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Digital ethnicity affordances in immigrant entrepreneurship: from a liability to an asset

 Abstract

Purpose. This paper aims to understand how immigrant entrepreneurs use digital opportunities to overcome the liability of newness and foreignness and how an immigrant's ethnicity can be digitally performed as an asset in business.

Design. The study adopts an inductive multiple case study approach using social media content. The data consists of over 3,500 posts, images, and screenshots from Facebook, Instagram, and the webpages of seven successful Vietnamese restaurants in Sweden. Grounded content analysis was conducted using NVivo.

Findings. The findings suggest that digitalising ethnic artifacts can mediate and facilitate three digital performances that together can turn ethnicity from a liability to an asset: (i) preserving performance through digital ethnicising, (ii) embracing performance through digital generativitising and (iii) appropriating performance through digital fusionising. The results support the introduction of a conceptual framework depicting the interwoven duality of horizontal and vertical boundary blurring, in which the former takes place between the offline and online spaces of immigrant businesses, and the latter occurs between the home and host country attachment of the immigrant businesses.

Originality. This study responds to calls for understanding how immigrant entrepreneurs can overcome the liability of foreignness. It offers a fresh look at ethnicity, which has been seen in a negative light in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship. This study illuminates that ethnicity can be used as a resource in immigrant entrepreneurship, specifically through the use of digital artifacts and digital platforms.

Keywords: Immigrant entrepreneurship, digitalisation, social media, digital ethnic performance, boundary blurring, digital ethnicity affordances

1. Introduction

The immigrant entrepreneurship literature has mainly presented foreign ethnicity as a disadvantage or liability, which leads to an increase in self-employment among immigrants (e.g., Dabic *et al.*, 2020; Evansluong *et al.*, 2019). However, businesses like restaurants can use and perform immigrant ethnicity (Clammer, 2015) to market and attract customers. Research suggests that foods, menus, interior decorations, traditional music, and uniforms representing features of the ethnic groups with which businesses are associated given the owners' backgrounds have been utilised as unique selling points to create exclusive atmospheres and attract customers (e.g., Flowers and Swan, 2019; Tsai and Lu, 2012).

Research also shows that utilising new technologies may help entrepreneurs obtain more valuable capabilities and gain knowledge (Troise *et al.*, 2022a). As such, being present online can transform the inherently uncertain nature of entrepreneurial processes (Nambisan, 2017) and reduce the increased risk immigrant entrepreneurs face due to their ethnicities (Jones *et al.*, 2014). Digitalisation, by which we mean the process of transforming offline communication into an online language and presence to improve business relationships (Reis *et al.,* 2020), has therefore become popular among businesses offering and marketing ethnic products and services (Anwar and Daniel, 2017; Rahman and Fee, 2012). However, because digitalisation brings consequences for offline immigrant entrepreneurs by creating new mechanisms of exclusion (Andrejuk, 2022), it is necessary to understand and investigate how immigrant entrepreneurs who have access to digitalisation use this opportunity to overcome the liability of newness and foreignness and promote their ethnicities to their own advantage.

Additionally, there is a scarcity of literature explaining digitalisation in immigrant entrepreneurship on a *business level*. To date, literature on immigrant entrepreneurship has acknowledged and partially addressed the role of digitalisation in emphasising ethnicity in immigrant businesses (e.g., Lassalle *et al.*, 2020; Anwar and Daniel, 2017); however, the question of how immigrant entrepreneurs use digitalisation to perform and commodify ethnicity is under-researched. Digitalisation is becoming more prominent in entrepreneurship in general (Berger *et al.*, 2021), and it affects everyone (Anderjuk, 2022), including immigrant entrepreneurs. As digital

technologies become an integrated part of mediating, producing, and circulating socio-spatial relations (Jansson, 2022; Ash *et al*., 2018; Fast *et al*., 2018; Rose, 2016), it is important to further our understanding of this phenomenon.

This study aims to increase knowledge of (1) how immigrant-owned businesses digitally promote and market their non-majority ethnicities to their advantage, and (2) how ethnicity is used and digitally performed by immigrant businesses. We use performance theory to investigate the constant reproduction of ethnic identities and how immigrant businesses are marketed as part of the contestation, confirmation, and elaboration of ethnicities (Clammer, 2015). Along with geomedia literature, focusing on socio-spatial relations in digital times (Jansson, 2022), this brings new insights into how ethnicity can be used as an advantage for immigrant businesses via digital platforms and what kind of performance of ethnicity serves as an asset. In addition, this research aims to move from focusing on the individual, who is part of the business, to emphasising the business as a social entity in its own right. We thus ask the research question: "How can ethnicity be digitally performed as an asset in immigrant businesses?" and take the immigrant-owned businesses as our unit of analysis.

Based on an inductive multiple case study approach (Yin, 2009) to social media content, there is a research gap on how immigrant entrepreneurs use digital opportunities to overcome the liability of newness and foreignness, as well as in the discussion of digitalisation in immigrant entrepreneurship on a *business level*. To fill that gap, we examine how ethnicity is used and expressed in seven successful Vietnamese restaurants in Sweden. This choice of cases is guided by theoretical sampling (further discussed in the Methods section); we therefore aim for analytical generalisation (Yin, 2009) based on our proposed theoretical model rather than statistical generalisation, which represents all immigrant businesses. We propose two concepts: "performing digital ethnicity" and "digital ethnicity affordances." The former describes the use of digitalisation to attract potential customers by fusionising home and host cultures through three digital performances: preserving, embracing, and appropriating. The latter illuminates the capability of immigrant businesses to utilise digital artifacts, platforms, and infrastructure to construct digital ethnicity, representing different degrees of attachment to both home and host countries in offline and online spaces through boundary stretching, boundary bridging, and boundary bonding.

Combining literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, digitalisation, ethnicity, digital foodscapes, and performance theory, this study contributes to an understanding of how ethnicity can be used and performed in immigrant businesses as an asset instead of a liability (Dabic *et al*, 2020; Vershinina and Rodgers, 2019). By focusing on the "role of media in organizing and giving meaning to processes and activities in space" (Fast *et al.*, 2018), it also contributes to the growing field of geomedia, as well as to the literature on marketing challenges for ethnic minority populations in developed countries (Khan *et al*., 2015).

The paper is organized as follows. The next section presents a literature review of research on digitalisation in immigrant entrepreneurship, digital ethnic foodscapes, and the performance of ethnicity. Then, we introduce our case study and visual analysis in the Methods section. Next, we present the data structure leading to our findings, followed by a conceptual model depicting our theoretical elaboration. Finally, we discuss our contributions.

2. Literature review

2.1 Liability of foreignness and the use of digitalisation in immigrant entrepreneurship

In the early phases of business establishment, immigrant entrepreneurs come across challenges, since they are especially dependent on the opportunity structure of markets, where they have to compete with established indigenous firms, and on the rules and restrictions set by the hosting country (Villares-Varela, 2018; Verver *et al*., 2020; Ram *et al.,* 2017; Kloosterman and Rath, 2001). These challenges are often referred to as "the liability of foreignness" (Gurau *et al*., 2020) or "the liability of newness" (Barth and Zalkat, 2020) and can generate boundary dynamics (Verver *et al.,* 2020). The literature on immigrant entrepreneurship mainly focuses on explaining the liability of foreignness and newness, which results from the differences in the immigrant entrepreneurs' backgrounds (e.g., race, ethnicity, foreign qualifications) and how such differences can hinder market entry and business success (Jones *et al*., 2014), business performance, growth, and sustainability (Kordestani *et al.*, 2017). However, the literature has not fully explained how immigrants can overcome such liabilities. Specifically, several studies mention the use of social media and digitalisation in their suggestions for breaking boundaries (e.g., Verver *et al*., 2020; Evansluong *et al*., 2019; Griffin-EL and Olabisi, 2018), but the current body of research has not sufficiently addressed the role of digitalisation in helping immigrants overcome these liabilities despite the increasing importance in entrepreneurship.

