



A Qualitative Research on the Use of Gaziantep Pistachio in Creating Gastronomic Identity

ABSTRACT

This research explores the ways in which Gaziantep pistachios, regarded as one of the key gastronomic components of Gaziantep cuisine, are utilized by local chefs and how they enhance culinary diversity through both traditional practices and innovative applications. A qualitative research design was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 18 professional chefs operating in the province of Gaziantep. The collected data were examined through thematic analysis, including themes, codes, and sub-codes. Given the limited number of studies that directly investigate the link between Gaziantep pistachios and gastronomic identity, this study aims to contribute meaningfully to the existing literature. Furthermore, the research discusses Gaziantep pistachios within the framework of gastronomic identity and cultural heritage, offering insights for the formulation of local gastronomy strategies. All participants emphasized the distinctive characteristics of Gaziantep pistachios in terms of flavor, texture, aroma, and overall quality, highlighting their essential role in baklava, katmer, and traditional desserts. The chefs also proposed several recommendations for global promotion, including visual campaigns, themed festivals, and institutional collaborations. The findings confirm the significant role of Gaziantep pistachios in shaping regional gastronomic identity and demonstrate that this product constitutes a core element in the advancement of gastronomic tourism. Future studies are encouraged to examine the economic and cultural impacts of Gaziantep pistachios through quantitative approaches. Additionally, incorporating pistachios into gastronomy routes is expected to support regional promotion efforts positively.

Keywords: Gaziantep pistachio, gastronomic identity, local chefs, qualitative research.

INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy is one of the strongest reflections of a region's cultural identity. In countries such as Turkey, which have rich culinary cultures shaped by their historical and cultural heritage, local ingredients and culinary traditions are deeply connected to the history, social structure, and geographical conditions of their societies. In this context, Gaziantep stands out as one of Turkey's most important culinary cities, both in terms of its food culture and gastronomic heritage.

Gaziantep cuisine carries the traces of a tradition and culture dating back centuries, both in its flavors and the stories behind them. Gaziantep pistachios stand out as one of the brightest and most indispensable symbols of this culinary identity. Gaziantep pistachios, which are not only a cornerstone of Gaziantep cuisine but also of Turkey's gastronomic heritage, have earned their place with their unique flavor profile, aroma, quality, and traditional production methods. The production process of Gaziantep pistachios bears the traces of a deep-rooted tradition; this laborious process is a reflection of the knowledge and experience of the local people accumulated over many years. The soil, climate conditions, and meticulous agricultural practices where Gaziantep pistachios are grown make their quality and flavor unique.

In the local cuisine, Gaziantep pistachios are mostly used in baklava, katmer, pistachio sweets, and various desserts, and have become an integral part of the gastronomic identity. However, Gaziantep pistachios have gained great popularity internationally beyond these delicious products and have proven themselves as a brand. The journey that began in the local market has been discovered over time by gastronomy enthusiasts and chefs abroad, finding its place in international food festivals and prestigious restaurants. Gaziantep pistachios are not just an agricultural product but also a representative of the region's cultural identity, traditional culinary arts, and gastronomic heritage.

With these characteristics, Gaziantep pistachios contribute to the development of gastronomy tourism both regionally and nationally. It serves as an important cultural bridge in the world of gastronomy, finding its place not only in traditional recipes created by local chefs but also in innovative cuisines. The international promotion of Gaziantep pistachios and their recognition in broader markets make this unique product and Gaziantep cuisine even more visible worldwide. Gaziantep pistachios are an important element that reinforces the region's culinary identity, reflects its rich gastronomic heritage, and contributes to the local economy. The preservation and promotion of this unique

