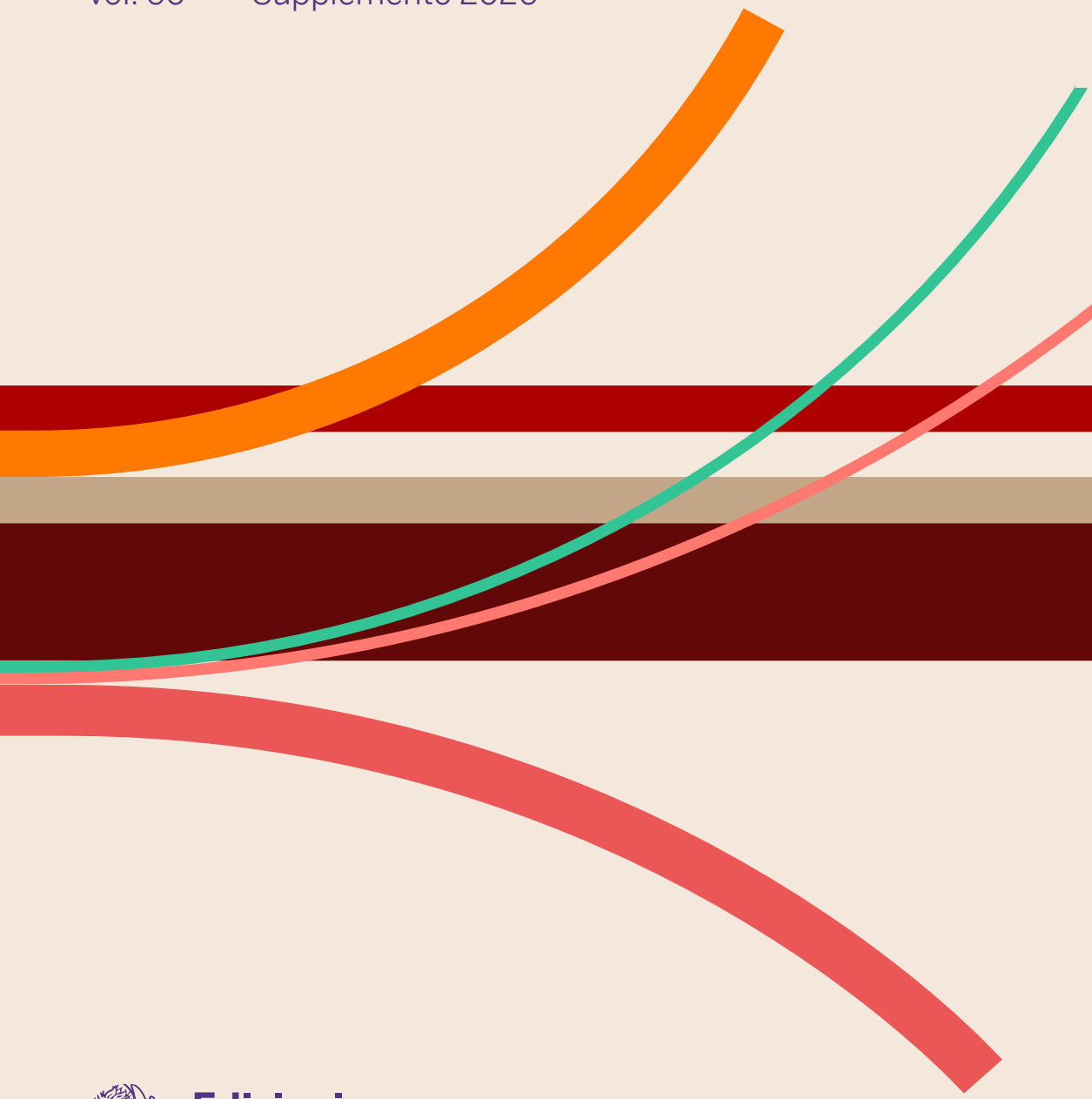
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Abstract

This special issue explores how food discourse constructs cultural identities, ethical values and consumer practices across institutional, commercial and digital contexts. Through corpus-assisted, critical and multimodal discourse approaches, the contributions examine representations of traditional and novel foods, from Italian culinary heritage and gastronationalism to alternative proteins and sustainable consumption. Together, they reveal how language and visual communication negotiate authenticity, health, innovation and responsibility, shaping contemporary food cultures and perceptions of what constitutes desirable food.

Keywords Food discourse. Cultural identity. Multimodal communication. Food marketing. Sustainability.

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Vol. 60 – Suppl. – 2026

Table of Contents

EDIBLE NARRATIVES: MULTIDISCIPLINARY ADAPTATIONS
AND REPRESENTATIONS OF NOVEL AND TRADITIONAL FOODS

edited by Daniela Cesiri, Michele Sala, Stefania M. Maci

Edible narratives. An Introduction
Daniela Cesiri, Stefania M. Maci, Michele Sala 9

Promoting 'Good' Food in Italy
Positive Evaluation and Fear Appeal in Promotional Discourse
Michele Sala, Stefania M. Maci 15

A Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis of Nutella®'s Website in English and in Italian
Representing Corporate Advocacy Between Traditional Values and Innovation
Daniela Cesiri 39

Constructing Guilt-Free Indulgence
Discourses of Plant-Based and Cultivated Meat Marketing
Gianmarco Vignozzi 63

Cultured Meat is (not) Vegan Meat
Discursive Boundary-Making in User Comments
Francesco Nacchia 85

From Farm to Table
Measuring Host Communities' Relationship with the Plant World in Instagram Tourism Reels
Elena Mattei 111

Italianness in the Digital Food Discourse of Italian Restaurants Abroad
A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Analysis
Walter Spezzano, Stefano De Cantis 157

Edible Narratives: Multidisciplinary Adaptations and Representations of Novel and Traditional Foods

edited by
Daniela Cesiri, Michele Sala, Stefania M. Maci

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Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie occidentale
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Promoting 'Good' Food in Italy
Positive Evaluation and Fear Appeal in Promotional Discourse

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Abstract This paper examines how Italian food is promoted in non-commercial institutional and sectoral discourse, comparing two sub-corpora: the website of the Italian Ministry of Health and that of Coldiretti. Combining word-frequency output with qualitative discourse analysis, it investigates the interplay of positive evaluation and fear appeal across health, cultural identity, sustainability and economic value. Both actors construct Italian food as 'good', yet differently: the Ministry integrates risk awareness into public-health education, whereas Coldiretti reserves conflictual framing for external threats.