Using online media can help immigrant entrepreneurs reduce the liability of foreignness and newness in several ways. First, through virtual embeddedness, these entrepreneurs can increase the sustainability of their businesses (Anwar and Daniel, 2017) by expanding their market bases, reaching out to online networks that go beyond their social connections (Morse *et al.,* 2007). Virtual embeddedness describes the connections between people and groups using electronic technologies. This enhances the creation of business relationships for entrepreneurs lacking social embeddedness (Morse *et al*., 2007). Virtual embeddedness is increasingly important, due to the development of technologies such as the Internet, telecommunications, and microprocessors (Bettis and Hitt, 1995), which can fundamentally change how businesses emerge, organise, and compete (Teece, 1998). Besides, accepting digital transformation can help businesses create new ventures (based on new technologies or the adoption of them), while enhancing their entrepreneurial orientation and increasing their chances of developing new technology-related innovations (Troise, et al., 2022a,b; Kraus *et al.*, 2019). Because digitalisation has been used as a breaking-out strategy in the search for a larger customer base (Reis *et al.,* 2020), it is also increasingly popular in immigrant entrepreneurship as a means to sustain a business (Anwar and Daniel, 2017).

Second, digital media use allows these entrepreneurs to expand and diversify social networks to gather resources for business strategies (Santamaria-Alvarez *et al*., 2019) and to break out from enclave markets (Griffin-EL and Olabisi, 2018; Lassalle and Scott, 2018) into their countries of residence – or even beyond their countries of residence and origin (Anwar and Daniel, 2017; Santamaria-Alvarez *et al.,* 2019). Connecting online with people and institutions of the same ethnicity can firmly anchor their relationship with the offline community (e.g., Matei and Ball-Rokeach, 2001). Interestingly, these studies show that the combination of the immigrant entrepreneurs' ethnicity and the adoption of digitalisation play a role in increasing the sustainability of their businesses. For instance, Anwar and Daniel (2017) illuminated how immigrant entrepreneurs rely on digital referral networks of customers from similar ethnic backgrounds. In a similar vein, Lassalle and Scott (2018) suggested that Polish entrepreneurs in Glasgow sought co-ethnic support by using social media to exchange information. This indicates that digitalisation may allow immigrant entrepreneurs to use ethnicity as an asset. However, how ethnicity is performed and utilised as an asset through digitalisation remains unknown. Moreover, while these studies echo the suggestions of Nambisan (2017), Berger *et al*. (2019) and Troise *et*

al. (2022a) on the importance of digital technologies in immigrant entrepreneurship, they have not discussed which aspects of digital technologies are most beneficial or how immigrant entrepreneurs have utilised such aspects to minimize the liability of foreignness and newness – specifically, they have not discussed the role of digital artifacts, platforms, and infrastructure in this process (e.g., Nambisan, 2017). To some extend Goodman and Jaworska (2020) explain how food, space and digital media, develop the concepts of digital foodscapes. They do so by analysing digital platforms, discourses and personas, to investigate the ways digital food influencers (DFIs) construct, curate and share the meanings of food (Goodman and Jaworska, 2020). Also, media portrayals of and reproduction of cultural meanings associated with food have a long history, and foodscape studies are increasingly interested in social and relational circumstances related to food, imaginaries and not the least in relation to increased digitalisation (Lupton and Feldman, 2020; Mikkelsen, 2011; Adema, 2007). Therefore, the use of digitalization in the restaurant sector in immigrant entrepreneurship is an example illuminating this above shortcoming, since digital food cultures (Lupton and Feldman, 2020) and digital technology concepts in entrepreneurship (Nambisan, 2017) have not yet been linked with digitalising ethnicity. Our study thus focuses on ethnic restaurants owned by immigrants as empirical cases to study how these immigrant businesses use their ethnicities and the food culture of their home countries to market their businesses digitally. This implies a commodification of ethnicity that is often considered a strategy for immigrants to overcome disadvantages and enter the host country's labour market, even as racism and the racialisation process ascribe their physical and cultural differences to social practices which underpin the production, consumption, and representation of food (Flowers and Swan, 2017). A critical discussion on digital foodscapes and ethnicity is therefore needed in relation to ethnic restaurant businesses and digitalisation.

2.2 Ethnic restaurants and digital foodscapes

Drawing on Appadurai's scape-typology (1996), foodscapes are "expressions of people's relationships with food in various social and individual contexts" (Adema, 2007 p. 2), and refer to perceived, conceived, and created connections between places and food. As a concept, foodscapes connect specific places with people's collective imaginations about those places. They are therefore "symbolic of real and desired identities and of power, social, and spatial relations articulated through food" (Adema, 2007 p. 2). Research on perceptions, expectations, and experiences of so-called "ethnic restaurants" is an important part of foodscape studies. Dining

experience research focused on "ethnic restaurants" has shown that food, environment, and cooks that appear ethnically authentic are crucial to the customer experience (Tsai and Lu, 2012); this is similar to the concept of ethnic cues in the marketing field (Khan *et al*., 2015). Authenticity is one of the key factors influencing customer evaluations of these restaurants (Kim *et al*., 2017; Qing Liu and Mattila, 2015), since "the pursuit of authenticity, indeed, can be interpreted as gaining belongingness to and exploring the uniqueness of a foreign culture" (Qing Liu and Mattila, 2015, p. 1). Customers often refer to uniqueness and difference as "authenticity," (Kim *et al.,* 2017) but the effectiveness of ethnic cues in advertisements results from visual cues that attract consumers who identify themselves distinctively with the advertised product in relation to its authenticity (Khan *et al*, 2015). Therefore, marketers acknowledge the importance of ethnicity when they attempt to target ethnic consumers (Trinh *et al*., 2020). However, it is not people with the same ethnic background as the restaurant owners who are the main customers of ethnically themed restaurants; rather, it is people from the local community who want a comprehensive, authentic ethnic dining experience (Qing Liu and Mattila, 2015; Lego *et al*., 2002). How ethnicity is performed as a marketing effort must therefore be understood in relation to the fact that the intended customers are people from the country of residence who seek authenticity from immigrant-owned restaurants.

Recent studies suggest that while ethnic commodification typically takes place offline, it is also growing online, especially through digital representations of ethnic foodscapes (Flowers and Swan, 2017). Digital media offers new ways to represent, create, and share food culture (Lupton, 2020), and digital food practices have become so common we barely notice them in the constant flow of social media. Postings of food (including cooking, preparing, dining) constitute one of the most common forms of uploads today (Lupton & Feldman, 2020). Mann (2020 p. 147) concluded that "our foodscapes are increasingly digital." Although a rising field of research focuses on digital food cultures (see Lupton and Feldman, 2020 for an overview of topics), ethnicity in digital food cultures and representations has not received sufficient attention (Flowers and Swan, 2017). In this study, we view digitalisation as an opportunity, since it plays an important role in commodifying ethnicity and providing communication channels to connect entrepreneurs and different actors while facilitating the entrepreneurial process and serving as a platform to construct digital race (Nakamura, 2013). We are particularly interested in the potential role of the characteristics or attributes of the digital artifacts of foodscapes in the shaping and reshaping the structural

boundaries of the novel opportunities that entrepreneurs can form and enact (Nambisan, 2017) to perform ethnicity in digital immigrant entrepreneurship.