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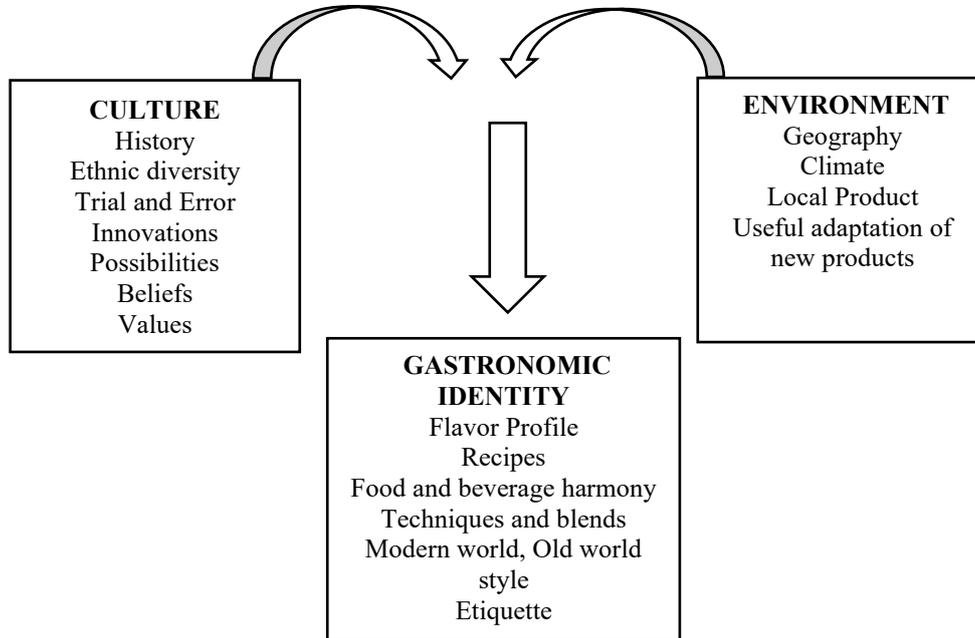
*This study is a revised full text of the abstract titled "A Qualitative Research on the Use of Gaziantep Pistachios in Creating Gastronomic Identity".

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product, which is an indispensable component of both traditional and modern gastronomy, plays a critical role in passing on Gaziantep's gastronomic heritage to future generations. The importance of creating a gastronomic identity is increasing today. The use of local products is of great importance when creating this identity of a region or city. The products produced in a society are closely related to the geography, climate, economic situation and production capacity of that society. Gastronomic identity is expressed as a concept used to describe the characteristics that are unique to a society, which will express the culture of the society related to nutrition, production and consumption of food.



Shape 1: Gastronomic Identity Model

Source: Danhi (2003); Harrington (2005a).

The 2 main elements (culture and environment) and sub-headings affecting gastronomic identity are presented in Figure 1. As can be seen, there are many different elements that create or affect gastronomic identity. These elements can be grouped in different categories.

When the gastronomic identity is examined with the element that creates that identity, studies to determine the position of local products in gastronomic identity; Studies such as bagel (Özbay, 2020), Ottoman strawberry (Köşker, Ercan, & Albuz, 2018), Van breakfast (Kılıçhan & Köşker, 2015), honey and kasar cheese (Balcı, 2024), Ardahan goose (Özbay, Semint, & Semint, 2020), çığ köfte (Baycar, 2022) are some of these examples. However, although Gaziantep pistachio has a unique position in the gastronomic identity of the Gaziantep region, studies on the subject have rarely been encountered. Gaziantep pistachios are known as an important part of the city's cultural and gastronomic heritage and are used in various ways in the local cuisine. In addition to being known for its flavor, pistachios have a significant impact on the city's agricultural culture, economy and social fabric. At the same time, the production, preparation for sale and marketing processes of pistachios contribute to the employment opportunities of the region (Ertürk, Geçer, Gülsoy, & Yalçın, 2015).

In this study, it is aimed to investigate how pistachio, which is considered as an important gastronomic element of Gaziantep cuisine, is processed by local chefs with innovative and traditional methods and how it contributes to the culinary richness of the city. Within the scope of the research, in the light of the data obtained from the interviews with the chefs working in Gaziantep, the role of Gaziantep pistachio in the dishes, the ways of use and the contribution of this use to the gastronomic identity of the city were evaluated.

In line with the objectives of the research, sub-objectives were created;

- ✓ This research aims to provide important clues for the protection and promotion of local food culture and to contribute to the strengthening of Gaziantep's gastronomic identity.
- ✓ In this research, it is aimed to examine how Gaziantep pistachio is used in creating a gastronomic identity.
- ✓ Through interviews with chefs and in-depth culinary research, it is aimed to provide information on how pistachio is used in various dishes in Gaziantep cuisine, the historical and cultural framework of this use, chefs' experiences with pistachio, and the contribution of pistachio to the local economy.

- ✓ In addition, another aim is to reveal the role of pistachio in protecting and strengthening the local gastronomic identity.