Keywords Promotional discourse. Food discourse. Positive evaluation. Fear appeal. Gastronationalism.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Food as Culture and the Culture of Food. – 3 Analytical Framework: Methodology, Materials, Scope. – 4 Results and Discussion. – 5 Conclusion.

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1 Introduction

Food is a central component of culture and one of its most visible expressions.[1] As widely argued in cultural and sociological studies, food practices play a crucial role in shaping and expressing cultural identity (Hall 1997; Mintz, Du Bois 2002; Katan 2014). What people eat, how they eat, and when they eat are not merely matters of individual preference or biological necessity but are embedded in systems of meaning that reflect shared values, social practices, and collective histories. At the same time, contemporary food practices are increasingly shaped by accelerated modern lifestyles characterised by limited time for eating and the erosion of eating as a family or communal ritual. These transformations have contributed to a growing homogenisation of food products and practices, often privileging convenience, speed, and standardisation over local specificity. One of the most frequently cited manifestations of this process is the so-called hamburgerisation of eating habits, whereby traditional culinary practices are progressively displaced "in favour of the queue-to-be-served hamburger" (Katan 2004, 32). Closely related to this is the phenomenon of McDonaldisation, defined – as far back as the early 90s – as "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant come to dominate more and more sectors of society" (Ritzer [1993] 2019, 1). Another aspect contributing to the homogenisation of contemporary foodscapes is the widespread availability of ethnic food venues (e.g. kebab shops, sushi bars, or Chinese, Thai, and Mexican restaurants) which, while suggesting cultural openness, often involve the simplification and standardisation of culinary traditions to suit global tastes and market logics (Wilk 2006; Askegaard, Linnet 2011; Johnston, Baumann 2015).

Nevertheless, alongside these globalized practices, there persist food-related places, rituals, dishes, and material objects that retain culturally specific meanings and continue to function as sites of collective belonging and identification (Counihan, Van Esterik 2013; Fischler 2011; Sutton 2001). Many societies continue to value traditional dining establishments that are deeply embedded in local cultural life (e.g. *diners* in the United States, *fish-and-chip* shops in Britain, Italian *osterie*, Spanish *tascas*, French *bistros*, etc.) and that function not merely as places of consumption but as social spaces where community ties are reinforced and cultural norms are enacted (Oldenburg 1999; Scarpato, Daniele 2003; Ray 2016).

1 The paper has been jointly conceived and written by the authors. The individual contributions of the authors are identified as follows: Section 1 has been written by Maci, while Sections 2, 3 and 4 have been written by Sala and revised by Maci and Sala. Section 5 has been jointly written by both authors.

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Similarly, certain dishes remain strongly associated with specific cultural and national identities (e.g. *pasta* in Italy, *paella* in Spain, *sausages* in Germany, *sushi* in Japan, and *curry-based dishes* in India), thus functioning not merely as items of consumption but as symbolic markers through which cultural belonging, tradition, and continuity are expressed (Fischler 1988; Anderson 2005; Ichijo, Ranta 2016). This identity dimension can take an explicitly ideological form, as in *gastronationalism*, that is the use of food to construct and defend national identity and economic sovereignty against perceived external threats (DeSoucey 2010). Their persistence demonstrates that food culture – understood both as 'food as culture' and as 'the culture of food' – remains a meaningful domain of social life. While equating culture with food risks an overemphasis on surface manifestations (Katan 2014), food can nevertheless be approached as a productive entry point into the deeper structures of a community's beliefs, practices, and social organisation. When analysed critically, food offers insight into how cultural values are negotiated in everyday life (Mintz 1996; Counihan 1999; Pilcher 2012).

Against this background, this paper qualitatively analyses how Italian food and eating values are framed and validated in Italian institutional and sectoral promotional communication, focusing on Italian food culture and the way in which notions of quality, authenticity, and health are constructed through language. Promotional discourse is not understood here solely as a marketing or advertising type of language (in other words, as commercial promotion) but as a strategy used across institutional, professional, and academic contexts to advance a product or idea by foregrounding its value or importance (Bhatia 1993; 2004; Hyland 2005).

The paper is structured as follows: after this introductory Section, the cultural backgrounds and research aims are introduced in Section 2. The methodological approach can be found in Section 3, while data analysis is offered in Section 4, followed by the Conclusion.

2 Food as Culture and the Culture of Food

2.1 Food as Culture

If culture is understood as a complex system in which ideas shape practices, which in turn generate material products, food emerges as a particularly revealing analytical domain (Hall 1976; Katan 2014). Food is directly connected to cultural ideas that define what is considered edible, healthy, tasty, acceptable, or more generally 'good' (Douglas 1966; Fischler 1988; Mintz 1996). These ideas inform food-related practices, including rituals, meal structures, temporal patterns of consumption, and modes of preparation and serving

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(Goody 1982; Counihan, Van Esterik 2013). Food also materialises in products and objects: dishes, ingredients, and the tools used to prepare and consume them (Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987). These ideas, practices, and objects are often assimilated subconsciously within a given culture and become habitual, forming part of what 'goes without saying' (Bourdieu 1977; Hall 1983), but they may also be accompanied by varying degrees of awareness or reflexivity, particularly when individuals can explicitly articulate that a certain way of eating is 'the best', the healthiest, or the most appropriate in a given context (Fischler 2011; Johnston, Baumann 2015). This distinction aligns with Hall's differentiation between formal culture and technical culture (Hall 1976). Formal culture is acquired implicitly through socialisation and operates largely below the level of conscious awareness, whereas technical culture involves explicit codification and instruction. In the food domain, technical culture emerges when practices are normalised through guidelines and pedagogy; institutionalised through regulations such as nutritional labelling, certifications of origin, and sell-by dates; and promoted through expert discourse and policy frameworks (Scrinis 2013; Katan 2014; Ichijo, Ranta 2016). Food thus becomes not only a cultural habit but also an object of conscious management, regulation, and ideological framing.

