

# Gastronomic tourism, factors that affect the competitiveness of restaurants in Zacatecas, México

## Turismo gastronómico, factores que afectan la competitividad de los restaurantes en Zacatecas, México

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism has been the sector most affected by the current pandemic, resulting in job loss and the closure of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME's). This research paper aims to determine the factors that can help restaurants to be more competitive in the face of a health crisis. The study was carried out in the City of Zacatecas, Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and the magical town of Guadalupe, located in the state of Zacatecas of the Mexican Republic. Based on the literature review, it was constructed the «resources» latent variable measured by five questions and «capabilities» through six items. For the hypothesis test, an analysis of structural equations of maximum likelihood was carried out. The results show that the businesses that promote food with authenticity and adherence to the customs of the region can increase their competitiveness.

**Keywords:** resources, capabilities, structural equations, business, development.

### RESUMEN

El turismo ha sido el sector más afectado por la actual pandemia, lo que ha provocado la pérdida de puestos de trabajo y el cierre de pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYMES). Este trabajo de investigación tiene como objetivo determinar los factores que pueden ayudar a los restaurantes a ser más competitivos ante una crisis sanitaria. El estudio se realizó en la Ciudad de Zacatecas, Patrimonio Cultural de la Humanidad, y el pueblo mágico de Guadalupe, ubicados en el estado de Zacatecas de la República Mexicana. Con base en la revisión de la literatura, se construyó la variable latente «recursos» medida a través de cinco preguntas y «capacidades»

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a través de seis ítems. Para la prueba de hipótesis se realizó un análisis de ecuaciones estructurales de máxima verosimilitud. Los resultados muestran que las empresas que promueven alimentos con autenticidad y adhesión a las costumbres de la región pueden aumentar su competitividad.

**Palabras clave:** recursos, capacidades, ecuaciones estructurales, negocios, desarrollo.

## Introduction

Globally, the service sector includes hotels, cafes, and restaurants; as well as cultural and recreational activities that account for more than 20% of the total employment (Piketty, 2014, p.108). The study of business related to gastronomic tourism is a very complex topic (Long, 2018), and an interesting field of study mainly because it combines historical, cultural, economic, social, artistic, environmental, and psychological aspects (Camarena, 2017; López & Sánchez, 2012; Peña et al., 2020). The restaurant food industry has been developing in a highly competitive environment in the tourism sector (Monroy & Urcádiz, 2019). Undoubtedly, tourism diversifies and energizes destinations (Orden et al., 2017), in this sense in the Mexican Republic it is considered an activity influencing development economic and social. Among the centers most visited by tourists are the colonial cities rich in cultural heritage (Cuevas et al., 2017). In this work, an analysis of cultural tourism is carried out (Carvache et al., 2018), specifically on the sub-segment of gastronomic, culinary, and or traditional food tourism, all three concepts are used indistinctly in this document. The study of tourism is relatively new, according to Acerenza (2014, p. 25) it began in Latin America in the 1970s. For Ascanio (2017, p. 13) it was in the eighties and nineties, another contribution is from Panosso and Lohmann (2012, p. 9) who point out it was important until the 1990. For its part Camarena (2017) specifies that it was in the year of 1986 when the relationship between tourism and gastronomy was determined by establishing that food is relevant in cultural and natural aspects; so, it is considered that gastronomy is a key and fundamental aspect for a tourist attraction (Prieto & Triana, 2019; Reyes et al., 2017).

According to López and Sánchez (2012) travelers look for different places to find new experiences, hence the importance of the study of culinary tourism; which is pointed out in the literature as the first variable of motivation for traveling (Panosso & Lohmann, 2012, p. 56). 88.2% of tourists considered traditional food as an important component in the selection of the destination (Long, 2018; World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] & Basque Culinary Center [BCC], 2019), so gastronomy is one of the factors most valued by visitors (Carvache et al., 2018; Kido et al., 2018; López et al., 2016; UNWTO & BCC, 2019). From this perspective, tourism currently requires strategic planning oriented in the long term, with emphasis on improving the operation of development of companies dedicated to serving the visitor, as is the case of gastronomic business or restaurants. Mexico is an important destination with anthropological, natural, and cultural attractions; therefore, gastronomic tourism is an essential part of the local life of the inhabitants of the country (López et al., 2016; Prieto & Triana, 2019; UNWTO & BCC, 2019). Above enriches the visitor's experience and causes the number of people who come to these destinations to know and taste the gastronomy. Every day, three out of ten tourists visit a destination to experience culinary art (Clemente et al., 2008). With the development of mass tourism,

gastronomy acquired relevance because it was considered a factor that influenced the attraction of tourists (Aguirregoitia & Fernández, 2017). In addition, Betancourt et al. (2014) specifically point out that restaurants are an important activity because it is one of the main reasons for families to start a business.

