

CONSUMER EVALUATIONS OF RESTAURANTS IN BOLU ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS: THE TRIPADVISOR CASE

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Abstract

This study examines user reviews of restaurants in Bolu on Tripadvisor. The research uses a qualitative approach and employs descriptive content analysis as the analytical method. A total of 274 user reviews from 10 restaurants that provided meaningful content and were posted between January and December 2025 were analyzed. The findings indicate that most reviews were positive, with taste being the most frequently emphasized dimension. Analyses of food and beverage offerings confirm the meat-based nature of Bolu cuisine, while local dishes such as mantı, gözleme, and soups strongly reflect the region's gastronomic identity on digital platforms. Additionally, staff and service quality, atmosphere and ambiance, cleanliness and hygiene, and price-value perception were identified as key themes shaping the user experience. Overall, the results support the influence of digital user evaluations on restaurant image and consumer preference decisions, and demonstrate that both product quality and service performance in gastronomic destinations are perceived and evaluated through online platforms.

Keywords: Bolu, restaurants, consumer evaluations, TripAdvisor, digital marketing

JEL Classification: M31, L83, Z33

1. Introduction

With the widespread use of social media and online communication platforms, individuals' information access patterns and purchasing behaviors have undergone significant changes. Social networks such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, as well as review platforms like Trivago and TripAdvisor, have become key channels where users share experiences and potential consumers benefit from these insights (Eryılmaz & Şengül, 2016). In particular, positive or negative user reviews on online platforms play a critical role in consumers' decision-making processes (Erdem & Yay, 2017; Eren & Çelik, 2017). User-generated reviews, which are perceived as non-commercial, are often regarded as more sincere, trustworthy, and credible by consumers (Kutluk & Arpacı, 2016). In this context, TripAdvisor holds a prominent position as a platform where users gather information about hotels, restaurants, and destinations, shaping their travel plans based on the experiences of other travelers (Miguens, Baggio & Costa, 2008).

This study analyzes user reviews of restaurants in Bolu on the TripAdvisor platform to identify the key factors influencing customer satisfaction and perception. The research focuses on users' experiences with food preferences, service quality, ambiance, hygiene, and price perception, and examines patterns in both positive and negative feedback. Bolu, a region with a rich culinary tradition and significant gastronomic tourism potential, attracts both domestic and international visitors. Thus, analyzing online reviews from tourists and local residents provides valuable insights into consumer behavior and offers practical implications for improving service quality in restaurants.

Previous studies on Bolu have examined various aspects of its gastronomy, including the impact of local cuisine on travel intentions (Şengül, 2018), the role of bee products in gastronomic tourism (Akar-

Şahingöz & İnci, 2018), the availability of traditional dishes in restaurants (Erdem et al., 2018), the contribution of Geographical Indication (GI) products to sustainable gastronomic tourism (Çavuş & Eker, 2022), and tourists' perceptions of Bolu's gastronomy (Özdemir & Çelebi, 2021). Additionally, Şimşek and Aytuğar (2021) investigated Bolu's gastronomic tourism potential and its integration with the local tourism sector, while Süzer (2025) analyzed online reviews of the ten highest-rated restaurants in the region.

Despite the growing body of literature, most studies have focused on destination potential, regional products, or overall gastronomic perceptions, with limited research examining restaurant experiences from a comprehensive consumer perspective based on online user reviews. Prior research often concentrated on specific restaurant groups, highly rated establishments, or quantitative datasets, limiting the inclusion of both positive and negative customer experiences. This study addresses this gap by analyzing authentic user reviews from all restaurants in Bolu using a qualitative content analysis approach. The research adopts a holistic perspective, examining multidimensional factors affecting customer satisfaction, including food and beverage quality, service performance, ambiance, hygiene, and price perception. In doing so, the study offers a unique contribution to the academic literature and provides practical implications for restaurant operators in Bolu.

