ARYAVART SHODH VIKAS PATRIKA
RNI TITLED NO. UPBIL04292
RNI REG. NO. UPBIL/2014/66218 **PP. No.- 116-120**
I S S N NO. - 2347 – 2944 (Print)
e–I S S N NO.- 2582 – 2454 (Online)
Vol.-20, No.- III, Issues-41, YEAR- July-Sept. 2026

Digital Foodscapes And Culinary Identity: A Sociological Study Of Social Media And The Unesco "Creative City Of Gastronomy" Lucknow

Nidhi Bharti
Research scholar, University of Lucknow (U.P.) India

Received-22.08.2026, Revised-30.08.2026, Accepted-07.09.2026, **E-mail:nidhibharti.99r @gmail.com**

Abstract: ***This research explores the intersection of digital media and urban food culture within the context of Lucknow, India, a designated UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. As traditional foodways migrate into the digital realm, "digital foodscapes" have emerged as powerful platforms that redefine culinary identity, heritage, and social practice.***

Through a sociological lens, this study examines how social media, specifically Instagram and YouTube influences the perception and consumption of Lucknow's historic culinary landscape. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach,and semi-structured interviews with traditional restaurateurs, and consumers.The study investigate two primary dimensions:The Mediatization of Heritage that how digital platforms curate and potentially commodify Lucknow's "Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb" (syncretic culture) for a global audience and the role of digital food photography and "food porn" in performing middle-class identity and local pride.

Preliminary findings suggest that while digital foodscapes democratize visibility for certain hidden culinary gems, they also risk standardizing diverse gastronomic traditions into "aesthetic-first" experiences. This research contributes to the burgeoning field of digital sociology by illustrating how virtual representations of food are not merely reflections of reality but active participants in the ongoing reconstruction of urban culinary identity.

Key words:Digital Foodscapes, Lucknow, UNESCO Creative City, Culinary Identity, Awadhi Cuisine.

INTRODUCTION- Food is not merely a biological necessity but a profound social and cultural phenomenon. InLucknow ,the famed city of Nawabs ,cuisine represents centuries of cultural exchange, aesthetic refinement , and communal identity -"a living embodiment of Ganga - Jamuni tehzeeb" means a shared cultural harmony and blended lifestyle between Hindus and Muslims in Northern India. With the UNESCO designation of Lucknow as a "Creative City of Gastronomy", the city's food culture has entered a new phase of global visibility. Simultaneously digital media platforms such as instagram and youtube and online food delivery apps like swiggy and zomato have become central in shaping how Lucknow's cuisine is perceived, performed and consumed both locally and globally. The best we can say is Mediatization of culture and society (Stig Hjarvard,2013) analyses how media spread to ,intertwined with ,influences social institutions and cultural phenomenon. .

The UCCN (UNESCO Creative Cities Network) is a global initiative launched in 2004 that brings together over 400 member cities across more than 100 countries to place creativity, culture, and sustainable urban development at the heart of their local planning and is currently formed by 350 cities and covers seven creative fields: Crafts & Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Music and Media Arts. Since the field was introduced to the UCCN in 2005, the Gastronomy subnetwork has grown to a total of 56 designated Cities of Gastronomy in 34 countries and 68.6 million inhabitants.. The criteria for Creative City of Gastronomy include a city must have a rich culinary heritage, traditional ingredients and skills, promote sustainability and food education, foster community participation and cultural exchange through food,etc.

The benefits of becoming a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy is the members of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network will have the opportunity to learn, get inspired, and partner with other member cities in the following key areas of action (UCCN Mission Statement) like sharing experiences, knowledge, and best practices;pilot projects, partnerships, and initiatives associating the public and private sectors, and civil society;professional and artistic exchange programmes and networks;studies, research, and evaluations on the experience of the Creative Cities;policies and measures for sustainable urban development and communication and awareness-raising activities.

Lucknow has officially been declared a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy during the 43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.The recognition honors Lucknow's rich Awadhi cuisine, known for kebabs, biryanis, kormas, and sheermal, reflecting its culinary artistry, hospitality, and cultural heritage.Lucknow is now the 2nd Indian city after Hyderabad (2019) to achieve this distinction.

Lucknow is located on the fertile plains of the Indo-Gangetic basin. to some as the "Paris of the East", the city has been a cradle of Awadhi civilization, blending Persian, Mughal, Hindu, and local traditions into a unique ganja-jamuni tehzeeb expressed through art, music, dance, architecture, and, most

I S S N NO. - 2347 – 2944 (Print)
e–I S S N NO.- 2582 – 2454 (Online)
Vol.-20, No.- III, Issues-41, YEAR- July-Sept. 2026

notably, its rich cuisine. Lucknow's neighbourhoods, historically nurtured skilled artisans, halwais (sweet makers), and bawarchis (royal chefs), contributing to its reputation as a hub of refinement and epicurean excellence.Characterized by the diversity of its culinary and cultural events, Lucknow hosts festivals such as 'Lucknow Mahotsav', 'Awadh Mahotsav', and the 'Sanatkada Festival', attracting nearly 5.8 million visitors annually. The city's heritage markets, 'Hazratganj', 'Chowk', and 'Aminabad', remain thriving centres of street food and traditional crafts, while heritage restaurants and contemporary dining continue to preserve Awadhi cuisine, from Tunday kebabs to dum biryani and sheermal. Educational institutions, including the Indian Institute of Management and the University of Lucknow, offer courses and research in food, hospitality, and cultural studies, supporting the development of culinary professionals and creative entrepreneurs.

