



THE ROLE OF FOOD NAMES IN GASTRONOMIC TOURISM AND THE FORMATION OF A NATIONAL BRAND

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Abstract: In the contemporary tourism industry, gastronomy has become an important means of representing national identity, cultural heritage, and the distinctive image of a country. Traditional food names function not only as linguistic units denoting particular dishes but also as cultural signs that transmit information about a nation's history, lifestyle, customs, values, and worldview. This article examines the role of food names in the development of gastronomic tourism and the formation of a national brand from linguistic, cultural, and tourism-oriented perspectives. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between traditional food terminology, cultural identity, tourist perception, and destination branding. Using examples from Uzbek cuisine, including *palov*, *somsa*, *manti*, *shashlik*, *norin*, and *sumalak*, the study demonstrates how culturally marked food names can function as recognizable elements of national identity in international tourism discourse. The article argues that preserving authentic food names while providing appropriate linguistic and cultural explanations can strengthen destination recognition and contribute to the construction of a sustainable national gastronomic brand.

Keywords: gastronomic tourism, food names, national brand, culinary heritage, cultural identity, Uzbek cuisine.

Introduction. Tourism in the twenty-first century is increasingly associated with the search for authentic cultural experiences. Tourists are interested not only in historical monuments, museums, landscapes, and architecture but also in the everyday cultural practices of the communities they visit. Among these practices, food occupies a particularly significant position because it allows visitors to experience local culture through taste, smell, preparation rituals, social interaction, and language. Consequently, gastronomic tourism has developed into an important component of the global tourism industry.

Traditional cuisine represents the historical experience and cultural memory of a society. Ingredients, cooking methods, serving practices, eating traditions, and the names of dishes may reflect geographical conditions, economic activities, religious and social traditions, as well as intercultural



contacts. For this reason, food can be considered both a material and symbolic component of cultural heritage.

Food names are particularly important in this context. A name such as *palov* does more than identify a particular dish. In the Uzbek cultural context, it may evoke hospitality, family gatherings, weddings, celebrations, community relations, and established culinary practices. Therefore, food names can acquire symbolic meanings extending far beyond their primary nominative function.

The increasing importance of gastronomic tourism also raises questions about national branding. Countries compete for international visibility and seek distinctive cultural symbols that can make their tourism destinations memorable. National dishes and their authentic names can become effective instruments in this process. The purpose of this article is therefore to investigate the role of food names in gastronomic tourism and to determine their potential contribution to the formation and promotion of a national brand.

Materials and Methods. The study employs descriptive, linguocultural, semantic, and comparative methods. Traditional Uzbek food names are examined as linguistic units containing culturally relevant information. The analysis focuses on several well-known gastronomic terms, including *palov*, *somsa*, *manti*, *shashlik*, *norin*, and *sumalak*.

A linguocultural approach makes it possible to examine the relationship between language and culture expressed through gastronomic vocabulary. The descriptive method is used to identify the cultural characteristics associated with selected food names, while semantic analysis helps reveal the meanings and associations attached to them in tourism and cultural communication.

The study also applies principles of destination branding to explain how gastronomic vocabulary may contribute to a recognizable national image. From this perspective, food names are treated not simply as lexical items but as potential cultural markers that connect language, heritage, tourism experience, and national representation.

Gastronomic tourism as a form of cultural experience. Gastronomic tourism can broadly be understood as tourism motivated partly or primarily by an interest in food, beverages, culinary traditions, food production, and local dining experiences. It provides visitors with opportunities to become acquainted with the cultural characteristics of a destination through its cuisine.

The significance of gastronomic tourism lies in its multisensory and participatory character. A historical building can be observed, while a traditional dish can be tasted, smelled, discussed, prepared, and shared. This direct participation may create a strong emotional connection between tourists and the destination.

Furthermore, gastronomy connects visitors with local communities.



Traditional markets, family restaurants, food festivals, cooking workshops, farms, bakeries, and culinary events create spaces where tourists interact with local people. Such encounters transform food consumption into cultural communication.

Uzbekistan possesses considerable potential in this field because of its diverse culinary traditions and the historical role of Central Asia as a region of cultural exchange. Uzbek cuisine reflects agricultural traditions, urban and rural lifestyles, regional diversity, hospitality customs, and historical intercultural contacts. Consequently, gastronomic heritage can complement the country's architectural and historical attractions in constructing a broader tourism image.

