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Taste of asean: traditional food images from Southeast Asian countries

Fajar Kusnadi Kusumah Putra^{1*} , Mandradhitya Kusuma Putra¹ and Selvi Novianti¹

Abstract

Gastronomy tourism and local food have become a powerful tool for tourism advertising because gastronomy often reflects the cultural identity of the destination. Local food images can help showcase the unique flavors of a particular region, making it more attractive to potential visitors. This study aims to analyze how regional tourism authorities share information about the diversity of traditional foods, promote gastronomic tourism, and enhance destinations' competitiveness by utilizing Instagram as a social media platform combining images with textual information. The ASEAN Tourism Online objectives are to promote the region as a single destination, increase tourism arrivals and receipts, and enhance regional connection. In this study, the official account of Southeast Asia Tourism on Instagram @visitsoutheastasiaofficial with keywords Taste of ASEAN marketing campaign. A qualitative approach using content analysis was used in this study. Data for this study were retrieved from 123 traditional food images posted on the official Instagram account from 2016 to 2022. A thematic analysis was used to classify themes. The findings presented categories ranging from the authenticity of traditional food, social media campaigns and promotions, local destination information, and gastronomic tourism activities. The majority of images posted related to the portrait of local cuisines. This analysis portrayed how the ASEAN tourism online wants to promote food as an attraction instead of food as a supporting element of tourism activities. The limitation of this study is only focused on the content of traditional visual food on the Instagram platform. Further research can be done using other social media platforms and comparing these findings with other destinations. It also provides an opportunity to gain insights into what people are saying about each destination, which can be helpful in terms of understanding customer preferences and opinions. The implication of this study will help national tourism organizations, culinary practitioners and academicians about the traditional food images on the social media platform to promote regional and city tourism. Additionally, it can help to identify potential opportunities for improvement or expansion within the region. Finally, researching other destinations through social media platforms can provide valuable information that could be used to create effective marketing strategies and campaigns.

Keywords Southeast Asia culinary, Gastronomy tourism, Traditional food, Social media, Foodstagram

Introduction

Competition among destinations brings along the requirement of constant action. New competitors with advanced dynamism capabilities change continually. As a natural outcome of this process, competition is acknowledged. One of the strategies in developing, preserving and promoting regional and national identities is using food—and maybe more specifically, local cuisine—as a prominent and integral part [11, 19, 61]. The relationship

*Correspondence:

Fajar Kusnadi Kusumah Putra
fap@stp-bandung.ac.id

¹ Department of Hospitality, NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic, Dr Setiabudhi 186, Bandung 40141, Indonesia



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between destination, promotion and traditional food becomes important for perspective and people responsible for promoting destinations [66]. Destinations view their food and cuisine as a market niche, where traditional or local food has become a major motivation for tourists to visit specific destinations. The definition of local food expanded to not only as a support for overall tourist experiences but also local food has a linkage to local culture, local food consumption involving all five human senses, including memory, and local food able to develop local economic development as well as agricultural products [14, 64, 69, 79].

Furthermore, destinations are often attributed to certain styles of food, meals and traditions. Advertising often combines regional differences in ingredients, style and approach into a more simplified package of symbols and images. Many local and regional organizations increasingly adopt food and beverage histories and heritage branding strategies to attract visitors and develop destination competitiveness [6, 38, 86]. Further, it is also possible to find examples of national and regional marketing strategies and social media platforms to disseminate local food delicacies in the hope of attracting more visitors to the destination. It may also stimulate innovation in food literacy, culinary arts, cultural identities, indigenous entrepreneurship in tourism, and balancing development and sustainability in destinations [67]. One recent phenomenon dominating destination promotional avenues and marketing is the rapid growth of social media channels, online promotion and social media marketing campaigns. Social media can create an engaging promotional content, build relationships and services for customer feedback to help businesses improve services and better understand customer needs [74, 73].

In the tourism and hospitality industry, social media have started to gain attention among researchers [55]. Most past research topics have focused on Facebook and Twitter as the most popular social media platforms in tourism [43]. Furthermore, research has also found that using these platforms can increase brand awareness, improve customer engagement, and drive sales growth in the tourism and hospitality industry [15, 41, 70]. Another social media platform is Instagram. Instagram allows users to share images and videos where others can view, comment, and like user posts [12]. Instagram has experienced significant growth and popularity in recent years. There are several reasons why Instagram has gained prominence and captured the attention. First Instagram focuses on visual content, primarily photographs and videos, which resonates with users who prefer a more visual and immersive experience. Second, Instagram has introduced various features that enhance user engagement and interaction. Features such as Stories,

IGTV (Instagram TV, Reels, and interactive stickers have provided users with creative tools to express themselves, collaborate with others, and discover content in unique ways. This has allowed individuals and businesses to showcase their creativity and engage with their audience in a visually appealing manner [2, 77].

