



Is the Modern or Classical Presentation of Turkish Cuisine More Acceptable? A Study on the Visual Senses of Europeans

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Abstract

This study focuses on analyzing the impact of creating modernist visual presentations of national foods on international acceptability. In this context, a classical Turkish menu including an entrée, savory appetizer, main course, side dish, and dessert is prepared and presented. Classical presentations have been created using tools found in Turkish cuisine. Modernist presentations are created in the style of Nouvelle cuisine. These courses are prepared and sent to the European consumers, a significant tourist group for Turkey's touristic demand. The data is obtained from a total of 82 participants from 19 different European countries using comparative test techniques and hedonic scales. When the data is analyzed, it is seen that modernist presentations are preferred in all courses. The scores of appreciations in modernist presentations are higher than that of the traditional versions. Based on these findings, it is found that preparing modernist presentations in line with the target market habits have a positive impact on the acceptance of traditional foods. The findings may be important in terms of making sense of the food consumption preferences of European visitors and increasing the extra benefit.

Keywords

Visual Sense, Food Acceptance, Food Presentation, Turkish Food, European Consumers

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Introduction

Classical Turkish cuisine reflects a highly diversified cultural system because of its rich characteristics. It can be said that the creation and formation processes of this sophisticated system are mostly based on migrations throughout history, interactions with new geographical areas, and including and adopting the cultural elements in these new lands into Turkish cuisine (Güler and Olgaç, 2010; Kızıldemir et al., 2014). The general processes and interactions that formed and contributed to the richness of Turkish cuisine include different features of the Middle East nomadic period, rules and arrangements of Islamic understanding about food, rich Anatolian culture, Mediterranean food diversity, different communities living on conquered lands during the Ottoman period, and involvement of modern era culinary movements in Turkish cuisine with the impact of globalization.

Numerous unique elements have been part of the development of Turkish culinary culture. Some of these basic elements of classical Turkish cuisine are different types of hot stews cooked with vegetables or cereals, cold dishes cooked with olive oil, different types of cooked rice, bread, pastries, and bakery products, fermented milk products such as kımız, yoğurt, and kefir, and meat products such as pastırma, kebab, and köfte (Taneri, 1978; Akan, 2005: 54; Şahin, 2008: 39; Güler, 2010). Some of the cooking methods especially preferred in Turkish cuisine are poaching, frying in oil, and cooking in dry heat (Halıcı, 2009: 36). In addition to the important factors that affected the formation of Turkish cuisine throughout history, the original Turkish methods of storing food were shaped by the impact of the nomadic lifestyle of the Old Turks. Some of these unique methods unique to Turkish cuisine are fermenting meat by filling it in the bowel; drying vegetables, fruits, and bread; fermenting vegetables; and boiling fruits with sugar (Ritchie, 1981: 53; Alpargu, 2008: 18; Işın, 2017; Özata, 2019: 30-32).

There have been some changes in the traditional structure of Turkish cuisine because of modernization in the understanding of cooking along with the impacts of globalization in recent years. In this process, Turkish cuisine has continued to reflect the features of the classical era while undergoing some changes, especially with the impact of Western culture (Gürsoy, 2011). The specific changes in Turkish social life because of the modernization movement in the Tanzimat reform era affected the society's culinary understanding. Sitting on a chair, eating food on the table instead of sitting and dining on the floor, and using a fork and knife were some striking changes in Turkish society during that period (Samancı and Croxford, 2006: 14). In addition to these dramatic changes, standardization of food products resulting from the increase in the use of industrial utilities, changes in the shape and material of the products used for cooking and presenting the food, adapting international recipes in

Turkish cuisine, and impacts of the French culinary movements have accelerated the modernization of Turkish cuisine (Merriman, 1996; Bilgin, 2011; Işın, 2017; Özata, 2019). This era of change affected Turkish culinary understanding and accelerated the adaption of Turkish food to the West; food products, cooking methods, equipment, and presentation features moved closer to Western standards throughout this process (Yerasimos, 2005). On the other hand, as it didn't require specific education, the restaurant business increased with the migration of Turks to Europe (Kulalı, 2020: 372). Many immigrants opened restaurants in the foreign countries they migrated to and this increased the recognition of Turkish cuisine in European lands. The data obtained from the literature indicate that the increase in the recognition of a country by experiencing its food has a positive impact on the intention of visiting that country (Min and Lee, 2014; Özdemir, 2019). On the other hand, when a tourist visits a country, he/she becomes more willing to visit and experience the food of the restaurants of that country when they go back to their homeland (Verbeke and Lopez, 2005). These findings indicate that restaurants that represent the local food and tourism activities have positive impacts on the recognition and accordingly acceptance of local cuisines (Warde and Martens, 2000; Bertella, 2011; Şahin and Ünver, 2015).

