Savoring food is capable of triggering tangible and vivid emotional interactions that transcend language and geographical boundaries. Culinary diplomacy represents one of the most enthusiastic instruments of cultural diplomacy. Culinary diplomacy, gastrodipomacy under certain contexts, is outlined as using food and national cuisine to create multicultural connections, with the aim of improving communication and long-term cultural understanding. Research on Egyptian youth’s acculturation with respect to food attitudes, habits, and environment is very limited. Hence, this study examines the role of culinary diplomacy as a public diplomacy instrument aiming to enhance foreign publics’ perceptions. This study analyzes the usage of culinary diplomacy as a means to develop an edible nation-brand, reflected in foreign publics’ behavior, perceptions, and consumption patterns. A quantitative survey has been distributed among Egyptians to assess and evaluate their perception, attitude, and behavior towards the use of food as a public diplomacy tool and its tagged symbolic connotations, ideas, values, identities, and behavior.

**Keywords:** public diplomacy, culinary diplomacy, nation-branding, soft

Food is an omnipresent element in history; with its communal rituals and habits across history (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). Food practices are an integral part of any culture, representing history, traditions, and culture. Scientists believe that food practices have the ability to maintain social cohesion. According to Prof. Robin Dunbar, a professor of psychology at Oxford believes that food always brings people together. Dunbar, Gamble, and Gowlett (2014) added that the act of eating together activates the endorphin system in the brain, playing a crucial role in social bonding in humans. Moreover, Spence (2016) indicated that food has a significant role not only in bonding, but the food we consume or even refuse to consume is capable of saying a lot about us.

In addition to its role in social bonding, food is a key determent of culture and identity. Brillat-Savarin (1862) affirmed that food is seen as an imperative means through which nations express themselves. Guerrón-Montero (2004) added that “[a]round the world, foods are both eaten and avoided in the name of racial or ethnic identity [and] is also intimately linked to political and economic power” (p. 29). Most famous examples of such identities include: “As American as apple pie”.

The association of food, nationalism, and connoted power indicates the potential of utilizing food in the international relations spectrum. Food has always been present during international communication, beginning...
with entertaining foreign diplomats and envoys with one’s national cuisine. Nonetheless, using food as an established technique to conduct diplomacy is still developing (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). Governments seek to disseminate any cultural artifact to the vast recipient world-wide; such disseminated messages may be in a form of national food, dish, or on a broader scale a national cuisine (Wilson, 2013, as cited in Chapple-Sokol, 2013).

**Food and Attitudes**

Generally speaking, attitude is a complex process that embodies various elements constituting food-related decisions and consumption patterns. Literature suggests that cultural differences in food attitudes exist across cultures. Moreover, group dynamics may affect attitude towards food. Studies showed that collectivist societies emphasize the desire of group structure rather than individual structure. However, Markus and Kitayama, in 2010, concluded that the individual self is still grouped around the influence and pressure of the group.

Less emphasis has been found when examining the relationship between food attitudes that may affect food consumption and food behavioral patterns. Literature offered associations on how the pleasure of eating is linked to levels of psychological well-being. A different link to food attitudes included the relationship between food attitudes and well-being to culture-specific factors. To conclude, the research found assessing the relationship among food attitudes and well-being has tackled the issue from positive and negative rewards only, and has explored various measures of well-being (Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

Brillat-Savarin’s famous adage “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are” provides clear inextricably links between identity and food preferences. Food preference and consequently choice are a complex act, influenced by several interrelated variables. Culture and food-related attitudes are key players in defining what consumers consume in a specific context. For example, studies have shown that reasons behind food choices are variant; some showed that consumers select food products with the purpose of feeling specific emotions (Varela & Ares, 2015).