2.2 The Culture of Food

Individuals are continuously exposed to food-related discourse through a wide range of popular and informal channels, including films, television cooking shows, food blogs and influencer accounts, lifestyle journalism, and advertising. Through repeated exposure, food-related terms and evaluative frameworks become familiar and taken for granted, contributing to shared assumptions about what constitutes 'good', 'normal', or desirable food. Food practices are also promoted in a more structured manner at the institutional level, where public bodies and sectoral organisations communicate food-related values, benefits, risks, and norms. This form of promotion is oriented toward the normalisation and regulation of food practices through guidelines, campaigns, and policy-oriented communication, and the associated discourse is typically structured around recurring rationales, namely: health concerns – through which food and food choices are framed in terms of risk, prevention, and well-being (Crawford 2006; Lupton 2013; Scrinis 2013); authenticity, tradition, and local or national identity – whereby food is interpreted as a symbol of collective memory and national belonging (Fischler 1988; Sutton 2001; Ichijo, Ranta 2016); environmental concerns – which relate food to biodiversity and sustainable food systems (FAO

2010; Goodman et al. 2012; Johnston, Baumann 2015); and, finally, economy-related considerations – where food is considered in terms of production systems, market relations, and social structures (Mintz 1996; Wilk 2006; Johnston, Szabo, Rodney 2011).

2.3 The Aim of This Research

This paper examines promotional discourse surrounding Italian food and eating practices, focusing on how food-related values and concerns are articulated and legitimised by institutional and sectoral actors.

Italian cuisine occupies a distinctive position in global food culture, as it is strongly associated with the Made in Italy label. This label functions not merely as an indication of geographical origin but as a symbolic marker of quality, authenticity, and cultural value, particularly in relation to food and agri-food products, taken to embody superior taste, artisanal knowledge, and territorial embeddedness. In the Italian context, non-commercial promotional discourse is produced primarily by public institutions (such as ministries and public-sector bodies) and by food-system organisations and sectoral associations. These actors play a central role in shaping normative understandings of food, health, quality, and cultural heritage. Public institutions operate within a regulatory and protective framework aimed at safeguarding public health and social welfare. Their discourse addresses individuals primarily as citizens and emphasises education, prevention, and collective responsibility. Food-system organisations and sectoral associations, by contrast, promote specific production systems, territories, and professional interests, often drawing on notions of authenticity, tradition, and quality to legitimise particular food practices.

For the selection of the material, we considered websites of institutional and sectoral organisations with a clear orientation toward promoting or explaining Made in Italy: such an orientation was considered to be foregrounded when the prominence of the Made in Italy label was evident on the organisation's homepage, either through direct reference to the expression or through easily accessible links in the homepage menu leading to a dedicated Made in Italy section. On the basis of this criterion, the Italian Ministero

della Salute[2] and Italy's leading agricultural organisation known as Coldiretti[3] (Confederazione Nazionale Coltivatori Diretti) were selected. These actors were chosen because they occupy distinct and yet complementary positions within the food promotion landscape: the Ministry of Health is the key public actor in relation to the promotion of healthy eating; Coldiretti is a key sectoral actor in relation to the economic and territorial valorisation of food.

Because the promotion of 'good' food frequently entails the implicit marginalisation of 'bad' or undesirable alternatives, promotional discourse often operates through contrast rather than solely through affirmation. In consideration of this, this study examines how food is framed in the non-commercial promotional discourse of both the Italian Ministry of Health and Coldiretti, focusing on the interplay between positive evaluation – especially concerning health, cultural identity, sustainability, and economic value – and the construction of risky or inferior alternatives, notably by considering and comparing lexical occurrences on the official websites of the two organisations.

3 Analytical Framework: Methodology, Materials, Scope

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic approach to examine how food is framed in non-commercial promotional texts produced by institutional and sectoral actors. The analysis focuses on two complementary persuasive strategies: the enhancement of positively valued attributes and the problematisation of negatively framed alternatives.

Promotional discourse frequently relies on the enhancement of positive values. Drawing on framing and evaluation studies (Chong, Druckman 2007; 2013; Johnston, Szabo, Rodney 2011), the analysis identifies recurrent domains in which food is positively framed, namely, as already mentioned above, health and well-being, cultural identity and territorial belonging, environmental sustainability

2 Official webpage here: https://www.salute.gov.it/new/it/alimentazione/. Although the Ministero dell'Agricoltura could have been a potential candidate, its Made in Italy section constitutes only a minor subsection of the website, is not easily retrievable from the Ministry homepage, and its available content, published in 2016, consists mainly of static PDF documents focusing on regulations, programs, and conventions. By contrast, Made in Italy as food and food-related practices plays a central role in the institutional discourse of the Ministero della Salute.

3 Official webpage here: https://www.coldiretti.it/. Coldiretti is a sectoral organisation representing and protecting the interests of farmers, particularly small and medium-sized producers, at local, national and European levels. Although it is formally oriented towards agriculture, its scope also extends to fisheries and animal husbandry, as well as to other food-related domains, thus going beyond the strict boundaries of agriculture and encompassing Made in Italy food in a broader sense.

and ecological responsibility, and economic value. These positive associations function to render specific food practices desirable, legitimate, and socially valued.

Alongside these strategies, promotional discourse may also make use of fear appeal, a well-established persuasive mechanism in communication studies (Witte 1992; Witte, Allen 2000; Ruiter et al. 2014), which operates by foregrounding potential threats and suggesting – implicitly or explicitly – that adherence to certain behaviours can prevent or mitigate negative consequences (Cap 2017). In food-related discourse, such threats may concern health (e.g. disease or contamination), cultural identity (e.g. loss of tradition or authenticity), the environment (e.g. ecological degradation or climate change), or socio-economic justice (e.g. exploitation or unfair trade). As previous research has shown, these framings do not merely inform audiences but contribute to the normalisation and regulation of consumption practices by defining what is considered safe, responsible, and acceptable (Crawford 2006; Lupton 2013).

A related but distinct mechanism is *proximization* (Cap 2017), whereby discourse constructs a deictic centre (typically the in-group audience or its values) as under threat from entities positioned as spatially, temporally, or axiologically 'distant' but drawing nearer (e.g. external competitors, counterfeit practices, or foreign actors). Unlike Witte's (1992) Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM), which centres on the individual's own risk perception, *proximization* foregrounds the discursive construction of a third-party antagonist and is therefore particularly suited to analysing promotional discourse that frames threats to a collective identity or economic interest rather than to personal health. Both *proximization* and *EPPM* frameworks are applied in the analysis below to characterise, respectively, the Ministry's health-oriented and Coldiretti's identity/economy-oriented fear-appeal strategies.

