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## The relationship between product innovation and fusion cuisine in food and beverage establishments: A discussion on Turkish cuisine

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**ABSTRACT:** The competition nowadays in globalization process deeply influences the tourism industry as well as the other industries. The increasing differentiation in demands and expectations of tourists forces tourism establishments to find out new seekings. In recent years, innovation is regarded as a fact which is widely used by tourism establishments in this process. By means of innovation, establishments are able to stay more competitive by creating differentiation in their products and services they offer. In this study, the innovation effect is reviewed in scope of food and beverage establishments – one of the sub units of tourism industry and the subject concentration is on “fusion cuisine”. In this context, a discussion is made on Turkish cuisine and the relationship between Turkish cuisine and fusion cuisine is reviewed by sectoral samples.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Today, being able to stay competitive for the establishments depends on mainly to define themselves completely distinctive, re-create their basic strategies, rediscover the sector they are in and make difference in all their goods and services. In this respect, the most important element that makes an organization successful for a long term is to be innovative (Zerenler et al., 2007). In this context, innovation is regarded as one of the main sources to obtain competitive advantage (Deveciođlu, 2008; Gemlik et al., 2009; Güleş and Bülbul, 2004; Porter, 1998; Makridakis, 1998; Higgins, 1999).

If an establishment is closed to innovation, it has difficulties to adapt the circumstances required by the time and environment, its capacity to change and adaptation decreases and accordingly, it considerably loses its power of development and survival. Therefore, innovation generates an important criteria for an organization to be able to adapt new requirements and environmental conditions (Zerenler et al., 2007). Among five factors which Porter (1992) determined to get a competitive superiority and keep it on, he emphasized on the importance of innovation in the following : “The competitive superiority, fundamentally, originates from development, making innovation and variation. For most firms, the challenge is to increase their skills of developing and making innovation (p. 578)”.

Innovation, like in all the sectors, shows its affect in food and beverage industry as well (Cousins et al., 2010). The rapid growing of food and beverage sector from the second half of the twentieth century accompanied with the developing of the establishments active in that sector in the meantime (Görkem and Öztürk,

2011). The purpose of innovation enterprises is to increase the service quality and products’ efficiencies, and to create unique tastes in innovative and creative cuisines.

Innovation is the process of transformation of new ideas into a commercial benefit. Namely, the combination of creativity with the commercial skills. In this context, a new application called “Fusion Cuisine” is seen in food and beverage establishments in recent years. Fusion cuisine includes the combination of food stuff in one dish by cuisine techniques of different nations still in which a single nation characteristic does not become prominent in the dish, and the use of this newly created product as a commodity. Thus, in the literature fusion cuisine is defined as the renewal and differentiation of products in food and beverage establishments and presenting them to consumers in an attempt to obtain a commercial income. In this respect, it is possible to say that innovation and fusion cuisine concepts are quite interrelating with each other.

The main reason why the Turkish Cuisine has been preferred as the sample for fusion cuisine is that the stuff variation used in Turkish cuisine is much more than the ones used in other cuisines. Thus, Turkish cuisine is ranked as one of the prominent world cuisines in terms of the stuff variation used both in product (food-beverage) and production. In Turkish cuisine, there are 2300 kinds of main courses along with local flavours, 1850 kinds of hors d’oeuvre (starters), 480 kinds of desserts, 335 kinds of soups, hundreds of warm starters and hundreds of local beverages (i.e. turnip, boza, ayran) available. Such abundance of Turkish cuisine affects the variety of stuff used in food and beverages, and enables the fusion-innovation relationship to be implemented. In this respect, it is considered that the study will make contribution to the literature.

## 2 THE CONCEPT OF INNOVATION

### 2.1 A general perspective

There are many definitions available for the innovation concept in the related literature (e.g. Guile and Quinn, 1988; Sarikaya, 2002; Sundbo and Fuglsang, 2002; Terziovski, 2004; Van Riel, 2005; İraz, 2005; Ögüt et al., 2007). The common point at all these definitions is that the innovation is a result of ideas which are produced and realized by individuals or groups (Yeloğlu, 2007). But, we meet mostly the same definition as the development and application of ‘some new things’. Schumpeter was the first person to improve a theory of innovation. He makes definition of innovation as ‘new ways of doing things, or (as) better, unique combinations of the factors of production’ (Ottenbacher and Gnoth, 2005).

In terms of organizations, the importance of the innovation may be explained with a simple sample as follows (Aksoy, 2009):

“Every product or service that is purchased by paying money indicates a value for the customer. A value presented from a good restaurant is obviously the food it presents, but at the same time, the district it is located in, its atmosphere, music, waiters’ services, people coming to the restaurant and what is talked about. An entrepreneur who opens a restaurant and becomes successful may not need to analyse his reasons of success. However, as the business becomes dull, innovation should be made to remake the restaurant a favourite place. Usually, a customer does not know what he/she wants and therefore cannot state the thing that he/she does not know. Therefore, the establishment should definitely study the customer, find out his/her expectations and so to say, enter into his/her life. The vital and importance of the innovation underlies here.”

Innovation is a process. This process includes a set of stages starting from generating ideas to implementation of such ideas (Sezgin et al., 2008; Öricü et al., 2011).

As seen in Figure 1, the first stage of the innovation process is to generate idea. All the innovations are originated from generating ideas as well as implementing and realising them (Jong and Vermeulen, 2003; Eren and Gündüz, 2002; Eraslan et al., 2008). Inspiration and imagination are important factors in creating new ideas (Öricü et al., 2011).

