

Exploring gastronomy brands as value-based motivations for cultural and heritage tourism in Nigeria

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**Journal of Tourism, Culinary,
and Entrepreneurship**

**e-ISSN:
2776-0928**

Publisher:
School of Tourism,
Universitas Ciputra Surabaya,
Indonesia

Keywords:

*Intangible Cultural Heritage
Gastronomy
Cultural and Heritage Tourism
Food Tourism
Tourism Development
Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

Gastronomy is the science that studies the connection between foods, traditions, and cultures of different peoples and societies of the world. Gastronomy has always been strongly linked with tourism because when people travel to new areas, they pay great attention to the local culinary habits and traditions. As an intangible cultural heritage (ICH), gastronomy has become one of the primary motivators for tourists' choices to visit specific destinations. Thus, following this important influence of gastronomy on the tourism industry, there arose a need to study it and uncover some of its salient contributions to tourism development to enhance the transformation of Nigeria's tourism industry. Therefore, to achieve the aim of this study, the researchers adopted the exploratory research design using key informant interview methods as a data collection tool. Secondary sources were also utilized to enable the drawing of coherent and concise conclusions. The research reveals massive gastronomy or culinary traditions in Nigeria. It is worth noting that these unique cuisines have not received the attention they deserve from all stakeholders, including academics, tourist professionals/practitioners, government organizations, and the general public. As a result, this study is relevant in light of the fact that there is little or no scholarly output on gastronomic tourism in Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy (also known as culinary or cuisine) is becoming a key factor in the competitiveness of tourist destinations globally. It is an ICH (intangible cultural heritage) that manifests tangibly as food products in society. "Gastronomic tourism is a new form of cultural tourism that seeks to satisfy the demand of a market segment related to the supply of food products" (Huertas-Lopez et al., 2019). It is considered a means of recovering the traditional food of each area. This has largely gained greater recognition during the first half of the 20th century and the first half of the 21st century and has now become a key piece for the positioning of regional foods (Williams & Dossa, 2003, cited from Millan, 2012).

Scholars in the area of heritage studies started engaging the phenomenon of gastronomic tourism more thoroughly after the World Gastronomic Tourism Congress, held by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in Cyprus in 2000. Among the issues being interrogated by different scholars are questions about the style of managing cuisines by all peoples of the world, protection and preservation issues, and the economic importance of these cuisines, among others.

In Nigeria, gastronomy as an ICH is a relatively new topic of discussion. Therefore, not much is known about the Nigerian people's cuisines or culinary practices within the country's scholarship space. There is little or no informed documentation of the diverse gastronomic products cherished by all Nigerians regardless of location. Thus, with the seeming importance of these ICHs to tourism development, and with the seeming lack of research on the significance of cuisines to tourism development, this article becomes an important piece. It is aimed at documenting these cuisines and highlighting their potential for tourism development and promotion in Nigeria.

According to the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture (FMIC, 2023), Nigerian gastronomy or culinary practice is as diverse as the country's ethnic groups. This means that every ethnic group in Nigeria is associated with a particular cuisine practice(s), cherished by all members of such a given group. The major traditional dishes and delicacies that have become national heritage in the country include Akpu, Pounded yam, Suya, Kilishi, Gbegeri, Owo, Bush meat, Edikaikong, Okoho, Fufu, Tuwo, Fura de nunu, Kunu, Amala, and Eba, among many others, to be discussed later in this article.

Conceptualizing Intangible Cultural Heritage and Gastronomy Tourism

ICH refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated with communities, groups, and, in some cases, individuals recognized as part of their cultural heritage. This encompasses the entirety of the capital of knowledge derived from the development and experience of human practices. It also involves the spatial, social, and cultural constructions that may be encapsulated in word memory ((UNESCO, 2018, cited from Nomishan et al., 2021). It is important in maintaining cultural diversity in the face of growing globalization.