Factors that may affect habits and food attitudes vary from: home environment, educational background, availability and accessibility to fast food providers, and social environment in their surroundings (Caswell & Yaktine, 2013). Consuming food is not only for a survival mechanism, it is a complex system of communication, an association of images and behavior (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). Since the 1900s, academic research on food has developed into a multi-disciplinary academic area. Most of the literature about food and diplomacy, in particular, culinary diplomacy, exist in the form of case studies. Literature provides numerous examples of gastrodiplomacy programs of Peru (Wilson, 2013), South Korea (Pham, 2013), Indonesia (Rasyidah, 2015), Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, and Japan, among others. In addition to the scarcity of culinary diplomacy research, there is limited research on Egyptian youth’s behavior with respect to food habits and attitudes.

Research showed that food product choice is a complex function of preferences for sensory characteristics, combined with the influence of non-sensory factors, including food-related expectations and attitudes, health claims, price, ethical concerns, and mood (Prescott, Young, O’neill, Yau, & Stevens, 2002). Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Sobal, and Falk (1996) had developed a comprehensive model to outline how people construct the process of choosing foods in general. Three major components used in this study are life course, influences, and personal systems. Food Choice Questionnaire has been used in this study as an instrument for predicting general food choice (Markes & Kitayama, 2010).

The authors decided to examine people’s perceptions of food and diplomacy and explore the relationship of these perceptions to their attitudes and eating behaviors. First, because food selection decisions are based in
part on surrounding companionship, respondents were asked about who or what decides their food choice and
decision. Moreover, this study tackled food attitudes analysis to illustrate: Attitudes are better predictors of
behaviors when the base of the attitude matches the nature of the behavior (Cantin & Dube, 1999; Millar &
Tesser, 1986; 1989).

**Food and Diplomacy**

Ruddy (2014) attributed the phrase “Food is the oldest form of diplomacy” to Hillary Clinton, United
States secretary of state when addressing the power of food and its potential use in diplomacy. Clinton gave a
new function to food by naming it “smart diplomacy” and crafting novel tasks that fall under its provenance
(Spence, 2016). Food significance has always been entrenched in history; Aristotle, in his book *Politics*,
debated the meaning of communal meals within a community, he saw it as a bond of solidarity as that of a
family unit (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). Constantinou (1996), in his book *On the Way to Diplomacy*, described the
links between food and diplomacy in ancient Greece. Constantinou emphasized the usage of food and
gastronomy as a “non-logocentric form of communication”, meaning it does not involve words for functionality.
This conception aligns with Raymond Cohen’s analysis of non-verbal diplomatic signaling. Cohen (1987)
defined non-verbal communication as “having two aspects, both the deliberate transfer of information by
non-verbal means from one state to another and also from the leadership of a state to its own population on an
international issue” (p. 27).

With its robust association with diplomacy, food has always been tied to negotiations and decision-making.
Natalie Jones, deputy chief of protocol in the US Government claims: “food is crucial because tough
negotiations take place at the dining table” (Burros, 2012, p. 2). Research showed that sharing a meal usually
ends up with positive consequences, and also fewer hierarchical displays of submissiveness, like for example
family members or employees and their bosses. Free lunch in companies, like Google, Apple, and Yahoo, is
very often, aiming to communicate and allow employees to socialize, encouraging diplomatic communication.

Diplomacy might be the mean, yet it differs in context and goals. Thus, on a country level, every country
has its own definition that copes with its identified objectives. The Planning Group for Integration of United
States Information Agency (USIA) into the Department of State in the United States of America sees public
diplomacy as “activities meant to explain and influence foreign audiences to promote the national interest of the
United States” (McPhail, 2010). Melissen and Wang (2019) outlined public diplomacy as “a country’s efforts
to create and maintain relationships with publics in other societies to advance policies and actions” (p. 2).

Building upon previous definitions, public diplomacy entails the usage of complex and multifaceted issues,
depending on foreign policy decisions and contemporary political context (Gilboa, 2008). Public diplomacy
may overlap with branding in some objectives or activities. Similarities among them may incorporate image
branding and symbols management, relationship building, and use of mass media. One of the most famous
cultural diplomacy activities is branding; Ham (2002) argued that branding “implies a shift in political
paradigms from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence”
as cited in Gilboa, 2008).

