

THE EFFECT OF GASTRONOMIC STORIES TOLD BY TOUR GUIDES ON TOURIST BEHAVIOUR: A CASE OF RAW MEATBALLS

Seda Çiçekli Ayyıldız*, Ferzan Aktaş** & Bekir Bora Dedeoğlu***

Abstract

This study explores how gastronomic stories shared by tour guides influence tourist behaviour and contribute to memorable experiences. Drawing on literature on experiential consumption, cultural proximity, and travel memory, the research investigates the storytelling potential of raw meatballs (çiğ köfte), the main dish of the Sıra Geceleri tradition, listed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Raw meatballs (çiğ köfte) were chosen because they combine ritual elements with a mythical origin story, providing a rich framework for examining story-driven culinary experiences. A qualitative approach was used, and data were analyzed using content analysis in MAXQDA 2020. The results indicate that gastronomic stories boost tourists' desire to taste the dish, make tourism experiences more memorable, and motivate visits by fostering a deeper understanding of the food's cultural background. The findings also show that participants mainly learned the çiğ köfte story through oral sources and had limited awareness of the "gastro-guide" concept. The study concludes that story-centred storytelling makes gastronomic experiences more immersive and meaningful. It offers theoretical insights into research on story-based gastronomy and practical guidance for destination management and tour guiding. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need to develop further and systematically define the gastro-guide concept in academic literature.

Keywords: Gastronomy Guidance; Storytelling; Experience Tourism.

O EFEITO DE HISTÓRIAS GASTRONÔMICAS CONTADAS POR GUIAS DE TURISMO NO COMPORTAMENTO DO TURISTA: UM CASO DE ALMÔNDEGAS CRUAS

Resumo

Este estudo investiga como as histórias gastronômicas transmitidas por guias de turismo influenciam o comportamento dos turistas e contribuem para a formação de experiências memoráveis. Fundamentada na literatura sobre consumo experiencial, proximidade cultural e memória de viagem, a pesquisa examina o potencial narrativo do almôndega crua turca (Çiğ köfte), prato central da tradição das noites de Sıra, inscrito na Lista do Patrimônio Cultural Imaterial da UNESCO. A almôndega crua turca (Çiğ köfte) foi selecionada por combinar práticas ritualísticas com uma narrativa mítica de origem, oferecendo um rico contexto para explorar experiências gastronômicas baseadas em histórias. Utilizou-se um desenho de pesquisa qualitativa, e os dados foram analisados por meio de análise de conteúdo no software MAXQDA 2020. Os resultados mostram que histórias gastronômicas aumentam o desejo dos turistas de provar o prato, fortalecem a memorabilidade das experiências turísticas e ampliam a motivação de visita ao aprofundarem a compreensão cultural do alimento. Observou-se também que os participantes conheciam a história do çiğ köfte principalmente por meio de fontes orais e apresentavam familiaridade limitada com o conceito de "gastro-guia". O estudo conclui que a narrativa transforma a experiência gastronômica em um encontro mais imersivo e significativo, além de destacar a necessidade de desenvolver e definir, de forma mais sistemática, o conceito de gastro-guia na literatura acadêmica.

Palavras-chave: Guia Gastronômico; Turismo e História; Turismo de Experiência.

EL EFECTO DE LAS HISTORIAS GASTRONÓMICAS CONTADAS POR LOS GUÍAS TURÍSTICOS EN EL COMPORTAMIENTO DE LOS TURISTAS: EL CASO DE LAS ALBÓNDIGAS CRUDAS

Resumen

Este estudio analiza cómo las historias gastronómicas transmitidas por los guías turísticos influyen en el comportamiento de los turistas y en la construcción de experiencias memorables. Basada en la literatura sobre consumo experiencial, proximidad cultural y memoria de viaje, la investigación examina el potencial narrativo de las albóndigas crudas turcas (çiğ köfte), plato central de la tradición ritual conocida como las Noches de Sıra, inscrita en la Lista del Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial de la UNESCO. Las çiğ köfte fueron elegidas porque combinan prácticas rituales con un mito de origen, lo que ofrece un marco ideal para explorar experiencias gastronómicas basadas en relatos. Se empleó un diseño cualitativo y los datos se analizaron mediante análisis de contenido con MAXQDA 2020. Los hallazgos muestran que las historias gastronómicas aumentan el deseo de los turistas de probar el plato, fortalecen la memorabilidad de la experiencia turística y elevan la motivación para visitar el lugar al profundizar en la comprensión cultural del alimento. También se observó que los participantes conocían la historia del çiğ köfte principalmente a través de fuentes orales y tenían un conocimiento limitado del concepto de "gastro-guía". El estudio concluye que la narración convierte la experiencia gastronómica en un encuentro más inmersivo y significativo y subraya la necesidad de desarrollar y definir de manera más sistemática el concepto de gastro-guía en la literatura académica.

Palabras clave: Orientación Gastronómica; Storytelling; Turismo de Experiencias.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism destinations develop in response to competitive market demands and tourists' preferences, and they enhance the diversity of cultural assets and values with ethnic characteristics (Çolakoğlu & Sarıışık, 2021). Previously, tourism areas were dominated by mass tourism, but today, niche markets have diversified to accommodate individual differences in demand. Among these niches, gastronomy tourism has emerged prominently amid rising interest in culinary experiences. Gastronomy tourism requires catering to various requests and demands. The demand for these services evolves based on current trends and the desire to understand the destination. Consequently, tourists must understand past and future cultures through reliable sources of information. These sources include oral traditions and mythological elements, as well as written materials supported by scientific data. Professional tour guides, who provide accurate information, play a vital role in the experience of tourists visiting destinations (Kızılırmak et al., 2016).

Professional tour guides convey historical, cultural, economic, and social information about the destination to tourists accurately, impartially, and effectively during tours, and can readily solve any issues that may arise (Kivela, 2005). Tour guides have been thoroughly examined and are described by their various roles and responsibilities. Key definitions include touristic experience provider, cultural mediator, cultural ambassador, and storyteller (Rabotić, 2009; Zhang & Chow, 2004; Salazar, 2005; Güzel, 2007; Köroğlu et al., 2012). Tour guides should specialize in different areas based on the nature and scope of the tour they offer. Specializations include faith tourism, cultural tourism, wine tourism, and food/beverage tourism. On-site experience is the core principle of gastronomy tourism (Gheorghe et al., 2014; Yüksel, 2019).

The stories narrated by professional tour guides during tours enhance the experience and contribute to memorable tourism. Gastronomy-specialized tour guides should be well-versed in world culinary cultures, local food traditions, culinary inventories, cooking and presentation techniques, and most importantly, the historical and mythological stories of foods (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Cheng, 2023).

A literature survey revealed that storytelling positively impacts tourist experiences (Aktaş & Batman, 2010; Pekyaman, 2018; Sezer, 2019; Kaya & Gümüş, 2020; Moscardo, 2020; Çolakoğlu & Sarıışık, 2020; Kaya & Ünlüönen, 2021; Özen et al., 2023). As tourist expectations have diversified, specialization in tour guidance has become important. In addition, specialization in gastronomic guidance has gained prominence as tourism expectations have increasingly focused on gastronomy.

While tour guide specialization and storytelling are significant determinants of tourist attitudes, the literature offers limited evidence on their role in shaping memorable tourism experiences. Given the topic's significance, the following research question was tested. RQ: Does the storytelling of raw meatballs – a gastronomic product with a mythical history – by professional tour guides and sıra night organizers influence tourist behaviour and contribute to a memorable tourism experience?

