

From cultural curiosity to culinary sustainability: how social food reels foster food culture preservation

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate how social media short videos (SMSVs), particularly those showcasing food culture, contribute to food culture sustainability through the stimulation of cultural curiosity and behaviour.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model and cultural capital theory, the research examines how stimulus quality, perceived enjoyment and telepresence influence cultural curiosity, which subsequently drives culinary reproduction, visit intention and support for food culture sustainability. Both offline and online surveys were conducted, involving 665 users of short-reel video content. Valid data were assessed and analysed through structural equation modelling.

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Findings – The findings reveal that the content of SMSVs significantly fosters cultural curiosity, leading to behaviours that promote sustainable food practices, including authentic culinary engagement and advocacy for cultural preservation. The moderating role of cultural intelligence (CQ) further enhances these relationships.

Practical implications – This study suggests that tourism marketers and cultural institutions can leverage short-form food videos to spark cultural curiosity and promote sustainable food practices by showcasing authentic culinary experiences, enhancing viewer immersion, and fostering cultural intelligence to encourage responsible gastronomic tourism and food culture preservation.

Originality/value – This study uniquely integrates the S-O-R model with cultural capital theory and cultural intelligence to show how short-form food videos stimulate cultural curiosity and drive sustainable gastronomic tourism. It offers original insights into how immersive digital media foster culturally responsible behaviour and food culture preservation.

Keywords Social media short videos, Cultural curiosity, Food culture sustainability, Sor-cq, Behavioural decision

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In today's digital era, food is no longer confined to the plate; it is performed, shared and globalized through digital storytelling. Among the most influential formats are short-form videos on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, Facebook and YouTube Shorts (Rashidin *et al.*, 2025b). Influencers and content creators routinely spotlight regional ingredients, traditional dishes and immersive dining encounters, transforming everyday meals into culturally rich narratives that reach global audiences. Hence, social media short videos (SMSVs) have rapidly emerged as powerful channels for showcasing local food culture (Kusumawati *et al.*, 2025) and helping to share these food-related traditions and cultures across borders (Aziz *et al.*, 2023). Viewers frequently respond by attempting to recreate dishes, visiting restaurants or seeking authentic dining experiences. As users engage with food reels, they often develop cultural curiosity towards the ingredients, preparation techniques and traditions embedded in the dishes (Al-Kwafi *et al.*, 2025), which can translate into meaningful consumer actions (Sharma *et al.*, 2024). By inspiring curiosity and encouraging people to try or learn from, other cuisines, reels can promote travel and support the long-term sustainability of food cultures. Notwithstanding, the role of SMSVs in promoting sustainable food behaviour and hospitality practices still remains underexplored. Previous research has largely examined long-form or traditional food media and their influence on tourism, destination image and consumer attitudes (Taheri *et al.*, 2024; De Oliveira Moreira *et al.*, 2025); however, while these studies offer valuable insights, they do not account for the distinctive features of short-form digital content (its brevity, interactivity, immersion and hedonic appeal) that may uniquely shape how cultural information is processed and acted upon. In particular, little is known about how specific SMSV features such as stimulus quality, enjoyment and telepresence influence deeper psychological responses like cultural curiosity, or how curiosity translates into tangible behaviours such as culinary reproduction, destination visitation and support for food culture sustainability. Moreover, the role of individual differences, such as cultural intelligence, in moderating these effects has rarely been considered, even though this knowledge might significantly advance hospitality research through linking digital media engagement with sustainable gastronomy through psychological and cultural mechanisms. Several research questions remain to be answered:

RQ1. How do features of SMSVs (stimulus quality, enjoyment, and telepresence) influence viewers' cultural curiosity?

RQ2. To what extent does cultural curiosity shape behavioural responses such as culinary reproduction, destination visitation, and support for food culture sustainability?

RQ3. How does cultural intelligence (CQ) moderate the relationship between SMSV stimuli and cultural curiosity?

To investigate these questions, this study draws on the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model ([Jia et al., 2024](#)) in proposing that SMSV content (stimulus) elicits cultural curiosity (psychological state), which in turn drives three behavioural responses:

- (1) intention to reproduce a dish;
- (2) intention to visit a destination; and
- (3) support for sustainable food practices.

To enrich this framework, cultural capital theory is integrated, highlighting how digital food engagement encompasses symbolic and experiential participation in culinary cultures ([Chukwurah et al., 2025](#)). Reproducing foreign dishes or seeking them out in hospitality settings thus becomes not only a hedonic act but also a way of acquiring cultural capital ([Kushwah et al., 2019](#)). Finally, the moderating role of cultural intelligence is incorporated to account for individual differences in cross-cultural competence.

Theoretical grounding and hypothesis

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in three complementary perspectives:

- (1) the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model;
- (2) cultural capital theory; and
- (3) cultural intelligence (CQ).

Together, they offer a comprehensive framework for explaining how SMSVs stimulate cultural curiosity and translate digital engagement into sustainable gastronomic behaviours. The S-O-R model, originating from environmental psychology, explains how external stimuli evokes internal states that, in turn, lead to behavioural responses ([Mehrabian and Russell, 1974](#)). In digital gastronomy, SMSV features such as video clarity, authentic storytelling, perceived enjoyment and telepresence act as stimuli, which trigger the organismic state of cultural curiosity, reflecting cognitive and affective engagement with the cultural meanings of food. This curiosity, in turn, leads to behavioural responses such as culinary reproduction, destination visitation and support for a sustainable food culture ([Kim et al., 2018](#)). Conceptualizing SMSVs as stimuli and curiosity as the organismic mediator allows the S-O-R framework to explain how digital content affects real-world hospitality behaviour.