Thus, understanding the ICH of different communities helps to strengthen intercultural dialogue and encourages or promotes mutual respect for others' ways of life (UNESCO, 1992-2022). ICH is therefore traditional, contemporary, and living at the same time, inclusive, representative, and community-based. Transmitted from generation to generation and constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environmental changes, cultural changes, and historical discoveries (Nova Putra et al., 2022). This

promotes a sense of belonging to a given group and contributes to identity construction and cultural continuity (Nomishan et al., 2023).

At the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH, five broad domains in which the ICH manifests were proposed. This includes Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage; Performing arts; Social practices, rituals, and festive events; Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and Traditional craftsmanship (Nomishan and Sani, 2023).

Considering the aspect of the identification of the heritage component, Nomishan (2023) notes that “the instances of intangible cultural heritage are not limited to a single manifestation and as such, may assemble elements from multiple domains”. A clear explanation of what each domain entails is provided by UNESCO (1992-2022). Romagnoli (2019) stated that:

“Heritage is far more complex, and its conception, interpretation and expressions by different cultures are so diverse that UNESCO recognizes that the boundaries between domains are extremely fluid and often vary from community to community (UNESCO, 2019). For this reason, it is possible to ‘tick’ several domains in the nomination file, and it is interesting to note that an extra domain (the sixth) is provided. This is what UNESCO calls ‘further domains’ or ‘new subcategories to existing domains’ and for which it provides a few examples, i.e., traditional play and games, culinary traditions, animal husbandry, pilgrimage and places of memory. At this point, we intend to introduce the broad concept and the recent patrimonialization(s) of food heritage by UNESCO. Food heritage comprises knowledge of food and culinary skills that communities consider as their shared legacies and common social practices. It encompasses a wide range of sociocultural aspects, from agricultural products, different dishes and cooking utensils, to manners of eating, drinking and sharing meals (Bessière & Tibère, 2010).”

Thus, the term gastronomy is derived from two Greek words, *gaster* (stomach) and *nomas* (law), and has been defined in many sources as the interaction of components related to food and beverage. Gastronomy differentiates a destination (country or region) by food, beverages, culinary and eating habits, ingredients, food preparation techniques, and presentation traditions (Vrasida et al., 2020). Gastronomy and culinary traditions encompass everything about the relationship between food and culture and the characteristic style of preparing food, often associated with a place of origin.

Romagnoli (2019) stressed that “In 2010, the Traditional Mexican Cuisine, the Mediterranean diet and the Gastronomic Meal of the French were inscribed on the

Representative List of the ICH of Humanity. These inscriptions represented a step forward in UNESCO's recognition of new heritage categories and, more specifically, the consideration of gastronomy about its symbolic, identity, and ritual role in societies. From 2010, more gastronomic elements made it to the List".

Following the above, this paper becomes very important and timely, as it seeks to present an interrogatory discourse on Nigerian gastronomy and/or culinary practices that have little or no presence in academic and policy discussions. The paper also discusses the various ways in which gastronomic practices impact tourism development in Nigeria.

2. METHODOLOGY

As indicated immediately above, gastronomic practices in Nigeria have gained little or no presence in academic and policy discussions over time. This has made this paper strategic, as it seeks to uncover various aspects of these gastronomic practices and explain how they can contribute to tourism development in the country. To achieve this aim, the researchers adopted an exploratory research design using key informant interview methods as a data collection tool. The sample data were obtained through field surveys (using semi-structured interviews) conducted intermittently between July 2019 to November 2022.

A total of 120 respondents including men and women from the age range of 18 to 90 years, cutting across academics, civil/public servants, artisans, businessmen/women, tourists, community leaders, farmers, and students, were selected and interviewed based on their knowledge of gastronomy or culinary practices in the selected communities. The interview cuts across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria in selected sections of states such as Kaduna and Katsina in the north-west, Adamawa and Taraba in the north-east, Benue and Abuja in the north-central, Anambra and Imo in the south-east, Lagos and Osun in the south-west, and Rivers and Cross River in the south-south.

The respondents were asked questions about specific gastronomic and culinary practices in their communities. The respondents were also asked about the modes of preparation of these cuisines and how they are consumed. Each interview session lasted for about one to two hours.

