

## THE IMPACT OF THE LOCAL BRAND IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM. PITA DE PECICA

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**Abstract:** *With an old symbolism, the brand concept currently defines aspects, models, features, communication, strategies, personality and value of a product, in the consumer's perception. An integral part of the country brand, the local brand has an essential role and can have a significant impact on the development and prosperity of the community, especially from a tourism point of view. The desire for relationships, for knowledge, as well as the cognitive motivation of travel are the basic elements of gastronomic tourism. Promoting local identity, the local brand often reflects the traditions, values and gastronomic culture of a certain region or even a community. With a history of over 50 years, Pita de Pecica is considered a local, national and international brand, being a key element in the development of gastronomic tourism in Arad County.*

**Key words:** *local brand, gastronomic tourism, Pita de Pecica*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered the most dynamic sector of activity world wide, an industry itself. It is a multilateral phenomenon that involves viable concepts and practices ranging from stimulating economic development and social structure, the valorization of natural resources to satisfying psycho-social motivations. [3,9]

With an increasing importance on the development of sustainable tourism, special attention is given to tourism planning, which ultimately aims to bring only socio-economic benefits to society. The strategies of local communities emphasize a series of measures for the promotion of tourist activities. Among these, the strengthening of cultural, multicultural, and spiritual identity stands out, an objective that can be achieved through the support and promotion of the local values and traditions of a community at national, European, and international levels. [3,9,13]

Since ancient times, the preparation and consumption of food have been fundamental practices for daily life and for humanity, as a whole. The motivation behind culinary acts, as well as economic development, have led to improvement of food preparation technologies, there by achieving gastronomic progress. The tendency for evolution, attraction to the new, natural desire for knowledge about other cultures, and the satisfaction of culinary senses have all contributed to the development of tourism, particularly in its gastronomic aspect. [11]

Current studies show that community based on gastronomic tourism has a positive impact on the development and promotion of tourism. One of the essential elements underlying gastronomic tourism is considered to be the cognitive motivation of the journey, involving the desire for connection and knowledge. [3,13]

The multitude of competitive tourist destinations leads to the continuous implementation of innovative promotional activities at both national and regional levels. One of the strategies addressed for enhancing tourist attractiveness and regional socio-economic development emphasizes the importance of forming a local gastronomic brand.[7]

Keeping the global trend, increasingly significant, of promoting and developing tourist activities, especially culinary ones, Romania can be a destination, a landmark with a valuable footprint on the world's gastronomic map. Traditional culinary dishes always connect people, having a significant impact on the promotion and development of tourism. Certainly, we can say, that gastronomic tourism could be considered a brand for Romania. Although, our country is in full process of recognition, appreciation of gastronomic heritage, but also of defining its culinary identity, at the level of the European Commission, it is represented by 13 certified traditional products. [3,13]

One of these, "Pita de Pecica - IGP" received the IGP product certification in 2023. It is made in Pecica city, Arad County, by members of the applicant group, the Association of Traditional Products Producers ARĂDEANCA – Arad. With a history of over 200 years, „Pita de Pecica” is considered a local, national, and international brand and could be a key element in the development of gastronomic tourism in Arad County. [3,13]

The interest in tourism has led to the emergence of new directions and new forms of tourism, including gastronomic tourism. Although culinary culture is considered the most long-lived part of a culture, tradition, or entity, until recently, it has been a neglected field. [3,13]

With the special attention given to the attractiveness of today's travel destinations, gastronomic tourism is now considered a modern concept, an independent branch of tourism involving a series of social and cultural interactions. [10,12]

Contemporary researchers associate it more with a "state of mind," a synergy of experiences, a marker of social and cultural belonging, with authentic and sustainable landmarks, and under no circumstances a singular experience. [10,12]

In the usage of gastronomic tourism terminology, several terms have been attempted. The use of the term and concept of culinary tourism was given in 1998 in "Culinary Tourism - A Folkloristic Perspective on Eating and Otherness" by Lucy M. Long. She considers culinary tourism as "destination and vehicle for tourism, a way to experience different cultures through food and, incidentally, through wine." [14]

The World Food Travel Organization has emphasized that the terms culinary tourism, food tourism, or gastronomic tourism refer to the same phenomenon; they are equivalent, and their usage depends only on the context in which they are used and the native language of those who use them. [14]

Following a study conducted among its members, the World Tourism Organization highlights that gastronomic tourism can be considered a strategic element in defining a tourist destination and a national as well as local brand, with over 60% of respondents stating that their country has its own gastronomic brand. [17,18]