Building on this, cultural capital theory ([Bourdieu, 1986](#)) illustrates why culinary engagement extends beyond hedonic pleasure. Reproducing foreign dishes or seeking authentic culinary experiences becomes a symbolic act of acquiring and displaying cultural competence ([Taheri et al., 2014](#); [Vratsanos, 2024](#)) and integrating this with the S-O-R model reveals how digital food stimuli promote both symbolic and experiential capital. However, scholars also caution that such media can commodify culinary traditions, reflecting both enriching and reductive aspects of digital cultural exchange. Finally, CQ serves as a key individual-level moderator. Defined as the capability to interpret, adapt to and function effectively across culturally diverse contexts ([Caputo et al., 2018](#)), CQ – comprising metacognitive, cognitive,

motivational and behavioural dimensions – raises cultural curiosity (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Individuals high in CQ interpret SMSVs as culturally meaningful, translating curiosity into sustainable, respectful actions.

Social media short videos/reels

Interaction with SMSVs has emerged as a powerful driver of cultural engagement and hospitality-related behaviours (Rashidin, 2025). Unlike passive content consumption, interactive behaviours, such as commenting, sharing, liking or recreating featured dishes, enable users to co-construct meaning, develop emotional attachment and enhance cultural awareness in real-time digital environments (Munaro *et al.*, 2025). This interactivity strengthens users' connection to food narratives and their cultural roots (Gajdzik *et al.*, 2023), fostering curiosity that often motivates culinary reproduction. Such acts extend beyond recreation, reflecting meaningful engagement with, and respect for, foreign culinary traditions. Moreover, interaction with SMSVs can stimulate visitation intention as users aspire to experience authentic cuisines and cultural contexts (Li *et al.*, 2022). Sustained engagement with culturally rich content thus promotes food culture sustainability through awareness, appreciation and advocacy for culinary heritage within modern hospitality ecosystems.

Cultural curiosity

Cultural curiosity refers to an individual's intrinsic motivation to acquire knowledge about food-related issues and emotionally engage with the traditions, meanings and practices of a foreign culture, particularly through gastronomy (Mikhaylov, 2016). It represents a cognitive–affective orientation that drives individuals to explore culinary origins, preparation methods and symbolic meanings beyond surface-level interest. In hospitality and tourism contexts, food functions as both a sensory attraction and a cultural symbol, making cultural curiosity a bridge between digital exposure and real-world behaviour (Justin and Setiawan, 2024). Unlike passive admiration, it precedes actions such as visiting destinations, experimenting with cuisines or advocating food heritage (Khan *et al.*, 2024). In SMSVs, brevity, immersive visuals and emotional storytelling evoke curiosity-driven responses (Arango *et al.*, 2024), and within the S-O-R framework, cultural curiosity acts as the organismic state linking digital stimuli to behavioural outcomes like culinary reproduction and cultural sustainability.

Effect of stimulus quality on cultural curiosity

SMSVs serve as potent vehicles for transmitting cultural narratives and gastronomic heritage due to their immersive, vivid and emotionally engaging nature. In hospitality and tourism, stimulus quality, defined as perceived clarity, coherence of storytelling and authenticity of representation, shapes both cognitive and affective responses. High-quality stimuli enable viewers to interpret and connect with the cultural significance of food, fostering deeper psychological engagement (Li *et al.*, 2022). Video clarity enhances sensory vividness, allowing audiences to perceive techniques, textures and presentations that stimulate learning and appreciation (Kim *et al.*, 2018). Coherent storytelling embeds food within cultural narratives tied to tradition, geography and identity (Li *et al.*, 2025), while perceived authenticity builds trust and credibility (Zhang *et al.*, 2025b). Collectively, these elements act as affective triggers that cultivate cultural curiosity – the intrinsic motivation to explore and engage with food culture. Prior research confirms that high-quality media stimuli enhance cultural learning, awareness and behavioural intention (Afaq *et al.*, 2025; Gursoy *et al.*, 2023); however, the role of stimulus quality within the SMSV format remains underexplored. Thus:

- H1. Stimulus quality (video clarity, storytelling, and authenticity) in social media short videos positively influences viewers' cultural curiosity towards the featured food culture.

Perceived enjoyment and cultural curiosity

In the context of SMSVs, perceived enjoyment refers to the intrinsic pleasure, fun and satisfaction derived from engaging with digital content (Lin *et al.*, 2025). In hospitality and tourism research, enjoyment is not merely a hedonic end state but a cognitive-affective driver that enhances immersion, attention and learning, as enjoyable experiences encourage audiences to process media in depth, form affective attachments, and sustain engagement beyond passive consumption (Keramaris *et al.*, 2025). In gastronomy-focused SMSVs, enjoyment often arises from aesthetic and narrative features, vibrant visuals of food preparation, engaging narration and emotionally resonant cultural storytelling, which make content both pleasant and meaningful. A high level of enjoyment promotes cultural curiosity, motivating viewers to explore the origins, preparation and symbolic significance of various cuisines (Kusumawati *et al.*, 2025), while also adopting openness to cultural diversity and exploratory behaviour (Sewak *et al.*, 2025; Seyfi *et al.*, 2025). Within the S-O-R framework, perceived enjoyment functions as a stimulus that evokes cultural curiosity, which subsequently drives behaviours such as culinary reproduction, destination visitation and food culture sustainability (Masmoudi and Jmour, 2024). Thus:

- H2. Perceived enjoyment derived from social media short video content positively influences viewers' cultural curiosity towards the featured food culture.