Content analysis was used in analysing data collected from the Interviews. The analysis of the data was done manually and commenced when all the data from the interviews had been transcribed by the researchers. It was thematically organized and then analysed using content analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gastronomy Brands in Nigeria

Nigeria has a wide range of culinary and cuisine practices. These consist of dishes or food items associated with the over 250 ethnic groups that comprise Nigeria (Oyibo, 2020). This is because every ethnic group is associated with a particular cuisine that is cherished by all members of such groups. Many of these culinary and cuisines share some similarities with those of the other West African and Central African neighbours, such as Ghana, Benin, and Cameroon. At the heart of this cuisine are products such as starchy foods such as yam, cassava, plantains, rice, and beans, which are prominent in the Nigerian diet.

They are usually consumed alongside a wide array of delicate soups and stews in which different types of meat and vegetables are added. Popular meats include beef, goat, lamb, chicken, and turkey, while some of the most widely consumed vegetables are fluted pumpkin leaves (popularly called *ugwu*), African spinach, water leaves, bitter leaves, pumpkin leaves, bitter melon leaves, and jute leaves, among many others. Other ingredients may include seasonings such as ground African crayfish, pepper, palm and groundnut oils, and local maggi/cubes.

According to the FMIC (2023), the major traditional dishes and delicacies that have become national heritage include Edikaikong, Okoho, Fufu, Tuwo, Akpu, Suya, Kilishi, Gbegeri, Owo, Bush meat, Fura de nunu, Kunu, Amala, Eba, and Pounded yam, among others. A brief explanation of these dishes is given as follows:

Edikaikong: also referred to as Edikang Ikong Soup, originated among the Efik people of Cross River and Akwa Ibom States in South-south Nigeria. It is a highly nutritious, delicious, and savoury vegetable soup natively prepared using fluted pumpkin leaves and malabar spinach (locally called water leaf in Nigeria). Edikaikong is sometimes served on important occasions. Like most soups from these coastal regions, Edikaikong dish comes loaded with various seafood delicacies such as the periwinkles (being a regular staple) and 'obstacles' (Nigerian slang for the preponderance of assorted meat cuts Nigerians love to feature in their soups), elevating this soup to a Nutritious adventure into the green, coastal depths of Cross Rivers culture (Agbenson, 2014).

Genger: Genger is a traditional and highly respected soup of the Tiv of Central Nigeria. It is derived from the blossom buds of the genger tree. The buds are selected, and their petals are separated, while the shell is dried thoroughly until it turns brown. The dried buds are then ground into a powder, which is then used to prepare genger soup. The tree is predominantly found in Tivland with a limited presence in other parts of Nigeria. Within the Tivland, it is found in great quantities in Konshisha, Gwer East, Gboko, Vandeikya, and Tarkaa. Genger is a seasonal soup that comes from late November to early April every year.

This means that once the rains set in, the ginger loses its delicious flavour. One of the respondents stated that:

“A rich and tasty ginger soup takes approximately two hours to cook. This is due to the numerous complexities and ingredients that go into its preparation. Aside from its sweetness and deliciousness, ginger soup also has certain medical benefits. According to sources, consuming ginger soup aids in the healing of wounds (both in the stomach and on the outside of the body)” (E. Dooyum, Personal Communication, August 22, 2021).”

Another respondent, T.K. Apine (Personal Communication, August 22, 2022) noted that “this traditional soup can assist in sharpening one's mind and strengthen one's immune system”. It is proudly and gladly served to visitors all over Tivland.

Fufu: Fufu, which is also spelt foofoo or foufou, is unarguably one of the most famous West African ‘swallow’ foods. It is a hearty side dish that is starchy, silky, dense, and stretchy and is adored since it is scrumptious, straightforward, filling, and simple to make. Furthermore, because of African migration, the Caribbean also enjoys this popular African food. In preparing fufu, a portion of fermented cassava is boiled, mashed, and formed into balls; the pounding procedure, which frequently uses a mortar and pestle, can be laborious and time-consuming. Fufu is frequently served with stews of meat, fish, or vegetables or dipped into sauces (Siciliano-Rosen, 2014).