Research studies about the recognition and acceptability of Turkish cuisine have been analyzed under the heading *tourism activities* in the literature (Okumuş et al., 2007; Okumuş and Çetin, 2015; Özdemir, 2019). According to the studies in the literature, European visitors are more prone to consume new and unusual food during their visits (Barcellos et al., 2009; Hsu, 2014). This finding indicates that Europeans have a low level of food neophobia, which is an eating behavior in which a person refuses to taste and eat food they are not familiar with (Pliner and Salvy, 2006). On the other hand, based on the same finding, that the level of willingness to experience new and unusual food, which is called food neophilia, is high (Chang et al., 2011). It can be said that Europeans, who have low food neophobia levels and high food neophilia levels, are willing to experience different tastes of Turkish cuisine during gastronomic and other tourism activities in the country. It can thus be said that selecting Europe as the target market in tourism will have positive impacts on the development of Turkey in terms of tourism; it will facilitate promotion activities about tourism in Turkey and increase the recognition and acceptability of the country in the market of tourism. These factors have been taken into consideration in selecting Europeans as the sample group for this study.

On the other hand, there have been changes in the consumption habits of Europeans throughout the dynamic process shaped by globalization. France-based culinary movements in particular have caused changes in Europeans' food and beverage preferences (Pinkard, 2009). "Nouvelle cuisine" which started in the 1970s, changed the understanding of cooking techniques, materials, nutritive value selection, design,

and presentation, and prioritized simplicity (Gault, 1995). The efficiency of new culinary trends in social life has had an effect on out-of-home consumption been especially efficient in out-of-home consumption and high-level restaurants organized their operations based on this understanding (Lane, 2011). This situation has revealed the importance of visual sense, especially in the dimension of food presentation, and caused an increase in the significance of visual sense for Europeans in terms of food acceptance (Zampini et al., 2012; Spence et al., 2016).

Firstly, it is necessary to present the features of the sensual process to analyze the impact of visual sense on food acceptance. Humans' perception of the environment is based on senses (Pekar, 2017). The receptor cells in sense organs transform the energy in the environment and transduction starts. As a result of this transduction, the energy perceived by the related cells is transmitted to the visual cortex in the brain and the process of seeing is completed (Canan and Dokuyucu, 2018). The sense of sight is one of the most necessary senses in daily life (Cüceloğlu, 2020). Most of the information about the world and life is perceived through vision (Canan and Dokuyucu, 2018: 170).

The eye, the organ of sight, can be defined as the starting point of a highly complicated process of vision. The functions of the eye are to catch photons, direct them to the photoreceptors and thus start the process of vision (Canan and Dokuyucu, 2018). Retina photoreceptors in the eye are made of bipolar cells and ganglions. They are made of three different neurons, in other words, nerve layers. These three layers send the environmental energy to the visual cortex with the effect of light (Sanalan et al., 2007). Although the process of sight starts with the eye, the most significant organ in this process is the brain (Aktümsek, 2001). The diagram of vision explaining the process is presented in Figure 1.

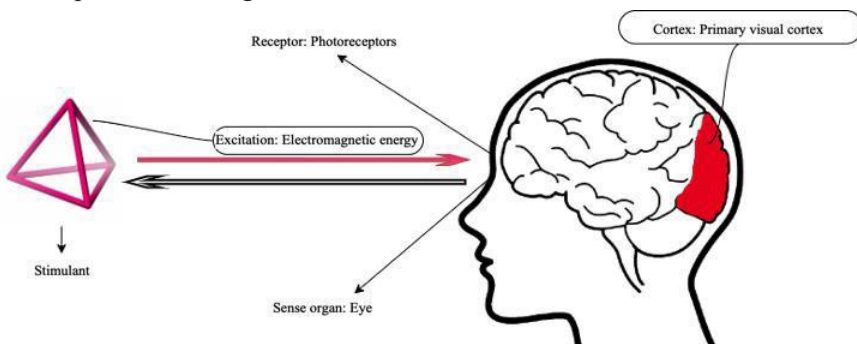


Figure 1. The process of vision. Created by the authors

Although a lot of information about the brain has been discovered, there are still hundreds of mysteries about this unique organ. When the parts of the brain related to the senses are analyzed, it is seen that the biggest part that is responsible for a sense

belongs to vision (Mather, 2016: 5). It is known that the sense of vision is extremely important for a human to picture things about the outer world in the mind, perceive his/her environment, and create experiences.

