK
Ludlow Food Festival	Ludlow	UK
Martha's Vineyard Food and Wine Festival	Edgartown	US
Mauna Lani Culinary Classic	Mauna Lani	US
Morgan Hill Mushroom Festival	Morgan Hill	US

<i>Festival names (in alphabetic order)</i>	<i>Location</i>	
<i>New York City Food and Wine Festival</i>	<i>New York</i>	<i>US</i>
<i>Ottawa Poutine Fest</i>	<i>Ottawa</i>	<i>Canada</i>
<i>Prince Edward Island Fall Flavours Festival</i>	<i>Charlottetown</i>	<i>Canada</i>
<i>Shediac Lobster festival</i>	<i>Shediac</i>	<i>Canada</i>
<i>Shrewsbury Food Festival</i>	<i>Shrewsbury</i>	<i>UK</i>
<i>South Beach Wine and Food Festival</i>	<i>Miami</i>	<i>US</i>
<i>Stragusto</i>	<i>Trapani</i>	<i>Italy</i>
<i>Stuttgarter Weindorf</i>	<i>Stuttgart</i>	<i>Germany</i>
<i>Taste Of The Caribbean</i>	<i>Montreal</i>	<i>Canada</i>
<i>Taste Of The Danforth</i>	<i>Toronto</i>	<i>Canada</i>
<i>Vegfest UK</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>UK</i>

Source: own elaboration

4. Results

4.1. REFLECTION TO THE USE OF LOCAL AND SEASONAL INGREDIENTS

In food festivals' communication, there is a growing emphasis on promoting sustainability through the selection of ingredients and the diverse range of food offerings. These events showcase a commitment to regional traditions, local producers, and catering to various dietary preferences.

In the context of the examined festivals, there was an emphasis on the utilization of local and

seasonal ingredients in food preparation (Table 4). Local ingredients were identified in 20 instances (58.8%), while the utilization of seasonal ingredients was noted in 7 instances (20.6%). Festivals highlighting seasonality consistently underscored locality in every case; hence, these dual aspects are collectively discussed in this chapter. Subsequently, the qualitative analysis will be explained, aligning with the specific online communication practices that have been identified.

Loch Lomond Food and Drink Festival's – as well as Exeter Food and Drink Festival's – website indicates a close collaboration with local producers, small businesses, and chefs to ensure

Table 4

Food Festivals' Practices Focusing on Locally Sourced Ingredients

<i>Practice</i>	<i>Example from the website</i>	<i>Festival's name</i>
<i>Providing free sample from locally grown food for festival visitors</i>	<i>"Free corn - Enjoy the most delicious corn on the cob you've ever had, completely for free!"</i>	<i>Corn & Apple Festival</i>
<i>Establishing regulations within the terms and conditions to facilitate the presentation of local producers</i>	<i>"We always look to include quality local, Welsh, unique, regular and new producers to offer a balance of variety, fresh offerings and familiarity."</i>	<i>Abergavenny Food Festival</i>
<i>Conducting programs related to local food, encompassing workshops, lectures, showcookings, and similar activities</i>	<i>"Each stage at the Festival hosts different chef, producer and speaker appearances (...) celebrating some of the finest producers and chefs of the region"</i>	<i>Ludlow Food Festival</i>
<i>Organizing an educational exhibition to highlight various aspects of a specific local ingredient</i>	<i>"Mushroom Educational Display and Exhibit (...) to learn about the health benefits of mushrooms, how mushrooms are grown, purchase a growing kit and maybe even enjoy a taste of Mushroom Beer!"</i>	<i>Morgan Hill Mushroom Festival</i>
<i>Demonstrating the preparation of international cuisines utilizing locally sourced ingredients.</i>	<i>"Veggie Vibes: Unleashing Global Cuisine With Local Ingredients - (...) We'll cook international dishes using locally sourced ingredients (...)"</i>	<i>Food Zurich Festival</i>

Source: own elaboration

the utilization of local and sustainable ingredients. Furthermore, the website provides information about dedicated exhibition spaces reserved for chefs exclusively working with locally grown or plant-based ingredients. Ludlow Food Festival's website showcases over 180 traditional food and beverage artisan producers participate in the festival, providing tastings and selling their products, with a prominent focus on seasonal and local ingredients. Festival programs involve daily presentations on the festival stage, featuring diverse appearances by chefs, producers, and speakers.

The Stuttgarter Weindorf website prominently emphasizes the offer of wines made from grapes sourced from the Baden-Württemberg region (Germany). Although the emphasis on wines is more on origin than seasonality, the utilization of local and seasonal ingredients remains a focal point in the food offerings based on the website.

