

THE FEELING OF SHAME OR DISGRACE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In this article, I will discuss the moral collapse caused by the digital age, which is now being experienced by nearly all societies around the world, also from the perspective of culinary arts. In the beginning and middle of this article, I will first touch on certain socio-cultural topics, followed by some of my own analyses. While doing this, I will try to express my thoughts—both directly and indirectly supported by evidence—in a way that is understandable and as inclusive as possible. In examining all this, I will also aim to hold a mirror to ourselves as a society through the lens of sociological and cultural data.

Alongside the benefits brought by advancing technology, much has also been taken from societies. In particular, the impact of developing social media and technology on civilizations rooted in ancient cultural values and strong family structures is clear and damaging.

We now live in a digital age in which we can access nearly everything through the phones in our hands. Smartphones—rightfully considered the invention of the century—have begun to make even the older generations dependent. Sadly, even babies as young as 5 or 6 months are placed in front of these devices by their families to distract them from crying, and this early exposure turns into attachment. Some babies begin fiddling with these devices like adults before even reaching the age of 1 or 2. Without a doubt, the harms of these technological developments and social media are just as significant as their benefits—perhaps even greater in terms of socio-cultural impact.

In this article, I will also attempt to evaluate the matter professionally within the framework of our culinary arts culture.

In many areas, we have unfortunately lost our sense of shame or disgrace. That vein of morality may still exist somewhere, but we are being told that the emotions of shame and disgrace, which stem from that moral vein, no longer matter. At the very least, a socio-cultural perception has been deliberately constructed in society to that effect. The consequences of this perception are clearly evident in the younger generations and in the limitless, shameless content that some individuals post on social media. Certain programs and even series on television use all the latest technological possibilities to contribute to this socio-cultural degradation. The same applies to social media. As a result, both platforms present similar and mutually reinforcing content. Of course, I separate from this criticism the content that is truly beneficial. But in general, most of what we are shown on these platforms is shaped by what attracts people's attention—or rather, what does not.

"What should I wear today?"

"What should I eat today? What can I cook that looks cool for social media?"

"Where should I go to enjoy myself and share it online?"

"He said this about her, and she gossiped about him."

"One celebrity insulted another, and the other clapped back. Breaking news!"

Or:

"Ahmet did something cool today and posted it online."

"Zeynep went shopping at a boutique, dressed up, and posted a stylish photo."

"He posted his new car—so why shouldn't I?"

"What are we missing? Who can I impress today so I'm not left behind?"

Or you'll see news and posts presented as if they were valuable—when in fact they serve shallow purposes.

As a result of such mentalities, almost everyone on social media—regardless of income level—is caught in a race to impress. These posts are glamorized across social and mainstream media as if they were of global significance.

Some individuals, who gained fame only by posting such content, are now portrayed as role models. It's no secret that these unqualified people are treated like celebrities whose every move has news value. Their only "qualification" is posting content that fits this shallow pattern. Presenting such people as if they represent success creates global moral decay.

The COVID-19 pandemic, with thousands of deaths every day, served as a lesson for all of us. Some wealthy people may explain this away by blaming it on "nouveau riche" behavior. But no matter what, it is a painful fact that many highly skilled and qualified individuals—who have dedicated decades to academic or professional work—do not receive the recognition they deserve. Meanwhile, society idolizes people who offer no real value.

There is only one conclusion I can draw from this contradiction. As the old proverb says:

"Look at the sea for wisdom—trash floats on top, but pearls lie deep."

Ultimately, what is valued by society gets reflected back through media. The TV shows we criticize, the social media posts we see, and what we consume on our phones all mirror our collective values. The elegance and respectful discourse in old TRT (Türkiye's national broadcaster) programs or the polite language of just a decade ago are now hard to find.

Of course, this change is also driven by socioeconomic factors. To keep up with the digital race, people feel pressured to maintain a certain image—something only possible with a good financial standing. When those who are less fortunate see exaggerated luxury posts or even wasteful displays of wealth, it can negatively affect their mindset and emotional well-being.

Over time, this may even lead to harmful behaviors. Some people express themselves only by trying to provoke envy. They may harm people they've never even met. We often see news headlines like "Man wreaks havoc due to psychological stress." These events are not always isolated—they are linked to the very societal issues described above.

Unfortunately, the values that once brought shame or social exclusion have now become celebrated. What used to be religious or cultural taboos are now applauded on television and social media—because those things **generate ratings**.

Professionally Speaking: For Those Who Ask Why We Haven't Reacted

Some may wonder why we haven't reacted more loudly to the immoral and unethical content aired on Turkish television programs or shared widely on social media. But the issue is not exclusive to Türkiye. Many Western channels also feature shows that are ethically bankrupt—some even worse. Worldwide, we see variations of reality TV shows like *Big Brother*. People even pay extra to access such content. Everyone knows how Kim Kardashian became famous, and many who watched her rise share responsibility for her success—whether they admit it or not. Personally, I have never found her shows worth even a second of attention.

Now let's return to our own country. From the perspective of culinary arts, our stance toward individuals who are now frequently seen on TV or social media was already clear—**long before** they became publicly known. Even when these individuals were virtually unknown in the industry, our position was firm.

The ethical stance of my late father, and his high regard for our values and Turkish customs, made him a symbol in our profession. His principled approach to culinary ethics still endures today, years after his passing, without losing its power or meaning.

11 years ago, we openly stood against the very individuals who now dominate the media. Today, a large portion of the Turkish public claims to oppose them. Many expect us—or others—to speak out, to write comments under their videos, to be their voice. But here's what they forget: I already said everything that needed to be said—**clearly and respectfully**—exactly like my father would have. I gave a response that **no person or institution** dared to give. I was **just 20 years old**, grieving the loss of my father.

