

Italian food experiences on Airbnb: A multimodal analysis of hosts' promotional videos

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Abstract

To better understand how digital entrepreneurs exploit various communicative modes to appeal to prospective consumers, this study provides a multimodal discourse analysis of videos posted by Airbnb hosts of food-related virtual experiences. Since April 2020 Airbnb has offered a wide range of “Online Experiences” (OEs): OEs are live events facilitated by an Airbnb host via Zoom. Among the most popular OEs are those related to food (i.e., cooking, baking or tasting classes). Specifically, we focus on how hosts of Italian food OEs discursively construct their professional expertise —especially their culinary knowledge— with the goal of attracting potential participants to join their OE.

Our analysis identifies several recurring stages in this genre of videos (e.g. food preparation, tasting of the final product, interactions with virtual guests) as well as other shared modal features across all the videos in our dataset: the setting of the video (the home kitchen), the use of a soundtrack, and relevant clothing choices (i.e., various types of chef attire). In addition, our in-depth, frame-by-frame multimodal analysis reveals that hosts rely on a wide range of semiotic resources (e.g., gaze, gesture, movements, interaction with guests, camera shots) to construct their culinary identities, and that hosts rely predominantly on the visual mode to achieve their communicative goals. This study adds to growing interest in multimodality in online food discourse, contributing specifically to the under-researched domain of digital food videos.

Keywords: Multimodal discourse analysis, multimodality, online food discourse, digital communication, Italian food videos.

Resumen

Experiencias gastronómicas italianas en Airbnb: Un análisis multimodal de los vídeos promocionales de los anfitriones

Este estudio trata de comprender mejor cómo los emprendedores digitales explotan diferentes modos comunicativos para atraer a posibles consumidores. Para ello, se ofrece un análisis del discurso multimodal de vídeos publicados por anfitriones de Airbnb que presentan experiencias virtuales relacionadas con la gastronomía. Desde abril de 2020, Airbnb ofrece una amplia variedad de “Experiencias Online” (OE, por sus siglas en inglés), que consisten en eventos en directo facilitados por un anfitrión de Airbnb a través de Zoom. Entre las OE más populares se encuentran aquellas relacionadas con la gastronomía (por ejemplo, clases de cocina, repostería o degustaciones). En particular, nos centramos en cómo los anfitriones de OE de comida italiana construyen discursivamente su experiencia profesional, especialmente sus conocimientos culinarios, con el objetivo de atraer a posibles participantes a sus OE.

Nuestro análisis identifica varias etapas recurrentes en este tipo de vídeos (por ejemplo, la preparación de los alimentos, la degustación del producto final y las interacciones con los invitados virtuales), así como otros rasgos modales compartidos en todos los vídeos de nuestro corpus: el escenario del vídeo (la cocina de la casa), el uso de una banda sonora y la elección de vestimenta relevante (es decir, distintos tipos de atuendos de chef). Además, nuestro análisis multimodal detallado, marco por marco, revela que los anfitriones recurren a una amplia gama de recursos semióticos (por ejemplo, mirada, gestos, movimientos, interacción con los invitados, planos de cámara) para construir su identidad culinaria y que, en su mayoría, se apoyan en el modo visual para alcanzar sus objetivos comunicativos. Este estudio contribuye al creciente interés en la multimodalidad en el discurso gastronómico en línea, abordando específicamente el ámbito de los vídeos digitales sobre alimentación, el cual apenas ha sido analizado.

Palabras clave: Análisis multimodal del discurso, multimodalidad, discurso sobre comida en línea, comunicación digital, vídeos de gastronomía italiana.

1. Introduction

Recent scholarship on food discourse appearing in various media has demonstrated that besides language, other modal elements such as visuals, are powerful and effective in communicating ideas and ideologies about food as: healthy, nutritious, and sustainable (Chen & Eriksson, 2019); as a resource for marking social distinctions (Mapes, 2021b); and as a means for creating

affiliation and connection (Diemer & Frobenius, 2013; Zappavigna & Ross, 2022). In addition, scholars have focused on multimodal food discourses as sites for constructing various identities, for instance ‘relatable expert’ identities in the case of celebrity chefs (Matwick & Matwick, 2017). Adding to this growing literature on multimodal food discourses found across media types, the present study provides a multimodal analysis of videos created by “digital food entrepreneurs”, in this case, hosts of Airbnb’s culinary Online Experiences. To shed light on how these individuals construct their culinary identities (Batat, 2019; Vásquez & Chik, 2015), we illustrate the ways in which they exploit and orchestrate multiple modal resources of the video format to achieve their communicative goals: i.e., to recruit participants. In what follows, we provide background information on the context of our study, Airbnb’s Online Experiences (sections 2 and 3); we offer an overview of previous work within the field of digital food discourse (section 4); and we present our methodological framework and analytical procedure (sections 5 and 6).

2. Airbnb’s online experiences

With global travel and tourism severely restricted during the Covid-19 outbreak, in March 2020 Airbnb launched “Online Experiences”. Partnering with Zoom, Airbnb provided the platform through which “hosts” could connect with a small group of “guests” (who could be located anywhere in the world) and provide 60-90 minute virtual experiences. The success of Online Experiences (OEs) has persisted beyond the early days of lockdown and today, the range of OEs offered on Airbnb are diverse. Among the most popular experiences are those related to food: cooking, baking, or drink-making. Examples include lessons in baking cinnamon rolls with a Swedish pastry expert, a wine tasting class with a Portuguese sommelier, or a session on preparing noodles with a Thai chef. In this article we focus on food-related OEs as we engage analytically with how hosts deploy a range of modal resources in their brief videos designed to promote their OE. More specifically, we restrict our analysis to Italian food-related OEs because there are numerous Italian food/drink OE offerings on Airbnb, because of the global appeal of Italian cuisine (Sassatelli, 2019), and because of own prior work on this topic (Vásquez & Cenni, 2024).