The sub-objectives guide the choice of data collection tool. In this direction, an interview form was prepared by asking the participants questions that would respond to the sub-objectives of the research.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Gastronomic identity is a concept defined by Harrington (2005) and states that the qualities of a region related to eating and drinking habits are shaped around two main topics such as environment and culture. Gastronomic identity is defined as a concept that covers a society's unique eating habits and components and the qualities that distinguish it from other societies (Diker & Deniz, 2017). In order to create a gastronomic identity, it is necessary to answer the questions of 'what, how, why and when' local products, which are a component of identity, are produced and consumed and to reveal the characteristic features of the products (Başat, Sandıkçı & Çelik, 2017).

Danhi (2003) conducted research on gastronomic identity and examined gastronomic identity under six headings: geography, history, ethnic diversity, culinary etiquette, well-known flavors and food recipes. He also emphasized that these elements are critical in determining culinary identity. Fox (2007), in his study on the formation of gastronomic identity and the promotion of existing identity, examined the discovery process of gastronomic identity in tourist destinations and interpreted the basic process of gastronomic identity with the titles of differentiation, aestheticization, authentication, symbolization and revitalization of the old.

Köşker et al. (2018) aimed to make a case study on the examination of Ottoman strawberry as a gastronomic identity element. In this direction, they collected data through face-to-face interviews with 22 participants. In the light of the data obtained, it was concluded that the Ottoman strawberry, which is unique to Karadeniz Ereğli, has been grown in the region for about 100 years, and is different from other strawberry types with its delicate structure, small and medium-sized appearance, different smell and flavor. It is also one of the results of the research that Ottoman strawberry is a fruit that can represent the gastronomic identity of Karadeniz Ereğli. The role of local agricultural products in creating gastronomic identity has become a subject of increasing interest today. In the case of Niğde province, it is seen that potato is one of the main agricultural products that shape the gastronomic identity of the region. In the research conducted by Kemer (2021), it was emphasized that Niğde potato differs from other potato varieties with its taste, diversity and nutritional value and has an important place in terms of regional identity. It was also stated that environmental protection measures and the support of local governments are necessary for the sustainability of this product.

Demirses, Kement and Zeybek Hüsem (2023), conducted a research to evaluate the existing local gastronomic identity of Ordu province. In this context, they selected Çamaş district as a sample and conducted face-to-face interviews with local people. In the light of the data obtained, it was concluded that Çamaş district has a strong gastronomic identity in the activities and traditions and customs around the gastronomic identity issue. Balcı (2024) investigated the effect of honey and cheddar cheese on the formation of gastronomic identities of Ardahan and Kars provinces. In this direction, the effect of honey and cheddar cheese on gastronomic identity in the axis of environment and culture relationship was analyzed. As a result of the research, the importance of culture in the formation of gastronomic identity was emphasized. The differences of honey and kashkaval produced in Ardahan and Kars provinces compared to those produced in other provinces were determined and it was concluded that gastronomic culture positively differentiates these provinces.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to assess the gastronomic identity potential of Gaziantep pistachio. In line with this objective, a qualitative research approach was employed. Qualitative research is characterized by the use of data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, enabling researchers to explore phenomena, perceptions, and events within their natural context in a comprehensive and holistic manner (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Among qualitative data collection techniques, the interview method was preferred, and a semi-structured interview form was developed. Semi-structured interviews provide flexibility to participants during the response process, thereby enhancing the depth and quality of the collected data (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interview questions were designed by the researchers in accordance with the objectives of the study.

Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants who could provide rich and relevant information regarding Gaziantep pistachio and gastronomic identity. Within this framework, interviews were conducted with 18 professional chefs working in Gaziantep province. The interview questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Research Questions

*In which dishes do you use Gaziantep pistachio in your kitchen? Which products or foods do you think it goes well with, and what are your suggestions?
*How do you evaluate the contribution of Gaziantep pistachio to the local cuisine?
*What can you say about the taste and texture of Gaziantep pistachio? Which characteristics do you think make it stand out?
*Which techniques do you prefer when using Gaziantep pistachios in cooking? For example; direct use, grinding and pulverizing or are there any other methods?
*What can be done to promote Gaziantep pistachios internationally? What are your suggestions?
*Finally, is there anything you would like to say about the use of Gaziantep pistachios in the kitchen?