At first, some congratulated me. But shortly after—on **August 26, 2009**—I was warned that I would be **“erased from the industry.”** By **August 30**, the pressure intensified. Why? Because I was defending the very values I still stand by today.

Back then, my father and I raised our voices for the moral values that others are only now beginning to whisper about. Many in the industry remember this well.

Chef Zeki Gülyiyen—my father—received partial support for his rightful stance and insights. But sadly, the backing he deserved was never truly given. Some professional associations and NGOs that should have supported these concerns remained passive—**deliberately**.

Those who were supposed to uphold professional ethics in Türkiye failed us. The only institution that sincerely tried to raise public awareness was **ATAD (Anatolian Chefs and Tourism Association)**, founded by my father.

Beyond that, and I say this without exaggeration, the key figures—individuals and institutions—who claim to represent Turkish cuisine, Anatolian heritage, the master-apprentice tradition, and the ethical values of culinary arts have **never properly addressed** the serious issues we raised.

These issues have been continuously ignored by those who pretend to defend our values, simply to protect their **own personal interests**.

If any of this is to hold real value, then first, those who have led certain federations and associations for years must **put aside their egos**. They must stop thinking they know everything and start seeing the world from **different perspectives**—ideally through the lens of **our own authentic culture**, and not through imitation of foreign models.

In my view, those who have held these seats for years—**without presenting a single noteworthy project for Turkish cuisine**—must look back and do some serious soul-searching. Let's ask them a question:

What have you truly contributed to Turkish cuisine?

Their answers would likely include things like:

- Festivals,
- Competitions,
- Public events,
- Pointless record-breaking stunts that generated nothing but waste and media buzz.

These are the projects they proudly present as their “contributions” to Turkish culinary heritage.

Even today, **certain flashy public campaigns** that were forcibly halted during the COVID-19 pandemic—because they only served the private interests of a few—are still falsely presented as the most “beneficial projects” for Turkish and Anatolian cuisine. But in truth, what both the world and Türkiye need is an **entirely new outlook**.

And within their so-called answers, you will **not** find:

- A single academic initiative,
- A forward-thinking project,
- Or any effort that would bring global, scientific credibility to Turkish culinary arts.

Why not?

Because their mentality—narrow, stagnant, and defensive—has been fixed for years. It is designed **not to grow**, but to **block** anyone who might surpass them or shine brighter.

They maintain their seats by **holding back the talented** and promoting the unqualified. They sustain their positions by tethering themselves to prestigious titles, clinging to them like lifelines.

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Those who should have been tireless defenders of Turkish cuisine and the moral values of our profession—those who should have united the community when necessary—have, unfortunately, sat in their seats for years in a **state of apathy**.

When will these seat-holders finally retire or abandon their obsession with status? I cannot say. But what is clear is this: they have **never truly embraced Turkish cuisine as a cause**. They have **failed to** adapt to global realities and changing times, and have been **incapable of presenting a vision or meaningful project** for the future.

And now, some people claim we never reacted. But this is simply not true. Many of our archives contain written documents that serve as **historical evidence** of the stands we have taken.

The industry's most vocal critics—those who routinely demolish their opponents in debates—have fallen conspicuously silent on these matters. This selective muteness speaks volumes, particularly when contrasted with the unwavering principles we've consistently upheld, even amidst the most challenging adversities.

But sadly, those who claim to represent our profession—or to guide future generations—are not only silent; they are also complicit. They sit idly while this moral collapse unfolds—and at times, even enable it.

To those who now come to us, urging us to react once again to such immoral displays, I'd like to say this: Sometimes, even animals show manners, dignity, and honor that **put humans to shame**. So calling those who degrade others and disgrace food on television “media monkeys” would actually be **unfair to monkeys**—and I say that seriously.

It is not right to mock such people with nicknames or insults. But also—aren't those who **knowingly promote and platform them** equally at fault?

You can't **criticize them by day** and then **watch, follow, and promote them by night**.

This type of behavior belongs to people who lack personal principles and a baseline level of cultural integrity.

In the end, **what you truly value is what you deserve**.

The TV shows and social media posts that you react to—they are all **mirrors**.

Those who continue to stare into these mirrors and consume what they see are **approving them silently**.

And if you keep watching what you say you hate, there's only one explanation:

You are **inconsistent** in both your **words** and your **actions**.

Those who attack the values of the Turkish nation—who have succeeded through TV or social media—have dragged our profession into this moral darkness.

Those enabling this care only about ratings and profiting from your attention. And when they throw you some rewards, you chase after them.

So if, on your phone, you encounter vulgar or insulting content disguised as “culinary media,” don’t just blame the one who posted it—**look within yourself first.**

Some of this content includes **explicit material** that should not even be seen by children. And yet, it’s everywhere.

These issues force us to ask deep cultural and sociological questions.

So if someone is guilty for posting it—what about those who **gave them an audience?**

To conclude:

Mevlana once said:

“When the yeast is spoiled, one knows neither shame nor modesty. Do not be saddened, dear heart—neither these troubles nor this life is permanent.”

After converting to Islam, the American civil rights leader **Malcolm X** took the name **El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz**. He said:

“If you’re not careful, the media will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.”

And as the Turkish poet **Necip Fazıl Kısakürek** wrote:

“If a person lacks manners, what good is school? Even if he becomes a scholar, he’s still a donkey—still a donkey.”

Indeed, there are people who never attended school but speak nothing but knowledge and culture. And then there are those who studied at the finest institutions—yet can’t shine even as bright as a humble, uneducated lamp.

Without a doubt, **God bestows knowledge, faith, culture, and moral values upon whomever He wills.**

**With respect and love,
Stay well.
Tolgahan Gülyiyen**