Tuwo Shinkafa: This is a Northern Nigerian fufu recipe called Tuwo Shinkafa, made from a soft rice variety. Typical accompaniments include Northern Nigerian soups such as Miyan Kuka and Miyan Taushe, among others. According to Y. Adamu (Personal Communication, July 06, 2019), “Tuwo shinkafa complements other Nigerian soups.” When cooked, the soft form of rice known as ‘Tuwo Shinkafa’ turns sticky. This makes it simpler to mash the grains into a mass of fufu.

Suya: Suya or tsire is a traditional smoked spicy pork skewer from Hausa Land in Northern Nigeria that is famous throughout West Africa. Suya (sometimes spelt Soya) is an important aspect of Hausa culture and gastronomy, and it is historically produced and cooked by Hausa men, who are referred to as ‘Mai nama’ (Eke, 2013). Suya is traditionally made from skewers of beef, ram, or chicken (AnnArbor, 2012). Organ meats such as kidney, liver, and tripe are most preferred in preparing suya. The thinly sliced meat is marinated in several spices, including ‘kwulikwuli,’ a traditional Hausa dehydrated peanut biscuit, salt, vegetable oil, and other spices and flavourings, before being barbecued. One of the respondents, (a suya trader in Abuja) narrated that:

“Suya has various variations in traditional Hausa cooking, such as Balangu and Kilishi, but the most common is suya. He added that suya is

typically served with an extra dried pepper mixture, traditional Hausa spices, and sliced onions. It is also usually eaten with Hausa Masa (fermented rice/grain/corn cakes) in Hausa culture” (M.m. Abdul, Personal Communication, July 06, 2019).”

Halal meat preparation procedures are typically utilized, particularly in northern Nigeria, where it originated, as is customary with traditional Hausa cuisines, where suspicion of nonconformity to Muslim dietary regulations in Suya cooking has been known to spark riots (France-Presse, 2012). M.A. Bello (Personal Communication, October 24, 2019) narrated that:

“Kilishi means a dried form of Suya. It can be eaten with Masa, Kosai, Garri, and Ogi. The complex mixture of spices and additives that comprise the Suya marinade (called Yaji) and the spice mix served alongside it has no set recipe.”

Personal and geographical tastes may influence the ingredients. Although Suya is a traditional Hausa Nigerian cuisine, it has permeated Nigerian society, as it is inexpensive and widely available. It has been said to have become a unifying element in Nigeria.

Gbegeri: Gbegeri, also referred to as abula, is a kind of Nigerian soup that is popular among the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria. P.C. Folashade, (Personal Communication, April 12, 2021) was of the opinion that gbegeri is prepared using cooked peeled beans and is frequently served at Buka eateries. According to her, gbegeri is smooth, silky, and mildly flavoured. It normally looks like baby food, but it comes alive when you add Ewedu Soup and meat from your Beef and chicken Stew. Research shows that individuals who aren’t used to eating soup cooked with beans struggle to get used to Gbegeri Soup. It is served with ewedu and buka stew. The mix of the Gbegeri Soup, ewedu soup and buka stew will undoubtedly tantalize and test your palate (Myactivekitchen, 2020).

Owo: The Urhobo people of south-south Nigeria are the originators of the traditional soup or sauce known as owo. However, due to its widespread consumption, many other South-Southern ethnic groups, including the Benin-Bini, Delta people, Itsekhiri, Ijaw, and Isoko, also eat the soup. This soup is prepared with a palm oil and potash mixture, after which some type of carb or starch, which may be sifted garri, edible starch, or yam that has been soaked in water, is added. Fish, Banga oil, meat, crayfish, palm oil, potash, and other ingredients are also used when garri is added to palm oil that has been thickened with potash. Other items, such as bush meat, are occasionally used as well. The Urhobo people nearly always serve it at festivities.