Source: (Created by the authors)

The data gathered from the interviews were subjected to thematic analysis using the Maxqda software. During the analysis process, data were systematically categorized into themes, codes, and sub-codes. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were taken into consideration (Merriam, 2018). The consistency observed in participants' responses indicates that the findings are coherent and analytically sound. Efforts were made to avoid subjective interpretations and to maintain an objective reporting style throughout the analysis. Additionally, data collection was concluded when responses began to repeat, indicating data saturation. Participants were coded as "P1, P2, P3..." in order to ensure confidentiality.

FINDINGS

Direct quotations were used to reflect the views of the participants in a striking way. While analyzing the interview data, coding was done and then the main theme, codes and sub-codes were determined by approaching the study holistically. In this study, word frequency analysis was also conducted to design a word cloud. Demographic information of the participants is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Educational Status	Tenure in the Profession
P1	44	Male	High School	20 years
P2	32	Male	Bachelor's Degree	12 years
P3	46	Female	High School	18 years
P4	42	Male	Primary Education	25 years
P5	52	Male	High School	33 years
P6	38	Male	Associate Degree	10 years
P7	55	Female	Primary Education	32 years
P8	74	Male	Primary Education	55 years
P9	46	Male	Associate Degree	30 years
P10	39	Male	Bachelor's Degree	21 years
P11	38	Male	Associate Degree	15 years
P12	37	Male	High School	15 years
P13	54	Male	Primary Education	35 years
P14	45	Male	High School	30 years
P15	43	Male	Bachelor's Degree	23 years
P16	68	Male	Primary Education	35 years
P17	47	Male	Associate Degree	27 years
P18	49	Male	High School	30 years

Source: (Created by the authors)

Participants reside in Gaziantep province. Of the interviewees, 2 were female and 16 were male. When the age ranges were analyzed, it was seen that the majority of the participants were between the ages of 40-49. Considering the educational status of the participants, it was determined that six participants were high school graduates, five participants were primary school graduates, three participants were associate degree graduates and three participants were bachelor's degree graduates. When the tenure of the participants in the profession was analyzed, it was concluded that they worked in the kitchen between 10 years and 55 years.

Findings related to interview questions

Interview question 1: In which dishes do you use Gaziantep pistachio in your kitchen? Which products or foods do you think it goes well with and what are your suggestions?

Most of the participants answered baklava as the first question in the research, which is the question of the foods in which pistachio is used and the foods with which it is compatible. Subsequently, the answers of katmer, pistachio kebab, kadayif, sweet pastry, stuffed meatballs, stuffed rice and dairy desserts were reached. The findings related to the themes, codes and sub-codes are presented in Figure 2.

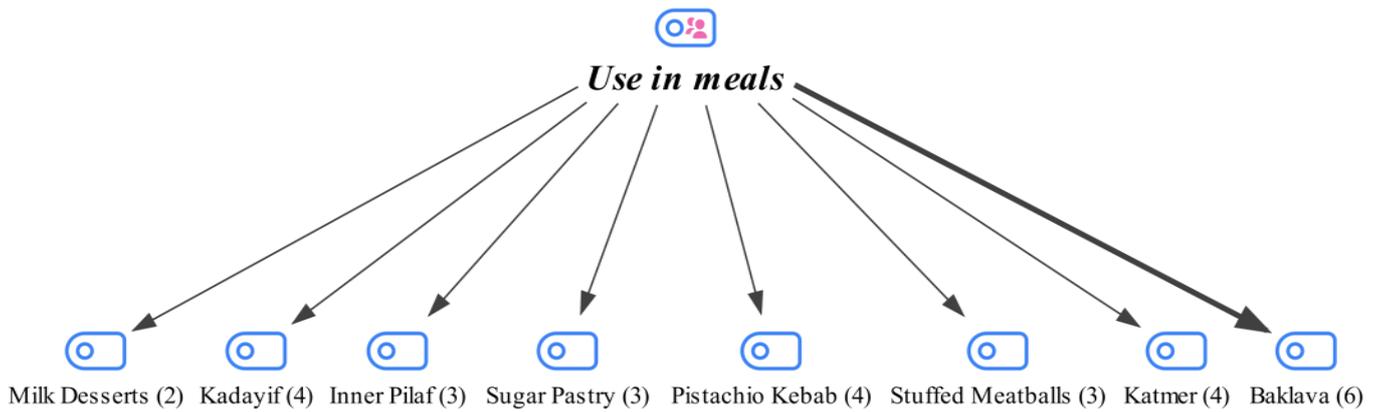


Figure 2: Dishes in which Gaziantep Pistachio is used in the kitchen and its harmony

Examples of the participants' responses regarding their suggestions on the foods that pistachios are compatible with are as follows:

P5; "If you want to taste Gaziantep pistachios, only those grown in Gaziantep should be used, because there is a difference in taste".