The previous studies were concerned with the use of Instagram as a social media platform to create visual excitement for food products to engage in food based-tourism [31] and how gastronomic objects in social networks, especially Instagram as the basis to choose a catering facility or food [21]. However, the study of Instagram as a social media platform for promoting traditional food in the regional destination is still lacking. Social media can be a powerful tool for promoting gastronomy tourism. It allows businesses to reach a wide audience, build relationships with potential customers, and create engaging content that will draw people in. Additionally, social media can help businesses track customer feedback and measure the success of their campaigns. For example, the use of social network, web 2.0 and 3.0 in promoting experiential marketing in traditional food market for tourist [23].

However, study on traditional foods marketing in regional context remains scarce. Considering this gap, this study will investigate what kind of Southeast Asian traditional food images are in social media. What kind of information does tourism authority share to promote gastronomic tourism through Instagram as the social media platform? This study will elaborate more on how regional tourism authorities share information in social media related to the diversity of traditional foods, promote gastronomic tourism, and enhance destinations competitiveness by utilizing Instagram as a marketing tool.

Literature Review

Gastronomy tourism and traditional food

Gastronomy can be defined as: 'the art of selecting, preparing, serving, and enjoying fine food' [17]. Gastronomic tourism that uses local foods as tools to attract tourists destinations those referred to exclusively as the art of cooking and good eating as an attraction and it is often as a part of way of life-related to the inherited relationship between culture and food [14, 38]. Gastronomic experiences were typically created by gastronomic features that can only be found in the destination as "cultural experiences, involved in tasting, preparing, experiencing, experimenting, researching, discovering, understanding, and writing about food, and, usually but not exclusively, about wine" ([38] p. 354).

Gastronomic tourism has become a powerful tool for tourism advertising because gastronomy often reflects the cultural identity of a tourism destination [26]. Gastronomic tourism authenticity is becoming increasingly important in tourist experiences because it allows travelers to connect with the culture and people of a destination in a more meaningful way, by engaging with authentic activities, travelers can gain an understanding of the local customs and traditions that they may not have been exposed to otherwise [40]. Additionally, authenticity helps create a sense of connection between tourists and locals, which can lead to more positive interactions and experiences for both parties. Authenticity has become a concern by many regions, where they have now begun to use to use gastronomy tourism as their unique selling point [69, 39]. Some examples of successful destinations to promote gastronomic destinations to attract visitors are Italy and France, which are well known worldwide with their culinary characteristics. Italian cuisine has rich culture and identity that attracts 5 million food tourists visited Italy in 2015, and it increases for 250.000 per year [13]. French as a Mecca for culinary professionals has develop strong gastronomic image through history. Some tourists visit French for food journey, learning how they prepare and make a French cuisine in the heart city of Paris [81]. In addition, several destinations, such as Australia and Switzerland investing in marketing campaigns, events, partnerships, and resources to promote their country destinations, for example Tourism Australia, the country's official tourism organization, has launched campaigns that specifically focus on promoting Australia's food and beverage experiences. These campaigns highlight the country's fresh produce, multicultural cuisine, wine regions, and unique dining experiences. Another example Switzerland hosts various gourmet festivals and events, such as the *Fête de l'Escalade* in Geneva and the *Zermatt Food Festival*. These events showcase local and international chefs, food artisans, and culinary experiences, attracting visitors who appreciate fine dining and gastronomy [22, 42, 45]. The marketing campaign highlighting on the uniqueness and culinary delights of each country, they also create new narratives, compensating and inventing heritage traditions, places to capitalize on the demand for special interests in heritage, cultural and gastronomic tourism [16, 19].

Food and diversity are important elements of any destination's marketing promotion because they can help attract a wide variety of visitors [37]. By offering a diverse range of food options, destinations can appeal to different cultures and tastes, while also providing an opportunity for visitors to experience the local cuisine. Additionally, promoting diversity in terms of culinary activities and

attractions can help create an inclusive atmosphere that appeals to all types of travelers [33].

Traditional foods have a high symbolic value and have become symbols of local communities, identification signifiers and nostalgic resurrection objects. Various advertising strategies and methods of analysis are used to promote food and drink, including the proliferation of social media channels, festivals, cooking schools and place reinvention. This makes it important to look at how these tools are targeted at different types of people and market segments [19]. Local ingredients, regional methods for preparing food and specialty foods are the main factor used in establishing and maintaining national mythology as well as a powerful tool for promoting and marketing tourism. However, the challenges have become evident in the age of globalization, especially as food cultures are more mobile and accessible [65].

As Hall and Sharples [30] suggested that food and cuisine are manifestations of national and environmental traditions so that the organic connection to heritage identities and tourism marketing remain. Nevertheless, in a globally competitive tourism setting food and cuisine can be firmly developed and distinguished by an origin of differentiation and their uniqueness. Further explained by Wijaya et al. [86], tourist encounter with local food in a destination is influenced by the service staff quality, sensory attributes, food uniqueness, local services capes, food authenticity, food familiarity, and food variety.