2.3 Digital performance of ethnicity

To understand the context in which immigrant-owned businesses operate and perform ethnicity, we start from an understanding of how the images of immigrant business owners and their restaurants are shaped in the first place. The basic assumption here is that our actions occur in space and are given meaning in/through space, while simultaneously influencing and recreating the place we are in (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991; Tosoni and Tarantino, 2013). This means that ethnic identities are not static but are instead positioned and constructed in relation to the place a person lives, their place of origin, gender, class, and age (Clammer, 2015; Georgiou, 2006). Ethnic identities can therefore not be studied in isolation from their context or in a fixed way (Smets, 2019). Vietnamese restaurant owners in Sweden operate their businesses and live their lives as a part of the Swedish community, and at the same time as representations of their ethnicity. This regulates their business and what will be understood as "authentic," "exotic," "foreign," or "Swedish."

Media technology developments blur the boundaries between offline and online spaces and performances - exotic experiences do not need to involve travel and can be found just by opening your smartphone (Jansson, 2022). We use performance theory to capture how ethnic identities are practiced and digitally performed and examine the process of constituting an identity through projected images and symbols, constrained by expectations. This theory has roots in feminist theory (Butler, 1990, 1993) but is also applicable in ethnicity studies (Clammer, 2015). Performance is a (re)production of ethnicity. The process can be compared to Gregory's (2004, p.8) description of how cultures are formed, through "production, circulation, and legitimation of meanings through representations, practices, and performances that enter fully into the constitution of the world." This means that the shaping of ethnicities as liabilities or assets must be understood as a complex process involving society as a whole. Our understanding is shaped by knowing that ethnic identity is not based only on physical characteristics but also on the psychological prominence of how one feels ascribed to an ethnic group at a given point of time (Khan *et al*, 2015). Moreover, as a locus of cultural effects, ethnicity can shape ethnic consumers' behaviours

(Khan *et al*, 2015) and hence the way immigrant-owned businesses aim to market themselves in offline or online spaces.

To further our understanding of how ethnicity is performed, we investigate these businesses in relation to spatial interactions. We consider that an immigrant-owned business carries its own idiosyncrasies influenced by the culture, values, and beliefs associated with the immigrant business owner's ethnicity (Karayianni, 2021; Evansluong *et al.*, 2019) and that an immigrant-owned business is a social entity in its own right, carrying embedded features as part of society (Karayianni, 2021). Therefore, it is a suitable unit to analyse the social phenomenon of digitally performed ethnicity. Media plays an important role by circulating representations (Jansson, 2013; Tarantino and Tosoni, 2013), and digital media allows everyone to produce and circulate content. Understanding digital media use is central to understanding the production and performance of ethnicity in immigrant-owned restaurants, since digital media "engender novel ways of orienting and re-envisioning the self, the world and one's place in it" (Fast *et al.*, 2018, p.1). Media should be understood as integral to the production and circulation of representations of space; it is therefore also integral to shaping the frameworks for real-time activities and practices (Tosoni and Tarantino 2013; see also Jansson, 2013). Research shows that media is important for the reproduction and formation of immigrant identities, as it provides opportunities to produce "new spaces where multiple remote localities and the experiences generated and shared by their inhabitants come together and become synchronized and related to each-other" (Tsagarousianou and Retis, 2019 p. 5). Immigrants' online practices can also be an important recourse against dispossession, a way of emplacing themselves on their own terms (Mitra and Evansluong, 2019; Witteborn, 2019). Therefore, we understand digital performance as a way to communicate ethnicity, opposing or conforming to online and offline representations. For immigrant businesses as social entities, these are representations that they have to deal with, either deliberately or subconsciously.

Our point of departure is that digital technologies infuse generativity, which refers to the production of "unprompted change driven by large, varied, and uncoordinated audiences" (Zittrain, 2006, p. 1980). Hence, digital communities have become an integrated part of the social production of space and social life, by mediating socio-spatial relations (Ash *et al*., 2018; Hand, 2016). Additionally, socio-material routines or practices involving a given digital artifact in

different contexts - including the enactment of digital artifacts that may lead to a wider and more socially accepted practice - create a broader market opportunity (Nambisan, 2017). Finally, digital technologies are integrated with ideas about ethnicity, foodscapes, and marketing perspectives in an expanded ethnic population (Trinh *et al*., 2020). This is evident in recent studies on purchasing behaviours of different ethnicities (Trinh *et al*., 2020), and ethnic cues' effectiveness for ethnic consumers (Khan *et al.,* 2015). In line with Nakamura (2002), we argue that the digital is just another arena where ethnicity continues to be shaped and reshaped. Digital performance therefore cannot be analysed separately from offline life. In this study, the use of digital platforms and social media to commodify, perform, and reconfigure ethnicity is central to the understanding of the everyday performance of ethnicity and may radically change existing views on immigrant entrepreneurship, given how ethnicity can be used as an asset to market immigrant businesses. Therefore, we focus specifically on the characteristics and aspects of digital artifacts and digital platforms that reflect their inherent generativity and socio-materiality (Nambisan, 2017), to understand the uncertainty associated with digitalisation of immigrant entrepreneurship and the commodification of ethnicity in a digital environment.

3.   Methodology

To address our research question, our point of departure in this study is that digital technologies have become an integrated part of the social production of spaces and places by mediating social-spatial relations (Ash *et al.,* 2018). Therefore, understanding the medium itself - producing and circulating digital images to an audience - is important for understanding its effect on social and cultural life (Rose, 2016). The new visibility of social interactions through social media enables new forms of analysis and understanding (Hand, 2016). We used a qualitative research approach with strands of netnography, to understand cultural experiences and expressions in social media (Corbin and Strauss, 2014; Kozinets, 2020; Miles *et al.*, 2020).

This study employs an inductive multiple case study approach (Yin, 2009), which is suitable for answering the how and why questions (Pratt, 2009). To answer our research question, we relied on rich empirical data from archival photography (see Ray and Smith, 2012) consisting of postings (photos and text) produced for social media for marketing purposes, for the Swedish market, which specifically focus on the food and dining experiences of restaurants. These postings are understood as "online traces" (Kozinets, 2020, p. 16) of social practice.

3.1. Empirical context

Sweden was chosen as the context for our study for several reasons. First, Sweden has for a long time been one of the largest receivers of immigrants in the Western world, in relation to total population. In 2021, a high unemployment rate (16.2 %) was reported among foreign-born residents (compared to 8.3 % among the total population) (SCB, 2022). Second, labour market establishment has always been central in Swedish integration policy, but it has been reinforced in the last decade (Grip, 2020; Brännström *et al.,* 2018). Integrating immigrants into the labour market is still a challenge for Swedish society (Calmfors and Gassen, 2019), so many immigrants start their own businesses. Therefore, the role of immigrant entrepreneurship - an attempt to create immigrant-owned businesses as an employment alternative - is important to tackle the high unemployment rate among foreign-born residents.

