

# A Study of Factors Influencing Food Tourism Branding: The Case of Iranian Tourism

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**Abstract** Food plays an important role in creating tourist places and destinations and it is recognized as a great potential and influential attraction in tourism. Nowadays, food tourism is considered one of the most attractive and popular kinds of tourism. Popular food tourist destinations are the places in which they have distinctive culinary style and offering high quality products. The ways to achieve sustainable competitive advantage are among the challenging topics in the field of tourism (In general) and food tourism (in particular). Due to the intangible nature, heterogeneity and inseparability of food tourism service, branding is the effective technique in achieving sustained competitive advantage. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the factors affecting food tourism branding. By studying the literature review a set of indicators were collected which is related to each of the factors affecting the branding in food tourism. The methodology used in this research is of correlation and survey and structural modeling is used to test the hypothesis. Findings indicate that the three main factors which positively and meaningfully influencing the food tourism branding are advertisement, distinctive culinary style and food quality and variety.

**Keywords** Food Tourism, Branding, Advertisement, Diverse Cuisine, Quality of Food, Iran

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## 1. Introduction

The growth of special interest tourism is seen as a reflection of the increasing diversity of leisure interests of the early twenty-first century leisure society[1]. The growth of food tourism is seen as an outcome of a trend where people spend much less time cooking, but choose to pursue their interest in food as a part of a leisure experience such as watching cooking shows, dining out and the like[2]. Food tourism is not a new product; they have always been travelers who had to eat far from their living places. Food tourism is a growing market segment internationally and many tourist destinations are developing this important sector as a means of gaining competitive advantage. Kim *et al*[3] shows that food is a critical and substantial part of any holiday; a part that may even constitute one third of tourist expenditures. Furthermore, Kim *et al*[4] voice a widely held belief when they claim that “food is one of the most important elements in tourists’ destination choice and travelers’ decision - making”. As such, perceptions of food as a key reason to travel and to visit a specific destination permeate many influential texts on food and tourism (e.g.[4][5]) and some claim that food tourism will become even more important in

future. Food is an extremely important part of the culture of a region[6]. Thus food tourism is a possible competitive advantage and an area’s gastronomy reflects the cultural identity and heritage of that specific place[7]. In an increasingly competitive world of tourism marketing, every region or destination is in a constant search for a unique product to differentiate itself from other destinations. Local food or cuisines that are unique to an area are one of the distinctive resources that may be used as marketing tools to get more visitors[8]. On the other hand, achieving a successful food tourism destination in a competitive advantage and providing an optimal image of themselves depend on the factors that have an impact on food tourism branding. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to identify factors affecting food tourism branding. First of all, by studying the literature review, a set of indicators were collected which is related to each of the factors affecting the branding in food tourism; these factors include: unique and distinctive style of cooking, food and food quality, advertisement, payment (piece and costs), regional condition, historical and cultural aspect of the region and the skillful people delivering services which according to the necessary experiment, the three factor which include advertisement, unique and distinctive style of cooking and food and food quality has been confirmed to be studied as the three variables affecting the food tourism branding. In addition, after determining the relationship between these factors and food tourism branding concept, this paper tries to find out

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the strength of this relationship and to specify the priority of each of these factors in branding.

## 2. Definitions

### 2.1. Food Tourism

Food tourism is a broad area and while there is no universally accepted definition, it is often described as travel to specific locations – with varying degrees of motivation – to sample cuisine unique to that area in order to gain a real sense of place. Although, for a small number of tourists food is the primary motivator of the visit – normally referred to as culinary or gastro tourism, all visitors sample food during their stay and as such the quality of food-related experience is of paramount importance. Food tourism is to visit destinations that the primary purpose of traveling to those places is the interest in experiencing the food of the country, region which may include eating, drinking, learning about the processes of food production, buying drinks or food and attending cookery training courses. Lacy and Douglass ([9], p. 8) claim that “every tourist is a voyeurringourmet”. The tourist’s food related activities at a destination, such as dining, purchasing local food products or food pertinent products, and experiencing the characteristics of a unique food producing region[8]. Food tourists eagerly want to try out the products of the country, region or specific country. Hall and Mitchell[10] categorize the food tourist in the following groups:

- **Gourmet tourist:** these people just like good food and drink, and necessarily prefer the expensive restaurants and wines.
- **Gastronomic/Culinary tourists:** this group includes travellers who are after unique cultural experiences and food and drink festivals.
- **Cuisine tourists:** this group is generally interested in specific cuisine of a region or country.