3. Airbnb OE webpage format

Comprising several obligatory and a few optional elements, the main function of each OE webpage (Figure 1) is to present information about that particular OE to prospective participants. Obligatory features include the title of the OE, a series of photos, a host bio (“Meet your Host”) and a short text describing the activity (“What you’ll do”). For culinary OEs, a list of ingredients that will be used during the OE is also provided (“What to bring”). More practical information such as cost, available dates, and how to participate (e.g. “Join a video call”) are also included. Participants’ reviews and (in some cases) hosts’ responses appear further down on the webpage.

In the section of photos at the top of the page, hosts may post between one to ten photos, and these generally include images of the hosts, sometimes depicted with a screen showing their OE participants (joining via Zoom), as well as images of the main ingredients used for the OE and the completed food product that is the focus of the OE. Additionally, hosts have the option of uploading a short video (less than a minute) in this space. These videos are the focus of our study, which adds to growing body of scholarship on multimodal digital food discourse. Specifically, our aim is to better understand how multimodal resources are deployed to present both an authentic and knowledgeable culinary identity as well as to market and promote a culinary experience to potential consumers. In this way, our investigation provides further insights into three interconnected digital phenomena: user-created multimodal texts, digitally-mediated food experiences, and contemporary practices of online self-branding.

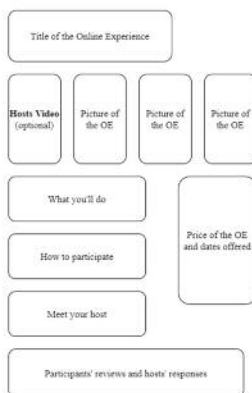


Figure 1. Composition of a OE page.

In earlier work (Vásquez & Cenni, 2024) we focused on the textual self-presentations in the “Meet your Host” sections, which serve as introductions from Airbnb OE hosts to prospective consumers interested in learning more about their service providers. Studying these textual bios, we examined how hosts of these culinary OEs construct their culinary expertise and authority. We found that hosts relied on three dominant rhetorical strategies, which highlighted their inheritance of —and passion for— Italian food traditions, their professional experiences in gastronomy and/or tourism, and their success on social media (demonstrated via metrics such as ratings or number of guests served). Building on this previous study which highlighted textual forms of self-presentation, we now turn our attention to multimodal forms of self-presentation in the videos posted by the same set of hosts on their OE pages. Specifically, this study examines how hosts exploit multiple modalities in various ways as they engage in self-promotional practices while, at the same time, forging their identities as experts on Italian gastronomic traditions. By focusing on these brief audiovisual texts, we are especially interested in discovering how hosts exploit and combine the different multimodal resources at their disposal to achieve their communicative goals.

4. Digital multimodal food discourse

Food discourse has witnessed growing public and academic interest. The increased popularity of food-related topics is linked to the emergence of social media platforms (Blackburn et al., 2018; Matwick & Matwick, 2019), which allow people to easily share information, experiences and conversations, and which foster an unprecedented level of engagement among users. Indeed, in our increasingly digitized reality, the connection between food discourse and online communication has become stronger than ever. The pervasiveness of digital food communication is also attested by recent scholarly publications on this topic. For instance, the chapters in Tóvares and Gordon (2021) adopt a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives to explore diverse online contexts and showcase many interconnections between food and online language. The volume provides several illustrations of how people use language and images—all centering on food—as communicative tools, to achieve social, cultural, and political goals while they create identities and circulate ideologies that involve, and in some cases even transcend, food.

Whereas earlier studies on digital food discourse focused on the textual dimension of food communication in various online contexts (e.g., Diemer & Frobenius, 2013; Rousseau, 2012), in the last few years, studies of digital food discourse have been attending increasingly to multimodal aspects in genres such as food blogs, food posts on social media, and food videos found on various platforms. These studies have focused on the interplay of the textual and visual dimensions of food communication, with the vast majority of these studies concentrating on food posts on Instagram, and considering a variety of food-related topics, ranging from coffee selfies to celebrity chefs' posts (e.g., Mapes 2021a, 2021b; Mapes & Ross, 2022; Zappavigna & Ross, 2022; Zappavigna & Zhao, 2020). Adopting a multimodal approach as the primary analytical and interpretive lens, these studies share an interest in exploring the moral, ethical and aesthetic issues related to food. As an example of this trend, Zappavigna & Ross (2022) examined Instagram posts about avocado toast, highlighting the interaction between aesthetic and moralizing discourses on food choices, achieved through the interplay of both the visual (i.e., image) and textual dimensions of the posts (i.e., hashtags and user comments). Their multimodal analysis revealed a preference for 'still life' or aerial shots, enhancing the visual appeal and creating an "amplified ordinariness" (Zappavigna & Zhao, 2020, p. 226). At the same time, accompanying hashtags reinforced identity construction, projecting a moralizing/instructional discourse on what is considered ethical, sustainable, and nutritious food consumption. Similarly addressing both the visual and verbal dimensions of digital food discourse, Mapes (2021a) analyzed multimodal Instagram posts from @nytfood #tbt (New York Times- "throwback Thursday" posts). Featuring historic photographs from decades-old NYT articles, Mapes examined three interrelated semiotic genres: photographs, captions and user comments on antiquated food representations, and discussed how these different modes are implicated in the construction and maintenance of contemporary consumerist practices. In terms of the visual mode, Mapes observed the tendency to present the food and table in a neat/orderly manner and the presence in these images of laboring women's hands in the black and white photos from the 1950s and 1960s: strategic choices contributing to a distance towards past eating habits and at the same time promoting contemporary fashionable eating.

While this line of research has enriched our understanding of the relationship between the visual and verbal in digital food communication, considerably fewer studies to date have considered multimodality in food-

related videos. Videos are a powerful medium for communication, with the potential for capturing and conveying a wealth of information through a diversity of modal resources. Given the current popularity of video sharing and viewing as common digital practice in our daily lives, it is important to extend scholarship on digital multimodal food discourse to include video genres.