P13; "We can use them in the new trendy bowl dishes, pastas and pizzas".

P18; "It can be included in spice mixtures."

Interview question 2: How do you evaluate the contribution of Gaziantep pistachio to the local cuisine?

When the participants were asked about the contribution of Gaziantep pistachio to the local cuisine, it was found that all of the participants were of the opinion that it made a positive contribution. It is among the findings that the majority of the participants think that Antep pistachio makes the local cuisine stand out more than the cuisines of other regions. In addition, the fact that all participants presented positive opinions clearly presents the position of Antep pistachio according to local chefs. Following the sub-code of being at the forefront (7 times), when the contributions of Antep pistachio to the local cuisine are examined, branding, its place in the journey of becoming a gastronomy city, the opportunities it provides nationally and internationally, wide employment opportunities and agriculture are among the most repeated answers. The themes, codes and sub-codes are given in Figure 3.

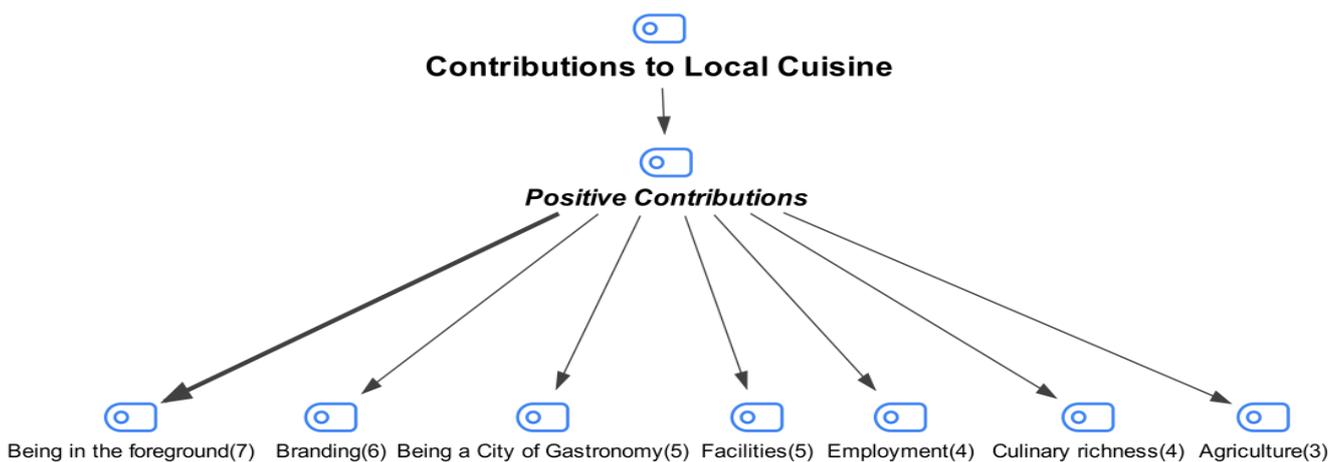


Figure 3: Opinions on the Contribution of Gaziantep Pistachio to the Local Cuisine

Interview question 3: What can you say about the taste and texture of Gaziantep pistachio? Which features do you think make it stand out?

When the answers given to the third question of the research are analyzed, the opinions of all participants about the taste and texture of Antep pistachio are positive. They stated that pistachios stand out with their unique taste, quality, color and aroma. Main themes, codes and sub-codes were created for the answers given by the participants. The findings are presented in Figure 4.