Impact and benefits of branding in food tourism industry for tourism destinations include: increased demand for food product, building loyalty to the brand, providing marketing information for manufacturers and suppliers, educational opportunities for visitors and residents, regional and local entrepreneurship, increasing tourist stay, wider distribution of costs and protecting intellectual properties. As many manufacturers are striving to protect their unique identity of products, the issue of intellectual property in the international market is becoming more important every day. Hence, branding provides a framework for the protection of certain brands.

### 2.2. Brand and Branding

The word "brand" is derived from the Old Norse *brandr* meaning "to burn"[11]. Although this word seems simple it has different meanings and complexities. According to the definition of the American Marketing Association “Brand is the name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that

identifies one seller's product distinct from those of other sellers for the aim of being distinct in the field of competition”[12]. Inter-brand experts believe that brand is made of a series of tangible and intangible characteristics which symbolize the brand logo and trademarks. In fact, brand is the perception in the mind of customer if tangible and intangible characteristics are managed well it will create value for the company[13]. Today, brand has gone beyond the product and in fact the product is part of the brand. When products are similar in terms of quality, it is the brand that calls the shots. The primary task of the brand is to revolutionize the product. Creating brand maintains the benefits of effective marketing, better sales and gaining a competitive advantage in which the tourism industry is no exception. The purpose of branding is to create a unique and interesting proposal to estimate rational and emotional needs of customers in a better way.

### 2.3. Influential Factors on Food Tourism Branding

Neglecting one brand leads to ignorance and slowly some substitutes on series of products comes to the market. By the time a food tourism destination in branding is succeeded when tourists repeat their purchase behavior and once again refer to these destinations for using the services. Authorities in the tourism industry should be able to attract and retain customers through the provision of food to satisfy their consumers especially when more customers are seeking new and unique experiences than before. All of these new challenges are mostly due to the competitive situation in the field of food tourism industry. Based on studies referring to the influential factors on food tourism branding, the following factors are included which will be explained later and those are: unique and distinctive style of cooking, food and food quality, advertisement, payment (pieces and costs) and the skillful people delivering services.

#### 2.3.1. Unique and Distinctive Culinary Style

Pleasure of eating and tasting different foods is one of the enjoyments that cause people to travel to different countries. This issue is particularly noticeable when traveling and seeing new lands, different ways of cooking and serving food. Many tourist destinations are in competition with each other in offering a comprehensive range of services to their customers. Among these destinations those who have a strong background in the area and fairly having style in cooking can attract more tourists which contribute to the image we have in the mind that places having a distinct culinary style and offering good quality product are usually popular.

#### 2.3.2. Variety and Food Quality

To insure that food tourist repeat the behavior of visiting those places, variety, quality and services delivered are the most significant factors. Providing several meals while maintaining the main meal, changes in the cuisine and decreasing the time to get the food ready (quick and easy

cook), and paying attention to provide healthy food, food containers, the variety and abundance of cooking, food decorations are the important factors in creating superior image as a destination in food tourism, so that it effectively attracts more visitors.