The objective of this study is to determine the variables that impact the competitiveness of restaurants in the City of Zacatecas and the magical town of Guadalupe, which are both located in the State of Zacatecas of the Mexican Republic. This document is structured first with an analysis of the challenges faced by restaurants during the pandemic. In the second part, the literature review is presented, and the methodology is exposed. Lastly, the third part contains the results, the discussion, and finally, the conclusions are presented.

## Literature review

### Challenges for restaurants in the face of the pandemic

It is a reality that to date there is a lack of studies regarding gastronomic tourism (UNWTO & BCC, 2019), in recent years progress has been made in the knowledge of this important tourism sub-segment while scientific research in this area is still limited (Camarena, 2017; Carvache et al., 2018; López, et al., 2016). The main challenges of gastronomic tourism are the abandonment of farmland as well as the deterioration of flora and fauna. For its part, Acerenza (2014, p. 67) found that the destruction of ecosystems and water pollution are listed as problems, especially when there is no tourism planning. According to Long (2018) culinary tourism causes harmful impacts on local environments, for examples it can modify the cultural heritage of the communities and cause a lack of natural resources such as water. Another difficulty is the change in family alimentation like the consumption not healthy food by child's (junk food), due to the incorporation of mothers into the paid work and the lack of transmission of gastronomic practices between generations (Reyes et al., 2017).

In the classical literature regarding service companies, the most notable problem is the monotony in the activities that accompany these jobs, which leads to high levels of employee turnover (Hopeman, 1982, p. 88). According to Panosso and Lohmann (2012, p. 73) another of the difficulty faced by organizations related to the tourism sector, is the lack of communication and articulation regarding projects and development. There is a difference between the interest of the public administration and private companies, which do not reach cooperation agreements causing difficulties in the productive development of companies, especially the smaller ones. The Productivity problem of gastronomic tourism organizations is the basic lack of knowledge regarding the functions of the administration and the understanding of the importance of the competitiveness of the businesses (Arana et al., 2018). Acerenza (2014, p. 67) points out that the managerial inability to direct tourism companies as well as the lack of skilled labor for the provision of services contributes to the lack of company development.

Espinosa et al. (2019) write that restaurants have deficiencies in equipment, as well as difficulty in acquiring goods, insufficiencies in technological equipment of kitchens, and lack variety in the food. They also point out that there is customer dissatisfaction, due to the high-fat content in food and the amounts of sugar in desserts, which has an impact on the health of diners. For their part, López and Sánchez (2012) point out that what needs to be improved in the tourism gastronomy sector is innovation and the variety of dishes.

Economic and epidemiological crises such as the COVID-19, have seriously affected restaurants. In addition to this, the author Durón (2014, p. 27) points out, that the lack of business awareness, ignorance of cost, financial losses, labor difficulties, high rent prices, lack of customers, and poor planning are variables that cause the exit of restaurants from the market. According to the literature review, another difficulty faced by entrepreneurs that have impacted competitiveness, is the owner's poor educational level (Rubio & Baz, 2005, p. 17), as well as the limited levels of schooling of employees (Correa, 2017, p. 19), which detracts from the value of the service process. A core aspect of the tertiary sector, is the salary received by people such as waiters, which is generally low and mostly women (Piketty, 2014, p. 305). An example is that in rural areas the local population settles for low-paying jobs which explain the lack of work (Cuevas et al., 2017).

Another aspect that affects the performance of restaurants is the lack of control that have over the purchases and sales they make (Correa, 2017, p. 19). Monroy and Urcádiz (2019) points out that in the restaurant industry business is competitive, however they lack a system that allows for measuring customer satisfaction and quality of service. Arana et al. (2018) argue that in the restaurant sector there is inadequate communication and a lack of customer-oriented vision which results in poor planning and restaurants do not have structured or systematic plans to evaluate, identify and provide continuity to their processes. Peña et al., (2020) highlights that among the main problems are the scarcity of economic resources, the difficulty of accessing financing for companies (Correa, 2017), as well as the seasonality of tourism, which is one of the most difficult problems to solve (Panosso & Lohmann, 2012, p. 83).

The gastronomic tourist it is complex to analyze and quantify their decisions, explained by their changing tastes as well as the difficulty to understand their behavior and their motivations (Ascanio, 2017, p. 38). It is a fundamental factor to analyze, because tourists have the opinions and knowledge regarding gastronomy, they also demand greater specialization of the service (Torres, 2008, p. 133). Based on the above analysis, it can be argued that to date there is a lack of studies regarding companies in the gastronomic sector and that the restaurants face various problems that affect their productivity and put at risk their permanence in the market. Therefore, the following research question arises: What are the resources and capabilities that affect the competitiveness of restaurants in Zacatecas, México?