The analysis focuses on content published on the Italian Ministry of Health's official website under the *Alimentazione* (Food) menu – where the emphasis on Made in Italy is more evident – specifically the subsections *Nutrizione* (Nutrition) and *Dieta mediterranea* (Mediterranean diet).[4] For the *Nutrizione* section the analysis concentrates on the subsections *Mangia sano* (Eating healthy), *Sicurezza nutrizionale* (Nutritional security), and *Maestra Natura* (Nature, the teacher), which align with the study's focus on food promotion, while in the *Dieta mediterranea* section all three entries – *Dieta mediterranea, dieta sana e sostenibile* (Mediterranean

4 Other sections – such as those dedicated to foods for special medical purposes, breastfeeding, food labelling, iodine prophylaxis, and food allergies – were excluded, as they fall outside the scope of this study.

diet, healthy and sustainable diet), *Benefici per la salute* (Health benefits), and *Come seguire la dieta mediterranea* (How to follow the Mediterranean diet) – were considered. This sub-corpus counts a total of 3,040 words.

The analysis also draws on texts published on Coldiretti's official website within the subsection *In difesa del* Made in Italy (In defence of Made in Italy), located in the broader *Istituzionale* (Institutional) area, as well as on selected materials from the *Notizie e approfondimenti* (News and insights) section, chosen on the basis of explicit lexical references to Made in Italy-related products, preparation, and culinary practices. Institutional and news-genre materials were deliberately combined because the study's object is Coldiretti's overall public-facing promotional voice, of which press releases and news items are an integral and organisationally sanctioned channel, not an external or incidental source; restricting the corpus to the institutional section alone would exclude a substantial part of how Coldiretti actually communicates with the public. The selection of texts for the Coldiretti corpus was guided primarily by discursive and functional criteria rather than by strict numerical equivalence with the Ministry corpus. In order to ensure comparability, we included only materials that explicitly promote food-related values, excluding texts mainly concerned with policy instruments, labour issues, training initiatives or consumers' reactions. This resulted in a corpus of 7,163 words.

Methodologically, attention is paid to lexical choices, including denotative, connotative, and figurative meanings that convey evaluative positioning. This focus allows for a systematic comparison of promotional strategies across institutional and sectoral discourses.

Although the materials gathered constitute a thematically coherent and workable dataset, organized here into a two-part corpus (the Ministry and Coldiretti), this study does not adopt a fully corpus-driven or quantitative approach – when quantitative observations are present, they are based on normalized frequencies (per 10,000 words [henceforth p10kw]) to provide an indicative sense of the relative salience of selected items across the dataset. This choice is motivated by differences in both size and communicative orientation between the two sub-corpora: the Ministry sub-corpus is smaller and thematically more homogeneous, while the Coldiretti sub-corpus is larger and more heterogeneous, comprising texts that range from informational content to advocacy-oriented material. Moreover, the two actors differ in institutional positioning: the Ministry of Health adopts a *super partes* stance, providing normative guidance intended to apply across contexts, whereas Coldiretti explicitly represents sectoral interests and adopts a more defensive and partisan tone.

On this basis, the analysis is conducted in two interrelated stages. The first stage is exploratory and descriptive, using word-frequency

lists to identify recurrent lexical items and dominant semantic fields across the two sub-corpora. The second stage is qualitative and interpretive. Lexical items carrying positive or negative evaluative meaning are examined in context in order to analyse how value, risk, and legitimacy are constructed in promotional food discourse. The evaluative classification of lexical items as positive or negative is grounded in the Appraisal Theory's Attitude system (Martin, White 2005), which distinguishes three sub-systems of evaluation: Affect (emotional response), Judgement (evaluation of human conduct and character against social norms, encompassing social esteem (normality, capacity, tenacity) and social sanction (veracity, propriety)), and Appreciation (evaluation of things, products, processes, and phenomena, encompassing reaction, composition, and valuation). Polarity (positive/negative) cuts across all three sub-systems rather than constituting a separate category. Given that the object of promotion in both sub-corpora is primarily food, diets, and agricultural processes, Appreciation is expected to predominate; Judgement becomes relevant whenever discourse explicitly credits or blames human or institutional actors, as will be shown to occur asymmetrically between the two sub-corpora.

Frequency outputs (generated with Voyant Tools)[5] are used in an auxiliary way, to orient close contextual qualitative reading, which remains the primary mode of analysis. No stopword list was applied at this stage; content words up to the 100th frequency rank were identified and manually verified against Voyant Tools output, as described above. Counting was performed on unlemmatised word forms rather than on lemmatised output. This choice reflects two considerations specific to Italian: first, grammatically inflected forms of the same adjectival lemma (e.g. *sano*/*sana*) were manually checked individually rather than automatically merged, since gender agreement in Italian is grammatically obligatory rather than optionally variable, and collapsing such forms risks obscuring genre- or register-specific agreement patterns; second, apparent morphological relations across word classes (e.g. *tutela* [noun] and *tutelare* [verb]) do not correspond to a single lemma in standard Italian lemmatisation and were therefore correctly retained as distinct items.

Together, these stages allow for a systematic yet interpretive examination of how food is framed by different promotional actors.

5 Available at: `https://voyant-tools.org/`.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Word Prominence and Semantic Orientation

The results of the word frequency analysis in the two sub-corpora, generated through Voyant Tools, are visualized in the word clouds below, which enable dominant terms and semantic tendencies to be readily identified.



Figure 1 Word cloud representing the Italian Ministry sub-corpus

The comparison between the two word-clouds shows clear differences in priorities, concerns, and interests across the two sub-corpora. The Ministry's discourse is primarily oriented toward citizens' health (the three most prominent words being *dieta* (diet), *salute* (health) and *mediterranea* (Mediterranean)), whereas Coldiretti's discourse places greater emphasis on the quality of food products and production systems (the prominence being given to Coldiretti itself, *qualità* (quality) and *prodotti* (products)). Given these general orientations, it becomes analytically relevant to move from a synoptic overview to a more fine-grained examination of how such concerns are articulated in the two sub-corpora, and, more broadly, how Italian food is promoted in relation to them.