Social media as traditional food marketing tools

In the context of tourism and hospitality industry, social media is commonly used for information and experience sharing activities by users. The increased use of social media has allowed travel and tourism organization to be much easier in sharing online knowledge and information about leisure and experience in destinations [52]. Social media not only allow users to see posts, but is also plays a mediation role in traveler's decision-making process to travel and choosing the destinations [47]. With social media an organization able to engage brand image management [25]. In the context of Gastronomy tourism, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) have increasingly been using local cuisine as a distinguishing feature in marketing a destination [75]. Therefore, food is a destination brand dimension that should be taken into account when developing a brand strategy [20].

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, communication through social media has changed tourism and service industry. Social media allows real time communication at lower cost with wider scope and variety of alternative ways of communicating. Currently, social media is used as a tool to prevent the extinction of traditional foods as well as an important marketing strategy. Social media

provide easiness to obtain information through linkages such as access to recipes, ingredients, methods and the most appropriate way of serving. A simple flow to channeling cultural information contained in traditional foods can be achieved by anyone in this world through social media [49, 71, 80].

Further in 2020, a study conducted in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia, found that 78% of Small and Medium-Size Enterprise (SMSE) use social media to market their traditional food, this is what can make traditional food survive amidst the onslaught of imported commodities with minimum nutritional content [8]. Social media related to food as digital communication tools prove able to advocated the ideas supporting local product. Consuming local products is a great way to promote sustainability in your community. Eating locally-sourced foods helps reduce the environmental impact of transportation, as well as supports local farmers and local businesses [44, 60].

'Instabranding'

Instagram, a mobile-based photograph and video sharing platform is currently one of the most popular social media platforms for marketing purpose [18]. In 2018, there were almost 714 million users who accessed the Instagram platform on a monthly basis, with young adults and adults age range 18–34 years old (65%) were the most active Instagram users [28, 76]. In the South-east Asia region, Instagram is now the fastest-growing social platform in the region, Instagram has disrupted the realm of social media with positive impact such as visual storytelling, creative expression through photography, videography, graphic design, and other visual mediums for advertisement and followers engage with brands [53]. Instagram allows the post to be shared with other platforms such as Facebook in addition to Instagram's page [34]. Instagram also allows users to share content with specified users through private direct messaging [18]. When users post content, users can add captions, hashtag, and tag or mention other users by using the @ symbol before posting them. The @ symbol effectively creates a direct link from the user's post to the referenced other user's account [34].

The shifting of direct brand-to-customer advertising to modern peer to peer approach, by actively involving consumer to spread their message (word of mouth) are supported by Instagram's features [24]. On Instagram, Food service businesses can customize and manage their images that appealing to their target market; hence it will drive brands to reflects the opinions or interest of their target market through composition and style [68]. The use of Instagram as a story-telling feature in Instagram enhances the information presentation of a company

which allows the story easily shared by users [7]. This has changed the way that brands connect with their followers and most importantly, the way they advertise with them [84]. The use of Instagram media in a tourist destination are related to the territorial distribution of tourism images, travel influencers on Instagram, dan promote a destination as the influence of destination image and city branding [4, 54, 59, 82].

From the literature review, it can be concluded that social media can be used to promote gastronomy and traditional local food by creating engaging content, such as videos, photographs, and stories. Additionally, social media as marketing tools can be used to analyze user data and create targeted campaigns that reach the right audience. Furthermore, influencers can be leveraged to spread awareness about the food or restaurant. Therefore, this study will elaborate more on how regional tourism authorities share information in social media related to the diversity of traditional foods, promote gastronomic tourism, and enhance destinations competitiveness by utilizing Instagram as a marketing tool.

Methods

Content analysis was used to conduct this qualitative study. Content analysis is a method of analyzing written, spoken, or visual content to gain insights into the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of people. It involves coding and categorizing data to identify patterns and trends in the content. Content analysis can be used for various purposes such as market research, customer feedback analysis, sentiment analysis [5, 50]. Previous study has used content analysis for analyzing visual information (pictures) and textual information (hashtags) available on social networks (i.e., Instagram) [4].

The data came from the official account of Southeast Asia Tourism on Instagram (@Visitsoutheastasiaofficial). This account chosen for this study because represent the regional tourism board to develop and promote Southeast Asian countries collectively as a highly desirable tourism region. This account was developed by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations National Tourism Organizations (ASEAN NTOs). These accounts have 17.100 followers as per 6 January 2023, with total post 1.633. Destination posts come from all the destination images come from 10 Southeast Asia countries which are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. ASEAN aims to capture the warmth, resilience, and sense of fun and adventure that is emblematic of the Southeast Asia region and peoples, revealed their collective efforts in marketing initiatives to inspire travel to Southeast Asia (ASEAN [1]. The ASEAN tourism marketing objectives are to promote the region as a single destination, increase

visitor arrivals and receipts, develop sustainable tourism practices, strengthen regional cooperation in the tourism sector, and create employment opportunities. Additionally, ASEAN aims to improve the quality of services provided by its member countries and enhance their competitiveness in the global market [63].