### **Conceptualization of gastronomic tourism**

For Panosso and Lohmann (2012, p. 56) the term gastronomy has its origin in a poem from the fourth century B.C. called *Gastronome*, which means «about food», currently the concept refers to the art of cooking. According to Reyes et al. (2017) the word gastronomy is derived from the word «*gastro*», which means stomach, and from the word «*nomos*», which refers to the knowledge of the food that is ingested.

The UNWTO (2019) defines gastronomic tourism as: «a type of tourism activity that is characterized by activities experienced by the traveler, and the products related to the gastronomy of the place». It can include authentic traditional culinary experiences and visits of local producers (UNWTO & BCC, 2019, p. 8). Another perspective is from Clemente et al. (2008) who point out that culinary tourism has the goal of knowing and

enjoying the gastronomy of a particular destination. For López et al. (2016) gastronomic tourism implies a transfer of knowledge and information regarding the culture and traditions of the place.

Gastronomic tourism is characterized by travelers who visit a particular destination to experience various types of traditional foods and drinks that are related to civil or cultural festivals in town (Ibañez & Cabrera, 2011). Another contribution is from Prieto and Triana (2019) who define food tourism as the trip people make to consume symbols typical of a certain place. From the economic approach, the essential part of culinary tourism is the businesses that offer food, which is important for this activity to be carried out. According to Ascanio (2017) the restaurants are defined as food and beverage companies that emerge with urban development and are classified as bars, cafes, tea rooms, breweries, pizzerias, inns, and taverns. For the authors Zárraga et al. (2018) the restaurants industry is made up of cafeterias, sodas fountains, the preparation of snacks, tacos, and large chains. Restaurants are perhaps the most obvious destination for food tourism (Long, 2018) and are open to anyone who shows interest in the food that is offered. According to the authors Aguirregoitia and Fernández (2017) restaurants are part of a tourist product that is used to satisfy travelers and reinforce the authenticity of the destination.

For Vera and Trujillo (2017) the conceptualization of the restaurant tends to consider everything is related to the product's tangible aspects and the service's intangible aspects. Both influence on the consumer's purchase decision. According to UNWTO and BCC (2019), one-third of a tourist's spending goes to purchasing food, therefore creating value for the entire chain, including the producer on the field, suppliers and even the image of a country. From the previous discussion, in this research work, gastronomic tourism is conceptualized as the trip made by tourist where the main experience is to try and enjoy food, with attachment to the customs of the region to taste the traditional symbols with local identity.

### **Importance of restaurants in gastronomic tourism**

Globally, according to Torres (2008, p. 133) the service sector is relevant because it generates three quarters of the jobs in a destination. Local and regional gastronomy contributes to improving the competitiveness of SME's of the region, so culinary tourism has positioned itself as a branch of cultural tourism that raises the development and benefits of both tourists and inhabitants (Correa, 2021; Durón, 2014, p. 8; Orden et al., 2017; Reyes et al., 2017). The study of companies in the tertiary sector is important because they have very efficient means to create jobs, generate growth (Prieto & Triana, 2019) as well as reduce poverty (Correa, 2021; Rubio & Baz, 2005, p. 9). However, the competitiveness of each company depends on internal resources and capacities (Correa, 2017; Fong et al., 2017).

According to Peña et al. (2020) companies and entrepreneurs are the main social actors for development, because they constitute the backbone of national economies with the generation of jobs and their contribution to production. Specifically, in the tourism sector, the gastronomy business is essential because they satisfy the consumption needs of food goods and services. They are the main actor in economic activity and therefore they are fundamental in attracting visitors. According to Durón (2014, p. 7) successful restaurants are those that provide adequate service, reasonable prices, and quality dishes, as well as an atmosphere according to the concept offered.

This research is focused on the study of restaurants from the theoretical approach of Resources and Capabilities, created by Edith Penrose in the decade of the 50s. Hence, the authors Betancourt et al. (2014) as well as Vera and Trujillo (2017) argues that these important economic units should be studied from the optic of tangible and intangible internal resources. Another important perspective is from Monroy and Urcádiz (2019) both authors point out that the tangible aspects and intangible factors of the restaurant's environment are related to the quality and the perception of value judgments and must be considered because it impacts the decisions of what to eat and where. Continuing with the analysis, for the authors Clemente et al. (2008) gastronomy is a tangible element that makes up the culture of a society and is an important tourist resource of the territory. For their part, Peña et al. (2020) argue that gastronomic tourism is a trigger for development and is constantly growing due to the motivation that have the visitors to taste the typical symbols of the region they want to know. For Camarena (2017) the improvement of services and customer service are fundamental in the competitiveness of each establishment and points out that the more original and authentic a restaurant is, the more it increases the chance for attraction and a greater number of tourists.

López et al. (2016) points out that businesses related to gastronomy to innovate their products, as well as improve service to increase competitiveness. For his part, Piketty (2014, p. 88) suggests that they require investments in employee training, as well as the development of technological knowledge. Therefore, it is considered necessary for restaurants to adopt new training models, based on the technological tools available to raise competitiveness (Porter, 2020, p. 16).

