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Gastronomic Destination Competitiveness of the Province of Bulacan: A Multi-Factor Analysis

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the gastronomic competitiveness of Bulacan and identify the key factors contributing to its success. Moreover, it examined how the findings could further enhance Bulacan's gastronomic competency. A quantitative design was employed, with 383 respondents participated, they are 18-59 years old tourists, had visited several places at the province, able to access google form, and are willing to participate. Using a Multi-factor analysis considered significant indicators of each dimension, thereby validating the inclusion of core resources, supporting resources, quality of gastronomy, and social media marketing in the model. The analysis showed that Social Media Marketing accounted for the highest accumulative variance at 78.812%, underscoring its dominant role in shaping competitiveness. Core resources followed with 60.672%, while Quality of tourism gastronomy contributed 55.431%. The lowest variance was explained by Supporting resources, at 51.830%, suggesting that while supportive elements are relevant, they play a comparatively smaller role in strengthening the province's gastronomic appeal. Lastly, this paper recommends key initiatives to leveraging Bulacan's strengths, addressing areas for improvement, and ensuring long-term sustainability in gastronomic tourism.

Keywords: Core resources, gastronomic competitiveness, quality of tourism gastronomy, social media marketing, and supporting resources

1. Introduction

Countries worldwide are increasingly leveraging their culinary traditions to enhance tourism, positioning local cuisine as a central attraction. By actively engaging in local food culture, tourists not only learn traditional cooking techniques but also gain a deeper appreciation of heritage, ultimately contributing to their overall satisfaction. A vibrant gastronomic scene enhances tourist experiences while simultaneously fostering economic growth, creating opportunities for local businesses, farmers, and chefs. Integrating gastronomy into tourism strategies allows destinations to establish themselves as must-visit culinary hotspots, strengthening their appeal and ensuring long-term sustainability. In turn, this enhances their gastronomic competitiveness, making them more attractive in the global market. Destination competitiveness plays a vital role in the development of gastronomic tourism, as food is a key driver of travel experiences and destination appeal.

This study focuses on Bulacan as the site for gastronomic competitive analysis due to its unique position in the emerging field of gastronomic tourism. Located in Central Luzon, just north of Metro Manila, Bulacan is historically significant as the cradle of the First Philippine Republic in 1899 and culturally

rich with heirloom recipes influenced by the Spanish colonial period. Its abundant natural resources—fertile rice fields, productive highlands, and thriving coastal waters—support diverse agricultural outputs, from staple crops to freshwater fish. These resources underpin a vibrant culinary heritage that reflects both tradition and identity.

Despite this potential, Bulacan's gastronomic tourism sector remains underdeveloped and less documented than those of more established destinations like Pampanga or Iloilo. This gap highlights the need for a focused analysis of Bulacan's culinary assets and competitive positioning, making it an ideal case for research on how heritage-based gastronomy can drive tourism development. Moreover, scholarly research on their competitiveness remains limited in the Philippines. Existing studies primarily examine the relationship between gastronomy and tourist satisfaction, such as those by Gregana & Ylaya [7], De Castro et al. [6], Marana [10], Joson & Masa [8], and Castro & Barrientos [4]. While these works highlight how food enriches tourist experiences, they do not explore how gastronomy contributes to a destination's overall competitiveness.

This study adopts Ritchie and Crouch's [11] comprehensive model of destination competitiveness and sustainability as its theoretical framework. The model identifies key components—such as core resources, supporting factors, and destination management—that are essential for understanding how destinations achieve and sustain competitiveness. Applying this framework enables the study to move beyond tourist satisfaction and examine how gastronomy functions as a strategic resource that strengthens a destination's competitive position. The model has been previously applied in tourism research, including Basle [1], from which this study's instrument was adapted, further validating its relevance and applicability.