2. Literature review

2.1. *The culinary culture of Bolu*

Bolu, with its abundant natural resources and longstanding agricultural heritage, stands out as a significant gastronomic destination, featuring a culinary culture that blends traditional and modern elements. Due to its extensive forests, a wide variety of edible mushroom species grow in the region; these mushrooms are used in many local recipes, including pastries, rice dishes, soups, and meat-based meals, enhancing the diversity and distinctiveness of Bolu cuisine (Öztürk, 2008). Additionally, as poultry farming has become a major economic activity in recent years, products such as chicken and turkey have become more prominent in Bolu cuisine, making the connection between local culinary production and economic transformation more apparent (Özçelik, 2019).

Bolu has the potential to become one of Turkey's leading gastronomic centers, not only because of its diverse natural products but also because of its long-standing culinary tradition and skilled workforce. Bolu's gastronomic significance extends beyond its natural produce; the city also benefits from a deep-rooted culinary heritage and qualified human capital, positioning it as one of Turkey's top centers for gastronomy (Erdoğan, 2007; Hoşcan, Genç & Şengül, 2016). The roles played by chefs from Mengen in the Ottoman Palace kitchens during the recruitment of cooks from Anatolia in the seventeenth century were decisive in institutionalizing Bolu's culinary culture, and this tradition has been passed down to the present day as a professional heritage (Arman, 2011). This historical continuity has helped preserve the authenticity of Bolu cuisine and supported the development of a strong, place-specific gastronomic identity.

Contemporary gastronomy tourism literature emphasizes that local culinary cultures should be regarded not only as elements of cultural heritage but also as strategic resources that enhance destination image and create competitive advantage (Bessière, 1998; Hjalager & Richards, 2002). In this context, Bolu demonstrates high potential for gastronomy tourism through its strong association with the culinary profession, geographically indicated products, local food culture, gastronomy-themed festivals, and distinctive local products (Şimşek & Aytuğar, 2021). Presenting local flavors in authentic settings and fostering trust in Bolu cuisine contribute to building a strong brand value for the destination in gastronomy (Şengül, 2018). Furthermore, integrating local cuisine with an experience-based tourism approach is considered a key factor in increasing visitor satisfaction and repeat visitation intentions (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Okumus, Koseoglu & Ma, 2018). From this perspective, Bolu cuisine represents an important cultural and economic asset that should be addressed within the framework of sustainable gastronomy and local development (Aksoy & Sezgi, 2015).

2.2. Feedback on digital platforms

The rise of digitalization and social media has become a central factor shaping consumer behavior in the tourism industry. User-generated content (UGC) is more influential in potential tourists' decision-making processes than traditional marketing tools, while social media has evolved from simply promoting destinations to serving as a strategic instrument for customer relationship management and consumer trend analysis (Khan et al., 2022).

Online review platforms such as TripAdvisor play a critical role in travel planning. For example, over 60% of American travelers and more than 80% of travelers in Turkey rely on user-generated reviews when planning their trips (Okazaki et al., 2017; Yilmaz, 2017). These platforms provide a forum for sharing experiences and offer businesses opportunities to gather feedback and improve service quality (Leung et al., 2013; Minazzi, 2015).

Research shows a positive and direct relationship between TripAdvisor users' privacy perceptions and their satisfaction, as well as a direct and positive relationship between e-WOM usage and users' trust and satisfaction with the platform (Martínez-Navalón, Gelashvili & Gómez-Ortega, 2021). The platform allows customers to access real-time information and provides constructive feedback for hotels, playing a critical role in both communication and interaction (Nicoli & Papadopoulou, 2017).

User experiences often emphasize hedonic aspects such as scenery, atmosphere, service quality, and products. These findings highlight opportunities for service and sales personnel to use social media analysis to enhance service experiences and customer satisfaction (Garner & Kim, 2022). Quantitative analyses of the salience and valence of online reviews provide concrete evidence of the importance tourists assign to various attraction dimensions, offering actionable insights for tourism professionals and destination managers (Balcioğlu & Altındağ, 2026).