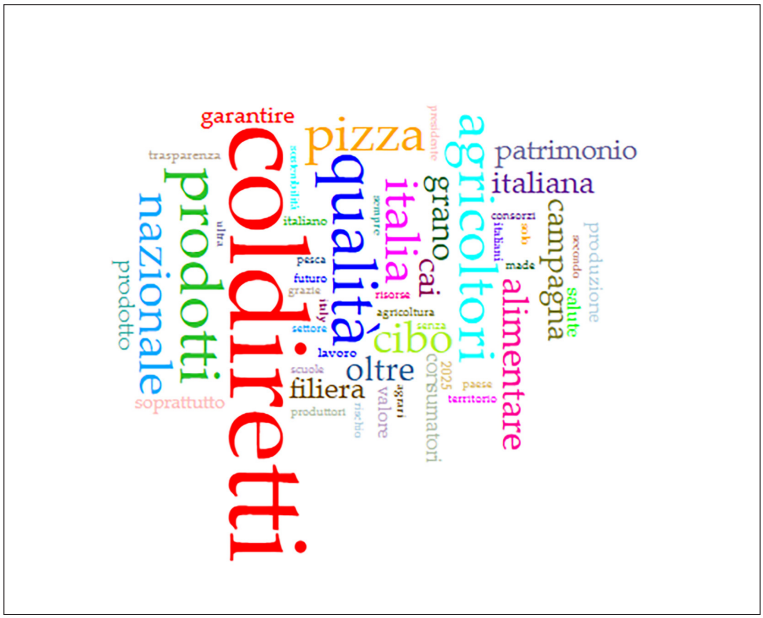


Figure 2 Word cloud representing the Coldiretti sub-corpus

4.2 Positive and Negative Lexicalization

For this stage of the analysis, lexical items – notably, content words – up to the 100th frequency rank[6] were identified through Voyant Tools. Of these, the majority were topic-denoting nouns referring to institutions, products, sectors, or temporal/geographic markers (e.g. Coldiretti, pizza, filiera (supply chain), campagna (countryside), settore (sector), territorio (territory)) and thus carried no inherent positive or negative evaluative charge; only items expressing explicit evaluative meaning were retained for classification, which accounts for the comparatively small subset reported in Tables 1 and 2 (21 items for the Ministry, 15 for Coldiretti) relative to the full top-100 list. Positive terms include words carrying positive denotation (e.g. *qualità* (quality), *risorsa* (resource), *amica* (friendly)), positive evaluation (e.g. *importante* (important), *garantire* (to guarantee), *valore* (value)), or carrying positive meaning associations by referring to values, attributes, or benefits (e.g. *sano* (healthy), *trasparenza* (transparency), *patrimonio* (heritage)). Negative or fear-inducing evaluation is here understood as being conveyed both by terms with

6 Available at: https://voyant-tools.org/.

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openly negative referents (e.g. *malattia* (disease), *diabete* (diabetes)) or negative meaning associations (*rischio* (risk), *pericolo* (danger)), and by neutral – or seemingly positive – items that nonetheless presuppose undesirable conditions or threats to be prevented or contrasted (e.g. *prevenzione* (prevention), *tutela* (protection)).

A further clarification is needed for items that, like *prevenzione* (prevention) and *tutela* (protection), presuppose a threat yet were coded as negative, as opposed to items such as *garantire* (guarantee) and *sicurezza* (safety), which likewise presuppose a threat yet were coded as positive. The distinguishing criterion is not the presence of a threat at the lexical-semantic level, but the immediate co-textual behaviour of each item: terms were coded as negative when their co-text explicitly names or foregrounds the danger, pathology, or condition being counteracted, keeping it discursively salient (e.g. *prevenzione… contrastando il rischio di insorgenza di importanti patologie croniche*, which can be found in ex. 1); conversely, terms were coded as positive when their co-text foregrounds an achieved or promised benefit, typically through coordination with unambiguously positive attributes, without lexicalizing the underlying threat in the same clause (e.g. *garantire sicurezza*, *origine*, *genuinità e qualità*, as seen in ex. 9). This co-textual criterion was applied consistently across all occurrences of the items concerned, consistent with corpus-linguistic approaches to semantic prosody (Sinclair 1991; Louw 1993; Stubbs 2001).

The resulting lists for the two sub-corpora are presented below in Tables 1 and 2. The reported raw frequencies and normalized values (per 10,000 words) are intended as indicative measures of distribution and salience, rather than as statistically significant indicators of quantitative relevance or lexical keyness. Because Tables 1 and 2 represent two independently analysed sub-corpora, gender-inflected forms of the same lemma occurring in different sub-corpora (e.g. *vero* in the Ministry sub-corpus, *vera* in the Coldiretti sub-corpus) were not merged across tables, as doing so would conflate frequency counts belonging to distinct discursive sources.

Table 1 Positive and negative lexicalization in the Italian Ministry sub-corpus

Ministero della Salute					
Positive lex.	**Raw fr.**	**Norm. fr. p10kw**	**Negative lex.**	**Raw fr.**	**Norm. fr. p10kw**
salute (health)	25	82.2	*malattie* (diseases)	15	49.3
vita (life)	18	59.2	*rischio* (risk)	10	32.9
nutriente (nutritive)	9	29.6	*prevenzione* (prevention)	8	26.3

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Ministero della Salute					
Positive lex.	**Raw fr.**	**Norm. fr. p10kw**	**Negative lex.**	**Raw fr.**	**Norm. fr. p10kw**
sana (healthy)	8	26.3	*patologie* (pathologies)	6	19.7
sostenibile (sustainable)	6	19.7	*diabete* (diabetes)	4	13.2
equilibrata (balanced)	6	19.7	*tutela* (protection)	3	9.9
regolare (regular)	5	16.4			
importante (important)	5	16.4			
corretta (correct)	5	16.4			
buona (good)	5	16.4			
sano (healthy)	4	13.2			
energia (energy)	4	13.2			
aiutare (help)	4	13.2			
vero (true/real)	3	9.9			
sicurezza (safety)	3	9.9			
Total	110	361.7	**Total**	46	151.3