The Lucknow Municipal Corporation actively promotes gastronomy as a driver of cultural and economic development. Initiatives such as the Annual Farmer's Fair and the Indian Food Expo connect producers, chefs, and policymakers to advance organic agriculture, sustainable food practices, and innovations in food processing. Culinary tourism, combined with heritage preservation, provides livelihoods for thousands of artisans, cooks, and small businesses, while showcasing the region's agricultural bounty.

As a Creative City of Gastronomy, Lucknow is dedicated to: Preserving and transmitting traditional Awadhi culinary knowledge through education, workshops and festivals; Promoting sustainable farming, responsible consumption and the use of local ingredients;Supporting culinary innovation and entrepreneurship as a driver of economic growth; and Strengthening the link between food, culture and tourism to celebrate Lucknow's identity globally. So this study explores the intersection of culinary heritage and digital culture analyzing how social media and food delivery apps transform Lucknow's traditional food practices , identities and meanings within a globalised framework.

Objectives Of The Study-

- To examine how food delivery apps influence eating habits in Lucknow.
- To analyze changes in traditional food consumption due to digital apps.
- To explore class ,age and gender differences in app based food consumption

Research Question-

- How social media reshapes the cultural identity of Lucknow?
- What are perceptions of local food vendors and consumers toward the digital representation of lucknow's cuisine?
- What class , age or generational differences exist in digital food engagement?

Theoretical Framework- The theory Mediatization of culture and society by Stig Hjarvard in 2013 analyses how media spread to ,intertwined with ,influences social institutions and cultural phenomenon. It argues how cultural practices are shaped by media logic.

The Glocalization theory by Roberston in 1995 argued that globalization is not just westernization or a force that erases local identity. Instead, the global and local constantly shape one another .This shows blending of local food traditions with global digital influences.

Also the Mcdonaldization of society by George Ritzer in 1993 explains how the fast food industry takes more and more sectors of normal daily life.

Research Methodology- Through a sociological lens, this study explores how social media, specifically Instagram and YouTube influences the perception and consumption of Lucknow's historic culinary landscape. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach and semi-structured interviews with traditional restaurateurs, and consumers. The purposive sampling technique is used to collect data.The data will be collected from 25 residents of Lucknow (age 18-45) which includes 5 restaurants and street vendors and 20 consumers .

Data interpretation and Analysis- For the present study, a sample of 25 respondents from Lucknow has been considered to examine the relationship between digital foodscapes, social media, and culinary identity. The sample consists of two categories: restaurant representatives and food consumers.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Category

Category	Number	Percentage
Restaurant owners/managers or representatives	5	20%
Food consumers	20	80%
Total	**25**	**100%**

I S S N NO. - 2347 – 2944 (Print)
e–I S S N NO.- 2582 – 2454 (Online)
Vol.-20, No.- III, Issues-41, YEAR- July-Sept. 2026

Table 1 indicates that 80% of the respondents are food consumers, while 20% represent restaurants. The larger proportion of consumers enables the study to explore food preferences, social media usage, and perceptions of culinary identity from the perspective of food audiences.

The inclusion of five restaurant representatives provides insights into the production, promotion, and commercialization of Lucknow's culinary traditions.

Socio-Demographic Profile of Food Consumers

Table 2: Age-Wise Distribution of Food Consumers

Age group	Number of respondents	percentage
18-25	8	40%
26-35	6	30%
36-45	4	20%
Above 45 yrs	2	10%
Total	**20**	**100%**

The age distribution indicates that younger respondents constitute a substantial proportion of the proposed consumer sample. Respondents aged 18–25 years account for 40%, while those between 26 and 35 years constitute 30%. The youngsters engage more frequently on social media and food delivery apps. They feel digital platforms contribute visibility and reinterpretation of traditional culinary practices.

Social Media Usage among Food Consumers

Table 3: Social Media Platforms Used for Food-Related Content

Social media platforms	No. of respondent	percentage
Instagram	12	60%
Youtube	5	25%
facebook	2	10%
Other	1	5%
Total	**20**	**100%**

The data indicate that Instagram is the most frequently used platform for accessing food-related content among the selected consumers, with 60% of respondents identifying it as their primary platform. YouTube accounts for 25%, while Facebook and other platforms account for the remaining 15%.