The Prince Edward Island Fall Flavors Festival website underscores the celebration of local ingredients (oysters, mussels, lobster, beef, potatoes) with several programs as well as participating restaurants in the festival feature and promote the use of local, organic produce. The Abergavenny Food Festival website also exemplifies exhibitors working with organic, seasonal, raw materials from local producers, processed under sustainable conditions. The website also outlines the organizers' preference to showcase local producers and the festival's policy, regulating the use of local and seasonal raw materials: fruits and vegetables should come from local producers, meat should

preferably be local, and pigs and poultry should not be fed genetically modified feed.

The Copenhagen Cooking website highlights concepts connected to locality such as zero-kilometer food and slow food, all receiving special attention during the event. The festival offers craft beers and food made from organic, locally grown ingredients. The festival's online platform features an occasion wherein chef and farmer, Thomas Køster, guides participants through tastings, imparts insights and techniques pertaining specifically to red cabbage (a traditional ingredient of Denmark) in daily culinary applications.

The Food Zurich Festival website excellently presents locally grown ingredients, featuring presenters from farms in the country. Visitors can taste local, farm-made food entirely crafted from domestically grown ingredients, with examples such as "Seasonal, Local, Delicious" and "Grow Your Own Veg" encapsulating the festival's mission. The website also introduces a slow food market with local food, and cooking shows presenting international dishes based on exclusively locally sourced ingredients.

4.2. REPRESENTATION OF ELEMENTS CONNECTED TO LOCAL FOOD CULTURE

Food festivals serve as conduits for the transmission of local food heritage to festival visitors. These events are enriched by interactive culinary programs, such as showcooking, insights into local production, or presenting local cookbooks (Table 5). However, in contrast to the utilization of local

Table 5

Food festivals' practices focusing on local food culture

Practice	Example from the website	Festival's name
Showcasing the preparation of traditional cuisine	"From a lobster party in a barn to meeting the Island's top oyster producers while slurping their fare, kitchen party dancing, lobster claw cracking, and everything in between (...)"	Prince Edward Island Fall Flavours Festival
Presenting the traditional grape pressing method	"Each year it is great fun when city councillors, members of the Bundestag and state parliament climb into the tub (...) and stomp the grapes with their (...) feet."	Stuttgarter Weindorf
Educating children on the preparation of local dishes	"School of Fish – a free children's cookery workshop – (...) kids create their own delicious seafood dishes at the Festival."	Dorset Seafood Festival
Conducting workshops to instruct visitors in the crafting of local food specialties	"Mastering the Art of Making Menton Lemon Tart! Savor a unique experience with this gourmet workshop!"	Fête du Citron
Engaging with actors of local food system	"From fourth generation lobster fishers to 'Islander-by-choice' food entrepreneurs, potato farmers with deep roots, and chefs with grand visions, you'll get to meet the fine people that are constantly shaping our incredible foodscape."	Prince Edward Island Fall Flavours Festival

Source: own elaboration

ingredients, a comparatively diminished number of festivals underscored explicitly their connection with local food heritage. Through textual analysis, it was discerned that 14 festivals (41.1%) highlighted these aspects in various manners.

Local, traditional foods are preserved and disseminated through festival websites, such as that of the Ottawa Poutine Fest, contributing to the conservation and global promotion of Canadian Poutine culture. Often referred to as the *Canadian Salad*, Poutine finds textual representation as a local cultural specialty. Similarly, the Butter Tart Festival's website in Canada showcases the Butter Tart Contest, which aims to acknowledge this culinary specialty in Ontario. The contest actively engages both professionals and amateurs, connecting various stakeholders within local food systems. Notably, a panel of esteemed judges includes celebrities, chefs, food and travel bloggers, along with local dignitaries. This event establishes a link to local food heritage and culture, celebrating and acknowledging a quintessentially regional culinary delight.

The Dorset Seafood Festival website recognizes participants that prioritize local and responsible sourcing of seafood. Moreover, the website emphasizes its commitment to the education of future generations in local food culture. According to the information available on the website, the School of Fish, a free children's cookery workshop facilitated by Weymouth College, serves as an ideal partner to engage visiting families and assist children in crafting their own delectable seafood dishes at the festival.

Several websites also feature the exhibition of traditional food and beverage preparation methods. The Stuttgarter Weindorf website, for instance, serves as an exemplary illustration of the preservation of local traditions through its traditional grape pressing event, a practice deeply rooted in the historical customs of local winemakers. Meanwhile, the Castroville Artichoke Festival webpage highlights Monterey County's chefs as they demonstrate the versatility of traditional artichoke preparation techniques in chef demos.

