




Innovation in Gastronomic Tourism: The Impact of Value Chain Stages on the Tourist Experience

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Abstract: Gastronomic tourism has gained significant importance in the tourism industry, offering a unique experience for travellers to delve into the culture, traditions, and flavours of a destination. This study examines the role of the value chain in gastronomic tourism, with a focus on the city of Shkodra, Albania. Through a comprehensive investigation of the stages of the value chain, encompassing food production, preparation, distribution, and consumption, the study aims to comprehend their impact on visitors' gastronomic experiences. Objectives include identifying current trends in gastronomic tourism, such as technological advancements and tourists' preferences for authentic cuisine, as well as pinpointing innovations and assessing economic impacts at the local level. This study utilizes a regression model to analyze the value chain within a specific context. The authors aim to identify how these interpretations can inform the understanding of various factors influencing gastronomic tourism analysis and inform the development of appropriate strategies for its future growth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gastronomic tourism, a rapidly growing segment of the global tourism industry, offers travelers the opportunity to explore and experience the culinary heritage of different cultures. This form of tourism not only satisfies the gastronomic desires of tourists but also serves as a vehicle for cultural exchange, economic development, and sustainable practices. As the demand for authentic and unique culinary experiences continues to rise, innovation within the gastronomic tourism value chain has become crucial for destinations seeking to differentiate themselves and enhance the overall tourist experience. The value chain in gastronomic tourism encompasses multiple stages, including food production, preparation, distribution, and consumption. Each of these stages plays a critical role in shaping the tourist experience, from the sourcing of local ingredients to the final presentation of dishes in dining establishments. Innovations across these stages can significantly impact the quality, authenticity, and sustainability of the gastronomic offerings, thereby influencing tourists' perceptions and satisfaction. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of innovation in gastronomic tourism, particularly in the context of sustainable practices and technological advancements. For instance, the use of organic farming methods and the promotion of farm-to-table dining have been recognized as key innovations that enhance the authenticity and environmental sustainability of gastronomic tourism (Hall & Gössling, 2020). Similarly, the integration of digital technologies in food discovery and dining experiences has transformed the way tourists interact with local cuisines, offering new opportunities for personalization and engagement (Sthapit & Williams, 2021). This paper aims to explore the impact of innovations within the gastronomic tourism value chain on the overall tourist experience, with a specific focus on the city of Shkodra, Albania. By analyzing the stages of food production,