### 2.3.3. Propaganda and Advertisement

Nowadays advertisement has tremendous impact in attracting visitors and food tourists. Professional advertising in food tourism destination makes destinations well-known and it presents a good image to the public. Food tourist destinations professionally advertise and introduce facilities, services and cuisine. By providing information they show their ability by using catalogs, posters, brochures, banners, billboards, mobile and virtual billboards, and 3D advertisement or by means of media to inform the tourists. Utilizing effective advertising tool to present the food tourist destinations is significant in how tourists act to that publicity. But among them some tools have survived. Of those surviving tools are specialized catalogs and brochures related to foods. These brochures contain information about foods and cooking ingredients, how to prepare them, philosophy and the history of food, and generally provide complete information about each food.

### 2.3.4. Payments (Prices and Costs)

Food tourists are generally richer and more educated than other tourists. One of the main obstacles for tourism service providers who want to influence and attract people is the lasting image in the minds of the public who considered food tourism as expensive and costly that specific people could enjoy the benefits. Delivering diverse services with variety of cuisine to different social classes and strata can attract ranges of visitors with different income. Actually using competitive pricing and an emphasis on the value of branding in this kind of tourism can provide a solution to a variety of foods and services that are affordable to the public.

### 2.3.5. Service Providers

Branding in the tourism service providers substantially depends on exerting the behavior and the expertise of service providers [14]. Due to the influence of employee's behavior on customer perception of the brand, the tourism industry should pay a lot of attention to provide proper services to their customers. However, the problem which exists is that service brands are in engagement in social interactions between employees and customers which reinforces the unpredictability of the branding process [15].

## 3. Food Tourism Branding Model

According to the theoretical literature and research studies, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed among food tourism service providers. Research variables were confirmed after statistical analysis and for further confirmation of some variables, questionnaire was

distributed again among food tourism service providers and finally the variables in the model are confirmed. Figure 1 shows the result of the research.

## 4. Methodology

According to the purpose of the study, this research is practical since this research intends to develop a practical knowledge of the factors affecting food tourism branding. Based on the data collection, this study used a survey method, because in addition to characterize the data and to determine the relationship, collecting data about one or more attributes is done through sampling in the society. Identifying the variables is done through interviews with marketing executives, branding specialists, tourists who participate in food festivals and cooking workshops in Iran and data are collected through questionnaire. Before the questionnaire was distributed, the questionnaire is reviewed by the branding professor and expert who had sufficient experience in designing. To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, a prototype consisted of 80 questionnaires with a range of Likert 5-choice (1 = never to 5 = always) has been tested initially among the food tourism service providers (Members of festival food, chefs, Mother restaurant and food service providers, for example, Akbar Joojeh (An Iranian famous chain restaurant)). The area of this research is to identify factors affecting food tourism branding. The area during the study period was all the festivals, workshops, famous cooking places in Iran in 2012. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics are used. Mann - Whitney test analysis and also Kruskal - Wallis test is used to study the data, and for factors affecting branding ranking, the standard beta is used. Sampling survey was conducted in classification.

## 5. Results of Statistical Analysis

Research questionnaire were distributed among 950 participants in festival food, chefs, providers of food in Mother Restaurants and cafeterias of which 860 questionnaires had complete information for analysis (the response rate was 90%). About 100 questionnaires were distributed among marketing managers, branding specialist and different managers of cooking workshops. The numbers of male and female respondent were equal. The average age of respondents was 35 years old.

## 6. Measurement of Branding Model

Because scientific research has been done on this model, the relevance of the model for evaluating variables is checked:

**Exploratory stage:** To examine whether the variables are correlated with each other and if there is a possible factor analysis, a study is done before exploratory factor analysis. According to Sphericity test, the error count is equal to zero.

(Sig. =0.000) which shows the correlation between the variable, this means that there is a possible factor analysis. A KMO criterion equals (0.804) represents the actual level of shared variance which indicates that the operating results of the acquisition is done properly. Principle Axis Factoring techniques and Varimax rotation were used for extraction. The three factors which are Advertisement, distinctive culinary style, quality and variety of foods were confirmed out of five-factor in the main model was used for internal validation. The equivalent advertisement value for the variable (0.88), distinctive culinary styles is equal to the (0.84), variety and quality of the food variable is equal to (0.95) and average Cronbach's alpha obtained for variables was (0.89). The results of this analysis are shown in Table 1.