2.2.1. Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

The literature provides strong evidence that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) plays a decisive role in shaping perceptions of tourism products and services. Dellarocas (2003) emphasizes that online consumer feedback accelerates the formation of trust in service sectors with high uncertainty, while Leung et al. (2013) highlight that social media data offer significant advantages for understanding customer preferences in the context of destinations and tourism businesses. Furthermore, some studies indicate that the extent to which consumers are influenced by eWOM is shaped by perceived similarity with reviewers, including past experiences, opinions, and preferences (Bansal & Voyer, 2000).

The effectiveness of eWOM largely depends on the perceived credibility and expertise of the source. Cheung and Thadani (2010) and Ayeh et al. (2013) assert that credibility is a key determinant of trust in the information. Source expertise refers to the perceived ability of an individual to provide accurate and valid information (Ruiterkamp, 2013), while source trustworthiness involves the perception that the information is unbiased and sincere. However, Litvin et al. (2008) caution that eWOM can be manipulated by service providers, and fake or misleading reviews may deceive consumers. Therefore, consumers' evaluation of eWOM credibility is influenced by their own knowledge and level of engagement in the process (Fan & Miao, 2012; Tseng & Hsu, 2010).

2.2.2. Online travel platforms and consumer decision-making

Online travel platforms such as TripAdvisor, Trivago, and VirtualTourist aggregate user-generated content, enabling direct observation of attitudes and perceptions toward tourism products and services. These platforms serve as key reference points in consumer decision-making, particularly in the accommodation and foodservice sectors (Yaşar, 2019; Zhang et al., 2017). The literature widely acknowledges that user reviews significantly influence perceived service quality, price–quality balance, and overall satisfaction, which, in turn, affect business demand levels and competitive positioning (Filieri et al., 2015; Melián-González et al., 2013).

However, much of the existing research addresses online reviews primarily at a descriptive level, providing limited insight into their contribution to business performance or strategic decision-making. Sánchez-Franco and Rondan-Cataluña (2010) emphasize the importance of integrating social media

applications into firms' official websites, while noting that empirical evidence regarding the strategic use of user feedback remains underdeveloped.

2.2.3. *TripAdvisor data and restaurant image*

TripAdvisor is a global online travel platform that provides user evaluations across various aspects of travel, including accommodations, restaurants, flights, and activities. As of the end of 2024, the platform operates in 49 markets and 28 languages, hosting hundreds of millions of user reviews, making it a widely used and significant data source in tourism research (TripAdvisor, 2025; Abeysinghe & Bandara, 2022). This extensive user-generated data pool enables the analysis of restaurant perceptions, service quality dimensions, and overall business image.

On TripAdvisor, restaurant evaluations are scored on a scale from 1 to 5 across four main dimensions: service quality, food quality, atmosphere, and price–quality balance. These dimensions are reported to directly influence overall restaurant ratings and online visibility (Zhang et al., 2017; Tepavčević et al., 2021). The literature emphasizes that these evaluations are not merely indicators of individual satisfaction but also play a decisive role in restaurant demand, competitive positioning, and booking likelihood (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019).

However, using TripAdvisor data in academic research presents several methodological limitations. The presence of fake or promotional reviews, the overrepresentation of extremely positive or negative experiences, the low participation rate among most consumers, and the inherently subjective nature of the data are primary concerns (Dellarocas, 2003). These limitations require a contextual and critical interpretation of the findings.

Empirical studies on platforms like TripAdvisor indicate that user reviews significantly influence restaurant image and customer perceptions. In a content analysis of Turkish restaurants, Eren and Çelik (2017) found that the most frequently mentioned cuisine types were seafood, Mediterranean, Turkish, and European, while many reviews did not reference specific dishes or beverages. Similarly, Aydın (2016) showed that TripAdvisor reviews can affect restaurant image both positively and negatively, with cleanliness, location, and service speed contributing to a positive image, while price was often associated with negative perceptions.

User trust and perceived information quality are key factors that amplify the impact of online reviews. Filieri et al. (2015) reported that user trust is directly associated with information quality, platform functionality, overall satisfaction, and user recommendations. Tiago et al. (2015), in their examination of restaurant user reviews, identified food and beverage quality as the most decisive factor for positive evaluations, with taste, aroma, and sensory satisfaction significantly enhancing customer satisfaction.