This study aimed to explore Bulacan's potential in gastronomy tourism. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether Core Resources, Supporting Resources, the Quality of Gastronomy Tourism, and the use of Social Media Marketing significantly contribute to the gastronomic competitiveness of the Province of Bulacan. The study is valuable as it provides insights into Bulacan's current competitive position in the field of gastronomy tourism.

Core resources contributes to Gastronomic competitiveness

Kovalenko et al. explain that food is an essential part of tourists' trips, serving as a significant element of their overall travel experience. They emphasize the importance of the quality of places where food is consumed, as this strongly influences visitor satisfaction. Zhang et al. [14] stress that the uniqueness and authenticity of local cuisine make destinations more competitive.

Supporting resources contributes to Gastronomic competitiveness

Enhancing a destination's gastronomic competitiveness requires strong supporting resources these includes tourism facilities, general infrastructures, and local features and reputation. Although they are not the primary attraction, such resources plays significant role in enriching the overall of gastronomic experience [1, 9].

Quality of tourism gastronomy contributes to Gastronomic competitiveness

Kalenjuk Pirarski [9] highlights that meal quality, service quality, physical surroundings, and price, are key factors influencing food satisfaction. These elements help destinations maintain competitiveness and attract visitors.

Social Media Marketing contributes to Gastronomic competitiveness

Correa Garcia [5] points out that destinations gain competitiveness when they effectively use social media and technology infrastructure. Building on Bushara et al. [2], the study emphasizes that the

informativeness and trendiness of social media marketing are crucial. Content shared on restaurant fan pages should be both trendy and informative about offerings and services. This approach enhances customer satisfaction and strengthens destination competitiveness by aligning with technological advancements in business.

2. Method

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the contributions of core resources, supporting resources, the quality of tourism gastronomy, and the use of social media marketing to the gastronomic competitiveness of the Province of Bulacan. A purposive, non-random sampling method was employed, and the number of respondents was determined using recent statistical records of tourist arrivals in the province. From a total of 113,965 arrivals in 2020 [13], Raosoft software was used to calculate a sample size of 383 tourists, based on a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be between 18 and 59 years old, to have visited Bulacan, to have used social media networking sites, to have utilized social media platforms to explore gastronomy in Bulacan, to have had access to Google Forms, and to have been willing to participate. A structured survey instrument was developed, incorporating items that measured perceptions of heritage and natural assets (core resources), infrastructure and accessibility (supporting resources), culinary quality and authenticity (quality of gastronomy), and the strategic use of social media marketing. The instrument was localized and was adapted from Basle's [1] GADECOMP model to ensure contextual relevance to the province. Data gathering was administered on-line.

Prior to conducting factor analysis, the suitability of the dataset was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO value exceeded 0.8, indicating very good sampling adequacy and confirming that correlations among variables were strong enough to justify factor extraction. Bartlett's Test produced a chi-square statistic significant at the 99% confidence level, demonstrating that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and that inter-item correlations were sufficiently large for principal component analysis (PCA). With data suitability established, PCA was conducted to extract factors representing the hypothesized dimensions of gastronomic competitiveness. Varimax rotation was applied to maximize interpretability of factor loadings. Eigenvalues greater than 1 and scree plot analysis guided the retention of factors. The resulting factor structure revealed the relative contributions of core resources, supporting resources, quality of gastronomy, and social media marketing to the overarching construct of destination competitiveness. Factor loadings above 0.5 were considered significant indicators of each dimension. The extracted factors were then analyzed to test the central hypothesis: that core resources, supporting resources, quality of tourism gastronomy, and the use of social media marketing significantly contributed to Bulacan's gastronomic competitiveness. The strength of factor loadings and the percentage of variance explained provided empirical evidence of the extent to which each dimension influenced competitiveness. Importantly, the factor with the largest total variance explained was treated as statistically significant, supporting the inference that the corresponding variable contributed most strongly to the gastronomic competitiveness of the province.