Bush meat: Traditionally, bushmeat is meat acquired from wildlife species that are hunted for human consumption. In Africa, this is commonly referred to as game meat. Poached animals include pangolins, elephants, gorillas, antelopes, grasscutters, porcupines,

crocodiles, and turtles, among others, and their meat is consumed by humans. Some are even sold while still alive. It is a primary source of animal protein as well as a cash-earning product for people living in humid tropical forest regions of Africa, Latin America, and Asia (Nasi et al., 2008). Bushmeat is a key food source for people in Nigeria's rural zones (Bennett et al., 2007). The number of animals killed and trafficked as bushmeat in West and Central Africa in the 1990s was deemed to be unsustainable. In 2005, the harvesting and trafficking of bushmeat were deemed a danger to biodiversity. As of 2016, 301 terrestrial mammals in developing nations were threatened with extinction owing to bushmeat hunting, including primates, even-toed ungulates, bats, diprotodon marsupials, rodents, and carnivores. Following the linkage of bushmeat to zoonotic diseases such as monkeypox, Ebola, Lassa fever, and even COVID-19 and the fact that Nigeria's wildlife population remains threatened, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dr Mohammad Abubakar, on Tuesday, May 31, 2022, directed hunters and dealers in bush meat in the country to stop the business (The Sun, 2022). Despite this caution, research shows that there is still a growing market for bushmeat, endangering the well-being of a variety of wildlife in the region.

Fura de nunu: Fura (fula) is a traditional West African gruel drink prepared from millet balls (fura) and cow milk (nono). The milk is typically fermented and extremely thick. Fura is traditionally offered in spherical balls, giving rise to the term fura balls. It is best taken with milk, which is why it is known as fura da nono (fura and milk). Fura da nono is one of Nigeria's many popular native drinks. The drink originated in the country's north, but it is now consumed in every corner of the country and even beyond. What makes fura da nono special is not just its sweet taste but also how healthful it is. Fura and nono do not require any processing. This helps the drink retain the minerals found in millet and milk, ensuring its high content. Although fura danono is a food drink with a potentially tremendous source of nutraceutical properties compared to other regularly consumed food drinks, it is highly underexplored academically (Musa and Adjene, 2021).

Kunu: Kunu (also known as kununzaki) is a popular drink in Nigeria, particularly in the northern part of the country. It is typically prepared from grains such as millet or sorghum, although it can also be produced from maize. The kunu made from sorghum is a milky light-brown colour, but the kunu made from millet and maize is yellowish in colour. A kunu seller in Makurdi, P.L. Ember and A.M. Zainab (Personal Communication, December 28, 2022) posits that:

“Kunu is made by germinating grain seeds and then soaking them in water for a few days before combining the soaked grain with sweet potatoes, ginger, or pepper to produce a smooth paste. After the above, the paste is divided into two halves. One portion is dumped into a vessel

with boiling water and stirred to create a thick slurry. The remaining paste was then added to this mixture and mixed again. The combination is then kept for a day or two to allow the grain husk to settle. Following that, the husk and other particles are filtered out of the combination, and the filtered liquid is bottled for consumption.”

This sort of kunu is known as 'kunu zaki', and it contains sugar. There are various varieties of kunu; depending on the ingredient, it may be kunu gyada (rice), kunu aya (tiger nut, coconut, and dates), or kunu zaki (millet).

Amala: Amala is a staple food for swallowing and the traditional cuisine of the Yoruba ethnic group in southwestern Nigeria. It is produced from unripe plantain, cassava, or yam (Ferris et al., 1995). Yam tubers are the most commonly used tubers for the production of amala. They are cleaned, cut into slices, dried, and then processed into flour. It is also known as elubo in the Yoruba language. Amala comes in different colours depending on the type of flour used in preparing it (whether it is yam, cassava, or plantain). Amala is often available in three varieties: yam flour (amala isu), cassava flour (amala lafun), and plantain flour (amala ogede). It is a common side dish served with ewedu and gbegiri (black-eyed bean soup) but is also served with a range of other soups, such as efo ila and ogbono.