Data collection method

Data were collected from @Visitsoutheastasiaofficial first posting in Instagram in September 1, 2016 to October 30, 2022 (last posts relevant to gastronomy tourism and culinary found when the study conducted). In this study dedicated software name 4Kstogram (<https://www.4kdownload.com/products/stogram-7>) was used to extract the images related to traditional food, culinary and gastronomic tourism from November 2022 to January 2023. The extracted data consist of profile information, photographs, captions, hashtags and posting date information, and most of the posts are using #TasteOfASEAN hashtags. After manually screening process using Microsoft excel by carefully check all the images and information provide in caption, 123 sample images related to culinary and traditional food are used for further analysis. This sample was chosen to represent the ways in which traditional food has presence as tools in promoting gastronomic tourism and regional in general. Later, we discuss about how we develop a coding scheme for categorizing the images and analyzing the content in data analysis.

Data analysis method

For this research, qualitative content analysis was used because it investigates the occurrence of specific features and elements in traditional food objects. This study

investigates the occurrence of specific features and elements in traditional food objects. In this study, two coders used the same categories to code all the images. Furthermore, we use the thematic analysis stage by grouping data based on the type of images; make initial codes; grouping by themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and tabulating data and making report visualizations [27].

From Fig. 1 it can be seen that the flow of data analysis has three steps. The first step is categorizing the images based on the characteristic which presenting food, beverage, food ingredients, people with food. The next step is by analyzing the full captions which has full information regarding the images and hashtags that representing the culinary, food and gastronomic term. The next stage is grouping the data including the country of origin, to analyze important messages and categorize the into three major themes which are food ingredients, expression, and gastronomic tourism activities.

Results

Findings of images and textual information

Based on the data analysis there are 123 Culinary related images from ten Southeast Asia countries as the origin of traditional food posted (see Table 1). The average number of posts per country is 8.33%. The largest number Culinary related image posts are from Cambodia (14.63%) and the smallest number culinary related image posts are from Laos (4.88%). However, there are 3 images which posted comes from several South East Asian countries in one post. Three images posted culinary profile of Southeast Asian countries in general without specifically mentioning ASEAN country.

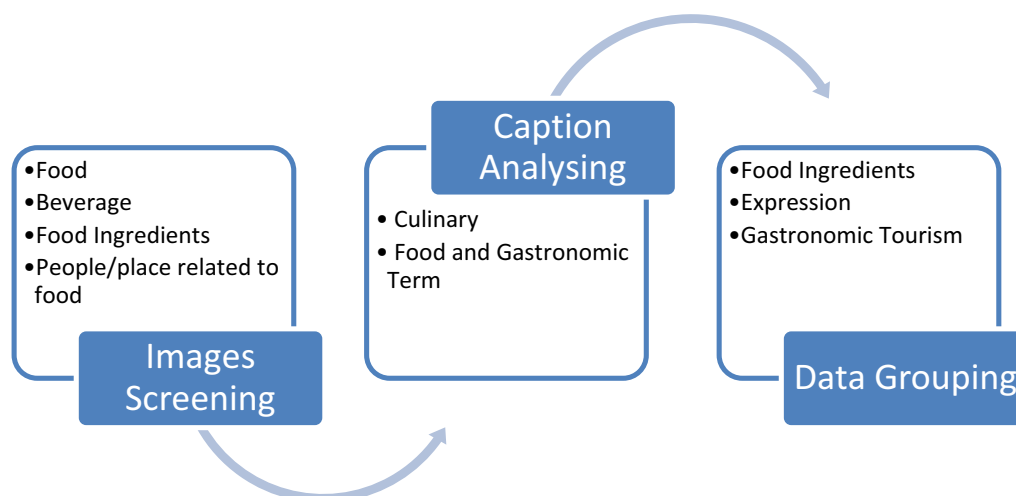


Fig. 1 Flow of data analysis Source: Authors' own work

Table 1 Distribution of images based on the country of origin

Country	Number of images	Percentage (%)
Cambodia	18	14.63
Malaysia	16	13.01
Thailand	16	13.01
Myanmar	14	11.38
Philippines	11	8.94
Vietnam	10	8.13
Indonesia	10	8.13
Brunei	8	6.50
Singapore	8	6.50
Laos	6	4.88
Several SEA Countries	3	2.44
All SEA Countries	3	2.44
Total	123	100

Most of the images show traditional food from each country with serving suggestion features, descriptions of food-related to ingredients, flavors, serving suggestions, country of origin and type of food (e.g., Entrée, Main Course, Main Dish, Sides, Starches, Dessert and Drinks). Some images also presented the traditional table manner in some Southeast Asian Countries. Table manners vary from culture to culture, but in general, ASEAN table manners involve being polite and respectful. ASEAN countries have a variety of food arrangements, depending on the culture and region. Generally, meals are served family-style with dishes placed in the center of the table for everyone to share. In some cultures, such as Thailand and Vietnam, it is common to serve individual plates of food. Traditional Indonesian dining experiences involve a variety of dishes served family-style. Dishes are typically served on a large platter and shared among the guests. Common dishes include rice, noodles, vegetables, fish, meat, and soup. Additionally, it is customary to eat with your hands in Indonesia rather than using utensils. Additionally, many ASEAN countries use chopsticks when eating rice or noodles. In addition, several posts show the cultural characteristics of each destination where food is cooked using different methods such as grilled, deep-fried, roasted, steamed, baked. Some cities and tourist destination regions in Southeast Asia are also highlighted in each post e.g., Penang, Sabah, Sarawak, George Town, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Isan, Luang Prabang Yangon, Pampanga, Hanoi, Manado, Bandar Seri Begawan.