Accordingly, the study population was identified as Tourist guides in Şanlıurfa, Sıra night organizers and tourists who participate in Sıra night. Şanlıurfa, a city inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list, is renowned for its Sıra night events. This study conceptualizes storytelling not merely as an element that enhances the tourism experience but as a medium that establishes cultural bonding and a sense of belonging between the tourist and the destination. The mythological and historical narratives accompanying gastronomic products enable tourists to experience local cuisine not only through taste but also through meaning-making and the formation of cultural closeness.

In this context, the presentation of raw meatballs with mythological narratives during Sıra nights strengthens the symbolic bond between tourists and local culture. It serves as a key mechanism for enhancing the experience's memorability. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the effects of storytelling on tourist behaviour and memorable gastronomic experiences within the framework of cultural bonding. Examining storytelling from the perspectives of gastronomy and tour guiding is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the literature and the tourism industry.

2 THEORETICAL REVIEWS

2.1 Gastronomic Guidance

Tourism includes activities that offer individuals opportunities for new experiences, serving as a motivating force. Tourism has a dynamic structure that adapts to evolving interests, preferences, and demands. For this reason, tourism intersects with numerous other fields (Akyurt Kurnaz & Kurnaz, 2019; Çolakoğlu & Sarıışık, 2021). As tourists' consumption habits evolve, eating and drinking activities during travel have shifted from necessity to experience. Consequently, tourism has found common ground with gastronomy, leading to the emergence of gastronomic tourism as a significant attraction factor in the industry (Başoda et al., 2018; Güzel & İşçi, 2020).

The term gastronomy was first used by Lavoisier in the 17th century (Güzel & Apaydın, 2016; Lee & Bucher, 2023). While gastronomy was initially defined as the observation of everything related to one's nutrition by a particular system, today it refers to the desire to enjoy well-prepared dishes and a curiosity about delicious cuisine (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Cheng, 2023). Furthermore, gastronomy is defined as a multidisciplinary science that explores the hereditary, physiological, and psychological attitudes of individuals toward the food they consume, as well as the history and stories of food from seed planting and harvesting to its presentation on the plate. Gastronomy is also supported by art, aesthetics, and social and scientific sciences during such explorations. Accordingly, the term gastronomy is more than just a meal; it reflects a people's cultural heritage, traditions, and communal feelings and behaviours. This broad definition of gastronomy is considered a result of experiential learning (Gheorghe et al., 2014; Yüksel, 2019).

Gastronomy tourism encompasses a range of travel activities, such as visiting producers, making observations,

and participating in processes from the preparation stage of food and beverage to the presentation stage, which, in turn, contribute to memorable tourism experiences (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Jerez, 2023). These tours act as intermediaries, helping visitors learn about the local people and their cultural heritage. Such tours also protect cultural heritage and serve as a strategic element in many destinations' branding efforts (Gheorghe et al., 2014; Akyurt & Güzel, 2022).

While eating/drinking activities are traditionally seen as necessities in the tourism sector, gastronomy tourism has transformed them into a special interest tourism. This special interest tourism has become a crucial determinant of tours, providing tourists with unique experiences and innovation (Akdu et al., 2018; Jerez, 2023). Consequently, gastronomic tour routes, offering tourists the chance to taste local and diverse flavours and experience food preparation, have begun to be developed. Such tour routes should include more than just eating and drinking; they should also highlight the destination's social structure, traditions, beliefs, and rituals (Akyurt & Güzel, 2022). The need to accurately convey such extensive information to tourists underscores the importance of tour guides specializing in gastronomy (Kızılırmak et al., 2016). A new concept emerging from this specialization is gastronomic guidance. Gastronomic guidance aims to inform and provide experiences for tourists seeking detailed knowledge of a region's local food culture and to experience it (Irigüler & Güler, 2017; Başoda et al., 2018). To put it another way, gastro-guides are tour guides who specialize in gastronomy, offering information and experiences related to gastronomic products (Akyurt & Güzel, 2022).

Tour guides specializing in gastronomy should have specific characteristics, including knowledge of world and local culinary cultures, familiarity with popular culinary trends, understanding of dish preparation and ingredients, a love for cooking, active interest in culinary activities, a willingness to research restaurants and dining places, knowledge of the history and origin of dishes, and strong narrative skills (Kızılırmak et al., 2016; Başoda et al., 2018; Bahar, 2021; Akyurt & Güzel, 2022). The most effective way for gastronomic guides to enhance interest in gastronomy tours is to present local dishes by sharing their stories. Tourists connect with these stories, which in turn give the experience a more lasting impression (Çolakoğlu & Sarıışık, 2021).

2.2 Storytelling and The Experience Economy

Storytelling is the oral or written narration of an event (Bassano et al., 2019). In a basic sense, stories are the art of manifesting and visualizing an event in the mind. Shakespeare, from the past to his own era, captured the dynamics of society through his characters and plots, bringing events to life for his audience. The way these stories are told is as essential for the acceptance of the narrators as representatives (Papadatos, 2006). In the tourism sector, which leads the experience and service industry, storytelling plays a vital role in shaping consumer expectations. The primary goal is to enhance the destination's appeal through storytelling, thereby creating an effective marketing strategy. Strengthening the narrative paradigm also serves as a bridge between the past and the future (Chronis, 2012). Stories

behind experiences offered in destinations help make memories last. Storytelling stems from the desire to create shared value (Aydın & Ünüvar, 2020). Stories typically have memorable beginnings and endings. The way storytellers tell their stories is as important as their fiction in making them lasting and remarkable. During storytelling, storytellers are expected to connect with the story.

The common goal is to enhance the lasting impact of the experience by varying gestures, expressions, and behaviours during the narration, bringing the stories vividly to life in listeners' minds (Sherman, 2015). This performative vividness not only elicits an emotional response but also shapes tourists' cognitive appraisals. Story-induced mental imagery activates psychological mechanisms that heighten curiosity toward cultural elements, thereby fostering cultural closeness. In this regard, psychological factors significantly influence tourists' decision-making; likewise, cultural narratives stimulate cognitive processes by triggering personal curiosity, which becomes a key predictor of cultural closeness (Saxena et al., 2025).

From the perspective of tour guides, the narratives are not told directly from a source but are shaped by the guides' animated, improvisational performances. Another key factor that strengthens the narrative is that the guides live in and are familiar with the region where the stories originated (Ibanez et al., 2003). Stories form the core of memories that make experiences last. Consequently, storytellers play a mediatory role in strengthening memorable memories (Bassano et al., 2019).

When storytelling creates a holistic picture and is perceived as part of the experience, it can increase demand for products and services, supporting the growth and development of the cultural and experience economy. Guides' attitudes also play an important role in storytelling. For instance, guides with a more traditionalist typology narrate stories of historical significance in chronological order. In contrast, entrepreneurial guides may prefer a narration style that encourages visitors to use their imagination.

Despite the narrative differences between guides, there are also common elements. Engaging listeners in the story and maintaining historical accuracy in narration are examples of common characteristics. Transmitting stories to future generations through compelling narratives also contributes to the sustainability of historical memory (Bryon, 2012). Storytelling has gained significance in the food and beverage service industry, both for its promotional role in products and services and for its integral part in the overall experience. In this regard, food-based storytelling is an effective way to connect with memories. Ylipää Abrahamsson, director of a Swedish catering company, describes the common thread between food and storytelling as follows: "We looked up from the plate and started creating" (Ylipää, 2015).