Food names as linguocultural units. From a linguistic perspective, food names belong to gastronomic vocabulary. However, their functions are not restricted to naming food products or dishes. Culturally specific food names may contain historical, social, symbolic, and ethnographic information. They can therefore be regarded as linguocultural units.

The relationship between a food name and its cultural meaning is particularly visible when the term enters intercultural communication. Translating a culturally specific dish merely by describing its ingredients may communicate its physical characteristics while losing part of its cultural identity. For example, replacing *palov* entirely with a general descriptive expression such as “rice dish” significantly reduces its cultural specificity.

The preservation of an authentic name can therefore serve an important function. Terms such as *palov*, *somsa*, and *manti* introduce tourists to the linguistic environment of the destination. When accompanied by concise explanations, these names simultaneously provide authenticity and comprehensibility.

This approach may be represented as follows: **authentic food name → cultural association → tourist experience → destination recognition → national brand**

Thus, gastronomic terminology participates in a broader semiotic process in which linguistic signs become cultural symbols.

Uzbek cuisine contains numerous food names capable of functioning as markers of national and regional identity. Among them, *palov* occupies a particularly important position. It is associated with both everyday and ceremonial contexts and is strongly connected with Uzbek hospitality and collective social life.

The cultural significance of *palov* extends beyond its ingredients. Its preparation and consumption can be connected with weddings, family celebrations, community gatherings, and other social occasions. Consequently,



the name activates a network of cultural associations rather than simply referring to food.

Somsa is another recognizable gastronomic term. Its traditional preparation, particularly in a *tandir* oven, can provide tourists with an experience involving not only taste but also traditional culinary technology. In tourism promotion, demonstrating the preparation process can strengthen the symbolic value of the food name.

Manti and *norin* similarly contribute to the representation of traditional culinary culture. Although related dishes can be found in other Central Asian and Eurasian cuisines, their local preparation, serving traditions, and cultural contexts can differentiate the Uzbek gastronomic experience.

Sumalak is especially important because of its connection with Navruz. Unlike food names associated mainly with everyday consumption, *sumalak* has strong seasonal and ceremonial associations. Its preparation is linked with collective participation and cultural tradition. Consequently, the term may introduce foreign visitors to a wider cultural system involving spring celebrations, renewal, community, and heritage.

These examples demonstrate that food names can operate at several levels simultaneously: linguistic, gastronomic, social, historical, and symbolic.

Food names as instruments of national branding. A national brand is constructed through recognizable images, narratives, values, symbols, and experiences associated with a particular country. Tourism contributes significantly to this process because visitors often form perceptions of a country through selected cultural elements encountered during travel.

Gastronomy can provide particularly effective branding resources because food is memorable, repeatable, and transferable across geographical boundaries. Tourists may encounter a national dish during their journey and later search for it in restaurants, cook it at home, recommend it to friends, or share photographs and descriptions on digital platforms. In this way, the food name continues circulating after the tourist experience has ended.

For a food name to contribute successfully to national branding, several factors are important:

Authenticity. The original or culturally accepted name should be maintained whenever possible.

Recognizability. Consistent spelling and presentation can help international visitors remember and search for the dish.

Cultural explanation. Menus, tourism websites, museums, festivals, and guidebooks should explain the cultural background of significant dishes.

Storytelling. Food names become more memorable when connected with stories about history, regions, celebrations, families, and traditional preparation.



Visual representation. High-quality images and videos can connect unfamiliar names with recognizable culinary experiences.

Consistency across tourism communication. Similar terminology should be used in menus, brochures, websites, festivals, airports, hotels, and international promotional materials.

Through these mechanisms, gastronomic vocabulary can gradually become part of the symbolic vocabulary associated with a country.

Translation and international promotion of food names. One of the challenges in promoting national cuisine internationally is the translation of culturally specific food names. Three major strategies can be identified: direct translation, transliteration or borrowing, and combined presentation.

Direct translation may make a dish immediately understandable but can weaken its national identity. Transliteration preserves the authentic cultural form but may leave international visitors uncertain about the meaning. A combined strategy is therefore often the most productive for tourism communication. For example:

Palov – traditional Uzbek rice dish prepared with meat, carrots, and spices.

Somsa – traditional baked pastry with a savory filling.

Sumalak – a traditional wheat-based dish prepared for Navruz celebrations.