Telepresence and cultural curiosity

Telepresence refers to the psychological sensation of "being there" within a mediated environment (Steuer, 1992) and reflects the extent to which technology immerses users in virtual experiences that mimic real-world exposure (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2022a). In the context of SMSVs, telepresence plays a crucial role in shaping how audiences perceive and engage with digital gastronomy content. Unlike traditional food media such as cookbooks or long-form programmes, SMSVs use multisensory audiovisual immersion, dynamic sequencing and real-time storytelling to create vivid experiences (Masmoudi and Jmour, 2024). These elements allow viewers to virtually "step into" the food environment, observing textures, colours and techniques while hearing ambient sounds and cultural cues (Schlssel and Frosh, 2023). The resulting sense of presence heightens emotional and cognitive involvement, reducing the psychological distance between the viewer and the culture depicted, thereby making the experience more personal and engaging.

In food tourism, telepresence helps create stronger connections to cultural identity and authenticity (Yung and Khoo-Lattimore, 2019). As a result, it can spark cultural curiosity, encouraging people to learn more about the cuisine and the traditions behind it. Previous research suggests that short reels using telepresence can influence visitation intention (Rashidin *et al.*, 2025), and building on this, we argue that culturally focused food reels not only shape visitation intention but also stimulate cultural curiosity and support for food culture sustainability. Therefore, the relation between telepresence and cultural curiosity remains underexplored in hospitality and tourism literature. Addressing this gap, the present study positions telepresence as a key antecedent of curiosity within the S-O-R framework, highlighting its role in bridging digital immersion with culturally meaningful engagement. Thus:

H3. Telepresence experienced through social media short video content positively influences viewers' cultural curiosity towards the featured food culture.

Cultural curiosity and its action

Cultural curiosity, as conceptualized in this study, serves as a critical psychological catalyst linking digital food media exposure with real-world behavioural outcomes in the hospitality and tourism context (Mengjia *et al.*, 2023). Defined as an individual's intrinsic desire to explore, understand and connect with the cultural elements embedded in foreign gastronomy, cultural curiosity operates as a mediating cognitive-affective mechanism that transforms passive media consumption into active cultural engagement (Fabio, 2014).

One significant behavioural expression of cultural curiosity is culinary reproduction intention – the motivation to recreate a foreign dish using local ingredients or adapted methods (Aziz *et al.*, 2023). Users are in a cross-cultural context, and the act of replicating a dish serves as a tangible way of participating in, and honouring, the represented food culture. The process of learning, preparing and presenting such dishes often involves a degree of cultural translation, which reflects both curiosity and respect (Arango *et al.*, 2024), and previous research in food tourism has noted that consumers who display higher levels of cultural interest are more likely to experiment with culturally distant cuisines and engage in learning-by-doing behaviours (Kim *et al.*, 2021). Thus:

H4. Cultural curiosity positively influences viewers' intention to reproduce the featured cuisine in their own cultural setting.

In addition to localized culinary practices, cultural curiosity often triggers destination visitation intention (Aziz *et al.*, 2023). When viewers encounter food content that evokes emotional resonance and stimulates intellectual interest, they frequently aspire to experience the cuisine within its authentic sociocultural context. Culinary curiosity enhances the perceived experiential value of visiting a destination, as travellers seek not only to consume food but also to understand the stories, rituals and traditions that underpin it (Lee *et al.*, 2025). The link between cultural motivation and destination choice is well established in tourism literature, where food is increasingly recognized as a core motivator in travel decision-making (Masmoudi and Jmour, 2024). Thus:

H5. Cultural curiosity positively influences viewers' intention to visit the destination associated with the featured food culture.

Beyond individual actions, cultural curiosity may also cultivate broader behavioural outcomes related to food culture sustainability support (Hinrichs *et al.*, 2023), including attitudes and actions that reflect appreciation for cultural authenticity, commitment to reducing food waste and advocacy for the preservation of culinary traditions (Justin and Setiawan, 2024). As viewers engage more deeply in the meanings behind the food they consume or recreate, they are likely to develop a stronger sense of cultural stewardship, and such behaviour is central to sustainable gastronomy tourism, which aims to balance cultural preservation with modern consumption practices (Sánchez-Sánchez *et al.*, 2025). Thus:

H6. Cultural curiosity positively influences viewers' support for food culture sustainability.

Cultural intelligence moderating effect

While media-based stimuli such as video clarity are compelling with storytelling, perceived enjoyment and telepresence and play an essential role in stimulating cultural curiosity through SMSVs, these effects are unlikely to be uniformly experienced among all viewers (Shi *et al.*, 2025). One important individual-level variable that conditions these relationships is CQ, a multidimensional capability that enables individuals to interpret, understand and adapt effectively to culturally diverse settings (Da Silva Teixeira and Klein, 2024). Individuals with high CQ demonstrate a heightened awareness of cultural contexts, an intrinsic motivation to engage with cultural differences, and the behavioural skills needed to act appropriately across cultures. In the context of digital gastronomy media, these individuals are more likely to recognize and internalize cultural nuances embedded in SMSV content, leading to more profound psychological engagement.