This statement means that, to make food meaningful to customers, the dish's significance must be conveyed through storytelling. This reinforces the perception of a memorable dining experience. Stories also contribute to shaping the overall experience, making the service memorable in the visited areas (Yavuz et al., 2016). Moreover, experiencing the local culture is a fundamental

component of understanding the destination; such cultural engagement enables tourists to grasp their surroundings both cognitively and emotionally (Atasoy & Oğuz Türkay, 2025).

The commoditization of services like products has led to varying price perceptions based on the experience offered. Customers play an active role in creating experiences. The pricing of experiences is determined by the perceived value of the service and products (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

Experiences aim to provide customers, especially in the service sector, with a mental journey. These experiences can also offer customers new existential insights. (Sundbo, 2009). It is essential to involve customers directly in the experience process to help them understand the destination's core values. Tourists evaluate destinations not only based on cognitive factors but also on the emotional responses they have toward the people of those destinations (Kutlu & Ayyıldız, 2023).

Tourism experiences include all events and activities that tourists engage in. Experiences during the decision-making and purchasing processes can be considered purchase prerequisites, as they shape perceptions of the destination. Experiences in the destination can generate positive stimulation and positively impact satisfaction by evoking positive emotions (Oh et al., 2007).

In the experiential environment, storytelling skills are as important as the place's atmosphere. Since stories play a key role in transmitting culinary culture, they can also convey information to consumers about the service received. The unique messages conveyed through stories can influence consumers' product purchase intentions and service preferences, thereby contributing to the continuity and sustainability of the experience economy (Mossberg & Eide, 2017).

2.3 An Example of a Gastronomic Product with a Mythological Story: Raw Meatball

Gastronomy has become a significant tourism segment, highlighting the unique elements of countries' cultures, foods, and cooking techniques. Therefore, the initial term proposed for gastronomy tourism was "culinary tourism" (Kivela & Crofts, 2005).

Gastronomic heritage can become unforgettable through storytelling, which helps transfer and preserve traditions and customs for future generations. Every geographical region has unique gastronomic products with their own stories to tell (Ayaz et al., 2023). Tourists visiting an area for gastronomic tourism connect with its historical memory through food while also contributing to the region's economy (Henderson, 2009). Gastronomic experiences are shaped in the minds of consumers by certain elements such as the places they visit, the taste of the food served, the ambiance, and the quality of service; additionally, the stories behind these experiences contribute to perceiving them as unique (Michael & Fusté-Forné, 2022; Keskin et al., 2024).

For storytelling to be perceived as exceptional by the listener, some aspects within the narrative must be fulfilled. The most fundamental of these is that storytelling should feature a strong narrative, unique language, and a coherent

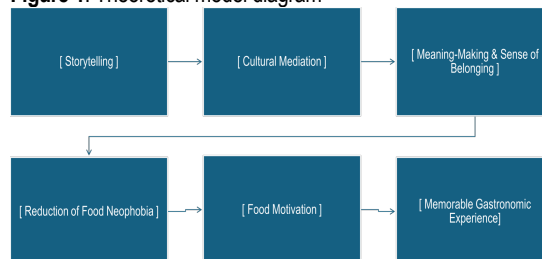
message (Huang et al., 2016). Visitors' memories are shaped by how stories are told, making the experience unforgettable (Su et al., 2023; Keskin et al., 2024). Within the cultural process, many gastronomic products can contribute significantly to the continuity of cultural transmission through their stories.

In this regard, known initially as *çiğ köfte* (a Turkish dish made from bulgur wheat, raw meat, and spices), is a vital dish representing the cuisine of the Şanlıurfa and Adıyaman provinces of Türkiye. Its story, told from past to present, is as follows: King Nemrud, ruler of the kingdom of Commagene, decides to burn Abraham because of his belief in one God. To accomplish this, he orders his people to gather all the trees and wood in the city square. There are no pieces of wood left in the houses that can be used for a fire, and Nemrud also forbids lighting fires in the homes. Following the king's order, the people collect wood for days.

Meanwhile, a hunter, unaware of the events, brings the deer he hunted home and asks his wife to cook it. His wife informs him of the king's recent ban on making fire and says she cannot cook the deer. However, she devises a plan and severs the deer's right leg. Then, she pounds it with a fine stone until it is crushed. She then adds bulgur, pepper, and salt and kneads them well with the ground meat (Alkayış & Yerli, 2020).

On the other hand, the origin of Urfa Sıra nights is the gatherings held every week in the house of a different person, organized in a particular order. These gatherings, predominantly organized by men, have significance in their cultural and historical context (Aslan, 2014). Historically, besides being an entertainment activity, Sıra nights served as a coded communication network through which people came together during the Turkish War of Independence. The Urfa branch of the Turkish liberation organization was established in the middle of the night during a Sıra night by Major Ali Rıza and his comrades (Tayanç, 2021). Today, Sıra nights are organized to offer visitors from various cultures visiting the region a memorable tourism experience and entertaining time.

Figure 1: Theoretical model diagram



Source: Created by the authors.

In this study, storytelling is conceptualized as a cultural mediation mechanism operating through professional tour guides and Sıra night organizers. The mythological and historical narratives transmitted through storytelling enable tourists to perceive food not merely as an object of physical consumption, but as an experiential element imbued with cultural meaning (Ylipää, 2015; Saxena et al., 2025). This process reduces food neophobia, particularly toward local and unfamiliar foods, which, in turn, enhances food

motivation and ultimately strengthens the memorability of the gastronomic experience (Bassano et al., 2019; Bryon, 2012). Within this framework, the study is evaluated through a theoretical relational structure operating as follows: storytelling → cultural bonding → reduction of neophobia → food motivation → memorable experience.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study aims to determine the role of tour guides in shaping the impact of stories about gastronomic products on tourists' expectations and behaviours. For this purpose, raw meatballs, a gastronomic product with a mythical tale, were selected. The reasons underlying this preference are that seasonality is not significant in promoting this product, it serves as an essential element of Sıra nights, especially as a touristic product, and it is a geographically differentiated product of both Şanlıurfa and Adıyaman. Another main reason for its preference is that "Sıra nights" are an important cultural heritage element, recognized and inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2010 as traditional conversation meetings (UNESCO, 2024).

3.1 Instrument

The study utilized a qualitative research method. Data were collected through semi-structured interview forms that included open-ended questions.

The open-ended questions in this semi-structured interview form were prepared by the researchers based on the current literature and were directly derived from the core theoretical constructs of the study (Aktaş & Batman, 2010; Çolakoğlu & Sarıışık, 2020; Kaya & Gümüş, 2020; Kaya & Ünlüöner, 2021; Moscardo, 2020; Özen et al., 2023; Pekyaman, 2018; Sezer, 2019). Storytelling was operationalized through questions focused on the content and perceived impact of gastronomic narratives.

At the same time, cultural mediation and bonding were examined through questions that addressed meaning-making and perceived cultural closeness. Food neophobia and food motivation were captured through questions exploring changes in hesitation, curiosity, and willingness to taste raw meatballs. Finally, a memorable gastronomic experience was assessed using questions about emotional intensity and recallability. Thus, the theoretical framework was systematically translated into empirical inquiry.

Before using the semi-structured interview form in the study, permission was obtained from the Science Ethics Committee on March 26, 2024, with decision number 22. The study sought answers to the following questions:

Questions for tour guides:

1. Do you have any information about the preparation myths and rituals of raw meatballs? If so, what is your source of information?
2. Do you share these myths and rituals with tourists? If so, why? If not, why?
3. If you tell the story before the raw meatballs experience, does it change the tourists' desire to experience it? If so, how does it change?
4. Do you think gastronomic stories told by guides make the travel experience memorable for tourists?