Textual information from various captions that are made indirectly promotes and invites users to engage with Southeast Asia destinations with their hospitality characteristics. In general, the included posts can be grouped into four categories, namely authentic traditional food (photo 1), Another example such as: “The

Philippines is known to be the fifth largest English-speaking nation in the world, making it especially easy to travel to for Western vacationers. It also makes it pretty easy to order food! Pull up a chair and enjoy a sweet Filipino welcoming with some halo-halo!” This caption explains how those who operate social medial accounts try to induce western tourist to visit Philippines because of their ability to speak English, and enjoying their welcoming dessert such as halo-halo.

Another textual posting is related to social media campaign and promotion (photo 2) and also promotion and marketing campaign from third parties, e.g., “Bun Cha Huong Lien in Hanoi was introduced to the world in 2016 after a visit by world-renowned late chef Anthony Bourdain and former President Barack Obama. The table and chairs on which they shared their meal are today preserved in a glass case at the restaurant, today attracting explorers to eat and experience a historical moment in food culture at the same time.” Third party’s involvement is important to give followers another perspective and in effort to build trust and encourage visiting the local restaurant.

Furthermore, as part of the destination information channel, several posts provide travel suggestions related to local destination information (photo 3), offering visitors with various activities e.g., “Traveling from a city to another city has never been so delightful like this one. On 4 days adventure package, there are Bandar Seri Begawan (Brunei) and Miri (Sarawak), the neighboring cities which have diverse culinary and cultural. You can begin the trip by sampling Brunei’s unique flavors at a local restaurant”. The caption tried explaining to followers how easily traveling around Southeast Asian countries can be.

More posts explore gastronomic tourism experiences and facilities (photo 4), by providing information related to experiences related to culinary across ASEAN countries such as e.g., “The rich taste of street food and its influence on culture always make us excited to visit Southeast Asia countries. Indian, Chinese, and Western migration throughout Southeast Asia created a beautiful cross-pollination of flavors. There you’ll find some of the region’s best street eats with spices, herbs and more. Check here for best street foods in Southeast Asia countries!”. The experience offered in this caption is how southeast Asian countries offered unique experience. For examples images, captions, and hashtags postings can be seen in Fig. 2.

Authentic traditional food

In total 123 images (Fig. 3) can be categorize into two classification first is traditional food classifications (64.23%) and second is food tourism activities (35.77%). The first category traditional food classification



Fig. 2 Examples of image posting in ASEAN Instagram official account Source: @Visitsoutheastasiaofficial (2022)

categorized based on food characteristics, food ingredients, and cooking method. This category was further broken down into seven food types consist of 79 images as it can be seen in Table 2 the traditional food

classification based on their types and the country of origin (Fig. 4).

First is classification is Entrée (i.e., food snacks, salads, soups with mostly has savory taste and can be

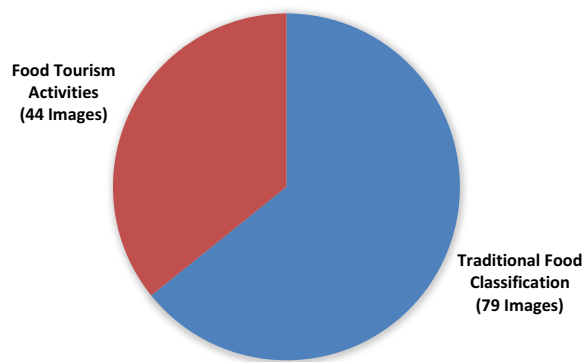


Fig. 3 Type of ASEAN Gastronomy Images ($n = 123$) Source: Authors' own work

serve as a starter) For example:. Second is Main Course, it is a set of complete meals containing of protein, carbohydrate and fiber source. Third is Main Dish categorize as a source of protein type of food consisting meat, poultry, fish and games. Fourth is Starches, a carbohydrate base food, based on result rice is the most staple ingredients consumes by Southeast Asian. Fifth is Side is containing vegetables as their major ingredients. The sixth is Dessert, type of food who has sweet taste and they are known for their indulgent flavors, textures, and presentation. The last classification is Drinks, as a vital role in dining experiences including beverages or liquids that are consumed for refreshment, hydration, or pleasure.

Traditional foods play a significant role in attracting tourists to a destination. Many travelers are interested in experiencing the local culture and cuisine, and traditional meals can offer a unique and authentic experience. Here are some examples of traditional meal courses and ingredients that can induce tourism: Tiramisu (Italy), Kimchi (Korea), Sushi (Japan), Tacos (Mexico). These traditional foods can serve as the centerpiece of culinary tourism, attracting visitors who are eager to explore the local flavors and culinary heritage of a destination. Culinary festivals, food tours, and cooking classes focused on these traditional meals and ingredients can further enhance the tourism experience and promote cultural exchange.