Eba: Eba, also called Utara (in the Igbo language) or Pinon in Togo, Benin, and southern Ghana, is a type of cooked starchy vegetable prepared from dried grated cassava (manioc) flour, also known as garri. It is a very popular staple swallow food from Nigeria. Many other West African ethnic groups and other Africans also consume eba. The Yoruba people of southwest Nigeria are the originators of the term eba. Small balls of Eba or Utara are typically wrapped up and served with thick soups such as okra, bitter leaf, ogbono/apon, ewedu, meat or fish, stewed vegetables, or various sauces such as gbegiri, amiedi (banga soup), or egusi soup, among others. In West Africa, there are two kinds of garri (white and yellow) used for preparing eba. Yellow garri is made by frying it with palm oil to give it a yellowish colour, whereas white garri is fried without palm oil. Whichever type of garri is chosen, an eba is prepared by adding hot water to a bowl and then sprinkling garri into the water. It is dispersed uniformly by turning it together with a wooden spatula or spoon until it becomes smooth and lump-free.

Pounded yam: Pounded yam, also known as Iyan (Yoruba) or Ruam-Yo (Tiv), is one of Nigeria's most popular swallow delicacies, native to the Yoruba, Igbo, and Tiv ethnic groups (Theonlinecook, 2022). P.K. Apine and S.W. Kenger (Personal Communication, November 22, 2021) explained that:

“In preparing pounded yam, the yam is neatly peeled and cut into sizable pieces, rinsed and boiled for approximately 30 minutes until it becomes very soft. Once the yam is sufficiently boiled, it is removed from the fire

and pounded using a mortar and pestle. Pounding is a quick action that continues until the yam being pounded is very smooth and dough-like in nature. A new yam does not require much pounding to get smooth, and neither does it stay much on fire to become soft. The one that requires much boiling and pounding is the fully matured and dried yam, which is harvested in the dry season between December and February.”

Additionally, cooked yam is pounded using a mortar and pestle. Pounded yam is a smooth and flavourful delicacy that is often served with hearty soups. It is a popular dish among most Nigerians. Pounded yam is popular in Nigerian states such as Ondo, Edo, Benue, and Ekiti. It goes well with hearty soups such as egusi, leaves soup (ewedu), stewed spinach or okra soup, and agee or okoho soup.

Okoho: This traditional food is peculiar to the Idoma people of Benue State in Central Nigeria. It is prepared from the plant *Cissus populnea*, which is a member of the Vitaceae family Ampelidaceae (S.L. Odoh and K.O. Ojonye, Personal Communication, November 19, 2021). It is a soup made from the slimy Okoho stick. The best accompaniment is pounded yam (also known as Onihi), which is typically made with bush meat (such as grass-cutter, alligator, smoked meat, etc.). It can also be consumed with yam flour, semolina, and eba made from garri (Ibrahim et al., 2011). Typically, this soup is prepared without the use of oil. Okoho soup is well known for its healing properties. It is also the most revered and in-demand dish at all Idoma celebrations, including formal marriages, funeral rites, birthday parties, and other celebrations. Okoho soup is well known for its medicinal properties and for helping with digestion (S.L. Odoh and K.O. Ojonye, Personal Communication, November 19, 2021). The stick is called Agee by the Tiv, Ajara or Orogbolo by the Yoruba tribes of Central and Southern Nigeria, but it is also called Okoho by other Nigerian tribes, including the Igbo and Igala, while the Hausa refer to it as Dafara (Ibrahim et al., 2011). The gastronomy brands presented above are not a comprehensive representation of Nigerian people's food or cuisines. As indicated in the introduction, Nigeria has a diverse range of gastronomic practices. As a result, the purpose of this paper is simply to start a conversation on the fascinating but underappreciated ICH of Nigeria's hundreds of ethnic groups. For example, among the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria, several cuisines exist, such as koko/kosai, kunu, dan wake, destiny, taliya, sobo, and alkaki. The Igbo also has a variety of foods, including abacha, echicha, isi ewu, moin moin, palm wine, ukwa, and fio fio, among others. Yoruba cuisine includes akara, ikokore, adalu, moin moin, jollof rice, efo riro, ofada rice, and asun. The Tiv people, on the other hand, have cuisines such as ruam, gbaa-yo (roasted yam), burukutu, pocho, atuu sha nase, ager, nune, and vambe, among many others.