The authors Zárraga et al. (2018) provides that the most relevant variables in restaurants are the environment, the staff that attends, the schedules, facilities, furniture, and a variety of symbols. For Monroy and Urcádiz (2020) if customers are more satisfied with the services, they will be able to maintain an acceptable level of competitiveness and improve their advantage in the market. Another perspective is from Moreira et al. (2019) who writes that the aspects that are evaluated in restaurants are the quality of the food served, the diversity of the menu, the decoration of the place, the appearance of the employee and the tradition of the restaurant. For Betancourt et al. (2014) the geographical location of restaurants influences performance, as well as the external environment. Another perspective is that of Kido et al. (2018) who point out that the quality of service in the restaurant is a relevant variable that is related to customer satisfaction. Durón (2014, p. 35) agrees, because if customers are satisfied with the food and service, they will probably return and make positive comments to other people about their experience.

Competitiveness in business related to gastronomy implies the need to be innovative with products and services to provide greater added value (López & Sánchez, 2012) to the satisfaction of the tourist experience. Correa (2020a) finds that companies must implement technological infrastructure and use social networks to increase the marketing of their products or services. Orden et al. (2017) showed that 23.6% of customers were informed about restaurants through social networks and 11.9% used information found on the Internet. Finally, the identity of the restaurant was a fundamental variable that impacted the survival of the organization in the long term (Fong et al., 2017). Also, the philosophy of quality, which impacted the productivity levels, ensured a lasting performance of the business in the market (Ibarra, 2014, p. 223).

### **The impact of the pandemic on the restaurants**

With the current pandemic, tourism activity has suffered severe effects derived from the declaration of the health contingency and the confinement of people. This has caused the closure of restaurants and places of public concentration, as well as an increase in sanitary measures. This has generated uncertainty in the mobility of tourists due to the hygienic conditions, resulting in a fall in hotel occupancy (Cuevas et al., 2017) and services related to the tourism sector as food, transport and tourist products (Correa, 2021). Undoubtedly, the greatest impact is the loss of jobs, due to the confinement and the closure of businesses, for example, in the period from March to June 2020, in Mexico, around 1.1 million formal jobs were lost (BANXICO, 2020). With unemployment, there are increases in inequity and poverty levels of the population (Atkinson, 2016, p. 193). The nature of employment has serious implications for social protection, economic activity and consumption, which negatively impacts to workers in the tourism sector, especially restaurant employees.

The contraction of the economy is another aspect that influences the performance of restaurants because the economic slowdown affects the service sector industry. This explains the suspension of non-essential activities, which caused the temporary closure of food and beverage establishments. According to BANXICO (2020), at the end of the first quarter of 2020, the pandemic caused a drop of -26% in temporary accommodation services and 8% in the businesses dedicated to the preparation of food and beverages. In April and May of the same year, the fall was deepest in temporary accommodation and food services losing 74%. In the first half of that year the gross domestic product (GDP) in Mexico showed a fall of 10%. From the above, we can argue that the sector most affected by the economic slowdown and social confinement are activities related to tourism, consumption in restaurants and other food services. People's income was negatively affected, which explains the 70% reduction in average consumption that would be expected under normal conditions.

Another factor that has a direct impact on the productivity of gastronomic businesses is a cost to run them. Because the cost is directly related to economic performance and it influences the means of production and working conditions (Correa, 2017, p. 44) and the competitiveness of companies in terms of their internal structures (Porter, 2020, p. 169; Rubio & Baz, 2005, p. 15). Although businesses are closed, fixed expenses such as payments to suppliers, the taxes, electricity service, social security, and the rent of premises, are constants; which causes the business to become unsustainable. From the above, we can discuss that companies related to gastronomic tourism have been affected by the conditions generated by the pandemic, therefore their resources and internal capabilities must be studied to adapt them to the new circumstances to transform innovations and business opportunities.

### **Economics factors associated with gastronomic tourism**

According to Durón (2014, p. 79) in Mexico, the restaurants industry is large and, highly fragmented, and in the year 2019 presented growth. In addition to generating employment, it was composed of 243 000 formal companies, of which 4% were «tablecloth restaurants» and 96% were organized under the figure of family businesses with a basic administration. According to the UNWTO y BCC (2019, p. 26) tourism and gastronomy have a significant impact on the region in which they are presented. Specifically Culinary tourism requires long-term investments for the generation of quality products and services, as well as making processes efficient and innovative, this will improve the infrastructure in information technologies to increase their commercialization (Correa, 2020a).