5. What do you think should be the primary purpose for tour guides to learn gastronomic stories?

6. What do you think are the main qualities that a gastro-guide should have?

Questions for organizers of Sıra nights and related persons:

1. Do you have any information about the preparation myths and rituals of raw meatballs? If so, what is your source of information?

2. Do you have any promotional brochures about the history and story of Sıra nights and raw meatballs? Do people ask you about this? Are the individuals who prepare and serve raw meatballs able to convey this information to visitors?

3. If you tell the story before the raw meatball experience, does it change the tourists' desire to experience it? If so, how does it change?

4. Do you think gastronomic stories make the travel experience memorable for tourists?

Questions for participants of Sıra nights:

1. Do you have any information about the preparation myths and rituals of raw meatballs? If so, what is your source of information?

2. Is listening to a product's story before a gastronomic experience effective at removing your prejudices against it?

3. Did the story of raw meatballs change your thoughts about a dish containing raw meat?

4. Have you heard of the concept of "gastro guide" before? What do you think "gastro guide" refers to?

5. Do you think gastronomic stories make your travel experience memorable?

3.2 Sampling

The study population included Tourist guides in Şanlıurfa, Sıra night organizers, and tourists who participate in Sıra night. The sample consisted of 25 individuals selected from this population using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is typically helpful in discovering and explaining phenomena and events. Additionally, it is suitable for situations requiring in-depth knowledge (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

The sample was selected from the following groups: professional tour guides who are familiar with local tourism and know the origin story of raw meatballs, organizers of Sıra nights who revive an old ritual during preparing and consuming raw meatballs, individuals involved in the preparation and serving of raw meatballs, and finally, tourists who have visited the region and experienced raw meatballs. To obtain sufficient findings, 10 professional tour guides, 7 Sıra night organizers and related individuals, and eight tourists who have experienced raw meatballs were surveyed.

Participants were informed of the research's purpose beforehand, and those who volunteered were interviewed. Survey questions were presented to all participants clearly and understandably. The next question was not asked until it was clear that the previous question had been fully answered. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at workplaces between 13 and 15 January 2024, lasting for 40-

45 minutes each. Participants were asked whether they granted permission for audio recording during the interview, and all participants consented to the audio recording. At the end of the interviews, the collected data were transferred to Microsoft Word and stored for protection. Codes such as "P1" and "P25" were used instead of the participants' names.

3.3 Data analysis

For the analysis of data from the semi-structured interviews, the MAXQDA 2020 program, a commonly used qualitative data analysis program, was used. With this program, participants' statements can be systematically evaluated and interpreted through thematization (Çayır & Sarıtaş, 2017). At this stage, content analysis was applied. Through content analysis, themes derived from participants' statements were organized in a simple, understandable manner to make the findings ready for processing (Akbulut, 2013).

Frequency analysis was employed in content analysis. This analysis is used to determine the repetition rate of verbally expressed quantitative statements and to rank verbal expressions by importance. The primary purpose of frequency analysis is to explore the number of repetitions and the importance of verbal expressions. In this context, the analysis consisted of three stages: coding the data, systematically organizing the codes, and presenting the findings obtained. During the coding phase of the data, codes related to participants' statements were created, and opinions on those codes were presented. Finally, frequency analysis was conducted, and the findings were prepared for interpretation.

4 RESULTS ANALYSIS

4.1 Findings

Demographic information about the participants is presented in Table 1. 15 participants were male, and 10 were female. The average ages are as follows: 31-40 (11 people), 21-30 (10 people), 41-50 (2 people), and 51+ (2 people). Of the participants, seven had a bachelor's degree, five had an associate's degree, five had a master's degree, two had a Ph.D. degree, three were high school graduates, and the remaining three were primary school graduates. Regarding the participants' occupations, 10 are professional tour guides, 7 are organizers of Sıra nights, 2 are accountants, and the others are clerks, lecturers, florists, receptionists, shipbuilding civil engineers, and students. The coding of the data obtained, to preserve the integrity of the study, is shown in Appendix A.

By asking professional tour guides who participated in our study, "Do you have any information about the preparation myths and rituals of raw meatballs? If so, what is your source of information?", the aim was to determine whether they knew the story of raw meatballs and whether their sources of information were oral or written. Based on the responses of the tour guide participants, it was determined that all professional tour guides knew the story/myth and their sources of information were both oral and written. Consequently, two themes, "oral" and "written", were established.

Table 1. Demographic Factors

Participant	Gender	Age	Educational Status	Job
P1	Male	31-40	Associate Degree	Professional Tourist Guide
P2	Woman	21-30	Doctorate	Professional Tourist Guide
P3	Male	31-40	Associate Degree	Professional Tourist Guide
P4	Male	31-40	Associate Degree	Professional Tourist Guide
P5	Male	31-40	Degree	Professional Tourist Guide
P6	Male	21-30	Degree	Professional Tourist Guide
P7	Woman	31-40	Licence	Professional Tourist Guide
P8	Woman	21-30	Degree	Professional Tourist Guide
P9	Woman	31-40	Licence	Professional Tourist Guide
P10	Male	21-30	Degree	Professional Tourist Guide
P11	Male	31-40	Primary school	Organization of Sıra Nights
P12	Male	31-40	Associate's degree	Serial Nights Operator
P13	Male	41-50	High school	Organization of Sıra Nights
P14	Woman	51 and above	Primary school	Organization of Sıra Nights
P15	Male	31-40	High school	Organization of Sıra Night
P16	Male	21-30	High school	Organization of Sıra Night
P17	Male	51 and above	Primary school	Organization of Sıra Night
P18	Woman	31-40	Licence	Accountant/Tourist
P19	Woman	41-50	Associate Degree	Accountant/Tourist
P20	Woman	31-40	Licence	Florist/Tourist
P21	Male	21-30	Degree	Receptionist/Tourist
P22	Male	21-30	Licence	Student/Tourist
P23	Male	21-30	Licence	Naval Architecture Engineer/Tourist
P24	Woman	21-30	Doctorate	Lecturer/Tourist
P25	Woman	21-30	Licence	Clerk / Tourist

Source: own elaboration.

In addition to these themes, two sub-themes, namely “academic written source” and “divine written source,” were added under the “written” theme. Participants' responses were classified into relevant themes, and a frequency analysis was conducted. The frequency analysis revealed that oral sources accounted for 36.84%, while written sources accounted for 31.58%, including 21.05% from academic sources and 10.53% from divine sources. Some of the participants' statements about this question are provided below:

P1: “Yes, I know. My sources of information are anonymous up until the moment Abraham was thrown into the fire.”

P2: “Yes, I am aware of it. I learned about it through a literature review.”

P3: “So, this is the knowledge that has come down to us from the ancestors. It is only mentioned in verse 69 of Surah Al-Anbiya (of the Qur'an) for the moment he was thrown into the fire.”

P5: “Yes, I know. This information was first taught to us in our families. However, as we grew up, we naturally researched, read, and learned more. Written sources are very incomplete and insufficient. We lack promotion greatly.”

P8: “Yes, I have information. I obtained the story by gathering information from the official internet sources of the region where the myth belongs, as well as from articles.”

P9: “I have information about the preparation myth and ritual of raw meatballs. (My sources are) the internet, books, and personal narrations.”