**Culinary Diplomacy & Nation-Branding**

The association made between food and image branding paves the road to using food as a tool of
international relations. One of the most powerful and overlooked forms of international relations and public
diplomacy is “culinary diplomacy”. Culinary diplomacy is the use of food and cuisine as an instrument to create cross-cultural understanding in the hope of improving interactions and cooperation (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). Recently, the government invokes the power of its cuisine as the tool of a national brand, so that when foreigners consume their product/food, they identify the food’s country, and thereby strengthen their connotations with that country.

Culinary diplomacy is often mistaken for food diplomacy and gastrodiplomacy; food diplomacy is using food aid as a tool of public outreach to reduce global hunger as a means to fight poverty (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). Paul Rockower in 2012 claimed that gastrodiplomacy is highly different than both culinary diplomacy and food diplomacy. The former is characterized by the hospitality efforts of using food for diplomatic purposes to gratify or convey subtle messages; while the latter is about sending food aid to countries in need due to a disaster or a crisis (Rockower, 2012). Another distinction is the power played by the foreign publics; culinary diplomacy may build a brand image from consumers to consumers with minimal supervision from officials. The most prestigious summit of culinary diplomacy is the “Club des Chefs des Chefs”, a group of the chefs of heads of state, whose slogan is “If politics divides people, a good table always gathers them” (Chapple-Sokol, 2013, p. 179).

Culinary diplomacy activities differ according to the intended objectives and range from promoting national cuisine for the country’s brand image, via sponsored television shows, the opening of restaurants in foreign countries, holding gastronomical events, creating awareness campaigns, exporting national dishes, and finally facilitating the process of finding ingredients in other countries. The United States, for example, is used to sending ambassador chefs and has launched the Diplomatic Culinary Partnership. Such a program aims to represent the United States abroad, furthermore, it aims to invite foreign chefs and culinary professionals to taste and discuss food (Prichep, 2014). Additionally, the United States of America took the first step towards executing official steps to operationalize culinary diplomacy; in September 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that José Andrés, a Spanish-born Washington D.C.-area chef, would be the first to hold the title first official “culinary ambassador”. His role is as the United States’ liaison with the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, an international partnership that is working to bring new cooking technologies to the developing world (Chapple-Sokol, 2013).

The initial effort of culinary diplomacy was first used in 2002, Thailand launched the “Global Thai Program”; Thailand’s idea of using food was a product of its situation in the 1960s and 1970s when it was known for sex tourism. Also, as a response to the war in neighboring Indochina, Thailand used national cuisine and diplomacy to reach substantial numbers of people, and alter the country’s image. In 2003, the government launched “Global Thai” under former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a plan to boost the number of Thai restaurants around the world in a bid to drive tourism and promote awareness of Thailand.

A Cable News Network (CNN) poll declared that Thai food is the world’s most popular cuisine, with pad Thai and Thai green curry becoming the favorite dishes of so many around the world (Ranta, 2015). Thailand today is one of the largest food processing countries in the world, as well as the world’s largest exporter of rice, ahead of India and Vietnam. Since the global Thai program, other countries, such as Taiwan, Korea, Peru, Malaysia, and Indonesia have sought to use their own unique “culinary delights to appeal to the global public’s appetite”, with a view towards improving the national image. A number of nations in Latin America, Asia, and Africa have historically employed national cuisines as a strategy to emphasize identity and contest colonialism.
Food Culture and Nation-Branding

Food is not only a method to survive, but also to comfort ourselves, communicate with others, and connect us to our forbearers. The symbolic nature of food culture includes practices, messages, colors, and preferences. Food culture is unique because it is a product of society, not organized by the government’s officials, but by the society and individuals within it (Montanari, 2006). Food and its symbolic representation can be used to communicate ideas, values, identity, and attitudes. In his book, *Competitive Identity*, Simon Anholt (2007) crafted the concept of nation-branding. The general objective of nation-branding is to enhance that image to outsiders, as to view the nation in a positive manner.

Nationalism and nation-branding play an important part in the creation of an effective culinary diplomacy campaign. A nation invokes the power of its cuisine as the tool of the national brand, so that foreigners while consuming the food/product will strengthen their associations with that country and attached artifacts (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). Creating a gastro-brand is defined as “activity to recognize and appreciate food as a material representation of experience to have an emotional and cultural connection” (Irwansyah & Triputa 2016, p. 4586).