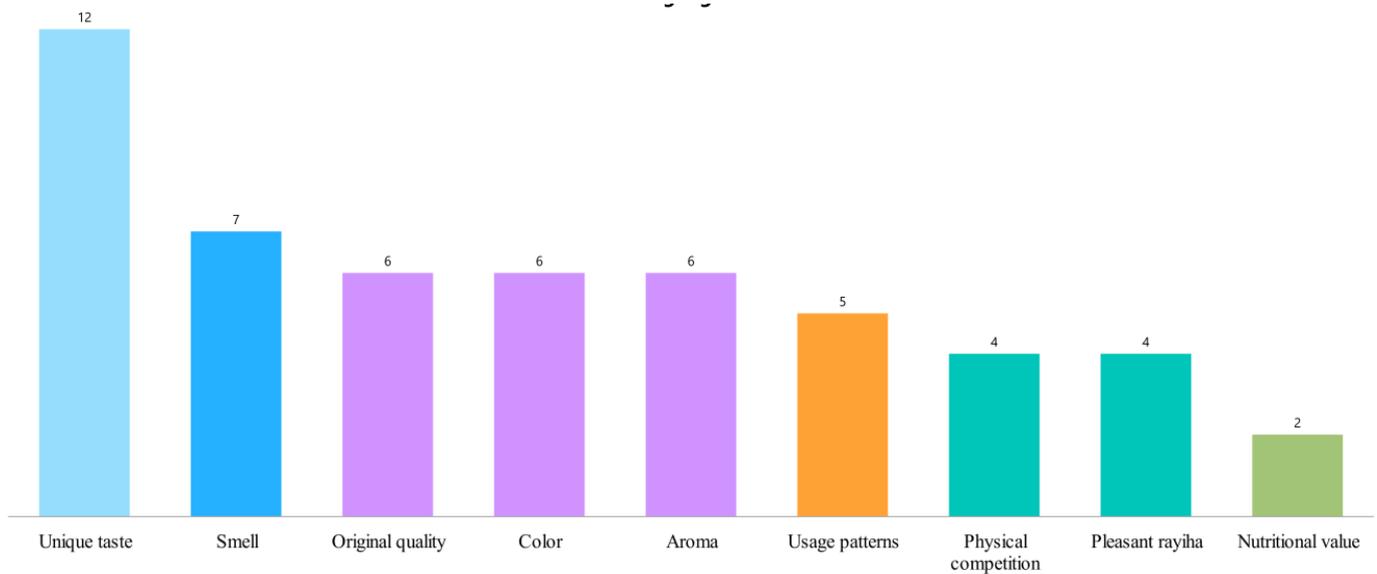


Figure 4: Responses Regarding the Taste and Texture of Gaziantep Pistachio

The statements of the participants regarding the table are as follows:

P5 “It has a unique taste, it gives a different aroma at different stages.”

P10 “Pistachio stands out with its aroma and smell. Its aroma, color and good taste are indisputable.”

P13 “Its color and nutritional value are as important as its taste.”

Interview question 4: Which techniques do you prefer when using Gaziantep pistachios in cooking, e.g. direct use, grinding and pulverizing, or are there other methods?

As it is understood from the codes and sub-codes presented in Figure 5, it is determined that pistachios are generally used in large grains, by grinding and whole. The repeated usage techniques in the interviews were found to be direct use (whole) (9 times), coarse-grained (8 times), grinding (8 times), in small pieces (5 times), peeling (5 times) and roasting (4 times).