Table 2 Positive and negative lexicalization in the Coldiretti sub-corpus

Coldiretti					
Positive lex.	**Raw fr.**	**Norm. fr. p10kw**	**Negative lex.**	**Raw fr.**	**Norm. fr. p10kw**
qualità (quality)	58	81.0	*rischio* (risk)	9	12.6
patrimonio (heritage)	14	19.5	*tutelare* (protect)	6	8.4
garantire (guarantee)	13	18.1			
valore (value)	12	16.8			
salute (health)	12	16.8			
trasparenza (transparency)	11	15.4			
sostenibilità (sustainability)	10	14.0			
risorse (resources)	10	14.0			
importante (important)	8	11.2			

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Coldiretti					
Positive lex.	**Raw fr.**	**Norm. fr. p10kw**	**Negative lex.**	**Raw fr.**	**Norm. fr. p10kw**
rispetto (respect)	7	9.8			
amica (friendly)	7	9.8			
vera (true/real)	6	8.4			
valorizzazione (valorization)	6	8.4			
Total	174	243.2	**Total**	15	21.0

As shown by the data in the tables, the Italian Ministry of Health tends to promote Italian food and related concepts through a relatively balanced distribution of positive and negative aspects. By contrast, Coldiretti places much stronger emphasis on highlighting positive aspects of Italian food and related practices, with negative lexical items playing a marginal role. Not only does the range of positive and negative elements differ between the two sub-corpora, but the ratio between the most frequent positive and negative items is particularly revealing. In the Ministry sub-corpus, the most frequent positive term (*salute*, 82.2 p10kw) and the most frequent negative terms (*malattie* and *rischio*, 49.3 and 32.9 respectively) show a relatively contained gap (with a ratio of approximately 1.7:1), suggesting a discourse that combines positive promotion with caution and risk awareness, while in the Coldiretti sub-corpus the imbalance is considerably more pronounced – where the most frequent positive item (*qualità*, 81.0 p10kw) far outweighs the most frequent negative one (*rischio*, 12.6), producing a ratio of over 6:1. This disproportion is evident across the Coldiretti frequency list, where negative lexicalization is both quantitatively scarce and semantically less diversified. When negative terms do appear, they tend to serve a defensive or mitigative function, while the discourse overwhelmingly foregrounds and articulates positive attributes. This single-item contrast is corroborated when frequencies are aggregated across all coded items rather than compared item-by-item: summing the normalized frequencies reported in Table 1 (*Total* row) yields a positive:negative ratio of approximately 2.4:1 for the Ministry sub-corpus, while the equivalent sum in Table 2 (*Total* row) yields a ratio of approximately 11.6:1 for the Coldiretti sub-corpus. The aggregate figures confirm, and sharpen, the asymmetry already suggested by the single most frequent items.

For a broader view of the prosodic choices characterising the two sub-corpora, if less frequent negative lexical items are also considered, namely those occurring three to five times in the corpus – albeit succinctly and without systematic distributional

analysis – it can be observed that negativity in the Ministry of Health sub-corpus remains relatively homogeneous and thematically focused, primarily centred on health risks and undesirable effects that can be prevented or mitigated through appropriate dietary practices (e.g. *prevenire* (prevent), *cancro* (cancer), *protezione* (protection), *sorveglianza* (surveillance)). By contrast, the Coldiretti sub-corpus presents a more diversified and heterogeneous negative lexicalization, often involving explicitly constructed antagonistic agents (e.g. *sleali* (unfair), *trafficanti* (traffickers)), morally charged representations (e.g. *spazzatura* (garbage), *frodi* (frauds), *follie* (follies), *danni* (damages)), and forms of opposition directed against them (e.g. *battaglia* (battle), *combattere* (fight)). Therefore, whereas negativity in the Ministry discourse remains largely impersonal and preventive, in the Coldiretti corpus it increasingly takes the form of personalized conflict and opposition. In Appraisal terms (Martin, White 2005), this asymmetry can be reformulated with greater precision. Positive and negative lexicalization in the Ministry sub-corpus is consistently realized as Appreciation – valuation of diets, foods, and health outcomes (e.g. *sana*, *equilibrata*, *rischio*, *patologie*) – with no clear instance of Judgement directed at human or institutional actors. Coldiretti's discourse, by contrast, remains Appreciation-dominant in its positive lexicalization (e.g. *qualità*, *patrimonio*, *valore*), but introduces a layer of Judgement absent from the Ministry sub-corpus, concentrated precisely where negativity personalizes into antagonistic agents. Expressions such as *chi spaccia per italiani prodotti che non hanno nulla a che fare con la realtà nazionale* invoke negative Judgement of veracity against unnamed counterfeiting actors, while *agricoltori custodi and una battaglia sostenuta da Coldiretti* construct positive Judgement of capacity and tenacity for Coldiretti and the farmers it represents. Negativity in the Coldiretti sub-corpus therefore does not merely personalize in a generic sense: it specifically shifts part of the evaluative burden from Appreciation of processes to Judgement of social actors, a resource the Ministry discourse does not draw on. It should be noted that the application of the Appreciation/Judgement distinction in this study is based on manual, qualitative reading rather than on a systematic coding protocol with pre-defined category boundaries and inter-rater reliability checks. The classification proposed here is therefore interpretive and illustrative of a broader analytical pattern, rather than a validated quantitative annotation; it is adopted to sharpen the qualitative contrast between the two sub-corpora rather than to support corpus-wide statistical claims.

On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative contrasts observed in this section, it is useful to proceed with a contextual analysis of lexical items in their discursive environments.

4.3 Lexicalization in Context

By examining the texts of the two sub-corpora more closely through manual analysis, it becomes evident that, despite their different orientations, the promotion of Italian cuisine is organized around four main thematic threads, namely: health; culture and tradition; sustainability and environmental care; and economic value. Assessing lexical items – at this stage, irrespective of their high or low frequency – within their contexts of occurrence allows us to observe not only how food is framed, but also how evaluation is realized and, more specifically, how positive and negative evaluations are often interwoven within the same textual segments. In this perspective, negativity does not simply oppose positivity but may function strategically to reinforce it, for instance by framing risks, threats, or undesirable practices as a backdrop against which Italian food products and practices are positively constructed.

