

Gastronomy tourism, cultural heritage, and quality of life: Evidences from Taiwan and Catalonia

Min-Pei Lin ^{1*}

¹ University of Lleida, Catalonia, Spain. Email: lm16@alumnes.udl.cat

* Corresponding author

Supervisors: Prof. Estela Marine-Roig and Prof. Nayra Llonch-Molina

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

The overall goal is to examine the relationship between gastronomy tourism and cultural heritage, using Taiwan and Catalonia as destination studies. This will be achieved by analysing the satisfaction, subjective well-being and quality of life of tourists who have engaged in gastronomic tourism experiences in these two regions.

Objectives

One significant objective of this dissertation is to determine the state of the art of research on gastronomic heritage in relation to UNESCO's concept of intangible cultural heritage and analyse its links with tourist destinations and their management. Another objective is to qualitatively and quantitatively analyse the satisfaction of tourists who engage in gastronomic experiences, such as local market tours, winery tours and cooking classes, as well as high-end dining experiences, including the special dietary needs approach. A third objective is to verify the similarities and differences in gastronomy tourism on two continents (i.e. Asia and Europe) and in two particular regions there (i.e. Taiwan and Catalonia).

Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this doctoral thesis, first a scientific literature review and bibliometric analysis were conducted using the PRISMA guidelines on studies related to tourists' gastronomic experiences. Then, tourist-generated content (TGC) posted on social media was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. TGC, consisting mainly of travel reviews on *TripAdvisor*, was collected and arranged, and content analysed through specific software. The content was categorized and treated from a semiotic perspective, including its designative, appraisive and prescriptive aspects. In addition, case comparison analyses were conducted between the regions.

Results

Firstly, the bibliometric analysis of the gastronomic heritage shows that most of the relevant articles associate gastronomic heritage with the sustainability of the destination and that the European case studies are more concerned with sustainability than the Asian ones. Secondly, the findings show that high-quality food, quality dining environment and service are the main reasons for favourable ratings in starred restaurants. Third, customers showed an elevated level of satisfaction with all gastronomic tourism experiences, including upscale gastronomic experiences. Further, findings highlighted regional differences in the popularity of different types of gastronomic experience and a positive relationship between the star rating and the popularity of high-end restaurants, customer satisfaction and well-being. Finally, the cooking classes in both regions were highly appreciated, and the beverages with regional characteristics were well branded and marketed through the cooking class experience.

Theoretical conclusions

This study examines how gastronomic experiences shape online tourism destination images (TDI) using four conceptual models: Morris's (1938, 1946) semantic and pragmatic dimensions, Marine-Roig's (2019, 2021) destination image formation framework, Gronroos's (1984) service quality model, and Stebbins's (2015) serious leisure theory. By synthesizing these models, it introduces an inter-theoretical approach, offering a comprehensive framework for analysing the formation of TDIs through gastronomic experiences. This research highlights the role of gastronomic activities, such as Michelin-starred dining and cooking classes, in enhancing satisfaction, loyalty, and TDI.

The novelty of this study lies in the innovative combination of different theoretical models to analyse gastronomic experiences in the context of TDI. This inter-theoretical approach not only enriches the understanding of how gastronomic experiences contribute to destination image formation, but also provides a novel framework and perspective that can be applied to other tourism experiences especially in the cultural tourism field.

Subsequently, this study found that gastronomic experiences play an important role in destination image formation, which is in line with previous studies: these experiences are crucial in enhancing destination satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, by combining different theoretical models, this study found that multiple dimensions and factors need to be considered and a more holistic approach (mixed methods) needs to be taken in order to fully understand the impact of gastronomic experiences on destination image. Finally, through quantitative and qualitative content analysis, this study also confirms the usability and limitations of user-generated content in empirical research (e.g., the lack of sociological variables of samples).

Practical application of the dissertation

This thesis utilises four models to contribute to management, marketing, and decision-making in the food and tourism industry. The findings may help practitioners in both the food and tourism industries to improve their promotion and communication strategies, build brand images, attract new tourists, diversify products and activities, and operate sustainably. Destination managers should strive to integrate gastronomic products and activities into the core of destinations. Such actions will enable consumers to associate gastronomic products and activities with their destinations, thus generating a cycle of positive word of mouth after consumption.