One example in this direction is Choe (2019), who investigated a specific food practice: *mukbang*, a Korean livestream in which a host eats and speaks (on video) while interacting with viewers. Choe's analysis examined not only the speech of the 'eater' and the typed comments from viewers, but also paralinguistic elements in the videos, such as shifting facial expressions and gazes of the live streamer as these practices unfold in time. By considering these different semiotic resources, Choe showed how the mundane social activity of eating is performed online, creating a sense of digital commensality even between physically distant participants.

More closely related to our own topic —i.e., videos of everyday culinary “experts” designed to promote an online food-related service— Matwick and Matwick's (2017) study explored the genre of TV cooking shows featuring female celebrity chefs. In their multimodal narrative analysis, the authors investigated how different semiotic modes are deployed strategically by TV hosts to teach and relate to viewers. Their study reveals that multiple modes contribute to the construction of the overall narrative, as well as to the creation of the identities of female chefs as credible experts. While these expert identities are constructed by verbal modes (for instance, through voiceover narratives, ‘live’ anecdotes, recipe instruction, superlative expressions), at the same time, celebrity chefs are also depicted as personal and reliable through the use of non-verbal cues, such as scenes of the domestic kitchen, close-up shots of the food or speaking directly to the camera.

Building on the work of Matwick and Matwick (2017), in this study we explore the construction of everyday culinary identities and we examine specifically how OE hosts promote themselves multimodally, by exploiting a wide range of modal resources at their disposal. Whereas Matwick and Matwick focused on a professional mass media genre —i.e., television cooking shows— and the celebrity hosts represented in them, our focus is instead on a newer digital genre: videos created by everyday users participating in the so-called ‘sharing economy,’ (Guttentag, 2019) who have

varying degrees of production resources and expertise, and who (unlike celebrity chefs) have only a few seconds at their disposal to establish their culinary identities in these brief videos. The purpose of our study is to demonstrate how more “ordinary” content creators use different modal resources to achieve their self-promotional goals by creating food-relevant identities.

5. Dataset

Because of our interest in food-related discourse, we used the filters provided by Airbnb’s platform for “Baking” “Cooking” and “Drinks” to identify all food-related OEs offered on the platform. Next, we manually screened these search results to identify all listings that included “Italian” in the title or description, resulting in a total of 34 OEs. For each of these, we then downloaded the respective host bios, the photographs and videos (if included). As mentioned, videos are an optional feature of the OE page; at the time of data collection, only 12 hosts of Italian OEs included a video.

In these videos, hosts present themselves and their culinary knowledge/skills and, in some cases, also offer a glimpse of what their online experience will look like —with the goal of attracting potential participants to the OE. Thus, in spite of being short and concise, OE videos as a genre have a clear goal of self-promotion and marketing as well as offering a preview of the future experience. However, as we will illustrate in our analysis, what these videos lack in brevity they make up for in their multimodal richness, combining multiple visual and audio elements, and making use of numerous communicative modes in addition to language: e.g., interactions with objects, movements, gestures, gaze, facial expressions, and music.

6. Multimodal discourse analysis

A multimodal approach to discourse analysis considers communication as an event involving the use of multiple semiotic resources. Multimodal analysis foregrounds the inquiry into the combination and interplay among various modes in the meaning making process (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). We draw on the framework of Multimodal Interaction Analysis developed by Norris (2004, 2019) to analyze our data, which provides guidelines specific to analyzing video material.

Our analytic process began with multiple, iterative viewing of the videos, conducted in two phases. In the first exploratory phase, we examined each video to obtain a broader understanding of general characteristics of this genre. In the second phase, we moved to a more fine-grained, in-depth analysis of the different modal features found in the videos. In this second phase, our analysis of multimodal features was adapted from the list of main analytical categories presented in Norris (2019), detailed in the following section. Following other studies (e.g., Xia & Hafner, 2021; Zappavigna, 2019) we first present and discuss the main multimodal features identified in our dataset in more general terms (see sections 7.1, 7.2); we then provide an in-depth discussion of a single video, so that we can consider these multimodal features in more detail than would be possible across a larger set of instances (Zappavigna, 2019).

Our focal video is for an OE called *Pasta with the Grandmas* and is hosted by “Chiara and Nonna.” (*Chiara* is the name of the young female host of the OE and *nonna* means *grandmother* in Italian.) We selected this video for our detailed analysis for several reasons. First, at the time of data collection, it was the most popular and successful OE in our dataset, as evidenced by its 3,548 reviews: the highest number of reviews of all the accounts included in our study. Second, in our dataset, this video also featured the highest degree of multimodal density, enabling us to address all of the modal features that are represented in the total videos we collected. Indeed, as will be seen in section 7.2 and 7.3, the patterns that are evident in the other videos are also present in *Pasta with the Grandmas* as well. Therefore, on the one hand, this video is representative of the genre, in that it includes all of the characteristic modal features of the other videos in our dataset. On the other hand, this video is simultaneously an extraordinary example in terms of its modal density: by exploiting multiple communicative modes throughout, this particular video manages to convey a great deal of information in a very short time frame.

6.1. Multimodal transcription and annotation

Multimodal transcription and analysis of audiovisual data involves making a number of methodological decisions. Indeed, as pointed out by Norris (2019) producing a multimodal transcript, even for very brief video content, represents a time-intensive and laborious process because of the many dimensions that could be taken into account (e.g., verbal language, paralanguage, gaze, color, visual framing) as well as their complex

interconnections. Therefore Norris (2019) recommends that —after general rounds of observation of the data have been conducted— analysts circumscribe the number of these dimensions, or variables, to be analyzed in-depth, defining which dimensions are key to illustrate, analyze and discuss the particular issue that is at stake. This means that the complex process of multimodal annotation and analysis will concentrate only on those dimensions most relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (e.g., Zappavigna 2019).