Following Long (2018), culinary tourism has great benefits such as the generation of economic spillover in the community, so stimulating the production and consumption of local products (Aguirregoitia & Fernández, 2017), promotes and develops the agricultural and commercial business fabric. According to Clemente et al., (2008) a tourist's spending on food and beverages represents 28% of the total investments. Another important contribution is the authors Orden and others (2017) point out that the tourist spends 25% of their budget in the field of food and beverages.

A fundamental aspect of gastronomic tourism is the generation of economic flows that benefit companies in other sectors such as tourist guides, artisans, and transports (Correa, 2020b), recreation activities (Peña et al., 2020), and the state who is remunerated through the payment of taxes. The gastronomic tourist has a high cultural level (Prieto & Triana, 2019), generally has a good economic position to cover the expenses, they are demanding and focus their attention on the quality of the services and above all on the authenticity. They are interested in the added presence of symbols and drinks that are characteristic of the place they visit (Reyes et al., 2017).

### **Cultural aspects in gastronomic tourism**

The authors Espinosa et al. (2019), as well as Orden et al. (2017) converge that gastronomy is an interesting tourist product. It is considered an essential attraction that is valued by travelers because it promotes cultural exchange. According to Panosso and Lohmann (2012, p. 174) based on Gray's tourism typology, it is realized by the tourist that they are, *eager to travel the world*, because they seek culture, customs, and different cuisines. For their part Reyes et al. (2017) point out that since the year 2010, traditional Mexican cuisine was registered as an *intangible cultural heritage of humanity*, which drives the value of its identity. Another perspective is that of Durón (2014, p. 95) who adds that the tradition and values in restaurants last for years and even decades. Based on the literature it is considered that to understand gastronomic tourism, it is necessary to analyze the cultural aspects, because they incorporate the identity of the territory as a key element of differentiation of the destination (UNWTO & BCC, 2019, p. 26).

Food is a biological need inherent in travel (Camarena, 2017; Long, 2018), much of this depends on the type of culture or how it is perceived, the hospitality, and the service offered by each gastronomic business. For Monroy and Urcádiz (2019) the gastronomy industry is the result of a cultural and social evolution of many centuries. According to Aguirregoitia and Fernández (2017) the tourist is motivated by the experience provided by the locality and the knowledge of the production mechanisms, the origin of the dish, and the elaboration process. López et al. (2016) points out that gastronomic tourism is how the community is exhibited to tourist, therefore there is an important connection between gastronomy, culture, and tourism. For López and Sánchez (2012) culinary tourism is part of the cultural and social history of the towns, as well as their inhabitants which reflects the lifestyle, and reinforces traditions and roots in the community. It is an essential part of the cultural heritage of the destination. For Torres (2008, p. 184), culture is composed of values, traditions, and beliefs that combine to shape the actions used in gastronomic business.

Authors such as Peña et al. (2020) highlight that gastronomic tourism is a living expression of heritage since it combines food traditions. For Reyes et al. (2017) gastronomy is part of the culture and can be called a tourist product, as well as an element of promotion and sale of the destination place, which causes cultural

exchange. Following Carvache et al. (2018), food tourism improves the identity of destinations, because it is related to lifestyles, cultural celebrations, local production, and heritage, as well as interaction with food preparation, gastronomic customs, and food culture. Finally, for Prieto and Triana (2019) gastronomic tourism is related to the social heritage, idiosyncrasies, and popular and cultural environmental knowledge of the communities. The previous discussion allows understanding the great relationship that exists between gastronomic tourism and cultural aspects and explains why the tourist seeks to enjoy new experiences, especially if it is about traditions and customs related to the food of the place traveled.

## Methodology

The research is quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, and correlational-causal, to know the variables that influence the competitiveness of restaurants in the metropolitan area of Zacatecas. The documentary review technique was applied to know the state of the art. The sample is non-probabilistic due to the characteristics of the research (Hernández et al., 2010, p. 176). The data collection was carried out through an instrument applied virtually to 158 customers who agreed to answer the survey in a restaurant with a tourist vocation in the municipality of Guadalupe that belongs to the «Pueblos Mágicos» program, and another in the city of Zacatecas, uniformly along the period from November 19, 2020 to July 17, 2021. The questionnaire is composed of eleven questions measured on a Likert scale of 5 points, where 1 = never through 5 = always. The latent variable called competitiveness, is inferred from the observed variables of resources and capacities.