In 2004, Olins described the nation-branding process as a “conscious and deliberate attempt to project a clear, consistent and ideologically dominated national identity” (p. 2). Nation-branding is a process of designing, planning, and communicating the name and identity of a country in order to build or manage its reputation with the aim of increasing a country’s international profile (Brian, 2016). Nation-branding might have variable names, yet the objective remains the same. For example, Singh (2015) called it delicious diplomacy or edible propaganda, elucidated as “planned branding efforts by governments looking to raise their profile on the world stage”. A most prominent example of food and national identity is France which as a brand, has the baguette, crème brulée, and soufflé among others. Another example is the Lebanese hummus plate, which was part of a campaign by the Association of Lebanese Industrialists, dubbed “Hands off Our Dishes”, which was “intended to stop Israel from marketing hummus, falafel and other dishes as Israeli”.

Soft Power and Contact Theory

With the advent of globalization and novel means of communication, new public diplomacy emerged as a subfield of global communication with long-standing ties to social influence, persuasive communication, and international exchange and engagement. New public diplomacy differentiates itself from mainstream public diplomacy by novel activities and recipients that cope with new media platforms offering a flow of collective images, messages, and meaning which we absorb and eventually, explicitly or implicitly, begin to embody such messages (see a vivid account of such collective images and messages in Wenzel, 2018).

We consume veiled messages from the media rather than family, friends, community, and the surrounding environment. Furthermore, with the expansion of social media platforms, a new culture emerged which is mainly driven by large multimedia conglomerates and sometimes by social media trends. ...Media conglomerates and trend influencers are capable of disseminating, controlling, and reproducing the universal flow of words, images, and sounds. They seek to influence the audiences’ minds with no regard to geographical location. Their messages are disseminated without no confined time nor space (McPhail, 2010).

The strength of a national culinary diplomacy program lies in its use of soft power and successful cultural communication, which allow nations while using less military, political, or economic strength to put their
imprint on the world around them (Tenkorang, 2019). “Through food, you can understand the cultures; and with the culture, you can understand the people …all the world gets fast food through America”, says Ashraf Abdo, who runs the Egyptian Chefs Association (Prichep, 2014). Generally speaking, government officials tend to use food resources in international diplomacy for two purposes: First, they aim to influence international food markets, and second, they aim to impact international economic and political relationships going beyond food markets (Nau, 1978).

According to Nye (2008), soft power is the ability to get other parties to wish for the outcomes that are in your best interest, using attraction to shape preferences. Soft power works by changing a society’s culture, symbolism, and ideology via another society’s culture. To Nye, food and cuisine are ideal examples of a nation’s soft power. Nye’s definition of soft power depends on the notion of attraction; focusing on what draws people in and appeals to them. Food has the ultimate attraction force as it has the universal effect of being loved by everyone. People might not pay attention to what they are being forced to consume, however, they will be attracted to consume it as a basic instinct to survive; making food the most powerful among cultural artifacts.

One of the theories underlying the field of diplomacy and the use of soft power is the contact theory (Allport, Kenneth, & Pettigrew, 1954). Contact theory is a powerful tool that helps to explain how relationships develop and change as a result of inter-group contact. Contact theory asserts that under the right conditions, contact among members of different groups will reduce hostility and promote more positive behavior in inter-group meetings (Vezzali & Stathi, 2016). Contact theory in relation to culinary diplomacy asserts that under the right circumstances and attitudes of receivers, contact will reduce negative hostility and increase positive behavior. As both soft power and food’s symbolisms are socially generated this enables food to be utilized as soft power (Reynolds, 2010).