Such descriptions preserve the culturally important lexical item while providing sufficient information for foreign visitors. Over time, repeated international exposure may allow certain food names to function as independent cultural keywords requiring less explanation.

Standardization is also important. If the same dish appears under many different English spellings, its online visibility and international recognition may become fragmented. Tourism organizations, restaurants, translators, and cultural institutions can therefore benefit from adopting relatively consistent transliteration practices.

Digital media and gastronomic branding. The role of food names has become increasingly significant in the digital environment. Tourists frequently discover destinations through search engines, travel platforms, video-sharing services, blogs, and social media. Food names function as searchable linguistic labels connecting images, videos, reviews, recipes, restaurants, and destinations.

A distinctive food name has potential branding advantages in this environment. When tourists encounter an unfamiliar term such as *palov* or *sumalak*, they may search for its meaning, preparation, history, and cultural context. Each search can potentially create another point of contact with the



destination's national culture.

Digital storytelling can further strengthen this process. Short documentaries about traditional cooking, interviews with chefs, regional food maps, culinary routes, multilingual menu descriptions, and festival promotion can connect gastronomic terminology with attractive cultural narratives.

However, effective digital branding requires consistency. The same culturally significant terms should be presented systematically across official tourism websites, restaurant menus, promotional videos, travel applications, and international events. This consistency can contribute to the gradual formation of stable associations between particular food names and Uzbekistan.

Discussion. The analysis suggests that food names occupy an intermediary position between language, culture, tourism, and branding. Their importance derives from their capacity to condense cultural information into relatively short and memorable linguistic forms.

From the linguocultural perspective, a traditional food name represents a cultural concept encoded in language. From the perspective of tourism, it identifies an experience available to visitors. From the perspective of marketing, it can operate as a recognizable label. From the perspective of national branding, repeated associations between the food name and the country can transform the term into a cultural symbol.

This process, however, does not occur automatically. A traditional dish may remain internationally unknown if it is not consistently represented and contextualized. Effective gastronomic branding therefore requires cooperation among tourism organizations, linguists, translators, restaurants, cultural institutions, media professionals, and local communities.

For Uzbekistan, the development of gastronomic tourism can complement existing tourism resources associated with cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Tashkent. Culinary routes and regional food festivals could encourage tourists to perceive Uzbek culture not only through monuments but also through living traditions.

Furthermore, regional gastronomic diversity should be considered an advantage rather than an obstacle. Variations in preparation methods, ingredients, terminology, and serving traditions can encourage tourists to explore different regions. A national gastronomic brand can therefore combine recognizable national dishes with local culinary identities.

Recommendations. Several practical measures may strengthen the role of food names in Uzbekistan's gastronomic tourism and national branding.

First, culturally important food names should be systematically documented together with their etymological, historical, regional, and cultural characteristics. Such documentation could support multilingual dictionaries,



tourism glossaries, digital databases, and educational materials.

Second, standardized English-language representations of major Uzbek food names should be developed for international tourism communication. Standardization would improve searchability and reduce inconsistency across menus and promotional materials.

Third, authentic names should normally be preserved rather than replaced completely by generic English translations. Short descriptive explanations can be added to make the dishes understandable to international audiences.

Fourth, gastronomic tourism products should integrate food terminology with cultural storytelling. Tourists should learn not only what a dish contains but also when it is prepared, how it is served, what social practices surround it, and why it matters culturally.

Finally, selected food names could be promoted strategically as components of Uzbekistan's international cultural image. In this model, a food name becomes more than a menu item: it becomes an entry point into the language, history, traditions, and identity of the nation.

Conclusion. Food names play a significant role in the relationship between gastronomic tourism and national branding. They function simultaneously as lexical units, cultural signs, markers of identity, and instruments of tourism communication. Traditional gastronomic terms preserve information about a nation's historical experience, social practices, values, and cultural worldview.

The examples of *palov*, *somsa*, *manti*, *norin*, *shashlik*, and *sumalak* demonstrate the potential of Uzbek gastronomic vocabulary to contribute to the international representation of Uzbekistan. Preserving authentic names while providing clear cultural explanations can strengthen both tourist understanding and cultural distinctiveness.

In the context of increasing global competition among tourism destinations, national cuisine should be viewed not merely as a service offered to visitors but as an important component of cultural heritage and national image. The systematic promotion of authentic food names through tourism, translation, digital media, festivals, and cultural storytelling can contribute to the formation of a recognizable and sustainable national gastronomic brand.

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