Subsequently, the statistical study was carried out through an analysis of structural equations, where both latent variables are analyzed, the first is the construct of «resources» (tangible and intangible) composed of five questions, and the second is the variable «capabilities» composed of six items. Data analysis was performed in the statistical software EQS 6.1, the measurement scales were constructed based on the authors presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Operationalization of variables*

| Variable                               | Indicator   | Authors   |
|--|---|---|
| Resources<br>(tangible and intangible) | X1 = RES 1. Provide confidence in food<br>X2 = RES 2. Hygiene in food preparation<br>X3 = RES 3. Rooting and tradition<br>X4 = RES 4. Attachment to customs<br>X5 = RES 5. Value of authenticity  | Clemente et al. (2008); Torres (2008, p. 184); López and Sánchez (2012); Durón (2014); López et al. (2016); Camarena (2017); Correa (2017); Reyes et al. (2017); Aguirregoitia and Fernández (2017); Kido et al. (2018); Carvache et al. (2018); Arana et al. (2018); Monroy and Urcádiz (2019); Moreira et al. (2019); Prieto and Triana (2019); UNWTO and BCC (2019, p. 35); Monroy and Urcádiz (2020). |
| Capabilities                           | X6 = CAP 1. Facilities (bathroom, lighting, easy parking)<br>X7 = CAP 2. Cleanliness and hygiene in the environment<br>X8 = CAP 3. Accessibility<br>X9 = CAP 4. Staff effectiveness (Treatment received, staff attitude, problem solving)<br>X10 = CAP 5. Efficiency of the service (furniture, employee clothing, the menu)<br>X11 = CAP 6. Food quality | Rubio and Baz (2005, p. 17); Betancourt et al. (2014); López et al. (2016); Vera and Trujillo (2017); Kido et al. (2018); Zárara et al. (2018); Monroy and Urcádiz (2019); Espinosa et al. (2019); Moreira et al. (2019).   |

## Analysis

The analysis is presented in Table 2, which includes the descriptive statics of the people interviewed, such as age, gender, schooling, attendance at restaurants, the means of transport used, the main reason for visiting the restaurant, and the average expenditure per consumption.

**Table 2**  
*General data of the interviewees*

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Average age of the diner        | 30 years old  |
| Age range                       | 18 - 70 years old   |
| Gender                          | 63% women<br>37% men  |
| Schooling                       | 90% professional<br>8% high school<br>2% secondary level                      |
| Restaurant assistance           | 94% family<br>4% friends<br>2% couple   |
| Means of transport              | 89% own car<br>4% taxi<br>7% public transport                                 |
| Main reason for visit           | 55% rest<br>15% get to know the gastronomy<br>25% leisure<br>5% work/business |
| Average consumption expenditure | 806 Mexican pesos = 39.72 USD   |
| Range of consumption            | 80 - 4500 Mexican pesos = 3.94 USD - 221.78 USD                               |

*Note.* Exchange rate Mexican peso - USD = 20.29

From analysis in Table 2, the people who attend the restaurants are young people with an average age of 30 years old, 63% of the diners are professional women who like to attend the restaurant with family and travel in their car. The main motivation to visit the gastronomic business is rest and the average expense is 40 U.S. Dollars. The reliability and validity study were carried out using the technique of analysis of structural equations of maximum likelihood; the internal consistency of the scales was evaluated Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the Composite Reliability Index (IFC) and the Extracted Variance Index (IVE). The statistical results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3***Internal consistency and convergent validity of the theoretical model*

| Variable     | Indicator | Factorial load | T                  | Cronbach's alpha | IFC  | IVE  |
|--------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|------|------|
| Resources    | RES 1     | .370           | 1.000 <sup>a</sup> | .688             | .601 | .288 |
|              | RES 2     | .367           | 2.985**            |                  |      |      |
|              | RES 3     | .604           | 3.704***           |                  |      |      |
|              | RES 4     | .689           | 3.822***           |                  |      |      |
|              | RES 5     | .689           | 3.823***           |                  |      |      |
| Capabilities | CAP 1     | .353           | 1.000 <sup>a</sup> | .643             | .651 | .335 |
|              | CAP 2     | .336           | 2.718**            |                  |      |      |
|              | CAP 3     | .469           | 3.197**            |                  |      |      |
|              | CAP 4     | .593           | 3.460***           |                  |      |      |
|              | CAP 5     | .713           | 3.573***           |                  |      |      |
|              | CAP 6     | .433           | 3.092**            |                  |      |      |

S-BX<sup>2</sup> (df = 43) = 80.868;  $p < 0.00042$ ; NFI = .746; NNFI = .816; CFI = .856; RMSEA = .075

Note.  $p < .01^{**}$ ,  $p < .001^{***}$

<sup>a</sup> Parameters against that value in the identification process.

## Results

Based on the above analysis, the model presents a good fit, as observed by the *Non-Normed Fit Index* presents a coefficient of .816 and the *Comparative Fix Index of* .856, is closer to .9 which indicates a reasonable adjustment. The estimation error is adequate .075. Convergent validity is checked when all factorial loads are statistically significant, which provides validity. Regarding the Extracted Variance Index (AVE), this coefficient indicates the amount of variance obtained from indicators, as can be seen, it does not exceed the recommended .50 (Maldonado et al., 2021), however, in literature there are accepted scales with low values (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Icen, 2020). The discriminant validity is achieved when the instrument is designed to measure the different latent variables, the correlation must be minor to latent variables. Table 4 shows the estimates of the correlations between the two constructs.