3.2. Sampling and data collection

To explore our research question, we followed Patton's (1990) purposeful sampling strategy to select cases that met certain predetermined criteria. First, we chose multiple cases with "common antecedents" (Eisenhardt, 2021, p.149) for replication logic (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) and for analytical generalisation (Yin, 2009). To do this, we selected businesses operating in the same service sector in Sweden. We focused on the restaurant sector in Sweden, as it is among the most prominent in terms of the number of companies founded by immigrant entrepreneurs (SCB, 2022). Second, we selected restaurants whose owners shared the same ethnicity, specifically Vietnamese restaurants established by Vietnamese immigrants. We chose Vietnamese restaurants because of (i) the increasing popularity of Vietnamese food in Sweden and (ii) how it is depicted on social media by both mainstream newspapers such as the *Swedish Daily News* (in Swedish: *Dagens Nyheter*) and major Swedish supermarket chains. Third, we selected businesses that actively use social media channels to communicate with different actors. These cases offer opportunities to understand different degrees of ethnicity based on rareness and uniqueness, which is suitable for theoretical sampling purposes (Eisenhardt, 1989).

We reached the data saturation point at the seventh case, since we were "empirically confident" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p.61) in our data, which showed a reasonable coverage of the phenomenon (Patton, 1990). Although there is no accepted ideal number of cases to be employed (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2013), Eisenhardt (1989, p. 545) suggested that "between four and ten cases

usually works well," since theory is difficult to generate with fewer than four cases due to a relatively small amount of data, while data becomes difficult to manage with more than ten cases. Although Dyer and Wilkins (1991) argued that increasing the number of cases provides better conditions for theory generation, Easton (1995, p. 382) suggested that "researching in a greater number of cases, with the same resources, means more breadth but less depth." The data from these seven cases are therefore sufficient for replication logic (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) and analytical generalisation (Yin, 2009). Our judgment for reaching data saturation relied on TripAdvisor, identifying seven Vietnamese restaurants receiving the highest ratings in the three largest cities in Sweden: Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö.

As there are increasing numbers of images uploaded on social media, we decided to limit our study to posts and photos uploaded between 2015 and 2019. 2015 marked the establishment of some of the restaurants in our data samples, while others were established prior to that year. 2019 marked the end of the pre-COVID era, so our data were not influenced by the effects of the pandemic on the restaurant sector. We drew on multiple sources of data from these restaurants' social media pages, including 1754 Facebook posts (text), 957 Facebook images, 768 Instagram posts (text + image) and 37 PDF pages of webpage screenshots, collected by nCapture in nVivo (see Table1). In addition, we made field visits to these restaurants between 2018 and 2019.

INSERT TABLE1 ABOUT HERE

3.3. Data analysis

Using NVivo, we adopted grounded content analysis (Miles *et al*., 2020) to understand how ethnicity can be used and performed by immigrant businesses. Guided by Gioia *et al*. (2013), our analysis consisted of four steps. First, we used open coding, akin to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach, which involved analysing photos and text from Facebook and Instagram posts as well as webpage screenshots. We assigned conceptual codes to texts (Corbin and Strauss, 2014) and photos (Shortt and Warren, 2019) by paying particular attention to the content of these materials and their contexts. The social context mediates the impact of the image (Rose, 2016) and is therefore vital to understand the meaning of the image beyond its content (Hand, 2016). At this stage, each image and text could be assigned to more than one conceptual code. The outcome of this stage produced several conceptual codes - for instance, bamboo and rice hats, traditional

Vietnamese landscapes, Vietnamese family photos, cooking by authentic chefs, Swedish Midsummer, Swedish National Day, and Swedish Pancake Day.

Second, we employed axial coding to identify relationships between these open codes across the seven cases, to generate our cross-case first order categories (Shortt and Warren, 2019; Corbin and Strauss, 2014; Gioia *et al.*, 2013). We were interested in questions concerning what representations were reproduced through the images and what form of social-spatial relation was produced across the seven cases. This resulted in several first-order codes - for instance, *showcasing interior design*, *stereotyping Vietnamese food decoration,* and *taking part in Swedish holidays and traditions*.

Third, we conducted another round of axial coding to understand the relationships between the first-order categories by comparing them to categories from relevant literature (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). The first-order categories suggest some relationships between the symbols of Swedishness and Vietnameseness and the degree to which the businesses expressed these two symbols, through images illustrating food in the digital context and texts explaining food and occasions on social media platforms. This stage resulted in a number of second-order themes-- for instance, idealising the home country's traditional symbols, assigning meanings of the host country's values in digital forms, and incorporating the home country's values into the host country setting.

Fourth, we conducted one more round of axial coding to understand how the second-order themes could explain the phenomenon. We looked at the relationships between the second-order themes by going back and forth between the data and the literature (Gioia *et al.,* 2013). This iterative process resulted in three higher theoretical abstracted aggregate dimensions (Gioia *et al.,*2013): preserving performance through digital ethnicising, embracing performance through digital generativitising, and appropriating performance through digital fusionising. The outcome of these three analytical steps is the data structure (see Figure 1) illustrating how we progressed from the first-order categories to the aggregate dimensions.

Finally, we engaged in theory elaboration (Fisher and Aguinis, 2017) by going back to the three aggregate dimensions - preserving, embracing and appropriating - to understand the relationships between them in connection to the focus of our theoretical framework: digitalisation in immigrant entrepreneurship, ethnic foodscapes, and performance theory. This resulted in an extension of existing theoretical constructs in a new context. For instance, positioning the three aggregate

dimensions in the digital settings, we proposed three types of digital performance: *digital ethnicising, digital generativising,* and *digital fusionising*. This leads to our proposed concept: digital ethnicity affordances. We looked at the relationships between these constructs both vertically and horizontally, which suggested three forms of boundary blurring: boundary stretching between the online and offline space; boundary bridging; and boundary bonding between the immigrant business owners' home and host countries. The outcome of this step is a model depicting boundary blurring duality through digital ethnicity affordances (see Figure 2).

3.4. Ethical considerations

Postings on public profiles on social media like Facebook and Instagram should be considered public information, as these sites can be considered public sites themselves, even if people may publish posts that are not intended for the public (Kozinets, 2020). However, even if the material can legally be considered public, using the data is not always unproblematic. This can be called a "consent gap," meaning that the person who uploaded the data might not welcome the data being analysed in research (Kozinets, 2020 p.175). Still, if privacy settings are set to public, this can be treated as a type of consent for others (including researchers) to use the data (Kozinets, 2020).

We analysed official restaurant social media profiles. In some cases, however, the character of a post was quite private, for instance including pictures of friends and family members. To refrain from exposing such sensitive material, we included these photos in the analysis but did not reproduce them as examples. We also decided not to name the restaurants in our study. This does not mean that our cases are completely anonymised, but since all data was accessed from a public setting, we deem this level of anonymity sufficient in relation to the use of the data and aim of the study.

4. Findings

Figure 1 depicts three aggregate dimensions showing how the digital performance of ethnicity can be understood in relation to established understandings of ethnicity and cultural symbols. First, *preserving performance through digital ethnicising* relies on the businesses' representations of something authentically from the home country. In this dimension, the actual connections to the home country are idealised, and nostalgia is used as an asset for the business. Second, *embracing performance through digital generativitising* illuminates the businesses' assimilation to traditions

and values of the host country, showing that the immigrant business owners are part of the host society. Third, *appropriating performance through digital fusionising* portrays the businesses' incorporation and combination of host and home country cultural symbols. Our empirical data suggests that it is a practice of adapting Swedish traditions in a Vietnamese way, combining and transforming the two cultures into something new.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

4.1. Preserving performance through digital ethnicising

Preserving performance through digital ethnicising of a business involves portraying the most distinguished features of the home country's ethnicity in digital forms by (a) idealising the home country's traditional symbols and (b) nostalgising the home country's family values. Idealising the home country's traditional symbols is done mainly through showcasing, stereotyping, presenting, and signposting in different online content to create a desirable image of ethnic product or service (for examples of pictures and quotes building up these first order categories, please see Table 2). Showcasing ethnic interior design and landscapes of the home country emphasises recurrent symbols of the ethnicity. For instance, our data reveals the use of bamboo, Buddha statues, birdcages, shutters, and rice hats (nón lá) in Vietnamese restaurants. Showcasing also involves displaying distinctive landscape features of the home country. For instance, restaurant owners use paintings of traditional Vietnamese landscapes and family photos on walls to create the most suitable background to accompany the food.