**Food in Egypt**

Egypt is located in the northeastern region of the African continent, bordering both the Mediterranean and Red Seas. Egypt has a long and strong bond with food and food culture. Ancient Egyptians left evidence of their food reverence and traditions. Wall paintings and carvings have been discovered on tombs and temples, depicting large feasts and a variety of foods. Many of these ancient foods are still eaten in Egyptian households today in Egypt (Egypt, 2018). In Egypt, eating is an important social activity and is central to marking special events and ceremonial occasions. The main national dish is fava beans (foul). The level of consumption of animal protein is high and usually dependent on wealth. Restaurants are widespread all over Egypt, and they vary in style, cuisine, and prices. Given Egypt’s history of being at the center and crossroads of civilizations in the old times, the Egyptian cuisine cherry-picked and integrated tastes from all over the old world, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, Greece, Morocco, and others (Memphis Tours, 2018).

Among the Arab world, Egypt is considered the largest consumer market and the most diversified economy. Egypt has a growing population that is young and has an increasing demand for food products. Egypt remains the largest market with over 100 million consumers, half of which are below 25 years of age and the most diversified economy in the Arab world; however, inflationary pressures may limit its growth. Young consumers increasingly demand processed products and snack foods, trending tradition for convenience. Typical American fast foods continue to enjoy wide acceptance in the Egyptian market (Tate, 2017).
Scope and Methods

This study examines the role of culinary diplomacy as a public diplomacy instrument aiming to enhance foreign publics’ perceptions. It analyzes the usage of culinary diplomacy as a means to develop a palatable nation-brand, reflected in foreign publics’ behavior, perceptions, and consumption patterns. This study uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Ten in-depth interviews enquired if eating a particular country’s food changes one’s opinion of it. The interviews also examined the perceptions of Egyptians associated with food attitudes, practices, and consumption patterns.

Moreover, a quantitative survey of 126 Egyptians investigated top of mind choices when thinking about food as a diplomacy tool. The survey assessed and evaluated their perception, attitude, and behavior towards the use of food as a public diplomacy tool and its tagged symbolic connotations, ideas, values, identities, and behavior. The questionnaire examined consumers’ food choice behavior and the motivators influencing this type of choice behavior which are complex and include psychological, physiological, situational, socio-cultural, and intrinsic & extrinsic product characteristics (Dalenberg et al., 2014).

To examine the relationship between the independent variables (attitude and perceived perception of food/product), food attitudes were measured by a Likert scale alongside Food Choice and Food Frequency Questionnaire. Attitude is used to evaluate the performance of a particular behavior involving the attitude object, such as food consumption. Attitude refers to the degree to which a person has favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in question.

Findings

In-Depth Interviews

The literature on culinary diplomacy is abundant; however, research on food attitude with relation to nation-branding is less developed. This research provided qualitative results to explain how Egyptian consumers perceive food and its capability for building a nation’s brand image. Perceiving the complex nature and embodied symbols beyond food was crucial for assessing its operationalization as a culinary diplomacy tool.

This research used an in-depth interview as a tool for qualitative research; 10 participants were involved; six females and four males. Differences in education and occupation showed differences in assessing the importance of food and exposure to other countries and cultures. All 10 respondents concurred on the joyfulness driven from food apart from being vital for survival. Those who are frequent travelers showed more inclination to view food as a tool for culinary diplomacy as they are exposed to foreign cuisines. Eight out of 10 respondents recalled colors of the flag and the US as their first thought when recalling American food (burgers, fried chicken). Similarly, when asked of first recalled thought for pizza, Italy was always the answer regardless of social class or occupation.

Combo Connotation

Less frequent travelers viewed food as a means for communication among similar cultures, such as other Arab world countries. However, they did not foresee food’s role in fostering cultural bridges among bipolar countries/entities even if they shared a familiar culture structure, like Israel and Iran, for example. One respondent, a tour guide, when asked about particular food chains, such as KFC and McDonalds, she perceived the color of the country’s flag as the first explicit message behind such food product. For example, KFC she...
recalled the red color of the USA’s flag. Pizza Hut reminded her of the country where pizza is a landmark, Italy. The food (pizza) overrode the country of origin of the chain in this case. She added that food is a direct link to identify a particular culture; she believed food is an artifact of culture, how people react and behave is reflected in how they consume and eat their food.