For example, the ability to perceive stimulus quality (such as authenticity, clarity and storytelling depth) as meaningful and culturally relevant depends on one's cultural interpretive capacity (Chukwurah *et al.*, 2025). Users with high CQ are more likely to find such content intellectually and emotionally stimulating and thus experience a stronger arousal of cultural curiosity. In contrast, those with lower CQ may find the same stimuli less resonant, thereby limiting the curiosity they experience (Mansoor *et al.*, 2025). Thus, it is hypothesized that cultural intelligence positively moderates the relationship between stimulus quality and cultural curiosity, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with higher CQ (Zhang *et al.*, 2025a). The same moderating effect is likely to occur in the case of perceived enjoyment, as while enjoyment is generally associated with heightened engagement, individuals with higher levels of CQ are more capable of transforming hedonic pleasure into culturally oriented curiosity. For them, enjoyment derived from SMSV content extends beyond entertainment and becomes a gateway to deeper cultural exploration.

Finally, telepresence may have varying effects depending on one's capacity to process and relate to cultural symbols. Individuals with high CQ are more likely to contextualize and personalize immersive media experiences, leading to heightened cultural curiosity (Morin and Talbot, 2024). Thus, it is hypothesized that cultural intelligence positively moderates the relationship between telepresence and cultural curiosity, such that the relationship is stronger for individuals with higher CQ. Therefore:

- H7. Cultural intelligence positively moderates the relationship between stimulus quality and cultural curiosity.
- H8. Cultural intelligence positively moderates the relationship between perceived enjoyment and cultural curiosity.
- H9. Cultural intelligence positively moderates the relationship between telepresence and cultural curiosity.

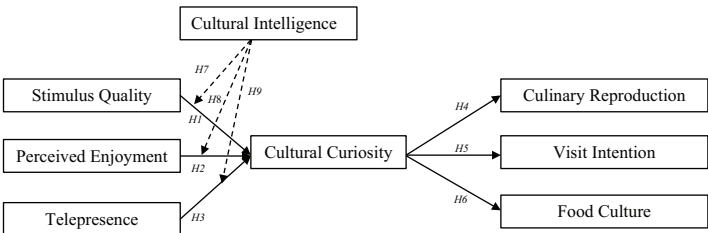


Figure 1. Conceptual model
Source: Authors' own work

H9. Cultural intelligence positively moderates the relationship between telepresence and cultural curiosity.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model and associated hypotheses, illustrating how stimulus factors influence cultural curiosity and subsequent behaviours, moderated by cultural intelligence in a digital gastronomy context.

Method

Research context

Italy is chosen as the research context of the study due to its unparalleled culinary heritage and iconic status within global food culture. Italian cuisine, ranging from traditional pasta dishes to regionally distinct cheeses and globally renowned pizza, offers a rich tapestry of gastronomic expressions that are deeply embedded in history, identity and place (Santos *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, Italy is not only a culinary powerhouse but also one of the world's most frequently visited tourist destinations, celebrated for its natural landscapes, architectural beauty and cultural depth. These factors make Italy an ideal setting for investigating how SMSV content related to food stimulates intercultural engagement and behavioural responses among viewers. By focusing on Italy, this study captures the high-density context of a rich food culture, enhancing the relevance and generalizability of its findings for hospitality scholars, practitioners and policymakers aiming to harness digital media with a view to sustainable tourism development and cultural preservation.

Measurements and survey development

To ensure the robustness and validity of our empirical investigation, the survey instrument was carefully designed based on well-established measures adapted from prior scholarly work, contextualized to fit the domain of SMSV engagement in gastronomic tourism. The questionnaire comprised three primary sections:

- (1) an overview of the study's purpose;
- (2) the main measurement items for the conceptual constructs; and
- (3) demographic questions.

All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), allowing for nuanced responses aligned with participants' perceptions and attitudes. Stimulus quality (encompassing clarity, authenticity and storytelling) was measured using a four-item scale adapted from Kim *et al.* (2018) and Li *et al.* (2025) and modified to reflect the SMSV context. Perceived enjoyment of short-form food content was assessed using drawn items, while telepresence was measured using a three-item scale derived from Rashidin *et al.* (2025), capturing the immersive nature of the content. Cultural curiosity was evaluated through a three-item scale adapted from Guo *et al.* (2024), reflecting users' cognitive and emotional engagement with foreign food cultures. Behavioural outcomes, including culinary reproduction, destination visitation intention and support for food culture sustainability, were assessed using validated scales adapted respectively from Truong *et al.* (2025), Mainolfi *et al.* (2021) and Bessière (1998).

The original English version of the survey was translated into Italian using a rigorous back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1980), with bilingual academics reviewing both versions to ensure semantic equivalence. A pilot study was conducted with a small sample to refine item clarity and contextual sensitivity, thus enhancing the overall reliability and construct validity of the final instrument.

Data collection

This study employed a quantitative approach using both online and offline survey (administered in Italian and English) distribution, targeting international individuals who had previously engaged with short-form video content related to Italian gastronomy. This positioning provided both contextual relevance and access to a multicultural sample, strengthening the applicability of the findings beyond a morally domestic perspective (Santos *et al.*, 2020), and thus giving us the opportunity to focus our attention on a target market (i.e. international travellers) that is potentially more interested in, and intrigued by, traditional Italian gastronomy and cuisine.

A non-probability convenience sampling method was adopted due to its efficiency and feasibility in reaching a large, diverse audience, although we acknowledge its limitations in terms of broader generalizability. Data were collected between March and April 2025. To reach participants actively engaged with tourism and food-related short-form videos, the survey link was distributed among targeted online communities, including solo travel groups and food review groups on social platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. These groups were chosen for their alignment with the focus of the study, thus ensuring that respondents were likely to have had prior exposure to SMSV content relevant to gastronomy and hospitality. In total, 671 responses were initially gathered, but after screening for incomplete or inconsistent entries, only 665 valid responses were retained for analysis. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted in February 2025, yielding 67 responses (64 valid after quality checks), which informed refinements to the final instrument and enhanced its clarity and contextual sensitivity.