Contents of the dissertation

Abstract of Chapter 1

Chapter 1 introduces the research theme and objectives, aiming to explore gastronomy and its importance in the field of tourism. Firstly, gastronomy has evolved from a basic life necessity to a multifunctional commodity that enhances happiness, identity, cultural experience, and economic revitalization. Secondly, gastronomy tourism now occupies an important position in the global market and influences tourist flows significantly. Finally, the chapter distinguishes between gastronomic heritage and gastronomy tourism, explores the boundaries between tourism and leisure, and examines how gastronomy tourism shapes destination image. This study is mainly based on the concept of TDI formation of Marine-Roig (2019, 2021), focusing on organic sources, such as user-generated content, and in particular electronic word-of-mouth shared on social media. In this context, the research objectives are divided into head targets and sub-objectives, thus more comprehensively revealing the linkages and influences between gastronomy tourism and destination image.

Abstract of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 describes the sample area, data, methodology and research approach. Taiwan and Catalonia, representing Asia and Europe, were chosen for comparison. A literature review provided insights into gastronomic heritage, research trends, and collaborative relationships. To conduct the review, the PRISMA guidelines were followed by adopting a bibliometric method of analysing the literature that is commonly used in systematic reviews. In terms of data collation and analysis, the *TripAdvisor* review platform, a commonly used data source in academia, helped us to collect and analyse valuable information from the online reviews downloaded from the webpage and to conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses. In the quantitative analysis, we analysed and categorised the relevant key terms of three semiotic aspects, while in the qualitative analysis, characteristic online travel reviews (OTRs) were

chosen for analysis based on the theoretical background to explore the implication of gastronomy tourism.

Abstract of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 includes five papers. The first one is “Gastronomy as a sign of the identity and cultural heritage of tourist destinations: A bibliometric analysis 2001–2020”, on gastronomic heritage and identity, shows that European studies emphasise sustainability more than Asian ones, with residents crucial in preserving heritage. The second paper is “Special dietary needs: Evidence from high-end restaurants”, and finds that high-quality food, environment, and service lead to high ratings in Michelin-starred restaurants, while poor hygiene, service, and high prices lead to low scores. The third one is “Gastronomic experience (co)creation: Evidence from Taiwan and Catalonia”, examines gastronomic experiences in both regions, revealing high customer satisfaction with regional differences. The fourth paper, “Gastronomy tourism and well-being: Evidence from Taiwan and Catalonia Michelin-starred restaurants”, links gastronomy tourism to well-being, showing positive correlations between star ratings, popularity, and satisfaction. The final paper, “Cooking as a sign of healthy living: Examining the role of cooking classes in improving quality of life”, highlights the value of cooking classes in enhancing quality of life.

Abstract of Chapter 4

Cultural heritage is shifting from tangible to intangible elements and embracing multiple meanings. Gastronomic heritage reflects a society's past, adapts to modern needs while retain its original flavour and impacts contemporary culture. Sustainable management of this heritage is crucial for preserving culture and promoting local economies. This study analyses gastronomic heritage and gastronomic tourism using previous relevant studies and UGC, based on a bibliometric approach and four theoretical frameworks. Findings in gastronomic heritage suggest that while commercialisation may dilute gastronomic heritage's original flavour, it can enhance sustainability if integrated into daily life. This finding is consistent with previous research results (Avieli, 2013; Ron and Timothy, 2013) Furthermore, in contemporary society, food meets physiological needs and symbolises identity, cultural heritage, and economic value, making it central to tourism. Accordingly, the findings of this study on gastronomy tourism found that, firstly, the tourism industry now prioritizes customer experience, focusing on service quality, ambience, and price, especially in high-end dining. Secondly, Michelin-starred restaurants have shifted to a more customer-centric approach, aiming to boost satisfaction and loyalty. Finally, cooking classes, offering entertainment, education, and escapism, meet today's diverse needs, with customer satisfaction and loyalty being key to sustainable business success, surpassing the importance of brand building, which has the same findings as the previous research (Romagnoli, 2019).

Abstract of Chapter 5

This chapter presents the overall conclusions. This thesis consists of two parts. The first part involves a bibliometric analysis of the scientific literature on gastronomic heritage in the 21st century, and the second part includes quantitative and content analyses of English-language OTRs on *TripAdvisor* in both regions. The first part indicated that UNESCO's gastronomic heritage activities have had an impact on the publication of relevant literature. In addition, the study showed that the sustainable management of local gastronomic heritage is a major focus of research among academics. The second part revealed that tourists expressed a high level of satisfaction with gastronomy tourism in the two regions, and that the popularity of different types of gastronomy tourism appeared to vary from one region to another. In addition, there are also differences in branding and marketing strategies between the regions.

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