P17: “The origin of raw meatballs and Sira nights holds significant historical importance. In 1919, during the period of national struggle, the French dominated the city and banned entry and exit. There are nearly 3000 villages in Urfa. Since they did not let anyone from outside in, people living in the villages started to suffer. They formed a military code, organized entertainment under the name of Sira nights, and passed political information to each other. Someone with a beautiful voice used to sing throughout the night so that the French would not notice. This is how the information was delivered to the headquarters, to Ankara. In other words, Sira nights are events that emerged from an organization. Over time, this process has also evolved within the local community. Since tourists visiting this region demand it, locals, both men and women, also participate in this entertainment. Thanks to Ibrahim Tatlis, Sira nights have shown an important development and change.”

By asking the question “Do you share these myths and rituals with tourists? If so, why? If no, why?”, the objective was to ascertain whether tour guides incorporate the myth of raw meatballs into their tours. All professional tour guides confirmed that they tell tourists the myth about raw meatballs. Based on the guides' reasons, three sub-themes were identified for telling the myth of raw meatballs during tours. Participant responses were categorized under the relevant themes, and a frequency analysis was conducted. The identified themes were “Attractiveness / Motivation (53.08%)”, “Enhancing the experience (23.01%)”, and “Increasing curiosity (23.01%)”. Some quotes from the participants' statements are as follows:

P1: “Yes, I share it. Abraham is revered as a prophet in all three religions. Visitors with diverse religious backgrounds are interested in learning about Abraham's birth, life, and death. Since the dish of raw meatballs is linked to this event, it is essential to provide them with this information.”

P2: “Absolutely, I do. The primary reason is that stories lend meaning to every aspect. Without stories, people might even question the beginnings of their lives. That is why I enrich my tours with narratives, aiming to arouse their (participants') curiosity. This makes the tours more engaging.”

P3: “We share it. After all, legends complement a tour. They are appealing to tourists.”

P6: “Because anything local attracts tourists' interest. This is why I share it.”

P7: Yes, I share it. Learning details transforms an ordinary perspective into a specific one.”

P8: “Yes, I mention it in almost all of my tours. When I do that, tourists feel more comfortable and informed about these products and food when they shop.”

Another question asked of the tour guide participants was: “If you tell the story before the raw meatball experience, does it change the tourists' desire to experience it? If so, how does it change?” This question aimed to explore whether storytelling influences the tourist experience. Based on the responses, two sub-themes were identified: “positively influences (90.00%)” and “negatively influences (10.00%)”. A frequency analysis was conducted for the responses categorized under these themes. Some quotes from the participants' statements are as follows:

P3: “Yes, absolutely. We tell them about this dish, raw meatballs, and they (tourists) want to experience it. Initially, its raw meat ingredient may concern them, but they are intrigued to taste it as part of the experience. In short, storytelling positively affects the experience.”

P5: “Yes, it does change it. However, there is a criterion: if the tourist is vegetarian, they will never try it. Tourists primarily visit here for both cultural and gastronomic experiences.”

P7: “Yes, it does change it. Their (tourists') desire to taste a legendary food increases.”

P8: “Yes, their desire to experience raw meatballs increases. I observed this through listening to their tasting processes and conversations during the raw meatball tasting sessions at the Sira nights.”

P9: “Of course, it changes. Because experiencing a product after learning its story makes it more memorable and satisfying.”

Another question addressed in the study was whether the story of raw meatballs affects the unforgettable tourist experience. For this question, two themes were created: “positively affects” and “negatively affects”. All professional tour guides responded that it “positively influences (100.00%)”. Here are some quotes from the tour guide participants' views:

P1: “If it is told in the right way, if the tourist guide shares the story in the right place and at the right time,

then yes, it is certainly effective. However, I think many guides today do not do this. Those who come here with agencies or on private tours usually focus on the ruins. In short, these stories enrich the guide's narration and improve their storytelling skills. It also positively contributes to the tourist experience."

P2: *"Of course, it positively affects (the experience). People always remember a place, a food, or a memory through narratives. Consequently, the story of raw meatballs can make Urfa unforgettable because this is the land where the event takes place. Everything integrates with a story."*

P5: *"Of course, it affects (the experience). In fact, not only gastronomic stories but also stories about even a stone or a tree are effective. Knowing these stories certainly contributes to ensuring the experience is unforgettable."*

P9: *"Gastronomic stories in a guide's narration make the travel experience unforgettable for tourists. It is important for tourists that the guide delivers a memorable presentation."*

Based on the myth of raw meatballs, the purpose of tour guides for learning gastronomic stories/myths was examined. To explore this, tour guide participants were asked, "What do you think should be the main purpose for Tour guides to learn gastronomic stories?" Based on the responses, three sub-themes were identified. A frequency analysis was conducted for the responses categorized under these themes. Accordingly, the themes identified were "Strengthening promotional elements (45.45%)," "Enriching narrative skills (36.36%)," and "Contribution to tourist motivation (18.18%)." Some quotes from the participants' statements on this question are as follows:

P1: *"Telling these gastronomic stories, which are rooted and lived in the society, ensures that tourists remember the tour permanently. It contributes to memorable tourism experiences. Tourist experience, in turn, fuels tourist motivation."*

P2: *"Tour guides have many features, one of which is being a good narrator. To become a narrator, one must learn stories, myths, and legends. These stories can be about a place of interest or a type of food. Accordingly, tour guides enrich their narratives and can add a unique touch to their presentation."*

P3: *"To introduce and inform people. More broadly, I want to make my narrative richer. This is why I tried to learn gastronomic information and stories."*

P4: *"For example, in Şanlıurfa, there is not only history but also gastronomy. A guide enriches their narration with gastronomic information, making their narration unique."*

P9: *"The main purpose of tour guides learning gastronomic stories should be to provide tourists with unique experiences and ensure their satisfaction during and after their vacation."*

P10: *"Telling the origin of the dish, conveying its unique features, expanding their storytelling, and making the dish more interesting."*

Participants in the tour guide group were asked, "What do you think are the main qualities that a gastro-guide should have?" to determine the essential qualities that tour guides should possess in the context of the gastro-guide concept, a

new specialization in the field of tour guidance. Seven sub-themes, namely, "Knowing the story/history of the gastronomic product (27.74%)," "Having a good palate (17.39%)," "Being open to new experiences (17.39%)," "Mastering culinary inventories (17.39%)," "Mastering local food culture (13.04%)," "Knowing standard recipes (8.70%)," and "Mastering technology (4.35%)" were established based on the responses. Some quotes from the participants' statements on this question are as follows:

P1: *"A tour guide should know the story and history of gastronomic products. They are expected to be familiar with the local food culture and have a good palate."*

P3: *"A tour guide should understand the historic lifestyles, kitchen cultures, and the tools and equipment used by people in past times."*

P5: *"A tour guide who has information about the food and drinks of the ancient world, introduces related stories, shows interest in food, has a good palate for tasting, and is adept at presentation techniques."*

P8: *"In my opinion, guides should be knowledgeable about all aspects related to the contents of the product they explain, including how it is made, its recipe, regional varieties, consumption practices, and serving methods. These details are crucial as they enable guides to provide tourists with comprehensive knowledge and a rich experience of the product."*

P9: *"The main qualities that a gastro guide should have include impartiality, reliability, strong local connections, extensive knowledge, excellent communication skills, and proficiency in utilizing technology."*

To ascertain the sources of information about the myth of raw meatballs for the organizers of Sıra nights and other individuals actively involved in this organization, the following question was posed to the organizer participants: "Do you have any information about the preparation myths and rituals of raw meatballs? If so, what is your source of information?" In addition, they were asked whether their sources of raw meatballs included tour guides. Participants' responses were categorized into relevant themes and analyzed for frequencies. The analysis showed that the source of information for all participants was "Oral (100.00%)." Some quotes from the participants' statements regarding this question are presented below:

P13: *"Yes, I have (information). It has been transmitted to us not through written sources but through mystical and mythological information."*

P12: *"Yes, I have (information). This legend I know has been passed down from generation to generation through oral narration and is still being passed on."*

P15: *"Yes, I know. The answer to the question of how I know is family elders. The way I learned about it is through family elders, who pass it down to us as a cultural heritage."*

P16: *"Yes, I have. I learned through oral ways. I overheard while the guides were talking about it. I understand that its origins date back to the (Turkish) War of Independence, and it later evolved into a*

tradition. However, nowadays, it is organized primarily for entertainment purposes and is not as it once was."

