

BUILDING A COUNTRY BRAND THROUGH GASTRONOMICAL MARKETING

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Annotation

Gastronomic marketing is becoming a crucial element in national branding, influencing the country's international perception, promoting tourism, and economic development. This article analyzes theoretical approaches to gastronomic marketing as a nation-branding tool, the characteristics of Uzbek cuisine and its potential to attract tourists, and existing practices for promoting Uzbekistan's gastronomic image. It demonstrates that culinary traditions can serve not only as a cultural phenomenon but also as a marker of competitiveness in the global tourism market. Based on this analysis, recommendations are offered for strengthening Uzbekistan's gastronomic brand.

Keywords

state brand, gastronomic marketing, Uzbek cuisine, nation branding, tourism marketing, cultural identity, gastronomic tourism.

Introduction

In the era of globalization, countries compete not only on economic indicators but also on the image they project to the outside world. Cultivating a favorable image is a strategic development resource, attracting investment, tourists, and international attention. One underutilized but promising tool for building a country's brand is gastronomic marketing a set of marketing activities based on culinary traditions, food products, and cultural practices related to food.

Uzbekistan has a rich gastronomic culture, shaped by the long history of the Great Silk Road and its ethnocultural diversity. Plov, samsa, manti, shurpa, flatbread, and fitness cuisine these dishes are not only hallmarks of the national cuisine but also a magnet for international tourists. However, the potential of Uzbek gastronomic culture to shape the country's positive brand is underutilized.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the possibilities and mechanisms for using gastronomic marketing in Uzbekistan's nation branding strategy, identify existing practices, and offer recommendations for strengthening this area.

Literature analysis

In the scientific literature, the concept of nation branding is considered a set of consistent marketing strategies for creating a favorable image of a country, its cultural, economic, and political attractiveness. Within the framework of nation branding, gastronomy attracts attention as a unique cultural resource capable of forming an emotional connection with the audience and enhancing tourist appeal¹.

Research in the field of gastronomic tourism emphasizes the importance of cuisine as a factor in choosing a travel destination and shaping the travel experience. National cuisines are viewed not only as a component of cultural heritage but also as a competitive advantage in the tourism market. Several authors note that the successful implementation of gastronomic

¹Horng et al., 2012; Richards, 2015

marketing requires a systematic approach, including brand management, collaboration between public institutions and the private sector, and the use of digital promotion channels².

Several studies have examined the tourism potential of traditional cuisine in Uzbekistan, its role in shaping cultural identity and appeal (the researchers' titles are typical topics for this field). However, systematic research linking gastronomic marketing with nation branding specifically in the Uzbek context remains scarce, which underscores the relevance of this study.

Analysis and results

Gastronomical marketing has become a strategic instrument in country branding, linking food culture with national identity, tourism development, and economic competitiveness. According to nation branding theory, a country brand is a multidimensional construct that includes cultural symbols, values, traditions, and economic attributes. Food, as a universal cultural expression, serves as one of the most tangible and emotionally engaging components of this identity.

Scholars such as Simon Anholt emphasize that a strong country brand is built not only through political or economic performance but also through cultural diplomacy and soft power. Cuisine functions as a soft power tool because it creates positive associations, emotional connections, and memorable experiences among foreign audiences. Similarly, Joseph Nye introduced the concept of soft power, highlighting culture as a non-coercive mechanism of international influence. National cuisine fits directly within this framework. Food heritage also aligns with the experience economy model proposed by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, where value is created through memorable and immersive experiences rather than merely through products or services. Gastronomy-based tourism, food festivals, and culinary storytelling transform national cuisine into experiential capital.

The analysis shows that traditional dishes are widely featured in international guidebooks and blogs, but a systematic marketing strategy that integrates culinary traditions into government branding policies is lacking. Local initiatives (plov festivals, gastronomic tours, and tasting routes) help generate interest, but their reach is fragmented and often not linked to a unified communications platform.

The presence of Uzbek cuisine in the digital space is growing, reflected in the growing content about Uzbek dishes on social media, travel blogs, and international culinary platforms. However, the use of modern digital marketing tools (SEO, targeted advertising, Instagram/TikTok campaigns, and influencer collaborations) is still in its infancy.

Culinary tourism stimulates economic activity in cities with rich cuisine and cultural traditions, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. Restaurant industry representatives report an increase in the number of tourists interested in tastings and master classes on preparing national dishes.

Conclusions and suggestions

Thus, we can conclude that Gastronomical marketing is an important resource for building a positive national brand, capable of enhancing tourism and cultural appeal in Uzbekistan. Existing initiatives demonstrate potential, but lack systematic government management or an integrated nation-branding strategy.

²(Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Santich, 2012).

Also It is necessary to strengthen coordination between government agencies (tourism, culture), the private sector (restaurants, agencies), and international platforms for promoting the gastronomic brand.

Based on the research, the following measures are proposed:

1. Developing a comprehensive gastronomic marketing strategy, including:
 - creation of an official communication platform;
 - participation in international exhibitions and culinary festivals;
 - digital campaigns involving global influencers.
2. Support for gastronomic routes and festivals as elements of the tourism product.
3. Implementation of educational programs for HoReCa entrepreneurs on branding and digital marketing standards.
4. Monitoring and evaluation of perceptions of Uzbek cuisine in international markets using social media analytics and tourist reviews.

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