Following these methodological guidelines and considering the multimodal dimensions highlighted by Norris (2019), the layers of annotation included in transcriptions of our data are the following:

- Spoken language
- Movement
- Gesture
- Gaze
- Posture
- Facial expression
- Proxemics
- Object handling (i.e., in this case, food preparation)
- Layout
- Camera shot (e.g., close ups)
- Interaction with guests (i.e., in this case, on a screen)

Focusing on these 11 dimensions, our analysis began with a frame-by-frame annotation of each video. The analysis and coding procedures of the videos was carried out with the assistance of the software NVivo12.

7. Findings

In this section, we outline the generic stages characteristic of all the videos in our dataset in 7.1. Next, in 7.2 we describe the modal elements that are common to these videos, and we illustrate them with several different

examples from our data. After this, in 7.3 we provide an in-depth analysis of the focal video (*Pasta with the Grandmas*), in which we elaborate on the interplay and coordination of different modal resources used in the construction of self-promotional practices —specifically those relevant to projecting an (Italian) culinary identity in this digital context.

7.1. Generic stages of food-related OE videos

After several rounds of viewing each video, we observed that food-related OE videos tended to display the following generic stages, which correspond to Norris's (2019) "Higher level mediated actions":

1. Introduction: Hosts introduce themselves and/or welcome viewers/potential participants.
2. Ingredients: Ingredients needed in the OE —i.e., those associated with Italian culinary traditions (e.g., tomatoes, olive oil, basil)— are displayed on a kitchen counter, shown being picked from a vegetable garden, or displayed in the hand(s) of the host.
3. Stages of food preparation: Food preparation segments feature hosts chopping ingredients, kneading dough, or preparing pasta fillings.
4. Interaction with guests: Hosts interact with OE participants, giving feedback on their cooking/baking techniques and encouraging them; participants are shown on a small screen, typically a tablet.
5. Final result: Hosts display the completed dish that was the result of the OE. In some cases, hosts and/or participants are shown tasting their final products.
6. Conclusion: Closing/leave-taking from hosts to viewers.

Although these stages are generally characteristic of OE videos, not every video includes all the stages described here and, in some cases, the order of the stages is slightly different.

7.2. General features of food-related OE videos

Beyond these generic stages, in the first phase of our analysis we also aimed at identifying recurrent visual and auditory features characterizing this specific audiovisual genre. To achieve this, we systematically coded various visual and auditory elements in each video within our dataset. Among the visual aspects we coded were the number of hosts, the number of participants, the video's location, the host's attire, and the editing style employed. The auditory features we coded included: the type of background music, the number of spoken words and language(s) used. Table 1 summarizes the distributions of these features across our dataset.

Title of the OE	Duration of the video (in seconds)	N of spoken words	Italian words	N of hosts and participants	Setting	Chef attire	Professional editing (Yes/No)	Background music
Pasta with Grandmas	19	43	<i>Ciao!</i> <i>Che figo!</i>	H: 2 P: 1	Home kitchen	Chef apron	Yes	Neutral
Luca and Lorenzo	33	81	<i>Ah brava!</i> <i>Brav!</i>	H: 2 P: 3	Home kitchen	Chef apron	No	Neutral
Make Gnocchi and Ravioli at Home	27	41		H: 3 P: 0	Home kitchen + vegetable garden	Chef apron + Chef jacket	No	Italian folk music
Handmade pasta with 2 Sicilian Farmers	34	56	<i>Buon appetito!</i>	H: 2 P: 0	Home kitchen + citrus orchard		No	Neutral
Pizza class with Italian Pizza chef	31	19	<i>Buon appetito!</i>	H: 1 P: 0	Home kitchen	Chef apron	No	Italian folk music
Amazing Italian Pasta Experience	20	56		H: 2 P: 1	Home kitchen	Chef jacket + Chef hat	Yes	Neutral
Pasta Cocktails Jokes and live music	34	69		H: 2 P: 0	Home kitchen	Chef apron	No	Neutral
Champion Tiramisu and funny Italian jokes	26	51	<i>Ciao!</i>	H: 1 P: 2	Home kitchen	Chef apron + Chef hat	Yes	Neutral
Alla scoperta della Cultura e Cucina italiana	26	58	<i>Buon appetito!</i> <i>Cin cin</i>	H: 1 P: 1	Home kitchen	Chef apron	No	Italian folk music
The Great Pasta Journey	25	25		H: 1 P: 0	Home kitchen		Yes	Neutral
Italian Ancient spiced wine with archaeologist	19	44	<i>Ciao!</i>	H: 1 P: 1	Vineyard + Home kitchen		Yes	Neutral
Amalfi coast limoncello, try it!	27	58	<i>Ciao!</i> <i>Arrivederci!</i>	H: 1 P: 0	Balcony with a view		No	Neutral

Table 1. Overview of main visual and auditory features.

As can be seen in Table 1, the video format is very short, ranging between 19 and 34 seconds. Some videos feature more speech from the host(s) than others, with an average of around 50 words per video. Additionally, the majority of videos take place in a domestic kitchen, show the host wearing some type of cook's or chef's attire, and feature the hosts uttering one or two Italian expressions. Half of the videos include more than one host, and half of the videos show hosts interaction with a participant on a screen. In terms of post-production features, although all of the videos feature some background music, only a few use Italian folk music, whereas the majority use neutral instrumental music. The majority of videos do not appear to have been edited professionally. In the remainder of this section, we elaborate on these recurring features observed in our dataset, illustrating our findings with three videos: *Luca and Lorenzo*, *Amazing Italian Pasta experience*, and *Italian ancient spiced wine with archaeologist*.

7.2.1. Location

One of the dominant visual elements in the videos is the setting. Across our dataset, hosts have chosen two main types of settings for recording their promotional OE videos: an indoor setting, in particular their home kitchen, or alternatively, an outdoor setting.



Image (a)



Image (b)

As can be seen in Image (a), hosts Luca and Lorenzo present their OE in their home kitchen, which is the case in the majority of our videos. Of

course, this finding is unsurprising given the topic of food-related OEs, which center on food preparation. Showing a real home kitchen where everyday cooking happens is not only practical but also emphasizes realism.