Stereotyping ethnic decoration includes displaying items used in typical settings in the host country. In the Vietnamese setting, it is typical to use chopsticks, bowls, and plates and the five traditional colours of Vietnamese food - red, green, black, white, and yellow - on a daily basis. The prominent background colours are gold, representing the golden lotus, and light brown and green, representing green bamboo. These are both symbols of Vietnam. Photos illustrating food decoration are shot in selective focus, creating visual effects highlighting specific features as focal points, such as green herbs or red chili peppers, representing traditional Vietnamese ways of combining the foods. In a typical Vietnamese home, vegetable portions are much larger than meat portions. This choice of interior design creates a distinguished background to showcase the pride

in the food and the ethnic identity of the business. This pride is also illuminated by presenting the services and products in the business owner's native language. The names of dishes are introduced in the native language, which creates an inviting setting for a holistic dining experience.

Preserving performance through digital ethnicising also involves nostalgising the home country's family values. This is expressed through signposting texts related to family members and previous generations, to highlight the authenticity attached to the product or service. Phrases used include "one of our dear grandmother's favourite dishes," "we serve the dishes our grandmother used to cook in the southern parts of Saigon," and "the restaurant was started by our grandfather in Vietnam […] a family business since three generations." These statements rewind authenticity back to old times and previous generations of the ethnicity associated with the restaurant. Together with postings from travels to Vietnam and photos of chefs and restaurant staff with Vietnamese looks, we interpret this as a performance of digital ethnicitising the business' connections to Vietnam. Our findings show that Vietnamese ethnicity and Vietnamese culture are used as symbols and markers for authenticity and exclusivity, giving the sense of an extraordinary experience that the customer can only receive by visiting the restaurant. To be able to offer this experience, the ethnic differences and the exotic traits must be stressed in a performance that gathers and displays the most distinguished features of the given ethnicity and presented in a way that makes them sellable and attractive to people in the new homeland.

The preserving performance entails online activities in which ethnic businesses commodify ethnicity by representing their home countries on digital platforms. This performance is enabled by a bonding mechanism (Pena-Lopez *et al.,* 2013), to maintain close ties between the businesses and co-ethnics and their home country. In our study, bonding refers to digital social capital, where media is understood as integral to the production and circulation of representations of space (Tosoni and Tarantino, 2013) and to shaping activities and practices (see also Jansson, 2013).

The photos and text represent something emotional and related to everyday practice. They are at the same time dominated by representations of what is perceived as "the other," exotic, and authentic (cf. Lefebvre, 1991). Our findings highlight that this performance of ethnic culture differs from ethnic cues illuminated in existing literature, which focuses on ideas about ethnicity

and marketing to examine the purchasing behaviours of different ethnicities and marketing perspectives in expanded ethnic populations (Trinh *et al*., 2020).

4.2. Embracing performance through digital generativitising

Embracing performance through the digital generativising of a business involves outlining the host country's ethnicity in a digital setting dominantly portrayed by the home country's ethnicity. This performance is enabled by a bridging mechanism (Salvato and Melin, 2008) to establish ties between immigrant-owned businesses (and the business owners) and the host country. While Nambisan (2017) defined generativity as the recombination capability of functionality in terms of elements, assembly, extension, and distribution, in our study, digital generativity refers to immigrant businesses' ability to assign meanings of the host country's values in different digital forms by combining host cultural elements. Assigning meanings of the host country's values in different digital forms involves actions that showcase local traditions, such as displaying traditional symbols or partaking in traditional events in the business setting through digital platforms. Our data suggests that the photos and posts in this category showcase how the restaurant owners represent Swedish culture, for instance by taking part in and celebrating Swedish holidays like Midsummer, Walpurgis Night, Christmas Eve, and the Swedish National day. The holidays are also represented in posts announcing that the restaurant is closed for these special days.

Embracing host country values is also expressed through hashtagging texts related to local values. For example, restaurant owners might focus on the Swedish quality of ingredients, emphasising locally produced products. This is typically done through texts stating that the restaurant uses certain kinds of Swedish ingredients (mainly meat), contracts local farmers, and buys locally produced ingredients. This can be understood in relation to discourses of the "local" (often placed in opposition to industrial agriculture) and the perception that some foods are more "authentic" than others (Parry, 2009; Petitt and Bull, 2018). Referring to the local also connects the ethnic, exotic food to something Swedish - a product of the Swedish countryside and, as such, a part of the reproduction of Sweden and Swedish values (cf. Petitt and Bull, 2018).

The embracing performance is therefore interpreted as representing the Swedish culture as something distinct with clearly defined borders, into which the restaurant owners can assimilate and embrace.

4.3. Appropriating performance through digital fusionising

In contrast to the preserving and embracing performances, the appropriating performance through digital fusionising involves extending the home country's values in the host country's setting and creating new trends and norms by combining the values of the home and host countries using digital infrastructure. The appropriating performance goes beyond acknowledging the importance of ethnicity as an attempt to target ethnic consumers (Trinh *et al*., 2020) and the effectiveness of ethnic cues in advertisements to attract consumers who identify with the advertised product (Khan *et al.,* 2015). Digital fusionising refers to the ability of immigrant businesses to use digital artifacts and platforms to (a) incorporate the home country's values into the host country's settings, (b) endorse inter-ethnic consumers, and (c) combine traditions of the home and host countries.

Incorporating the home country's values into the host country's settings includes portraying or advertising home country traditional features in a host country context, thereby redefining and transforming the original tradition. For example, businesses post photos advertising Vietnamese pancakes on Thursdays, connecting this Vietnamese food to the Swedish tradition of eating soup and pancakes on Thursdays. Digital artifacts portraying golden Vietnamese pancakes (Bánh Xèo) and green herbs highlight the crispiness of the rice batter mixed with coconut milk and turmeric fried in a super-hot skillet topped with a savoury stuffing of pork, prawns, diced green onion, and bean sprouts. Other examples include serving Vietnamese meatballs on the Swedish National Meatball Day; marketing alcohol on "lille-lördag" [the "small Saturday" = Wednesday] which is traditionally the day other than Saturdays when Swedish people party; or using the term "husman" ("husman"/"husmanskost" is a term used to describe traditional Swedish food that was common in every home 50 years ago) to describe a Vietnamese restaurant's lunch offerings.

Endorsing inter-ethnic consumers involves envisioning new consumer personas from various ethnicities who would like to experience the restaurant's products or services. In our study, some photos illuminate local diners with western looks enjoying the Vietnamese food in outdoor settings. This suggests that the restaurants have attempted to promote a diverse range of customers enjoying Vietnamese cuisines.