To determine whether written sources are sufficiently used in the Sıra night organizations, the organizer participants were asked, "Do you have any promotional brochures about the history and story of Sıra nights and raw meatballs?" Based on the responses, two themes were established. The participants' statements were grouped into relevant themes and analyzed for frequencies. Accordingly, the obtained themes were "We do not have a promotional brochure (71.43%)" and "We have a promotional brochure (28.57%)". Some quotes from the participants' statements regarding these themes are as follows:

P11: "We provide information to every tourist who asks. Every person working here knows the relevant story, which is why we do not have a written source."

P13: "Yes, I have brochures. People prefer watching and listening over reading. The origin of raw meatballs and Sıra nights holds significant historical importance. In 1919, during the period of national struggle, the French dominated the city and banned entry and exit. There are nearly 3000 villages in Urfa. Since they did not let anyone from outside in, people living in the villages started to suffer. They formed a military code, organized entertainment under the name of Sıra nights, and passed political information to each other. Someone with a beautiful voice used to sing throughout these nights so that the French would not notice. This is how the information was delivered to the headquarters, to Ankara. In other words, Sıra nights are events that emerged from an organization. Over time, this process has also evolved within the local community. Since tourists visiting this region demand it, locals, both men and women, also participate in this entertainment. Thanks to İbrahim Tatlıses, Sıra nights have undergone significant development and change. It became famous, and consequently, evolved in form."

P14: "Yes, we have brochures, but we only give these brochures to people who request them."

P15: "Foreign tourists are more curious about the preparation of raw meatballs. This curiosity is more prominent on guided tours. When there is a guide, they convey these narratives and act as an intermediary between the tourists and us. We tell the stories to those who ask."

To determine whether telling the myth of raw meatballs affects the tourist experience, the Sıra night organizers were asked, "If you tell the story before the raw meatball experience, does it change the tourists' desire to experience it? If so, how does it change?" Based on the received responses, two themes, namely "positively affects" and "negatively affects," were identified. A frequency analysis was conducted for the participants' responses grouped under these themes. The results were "Positively affects (87.50%)" and "Negatively affects (12.50%)". Some quotes from the participants' statements are as follows:

P11: "Tourists are affected by these stories. They want to experience it. These stories even have a

permanent impact. I also think they help break down prejudices."

P12: "(These stories) change (the experience) for local tourists, but they do not affect foreign tourists much. Only their prejudices are broken."

P13: "Well, I have a small quantity of a psychological approach to these things. It is very difficult to break down prejudices, but the story makes an important impact, and people want to try (this product)."

P15: "In my opinion, they (these stories) are quite interesting for tourists. I mean, the story itself is interesting. I think foreign individuals pay more attention, and it affects them more."

P16: "It (telling the story) changes, does make a difference. In my opinion, it can change (the experience) in either a good or a bad way. It even triggers revisits."

Another question asked of the organizer participants was: "Do you think gastronomic stories make the travel experience memorable for tourists?" All participants responded that the myth of raw meatballs positively affects the memorability of tourism experiences (100.00%). Some quotes about participants' views on this question are as follows:

P12: "Of course. They already come here because of the legends. That is why legends and stories make tours unforgettable."

P15: "Of course, stories affect us. They strengthen the perception of experience. For example, it is interesting to me. Frankly, it makes this dish unique."

P16: "They (gastronomic stories) change it (the experience). For instance, upon request, we can inscribe visitors' names on raw meatballs, creating a lasting memory. Additionally, foreign tourists often do not know how to eat this product, so we teach them. This leaves a lasting impression on them."

The distribution of tourists' sources of information about the myth of raw meatballs was examined, revealing that tourist participants received information from both oral and written sources. The frequency analysis revealed that 55.56% of the participants received information from oral sources, 25% from written sources, and 22.22% from academic sources. Here are some quotes from tourists' statements regarding their sources of information about the myth of raw meatballs:

P24: "I know the myth about the preparation of raw meatballs. I learned this information both verbally and through written materials from the organizers of the Sıra nights. Additionally, the guides provided me with detailed information that I hadn't heard before."

To determine the impact of gastronomic stories on their prejudices, the tourist participants were asked, "Is listening to the story of a product before a gastronomic experience effective in removing your prejudices against the product?" Based on the responses of the participants, two themes were established: "Yes, it has an effect" and "No, it has no effect. According to the frequency analysis, the distribution of the themes was "Yes, it has an effect" (87.50%) and "No, it has

no effect" (12.50%). Some of the quotes from the related comments of the participants are as follows:

P20: "Stories can change (my prejudices) positively or negatively depending on their content. They have the power to break my prejudices."

P18: "Yes, (my prejudices) change. Frankly, I am easily influenced. Stories affect me and can help dismantle my prejudices."

One aim of the study was to assess the impact of food stories on reducing neophobic attitudes. Accordingly, the tourist participants were asked "Did the story of raw meatballs change your thoughts about a dish containing raw meat?" Based on the responses of the participants, two themes were identified: "Not effective in changing my thoughts" (62.50%) and "Effective in changing my thoughts" (37.50%). Selected quotes from the participants' statements related to these themes are as follows:

P18: "Yes, I didn't like raw meat initially; however, I couldn't help myself from trying it."

P25: "Knowing the story of raw meatballs is attention-grabbing. However, I wouldn't try it because it contains raw meat. Therefore, its story does not change my thoughts on it."

P23: "The story did not alter my opinion about raw meat."

The study also explored tourists' awareness of the gastro-guide concept. For this purpose, tourists were asked the following question: "What do you think 'gastro guide' refers to?" Some themes were created based on the responses of the participants: "Someone who knows food stories (29.41%)", "Someone who can present/promote food (23.53%)", "Someone who knows local foods (11.76%)", "Someone who has a food culture (11.76%)", "Someone who is familiar with culinary inventories (11.76%)", "Someone who is interested in food (5.88%)", and finally, "Someone who has information in the fields of gastronomy and tourism (5.88%)". Some quotes from the participants' statements related to these themes are as follows:

P21: "I think a gastro guide is not just about visiting a place, but also about understanding the eating and drinking habits of the locals."

P24: "The concept of 'gastro guide' is an umbrella concept that merges gastronomy and tourist guidance. I believe gastronomy and tour guides share a collective responsibility in the realm of gastronomy guidance."

The tourist participants were asked whether gastronomic stories have a positive or negative impact on creating memorable destination experiences. All of the tourist participants (100%) stated that gastronomic stories positively impact the memorable experience of the destination. Some quotes from the participants' statements related to memorable destination experiences are as follows:

P25: "As a person who loves eating, my answer is yes. I have always been intrigued by the stories behind the names of dishes and how they first

appeared. Just as I am curious about the historical sites and museums of the cities I visit, I also pay attention to trying local food."

P19: "It certainly affects (unforgettable experience), because it is informative and increases memorability."