Research on consumer perceptions about food indicates that vision is a crucial element of the food experience process. Studies in the literature show that the sense of vision is especially important in food acceptance (Imram, 1999; Cardello, 1996: 4; Imram, 1999; Wadhera and Capaldi-Phillips, 2014; Jang and Kim, 2015; Melovic et al., 2020; Hoppu et al., 2020; Ueda et al., 2020). The presentation of food and how it is visually perceived are highly important factors in understanding the role of the sense of vision in the food perception process (Cornell et al., 1989). Preferring a food, creating a sense of willingness about a food (Ueda et al., 2020), deciding on the acceptability or touchableness of a food (Hoppu et al., 2020), having a mental process about the quality of food (White et al., 2020), and decreasing neophobia about food (Wadhera and Capaldi-Phillips, 2014) are all related to the process of seeing, and thus perceiving food.

Food acceptance is based on a multi-dimensional process (Costell et al., 2010) and it is possible to get a variety of clues through the sense of vision about many elements of this complicated process. Freshness, (Arce-Lopera et al., 2015; Motoki et al., 2020), flavor (Ueda et al., 2020), color (Cardello, 1996), odor (Szcześniak, 2002), density, size, and shape can all be perceived through the sense of vision. The significance of the sense of vision in food acceptance causes food creators to use and organize elements that appeal to this sense (Ueda et al., 2020). Based on the studies in the literature, manipulating senses and organizing food elements in a way that successfully appeals to these senses have a great impact on food consumption. It is also known that inputs through multiple sensory perceptions are used to create a manipulative process in food consumption (Chen and Spence, 2017). Although visual arrangement studies in the food industry are based on commercial purposes (Hisano, 2019) these studies also reveal some social impacts. It is observed that visual arrangements that may affect children's consumption habits, decrease their food neophobia, and contribute to their physical and mental development (Rioux, 2019).

Using the organization of food presentation to increase the acceptability of foods to be consumed for the first time positively affects food acceptance. It is necessary to have successful presentation processes to introduce new, unusual foods that belong to different cultures, and decrease neophobic tendencies towards these kinds of foods. Based on these data, the role of the sense of vision in increasing the acceptability of Turkish food to Europeans is analyzed in this study. The study process is based on the data about the evaluations of traditional and modern representations of the food in the specifically created menu.

Although there are studies in the literature investigating the food acceptance levels of different cultures through the concepts of neophobia and neophilia, this study plays an important role in investigating the effect of regulations on the appearance of food as a recent attraction, especially in the attention of Europeans, who have been Turkey’s touristic demand target all along.

Methodology

This research is designed as a consumer test that supports the improvement of chefs and restaurants representing Turkish cuisine. A menu including the traditional foods of Turkish cuisine was used in the research (Yolaçan, 2020: 318-323) and classical and modernist presentations of these specific foods were prepared. Foods that are unique to Turkish cuisine were specifically chosen. The menu includes *sütlü badem çorbası* (almond milk soup) as an entrée, *avcı böreği* (Turkish spring roll) as a savory appetizer, *beğendili tas kebabı* (meat stew kebab with eggplant puree) as the main course, *peynir dolgulu kabak and biber sarma* (zucchini filled with cheese and stuffed pepper) as a side dish, and *zerde* (saffron and rice dessert) as dessert.