While most of the videos depict the OE hosts preparing food in their home kitchens, other videos were filmed outdoors. For instance, the video for *Italian ancient spiced wine with an archaeologist* (Image (b)) shows the host walking through a vineyard. Other outdoors settings shown in OE videos include a citrus grove, a vegetable garden and a balcony overlooking the Amalfi coast. Setting the video outdoors highlights a deep connection to the source of the food and emphasizes the authenticity of the products used as well as the localness of the recipe and of the hosts. Further, such settings are visually appealing. This aesthetic appeal may attract viewers who are not only interested in cooking but who also appreciate the beauty of Italian natural settings. (The fact that these OEs were created during the early days of the COVID pandemic (March-April 2020), when international travel was severely restricted, very likely made the representation of Italian landscapes during this time even more appealing to viewers/prospective participants, most of whom were homebound at the time and could not travel.)

7.2.2. Culinary attire

The majority of the videos show the host wearing typical chef's attire, such as aprons, chef toques and/or chef jackets.



Image (c)

As seen in Image (c), in the video for *Amazing Italian Pasta experience*, host Deborah wears a matching red chef's toque and chef jacket. Wearing chef's attire communicates a sense of professionalism and authority in the culinary field. It acts as a visual shorthand for the viewer/prospective OE participant, suggesting that although the host may be delivering the OE from their home kitchen, they nevertheless possess the expertise and qualifications to teach or guide the experience. In contrast, when hosts are depicted *not* wearing chef's attire—as in Images (a) and (b)—this connotes a greater sense of casualness and informality.

7.2.3. Number of hosts

Our analysis found that half of the videos features a single host (as in Image (b)), whereas the other half depict multiple hosts—as exemplified in Images (a) and (c). Videos featuring a single host emphasize the expertise and personality of that individual, making the experience more focused and centered around their specific skills and unique knowledge. This can be particularly effective if the host has a strong personal brand or a unique style that is a key selling point of the experience—as is the case with Raffaele, the host of *Ancient Italian Spiced Wines with an Archaeologist*, who emphasizes the unique disciplinary perspective that he offers in his OE. Furthermore, the presence of a single host may make the video clearer and easier to follow.

On the other hand, videos featuring multiple hosts tend to be more dynamic. This is exemplified by the two hosts, *Luca and Lorenzo*, shown in Image (a), who engage in jocular banter with one another in their video. Interactions between a video's hosts add an element of spontaneity and liveliness, making the video more engaging and enjoyable to watch—as we will illustrate in more detail below in our analysis of *Pasta with the Grandmas* below, in 7.3. Additionally, having multiple hosts may also allow for the presentation of different skills, perspectives, and culinary techniques in the same video. This can enrich the educational value of the experience, as different hosts may bring their own specialties and insights, offering a broader learning opportunity. Videos which include two or more hosts typically emphasize collaboration and teamwork, appealing to viewers who enjoy seeing people work together in a cooperative environment.

7.2.4. Interaction with participants

Half of the videos depict an interaction between the host(s) and one or more participants of the OE. Image (d) shows a shot of a laptop located in

hosts' Deborah kitchen: on its screen, we see a participant as she engages virtually in their *Amazing Italian Pasta experience* from her own kitchen.



Image (d)

Because OE participants are not physically co-present with hosts, they are shown as being ‘digitally’ present, appearing on a digital tablet or computer screen (as in Image (d)), just as they would appear to the host during an actual OE. Representing host-participant interactions during these brief promotional OE videos offers viewers a preview of the educational approach that will be adopted in the actual OE, and may help potential participants set their expectations.

Ultimately, the variation in the number of people included in these videos allows for a range of different types of interactions portrayed: from a solo video with a single host to a more complex multiparty interaction involving multiple hosts interacting with multiple (virtual) guests. Each setup creates a different dynamic and is likely to impact the viewer’s perception of the experience in distinct ways.

7.2.5. Video editing style

We also observed variation in video editing. A number of videos (N=5) resemble professional advertisements in that they feature a slick, rapid editing style, whereas a slight majority (N=7) are clearly “homemade,” with lower quality in the clarity of images and less smooth transitions from one shot to the next. A professional editing style incorporates high-quality visuals and seamless transitions, appealing to an audience that values a well-

produced and visually appealing presentation. This style can be effective on platforms such as Airbnb, where there is stiff competition for viewer attention. Professional video production may also lend authority and credibility to the host and the experience, and it can make the experience seem more legitimate and well-established. While it is impossible to know the extent to which the highly polished professional production style is related to the overall popularity and success of the video we discuss below (*Pasta with the Grandmas*), it is definitely the case that this video's professional, rapid editing enables its hosts to convey a wealth of relevant and appealing visual information in a very short time frame.

In contrast, a less professional and more 'homemade' editing style, which include simpler cuts, less polished visuals, and a more casual presentation — as is the case in the video for *Luca and Lorenzo*, shown in Image (a)— might convey a greater sense of authenticity. It can make the host(s) seem more approachable and relatable, which may appeal to viewers looking for a more personal and genuine interaction. In this sense, a 'homemade' video can create a greater sense of intimacy between the viewer and the host(s): as though they are being invited into a personal space or family setting. In addition, it is likely that videos which appear to be more amateur, rather than professionally made, convey the message that the cooking experience being promoted is accessible to everyone, including those who might be intimidated by overly professional productions. It suggests that the focus is more on fun and learning rather than perfection, which may be particularly appealing to beginners or casual learners who would appreciate a more easygoing learning experience.