P21: "We may forget some stories from the places we visit, and we may forget parts of museums, but we never forget a unique product we tasted. This is a clear example of a memorable tourism experience."

P20: "The story makes the tour unforgettable for me and enhances my overall emotional experience."

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Gastronomy tourism involves regional travel where individuals visit food and beverage venues, actively participate in food preparation, and gain direct experience and observation, which, in turn, contribute to creating memorable tourism experiences (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Jerez, 2023). From this perspective, local food culture, food preparation rituals, presentation techniques, dishes prepared for special occasions, and the tools and equipment used in food preparation are all covered by gastronomic tourism information (Kızıllırmak et al., 2016; Başoda et al., 2018; Bahar, 2021; Akyurt & Güzel, 2022).

Professional tour guides are individuals who can directly convey this information to tourists. With the recent rise in gastronomic travel, a new concept of the 'gastro guide' has emerged. Gastro guides are experts who can introduce the stories and histories of gastronomic products, as well as the link between food and local culture. These experts should have a discerning palate and a deep knowledge of the culture they represent, particularly its narratives about food and drink. Stories have played an important role in making sense of the world and preserving experiences since the dawn of humanity. This study explored how 'Raw meatballs' affect tourist experience and the mediating role of tour guides in this impact. Accordingly, semi-structured surveys were administered to professional tour guides, Sıra night organizers, and tourists who participated in Sıra nights. The main findings derived from the data are discussed below.

First, the aim was to determine the sources of information for tour guides regarding the myth of raw meatballs. Based on the responses received, the sources of information were both verbal and written; however, the written sources were insufficient for this subject. Another question posed to the tour guides was whether they tell the myth of raw meatballs to tourists during tours. All tour guide participants reported conveying this myth during tours. The main reason for telling this myth was to make the tour more memorable for tourists. Another investigated aspect is whether telling this story beforehand changes tourists' desire to try raw meatballs. Almost all responses indicated that storytelling influences tourists' desire to experience it. As additional information, tour guides emphasize that this storytelling does not affect the experience for tourists who are vegan or vegetarian.

Despite this detail, it is an important finding that food stories positively impact tourists' memorable tourism experiences. The main reasons identified for tour guides to learn gastronomic stories include enhancing promotional

aspects of the tour, enriching narrative skills, and boosting tourist motivation. How the concept of gastro guide, which is a new specialty in tour guidance, is perceived by tour guides was also examined. According to the majority of responses, perceived characteristics include knowing the story/history of the gastronomic product, having a good palate, being open to new experiences, mastering culinary inventories, mastering local food culture, having knowledge of standard recipes, and mastering technology.

The second group of participants was Sıra night organizers. The first question asked of this group was the same as the one asked of tour guides, aiming to determine sources of information about the myth of raw meatballs. The sources of information for this group of participants were all based on oral religious transmission arising from family culture, local culture, and religious belief. This finding highlights the lack of written sources. It was also revealed through the questions asked of them that these deficiencies should be addressed primarily by the organizers of the Sıra nights. Participants were asked whether they had written sources on Sıra nights and the myth of raw meatballs. Only one organizer reported having a written source (a promotional brochure).

The findings revealed that storytelling enhances tourists' perceptions of the on-site experience and atmosphere, thereby positively affecting their unforgettable tourism experience. This outcome aligns with the notion of cognitive image formation, as storytelling enriches tourists' knowledge structures and mental representations of the destination (Campodónico, 2023). Consistently, some studies reported that storytelling positively influences the tourism experience and the perception of an unforgettable trip. (Pera, 2017; Zhong et al., 2017). Another finding derived from the organizers' responses was that gastronomic stories have a positive effect on eliminating pre-existing prejudices before the experience and serve as a tourist attraction. A literature survey indicated that by combining the concepts of education and entertainment, storytelling has given rise to a new concept: edutainment. The findings of the current study are consistent with the literature. Stories intertwine with enjoyable experiences in the memory and offer a combination of knowledge transfer and experiential processes (Bassano, vd., 2019; Bryon, 2012; Ibanez et al., 2003; Zhong et al., 2017).

For example, the comment of Participant 16 aligns with this argument: "Upon visitors' requests, we can inscribe their names on raw meatballs, creating a lasting memory. Additionally, foreign tourists often do not know how to eat this product, so we narrate the story of raw meatballs and teach them how to eat them. This leaves a lasting and enjoyable impression on them."

Finally, it was determined that tourists primarily acquired information about the story of raw meatballs through both written and oral sources, with oral sources being more prevalent than written ones. Accordingly, it was examined whether food stories influence the desire to experience a specific food. The obtained results indicate that stories can be effective in eliminating concerns before experiencing the food. However, tourists' social norms, religious values, and most importantly, their sense of social belonging can hinder the effectiveness of these stories. Consequently, it can be

argued that neophobic attitudes towards trying unfamiliar foods may be influential (Dovey, 2018). Since raw meatballs contain raw meat, they can trigger neophobic attitudes.

The narrative skills and knowledge of local food culture possessed by professional tour guides who accompany tourists during tours can significantly influence tourists' food and beverage experiences, either positively or negatively. Consequently, the study investigated whether tourists are aware of the gastro-guide concept. According to the findings, a gastro-guide is someone who knows food stories, can present/promote food, knows local foods, has a food culture, is familiar with culinary inventory, is interested in food, and has expertise in gastronomy and tourism. The tourists' responses also indicate that they did not fully understand the concept of gastro-guide. In simplest terms, a gastro guide is someone who enhances visitor experiences by narrating stories about the region's gastronomic culture (Seyitoglu, 2020).

The final finding suggests that stories positively affect unforgettable tourism experiences. This finding aligns with existing literature. More specifically, stories are associated with the dimensions of a memorable tourism experience, such as knowledge, meaningfulness, local culture, and novelty, and therefore add unique significance to the tourist experience (Göçmen, 2022).

5.1 Theoretical implications

A common implication across three participant groups was that the story of raw meatballs is predominantly known through oral sources rather than written ones. Since legends have reached the present day through beliefs and social paradigms, there are few written sources available to verify their accuracy. Therefore, creating written sources for food stories by relevant authors and academics will make a valuable contribution to the existing literature.

The evaluation of awareness of local cultural values through stories highlights the importance of narrative in the development and assimilation of knowledge through firsthand experience. Accordingly, tour guides' narrative skills were found to influence memorability and local engagement among tourists positively. These findings are consistent with the narrative transportation theory. This theory, introduced by Green and Brock (2000), describes how individuals assimilate information presented to them and gain interactive and experiential awareness.

Both tourists visiting the destination and tour guides have a common role in reinforcing experiential perceptions. To create a perception of satisfaction and an intention to revisit at the end of the process, it is crucial to establish common ground and share information aligned with shared values throughout the interaction. In line with this, it was found that actively engaging in value co-creation enhances behavioural intentions. Value co-creation, at its most basic, refers to the collaborative generation of value through shared responsibilities between visitors and hosts (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014). The findings of the current study are consistent with the value co-creation process.

Altruistic behaviours, a sense of responsibility, traditional attitudes, and an organizational thought culture can contribute to raising awareness among tourists following

experiential narratives. The findings obtained showed that the transmission of oral and written cultural information by tour guides, in conjunction with personal values, can enhance awareness of outcomes and thereby positively influence organizational behaviours. Integrating especially local societal structures with oral narrative traditions can positively affect awareness and a sense of responsibility in behaviours. Consequently, the reinforcement of a sense of responsibility through tour guides' narratives can be explained by the value-belief-norm theory.