Classical and modernist presentations of the foods in the menu were prepared by chefs that are experts in Turkish cuisine. Each chef prepared a classical and a modernist presentation of the food he had chosen from the menu. Five different chefs were chosen to prepare five different classical and modernist presentations to prevent possible sampling mistakes resulting from personal interpretations. In addition, the opinions of another expert group were received to ensure that the classical and modernist presentations in the study were perceived correctly. The phase of collecting data from the sampling started after receiving positive feedback from Turkish cuisine researchers and academicians. Features of these experts, who contributed to the study, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Features of the Experts Who Contributed to the Study with their Views

Code	Profession	Age	Experience in the Sector
E1	Academician / Turkish Cuisine Researcher	35	21 years
E2	Turkish Cuisine Practitioner / Chef	40	25 years
E3	Academician / Chef	38	23 years
E4	Academician / Turkish Cuisine Researcher	42	24 years
E5	Academician / Turkish Cuisine Researcher	38	16 years

Plates that are specific to Turkish culture were used in the classical presentations of the food on the menu. The plates used for classical presentations were chosen from those that represent the features of kitchenware mentioned in the “Turkish Cuisine” book prepared by the Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Bilgin and Samancı, 2008). The modernist presentations were prepared according to the *nouvelle cuisine* manifesto (Freedman, 2008).

Comparative test techniques and hedonic scales were used as data collection methods in the research. Plates that represent classical and modernist approaches were photographed at a 45-degree angle on a white background. The images were sent to 110 panelists online through the “Qualtrics” program. Qualtrics is a software platform with over 100 question types and templates designed specifically for research projects at many global corporations and universities. The artificial intelligence-powered Qualtrics Experience Management software can perform statistical analyses in a unified fashion across multiple interfaces. Preliminary interviews were held with panelists, and those who had visited fine dining restaurants and didn’t have any sensory analysis education were specifically chosen for the study. Photographs that include both traditional and modernist versions of the food were presented to the panelists in the first phase, and they were required to select one of the presentations. After this step, they were required to score the level of their appreciation for each plate on a 9-point Likert-type hedonic scale (1 - I didn’t like it at all – 9 - I definitely liked it). 82 panelists out of 110 answered all the questions in the research. Data obtained from the panelists that are the samplings of the research were analyzed and interpreted.

Results

When the demographical data of the participants in Table 2 are analyzed, there is a balance in terms of age, income, and educational features. Furthermore, data were collected from participants working in 19 different European countries. This diversity indicates that study data includes the views of participants from almost all over Europe.

Table 2
Demographic Features of the Participants

	n	%
Gender		
Female	46	56
Male	36	44
Age		
18-24	19	23,1
25-34	33	40,3
35-44	18	21,9
45 and older	12	14,7
Education		
Below high school	3	3,6
High school	6	7,4
College	13	15,9
Bachelor’s degree	24	29,2
Master’s degree	32	39
Doctorate	4	4,9

Annual Income		
Less than 10,000 €	43	52,4
Between 10,000 € and 20,000 €	19	23,2
More than 20,000 €	20	24,4
Region/Country		
Northern Europe (Denmark, Finland, Sweden, UK)	18	21,9
Western Europe (France, Spain)	9	11
Central Europe (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Slovenia)	24	29,3
Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Poland, Albania)	11	13,4
Southern Europe (Italy, Greece, Cyprus)	20	24,4
Total	82	100

Based on the analysis aimed at revealing the differences among demographic groups, it can be said that all the participant groups preferred modernist presentations rather than classical ones.

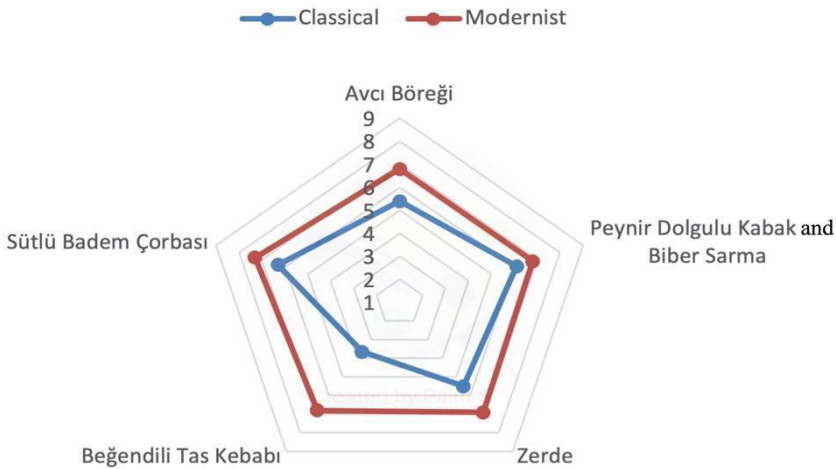


Figure 2. Comparison of general views about classical and modernist presentations

When Figure 2 is analyzed, the courses in the menu unique to Turkish cuisine are compared in terms of classical and modernist presentations, and all the participants who made this comparison liked the modernist presentations more.