4.3.1 Promotion in the Ministry of Health Sub-corpus

Positive promotional elements relating Italian food or cuisine to health are, expectedly, quite frequent in the Health Ministry sub-corpus and present the Mediterranean diet and Italian food as beneficial to overall well-being, as in the following extract:

(1) […] *ad oggi la Dieta Mediterranea (DM) rappresenta un vero e proprio modello di dieta sana e sostenibile, in grado di anteporsi come fattore determinante di prevenzione, contrastando il rischio di insorgenza di importanti patologie croniche come diabete, ipertensione arteriosa ed obesità.*

To date, the Mediterranean Diet (MD) represents a true model of healthy and sustainable diet, capable of acting as a determining factor in prevention, counteracting the risk of onset of significant chronic diseases such as diabetes, arterial hypertension, and obesity.

(2) […] *la dieta mediterranea […], attraverso un sano profilo di grassi, bassa percentuale di carboidrati, basso indice glicemico, alto contenuto di fibre alimentari, composti antiossidanti ed effetti anti-infiammatori, riduce il rischio di insorgenza di alcune patologie, come il cancro e malattie cardiovascolari*.

The Mediterranean diet, through a healthy fat profile, low percentage of carbohydrates, low glycemic index, high content of dietary fiber, antioxidant compounds and anti-inflammatory

effects, reduces the risk of onset of some diseases, such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

Positive promotion may also link the diet to cultural heritage and identity:

(3) *Nel 2010 l'UNESCO ha riconosciuto la DM come Patrimonio Culturale Immateriale dell'Umanità in quanto esempio di ricchezza culturale legata al territorio, alla convivialità, alla società con l'alimento che si trasforma in un vero e proprio atto di relazione e condivisione.*

In 2010 UNESCO recognized the Mediterranean Diet as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as an example of cultural richness linked to territory, conviviality, and society, with food that transforms itself into a genuine act of relationship and sharing.

(4) […] *le produzioni agricole e agroalimentari, infatti, insieme alla tradizione culinaria da un lato assicurano la qualità dal punto di vista organolettico e, dall'altro, garantiscono il rispetto di criteri etici e ambientali.*

Agricultural and agri-food productions, in fact, together with culinary tradition on the one hand ensure quality from an organoleptic standpoint and, on the other, guarantee respect for ethical and environmental criteria.

The Ministry also positively frames the diet in terms of environmental value.

(5) *Orientare le proprie scelte alimentari alla dieta mediterranea fin dalla giovane età può aiutare chiunque a prevenire i problemi di salute e a comprendere le notevoli potenzialità che essa offre, sia dal punto di vista economico che ambientale.*

Orienting one's food choices toward the Mediterranean diet from a young age can help anyone prevent health problems and understand the remarkable potential it offers, both from an economic and environmental point of view.

(6) *Contestualmente la DM si presenta anche come modello di dieta sostenibile con i suoi effetti positivi in ambito ambientale ed economico.*

> At the same time, the Mediterranean Diet also presents itself as a model of sustainable diet with its positive effects in the environmental and economic fields.

An interesting finding concerns economic value, which is never positively evaluated in isolation but only in relation to other positive aspects, as shown in examples (5) and (6).

Another remarkable finding is that elements in the Ministry's dietary discourse that function as fear appeals – when present – tend to be implicit rather than direct or sensationalist. Rather than operating as explicit scare tactics, they take the form of risk-focused framing, invoked to justify policies and recommendations, as can be observed in the following excerpt (as well as in examples (1), (2), and (5)).

> (7) […] *con i suoi prodotti tipici diventa espressione della storia e della cultura la cui riscoperta rappresenta un'importante occasione per sottrarsi alla omologazione delle abitudini alimentari, salvaguardando così la biodiversità alimentare.*
>
> […] With its typical products it becomes an expression of history and culture whose rediscovery represents an important opportunity to escape the homogenization of eating habits, thereby safeguarding food biodiversity.

As shown here, the Ministry implicitly frames the traditional diet as a protective response to potential risks. Mapped onto Witte's (1992) EPPM constructs, examples (1), (2), and (5) build threat severity through named but non-sensationalized chronic conditions (diabetes, hypertension, obesity, cancer, cardiovascular disease), while perceived susceptibility remains diffuse and universalized (*chiunque* (anyone), rather than a targeted at-risk group). Response efficacy, by contrast, is framed explicitly and strongly – the Mediterranean diet is presented as *un fattore determinante di prevenzione* (a determining factor in prevention), whereas self-efficacy is left implicit, assumed rather than argued. This high response efficacy, low/diffuse severity and susceptibility, unaddressed self-efficacy configuration is consistent with a public-health register that avoids alarmism while still motivating preventive behaviour.

4.3.2 Promotion in the Coldiretti Sub-Corpus

While promotional discourse in the Ministry of Health sub-corpus is largely structured around health education and prevention **[tab. 1]**, promotion in the Coldiretti sub-corpus appears more varied and

explicitly evaluative, and more evenly distributed across different thematic domains **[tab. 2]**. Concerning the health dimension, in Coldiretti discourse health tends to be more tied to quality, safety, and standards than to nutrition in general, as can be seen in the following examples emphasizing food quality and well-being:

(8) *La dieta italiana è, infatti, sinonimo di cibo salutare: una verità elementare confermatissima anche nel dopo pandemia.*

The Italian diet is, in fact, synonymous with healthy food: a basic truth confirmed even after the pandemic.

(9) *Gli obiettivi sono* […] *garantire sicurezza, origine, genuinità e qualità ai consumatori italiani.*

The objectives are to guarantee safety, origin, genuineness and quality to Italian consumers.

Unlike the Ministry discourse, where references to tradition are primarily linked to cultural heritage and conviviality, Coldiretti frames tradition as a strategic asset and a source of competitive advantage, as in the two examples below:

(10) *Il legame con il territorio e la distintività fondata su un mix unico e irripetibile di asset (cibo, cucina, arte, cultura, turismo, paesaggio) rappresentano la vera leva competitiva con cui il Made in Italy può affrontare i mercati globali.*

The link with territory and the distinctiveness founded on a unique and unrepeatable mix of assets (food, cuisine, art, culture, tourism, landscape) represent the true competitive lever with which Made in Italy can face global markets.

(11) *Il ruolo dell'agricoltura familiare* […] *può generare non solo ricchezza e occupazione, ma anche coesione sociale* […] *valorizzando i prodotti locali* […] *e promuovendo pratiche commerciali leali e prezzi equi.*

The role of family agriculture […] can generate not only wealth and employment, but also social cohesion […], valuing local products and promoting fair commercial practices and prices.