**Table 4***Discriminant validity*

| Latent variables | AVE  | Square of correlations |
|------------------|------|------------------------|
| Resources        | .288 | .032                   |
| Capabilities     | .335 |                        |

According to Table 4, the criterion of the Extracted Variance Index (AVE) is higher than the square of correlations (.032), which affirms the discriminant validity. Based on the two previous criteria, both validities of the model are demonstrated for the hypothesis test. The nomological validity is performed through the chi square test, referring to the research hypothesis ( $\beta = .179$ ,  $t = 27.660$ ,  $p < .0025$ ), therefore there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

**Figure 1**

*Relations between variables*

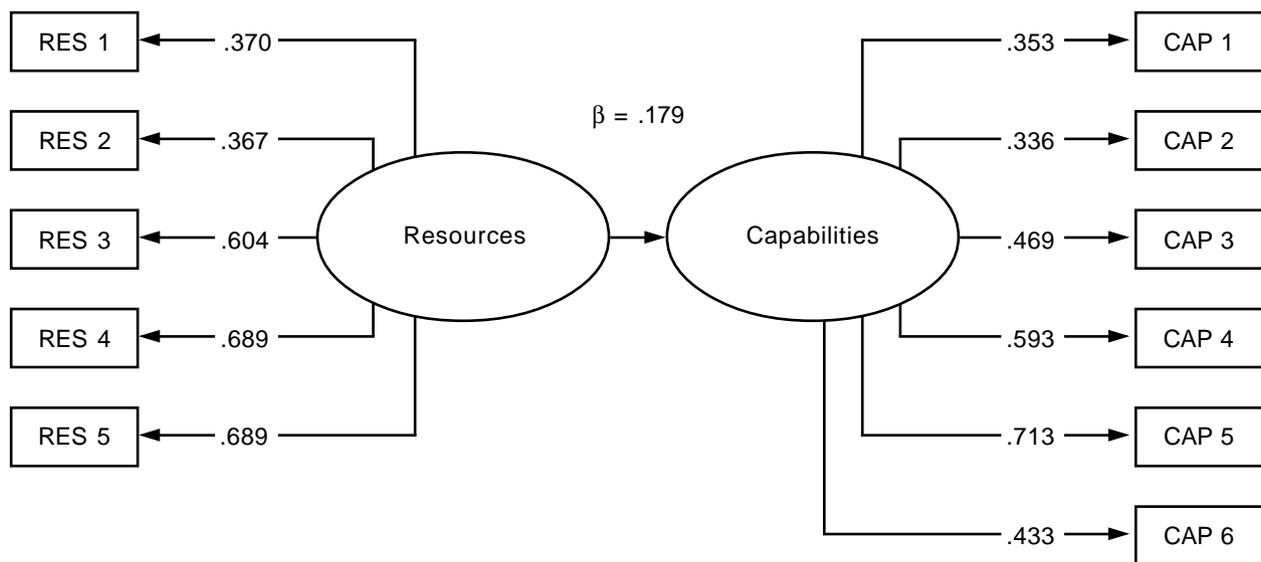


Figure 1 shows the diagram of research model. Where it is appreciated that resources have positive effects on business capabilities. In that sense, the variables attachment to customs, the value of authenticity, the efficiency of the service and the staff effectiveness are variables that can improve business competitiveness and are important for the tourist.

## Discussion

Based on the results, the latent variable called «resources», has four observed variables with significance, the one that has the greatest statistical load is «value of the authenticity ( $t = 3.823$ )» which indicates that the tourist who travel and visit restaurants, is seeking the authentic gastronomy of the region, and the culinary business that provides symbols to identify with to add value to the tourist experience. The second variable observed is «the attachment to customs ( $t = 3.822$ )», which indicates that the tourists prefer that the food is typical of the locality prepared with attachment to traditional customs. The third item is «rooting and traditions ( $t = 3.704$ )», which means that restaurants must project to the customer, the importance of rootedness and the tradition of the business among the population. This means that the older the business is, the more competitive

it can be. The three variables are the construct of resources specifically, intangible, which confirms that gastronomic tourism is considered as a sub-segment of cultural tourism composed of traditions (RES3), customs (RES4) and values (RES5); together are the variables that probably attracts tourists, therefore, they can increase the income of restaurants and thus the competitiveness. Regarding tangible resources, the observed variable «hygiene in food preparation ( $t = 2.985$ )», the factorial load was not supported, because usually the client does not have access to the food preparation area and focuses mainly on the final presentation of the dish.