3. Results

Table 1 shows the result of this study. Prior to conducting factor analysis, the suitability of the dataset was confirmed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, both

of which indicated strong inter-item correlations and justified the use of principal component analysis (PCA). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity further demonstrated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA, with chi-square values of 4372.72, 5958.67, 26435.35, and 2282.901, all significant at the 99% confidence level (Sig. = .000). With data suitability established, PCA with Varimax rotation was applied, guided by eigenvalues greater than 1 and scree plot analysis, to extract the hypothesized dimensions of gastronomic competitiveness. Factor loadings above 0.5 were considered significant indicators of each dimension, thereby validating the inclusion of core resources, supporting resources, quality of gastronomy, and social media marketing in the model.

Building on this methodological foundation, the extracted factors revealed the relative contributions of each dimension to Bulacan's gastronomic competitiveness. The analysis showed that Social Media Marketing accounted for the highest accumulative variance at 78.812%, underscoring its dominant role in shaping competitiveness. Core resources followed with 60.672%, while Quality of tourism gastronomy contributed 55.431%. The lowest variance was explained by Supporting resources, at 51.830%, suggesting that while supportive elements are relevant, they play a comparatively smaller role in strengthening the province's gastronomic appeal. These results empirically confirm the central hypothesis that all four dimensions significantly contribute to competitiveness, though with varying degrees of influence.

Table 1: Summary of KMO and Bartlett's Test

Variables	KMO test	Bartlett's test	Sig	% of variance	Interpretation
Core resources	.908	4372.72	.000	60.672%	Ha Supported. Core resources contributes to the gastronomic competitiveness
Supporting resources	.920	5958.67	.000	51.830%	Ha Supported. Supporting resources contributes to the gastronomic competitiveness
Quality of Tourism Gastronomy	.951	26434.35	.000	55.431%	Ha Supported. Quality of tourism gastronomy contributes to the gastronomic competitiveness
Social Media Marketing	.9054	2282.901	.000	78.812%	Ha Supported. Social media marketing contributes to the gastronomic competitiveness.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that Social Media Marketing is the most significant contributor to Bulacan's competitiveness, followed by Core Resources, Quality of Tourism Gastronomy, and Supporting Resources. The province demonstrates competitiveness through its innovative local restaurants, which use social media to showcase culinary heritage, unique dishes, and local flavors. This finding aligns with the study of Correa Garcia [5], who emphasizes that a destination becomes competitive when it leverages social media and technology infrastructures. Core resources are also a contributory factor to competitiveness. As Zhang et al. [14] stress, the uniqueness and authenticity of local cuisine enhance a destination's appeal and competitiveness. While Supporting Resources

contributed only a minor impact on the province's competitiveness, this discrepancy is understandable. Bulacan has a diverse geographical layout, with destinations spread out and not necessarily located near one another, which limits the influence of supporting infrastructure. This observation is consistent with the statements of Basle [1] and Kalenjuk Pivarski [9], who note that although supporting resources are not the primary attraction, they play a significant role in enriching the overall gastronomic experience.

Importantly, this study helps fill a critical gap in the literature: scholarly research on competitiveness in the Philippines—particularly in the province of Bulacan—remains limited. By examining the above elements in shaping Bulacan's competitiveness, this research provides empirical evidence that strengthens the understanding of how local destinations can leverage digital platforms and culinary heritage to position themselves more effectively in the tourism market.

This study recommends maximizing the use of social media marketing to strengthen the gastronomic competitiveness of the destination. Specifically, it highlights the importance of promoting gastronomy while prioritizing sanitation in restaurants, eateries, and pasalubong centers. The recommendations include partnering with local farmers to ensure high-quality gastronomic experiences, organizing themed events such as cooking workshops and food-pairing activities to attract tourists, and implementing strict sanitation protocols. Furthermore, it offers future researchers' insights for developing frameworks that support resources to complement the province's diverse geographical layout, thereby making tourist destinations more accessible and encouraging greater visitor engagement.

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