On the other hand, concerning the promotion of tourist products, the study mentions that special importance is given to gastro-economic events (79%), gastronomic routes (62%), cooking courses and workshops (62%), and visits to local markets and producers (53%). [17,18]

Since, most of the time, the development of a brand is closely linked to a tourist destination, promoting the concept is very important. In this extensive context of brand visibility, recognition, growth, and development, the emotional and cultural aspects of the community are necessary. [20]

With origins of over thousands of years, the concept of a brand is now emerging as a reference point in consumer perceptions. Starting from a term, a name, a distinguishing feature, or a unique symbolism, the term "brand" has expanded to denote the personality defined for a product or a company. [4,6,8]

The socio-economic impact of the brand concept involves several key elements, outlined in the brand's identity: the use and recognition of a logo or a registered trademark,

patented image, brand loyalty, and various strategies for brand promotion and management. A different approach for defining a brand is specified in the study published by Kotler in 2009, mentioning a set of attributes, benefits, personality, and focusing on the brand's fundamental values. [4,6,8]

Regarding the emotional impact felt by consumers, a local brand essentially boils down to a promise, a commitment, and expectations, ultimately leading to loyalty to that product. [4,6,8]

Another essential aspect in consumer perception relates to the brand's notoriety. For this concept, various forms of perception can be identified, each of which may address the consumer's cognitive perceptions differently. [1]

The essence and notion of a brand implies a deeper, multidimensional approach, beyond what we perceive auditorily and visually. The communication possibilities among consumers are implicitly based on their trust in the brand effect, evoked in a well-defined entity. Currently, brands, as influential symbols, have the capacity to convey messages that are profound, complex, and with a strong emotional impact. [5,24]

An integral part of a country's brand, the local brand plays an essential role and can have a significant impact on the development and prosperity of a community, especially in terms of tourism activities. By promoting local identity, local brands often reflect the traditions, values, and gastronomic culture of a specific region or even a local community at the national and even international levels. [3,7,13]

Documented in various chronicles since ancient times, culinary art has always been a subject of interest for the population of Romania. However, systematic research on Romanian culinary culture only began in the 19th century. [15]

Romanian cuisine has often been associated with the gastronomic influences of different cultures it has encountered. It is also true that culinary elements have been adopted and preserved, but they have always been perfectly combined with the diversity of local resources, becoming appreciated in the gastronomic tradition. Proudly persevering in maintaining traditions, authenticity, and the values of culinary identity, Romania is recognized for promoting gastronomic tourism and local brands. [15]

Romanian traditional products recognized and protected in Europe, deserving international recognition, have a well-deserved place in our gastronomy and play an essential role in promoting the country's brand. According to the European Commission's eAmbrosia website, there are currently approximately 3900 registered and protected food products in the EU, and among these, 13 belong to Romania. [21]

The placement of a traditional product on the map of recognition by the European Commission is achieved through the granting of designations such as IGP (Protected Geographical Indication), a mark that holds specific characteristics, quality, and reputation and refers to the name of a region or locality used to describe a food product; DOP (Protected Designation of Origin), a specific mark of origin applied to certain food or beverage products; and IG (Geographical Indication), a designation awarded only for alcoholic beverages and flavored wines. [22,23]

Starting with "Magiunul de prune Topoloveni", registered as IGP since 2011, and ending with "Salinate de Turda," recognized as IGP since 2023, "Pita de Pecica - IGP" is the twelfth Romanian product listed in the database of a designation in the Register of Protected Designations of Origin and Protected Geographical Indications (eAmbrosia), being posted on the official website of the European Commission. [21,22,25]

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper conducts a study on the impact of the certified food product "Pita de Pecica" on consumer behavior and its direct influence on gastronomic tourism in the Arad

area. To this end, a survey questionnaire was developed and administered among consumers. The sample studied consisted of 200 respondents.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

The product "Pita de Pecica - IGP" was registered on June 26, 2023, and is manufactured by members of the applicant group, the Association of Traditional Products Producers ARĂDEANCA, from ARAD county. The applicant group consists of 2 producers from the town of Pecica, Arad County. [21,22]

Often referred to as the primary occupation of inhabitants in the Carpathian region, bread baking perpetuates rich traditions, expressive cultural symbols, and interethnic symbols.

„Pita”, considered the ambassador of the national culinary heritage, is a product of intangible heritage that deserves to be promoted as a local and national brand, there by contributing to the development of Romanian gastronomic tourism.