This research was carried out in full compliance with institutional ethical standards for studies involving human participants (Chakraborty *et al.*, 2022b). Approval for the study was granted through the appropriate ethical review process overseen by one of the authors. Before data collection commenced, all participants received a detailed information sheet outlining the study's aims and procedures, and their rights. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from each individual. Participants were made aware of the research objectives, assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and informed that their data would be securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes. They were also advised of the minimal risks involved in participation. Importantly, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without facing any consequences.

Data analysis

To examine the hypothesized relationships within the proposed conceptual framework, we employed structural equation modelling (SEM), which offers a comprehensive approach for assessing both measurement and structural components concurrently (Hair *et al.*, 2011). SEM was selected due to its robustness in modelling complex, multivariable relationships and its capacity to evaluate latent constructs with high precision. This analytical technique enabled rigorous testing of the hypothesized pathways and provided a nuanced understanding of the interrelationships among stimulus, organism and behavioural variables central to the study.

Results analysis

Males represented 64.8% and females 35.2% of the valid respondents. The largest age group was 20–30 years (55.3%), followed by 30–40 years (16.1%) and below 20 years (13.8%). In terms of education, more than half (57.9%) were university graduates, while 32.2% held a Master's degree and 9.9% held a PhD. Many participants were single (62.1%), and most reported a monthly income below €2,500 (64.1%). Respondents were reported to reside in

different countries: 42.6% were from EU countries (e.g. Germany, France, Spain, Norway, etc.), 15.9% came from China, 8.6% were from Bangladesh, 6.2% from India, 3.5% from Thailand, 3.3% from Turkey, 1.4% from Canada, and smaller proportions came from Pakistan, Iran and Morocco. In addition, pilot testing was conducted prior to the main survey, and the results are also summarized in the supplementary materials to demonstrate the preliminary validation of the instrument.

Measurement model evaluation

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS AMOS Graphics (Version 23), and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data, with the following indices meeting established criteria: $\chi^2 = 639.284$, $df = 273$, $\chi^2/df = 2.294$, CFI = 0.928, NFI = 0.996, IFI = 0.940, RMSEA = 0.032 and SRMR = 0.037 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). These results confirm that the observed variables appropriately represented the underlying latent constructs. As reported in in the supplementary materials, all constructs exhibited strong internal consistency, with composite reliability (CR) values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, factor loadings for all individual items surpassed 0.70, and average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, thereby establishing convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2011). Discriminant validity was confirmed through the Fornell–Larcker criterion, as shown in Table 1. The square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its inter-construct correlations, and no correlation coefficient surpassed the 0.85 threshold, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity, as shown in Table 1 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). These results support the robustness of the measurement model for subsequent structural analysis.

Structural model fit

The structural model was evaluated using the maximum likelihood estimation method. Overall, the model exhibited a satisfactory fit to the data, as evidenced by several key goodness-of-fit indices: $\chi^2 = 1.562$, $df = 1$, $\chi^2/df = 1.562$, AGFI = 0.946, CFI = 0.929, TLI = 0.921 and RMSEA = 0.041. All fit indices met or exceeded the commonly accepted thresholds for model adequacy, falling within the recommended range of 0.90–1.00 (Hair *et al.*, 2011; Schreiber, 2008). These results confirm that the proposed model provides a robust representation of the underlying theoretical structure and supports further examination of the hypothesized relationships among constructs.

Moderation analysis

Assessment of the structural model confirmed the absence of multicollinearity, with all variance inflation factor (VIF) values falling well below the threshold of 3 (see Table 1). Structural path analysis was conducted to test the proposed hypotheses, with the results demonstrating that stimulus quality ($\beta = 0.758$, $t = 7.599$, $p < 0.001$), perceived enjoyment ($\beta = 0.437$, $t = 5.638$, $p < 0.001$) and telepresence ($\beta = 0.684$, $t = 6.860$, $p < 0.001$) each exerted a significant positive influence on cultural curiosity, providing empirical support for H1, H2 and H3, respectively.

Further analysis revealed that cultural curiosity significantly influenced all three behavioural outcomes. Specifically, it had a strong effect on culinary reproduction intention ($\beta = 0.537$, $t = 5.174$, $p < 0.001$), destination visitation intention ($\beta = 0.501$, $t = 6.216$, $p < 0.001$) and support for food culture sustainability ($\beta = 0.637$, $t = 5.754$, $p < 0.001$). These results confirm Hypotheses H4, H5 and H6, as summarized in Table 2. Collectively, these findings validate the proposed

Table 1. Discriminant validity

#	Constructs	Mean	SD	VIF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Stimulus quality	3.479	0.418	2.694	0.859							
2	Perceived enjoyment	3.260	0.336	2.375	0.700**	0.853						
3	Telepresence	4.757	0.495	2.976	0.365**	0.487**	0.829					
4	Cultural curiosity	5.761	0.427	1.385	0.537**	0.591**	0.489**	0.846				
5	Cultural reproduction support	4.362	0.301	2.398	0.598**	0.598**	0.390**	0.702**	0.825			
6	Visiting intention	4.501	0.380	1.486	0.375	0.386**	0.652**	0.535**	0.515**	0.854		
7	Food culture sustainability	4.835	0.378	2.710	0.410	0.876	0.531	0.475	0.420	0.438	0.843	
8	Cultural intelligence	5.752	0.796	2.647	0.347	0.386	0.486	0.265	0.774	0.549	0.410	0.854
Note(s): The italic digits in the diagonal are square roots of AVE; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$												
Source(s): Authors' own work												