7.2.6. Auditory elements

As mentioned earlier, all videos include a background musical soundtrack: three feature Italian folk music, while the other nine include more neutral ambient instrumental music. Unsurprisingly, spoken discourse also occurs in all of the videos. In most videos, hosts speak to, and directly address, their potential audience, i.e., prospective participants or "guests," who are presumably viewing the video to learn more about the host as well as what the OE is like. However, the amount of spoken language in each video varies. For instance, as Table 1 shows, some hosts produce several complete utterances (e.g., *Luca and Lorenzo*), while others utter only a few words (e.g., *Pizza class with Italian pizza chef*). Although hosts use English as the primary language in these videos, in the majority of the videos (9/12) hosts also

produce a small set of common words or formulaic phrases in Italian, such as *ciao* (*hi*) or *buon appetito* (*enjoy your meal*). In other words, although spoken language plays some role in all of the videos, it is clearly not the dominant communicative mode used to convey the host's message, as will become evident in our more detailed multimodal analysis below (7.3), where we show how much more information is communicated through visuals and rapid editing. Indeed, OE videos are characterized by considerable modal complexity, whereby a multitude of communicative modes are utilized simultaneously to construct an (inter)action.

7.3. Multimodal analysis of “Pasta with Grandmas”

Because the main goal of this study is to investigate how hosts exploit modal resources in their videos to construct their culinary identities and through that, to promote their OEs, we now present a more fine-grained, detailed analysis of our focal video, *Pasta with the Grandmas*. *Pasta with the Grandmas* portrays a multiparty interaction between the two hosts —Chiara and her grandma (*nonna*)— who, toward the end, are joined by a virtual participant of the OE, shown on a small screen located in the hosts' kitchen. The food-related activity offered by this specific OE consists of preparing homemade pasta from scratch.

One of the most striking features of this video is its professional production, characterized by an extremely rapid editing style that enables the hosts to densely pack a series of messages and information into a very short time frame (19 seconds); this is complemented by an upbeat soundtrack. The result is presented not as a coherent storyline, but rather as a sequence of different frames not necessarily connected to each other in a linear fashion, yet all serving the main function of presenting and promoting the OE. Because of this non-linear editing, we first offer a brief synopsis of the video, providing a concise second by second overview of its content. After this, we present our analysis of the main multimodal sequences of the video, in which multiple modes in individual frames of the video are exploited by these hosts in order to achieve their communicative goals.

7.3.1. Synopsis

The video opens with a moving close-up of fresh ingredients (tomatoes, herbs and onions) on a wooden table in a domestic kitchen. The hosts then demonstrate the stages of food preparation, briefly working the dough before showing a finished tagliatelle dish. Next, Chiara addresses viewers directly,

highlighting the uniqueness of their OE, followed by a shot of her and *nonna* hugging. Chiara and *nonna* then interact with a female participant via a tablet, greeting her, demonstrating techniques, and providing feedback. Throughout, fast close-ups capture their hands meticulously shaping pasta. The video concludes with Chiara and *nonna* dancing, the guest joining in, and Chiara speaking to the camera again before a final close-up of the completed dish.

7.3.2. Opening: Food preparation

At the beginning of the video (00:01), the first modally dense moment is represented by the frame of Chiara and *nonna*, both wearing aprons and working the dough together on a wooden cutting board (Image e). Chiara is the one touching the flour, while *nonna* is closely watching what Chiara is doing. Beyond the main object handling action, other modes co-occur to emphasize the collaboration and closeness between the two hosts. This is underscored both by proxemics —i.e., Chiara and *nonna* are standing very close to each other— as well as the shared object of their gaze (both hosts are gazing down looking at the dough), all of which reveals a mutual attention to the food preparation they are carrying out.

In the following frame (00:02, Image (f)), *nonna* now takes over the lead in the food preparation and she is shown working the rolled dough with both hands as she appears to be demonstrating her technique to Chiara, who is observing over *nonna*'s shoulder. Although they shift positions in the frame, once again Chiara and *nonna* are standing very closely together and both are gazing down, looking at the dough, maintaining a sense of closeness and intergenerational collaboration between the two co-hosts.



Image (e)



Image (f)

In these images —just as in most frames in which a food preparation action is taking place— typical Italian ingredients and cooking utensils are also displayed within the same frame¹. These foods and objects, even if they are often placed in the background of the main (inter)action, nevertheless contribute to the construction of an authentic Italian culinary experience. Indeed, the cumulative value of these multiple visual elements (i.e., typical Italian ingredients, cooking utensils, aprons, kitchen setting) implicitly communicate a degree of culinary authenticity and expertise.

7.3.3. Talking to the audience

The next sequence is represented by Chiara speaking to the camera (Image (g)), addressing viewers directly (00:04). In contrast to the previous sequence in which Chiara and *nonna* were focused on object handling and food preparation, in this frame we observe a clear change of the main action. Chiara stands alone in the frame and speaks directly to the camera; for the first time in the video, her gaze is not focused on the food but is instead oriented directly at the camera. In addition, she assumes a specific posture, with both hands on the cutting board and her torso leaning forward toward the camera. This moment reveals an awareness by the host of the commercial scope of the video she is creating. Indeed, directing her gaze to the camera and addressing her speech to the imagined viewers of the video is an obvious self-promoting action, in which the host acknowledges potential participants, and communicates directly with her audience.

In the voiceover from Chiara that occurs during the opening seconds of the video, we hear Chiara saying “We will share our handmade pasta technique with our guests.” However, as the shot changes to Chiara now addressing the camera, she concludes this utterance by saying “You need a grandma to know it” (Image g). The spoken language thus clearly contributes to the self-promotional goals of the video. Beginning with a straightforward description of the core offering of their experience (“We will share our handmade pasta technique with our guests.”) —which verbally ascribes their knowledge as a shared resource (*our handmade pasta technique*), Chiara then shifts to the “special” feature, or the unique aspect of her OE, which is the presence and contribution of her grandma, whose role will be discussed in more detail in the next section.



Image (g)

7.3.4. Interaction: Chiara and Nonna hugging

Immediately after the frame shown in Image (g), the fundamental role of Chiara's grandma (*nonna*) expressed through spoken language is now reinforced by additional semiotic dimensions as well. More specifically, the following frame shows *nonna* and Chiara hugging each other (Image (h)). While the opening seconds of the video depict moments in which Chiara and *nonna*'s attention is focused on food handling, the video also includes several segments – such as this one – in which food preparation is moved to the background and the relational connection and interaction between *nonna* and Chiara takes the foreground.