The Southeast Asia region is renowned for its diverse and flavorful cuisine. Here are some characteristics of food in Southeast Asia and information to help you discover and understand the local food tastes and uniqueness, which can attract tourists. Southeast Asian cuisine is known for its bold and vibrant flavors. It often combines a variety of ingredients such as herbs, spices, and condiments to create a harmonious balance of sweet, sour, salty, and spicy tastes. Chili peppers, lemongrass, garlic, ginger, and shrimp paste are commonly used to

add heat and depth to dishes. Southeast Asian cuisine heavily relies on fresh herbs and aromatics to enhance flavors. Coriander, basil, mint, lemongrass, and kaffir lime leaves are commonly used in soups, curries, salads, and stir-fries. These ingredients contribute to the distinct fragrances and vibrant tastes of the dishes. With its extensive coastlines and tropical climate, Southeast Asia offers an abundance of fresh seafood and exotic fruits. Grilled fish, shrimp, squid, and crab are commonly featured in dishes. Tropical fruits such as mangoes, papayas, dragon fruits, and durians are widely available and provide a refreshing and sweet finish to meals. The most common local ingredients found in traditional food in the Southeast Asian region can be seen in Fig. 5. Interestingly from the analysis from each post, the most used ingredients by traditional food in Southeast Asia countries are rice, coconut milk, meat from beef, chicken and pork, as well as seafood and vegetables.

From Fig. 6 the use of expression term that attract culinary lovers plays a role in providing information for further discovering, understanding local food tastes and uniqueness. Characteristics of food in the Southeast Asia region that has a spicy, sweet, savory taste can be seen in the summary description of each traditional food. Spicy flavors can be found in most foods made with chilis, chili paste. Besides raw materials typical of tropical regions such as herbs and spices e.g., lemongrass, ginger, pepper, coriander, is commonly found in traditional dishes.

In the second category, there are 44 images related to food tourism activities, local cuisines (foods that is not categorize as traditional food but popular in the region), and local gourmets (sophisticated authentic food and restaurants). Gastronomic experiences and food authenticity as well as local and regional culinary products in Southeast Asia, for example, posting and images that describe Bangkok as one of the street food wonderlands: "Did you know Bangkok is a synonym of street food? Well, probably it isn't according to the official dictionary. But, having eaten and explored the street food in this culinary wonderland since 2009, We can say without doubt, Bangkok is one of the world's best cities for food, are you ready to explore best food from Bangkok."

Southeast Asia is famous for its bustling street food scenes. Hawker centers, night markets, and street stalls offer a wide array of affordable and delicious local specialties. Exploring these vibrant food markets can be a fascinating experience for tourists, providing opportunities to taste authentic dishes and interact with local vendors. To further discover and understand the local food tastes and uniqueness in Southeast Asia, tourists can enjoy several activities that has been exposed in @Visitsoutheastasiaofficial Instagram account such as: food tours where tourist can join guided food tours that take you to local markets,

Table 2 Distribution of images based on the country of origin. Source: Authors' own work

Country of origin	Entrée	Main Course	Main Dish	Sides	Starches	Dessert	Drinks
Brunei	-	Nasi katok	-		Ambuyat Sago	Kelupis Kuih Penyarams Matcha Crepes Wajid	Kopi tiam
Cambodia	Balut	Bai sach chrouk Kuy teav	Ang dtray-meuk Lok lak Fried crab Mann Oeng K'tem Sor Chha kroueng sach moan				
Indonesia	Gado-gado Lotek	Mi goreng Nasi kuning Tinutian	Ayam penyet Cakalang fufu Rendang		Cakwe		
Laos	Khao jee pâté Lao khao poon Mok pla	Ping sin nam tok Then khao piak sen					
Malaysia	Chee cheong fun Loh bak Murtabak	Char kway teow Laksa Nasi kandar Nasi kerabu Nasi lemak Nasi ulam Shin kee beef noodles	Ayam buah keluak			Apom balik Celorot	
Myanmar		Burmese thali Danbawk Mohinga	Wet tha dote htoe	Lahpet			Myanmar green tea
Philippines	Sinigang	Kamayan Feast-style	Binukadkad na Isda Binusog na pusit Kare-kare Kinilaw Nilutlot Sisig Tortang talong			Halo-halo	
Singapore	Bak kut teh / Rou gu cha	Tai hwa pork Noodle	Black pepper crab Hainanese chicken Steamed crabs			Kaya toast	
Thailand	Hor mok pla Sai krok Isan Tom yum goong	Pad thai	Panang gai Pla chon pao	Nam phrik num	Kanom jeen	Khanom krok	
Vietnam	Banh Bot Loc Bánh gối Banh mi Banh xeo	Bun cha Pho noodle soup	Ga nuong				Cà phê coffee

**Gado-Gado**
(Entrée)**Nasi Lemak**
(Main Course)**Panang gai**
(Main Dish)**Lahpet**
(Sides)**Ambuyat Sago**
(Starches)**Halo-halo**
(Dessert)**Cà phê coffee**
(Drinks)**Fig. 4** Example of Traditional food images based on classification Source: @Visitsoutheastasiaofficial (2022)



Fig. 5 Ingredients used for ASEAN traditional food



Fig. 6 Expressions used for ASEAN traditional food

street food stalls, and traditional restaurants. These tours provide insights into the regional cuisines, ingredients, and cooking techniques, and allow you to taste a variety of dishes. Cooking classes, where tourists can take part in cooking classes where you can learn to prepare authentic Southeast Asian dishes from local chefs. These classes often include visits to local markets to select fresh ingredients and provide hands-on cooking experiences.