Environmental promotion in the Coldiretti sub-corpus is closely – and expectedly – associated with agricultural practices and technological solutions, rather than with dietary models alone:

(12) *Il digestato ottenuto negli impianti di biogas* […] *rappresenta una risposta concreta* […] *valorizzando così una risorsa naturale rispetto ai fertilizzanti di origine chimica.*

The digestate obtained in biogas […] plants represents a concrete response […] thus enhancing a natural resource compared to chemical fertilizers.

(13) *La multifunzionalità dell'impresa agricola è la sua capacità di produrre non solo cibo ma anche servizi ai cittadini. Ne sono un esempio* […] *agribenessere, la cura del paesaggio, la produzione di energie rinnovabili.*

The multifunctionality of the agricultural enterprise is its capacity to produce not only food but also services for citizens. Examples include […] agri-wellness, care of the landscape, production of renewable energy.

Economic framing is considerably more explicit and central in the Coldiretti discourse than in the Ministry sub-corpus, where agriculture is framed not only as a key element for health, the environment and cultural identity, but as an indispensable economic and strategic sector.

(14) *Il cibo è diventato la prima ricchezza del Paese, con una filiera agroalimentare allargata che vale 707 miliardi, dai campi all'industria fino alla ristorazione e alla grande distribuzione, un valore pari a quello di oltre venti manovre finanziarie.*

Food has become the country's primary wealth, with an extended agri-food supply chain worth 707 billion, from the fields to industry and on to catering and large distribution, a value equal to more than twenty financial maneuvers.

(15) *Contratti di filiera* […] *si confermano uno strumento decisivo per assicurare stabilità ai redditi agricoli, investimenti condivisi in innovazione, garanzia di qualità e continuità occupazionale.*

Supply chain contracts […] are confirmed as a decisive instrument to ensure stability of agricultural incomes, shared investments in innovation, guarantees of quality and occupational continuity.

Compared to the Ministry discourse, Coldiretti's promotional strategies also incorporate negative prosody, notably explicit risk-oriented and conflictual elements, particularly when external threats to Italian food, agriculture, or economic sustainability are

foregrounded. While not sensationalist, these elements function as problem-framing devices that personalize responsibility and construct antagonistic agents, thereby reinforcing positive values through contrast. This can be seen in the following examples, where negative prosody is used to emphasize the link between food and, respectively, health, tradition, the environment, and the economy.

(16) *Una battaglia sostenuta da sempre da Coldiretti* […]. *L'obiettivo è quello di formare dei consumatori consapevoli per valorizzare i fondamenti della Dieta Mediterranea e fermare così il consumo del cosiddetto junk food.*

A battle long supported by Coldiretti […]. The aim is to educate informed consumers in order to enhance the foundations of the Mediterranean Diet and thereby curb the consumption of so-called junk food.

(17) *Tale patrimonio viene però messo a rischio dalla mancanza di trasparenza che favorisce chi spaccia per italiani prodotti che non hanno nulla a che fare con la realtà nazionale.*

This heritage is, however, put at risk by a lack of transparency, which favours those who pass off as Italian products that have nothing to do with the national reality.

(18) […] *prodotti che rischiavano di scomparire* […] *oggi sono stati salvati grazie al lavoro degli agricoltori custodi.*

[…] products that were at risk of disappearing […] have today been preserved thanks to the work of custodian farmers.

(19) *In questo modo – conclude Coldiretti – i ricavi non coprono più le spese, mettendo a rischio le semina futura e la tenuta economica delle aziende agricole.*

In this way – Coldiretti concludes – revenues no longer cover costs, putting future sowings and the economic viability of agricultural enterprises at risk.

As we can see, within Coldiretti's discourse negative framing operates through what Cap (2017) terms proximization: a deictic centre constituted by Italian producers and consumers is discursively threatened by peripheral antagonistic entities (such as *junk food*; *chi spaccia per italiani prodotti che non hanno nulla a che fare con la realtà nazionale*; etc.), rhetorically drawn into the in-group's space to construct urgency and legitimize Coldiretti's advocacy stance.

Unlike the Ministry's implicit, process-oriented fear appeal, this is spatial and axiological proximization operating on discrete external entities, which explains why Coldiretti's negative lexis reads as more antagonistic despite being quantitatively marginal.

5 Conclusion

This study has shown that promotional discourse surrounding Italian food relies on a dynamic interplay between positive evaluation and fear appeal. Both the Italian Ministry of Health and Coldiretti construct Italian food as essentially and openly 'good', yet they do so through distinct communicative logics shaped by their distinctive institutional roles.

The Ministry of Health adopts a regulatory and preventive approach. Positive evaluation is closely integrated with risk awareness, and fear appeal operates implicitly, supporting public-health objectives without overt dramatisation. Food is generally framed as a matter of collective responsibility, and risks are presented as manageable through adherence to Ministry guidelines, through which the Ministry actively promotes its public-health objectives by encouraging specific eating practices and nutritional choices.

Coldiretti, by contrast, places greater emphasis on positive lexicalisation, which is more visible and widely distributed across its discourse. Within this broadly positive framing, negative evaluation operates on two levels. At a more general level, overtly negative lexical items primarily serve a contrastive function, providing the backdrop against which positive representations of Italian food and agriculture are enhanced. At a more local level, however, negative evaluation can take the form of explicit fear-inducing appeals, especially in contexts where threats are linked to malevolent agency and conflictual dynamics are foregrounded. In these instances, fear appeal serves to mobilize support, reinforce defensive positioning, and legitimize sectoral interests, possibly contributing to forms of gastronationalism that link food practices to economic sovereignty and cultural identity.

Despite the limitations posed by the relatively small corpus considered here and by the genre heterogeneity of the Coldiretti subcorpus, which combines institutional and news-genre material and may inflate certain lexical items (e.g. Coldiretti itself, frequently used in news texts to attribute quoted statements) without this necessarily reflecting a thematic pattern, these findings may contribute to research on framing and food discourse by demonstrating that both positive evaluation and fear appeal do not operate uniformly but are instead shaped by institutional positioning and communicative purpose. Examining the interplay between these evaluative strategies

offers insight into how food ideologies are normalized, contested, and strategically mobilized in contemporary society.

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