3. Methodology

This study used document analysis as the primary qualitative research method. Document analysis involves the systematic examination and evaluation of written materials relevant to the research objective (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In tourism research, user-generated content platforms are significant data sources because of their accessibility, large user bases, and diverse experiential narratives. TripAdvisor, in particular, is widely consulted during pre-travel information searches and is frequently used in qualitative tourism studies (Şahin & Şahin, 2023; TripAdvisor, 2020; Uçuk, 2025; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

The study population consisted of user reviews of restaurants in Bolu, Türkiye, listed on TripAdvisor. At the time of data collection, 223 restaurants were listed on the platform. Restaurants that were actively listed and had user reviews were considered for inclusion. Initially, 22 restaurants met these criteria. However, establishments with only 1 to 5 reviews were excluded due to limited representativeness and the potential for subjective bias. After this exclusion, the final sample included 10 restaurants.

The dataset included 274 user reviews posted between January and December 2025, totaling 10,413 words. Restricting the timeframe ensured that the findings reflected recent consumer experiences. Reviews containing only emojis, lacking semantic coherence, or not constituting evaluative content were excluded to maintain analytical rigor.

Descriptive content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes related to food quality, beverage quality, and service performance. A systematic data extraction procedure was applied, and similar expressions were standardized before being categorized into thematic clusters. Both qualitative interpretations and quantitative frequency considerations were integrated to reveal overarching patterns. The analysis was limited to restaurants that met the minimum review threshold, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. All documents were examined systematically in accordance with established document analysis procedures (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

4. Results

In the present study, user reviews of 10 restaurants operating in the province of Bolu were analyzed, and 274 out of a total of 2,545 reviews were posted in 2025 (Table 1). The findings show that the restaurants' average ratings range from 4.0 to 5.0, reflecting a high level of overall customer satisfaction.

Table 1. TripAdvisor ratings and number of reviews for restaurants in Bolu

No	Restaurant Name (English Description)	Rating	Total Number of Reviews	Number of Reviews in 2025
1	Tranç Kavurma (Tranç Roasted Meat)	5.0	129	117
2	Bolu Hanzade Restaurant	4.9	384	42
3	Grand Gurme	4.1	46	22
4	Yörem Mantı Unlu Mamüller	4.9	712	17
5	Mercan-İ Restaurant	4.0	575	17
6	Nev Bolu	4.7	84	15
7	Morino Kartalkaya	4.0	24	13
8	Muhtarın Yeri Bolu	4.0	59	13
9	İbrahim'in Yeri Garden Restaurant	4.5	105	10
10	Kubbealtı	4.3	427	8
Total	10 Restaurants	—	2,545	274

Source: Author's own results based on data analysis

In the data analysis, Tranç Kavurma, with the highest average rating (5.0), stands out as the most prominent establishment in the current period, with 117 of its 129 total reviews posted in 2025. Bolu Hanzade Restaurant, with an average rating of 4.9 and a total of 384 reviews, shows a stable profile in both the number of evaluations and rating performance. In terms of total review volume, Yörem Mantı Unlu Mamüller (712 reviews) and Mercan-İ Restaurant (575 reviews) are the most frequently reviewed establishments; however, the number of reviews posted in 2025 for these restaurants is limited.

The fact that restaurants with the highest number of reviews also tend to have high average ratings suggests that increased visibility of user experiences strengthens a restaurant's image. This finding aligns with previous studies demonstrating a positive relationship between the volume of online reviews and perceived trust, as well as the likelihood of being chosen on online travel platforms (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019; Zhang et al., 2017).