The Fête du Citron website underscores the significance of the citrus fruit to Menton, constituting an integral part of its history and culinary heritage. Its website features a lemon tart workshop offering participants a unique and gourmet experience and serves as an opportunity to learn about the preparation methods of this local food specialty.

The Morgan Hill Mushroom Festival website revolves around the mushroom as its focal point,

inviting visitors to savor specialties including mushroom beer. The festival offers cooking demonstrations by local chefs, allowing visitors to explore a variety of mushroom dishes, ranging from stuffed and sautéed to sandwiched, deep-fried, and grilled, among others.

The Prince Edward Island Fall Flavours Festival celebrates local culinary excellence, providing an immersive experience with lobster parties, oyster tastings, and engagements with key figures shaping the Island's foodscape.

The Dine Out Vancouver Festival website emphasizes its role in professional community-building by bringing together hundreds of local chefs, over 300 restaurants, wineries, craft breweries. The website also promotes virtual events on the future of (local) food systems, and experiences designed to allow visitors to experience the city's food culture. The festival is centered around community, collaboration, and sharing Vancouver's culinary narrative with the world.

Culinary festivals, through their diverse strategies and cultural interactions, play a pivotal role in preserving and disseminating local and international culinary traditions. These events foster cultural exchange, community-building, and sustainability, contributing to a rich tapestry of global culinary understanding.

5. Conclusions

This study contributes to the existing literature by analyzing websites of food festivals concerning the representation of local ingredients and local food culture. The promotion of local food culture is deemed essential as it holds the potential to stimulate local food businesses and service providers within the tourism industry (CHENG 2023). Furthermore, food festivals that represent local food heritage have the capability to enhance the destination's image (YANG et al. 2020).

To address the research question – *What role does the incorporation of local ingredients and the preservation of local food culture play in the online communication of food festivals?* –, this study first explores the use of local and seasonal ingredients. Food festivals are increasingly prioritizing sustainability through ingredient selection, demonstrating a commitment to regional traditions, local producers, and diverse dietary preferences. This aligns with CHENG's (2023) findings, acknowledging that festivals fostering sustainable food practices have a long-term impact on local communities. Their online platforms can serve as educational tools throughout the year, promoting sustainable practices and connecting

local communities with food producers, thereby improving environmental conditions (ZARĘBSKI-ZWĘGLINSKA-GALECKA 2020).

The second aspect focused on the representation of elements connected to local food culture. The analysis revealed practices contributing to the preservation of local food culture and heritage such as showcasing traditional cuisine, presenting the traditional grape pressing method, educating children on the preparation of local dishes, and organizing workshops on local food specialties (AYDIN et al. 2022).

Food festivals with rich website content can provide adequate information and stimulate the interest of both locals and tourists. The study suggests that the promotion of local food culture should align with the actual food offerings of the destination to generate a long-term effect. Successful food festival websites are those that develop an online presentation of local food experiences, maintain dynamic year-long content, while focus on the common needs of local communities.

Based on the analysis of websites, it can be stated that the online representation of food festivals can be categorized according to their concept's connection to local ingredients and local food culture as follows:

- Food festivals presenting specific food specialties or beverages (e.g. Poutine Fest).
- Food festivals introducing locally available ingredients and dishes built upon them (e.g. Fête du Citron).
- Food festivals representing local food culture and heritage (e.g. Dorset Seafood Festival).
- Food festivals as presentation of (distant) ethnic or regional cuisines (e.g. Taste of The Caribbean Festival).
- Food festivals focusing on world cuisine with multinational, diverse food and beverage offering (e.g. South Beach Wine and Food Festival).

The research suggests that festival organizers should prioritize *locality* in their planning and execution to enhance their overall impact on local communities. Emphasizing local engagement, supporting regional businesses, and preserving cultural heritage can enhance visitors' experiences while advancing sustainability objectives. Effective communication and educational initiatives are crucial for raising awareness among festival attendees and encouraging active participation in promoting local food culture.

While this study offers valuable insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged. A main

limitation discerned during the analysis of web content is the disparity between the information conveyed on the festival's websites and the actual initiatives or actions undertaken by the festival. Moreover, the dataset might have missed festivals lacking an online presence, and the data collection process excluded festivals without official websites or English-language content. Future research could focus on obtaining information directly from festival organizers, delving into the motivations behind showcasing local ingredients and food heritage.

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