Tourism Potentials of Gastronomy Brands in Nigeria

Gastronomy tourism has an important potential to enhance tourist attraction and help the marketing and sustainability of the tourism industry (Global Tourism Forum, 2023). Because the culture of food consumption is one of the main characteristics of humans, they become more interested in places where there is assorted food to support their lives. It is also a natural characteristic that after an exhaustive task, humans eat to regain energy for a new task.

In tourism, people turn to be very mobile, walking across tourist attractions and sometimes involving different territories, and because this happens for a short time, there is full attention given to all tourism exercises by almost all stakeholders. Thus, food consumption becomes inevitable and at the heart of all tourism exercises. Some tourists are particularly interested in testing new foods during tour exercises. Additionally, because a tour happens outside of one's usual environment, there is usually an important need to give food tourism special consideration, hence the concept of gastronomy tourism.

According to Richards & Hjalager (2002), gastronomy has a very significant role to play in the promotion of tourism activities not only because food is central to the tourist experience but also because gastronomy has become a significant source of identity formation in postmodern societies. Chatzinakos (2016) thinks that:

"In a world characterized by structural changes, social mobility and globalization processes, tourism has undergone major changes. Over the past decade, the ever-increasing competition between tourist destinations has led to the development of unconventional and extraordinary attractions to catch the attention of prospective visitors (WTTC, 2015). In turn, it is claimed that modern tourists are interested in those destinations with which they can connect through highly personalized and authentic experiences: destinations where travellers can feel themselves to be in touch with the 'real' world and the 'real selves' (Handler & Saxton, 1988). To this effect, among the various trends that are located in postmodern tourism, gastronomy and culinary tradition can be seen as key factors in its development and promotion (Guzmán & Cañizares, 2012)."

Therefore, it is impossible to overstate the importance of gastronomy in the growth of tourism. Food has become an essential component of the travel experience as a result of recent efforts made by tourism companies to replace restaurant meals with a "culinary experience." One part of this experience is serving food to tourists. The entire concept is around introducing tourists to the local culture through the use of colours, fragrances, and flavours. Moving on, the tourism sector quickly saw that local cuisines needed to broaden their horizons to improve the visitor experience (Vrasida et al., 2020).

To this end, gastronomy works hard to uphold the general standards, norms, and values that govern all food and beverage-related activities in a destination. This component of gastronomy assures the protection and preservation of a destination's food legacy. Even though it is an ICH, its ability to oversee the treatment of gastronomic heritage in a location makes its value comparable to those of archaeological and historical monuments. It has since become a part of the social, economic, political and cultural structure of a society. Therefore, since most tourists are interested in the cultural heritage of the host communities (Hendra et al., 2021), gastronomy becomes a great factor in destination marketing.

Furthermore, gastronomy tourism is much more than just cuisines or culinary practices. Tourism, cultural heritage, and agriculture are all intertwined. Different geographical regions of the world provide different products (fruits and vegetables, various animals for meat), and societies construct their cuisines based on what their relationship with the environment around them can provide. These traditions, cooking techniques and tastes are passed down through generations and become part of the cultural legacy. These factors contribute to a destination's attractiveness and allow it to be positioned and marketed as a gastronomy tourism destination.

Anyone who travels hopes to see new locations, learn about new cultures and sample new foods and activities. They expect new delicacies as well as exotic and local flavours when visiting a destination. There is a link between tourists who enjoy wine and food and those who enjoy museums, shopping, festivals, shows, and leisure activities. According to the United Nations World Travel Association, food and beverage expenses account for 30% of total tourism revenue. It should be noted that 88% of tourists believe that cuisine is highly significant in their destination decision.

To sample a special local delight, watching the creation process of special foods, visiting restaurants, festivals, and food producers, and studying different food production techniques or tasty cuisine cooked by a famous chef constitute the primary motivators of gastronomy tourism. Tourists like indigenous food, especially items of a local or ethnic type (Wagner, 2001). People are interested in local, regional, and national cuisine in today's globalized world. They are interested in learning more about indigenous culinary traditions. In this way, gastronomy and culinary heritage can be characterized as destination branding methods (Kalpaklioglu, 2022).