Table 2. Demographic and National Distribution of Tourists Evaluating Restaurants in Bolu

Dimension	Subcategory	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Tourists' origin	Türkiye	274	100
	International	0	0
Tourists' gender	Female	113	41.2
	Male	119	43.4
	Not specified	42	15.3
Total		274	100

Source: Author's own results based on data analysis

An examination of the distribution of tourists evaluating restaurants in the province of Bolu by demographic characteristics and country of origin (Table 2) shows that all participants were of Turkish

origin (n = 274; 100%). No international tourists were included in the sample (0%). All reviews were written in Turkish. Users' country of origin and gender were determined based on information provided in user profiles or explicitly mentioned in reviews. Some users used nicknames without providing gender information; these users were classified as 'Not specified.' Regarding gender distribution, male tourists constituted the highest proportion at 43.4% (n = 119), followed by female tourists at 41.2% (n = 113). The proportion of participants whose gender was not specified was 15.3% (n = 42). These findings indicate that the restaurant visitors evaluated in the study were predominantly of Turkish origin and had a relatively balanced gender distribution.

Table 3. Percentage distribution of food and beverage categories in Bolu restaurant reviews

Category	Prominent Products / Food Items	Percentage (%)
Meat Dishes	Lamb sauté, Lamb tandır, Beef sauté, Lamb shank, Hünkar beğendi, Eggplant kebab, Tas kebab, Sautéed meat with purée, Lamb chops, Abant kebab, Mengen pilaf, Butcher-style meatballs, Scored lamb, Beyti kebab, Oven-baked beyti, Beef ribs, Mixed grill, Grilled steak, Adana kebab, Beyti kebab	45%
Manti – Gozleme	Manti (Bolu-style manti, Crispy manti), Gozleme (minced meat, yogurt, eggplant, cheese, olive, spinach)	12%
Soups	Bolu Toyga soup, Beykoz-style trotter soup, Atom soup, Lentil soup, Sultan soup, Meat trotter soup, Bolu Beyi soup, Head and trotter soup, Beyran, Yuvalama, Tripe soup, Sour cherry tarhana soup, Tandır soup	14%
Mezes / Side Dishes	Salad, Ezme (spicy tomato spread), Pickles, Yogurt-based mezes, Hot appetizers, Stuffed vegetables	8%
Pide & Lahmacun	Etli ekmek, Lahmacun, Minced meat pide, Diced meat pide, Mixed pide, Stone-oven pide	6%
Breakfast / Mixed Breakfast	Mixed breakfast, Open buffet breakfast, Muhlama, Menemen	7%
Beverages	Tea, Churned ayran, Turnip juice, Fresh ayran, Compote, Salep	5%
Desserts	Rice pudding, Semolina halva (with ice cream), Bread pudding (with clotted cream), Fig dessert with ice cream, Pumpkin dessert	3%

Source: Author's own results based on data analysis (Percentages indicate the proportion of products mentioned in user reviews for each category).

When the percentage distributions of food and beverage categories derived from TripAdvisor user reviews are examined, user evaluations are found to be concentrated around specific product groups (Table 3). Frequency analysis of food and beverage categories shows that meat dishes (45%) clearly dominate, directly reflecting Bolu's strong meat-based culinary culture emphasized in the literature (Öztürk, 2008; Arman, 2011). The frequent mention of traditional dishes such as lamb sauté, tandır, hünkar beğendi, lamb shank, and mixed grill in user reviews demonstrates that the distinctive gastronomic identity of Bolu cuisine is also represented on digital platforms.

The high frequency of local products such as manti and gözleme (12%) shows that destination-specific flavors play a decisive role in shaping a restaurant's image. The soup category (14%), especially with regional varieties like Bolu Toyga soup, tripe soup, and tandır soup, holds an important place in consumer preferences for both breakfast and main meals. Mezes and side dishes (8%) and pide–lahmacun (6%) stand out for their complementary role to main dishes and their traditional flavor profiles, while breakfast/serpme breakfast (7%) and beverages (5%) are considered additional supportive elements of the consumer experience. Desserts (3%), though mentioned less frequently, indicate that local and classic dessert options contribute to menu diversity.

Overall, these findings align with the literature emphasizing that food and beverage quality is the most dominant factor in restaurant evaluations, as highlighted by Tiago et al. (2015), and reveal the impact of both traditional and regional flavors on consumer perceptions of restaurants in Bolu.