The reciprocal physical action (i.e., movement) of hugging takes place as a brief interlude during the food preparation, as Chiara wraps her arms around *nonna*, and *nonna* touches the back of Chiara's arm with her left arm, while holding a knife in her right hand. Both during (Image (h)) and at the end of the hug (Image (i)), the proxemics of the co-hosts indicate intimacy and their smiling facial expression signal connection and affection between Chiara and *nonna*.

The active presence of *nonna* both in the video and in the name of this OE is not only of fundamental importance in the identity construction of the hosts of the OE but it also functions as an implicit index of Italianness of the OE, thus it becomes a key component in the promotion of the experience itself. Indeed, the Italian grandmother/*nonna* embodies an iconic figure in Italian culinary tradition and has been elevated to undisputed

stronghold of Italian gastronomic traditions (Parasecoli, 2019). *Nonnas* represent the main reference point of Italy's culinary past, and they are often linked to the concepts of tradition, family and authenticity. While none of the other OEs in our dataset exploit the cultural figure of the *nonna* quite to the extent that this particular OE does (in which the grandmother is actually a co-host of the OE), many other Italian OE hosts also make references to their culinary knowledge having been passed down from their grandmothers. Indeed, we found this to be a common strategy in many of the hosts' bios for establishing their expertise and authority on Italian food-related matters (Vásquez & Cenni, 2024).

This archetype of the *nonna* as repository of Italian culinary knowledge and expertise is reproduced and exploited in this video, especially when demonstrating food preparation (as in (e) and (f), for instance). In addition, the intergenerational hug between Chiara and *nonna* visually emphasizes the passing down of family traditions and thus contributes to the construction of a traditional Italian identity. Furthermore, Chiara's verbal message to the viewers (i.e., *you need a grandma to know it*) succinctly positions *nonna* as the ultimate authority on Italian pasta-making, while simultaneously highlighting what is special, or unique, about this particular OE. Indeed, other than one brief directive spoken by Chiara—in which we overhear her giving instructions to the virtual participant (*don't press down on the pasta or it will stick*)—the only explicit claim to culinary authority that is made verbally in this video is in Chiara's utterance, *you need a grandma to know it*, in which the modal of necessity (*need*) situates the food-related knowledge exclusively with *nonna*.



Image (h)



Image (i)

7.3.5. Interaction with guest

Following the hugging sequence are several frames that depict the interaction between the two co-hosts and the participant who is following their OE online (Images j, k, l, m).



Image (j)

Similar to several other OE videos in our dataset (see Table 1 and Image (d)), hosts not only show what will be done during the OE in terms of food preparation but they also demonstrate the style of interaction between the host and their participants during their OE. The interaction between hosts and participant (Image (j)) starts with both Chiara and *nonna* looking at the digital tablet (00:06) that is resting on their worktable, as they greet the participant who is following the OE virtually. In this frame (Image (j)) the same multimodal greeting action is achieved differently by the two hosts. *Nonna* says “ciao” in Italian and her posture and facial expression remain neutral (i.e., both hands palm down on the cutting board and neutral facial expression). In contrast, Chiara performs her greeting in a much more animated fashion, by exploiting diverse semiotic resources. In particular, she accompanies her English language *hi* with a hand gesture, waving to the participant, thus performing her greeting both verbally and non-verbally, while her facial expression conveys great enthusiasm (big open-mouthed smile, head slightly tilted toward the screen), especially when compared to the expression of *nonna* in the same frame.

In the following moment the video presents a change of perspective, with the camera angle revealing the participant showing her own food preparation to *nonna* via the tablet, which appears on the right side of the frame (k). In

response, *nonna*, shown in profile on the left side of the frame, offers feedback to the participant through the gesture of clapping her hands as she looks back at the participant on the screen. In this moment, no spoken language is used by *nonna* (or Chiara), however the gesture of clapping — which takes visual prominence in the center of the frame— and *nonna*'s smiling facial expression clearly communicates a message of approval and encouragement to the participant, highlighting not only the highly interactive but also the learning dimension of this OE.



Image (k)

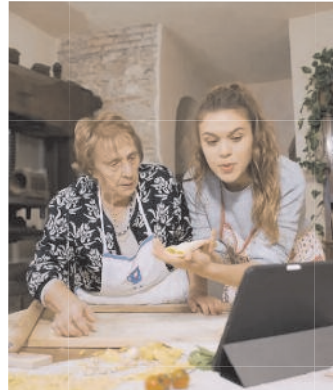


Image (l)

The teaching aspect of the OE and its interactive character is further emphasized in the following frame, in which *nonna* and Chiara, standing closely next to each other, display the rolled dough to the participant, as they both gaze at the tablet (l). In this frame both co-hosts lean forward to the tablet's camera, displaying the dough closer to the camera; their postures and gestures suggesting that they want to be sure the participant can see the correct procedure for this step in the food preparation.



Image (m)

In final frame of this segment (Image (m)), the screen of the tablet occupies the center of the frame. On the screen of the tablet, the smiling participant is holding up her own cut tagliatelle, in front of her camera, proudly displaying her result from this OE. The frame depicts similar freshly cut pasta lying on the table in front of the tablet, as well as *nonna's* hands clapping, even if slightly blurred, and we hear Chiara's voice in the background exclaiming “Che figo!” (*How cool!*). Both of these signs, involving different modes (e.g., clapping, speaking), produced by the two hosts, reciprocally reinforce the hosts' encouragement toward, and positive evaluation of, the learning outcomes of their virtual participant. In this way, they give viewers a preview of the nature of the hosts' enthusiastic interactional style, while at the same time, depicting an OE participant who appears to be a successful, satisfied customer.

7.3.6. Cooking and dancing

During the interaction with the guest, *nonna* and Chiara are shown dancing near the cutting board situated on their working table (Image (n)). *Nonna* dances in front of Chiara moving her hands and arms, while Chiara dances behind *nonna*, jumping from side to side, while waving her arms up and down, with an excited, happy facial expressions (i.e., mouth open and smiling) and holding a rolling pin in the air.