Verbal narrative traditions that have evolved over time can make tangible or intangible cultural heritage elements meaningful to individuals. Linking environmental elements with historical narratives through storytelling positively influences people's emotional states and enhances visitor satisfaction. The findings of this study align with the Feelings-as-information theory. This theory conceptualizes the role of subjective evaluations in the cognitive judgment process (Shin et al., 2019).

5.2 Practical implications

The absence of brochures and handbooks as written sources for 'Sıra nights' and 'raw meatballs' indicates a promotional deficiency. Consequently, preparing written resources, supported by virtual tools such as ChatGPT, eWOM, and other online applications, can play an effective role in promoting destinations.

It was determined that social media videos and television programs are effective in motivating participants to engage in Sıra night events. The participants commented that Sıra nights evolved culturally, particularly after TV shows (e.g., Tatlıses Show), and have become more in demand among different audiences.

Considering the responses of P13 and P17, actively using online channels to highlight the attraction elements travel agencies wish to promote for a destination can enhance regional promotion. Additionally, a program showcasing "Sıra nights" in their original form should be organized, with professional tour guides accurately conveying their origins. This approach will ensure the preservation and transmission of cultural values and traditions to future generations.

Gastronomic tourism is based on the principle of on-site experience. Stories shared by tour guides during food experiences can enhance visitors' sense of satisfaction and positively influence their revisit intention. Consequently, tour guides who are knowledgeable about the stories behind the dishes and share them during the tour can enhance the experience.

TUREB (Turkish Association of Tourist Guides Chambers) may offer specialization training in gastronomy. Thus, addressing the deficiency of gastro-guides can help safeguard cultural assets and values.

5.3 Limitations and future directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the findings are based only on domestic tourists, tour guides, and local Sıra night organizers; therefore, they cannot be generalized to international

tourists, whose cultural backgrounds and symbolic interpretations of food may differ. In particular, the strong mythological and religious meanings attached to raw meatballs may not elicit similar emotional or behavioural responses among foreign visitors.

Second, although gastronomic storytelling enhances memorability and destination bonding, its effect on reducing food neophobia is not universal. Especially in the case of raw meat, some participants maintained strong avoidance tendencies, indicating that cultural values and dietary norms may limit the persuasive power of narratives.

Third, this study is methodologically limited by its qualitative design, which does not allow for causal or predictive testing of the relationship between symbolic narratives and tourist behaviour. Future studies may employ mixed-methods or experimental designs to examine the direct effects of storytelling on tasting behaviour, satisfaction, and revisit intention.

From a comparative perspective, future research should investigate gastronomic storytelling in destinations where food does not carry strong mythological symbolism and conduct cross-cultural studies involving international tourists. In addition, future studies may integrate storytelling with variables such as motivation, neophobia, flow experience, and experiential authenticity to better explain its role as a behavioural driver within the experience economy.

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Appendix A. Codes for content analysis.

Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
A	Verbal	P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P8,P10	7	36,84
	Written	P1,P2,P4,P6,P7,P8,	6	31,58
	Academic	P2,P6,P7,P8,	4	21,05
	Divine	P1,P4	2	10,53
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
B	Attractiveness/Motivation	P2,P3,P5,P6,P7,P8,P10	7	53,08
	Enhancing the experience	P1,P8,P9	3	23,01
	Increase Curiosity	P1,P2,P4	3	23,01
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
C	Positive	P1,P2,P3,P4,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10	9	90,00
	Negative	P5	1	10,00
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
D	Positive	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P6,P7,P8,P9,P10	10	100,00
	Negative		0	0,00
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
E	Strengthening Promotion Elements	P1,P3,P6,P7,P8,	5	45,45
	Enriching Expression Skills	P2,P4,P5,P9	4	36,36
	Contributing to Tourist Motivation	P9,P10	2	18,18

Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
F	Know the story/history of the gastronomic product	P1,P2,P3,P4,P5,P10,	6	25,00
	Having good taste	P1,P5,P7,P10	4	16,67
	Open to experience	P1,P2,P8,P10	4	16,67
	To have a good command of the kitchen inventory	P3,P4,P5,P8	4	16,67
	Having a good command of the food culture of the region	P2,P6,P8	3	12,50
	Standard prescription information	P3,P8	2	8,33
	Good command of technology	P9	1	4,17
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
G	Verbal	P11,P12,P13,P14,P15,P16,P17	7	100,00
	Written		0	0,00
	Divine Sources		0	0,00
	Academic Resources		0	0,00
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
H	No	P11,P12,P15,P16,P17,	5	71,43
	Yes	P13,P14	2	28,57
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
I	Positive	P11,P13,P14,P15,P16,P17	7	87,50
	Negative	P12	1	12,50
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
J	Positive	P11,P12,P13,P14,P15,P16,P17	7	100,00
	Negative		0	0,00
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
K	Verbal	P20,P22,P23,P24,P25	5	55,56
	Academic Resources	P21,P24	2	22,22
	Written	P21,P24	2	22,22
	Divine Sources		0	0,00
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
L	Yes	P18,P19,P20,P21,P23,P24,P25	7	87,50
	No	P22	1	12,50
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
M	No effect	P19,P20,P22,P23,P25	5	62,50
	Yes effect	P18, P21, P24	3	37,50
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
N	Someone who knows food stories	P21,P20, P23,P24,P25	5	29,41
	Can present/promote food	P18,P20,P22,P23	4	23,53
	Someone who knows local food	P21,P22	2	11,76
	Knows food culture	P21,P24	2	11,76
	Someone who knows the kitchen inventory	P23,P24	2	11,76
	Someone who takes care of the food	P19	1	5,88
	Someone knowledgeable in gastronomy and tourism	P24	1	5,88
Content	Codes	Participants	Frequency	Percent
O	Positive	P18,P19,P20,P21,P22,P23,P24,P25	8	100,00
	Negative		0	0,00

A: Tourist Guides' Sources of Information on the Myth of (Raw Meatballs) Çiğköfte; B: The Effect of Stories Told by Tourist Guides on Tour Attractiveness; C: The Effect of Story on Tourist Experience According to Tourist Guides; D: The Effect of Story on Memorable Tourism Experience According to Tourist Guides; E: The Main Purpose of Tourist Guides' Story Learning; F: Gastro Guide Characteristics according to Tourist Guides; G: Information Sources of Queue Night Organizers on the Myth of (Raw Meatballs) Çiğköfte; H: The use of written materials in the promotion of ordinary nights; I: The Effect of Stories on Tourist Experience according to Queue Night Organizers; J: The Effect of Stories on Unforgettable Tourism Experience according to Queue Night Organizers; K: Tourists' Sources of Information on the Myth of (Raw Meatballs) Çiğköfte; L: The Effect of Stories on Breaking Prejudices Against Food According to Tourists; M: The Effect of Stories on Removing Negative Judgments according to Tourists; N: :Gastro Guide Characteristics according to Tourists; O: The Effect of Stories on Memorable Tourism Experience according to Tourists.

CRedit author statement

Term	Definition	Author 1	A2	A3
Conceptualization	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.	x	x	
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models.	x	x	
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components.	x	x	
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/ reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs.	x	x	x
Formal analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyze or synthesize study data.	x	x	

Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection	x	x	
Resources	Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools.	x	x	
Data Curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later reuse.	x	x	
Writing - Original Draft	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation).	x	x	
Writing - Review & Editing	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision – including pre-or post-publication stages.	x	x	x
Visualization	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/ data presentation.	x	x	x
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.	x	x	x
Project administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.	x	x	x
Funding acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication.			

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