Regarding the traditional aspects of "Pita de Pecica," it is imperative to mention several and marks over time. The first reference to the term "pitărit" or making pita at home is mentioned in the Monograph of the town of Pecica from its first mention (1335). The recipe, over 200 years old, along with exclusively local raw materials, the traditional burnt brick oven, and the ecological traditional packaging are elements that attest to the authenticity of „pita”. Marki Sandor, in the publication "History of Arad County" (1892), mentions the appearance of „Pita de Pecica” in the Arad market since the 1790s. [2,16,26]

The national recognition, through the certification of the registered trademark of "Pita de Pecica" at OSIM, was achieved in 2011, a certificate granted to Pecica City Hall, Arad County.

The notoriety of "Pita de Pecica" has been honored by the local community, so, since 1990, around the time of Saint Mary's Day, "Praznicul de Pită Nouă" (The Feast of New Bread) has been dedicated to "Pita de Pecica." A reproduction of a traditional bread oven, made according to a model dating back approximately 250 years, can be found in the Digital Museum of Pecica. [27]

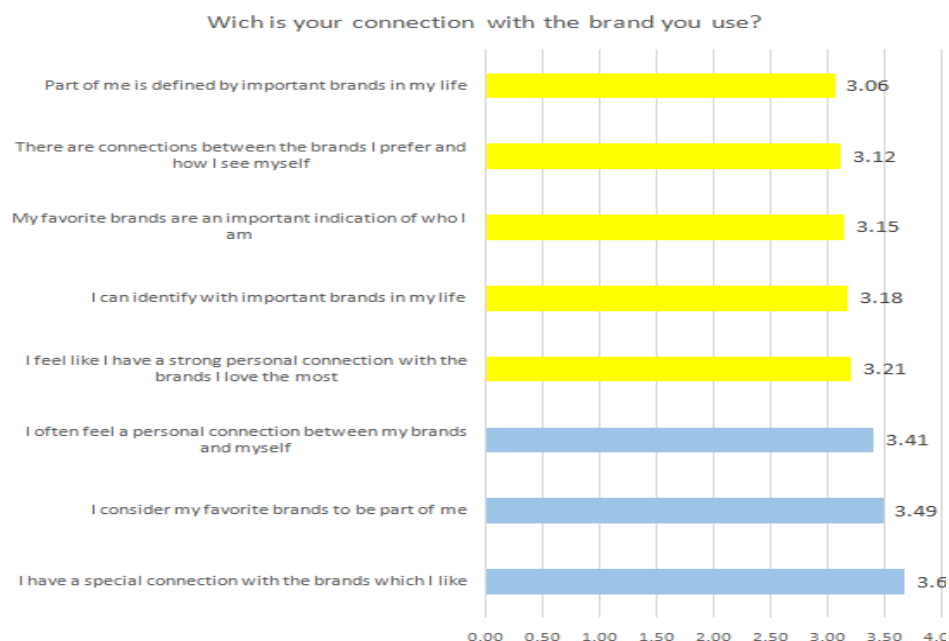
Regarded as a local brand, "Pita de Pecica" has been present at many fairs, exhibitions, and conferences, among which it is worth noting the " Open Doors Day at the European Institutions in Brussels ", in 2015. [28]

A constant of Romanian traditional customs, an essential element of national culinary and cultural values, a symbolic food of Arad, "Pita de Pecica" is marked on the Bread Map, a map presenting recipes, stories, and articles about the history of bread. Supported by journalist Cosmin Dragomir from gastroart.ro publishing house, the Bread Map is certainly a bold and interactive project, with content shaped by local traditional bread producers, culinary souvenir enthusiasts, and people involved in promoting local gastronomies. [29,30]

Considering current culinary trends, which are moving regionally and locally towards rediscovering and valorizing traditions, the immense potential of Romanian gastronomic values is reflected in local brands, certified and considered to be national culinary emblems.