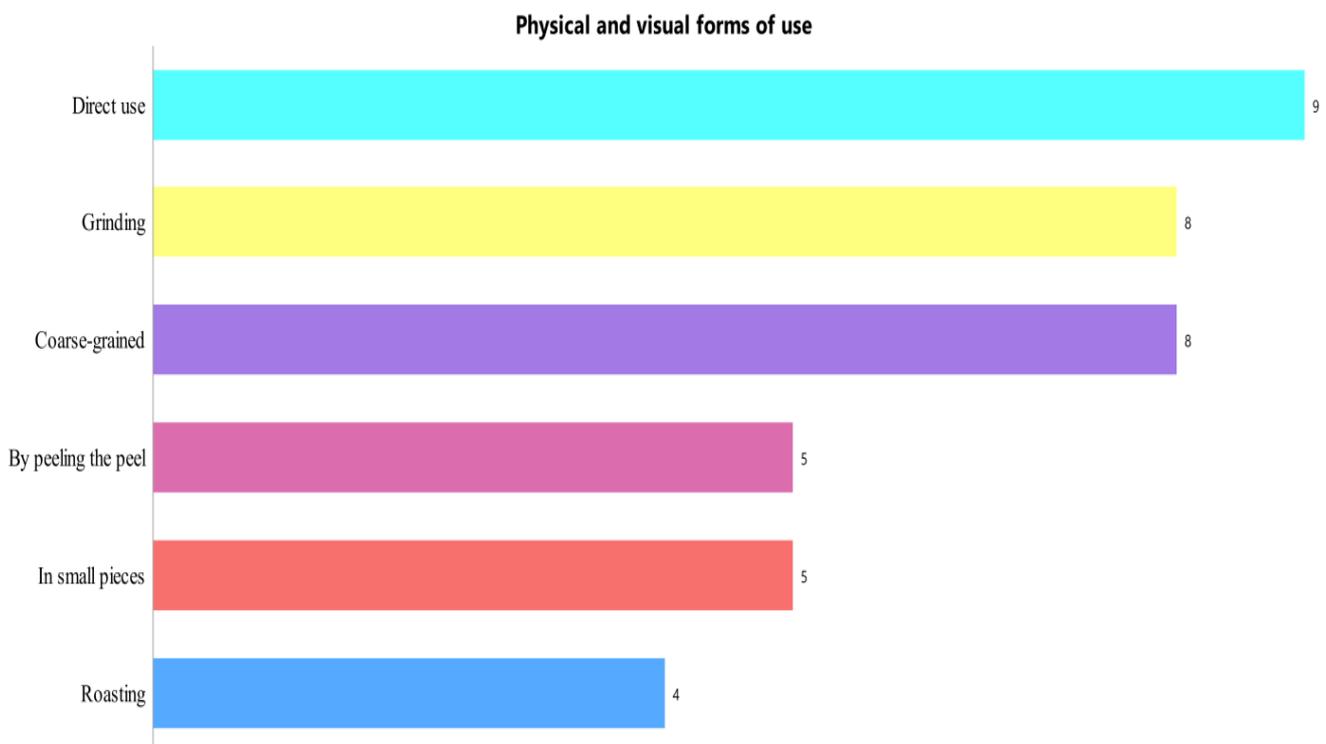


Figure 5: Preferred Techniques for Using Gaziantep Pistachio in Cooking

Interview question 5: What can be done to promote Gaziantep pistachio in the international arena? What are your suggestions?

When the responses were analyzed, the participants stated that there is no general promotion and marketing problem specific to Antep pistachio. When the participants were asked about their promotional suggestions, the responses are given in Figure 6.

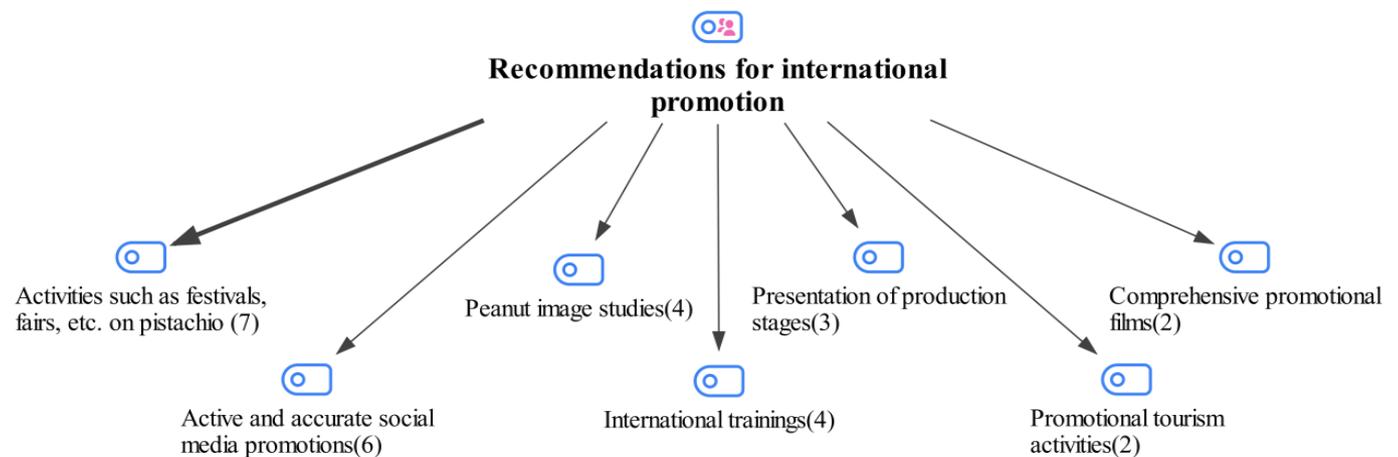


Figure 6: Findings on Participants' Suggestions for International Promotion

Sample statements containing the suggestions 1 of the participants are as follows;

P5 “By explaining the differences in the areas of use. (By explaining which product should be used for which product at which stage, for example: early harvested pistachio for baklava, etc.)”