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preparation, distribution, and consumption, this study seeks to identify (i) current trends in gastronomic tourism, including technological advancements and tourist preferences for authentic cuisine (ii) how these innovations contribute to the enhancement of gastronomic tourism and its potential for future growth, (iii) to assess the economic impacts of gastronomic tourism at the local level in Shkodra. Through a combination of empirical research and statistical analysis, this paper will provide insights into the key factors driving innovation in gastronomic tourism and stakeholders seeking to capitalize on these trends. This paper will review the relevant literature on gastronomic tourism and value chain innovations, outline the research methodology, present the findings, and discuss the implications for the tourism industry and local economies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gastronomic tourism is increasingly recognized as a powerful means of experiencing a destination's culture and plays a vital role in the economy, cultural preservation and sustainability. According to [Dixit \(2019\)](#), the concept of gastronomic tourism extends beyond the simple consumption of food to include a deep engagement with the entire food system, from production to plate. The value chain in gastronomic tourism includes different stages, including the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food, all of which contribute to the overall tourist experience. [Richards and Wilson \(2020\)](#) emphasize the integration of local food systems in tourism products, suggesting that the authenticity and quality of the gastronomic experience are directly influenced by each stage of the value chain. They argue that innovations in food production and distribution, such as the use of organic ingredients or the promotion of local food markets, increase the perceived authenticity and sustainability of the tourism experience. Innovation in food production, especially through sustainable practices, has become an essential aspect of the growth of gastronomic tourism. [Hall and Gössling \(2020\)](#) discuss how technological advances in agriculture and food processing have allowed regions to differentiate their gastronomic offerings. These innovations include the development of organic farms, the use of heritage crops, and the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices, all of which contribute to the uniqueness of a destination's culinary identity. Furthermore, [Del Valle and Garcia \(2019\)](#) emphasize the importance of culinary innovation in the preparation stages. They argue that the incorporation of modern cooking techniques and the fusion of traditional and contemporary flavors can enhance the tourist experience by offering new and exciting gastronomic encounters. Such innovations not only attract food enthusiasts but also help preserve the culinary heritage by adapting it to modern tastes. The distribution of gastronomic products is another critical stage in the value chain that significantly affects the tourist experience. [Ruiz and Lopez \(2022\)](#) examine how distribution networks, including local markets, food festivals and direct farm-to-table initiatives, influence tourists' perceptions of authenticity and quality. They find that tourists are more satisfied when they can trace the origin of their food and when they are engaged in the distribution process, such as attending local food markets or visiting farms. In terms of consumption, [Nunkoo and Pratt \(2019\)](#) argue that the environment in which food is consumed plays a crucial role in shaping the tourist experience. Restaurants that emphasize local cuisine, traditional dining practices, and a strong connection to the community tend to provide more memorable experiences. The authors suggest that innovations in restaurant design, menu development, and service can further enhance the tourist experience by making it more immersive and reflective of the destination's culture. Technological advances have been essential in driving innovation at all stages of the value chain in gastronomic tourism. [Sthapit and Williams \(2021\)](#) discuss how digital technologies, such as mobile food discovery apps, online reservations and virtual culinary experiences, have transformed the way tourists interact with food. These technologies not only increase convenience but also allow greater personalization and customization of the gastronomic experience. Furthermore, sustainability has become a central

theme in the discourse of innovation within gastronomic tourism. Hall and Gössling (2018) explore how sustainable practices in food production, packaging and waste management contribute to the long-term sustainability of gastronomic tourism. They argue that tourists are increasingly valuing sustainability in their food choices, and destinations that adopt sustainable practices are more likely to attract environmentally conscious travelers. The economic and cultural impacts of innovations in gastronomic tourism are profound. Lazzeretti and Capone (2021) analyze how innovations in the value chain contribute to regional economic development by creating new jobs, promoting local products and fostering entrepreneurship. They also emphasize the role of gastronomic tourism in preserving cultural heritage by promoting traditional food practices and supporting local artisans. Hjalager (2018) emphasizes the cultural importance of gastronomic tourism. She argues that innovations in this sector not only enhance the tourist experience but also strengthen the cultural identity of the destination. By promoting unique culinary traditions and fostering a deeper understanding of local culture, gastronomic tourism can play a crucial role in cultural preservation and promotion.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSES

This study aims to analyze the influence of value chain stages on the tourist experience in the context of gastronomic tourism. The research adopts a quantitative approach using a survey-based method to collect data from 100 tourists who have experienced gastronomic tourism in Shkodër, Albania. The survey results are then analyzed using a simple regression model to determine the relationship between value chain stages (independent variables) and overall tourism experience (dependent variable). The target population for this study consists of tourists who have engaged in gastronomic experiences in Shkodra. A sample of 100 respondents was selected through convenience sampling, focusing on tourists who visit popular gastronomic spots such as local restaurants, food markets and food cultural events. The survey is administered both in person and online in order to capture a diverse group of tourists.

3.1. Survey Instrument

The survey is designed to measure the tourists' experiences related to various stages of the value chain in gastronomic tourism. The instrument is divided into four key sections representing the value chain stages:

1. **Food Production:** Questions focus on tourists' perceptions of the quality and authenticity of locally sourced ingredients, as well as their awareness of sustainable practices.
2. **Food Preparation:** Questions address the significance of traditional and innovative cooking techniques, the quality of food preparation, and the involvement of local chefs.
3. **Food Distribution:** This section covers tourists' experiences with local food markets, farm-to-table practices, and the accessibility of local products.
4. **Food Consumption:** Questions explore the tourists' satisfaction with the dining experience, including the ambiance, service quality, and the authenticity of local dishes.