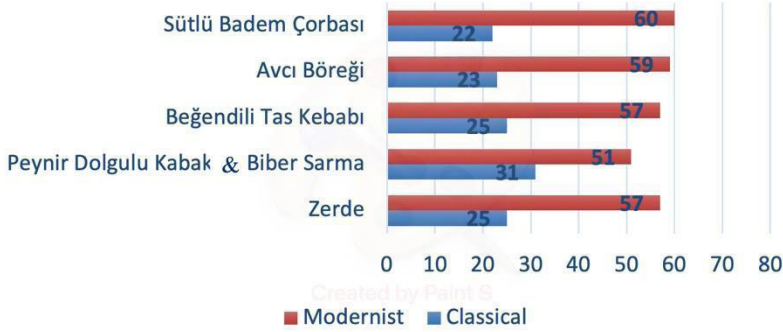


Figure 3. Distribution of participant scores on classical and modernist presentations

The panelists firstly evaluated the entrée of the menu, which is *sütlü badem çorbası*. 60 panelists (~73,17) preferred the modernist version, while 22 panelists (~26,83) preferred the classical version of the presentations. Similarly, 59 panelists (~71,95) preferred the modernist presentation of the savory appetizer, *avcı böreği*, while 23 panelists (~28,05) preferred the classical presentation. Findings of the panelist views on the main course, *beğendili tas kebabı*, indicate that 57 panelists (~69,5) preferred the modernist presentation while 25 (~30,5) panelists preferred the classical presentation. According to the data about the presentations of *peynir dolgulu kabak and biber sarma*, 51 panelists (~62,1) preferred the modernist presentation while 31 panelists (~37,9) preferred the classical version. Finally, *zerde* was evaluated by the participants; 57 individuals (69,5) said that they liked the modernist presentation, while 25 individuals (~30,5) said that they preferred the classical presentation of the desert.

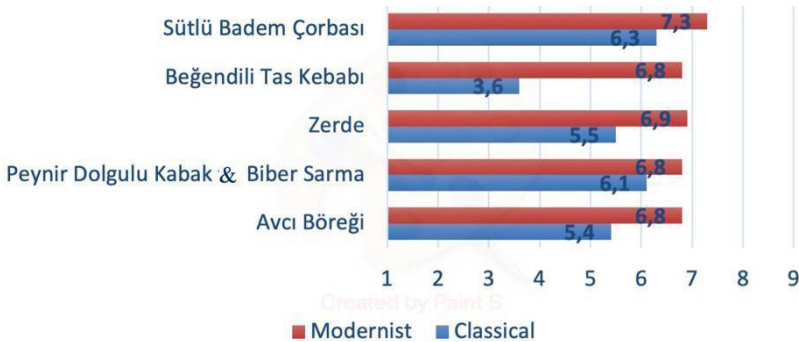


Figure 4. Sensory analysis results¹

¹ Sensory features according to the hedonic scale: point 1 averages *I didn't like it at all*, while point 9 averages *I definitely liked it* (Weighted means of the scores are taken into consideration, Altuğ Onoğur and Elmacı, 2019).

It is observed that modernist presentations of all the dishes on the menu are preferred by the participants when compared to the classical presentations. Figure 4 shows main course and dessert dishes with a higher preference for modernist presentation over classical presentations. The preference level is lower for the entrée, the savory appetizer, and the side dish.

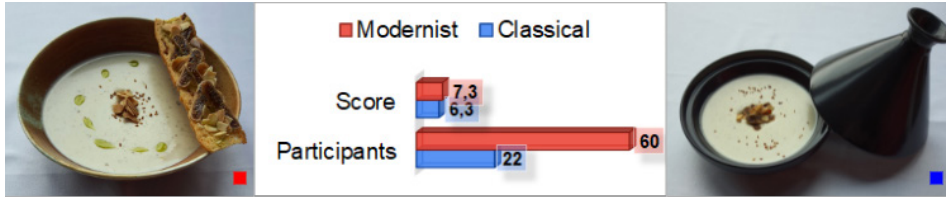


Figure 5. Panelists' sensory analysis evaluation of *sütlü badem çorbası*

As can be seen in Figure 5, when the parameters of the classical and modern presentations of *sütlü badem çorbası* are analyzed, the modernist presentation has the higher average score, which is 7,3. It is seen that 60 of 82 panelists preferred the modernist presentation while 22 panelists preferred the classical presentation.