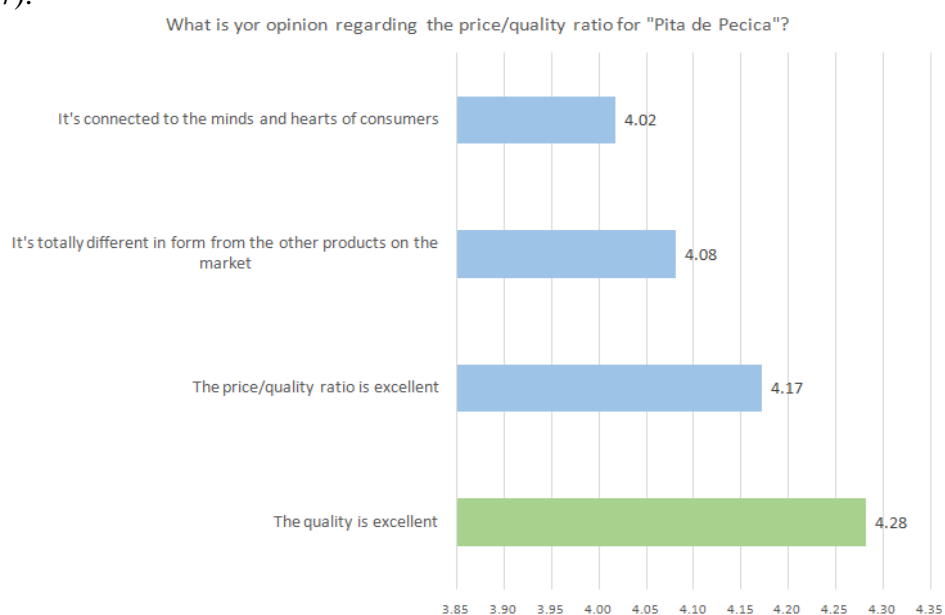
Of the 200 respondents, aged between 18 and 65 years, the majority have a high school diploma (61%), with the remaining 28% having a bachelor's degree, 9% holding postgraduate degrees, and 2% without a high school diploma. Most respondents come from urban areas (60%), with the remaining 40% from rural and suburban areas. Additionally, 76% are male. Regarding their financial situation, most come from families with an average monthly income.

To the question “*What is your connection to the brands you use?*” (figure 1) the response was only for 3 items (weighted average 3.06-3.21) and neutral for 5 items (weighted average 3.41-3.68).



**Figure 1. Quantify answers for the question “What is your connection to the brands you use?”**

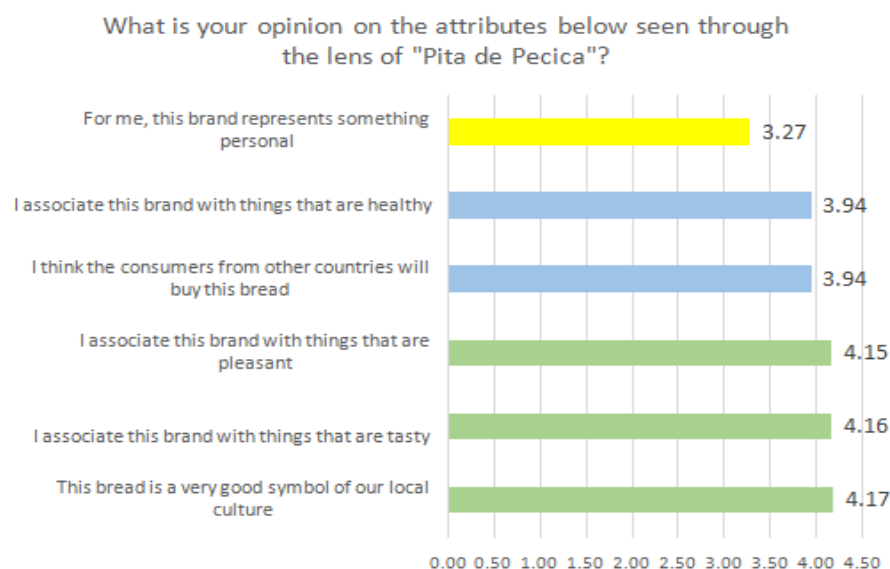
For the question “*What is your opinion regarding the price/quality ratio for Pita de Pecica?*” the majority consider the product to be of excellent quality (total agreement - weighted average 4.28), and the quality/price ratio to be very good (agreement - weighted average 4.17).



**Figure 2. Quantify answers for the question “What is your opinion regarding the price/quality ratio for Pita de Pecica?”**

Regarding the attributes seen through the lens of „Pita de Pecica” (“*What is your opinion on the attributes below seen through the lens Pita de Pecica?*”), the majority

consider the product to be a very good symbol of our local culture (total agreement - weighted average 4.17).



**Figure 3. Quantify answers for the question “What is your opinion on the attributes below seen through the lens Pita de Pecica?”**

## CONCLUSIONS

Following the study, it is observed that there is a need for more extensive information regarding certified Romanian products in terms of their properties and nutritional value. This approach could significantly contribute to the development of effective gastronomic tourism.

The results of this study lead to other research directions regarding the ways to promote local brands and raise public awareness about the advantages of using local brands, both at an individual level and concerning their impact on the development of tourism, particularly gastronomic tourism.

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