**Approval Stage:** In order to model the structure, confirmatory factor analysis in Lisrel program and the covariance matrix is used. There was not a good model at the first stage; to fix the error between the observed variables,

aproper model was obtained. Considering Lisrel output, the model is in a good condition in terms of ratio index such as Chi2 and the RMSEA, Chi2 is less than 3, which shows a small amount of Chi2. The value of RMSEA is also smaller than 0.05. The amount of t-value in factors was variable from (10.53) to (15.04) which represents the convergent validity of the model variables. As a result, the t estimates showed that the three variables have an impact on food tourism branding and branding is affected from these aspects.

**Ranking stage:** Based on beta coefficient and the coefficient, the significance which is obtained from the results, the effect of advertising is more significant than the other two factors (beta =0.85; t=8.87). The effect of different cooking styles, variety and quality of food branding are (0.77) and (0.75) respectively with coefficient between 7.15 and 6.88. The results obtained in this stage are shown in diagram 1 below:

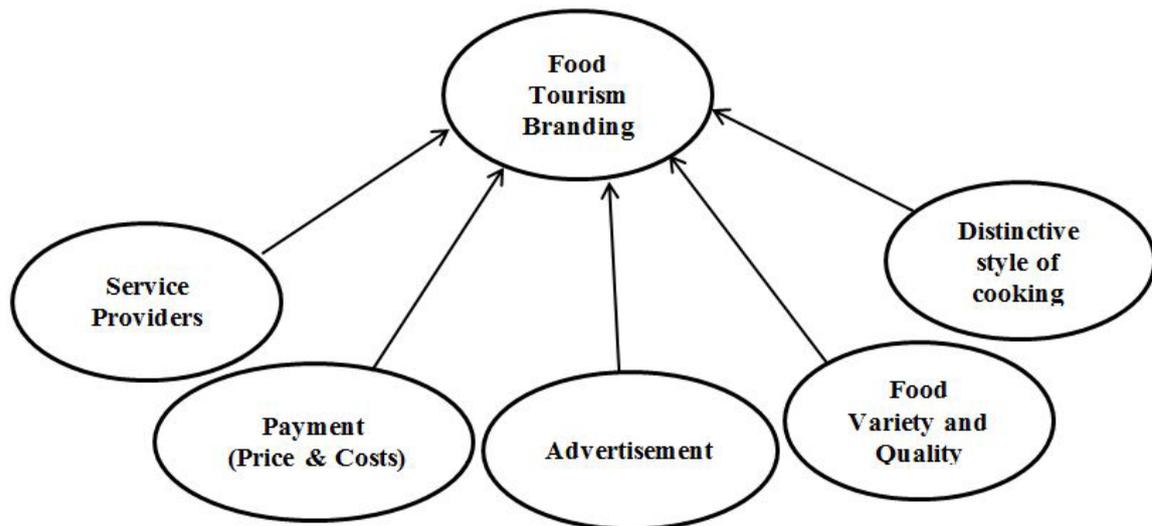


Figure 1. Food tourism branding model

Table 1. Rotated Factor Analysis

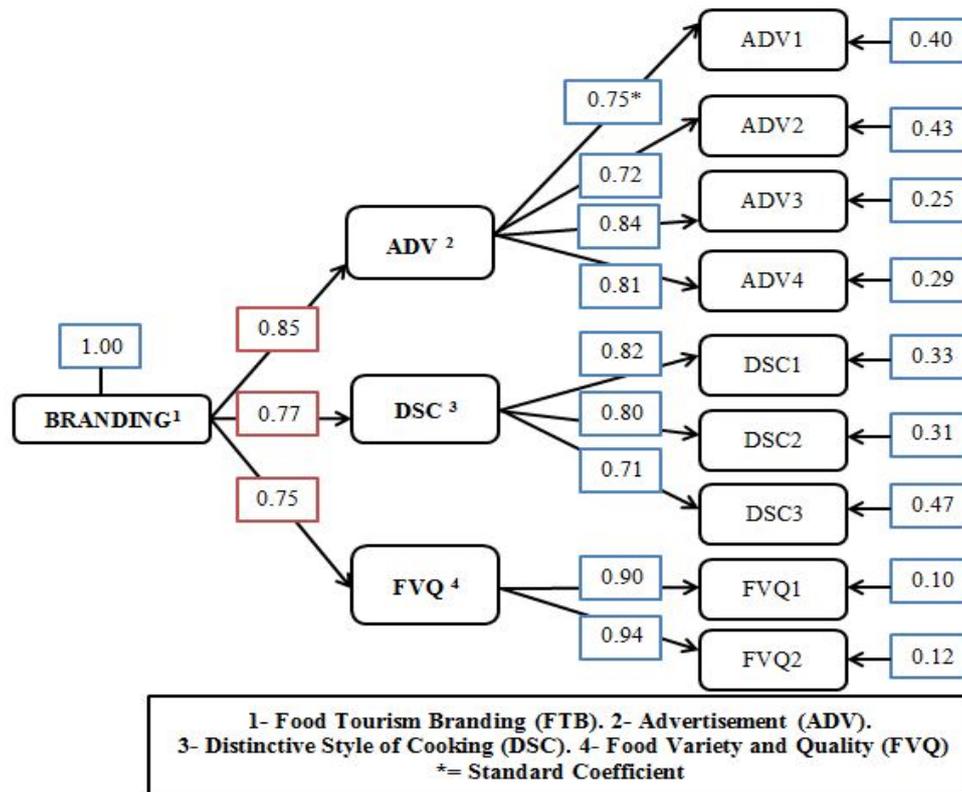
| VARIABLES   | ADV <sup>1</sup> | DSC <sup>2</sup> | FVQ <sup>3</sup> |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Advertisements in food tourism relieve the needs of tourists                          | *0.868           | 0.208            | 0.101            |
| The advertising message is carried out in accordance with the concept of food culture | *0.776           | 0.221            | 0.213            |
| Appropriate tools are used for advertisement in the area of food tourism              | *0.716           | 0.246            | 0.252            |
| Advertisement is done appropriate to target market of food tourism                    | *0.655           | 0.291            | 0.276            |
| A full set of different types of cooking is provided in tourism centers               | 0.250            | *0.804           | 0.222            |