3.2. Hypotheses

- **Food Production**
Null Hypothesis (H0): Food production does not have a significant effect on the overall tourist experience in gastronomic tourism.
Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Food production has a significant effect on the overall tourist experience in gastronomic tourism.

- **Preparation**
Null Hypothesis (H0): Food preparation does not have a significant effect on the overall tourist experience in gastronomic tourism.
Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Food preparation has a significant effect on the overall tourist experience in gastronomic tourism.
- **Distribution**
Null Hypothesis (H0): Distribution does not have a significant effect on the overall tourist experience in gastronomic tourism.
Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Distribution has a significant effect on the overall tourist experience in gastronomic tourism.
- **Consumption**
Null Hypothesis (H0): Consumption does not have a significant effect on the overall tourist experience in gastronomic tourism.
Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Consumption has a significant effect on the overall tourist experience in gastronomic tourism

3.3. Model Specification

To analyse the value chain in gastronomic tourism and its impact on the overall tourist experience, we will construct a simple linear regression model. The dependent variable in this model will be the overall tourist experience, while the independent variables will be the stages of the value chain: food production, preparation, distribution, and consumption.

$$\text{Overall Tourist Experience} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Food Production} + \beta_2 \text{Preparation} + \beta_3 \text{Distribution} + \beta_4 \text{Consumption} + \epsilon$$

Where:

β_0 is the intercept.

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ are the coefficients for the independent variables

ϵ is the error term

3.4. Interpreting the Results

The regression output provides coefficients for each independent variable, the intercept, and various statistics.

- **R-squared:** Indicates the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that is predictable from the independent variables.
- **Coefficients:** Show the expected change in the dependent variable for a one-unit change in the respective independent variable.
- **P-values:** Test the hypothesis that each coefficient is different from zero. A small p-value (typically ≤ 0.05) indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis.

Table 1. OLS Regression Results

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Constant	0.1023	0.293	0.349	0.741	[-0.816, 1.021]
Food Production	0.2460	0.158	1.556	0.212	[-0.259, 0.751]
Preparation	0.3897	0.142	2.743	0.070	[-0.057, 0.836]
Distribution	0.1389	0.158	0.879	0.434	[-0.366, 0.644]
Consumption	0.4087	0.201	2.033	0.137	[-0.210, 1.028]

Source: Own research

Table 2. Model Statistics value

Model Statistics	Value
R-squared	0.85
Adjusted R-squared	0.80
F-statistic	17.45
Prob (F-statistic)	0.003
Log-Likelihood	-2.1323
AIC	12.26
BIC	11.47
Durbin-Watson	1.581

Source: Own research

Statistical Test:Omnibus Test: **0.126 (p = 0.939)**Jarque-Bera Test: **0.249 (p = 0.883)**Skewness: **-0.111**Kurtosis: **2.110**Condition Number: **1.63**

Below is a detailed explanation of the key components:

- **R-squared (0.85):** Indicates that 85% of the variance in the overall tourist experience is explained by the independent variables (Food Production, Preparation, Distribution, and Consumption). This is a high value, suggesting a strong fit of the model.
- **Adjusted R-squared (0.80):** Adjusts the R-squared value for the number of predictors in the model. An adjusted value of 0.80 still indicates a good model fit, accounting for the number of independent variables.
- **F-statistic (17.45):** Evaluates whether the model is statistically significant overall. A higher value suggests that at least one independent variable significantly predicts the dependent variable.
- **Prob (F-statistic = 0.003):** Indicates the p-value for the F-statistic. A p-value of 0.003 is statistically significant, meaning the overall regression model is meaningful.