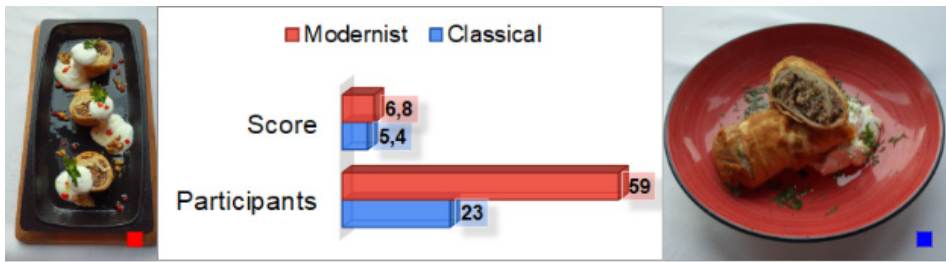


Figure 6. Panelists' sensory analysis evaluation about *avcı böreği*

According to the parameters of the classical and modern presentations of *avcı böreği*, the modernist presentation received a higher score from the panelists, which is 6,8, while the classical presentation average score is 5,4. It is determined that 59 of 82 panelists preferred the modernist presentation.

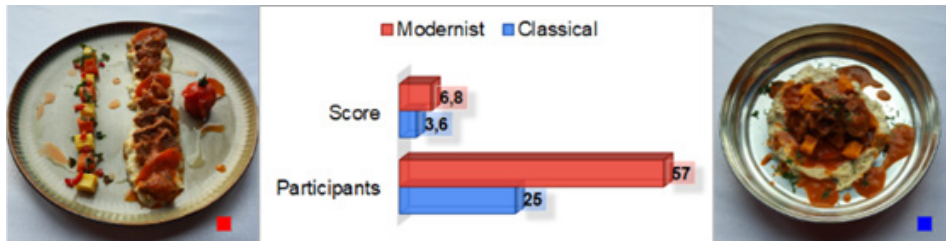


Figure 7. Panelists' sensory analysis evaluation of *beğendili tas kebabı*

According to the parameters of panelist evaluations about the main course, *beğendili tas kebabı*, the modernist presentation average score is 6,8 while the

classical presentation average score is 3,6. 57 of 82 panelists stated that they liked the modernist presentation more while 25 individuals preferred the classical presentation.

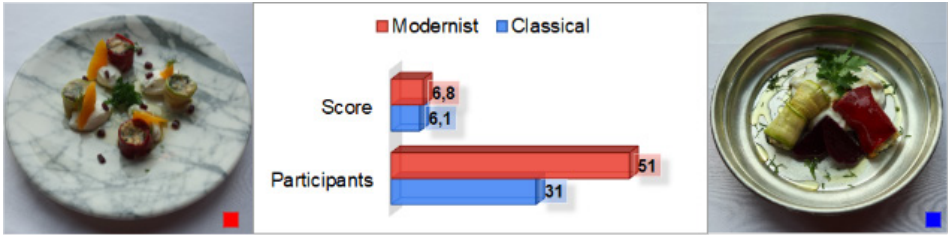


Figure 8. Panelists' sensory analysis evaluation about *peynir dolgulu kabak* and *biber sarma*

According to the parameters of modernist and classical presentations of *peynir dolgulu kabak* and *biber sarma*, the modernist style of the dish is preferred by the participants. The average score of the modernist version is 6,8, while the average score of the classical presentation is 6,1. In the comparison test, 51 panelists stated that they prefer the modernist presentation while 31 panelists said that they prefer the classical presentation.

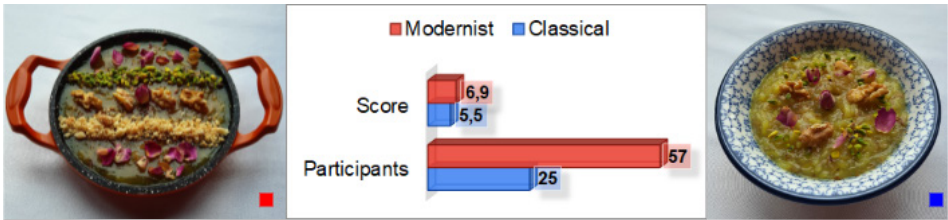


Figure 9. Panelists' sensory analysis evaluation about *zerde*

The dessert on the menu, called *zerde*, was evaluated by the panelists. The parameters indicate that the modernist presentation is preferred more by the participants. The average score of the modernist version is 6,9, while the average score of the classical version is 5,5. 57 panelists stated that they prefer the modernist presentation of the dessert, while 25 panelists said that they prefer the classical presentation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data collected from the research process were carefully analyzed. According to the obtained results, the distribution of participants in terms of gender, age, education, and income level are equal. Furthermore, participants from almost every corner of Europe, in other words from 19 different countries, have participated in the process. This richness in terms of geography and socio-economic features indicates that there is a high probability that the research results represent European consumers in general terms.