Combining traditions involves integrating the values of the home and the host countries. The digital artifacts generated from the integration of these new values are promoted through digital

platforms and can quickly become new norms in the industry. In our study, the businesses used Swedish nature symbols, such as wooden plates and pinecones, for Vietnamese dishes. This is the highest level of fusionising to create new values in the gastronomy sector. This performance shows that the restaurant owner is familiar with local traditions and confident enough to include Vietnamese tradition in the local tradition. Georgiou (2019) discussed the skills and capabilities of cosmopolitan immigrants in terms of a transnational habitus, which is described as the "almost natural ability to use mobility, connectivity, and transnational association to achieve certain goals" (Georgiou, 2019 p.73). The appropriating performance fits well into this description, in the sense that business owners use their home country ethnicities alongside knowledge of their host communities to run popular restaurants. Georgiou (2019) also named reproducing symbolic resources (i.e., social networks, knowledge, etc.) to support diasporic subjects through encounters with familiar and unfamiliar "Others" as a *transnational habitus skill*. Because foodscapes reach people both within and beyond the diaspora network, the appropriating performance is an enabling fusionising mechanism that entails both bonding and bridging. This is a performance where both home and host ethnic elements are expressed and combine into a new asset for the immigrant-owned businesses. This highlights how the home and the host country ethnicities of immigrant-owned businesses become an interwoven combination of expressions, while an ethnic fusion emerges and is utilised as an asset on digital platforms.

Appropriating culture is the outcome of not only diversifying but also harmonising ethnic values with local values. At the same time, the experience at the restaurant must be different from "the ordinary" - but not too different - to be an asset (see Kim *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the ethnicity has to be performed in relation to the local context. The visitors of the restaurant must recognise themselves and feel included. Digital representations of food function as a mediator connecting Vietnamese and Swedish culture and foodscapes.

5.   Discussion

Our study furthers our understanding of immigrant entrepreneurship and digital entrepreneurship by proposing a conceptual model (see Figure 2) explaining how ethnicity is used and digitally performed in the studied immigrant businesses. The model expands upon the importance of boundary breaking in immigrant entrepreneurship (e.g., Verver *et al*., 2020; Evansluong *et al*., 2019; Griffin-EL and Olabisi, 2018); digitalisation in immigrant entrepreneurship (e.g., Andrejuk,

2022; Anwar and Daniel, 2017), and the increasing fluidity of boundaries in digital entrepreneurship (Troise *et al*., 2022a; Nambisan, 2017) by depicting the interwoven duality of horizontal and vertical boundary blurring. Horizontal boundary blurring occurs between the offline and online spaces of the immigrant businesses, and the vertical blurring occurs between the home and host country attachment of the immigrant businesses. We contribute to the work of Verver *et al*. (2020) on "stretching the boundaries of ethnic spheres" (Verver *et al*., 2020, p. 778) by providing new knowledge on horizontal boundary blurring as an iterative process of *boundary stretching* between the online and offline spaces. This leads to the construction of the digital ethnicity of the business, through three stages: (a) converting offline content to online content to create digital artifacts; (b) capitalising on digital artifacts through digital platforms; and (c) catalysing towards digital ethnicity through digital contextualisation. These three stages bridging the offline and online echo and contribute to the work of Nambisan (2017) on digital entrepreneurship by detailing how digitalisation makes "entrepreneurial processes become less bounded" (Nambisan, 2017, p. 1033) in temporal and spatial aspects.

The first stage, converting offline content to online content, consists of turning a wide range of offline materials into digital formats that can be stored and displayed online. These materials are published on social media together with a narrative, using hashtags as a digital marketing tool. The outcome of this stage is a collection of digital artifacts bridging the boundary between the online and offline spaces. This outcome echoes the importance of digital artifacts in the entrepreneurial process outlined in Nambisan (2017).

In the second stage, the immigrant businesses use digital platforms to capitalise on these digital artifacts. We echo a study by Kraus *et al*. (2019) on the importance of digital platforms in entrepreneurial processes by showing how such platforms can help produce an image of a business that attracts host country customers. A variety of different strategies are used together, showing that the businesses are both anchored in home country culture and well established in host country culture. This stage involves boundary blurring between the home and the host country through three strategies for capitalising through digital platforms: (a) idealising-nostalgising the home country, (b) incorporating-endorsing-combining the home and the host country; and (c) assigning meanings from the host country. We extend Troise *et al.*'s study (2022b) on the impact of social media in entrepreneurship by suggesting how these three strategies for capitalising digital artifacts

can transform resources from the offline to the online context. Idealising and nostalgising the home country's symbols and traditions through stereotyped images with "romantic" colour patterns is a promising avenue for an authentic customer experience. Incorporating-endorsing-combining involves attempts to harmonise the home and the host country's cultures. Assigning meanings from the host country illustrates how immigrant businesses consider their host countries' values and promote these values in everyday business.

The third stage, catalysing towards digital ethnicity through digital contextualisation, constructs the ethnicities of the home and the host countries in digital form by: (i) digital ethnicising, (ii) digital fusionising; and (iii) digital generativitising. We extend the literature on digital entrepreneurship (e.g., Nambisan, 2017), immigrant entrepreneurship (e.g, Andrejuk, 2022), and social media (e.g., Mitra and Evansluong, 2019) by conceptualising "digital contextualisation," which refers to the ability to situate digital artifacts representing ethnicity in the appropriate setting and assign meanings to them in order to construct a digital form of the ethnicity. It entails three degrees of ethnic boundary blurring: *digital ethnicising* to construct digital ethnicity representing the home country; *digital fusionising* to construct digital ethnicity representing both the home and the host country; and *digital generativitising* to construct digital ethnicity representing the host country. Our results contribute to the integration of digital entrepreneurship and immigrant entrepreneurship literature by showing that immigrant entrepreneurs utilise digital transformation effectively to improve their knowledge capabilities (Troise, et al., 2022a), such as in how they express ethnicity in foodscapes.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The vertical boundary blurring between the home and the host country entails both (i) *boundary bridging* from home to host country and (ii) *boundary bonding* from host to home country. We extend the concept of "ethnic boundary dynamics" presented in Verver et al. (2020) by showing that the studied immigrant businesses utilise both boundary bridging and bonding to create ideal spaces where digital ethnicity is constructed to represent the fusion of home and host countries. We propose the term "digital ethnicity affordances" to illuminate the capability of immigrant businesses to utilise digital artifacts, platforms, and infrastructure to construct digital ethnicity. This digital ethnicity represents different degrees of attachments to both the home and the host

country in both offline and online space through boundary stretching, boundary bridging, and boundary bonding.

Our theoretical model indicates that digital technologies play a significant part in immigrant entrepreneurship (Nambisan 2017; Berger *et al*., 2019), to target ethnic consumers (Trinh *et al*., 2020) and people from the local community (Qing Liu and Mattila, 2015; Lego *et al*., 2002), to produce ethnic cues in advertisements (Khan *et al*., 2015), and to repossess and emplace immigrant entrepreneurs on their own terms (Mitra and Evansluong, 2019; Witteborn, 2019). Foodscapes express people's relationships with food in social and individual contexts (Adema, 2007), as well as perceptions, expectations and experiences of ethnic restaurants (Tsai and Lu, 2012).