Image (n)

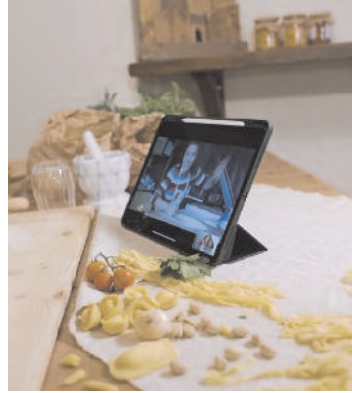


Image (o)

This action is a bit surprising, as dancing is usually unrelated to cooking and contrasts with the video's other food-focused actions, which are more obviously connected to food preparation. However, like the earlier hugging sequence, these dancing actions may index stereotypical associations between Italian food culture and embodied conviviality (Parasecoli, 2019). Beyond these stereotypical associations, dancing in this video clearly functions as a non-verbal action which highlights the entertainment (or “edutainment”) dimension of this OE. Including this dancing in the kitchen segment clearly conveys a message about the engaging nature of the OE, which is strongly tied to the self-promotional function of the video². Moreover, a density of multimodal resources are marshalled simultaneously at precisely this moment to communicate the overall message of fun: gesture, movement, facial expression, proxemics, Chiara's voiceover (“What makes our experience so special, I think...”), and the upbeat soundtrack. After the frame in which *nonna* and Chiara are dancing, the participant too is shown “dancing” (moving her torso from side to side, on the tablet's screen), reinforcing the notion that the “fun” aspect of this OE is contagious.

7.3.7. Closing

At the end of the video, we see Chiara looking directly at the camera (Image (p)) and completing the utterance initiated in her earlier voiceover statement: “[What makes our experience so special I think]... is the love we put in.” Chiara comes into frame just as she says the word *love*, which she emphasizes not only through emphatic stress, but also with a beat gesture of her clasped

hands, as well as with her sincere facial expression (Image (p)). At the same time, *nonna* is shown on the left side of the frame, absorbed in her work on the table in front of her, communicating, once more, her culinary experience and expertise implicitly as her skillful manual work is depicted visually.

This message is simultaneously emotional and promotional. In our earlier work, we found that the words *love* and *passion* were frequent appeals to pathos used by many Italian OE hosts in their “Meet your host” bios to emphasize their authenticity. In the video format, what is evident from this frame is how many different modal dimensions —spoken language, gaze, facial expression, hand gesture, movements— co-occur and work together to communicate a message of love and passion in this multimodal ensemble centering on Italian food preparation.



Image (p)

8. Conclusions

In this study, we analyzed videos created by hosts of Italian food Airbnb Online Experiences, where hosts present their culinary expertise while offering a preview of the OE. Elaborating on the modal richness of these videos, we examined how hosts exploit multimodal resources in the audiovisual format to construct their identities and promote their offerings.

Similar in length and content to the other videos in our dataset, in the ‘*Pasta with the Grandmas*’ video —with fewer than 45 words uttered— the majority of the communicative content in the 19 second video was conveyed visually. Although the setting of the video was in a domestic kitchen and food

preparation was ostensibly the primary topic of this video, what the visual content highlighted to a far greater extent were human interactions. More than focusing on the food itself, or the food preparation activities, the majority of the shots in the video depicted interactions between Chiara and *nonna*, between the two co-hosts and their virtual participant, and between Chiara and the viewers. And more than through the language represented, it was through the high density of modal resources—which included an upbeat soundtrack, close proxemics between co-hosts, gestures, animated facial expressions and movements—that the video projected a sense of interactivity and conviviality. Furthermore, our analysis shows that culinary authority and authenticity were indexed far more implicitly than explicitly: through the kitchen setting, the close-up camera shots of fresh ingredients, a few shots of Chiara and *nonna* working the dough while wearing aprons, and their delivery of praise to the virtual guest. Indeed, the only claims to culinary authority made explicitly were verbal references to *nonna* and *love*, elements of the OE which were actually depicted to a far greater extent visually, thus requiring only minimal linguistic reinforcement.

More generally, our findings indicate that in these videos hosts' culinary identity constructions are achieved by the combination and integration of multiple modal resources. Communicating to their audience, hosts exploit all the resources available through the audiovisual format: speech, gesture, gaze, posture, movement, camera angles, music, and editing. Our analysis shows how these multimodal resources are carefully orchestrated and combined by hosts in order to achieve their communicative goals: to construct their culinary identities, to project a sense of interactivity, and to promote their offerings on the platform.

Furthermore, our analysis shows that spoken language is not the most prominent mode and that it is exploited far less than visual elements in this format. In other words, hosts in these videos tend to show rather than tell, which reveals that spoken language plays more of a supporting than a leading role in this communicative format and context. Moreover, videos allow hosts to express themselves effectively in a more physical and tactile way, involving other senses and semiotic resources, such as touch (e.g. through food preparation) or proxemics (physical closeness between Chiara and *nonna*), a tendency which is in line with the highly sensorial nature of food and food-related communication. Beyond conveying their message, constructing relevant identities, and showcasing ways in which OEs can be interactive, the videos represent a powerful form of self-promotion or

marketing. In the case of Chiara and *nonna*, the careful orchestration of elements in their video has likely played some role in the popularity and success of their OE.

Finally, our study attests to the need for further multimodal research on videos, which remain underrepresented in academic research on digital food discourse. To date, only a handful of studies have explored digital food discourse from a multimodal perspective, with most of these restricting their focus to textual or text-image interactions and often maintaining a primary analytic focus on linguistic aspects of the message. With the expansion of video sharing platforms in recent years—and given the pervasiveness of audiovisual material in our everyday life and communicative habits—there is a clear need for additional studies which take into account all the semiotic resources brought into play in food-related audiovisual texts.

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NOTES

¹ Ingredients and/or cooking objects appear in the majority of the video (i.e., in 16 of the total 19 seconds).

² This element represents the dominant feature which sets this video apart from the others.