P6 “We show the invention of that flavor one-on-one by shooting a short video from the seedling state of the pistachio we are growing traditionally and the grown pistachio.”

P17 “We can go further by doing R&D with universities, NGOs and professional chefs who are dedicated to cooking.”

P18 “A competition can be organized and creative ideas can come out with pistachios.”

Interview Question 6: Finally, is there anything you would like to say about the use of Gaziantep pistachio in the kitchen?

The last question of the research was aimed at getting the general opinions of the participants about the use of pistachios in the kitchen. In this context, the majority of the participants expressed their opinions. Participant statements regarding this situation are as follows;

P1 “There is no other pistachio in the kitchen that can compete with Gaziantep pistachio, we should be aware of this.”

P11 “We should expand the product range by using pistachios in different products and sauces”,

P16 “I think that all public and private sectors and producers have a great duty to recognize the value of this food that the world has given us as a chance”,

P17 “The success of Gaziantep pistachio has been accepted and confirmed by many chefs today, but we have some difficulties with the price.”

As a result of the coding process of the data transferred to the Maxqda program, the word cloud showing the most repeated words is shown in Figure 7. In the research, the most frequently used words in all responses to the interview questions were analyzed and a word cloud was designed. While filtering the words in the prepared cloud, the condition of being repeated at least 2 times among the answers was sought. In this respect, the first words that stand out in the word cloud are “Gaziantep, Local, Richness and Turkish”. As a result of the data visualization using the word cloud, it can be said that the words that stand out are compatible with the research topic. On the other hand, these words contain clues to present the common thoughts of the participants. The most frequently used words of the participants with this word cloud are presented in Figure 7.

In conclusion, Antep pistachios play a multidimensional role in Gaziantep's gastronomic identity from a strategic, cultural, and economic perspective. However, a holistic approach is needed to sustainably preserve this value and ensure it receives the recognition it deserves at the national and international levels. Collaboration between local producers, culinary professionals, public institutions, civil society organizations, and academic circles will be decisive in establishing a pistachio-based gastronomic vision. Through this vision, pistachios will not only be recognized as a product but also as a story, a culture, and a brand, thereby achieving their rightful place on the global stage.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes significantly to the theoretical discourse on the formation of gastronomic identity from the perspective of local products, particularly by examining pistachios from Antep as a case study. By utilizing qualitative data obtained from the insights of experienced local chefs, the research supports and expands upon the conceptual models proposed by Harrington (2005) and Danhi (2003), which emphasize the interdependence of environmental, cultural, and social factors in shaping regional food identities.

The findings reveal that Antep pistachios function not only as a culinary ingredient but also as symbolic carriers of cultural memory, identity, and continuity. This aligns with food studies theories that position gastronomy as a vehicle for intangible cultural heritage and regional distinctiveness. By demonstrating how a single local product can function across multiple dimensions—economic, cultural, symbolic, and sensory—the research contributes to the emerging literature on gastronomic branding and regional foodscapes.

Additionally, the study expands theoretical understandings of chefs' roles not only as practitioners of culinary arts but also as cultural mediators bridging tradition and innovation. Their capacity to reinterpret local products in both traditional and contemporary gastronomic contexts supports a dynamic model of culinary transmission, adaptation, and identity reinforcement. By addressing the under-explored intersection between single-origin ingredients and regional gastronomic identity, this research lays the groundwork for future theoretical explorations in areas such as cultural sustainability, culinary tourism, and the socio-political dimensions of food heritage. It argues that interdisciplinary approaches integrating gastronomy, anthropology, cultural geography, and economics are needed to fully understand the layered importance of local food products in identity formation.

Limitations and future research

As with any research, this study has some limitations. The study is limited to a single region (Gaziantep), which limits the generalizability of the findings to broader geographical contexts. Data was collected only from professional chefs and the perspectives of other stakeholders such as farmers, consumers or food historians could not be included. Future studies could expand the geographical scope to include other pistachio-growing provinces in Southeast Turkey, allowing for comparative analyses.

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