Linked with cultural festivals held by many countries annually, tourists can attend food-focused cultural festivals, such as Songkran (Thailand's water festival) or Lunar New Year celebrations, where you can immerse yourself in the local food culture and witness traditional cooking demonstrations and food competitions. Another thing that can be highlighted is visit museums or cultural centers that showcase the culinary heritage of the region. These establishments may offer exhibits, interactive displays, and educational programs to help you understand the historical significance of local ingredients and traditional cooking methods. Promoting these unique

characteristics and offering opportunities for tourists to engage with the local food scene, Southeast Asian destinations can attract visitors who seek immersive culinary experiences and a deeper understanding of the region's rich gastronomic heritage. Food images can be used as authentic representations of the local cuisine and accurately reflect what visitors can expect when they arrive by showcasing mouthwatering visuals and telling compelling stories through food images, destinations can effectively promote gastronomic tourism and inspire travelers to explore and indulge in the culinary delights of a destination (Fig. 7).

Figure 8 obtain insights from the content analysis of textual information, where hashtags use by ASEAN tourism Instagram account, will improving the visualizations of their posts categorized by topics and contents. From each of images captions, a word list on hashtags related to Southeast Asia traditional food identifying the 20 most frequent words related to the entire data set. The results indicate that #tasteofasean, #culinary and #food are the



Fig. 7 Example of Food tourism activities Source: @Visitsoutheastasiaofficial (2022)



Fig. 8 Hashtags used in ASEAN tourism Instagram posts

most frequent hashtags, while specific hashtags related to ASEAN gastronomic tourism such as #aseanfoodlove, #traditionalfood, #asianfood also being used. Although there are more common hashtags used by the Instagram users when posting culinary contents such as #foodgasm, #foodgram, #foodtraveler, #foodlover and #foodblogger.

Discussion

This study provides findings related food images of Southeast Asian countries based on promotional efforts that official government has done in Instagram. Major findings found that of South East Asian traditional food is known for its unique flavors and ingredients. Common ingredients used in Southeast Asian cuisine include coconut milk, lemongrass, galangal, tamarind, fish sauce, shrimp paste, chilies and herbs such as basil and mint. Popular dishes include curries, stir-fries, noodles and rice dishes. Additionally, many Southeast Asian countries have their own unique regional specialties that are distinct from the rest of the region.

The location of ASEAN Region is close to the equator causes the majority ASEAN Countries to have a tropical climate. This climate and geographical location results ASEAN Countries have abundance natural resources which also contributes to the richness of food ingredients available. Besides, ASEAN countries also has been a melting pot of cultural identities in term of foods. Many

foods in southeast Asian countries derived from adaptation from Chinese, Arabic and Indian Culture. It develops rich and unique flavors that portrayed from the naming of food, cooking method as well as food ingredients used. These findings also supported by many previous researcher [10, 32, 46, 57].

Furthermore, there are some major ingredients found in almost every Southeast Asian food, like rice, coconut milk, meat from beef and pork, chicken vegetables, as well as seafood. These findings, has resulting statement that ASEAN countries shares cultural identity such as beliefs as well as religion [3], that implicated to the similarity of characteristic of food flavors, ingredients and cooking method [85]. We can see it from how the naming of food has similarity in some countries e.g., there are some foods in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei who has identical names, ingredients, cooking method or even taste. Likewise, some Thailand food are existing in Cambodia and Laos, the different only how to pronounce the name and in some case, there are some additional seasoning or flavoring ingredients.

Previous studies stated that some ASEAN foods still have their own uniqueness and characteristic [32, 72, 87]. The results of this study indicate the dominant flavors and taste of Southeast Asian traditional foods is unique 'umami' and 'spicy.' The use of shrimp paste, coconut milk and garlic as flavoring ingredients are found in

many ASEAN foods. Those ingredients combine with traditional cooking method contributes to umami and spicy flavors through the foods. In term of spicy foods, as countries with tropical climates produces many herbs and spices and use it as flavoring ingredients on their foods. This also derives from the acculturation that happens during fifteenth century as silk road has presenting the herbs, spices and food ingredients from China, Arab and India. This dominant flavors and taste produce by ASEAN food images should consistently promote by the related organization.

In addition, the majority of traditional food images that were posted related to the portrait of local cuisines consists of local street food, local gourmets, local chefs, local food market and other local images related to food. This analysis portrayed how the ASEAN tourism online wants to promote food as an attraction instead of food as supporting elements of regional tourism experiences and authenticity. However, it is not an easy task to identify Southeast Asian nations as one destination, each country has their own unique identities; they have their own cultures, and each country's customs and traditions are clearly distinguishable from the other [3].