| The distinctive culinary style provides ways to achieve a new target market           | 0.200            | *0.726           | 0.239            |
| Places with distinctive culinary style are the favorite places                        | 0.287            | *0.651           | 0.256            |
| Tourist are satisfied with food variety and quality provided in food tourism centers  | 0.199            | 0.282            | *0.847           |
| Food variety and quality leads to repeated behavior of food tourist                   | 0.275            | 0.266            | *0.823           |
| The total variance  | 27.414           | 23.879           | 21.794           |

1 Advertisement (ADV)

2 Distinctive Style of Cooking (DSC)

3 Food Varieties and Quality (FVQ)

\* The numbers with stars are Factor Loadings



**Diagram 1.** Branding structural equation modeling (standardized estimate)

## 7. Conclusions

Model results shows that branding is positively and significantly influenced by the variables which are advertisement, distinctive culinary style, quality and variety of foods. In general, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis of the final Lisrel model shows that advertisement ranked first, and distinctive cooking styles and a variety of quality foods are ranked second and third respectively in food tourism branding. These results indicate that at higher levels of the three variables, we are faced with higher levels of branding which means that advertisement is more effective than two other factors in branding that should be more focused. Advertising plays an important role in attracting food tourists to visit food tourist destination or to participate in food festivals, cooking workshops and also visiting the cooking associations. In fact, when advertisements are well designed, the needs of tourists will be well satisfied which leads to better introduction of the destinations and ultimately cause visitors to travel those places again win the competitive food tourism marketplace.

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