The thematic analysis of TripAdvisor user reviews indicates that restaurant experiences in Bolu are generally evaluated positively (Table 4). Of all expressions analyzed, 86% were classified as positive and 14% as negative, indicating a high level of overall user satisfaction and a small proportion of

unfavorable experiences. Taste was the most frequently emphasized theme in user reviews. While 29% of comments described the dishes as “excellent,” “very tasty,” “legendary,” or “highly successful local and Ottoman cuisine,” 5% of users mentioned negative aspects such as dry or tasteless food, tough steak, and mismatched sweet–sour sauces. Taste-related expressions accounted for 34% of all comments. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that food quality plays a more decisive role in restaurant satisfaction than service quality (Filieri et al., 2015; Tiago et al., 2015; Knežević & Živadinović, 2024; Low, 2024).

Table 4. Thematic Distribution of Positive and Negative Expressions in Bolu Restaurant Reviews

Theme	Summary / Positive Comments	Positive (%)	Summary / Negative Comments	Negative (%)	Total (%)
Taste	Excellent dishes, very tasty, legendary, delicious, tender meats, perfect soups, highly successful local & Ottoman dishes	29	Dry or tasteless dishes; tough steak; mismatched sweet–sour sauces; mediocre flavor	5	34
Staff – Attentiveness – Friendliness	Attentive staff, smiling, warm welcome, hospitality, family-like atmosphere	21	Indifferent service, orders not delivered, communication issues with manager, rude behavior	3	24
Ambiance – Environment	Clean, nice, elegant, fireplace, scenic views, natural setting, quality décor, spacious	15	Crowded tables, uncomfortable layout, smoky environment	1	16
Cleanliness – Hygiene	Clean venue, clean restrooms, hygienic and well-presented dishes	8	Poor hygiene, sticky cutlery, neglected cleaning	1	9
Price / Value	Reasonable prices, fair, good price-performance ratio, large portions	5	Exorbitant prices, not worth the money	1	6
Service – Speed	Fast service, organized, attentive waitstaff	4	30–40 minutes delay, wrong orders, slow service	2	6
Recommendation – Satisfaction	Highly recommended, would return, suggested to others, satisfying experiences	4	Would not return, does not deserve rating, disappointing	1	5
Total		86		14	100

Source: Author's own results based on data analysis

Comments related to staff, attentiveness, and friendliness formed the second most prominent theme. While 21% of users evaluated the service positively as attentive, friendly, and hospitable, 3% reported negative experiences such as indifferent service, undelivered orders, communication problems with management, and rude behavior. Overall, this theme accounted for 24% of the total comments. This result confirms the critical role of the human factor in perceived service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector. Similarly, Aydın (2016) emphasized that service quality is a key determinant of a positive restaurant image based on TripAdvisor reviews. Friendly and attentive staff enhance positive dining experiences, while service inconsistencies and communication issues lead to negative feedback. These findings align with the studies of Kordić and Milićević (2020) and Kim and Jang (2020), which underline the importance of employee motivation and service continuity in customer satisfaction.

The ambiance and environment theme received positive evaluations from 14% of users, who described the venues as clean, spacious, aesthetically pleasing, and well-decorated. Only 1% reported negative conditions, such as crowded seating arrangements or a smoky atmosphere. Ambiance-related expressions accounted for 15% of the total comments. This finding supports previous research suggesting that restaurant experiences are shaped not only by food quality but also by the physical

environment and atmospheric factors, contributing to a multidimensional restaurant image (Melián-González et al., 2013; Filieri et al., 2015).

Cleanliness and hygiene were mentioned in 9% of the comments, with 8% offering positive evaluations highlighting clean venues, restrooms, and hygienic food presentation, and 1% expressing dissatisfaction with hygiene issues. Regarding price and value, 5% of users perceived prices as reasonable with good portion sizes, while 1% considered the restaurants overpriced, making this theme account for 6% of the total comments. This result is consistent with the findings of Radić and Popesku (2018), who emphasized the impact of price perception on customer satisfaction.

Service speed was evaluated positively in 4% of the comments, while 2% of users complained about delays and incorrect orders, resulting in a total share of 6%. Recommendation and overall satisfaction were largely positive (4%), with only 1% of users stating they would not return or recommend the restaurant. This indicates a strong tendency among users to recommend Bolu restaurants based on their dining experiences.