Kalpaklioglu (2022) emphasized that because gastronomy has a significant potential to increase tourist attractiveness and aid in the marketing and sustainability of tourism, local and regional foods must be studied and adapted to modern cuisines in a balanced manner. Local foods have been adapted to suit the tastes of international tourists in several places. However, this sometimes results in the extinction of traditional culinary practices and tastes.

As outlined above, many gastronomy products in Nigeria can be studied and adapted into modern cuisine to improve tourists' experience. This can also lead to the conscious development of the many cultural heritage sites that are scattered all over Nigeria into cultural tourism attractions to enable the speedy promotion of gastronomy tourism in Nigeria. The promotion of cultural tourism in Nigeria will benefit the nation and its citizens in different ways. It will create or rebrand ethnic and national identities while also boosting the economy of the nation (Nomishan et al., 2020).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Gastronomy tourism, besides being the most important means of economic development, is also the most significant part of the rapidly developing cultural tourism market. Much recent research has emphasized that the culinary culture of a target destination influences a significant part of the travel experience. Travelling to experience new and unbelievable food, wine and other inimitable local gastronomy assets of another region is becoming a great motivating factor for destination choice for many tourists.

The fact that 30% of all tourism money is spent on food and drink expenses is a significant element in drawing academic attention to gastronomy tourism in Africa and Nigeria in particular. This can be accomplished by giving the required attention to the cultural tourism unit of Nigeria's tourism sector. This is because the development of the cultural tourism unit of the country's tourism industry would automatically result in the repositioning of the cuisines and culinary practices of all Nigerian ethnic groups.

Many communities in the world develop cultural tourism attractions and then use gastronomy products to draw tourists to their destinations. This is possible because tourists are interested in sampling special local delights, watching the creation process of special foods, visiting restaurants, festivals, and food producers, and studying different food production techniques or tasty special cuisines in destinations. This influences tourists' decision to travel to a particular location.

Gastronomic brands such as presented above have the potential to poll tourists to designated tourism destinations in Nigeria. Genger is a special occasional delicacy among the Tiv people which possesses the potential to influence a tourist's choice of a destination. Invitations to occasions such as traditional marriages and festivals in Tivland are readily considered by prospective visitors once there is a mention of gener soup. This can be utilised for tourism development and promotion in Tivland. This is the same as the suya, which is a general delicacy of all Nigerians especially those in the northern part of the country. Mentioning suya while inviting a friend on an outing gets them prepared at once.

This is because of the seeming cultural importance of suya to the people of Nigeria and other African nations.

Pounded yam and bush meat are among the most preferred delicacies by many African people including other parts of the world. One of the respondents told the researchers that:

“He was a well-travelled person and in his travel experience, he came across many people who were interested in the Tiv society because of the pounded yam and bush meat delicacies found there. He believes that these delicacies have the potential of polling millions of tourists from all over the world to Nigeria if properly managed.”

The above represent many other cases of delicious native delicacies that possess the potential for tourists’ attraction as already presented earlier in this article.

Therefore, adopting gastronomy tourism will play a significant role in the development and promotion of the tourism industry in Nigeria because local food experiences are traditionally linked to the places visited. Thus, with a focus on food as a cultural reference point, it is possible to combine the efforts of producers and tour operators to contribute to regional development and tourism advancement in Nigeria.

If gastronomy tourism is created and managed properly, it will offer much more than just cuisine to the Nigerian tourism industry. This is because gastronomy represents distinct peoples and their cultures, histories, customs, and feelings. It will enhance cultural understanding and promote a sense of belonging while also bringing together different Nigerian cultures and traditions. This will thus lead to the growth of gastronomy tourism into a significant cultural heritage guardian, thereby helping to offer opportunities such as employment, economic expansion and diversification, infrastructural development and the inducement of high consumption resulting in increased commercial activities, particularly in rural areas, among many others.

However, this study does not represent all the gastronomic brands that are practised in Nigeria. It is a sampled study resulting from pioneer research on the subject of food heritage and gastronomic tourism in Nigeria. The researchers call for further research engagement on the subject to enable a comprehensive understanding of the food heritage of the Nigerian people.

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