Our results also suggest the importance of digital technologies in bridging and bonding between the immigrant businesses and the home and host countries. In particular, our theoretical model helps expand our understanding of breaking out strategies (e.g., Evansluong *et al*., 2019; Griffin-EL and Olabisi, 2018) by highlighting the role of performing ethnicity through digital media and how it enables ethnicity to be utilised as an asset, even where performance is restricted by offline socio-spatial relations. Immigrant businesses can choose which ethnic symbols to use and commodify in the digital setting, using ethnicity as a business asset. At the same time, while bonding and bridging mechanisms work on an individual level as a marketing asset, it is not up to the immigrant business owner to decide. Success in this regard is closely related to the norms and standards of the host community, since immigrant entrepreneurs face structural barriers that can limit their entrepreneurial scope (Jones *et al.*, 2014), and their opportunities are influenced by the contextual circumstances of entrepreneurship (Karayianni, 2021; Evansluong *et al*., 2019) and the psychological prominence of how they are ascribed to an ethnic group (Khan *et al.*, 2015). Transnational habitus skill (Georgiou, 2019), combined with the possibilities offered by digital media, finds its optimal performance outcome in digital communication. Digital platforms act as the mediators and facilitators for the three ethnic performances that turn ethnicity from a liability into an asset.

6. Conclusion

This paper responds to calls for understanding how immigrant entrepreneurs can use online opportunities to overcome the liability of foreignness (Dabic *et al., 2020*) and offers a fresh look

at ethnicity, which has previously been viewed in a negative light in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship (Vershinina and Rodgers, 2019). By responding to this call, we show *how* immigrant entrepreneurs use digitalisation to perform and commodify ethnicity. We argue that ethnicity can be used as a resource in immigrant entrepreneurship through (i) digital ethnicising, (ii) digital fusionising; and (iii) digital generativitising.

Contributions to theory

Our study makes three theoretical contributions. First, it advances theoretical understanding on how ethnicity can be turned into an asset through the utilisation of digital artifacts and digital platforms. An immigrant's ethnicity, which was originally considered a liability because of the lack of roots in the host country environment, as well as a basis for "otherness" and discrimination in the labour market, is reconstructed into an asset through digital performances. Our results respond to Vershinina and Rodgers's study (2019) indicating that ethnicity has been researched mainly as a disadvantage.

Second, it contributes to the ethnicity and immigrant entrepreneurship literature by proposing the concept of "performing digital ethnicity" regarding the use of digitalisation to attract potential customers by fusionising home and host cultures through three digital performances: preserving, embracing, and appropriating. Immigrant entrepreneurs possess a transnational habitus skill that can be used as a marketing means to attract host country customers. These results extend studies by Evansluong *et al*. (2019) and Griffin-EL and Olabisi (2018) by suggesting three specific digital performances to immigrant businesses as "breaking out" strategies to enter the mainstream market.

Third, it conceptualises horizontal and vertical boundary blurring through digital ethnicity affordances. It shows how digitalisation mediates socio-spatial relations (Ash *et al*., 2018; Hand, 2016), extending Verver *et al.*'s (2020) study on ethnic boundary dynamics by proposing three types of boundary blurring: boundary stretching between online and offline spaces, boundary bonding, and boundary bridging between the home and host countries of immigrant businesses. Additionally, it contributes to the growing interest in digital food and foodscape studies by adding perspectives of ethnicity (Flowers and Swan, 2017).

Practical implications

The purpose of this study is to address the research gap on how immigrant entrepreneurs use digital opportunities to overcome the liability of newness and foreignness and how immigrant entrepreneurs on a *business level* digitally promote and market their non-majority ethnicities as an advantage. The study's implications are therefore more theoretical than practical and managerial. While our study is based on multiple Vietnamese-owned restaurants, the implications can also be useful for business owners who share both similar and different cultural characteristics to those of our chosen cases. This is because our results indicate how cultural artifacts are used to digitally express ethnicity, rather than why specific artifacts are used. Therefore, regardless of their antecedent backgrounds, immigrants wanting to establish businesses in their host countries will become more aware of how ethnicity can be used as an asset instead of perceiving it as a liability.

Our results point to the importance of combining preserving, embracing, and appropriating performances. This study also shows practitioners new ways to develop marketing strategies, since we have explicitly shown how digitalising ethnicity can play an important role in this process for immigrant-owned businesses, helping them attract both ethnic and local customers. Because these businesses rely on their owners' decisions, the owners as practitioners should comprehend how business success can be facilitated by boundary blurring duality and through digital ethnicity affordances, which can merge into a newly formed digital ethnic capital. This allows for digital ethnic capital to surface within the immigrants' businesses, as well as across newly formed businesses. They can use such capital to reach out to digital networks and hence digital users. It is advised that practitioners in this field understand that converting offline content to online content to create digital artifacts, capitalise on digital artifacts through digital platforms, and catalyse towards digital ethnicity through digital contextualisation is the foundation for the creation of digital ethnic capital. This capital can be used as an asset and thus strengthen their business while eliminating the exclusion mechanisms that come with offline immigrant entrepreneurship.

Limitations and future research directions

Despite its contributions to immigrant entrepreneurship literature, our study has some limitations. First, our sample includes seven restaurants owned by one specific group of immigrants. Our proposed theoretical concepts provide analytical rather than statistical generalisability (Yin, 2009). To increase generalisability, we would need to investigate our framework using a larger sample

featuring different immigrant entrepreneur groups and different sectors. Second, we rely on only digital artifacts. Conducting interviews with restaurant owners and customers could provide more insightful understanding of the cases, since triangulating between data sources can reduce the room for bias and increase credibility (Denzin, 2017).

Based on the results of this study, future research should dig deeper into how intentional immigrant entrepreneurs' digital communication and performance is, through interviews with entrepreneurs. How customers receive and interpret digital communication could be another future research focus. Future research should also extend beyond our sample of Vietnamese restaurants and include restaurants from other ethnic groups. Since digital communication has become integrated into the social production of spaces and places (Ash *et al*., 2018, Jansson, 2022), it would also be interesting to compare the digital performances of immigrant entrepreneurs in cities and in smaller towns, to find out if the assets found in this study can be used in the same way in other settings and contexts. In addition, understanding the dark side of digital technologies in entrepreneurship would increase our knowledge of this topic.

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Table 1. Data collection

Case	Facebook posts	Facebook photos	Instagram post (photos & texts)	Webpage pages (texts)
Case 1. 'An Authentic Vietnamese modern bistro'	220	93	131	5
Case 2. 'A family-run Vietnamese restaurant with roots in Saigon in southern Vietnam'	27	43	5	5
Case 3. 'Modern Vietnamese bistro with a focus on good ingredients'	1064	652	244	1
Case 4. 'A family-owned traditional Vietnamese restaurant'	113	47	76	11
Case 4. 'Food with origin in Southeast Asia'	70	15	16	5
Case 6. 'Modern Vietnamese gourmet'	98	42	183	8
Case 7. 'Authentic and fresh Vietnamese food'	162	65	113	2
Total	1754	957	768	37