Table 2. Findings of direct paths

Indices	Direct paths	Standardized estimates	t-value	Relationship
$\chi^2 = 1.562$, $df = 1$, $\chi^2/df = 1.562$, AGFI = 0.946, CFI = 0.929, TLI = 0.921, and RMSEA = 0.041				
	<i>Direct paths</i>			
	H1. SQ → CC	0.758	7.599	Supported
	H2. PE → CC	0.437	5.638	Supported
	H3. TE → CC	0.684	6.860	Supported
	H4. CC → CR	0.537	5.174	Supported
	H5. CC → VI	0.501	6.216	Supported
	H6. CC → FS	0.637	5.754	Supported
	H7. SQ*CC → CQ	0.794	6.387	Supported
	H8. PE*CC → CQ	0.437	5.609	Supported
	H9. TE*CC → CQ	0.655	6.286	Supported

Note(s): SQ = stimulus quality; PE = perceived enjoyment; TE = telepresence; CC = cultural curiosity; CR = cultural reproduction support; VI = visiting intention; FS = food culture sustainability; CQ = cultural intelligence; *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

model and underscore the central role of cultural curiosity in translating digital media engagement into culturally and behaviourally meaningful outcomes.

To assess the mediating role of cultural curiosity in the relationships between media stimuli and behavioural outcomes, we employed Hayes' PROCESS macro (Version 4.2, Model 6) using 5,000 bootstrap samples with a 95% confidence interval (CI) (Hayes, 2013). The results, summarized in the supplementary materials, reveal statistically significant indirect effects ($p < 0.001$), confirming the mediating role of cultural curiosity. Specifically, stimulus quality exerted a significant indirect effect on culinary reproduction intention through cultural curiosity (indirect effect = 0.0071, 95% CI: [0.0010, 0.0078]), indicating full mediation. Similarly, perceived enjoyment was found to indirectly influence destination visitation intention via cultural curiosity (indirect effect = 0.0032, 95% CI: [0.0001, 0.0081]). In the case of telepresence, the analysis also confirmed an indirect effect on food culture sustainability support through cultural curiosity (indirect effect = 0.0029, 95% CI: [0.0011, 0.0038]). These findings reinforce the theoretical assertion that cultural curiosity acts as a critical psychological mechanism, translating media engagement into culturally and behaviourally meaningful actions within the context of gastronomic tourism.

Moderating role of cultural intelligence

The moderating role of CQ was examined using IBM SPSS 27.0, following the analytical approach outlined (Caputo *et al.*, 2018). This analysis assessed whether CQ influenced the strength of the relationships between key media stimuli (stimulus quality, perceived enjoyment and telepresence) and cultural curiosity. Interaction terms were computed, and the variables were mean-centred to reduce multicollinearity, as recommended by Aiken and West (1991). The results confirmed significant moderation effects across all three relationships. The interaction between stimulus quality and cultural curiosity was significant ($\beta = 0.794$, $t = 6.387$, $p < 0.001$), as was that between perceived enjoyment and cultural curiosity ($\beta = 0.437$, $t = 5.609$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting Hypotheses H7 and H8, respectively. Furthermore, cultural intelligence significantly moderates the relationship between telepresence and cultural curiosity ($\beta = 0.655$, $t = 6.286$, $p < 0.001$), providing empirical support for Hypothesis H9.