Overall, the findings show that the majority of TripAdvisor user reviews (86%) contain positive expressions, while negative opinions are limited (14%). The results demonstrate that restaurant experiences in Bolu are highly appreciated by users, particularly regarding taste and staff service quality, both of which play a decisive role in shaping restaurant image and customer satisfaction on digital platforms.

Conclusions

This study aimed to examine TripAdvisor user reviews of restaurants in Bolu province to explore the relationship between online evaluations, restaurant image, and customer satisfaction. Analysis of 2,545 user reviews shows a high level of reported satisfaction with restaurants in Bolu. Average ratings, which range from 4.0 to 5.0, indicate that positive perceptions are predominant on online platforms and that user experiences are generally satisfactory. This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting the association between online reviews, perceived service quality, and restaurant preference (Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019; Zhang et al., 2017).

Another notable finding concerns the temporal distribution of reviews and their relationship with restaurants' online visibility. Restaurants with higher average ratings also tend to have more recent reviews. This pattern suggests that the continuity and recency of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) should be considered alongside consumer evaluations. This result aligns with the literature, which emphasizes that both the volume and recency of online feedback are considered in the evaluation of restaurant image (Filieri et al., 2015; Taecharungroj & Mathayomchan, 2019).

Findings related to user profiles show that all analyzed reviews were written in Turkish and posted by users identified as being from Türkiye. The gender distribution appears relatively balanced, although some users did not specify their gender, often due to the use of nicknames without profile details. These results indicate that online content about Bolu restaurants is primarily generated by domestic visitors. As emphasized by Leung et al. (2013) and Minazzi (2015), social media and online platforms provide valuable insights into user perceptions of destinations, which is also evident in the case of Bolu.

The analysis of food and beverage categories shows that meat-based dishes are the most frequently mentioned items in user reviews, reflecting the meat-oriented structure of Bolu cuisine. Traditional dishes such as mantı, gözleme, and various soups are also frequently highlighted, suggesting that the local gastronomic identity is prominently represented in digital narratives. Expressions such as "authentic Bolu cuisine" and "homemade taste" indicate that perceptions of authenticity and locality serve as important reference points in users' evaluations of their dining experiences. This observation aligns with previous research discussing the role of gastronomic authenticity and local products in online food-related content (Süzer & Demirel, 2025; Şeyhanlıoğlu et al., 2023).

The thematic analysis shows that a substantial majority of the reviews (86%) contain positive evaluations, with taste emerging as the most dominant theme. Taste, staff behavior and service quality, atmosphere and ambiance, and cleanliness and hygiene are the most frequently referenced dimensions in user evaluations. These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that food quality and

service performance are central elements in customer satisfaction assessments (Filieri et al., 2015; Tiago et al., 2015). In contrast, themes such as price–value ratio and service speed are mentioned less frequently, suggesting that they occupy a comparatively secondary position in user narratives.

Overall, the findings indicate that TripAdvisor data provide a meaningful source for examining restaurant image, customer satisfaction, and gastronomic identity. The case of Bolu shows that online user reviews not only reflect individual dining experiences but also offer interpretable indicators for destination and restaurant management. However, potential limitations, including the possibility of fake reviews, the tendency for extremely positive or negative experiences to be shared more frequently, and issues related to user representativeness, should be carefully considered. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as descriptive and associational rather than causal.

Future research may benefit from comparative analyses across different online platforms, examination of expectation differences among customer segments, investigation of temporal and seasonal patterns in online reviews, and analysis of managerial responses in the context of digital reputation management. Furthermore, given the subjective and potentially non-representative nature of online platform data, findings should be interpreted within their contextual boundaries and with appropriate methodological caution.

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Data Availability Statement: The data used in this study were obtained from publicly accessible user reviews on the TripAdvisor platform. The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Compliance with ethical standards: This study is based on the analysis of publicly available secondary data (user reviews). As the research did not involve direct interaction with human participants, ethical committee approval was not required. The study was conducted in accordance with established scientific ethical principles.

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