The majority of respondents agree on the fact that food might be the best, enjoyable, and well perceived global communication tool than any other tool because we “simply love it”. Doaa Asaad, an Egyptian engineer, adds: “why would you eat it if you don’t like it”. Consuming the food consequently follows consumption of a *combo of meanings*; country, brand, culture, manners, attitudes, and finally behaviors of such connoted country relating to food origin. Asaad adds that food expounds on the culture and people’s behaviors. In a way, if you have a cuisine that is mainly concerned with healthy dishes, such as French cuisine, then probably this culture has well-being as a general behavioral pattern.

Another element that was considered is the consumption of American coffee and its tagged behavior. Seven out of the 10 respondents saw coffee as a foreign artifact that abides by a behavioral pattern that is alien to the Arab world. “We may be used to have tea, and not even on a daily basis, but why coffee for work every day?” asks Mohamed Salah, supply chain director. Salah adds that currently there has been an independent sector running on morning coffee, and he is amazed by how many people are obliged to make a morning stop to consume coffee and its accompaniments from a coffee-shop that is usually US origin. “Since when do we have to make a stop for coffee, let alone an American one”, adds Salah. Coffee has been invading the Egyptian market for the past couple of years, branches of US coffee franchises are around every corner. Consuming morning coffee is an American tradition that has been applied to the Egyptian market rigorously, making it a common morning food habit borrowed from the American culture.

**Quantitative Survey**

The questionnaire was distributed online and completed by 126 respondents. They represented the Egyptian social fabric well in terms of gender (56% females) and age groups. The sample had equal representation of age group 35-45 years old and above 45 years old of 34% each, 25-34 years old were 25% of the total sample, 18-24 years old represented 3.2%, and below 18 years old only 1%. About half of the sample eat two meals per day, 1.5% are vegetarians, and 64% of the sample consume food both for fun and survival. But the intriguing part comes when we look at their perception of different foods.

The questionnaire was divided into three main sections, section one was aimed to recognize respondents’ demographics characteristics, general life habits, and food consumption patterns. Section two asked respondents about their preferences during a certain time of day and connotation assigned to such meal/food from their point of view. The Food Frequency and Preference Questionnaire (FFPQ) was partially used to report consumption rates. FFPQ uses an assigned checklist of foods and beverages with a frequency response section for respondents to select from. Due to a lack of literature on Middle Eastern Culinary Diplomacy and Food Consumption Questionnaire, authors developed a checklist linked to habitual consumption inspired by FFPQ and added scales that are familiar with Arab culture and novel globalization patterns.

Section three aimed to identify consumers’ food attitudes and national-identity perception. Respondents were asked to denote their first thought/feeling when asked about specific food products, such as pizza, fried chicken, and beef burgers. Moreover, the FF brand with a culinary diplomacy association was introduced to measure its connotation and awareness of origin.
Egyptians have a sweet tooth evident in their snacking habits. While the question about snacking choices allowed for multiple responses, almost twice as many responses indicated sweet snacks than savory ones. Sixty percent drank coffee once or twice a day, while 15% consumed three or more cups a day; the rest are not regular coffee drinkers. What kind of coffee? Seventy-Eight percent of the time, they drank coffee from coffee machines, including cappuccino, latte, macchiato, mocha, and expresso; and 22% of the time they drank Turkish coffee. This is the first clear indication of the contemporary western culture imposing on the traditional norms.

Our sample’s responses continue to reveal an intriguing story. What comes to their mind when we say “pizza”? Italy (62%) followed by pasta (11%); “fried chicken”? KFC (60%) followed by oil (9%), then nothing, childhood, then the USA. Seventy percent prefer eating meat as steak then the burger, and what comes to mind for “beef burger”? McDonald’s (37%), followed by meat, home-made burger (20%), and then Burger King. Their favorite dishes were in order: pizza, Chinese food, kofta, burger, fried chicken, and Indian food; all but one is not Egyptian food. The family has the highest effect on the choice of food decision by 53% followed by friends by 33%.