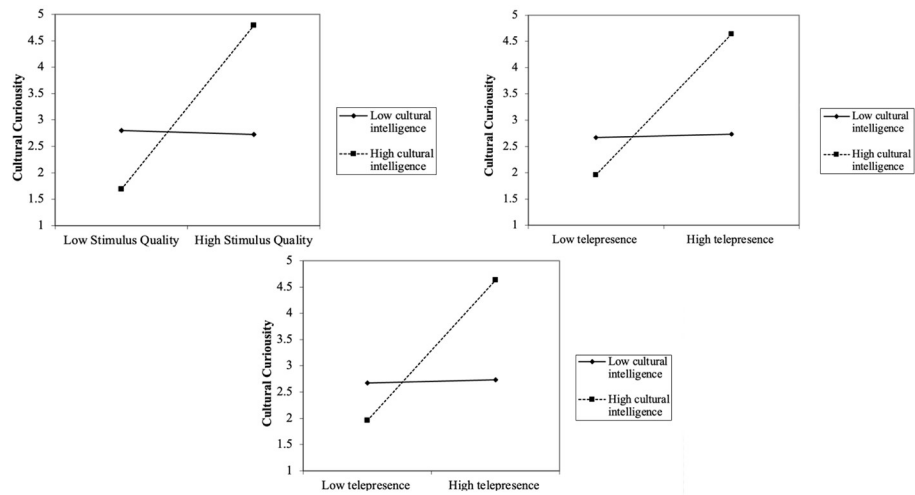


Figure 2. Graphs representing the moderation effect
Source: Authors' own work

To further validate these effects, participants were categorized into high- and low-CQ groups using dummy coding and mean-centring procedures. The results demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of cultural intelligence exhibited stronger associations between media stimuli and cultural curiosity. As depicted in [Figure 2](#), these moderating effects were consistent and robust, highlighting the critical role of cultural intelligence in enhancing the impact of digital media on cross-cultural engagement within the hospitality and tourism context.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer compelling insights into how SMSVs, particularly food-focused content, shape cultural engagement and behavioural intentions within the context of hospitality and tourism. Grounded in the S-O-R framework and enriched by cultural capital theory, the results confirm that media stimuli (specifically stimulus quality, perceived enjoyment and telepresence) are significant antecedents of cultural curiosity ([Hinrichs et al., 2023](#)). These findings emphasize the potency of SMSVs as more than ephemeral entertainment, because they function as powerful cognitive and affective triggers that cultivate deeper cross-cultural interest. Cultural curiosity emerged as a central psychological construct that bridges digital stimulus with real-world behavioural outcomes. It significantly influenced viewers' intentions to reproduce foreign dishes, travel to the cuisine's country of origin and support practices that preserve food culture sustainability. These relationships suggest that curiosity is not merely a passive state but a motivational driver with practical implications for gastronomic tourism and heritage preservation ([Lin et al., 2025](#)). Notably, culinary reproduction behaviour highlights the role of digital gastronomy in facilitating participatory cultural exchange, where individuals engage with distant cultures through local recreations of foreign cuisines.

While our findings suggest that SMSVs can serve as a pathway for accumulating symbolic cultural capital through culinary learning and engagement, it is important to

recognize a potential issue. The very process of translating cultural practices into digital content may risk commodifying food traditions, reducing them to easily consumable images for global audiences (Thomas-Francois *et al.*, 2023). This tension reflects an ongoing debate: on the one hand, SMSVs democratize cultural access and foster appreciation, but on the other, they may simplify or commercialize heritage for entertainment purposes. Simultaneously, the positive impact of cultural curiosity on destination visitation aligns with existing literature emphasizing the experiential and symbolic value of food in tourism decision-making. The study also advances the theoretical conversation by introducing CQ as a moderating variable. The findings confirm that individuals with higher CQ are more responsive to media stimuli, particularly in interpreting and internalizing culturally rich content. This moderating effect indicates that the ability to cognitively and behaviourally navigate cultural diversity enhances the impact of SMSVs on curiosity and subsequent behavioural responses (Siddiqui *et al.*, 2023). From a managerial perspective, this highlights the value of tailoring digital content strategies to audiences with varying levels of cultural literacy, particularly when promoting destinations through food narratives.

The study insights suggest that high-quality short-form content that emphasizes authenticity, immersive storytelling, and emotional resonance can cultivate cultural curiosity and drive meaningful behaviours (Rashidin *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, the link between SMSV interaction and food culture sustainability suggests that digital content can be a strategic tool in promoting responsible and culturally sensitive tourism. Encouraging culinary appreciation through short videos not only enhances destination appeal but also fosters awareness of traditional food practices that may be at risk in the globalized hospitality landscape. Collectively, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of how digital food media mediate cultural learning, behavioural intention and sustainability, bridging digital engagement with real-world hospitality practices in a globally connected tourism environment.

Conclusions

This study advances the understanding of how SMSVs, particularly those focused on food content, shape cultural engagement and sustainable behavioural intentions in hospitality and tourism. By integrating the S-O-R model with cultural capital theory and examining the moderating role of CQ, the research offers a comprehensive framework for explaining how digital media stimuli influence cultural curiosity and, in turn, drive culinary reproduction, visitation intention and support for food culture sustainability (Swain, 2024). The empirical findings affirm the strategic role of SMSVs in fostering culturally meaningful and environmentally responsible behaviours among global travellers. Cultural curiosity serves as a pivotal mechanism connecting immersive digital experiences with real-world hospitality practices, while CQ enhances the efficacy of such engagements. As digital storytelling continues to shape tourism experiences, this research provides timely insights for scholars and practitioners alike, highlighting the importance of culturally resonant content strategies that not only promote destinations but also preserve and sustain the culinary heritage (Li *et al.*, 2025).

Theoretical implications

This study makes several meaningful theoretical contributions by advancing the understanding of how digital media (particularly SMSVs) influence consumer behaviour through both psychological and cultural mechanisms. Applying the S-O-R framework to short-form food videos extends its application beyond traditional physical environments into the dynamic, media-rich and algorithm-driven digital hospitality ecosystem (Jia *et al.*, 2024). Within this context, stimulus elements such as video clarity, authenticity and telepresence are reconceptualized not merely as surface-level aesthetic attributes but as powerful experiential

triggers that elicit deeper psychological engagement. This reconceptualization contributes to theory by positioning SMSVs as immersive digital stimuli capable of shaping consumer responses to hospitality services and experiences in ways that are distinct from long-form or traditional media.

A second contribution lies in the elevation of cultural curiosity as a central psychological mechanism mediating the link between SMSV stimuli and hospitality-related behaviours. Previous research has predominantly focused on attitudes, satisfaction or trust as mediators in hospitality and tourism contexts (Guo *et al.*, 2024; Rashidin *et al.*, 2025). By contrast, this study demonstrates that curiosity (i.e. a motivational, future-oriented construct) plays a pivotal role in translating digital exposure into behavioural outcomes, including culinary reproduction, destination visitation and support for food culture sustainability. This insight advances hospitality theory through foregrounding curiosity as an underexplored yet powerful psychological driver that bridges the gap between hedonic media use and sustainable, culturally meaningful consumer actions.