These findings suggest that visually oriented platforms play an important role in the digital circulation of food-related information. Images and videos of kebabs, biryani, korma, sheermal, and other foods associated with Lucknow contribute to the visibility of local culinary traditions.

From a sociological perspective, such platforms came as digital foodscapes in which food is not only consumed but also photographed, narrated, shared, and culturally interpreted.

Influence of Social Media on Food Choices

Table 4: Influence of Social Media on Food Consumption

Response	No. of respondent	percentage
Strongly agree that social media influences their food choices	5	25%
Agree	7	35%
Neither agree nor disagree	4	20%
Disagree	3	15%
Strongly disagree	1	5%
total	**20**	**100%**

I S S N NO. - 2347 – 2944 (Print)
e–I S S N NO.- 2582 – 2454 (Online)
Vol.-20, No.- III, Issues-41, YEAR- July-Sept. 2026

The findings indicate that 60% of food consumers either agree or strongly agree that social media influences their food choices. Meanwhile, 20% remain neutral, and another 20% disagree or strongly disagree.

These responses suggest that social media influence food-related decisions among a considerable proportion of the selected consumers. Food reviews, recommendations from content creators, and visually appealing presentations encourage individuals to visit restaurants or try particular dishes.

From the perspective of digital sociology, social media functions as a mediating space between food producers and consumers.

Awareness of Lucknow's Culinary Heritage

Table 5: Awareness of Traditional Lucknow Cuisine

Response	No. of respondent	Percentage
Highly aware	6	30%
Moderately aware	9	45%
Slightly aware	4	20%
Not aware	1	5%
Total	**20**	**100%**

The table suggests that 75% of the selected consumers report being highly or moderately aware of Lucknow's traditional cuisine. This indicates a substantial level of familiarity with the city's food heritage within the sample.

Awareness of traditional cuisine contributes to the recognition of food as a form of cultural identity. Dishes associated with Awadhi culinary traditions represent historical memory, family practices, regional belonging, and cultural continuity.

Awareness of UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy

Table 6: Awareness of Lucknow's UNESCO Designation

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Fully aware of designation	5	25%
Having limited knowledge	6	30%
Not aware	9	45%
Total	**20**	**100%**

The data indicate that 55% of the selected consumers are either fully aware of Lucknow's UNESCO designation or have heard about it but possess limited knowledge. The remaining 45% report no awareness of the designation.

This finding raises an important sociological question concerning the relationship between institutional cultural recognition and public awareness. UNESCO recognition provide an international platform for the promotion of local culinary traditions, but its cultural significance depends partly on how information reaches residents and local food communities.

The data also suggest the need to examine how the designation is communicated through social media, local institutions, tourism initiatives, and community-level activities

Restaurant Representatives and Digital Food Promotion

Table 7: Social Media Usage among Five Restaurant Representatives

Social media usage for business promotion	No. of restaurants	Percentage
Use social media regularly	4	80%
Use social media occasionally	1	20%
Do not use social media	0	0%
Total	**5**	**100%**

I S S N NO. - 2347 – 2944 (Print)
e–I S S N NO.- 2582 – 2454 (Online)
Vol.-20, No.- III, Issues-41, YEAR- July-Sept. 2026

The data suggest that four out of five restaurant representatives use social media regularly to promote their businesses, while one uses it occasionally.

This pattern indicates that digital platforms serve as important promotional spaces for restaurants operating in Lucknow. Restaurants use photographs, short videos, customer reviews, and digital advertising to communicate information about their food offerings and culinary traditions.

From a sociological perspective, digital food promotion influences how traditional cuisine is packaged and presented to contemporary consumers. The presentation of dishes online emphasize heritage, taste, luxury, hospitality, or innovation, depending on the intended audience.

Conclusion - The findings indicate that three of the five restaurant representatives consider increased visibility of traditional food to be a major contribution of social media. One respondent emphasizes customer engagement, while another highlights culinary innovation.

The findings suggest that restaurant representatives perceive digital platforms as more than commercial marketing tools. They also regard them as mechanisms for communicating the cultural significance of traditional dishes.

At the same time, digital promotion encourages the adaptation of traditional recipes, presentation styles, and dining experiences to suit changing consumer preferences. Such changes can be examined through the sociological concepts of cultural transmission, commodification, and cultural transformation.

REFERENCES

1. Hjarvard ,Stig (2013).The Mediatization of Culture and Society.
2. Ritzer, G. (2018). The McDonaldization of society: Into the digital age (9th ed.). SAGE Publications.
3. Robertson, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. In M. Featherstone, S. Lash, & R. Robertson (Eds.), Global modernities (pp. 25–44). SAGE Publications.
4. UNESCO(2019). Creative Cities Network : Lucknow- city of Gastronomy.https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/lucknow-joins-unesco-creative-cities-network-city-gastronomy.

*****