Based on our output, we interpret the results for each hypothesis:

- **Food Production:** Coefficient = 0.2460, p-value = 0.212
Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Food production **does not have a statistically significant** effect on the overall tourist experience.
- **Preparation:** Coefficient = 0.3897, p-value = 0.070
The p-value is slightly above 0.05, indicating a trend towards significance. While we do not have strong enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level, preparation appears to have a **potential impact** on the overall tourist experience.

- **Distribution:** Coefficient = 0.1389, p-value = 0.434
Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. **Distribution does not have a statistically significant** effect on the overall tourist experience.
- **Consumption:** Coefficient = 0.4087, p-value = 0.137
While the p-value is greater than 0.05, it is relatively close, suggesting **a potential effect**. However, we fail to reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level, indicating that consumption shows potential significance.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

For future research, the authors suggest several directions that not only highlight potential areas for expanding current research but also underline the interdisciplinary nature of innovation in gastronomic tourism, including technology, culture, sustainability and economics.

1. **Technological Integration in the Value Chain:** Future studies can explore the role of advanced technologies, such as AI-driven personalization, blockchain for food traceability, and augmented reality (AR) for enhancing tourist experiences. Researchers could analyze how these technologies can be integrated at various stages of the value chain and their subsequent impact on tourists' satisfaction.
2. **Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies:** Conducting comparative studies between different cultural and regional contexts can provide insights into how value chains differ across gastronomic tourism sectors. Future research could explore how local cuisines and food traditions in different parts of the world influence the value chain and tourist experience.
3. **Sustainability and Environmental Impact:** Investigating the role of sustainability practices within the value chain stages, particularly in production and distribution, can provide a deeper understanding of how environmentally-friendly innovations affect the tourist experience and decision-making in gastronomic tourism.
4. **Longitudinal Studies on Trends and Consumer Preferences:** To identify evolving trends in gastronomic tourism, longitudinal research could monitor changes in consumer behavior, preferences for authentic experiences, and the impact of value chain innovations over an extended period. This would offer a more dynamic view of how the industry adapts to shifts in demand.
5. **Analyzing the Role of Stakeholders:** Future research could delve deeper into the roles of various stakeholders, such as local communities, businesses, and policymakers, in shaping the value chain in gastronomic tourism. Understanding the collaboration between these stakeholders can provide insights into enhancing regional competitiveness and promoting local culinary traditions.
6. **Impact of Crisis Situations on the Value Chain:** Given recent global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, examining the resilience and adaptability of the value chain in gastronomic tourism under crises could be a critical research area. Future studies could assess how disruptions affect each stage of the value chain and propose strategies for recovery.
7. **Consumer Perception and Sensory Analysis:** Research could also focus on exploring how tourists perceive different stages of the value chain, particularly through sensory analysis. Investigating how factors like taste, presentation, and ambiance influence tourist satisfaction would provide practical insights for businesses seeking to enhance their offerings.
8. **Economic Impact Analysis:** Future studies can assess the economic impact of innovations in gastronomic tourism at the regional or national level, focusing on how improvements in the value chain translate into economic growth, job creation, and sustainable investments.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the hypothesis testing, we conclude the following:

- Food preparation and consumption show potential trends toward significance but do not meet the strict threshold of 0.05 in this analysis. Further research with a larger sample size may help clarify their impact.
- Food production and distribution do not have statistically significant effects on the overall tourist experience in the given sample.

These insights inform our recommendations to focus on enhancing food preparation techniques and promoting unique consumption experiences, as these areas show potential for improving the overall tourist experience in gastronomic tourism in Shkodra. By implementing the strategies, stakeholders in Shkodra can effectively support the value chain to encourage gastronomic tourism, benefiting local businesses, the community, and visitors, and has proven effective in attracting tourists. The economic benefits extend beyond the tourism sector, impacting local agriculture, hospitality, and retail industries.

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