The obtained results indicate that the modernist presentations of the courses carefully chosen to present Turkish cuisine are preferred by the participants more than the classical presentations. All the demographic subgroups of the participants made similar decisions, which proves the validity of the research.

It is seen that the modernist or classical preference levels of participants varied in different courses in the menu. In particular, scores on the modernist and classical preferences of the foods placed in the menu as entrée and side dish are very close. The *sütlü badem çorbası*, which is the entrée, has a low viscosity as a soup and it is not possible to make big changes in the presentation; this situation explains the similarity between the modernist and classical preference ratios of the participants. *Peynir dolgulu kabak and biber sarma*, placed on the menu as the side dish, are already prepared in a minimalist manner in the traditional presentation; this explains the small difference between the modernist and classical preferences. This rule also applies in the case of the *avcı böreği* which is the savory appetizer. The biggest difference between the modernist and classical scores is in the *beğendili tas kebabı*. The participants liked the modernist version of *beğendili tas kebabı*, which is a kind of traditional Turkish food cooked in a stew; this is a significant finding. The findings of the research study, in general, are important as they indicate that the modernist presentations of traditional Turkish foods make a positive contribution to the acceptance of local foods by Europeans.

The same meal was presented in different arrangements in Zellner et al.'s (2014) study. They discovered that food presented in a more appealing manner was preferred over food presented in a less appealing manner. It is possible that what researchers find appealing may not be appealing to participants. This study obtained classical presentation equipment from historical sources. In this context, it is believed that reliable results have been obtained in terms of the effects of presentation style on taste when evaluating classical and modern presentation.

Roque et al. (2018) demonstrated that they subjected the dishes prepared by two different chefs to visual sensory evaluation using food photographs in a restaurant. The panelists were shown the chefs' creative and modernist presentations of the dishes they prepared during the research. The researchers concluded that creative dishes with more colors were liked more. The research findings of Roque et al. (2018) can be described as a comparison of two modernist presentations. Our study, on the other hand, is unique in that it seeks to determine whether consumers prefer classical or modernist presentations.

The role of the visual sense in increasing the acceptability of Turkish cuisine in the international arena and advertisement of traditional Turkish food is presented in this study. It is possible to say that modernist presentations of traditional Turkish

foods have the potential to increase the gastronomy tourism of European travelers in Turkey, which has the biggest share in Turkish tourism. This factor might ease creating an alternative to regular tourism activities in Turkey. In addition to this, local and regional cuisines might meet the demand for food and beverage, which is a necessity during travel. Restaurants serving Turkish food are often visited by European tourists that seek local, original experiences; therefore, these restaurants should increase their modernist presentations. Such improvements might provide economic sustainability. European tourists visit more restaurants, have more regional experiences, and spend more money during their visits.

On the other hand, modernist presentations in ethnic restaurants, which are the representatives of Turkish culture abroad, will contribute to the recognition of Turkish culture and touristic richness in terms of promotion, touristic visits, and economic development. Modernist presentations in ethnic restaurants have the potential to create an image of changing and developing Turkish cuisine.

This study focuses on the impacts of changing and/or improving the presentations of traditional foods in national cuisines according to the habits and inclinations of target consumer groups. This study is thus significant as it presents the contribution of this process to the acceptance of those foods. It is suggested that similar studies be conducted in the future including bigger samplings in restaurants presenting Turkish cuisine in Turkey or Europe. In addition, including sensory analysis tests focusing on the element of taste might support the findings obtained in the context of this study. It is thought that the representatives of the food and beverage industry should not insist on classical presentations. It is recommended that traditional Turkish dishes be served with modernist presentations, particularly in establishments catering to European tourists. The research can be repeated in future studies by preparing presentations (for example, postmodernist presentations) in light of different approaches.

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