The second latent variable called capabilities, composed of the observed variable «efficiency in the service ( $t = .573$ )», indicates that customers perceive the importance of the image of the business, as well as the speed they are attended to, the clothing of employees and the presentation of the letter. This is the most relevant capability that tourist perceives as important. Staff efficiency ( $t = 3.460$ ) does not present a factorial load higher than the recommended level ( $< .70$ , according to Aldape et al., 2016); however, the treatment received, the attitude of the personnel working in the business, and the resolution of problems, are characteristics that are related to the Management of Human Capital (Werther & Davis, 1995, p. 7). Therefore, the findings suggest that interaction with staff is important to customers. From the above, it is considered that employees in the service sector must be constantly receiving training in customer service issues.

Another variable observed is the «accessibility ( $t = 3.197$ )», like the capacity previous one, it does not present an adequate factorial load ( $< .70$ ), but this variable indicates that restaurants must have a location in the historic zones, near tourist attractions or craft corridors; be accessible to transport routes, such a city bus and taxis. It is advisable to establish agreements with the operators of tourist products and experiences for greater proximity and interaction with tourists, in addition to including tools that facilitate the approach with the client such as technological apps and adequate advertising. The factorial load of the observed variable «food quality ( $t = .396$ )», does not exceed the recommended level ( $< .70$ ), however, it is an important internal capacity of the restaurant since the tourist wants the food to adhere to the needs they demand. Finally, the observed variable «cleanliness and hygiene of the environment ( $t = .2718$ )», is the one with the lowest factorial load.

Contrary to what was expected, in the statistical analysis, the variable «price» is not significant. It is explained because the gastronomic tourist does not pay attention to the investment that makes for the food they consume, which suggests a high education and purchasing power. Likewise, the diner understands that a gastronomic food with attachment to the culture of the region cannot have the same price as a dish from a commercial chain without these characteristics. As can be seen in the previous discussion, intangible resources are the most relevant in the service sector, especially those related to cultural aspects, therefore, the tourist prefers to go to a restaurant that exhibits a typical gastronomy of the town. On the other hand, the internal capabilities of the restaurant should focus on measuring the effectiveness of service and the efficiency of the staff. The above information helps to understand and answer the research question.

These results presented are consistent with Jara et al. (2013) who studied the competitive advantage in Colombian restaurants and found that business is based on good customer service, the identity of flavors and adherence to customs and traditions. Likewise, it agrees with the findings of Cabana et al. (2015) who studied gourmet restaurants in the Republic of Chile and found that competitive advantages depend on the quality of service.

The limitations of the study are the development of the measurement scale, that is, the way in which the questions were elaborated and the data collection that was in a delimited geographical space. For future research work, it is recommended to expand the size of the sample to improve standardized factorial loads, as well as to apply the instrument in other Latin American countries with a tourist vocation such as Peru or Colombia with the purpose of contrasting results.

## Conclusions

Using the theoretical foundations of business resources and capabilities, applied to the restaurants in the metropolitan area of Zacatecas, the observed variables that are considered by customers as relevant in-service businesses belonging to gastronomic tourism are statistically estimated. This analysis allows knowing the variables that are most significant for diners when they attend a restaurant and at the same time contributes to the study of gastronomic tourism. It is concluded that intangible resources are important to raise the competitiveness of restaurants, especially in a business that offers food and dishes with authenticity and attachment to the customs of the region, as well as the rooting and traditions of the place. Regarding capabilities, service efficiency is a significant variable. The price is not a factor that is important for customers because generally the gastronomic tourist has a high economic level. From the above analysis, it can be concluded that it is necessary to continue to study the behavior of gastronomic businesses, because they are fundamental organizations in the creation of employment. Despite the situation of social confinement and the contraction of the economy, restaurants must carry out campaigns through social networks emphasizing the authenticity of the traditional dishes and the image of the business to increase the arrival of tourists.

Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants need to focus on attracting tourists looking for gastronomic experiences related to the preparation of foods that are typical of the region and making investments to improve the services. Must be aware that we are living a new normal and that currently the decisions made by restaurants owners must focus on the long term, such as the new space and sensory tourism industries for example. These new kinds of tourism products demand technological innovation and great strategic planning. For gastronomic businesses to be more competitive and manage to remain in the market, they need to make better the service. This is the key to generating added value (Porter, 2020, p. 16; Rubio & Baz, 2005); this translates into the preparation of traditional dishes that show the tourist the experience of enjoying an authentic meal unique to the region they visit. The limitations of the study are the size of the sample, since the statistical coefficients of the analysis carried out are sensitive to the number of observations. Another is the development and validation of the measurement scale. It is recommended to apply the survey in the restaurants of important tourist destinations such as the countries of Spain or France. It is advisable to ask if the client is a tourist or a local inhabitant. Also, should include variables related the customer motivation, as well as innovation in process, product, organization, and marketing. To generate more knowledge of gastronomic tourism, is very important because it preserves the cultural aspects of food and contributes to the generation of jobs.

## Conflict of interests

The author has no conflict of interest with the content of this work.

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