Some culinary brands have become so strongly associated with their home country that their stores and investments are endangered when the public is angered at their home-country’s diplomacy. Angry mobs boycott, burn down or damage stores as a strong political message to their nations of origin. The association here is more to the brand and its country, although the food is also associated with the country of origin. The intention is to hurt the investment and send a message it is not welcomed. A local chain selling burgers or fried chicken would not suffer while McDonald’s or KFC would if American diplomacy steps on the toes of the host nation.

Will eating a country’s food ever change your opinion of it? More than 40% said it would, 32% were neutral and 28% said no. But more importantly, could eating a country’s food actually change your behavior? About 34% said it would make them think of traveling there, 21% would see the country in a positive way, and another 21% said it would make them search for more information about the country and 4% would even seek other cultural forms, such as music and art. Food could also trigger some negative thoughts and reactions including ignoring all forms of culture, never consider visiting the country, or simply seeing it in a negative way. Only 2% said it would not have any influence on them, positive or negative.

Would it be too far a stretch to think that food can be used as a means of diplomatic communication? In our survey, 62% of respondents believed it can, while only 10% said it cannot and the rest were neutral. Furthermore, of those who believe food can, 30% thought that Italy is the country that best uses food as a tool for public diplomacy, followed by France (16%), US (11%), Lebanon and Egypt (8%) each and China, India, Turkey, and Japan each scoring less than 6% (few were undecided). Focusing on Egypt, 80% believed that “Koshary” would be Egypt’s choice as a diplomatic tool, with the rest of the votes going to “Molokhia”, “Fattah” and “Falafel” respectively. Finally, 81% of our total sample believed that food can indeed serve as a means for strengthening the national identity.

**Conclusion**

The significance of food to humans was never confined to nutritional role and survival instinct. Food has its significance in social engagements, in expressing social status and group sentiments in festivities and in many cases in mourning. The selection, quantity, and quality of food have a place in reflecting the
psychological mood or creating it. Many foods have roots in history and get their name from a historical symbol, figure, or era. Other foods get their significance from their association with cultural or medicinal value and from their consumption on certain occasions. Hence, no wonder that food can develop as a vital part of the nations’ identities, as well as a means of diplomatic communication. It is expected that food types can be associated with memories, good and bad, and prepared to express hospitality and respect. Food consumption has always been an important ingredient in providing an authentic experience for tourists. Along with music, dance, history and artifacts, tourists also reach out to experience the local foods and love to link their cooking and serving to the destination.

It is not only the food, but it is also the way it is prepared (teppanyaki) and the script of the food dramaturgy (Grove, Fisk, & Bittner, 1992). It took some time for the oriental culture to accept the self-serve requirement of fast food, and the peculiar order of paying for the food before seeing it, and cleaning your table after eating; but it did in the end. The far-eastern cultures had to accept the idea of eating while walking on the street and the Americans had to learn how to use chopsticks to enjoy the experience of Chinese and Japanese food. The ingredients are also an important part of the food experience, and some ingredients may be unacceptable in some cultures. These incompatibilities teach us to tolerate our differences and respect for our diversity, a core concept in diplomacy.

Limitations and Future Research

Observatory methods would have been very effective in conducting this research or at least setting its foundations. But the authors believe that they have been watching and observing the phenomenon almost daily for decades now. Although the typical retrospective method that relies upon the respondent’s memory has its shortcomings, the vividness of their experiences and the familiarity of the respondents with the topic made it less impactful.

Other variables certainly impact the food choice process and attitudes towards foreign food products, such as education, cosmopolitan exposure, reference groups, availability of the full ethnic experience, socio-economic standard, gender, and psychological profile, and family to name a few. There are a plethora of opportunities for future research to decipher the intertwined relationships and effects of these variables. Thus, this research recognizes the need for a more statistically robust multidimensional instrument to investigate the roles food in the conscious and unconscious induction of one culture into another, and challenging one set of values by another.

The research is exploratory, intending to raise awareness, point the way to a valley full of golden nuggets for the serious researcher in communication, political science, sociology, psychology, global affairs, diplomacy, and many other social sciences.

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