Table 2. Representative data
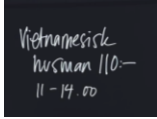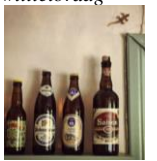
Preserving performance				Embracing performance		Appropriating performance		
Idealising home country's traditional symbols			Nostalgising home country's family values	Assigning meanings of host country's values in digital forms		Incorporating home country's values to host country's settings	Endorsing inter-ethnic consumers	Combining traditions
Showcasing ethnic interior design and landscape of the home country	Stereotyping ethnic decoration	Presenting service's/product's content in ethnic language	Signposting texts related to family members and previous generations	Showcasing local traditions by displaying and partaking	Hashtagging local values	Advertising home country traditional elements in a host country context	Envisioning new consumer personas for ethnic products	Integrating values of the host and home country
			"We are a family run Vietnamese restaurant with roots from Saigon in Southern Vietnam." *Traveling in Vietnam – our family makes #mooncakes and sells at home 100% #homemade #family #business*	*(We are closed 19-21 June. Happy Midsummer!)* *Go Sweden! #wearesweden "Tonight we are open as usual. Come and celebrate the Swedish National Day with us." #summer #vietnam "familystyle #finedining "sweden*	*"We use home-grown and locally produced ingredients from Swedish farmers" #finedining #vietnamesefood* *"VIETNAMESE COMFORT FOOD LUNCH. Cơm Thịt Nướng – rice with wood ear mushroom omelet and grilled char siu pork loin (Swedish free-range farm pork)"*	*"Business as usual. Thursday means sizzling pancakes lunch."* *#lillelördag* *"Today is the official National Meatballs Day ere in Sweden. Too bad we don't serve meatballs. But we serve the no. 1 street food of Hanoi - Bún chả."*		*"We create dishes with Vietnamese favour and a modern take of meadow, sea, and forest." #finedining #vietnamesefood*

Figure 1. Data structure

First-order categories	Second-order categories	Aggregate dimensions

Showcasing ethnic interior design and landscape of the home country: *birdcage, bamboo, Buddha statue, shutters, rice hat (nón lá), photos and paintings in the restaurant: traditional Vietnamese landscapes, rural landscapes, rice fields, animals, urban landscapes, local food market, boats, buildings/houses, local people*

Stereotyping ethnic decoration: *service (plates and bowls), chopsticks; colorful food in vivid mode: red, green, black, white and yellow*

Presenting service's/product's content in ethnic language

Idealising home country's traditional symbols

Signposting texts related to family members and previous generations: *"grandmother's favorite dishes", started by our grandfather in Vietnam" etc. Family photos, Cooking and preparation of food by "authentic" chefs*

Nostalgising home country's family values

Preserving performance through digital ethnicising

Showcasing local traditions by displaying and partaking: *Midsummer, National Day celebrations in the settings of Vietnamese restaurants*

Hashtagging local values: *e.g., "Swedish chicken", local farmers, local grown ingredients in Vietnamese dishes*

Assigning meanings of host country's values in digital forms

Embracing performance through digital generativitising

Advertising home country traditional elements in a host country context: *Vietnamese pancakes on Swedish Pancake day (Thursdays), Vietnamese meatballs on Swedish National meatballs day*

Incorporating home country's values to host country's settings

Envisioning new consumer personas for ethnic products: *picturing Western people eating Vietnamese food in open-air restaurants*

Endorsing inter-ethnic consumers

Integrating values of the host and home country: *linking Swedish nature symbols (wooden products/plates, pinecones, pine needles) with Vietnamese dishes*

Combining traditions

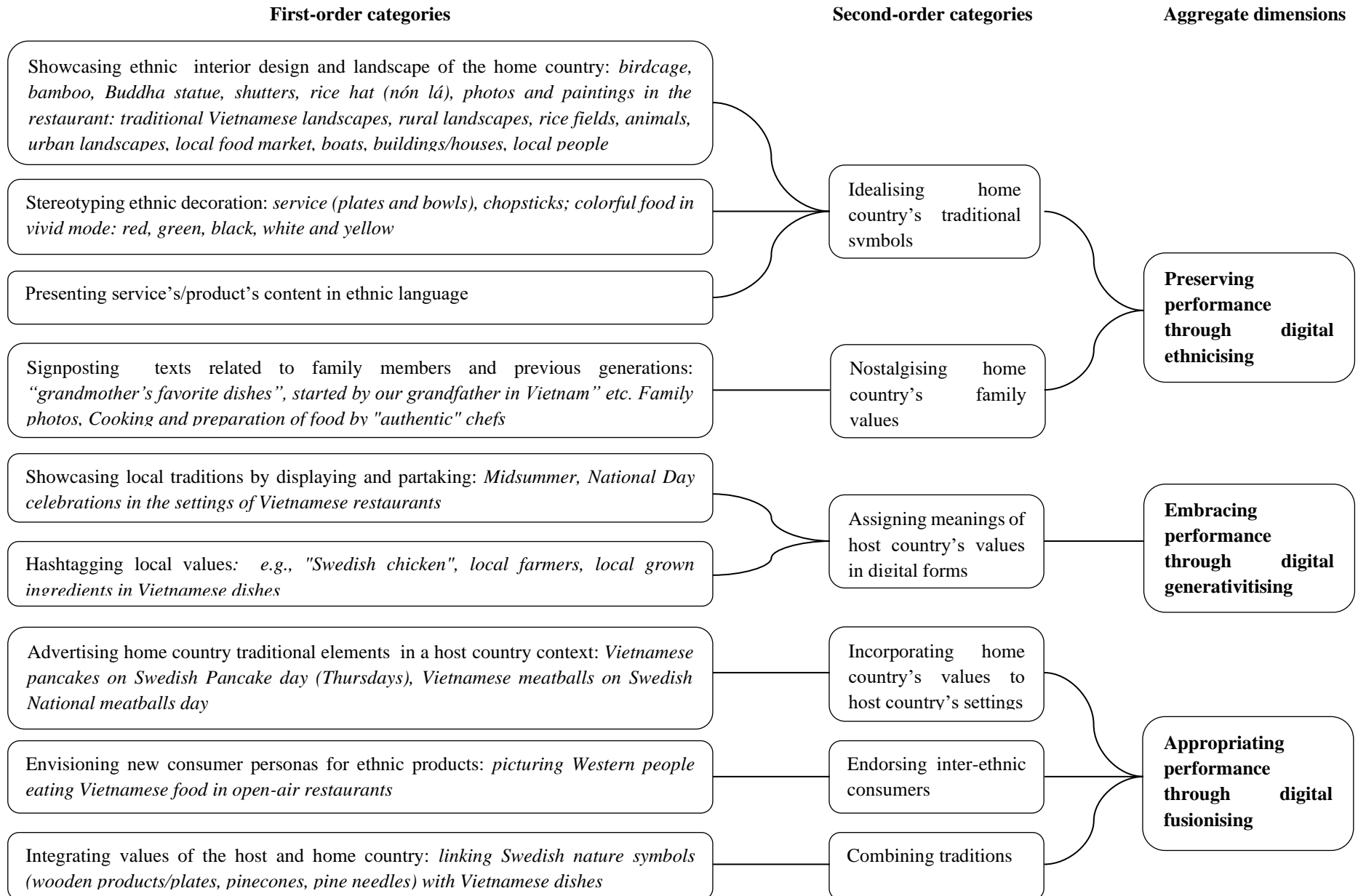**Appropriating performance through digital fusionising**

Figure 2. Boundary blurring duality through digital ethnicity affordances

Offline	Horizontal boundary blurring		Online
Converting offline content to online content to creating digital artifacts	**Capitalising** digital artifacts through digital platforms	**Catalysing** towards digital ethnicity through digital contextualisation	

Home country

Offline	Horizontal boundary blurring	Catalysing	Online
Showcasing	Idealising	Digital ethnicising	Preserving performance
Steoretyping	Nostalgising		
Presenting			
Signposting	Incorporating		Appropriating performace
Hastaging	Endorsing	Digital fusionising	
Advertising	Combining		
Envisioning			Embracing performace
Integrating	Assigning	Digital generativitising	

Vertical boundary blurring

Host country