To accommodate tourism promotion activities in the ASEAN region, regional tourism organization use main websites (www.aseantourism.travel) and various social media accounts to promote the region as a single destination highlighting on various tourism landscapes. Promoting the region as a single destination and highlighting various gastronomic and local food is becoming more important because it allows for greater visibility of the area, which can help to attract more visitors [62]. Region as single tourist destination has been implemented in European union (EU) countries, where competition policy and regional development are addressed through EU cohesion policies, funding mechanisms, regional frameworks, and initiatives that aim to reduce disparities and promote economic growth across different regions within the EU [58]. Additionally, it helps to create a unified identity for the region, which can be beneficial in terms of regional marketing and branding. Finally, highlighting various tourism landscapes within the region can help to showcase its unique features and attractions that may not be found elsewhere [56].

From this study, we can see how national and regional marketing strategies using Instagram as social media platforms to expose the delicacies of local food to attract more visitors to destination and stimulate innovation on food literacy; culinary arts; cultural identities; indigenous entrepreneurship in tourism; and balancing development and sustainability in destinations [67]. With advanced web technologies, destinations are establishing real and online spatial and social zones, based upon a cultural

tradition and its food, where food trails and packaged journeys bring together iconic cuisines, producers and foodstuffs into a much larger and enticing offer. In order to grab the potential of social media effect on the organization, careful consideration needs to be taken on how the company must manage their social media accounts. Organization also needs to pay more attention on how to maximize the engagement with customers on social media since research suggests that the majority of the organization spent less than 1% of an average marketing budget for the social media platform [35].

Based on the findings, the organization trying to inform potential tourists to visit and consume traditional and local food. The use of hashtag and taglines is an effort to collect all the information regarding certain products and information. Different taglines are used for promotional activities, the main tagline for ASEAN tourism is "Feel the Warmth," another special tagline commonly used are "The tastes of Southeast Asia," "ASEAN, a tropical paradise," and "Diverse Contemporary Creativity" [78]. This information contains to introduce the regions traditional foods diversity to become well known and familiar with [51]. Furthermore, the images posts by Southeast Asia tourism organization in Instagram offer information on how the travel experience has been raised to the stage of enriching sustainable knowledge [9, 36, 83]. For Example, post about how the cooking class package in Laos will add insight into how to make Lao food products that they can practice on their own when they return to their respective places. Captions that are slightly longer and descriptive are the main way of sending important information using easy-to-digest language. Information in each image posted was described specifically, such as information on food ingredients so that people can be well informed with foods that they consumed. The information made with the intention to present short information with only one description, the reasons is people tend to read short captions compared to long captions with complex words [4, 34, 68].

Conclusion

Given the importance of the traditional food and gastronomic tourism as one of the region and city branding process, this study provides an insight on how regional tourism authority in Southeast Asian region with diversity of own cultures, customs and traditions are clearly distinguishable from the other utilizing their heritage traditions, places to capitalize on the demand for special interests in heritage, cultural and gastronomic tourism [19]. Instagram has become more popular as marketing platform among firms because it has a growing number of users as well as it has levitated the trend of visual content in social media marketing [84].

The implication of this study will help national tourism organizations, practitioners and academicians who are interested in gastronomic tourism to develop informative, attractive content about the traditional food images in social media platform to promote regional and city tourism as unique identities. The limitation of this study is only focused on the content of traditional food on the Instagram platform. Further research can be done by using other social media platforms and compare these findings with other destinations. It also provides an opportunity to gain insights into what people are saying about each destination, which can be useful in terms of understanding customer preferences and opinions. Additionally, it can help to identify potential opportunities for improvement or expansion within the region. Finally, researching other destinations through social media platforms can provide valuable information that could be used to create effective marketing strategies and campaigns. The implication of this study will help national tourism organizations, culinary practitioners and academicians about the traditional food images in social media platform to promote regional and city tourism.

Supplementary Information

The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42779-023-00189-0>.

Additional file 1. Database.

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Author contributions

FP, MP devised the main conceptual ideas, wrote and revised the paper. FP worked out the technical details and performed data collection. FP, MP, and SN conduct the data analysis and discussion section. FP, MP worked out in manuscript incorporating revisions. The author(s) read and approved the final manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

Not applicable.

Declarations

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Fajar Kusnadi Kusumah Putra is an assistant professor at the department of hospitality, NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic, Indonesia. Fajar Main research interests include etourism, hospitality management, and hospitality education.

Mandradhitya Kusuma Putra is an assistant professor at the department of hospitality, NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic, Indonesia. He is head of Hospitality practice laboratories. Mandradhitya research includes Culinary art, Hospitality Tourism Management, and Gastronomy Tourism.

Selvi Novianti is an assistant professor at the department of hospitality, NHI Bandung Tourism Polytechnic, Indonesia. She is head of Pastry and Bakery study program. Selvi does research in hospitality, tourism, culinary, and gastronomy

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