Third, integrating cultural capital theory with the S-O-R framework, the study introduces a dual-theoretical lens that deepens the understanding of digital engagement. Cultural capital theory highlights how engaging with SMSVs allows individuals to acquire symbolic and experiential forms of capital by learning about, reproducing and appreciating foreign culinary traditions (Bourdieu, 1986). This integration strengthens hospitality theory, which links digital food consumption not only to hedonic pleasure but also to processes of identity building, social distinction and cultural competence. In doing so, the study moves beyond psychological mechanisms to incorporate broader sociological dynamics, which show how SMSVs can operate as sites of cultural participation and heritage preservation within global hospitality ecosystems.

Finally, the moderating role of CQ expands theoretical models of consumer heterogeneity in digital hospitality contexts. By showing that individuals with higher CQ are more responsive to SMSV stimuli, this study emphasizes the importance of intercultural competencies in shaping how consumers interpret, internalize and act upon culturally rich digital content (Caputo *et al.*, 2018). This finding enriches theoretical debates on consumer diversity, highlighting CQ as a boundary condition that determines the effectiveness of digital stimuli, offering a more refined explanation of why SMSV engagement yields stronger outcomes for some consumers than others (Chukwurah *et al.*, 2025).

Practical implications

The findings of this study yield important implications for hospitality marketers, restaurant operators, food service brands, and culinary experience designers operating in an increasingly digital and culturally diverse marketplace. As short-form videos and reels continue to dominate consumer attention on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, this study confirms their strategic value in cultivating cultural curiosity and driving hospitality-related behaviours, including restaurant visits, food exploration and sustainable culinary practices. For hospitality professionals, investing in high-quality SMSV content that emphasizes authenticity, emotional storytelling and immersive food experiences can enhance guests' psychological engagement with culinary culture, thereby increasing their intention to dine, share and return. Authentic storytelling can be achieved by partnering with local chefs, food producers and cultural ambassadors to showcase heritage-rich practices, while algorithmic tailoring of food reels and the adoption of culturally respectful content guidelines can ensure resonance with diverse audiences. Restaurants and hotels can use food-based digital narratives not only to showcase local cuisine but also to celebrate cultural heritage and position their offerings as meaningful, differentiated experiences in a saturated market.

Moreover, the study highlights the role of SMSVs in supporting food culture sustainability through consumer-led recreation of dishes, advocacy for authentic ingredients and appreciation of diverse culinary traditions (Swain, 2024). This presents a unique opportunity for hospitality organizations to embed educational and cultural messaging within promotional strategies, fostering more respectful, informed and sustainable guest behaviours. Finally, recognizing the moderating role of CQ suggests the importance of tailoring content strategies to the cultural readiness and diversity of hospitality audiences. Creating localized yet globally resonant messaging enhances relevance and impact, helping brands deliver more inclusive and culturally attuned service experiences.

This study also provides actionable insights for hospitality managers and operators seeking to align digital engagement with cultural preservation and responsible guest consumption. By demonstrating that high-quality short-form videos can stimulate cultural curiosity and promote sustainable hospitality behaviours, the findings suggest that managers should prioritize authentic, culturally rich storytelling in their digital branding and content strategies. Integrating local culinary narratives into SMSV content can enhance guests' emotional connection with hospitality venues (from restaurants to boutique hotels) while encouraging respectful reproduction of traditional dishes in consumer behaviour. Moreover, the positive influence of cultural curiosity on food culture sustainability highlights the potential for hospitality-driven digital platforms to act as informal educational tools (Hinrichs *et al.*, 2023). Hospitality businesses can collaborate with local chefs, food producers and cultural ambassadors to co-create content that promotes heritage preservation, food waste reduction and locally sourced dining experiences. In addition, audience segmentation based on CQ enables more effective targeting, ensuring that sustainability-focused hospitality messaging resonates with culturally receptive consumers. This strategic alignment enhances brand equity, guest loyalty and the long-term resilience of hospitality destinations and businesses.

The findings also suggest policy-level directions. Tourism boards and cultural heritage organizations could develop guidelines for culturally respectful food content, support collaborations between local chefs and digital creators, and incentivize campaigns that emphasize authenticity over commodification. Policymakers may also play a role in regulating misleading or culturally insensitive representations in digital food media, while simultaneously funding SMSV-driven initiatives that promote heritage preservation, sustainable consumption and community-based gastronomy. Interventions of this nature would ensure that the growing influence of short-form food content contributes not only to tourism competitiveness but also to the long-term protection of cultural identity and sustainability.

Limitations and future direction

This study is not without limitations. First, the use of convenience sampling in a single-country context (Italy, albeit with a diverse international sample) may restrict the generalizability of findings across different cultural settings, so future studies might attempt to collect a stratified or quota sample. Second, the study is based on a cross-sectional design relying on self-reported data where the focus has been on measuring behavioural intentions. Longitudinal approaches would also be valuable for capturing the evolving impact of SMSVs on shaping actual behavioural change. Moreover, this study did not investigate whether socio-demographic (e.g. age, gender, socio-economic status, cultural background/country of residence, etc.) and/or psychographic (e.g. personality traits) variables might exert a moderator effect. Future studies might consider filling this gap, thereby gaining the ability to better interpret the complexity of real-world decision-making in digital gastronomy. Future research could also attempt to examine how SMSVs can promote cultural learning and engagement without oversimplifying or commodifying food traditions. Finally, future research could benefit from methodological

triangulation, which involves qualitative approaches (e.g. interviews with content creators, hospitality operators or destination marketers) alongside quantitative surveys. Such triangulation would provide richer insights, validate the robustness of quantitative findings, and offer a more holistic understanding of how SMSVs shape cultural engagement and sustainability in hospitality.

Ethics statement

This study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was received from one of the authors.

Data availability

The data supporting this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements and participant privacy considerations.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

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