The second step of innovation process is to check the compliance of the developed ideas with the purposes of establishment. In other words, it is quite important for the innovations to comply with the purpose. For example, in a study, it was detected that the food companies in Spain failed in result of only making product differentiation for increasing their product range, instead of giving priority to their customers’ needs (Çalıpınar and Baç, 2007).

The last step for the innovation process is to check the feasibility of the ideas complying with the purposes of the establishments, and commercialize them. Intrinsically, innovation is to acquire commercial success and create added value. Many innovations have

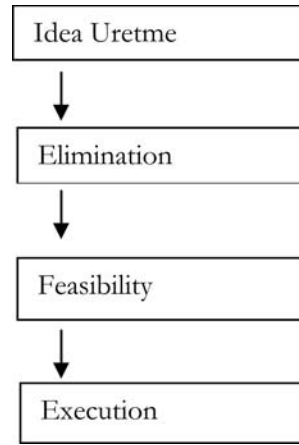


Figure 1. Innovation process.

Source: Majaro, S., (1998), *Managing Ideas for Profit*. McGraw-Hill, Maidenhead. Adapted: Sezgin et al., 2008: 132.

to expire before acquiring a commercial income success. Therefore, the innovative applications which do not create an important economic added value are not deemed as innovations (Insel ve Sarıdoğan 2009). Likewise, Zerenler et al (2007) asserted that an activity which is entered in an organization might be successful and innovative when it is able to be commercialized.

There are many dimensions of innovation. (Bakkalbaşı, 2003). Montes et al. (2005) defined innovations as the introduction of new ideas, products, services, systems, policies, programs and processes earlier than other firms in the environment. In other words, Ottenbacher and Gnoth (2005) defined them in an idea, practice, process or product. However, in this study, innovations have been defined mostly in new products in hospitality and especially food and beverage firms. Also, this study has focused on product innovations in food and beverage enterprises.

### 2.2 Food and beverage firms perspective

Food and beverage establishments are under economic and social management discipline, which accept to meet the peoples’ refreshment needs as a profession with its material and social values such as its structure, technical equipments, comfort and maintenance status as well as its qualitative elements such as service quality of the personnel (Atak, 2009).

Food and beverage motive is one of the most important basic needs of human being. Au and Low (2002) stated that due to being the basic requirement of life, the demand towards food and beverage services in the tourism industry is not flexible against the prices. Wolf (2005: 10) asserted that almost every travelling person eats outside food and beverage service is one of the three most demanded activities (Görkem and Öztürk, 2011).

The growing of food and beverage sector day by day, and high profitability causes the increase in innovative investments in this field and makes the competition conditions tougher. Following the food-beverage cultures of the other countries, tracing the new developed cooking and preparing methods and trying to modernize, make important contributions both to the customers and food and beverage establishments (Sezgin et al., 2008). The product innovation in food and beverage sectors might be defined as creating a new, different product, which has not been made before and might yield profit by developing the existing products for new expansions.

Haktanir and Harris (2005) identified in their study on an independent hotel in Northern Cyprus that the term “innovation” is widely perceived to relate to the entertainment activities and variations in food and beverage products in order to increase in-house sales. These authors determined that innovative activities are mostly related to food and beverage department’s operations, and are seen in terms of revisions to food menus, beverage choices, and variety in bar operations and banqueting.

Food and beverage establishments in the tourism industry are the service areas where innovation and creativity come to the forefront. The change in demands and expectations of customers lead to diversities in the presented food-beverage services. In this context, innovation plays a key role in competition strategies of many countries. For example, creativity and innovation is supported personally by entrepreneurs in France which has 47% of the world’s luxury restaurant market. The big restaurants’ chefs, who are the founder or owner of the establishment at the same time, play an important role in presenting France food culture worldwide. These chefs and their colleagues spare most of their times by forming a creative process, and for food presentation and customer services (Sezgin et al., 2008).

On the other hand, Oliver Chaleil – the Executive Chef of Çırağan Palace Kempinski Hotel in İstanbul – points out that 10% of the job needs to be reserved for innovation and discovery in every discipline and cuisine. Although Chaleil states that the Turkish cuisine is closed to renewal when it comes to innovation, he also expresses that this is not due to chefs, rather it arises from the consumers who are not open to renewals (Chaleil, 2012). Thus, in the study of Ata et al (2011), there is a finding that supports this case. When examining the innovation performances of the establishments that produces food and beverage; Sweden, Portugal, Lithuania, Italy, France, Greece, Estonia and Bulgaria stand out to be the most innovative countries, while the establishments manufacturing food and beverage in Turkey are seen as making too less innovation when compared with the other European Union countries.

In parallel with all these developments, new trends and concepts in the world’s food and beverage sectors can be summarized as follows:

**Gastronomy tourism:** Gastronomy tourism adds important values to many destinations. The interest

shown to ‘good eating’ in Europe has become a movement in recent years, and “gourmet tours” or “gastronomy tours”, where intellectual tourists with good income levels participate, has become one of the most best-selling tourism products. The groups, which organize tours to Italy or France for good food, an ethnic chef or a good wine, are important examples for Turkey to develop gastronomy tourism. For example, Barcelona acquires a considerable part of its tourism incomes from food and beverage activities it organizes every year.

**Wine tourism:** Today, trips to Europe countries that traditionally engage in wine, and to the countries where the most developing vineyards are located, are increasing. Here, the purposes in terms of tourists are to learn how to make wine, taste and purchase wine, and gain experience about the features of the wine area.

**Slow food movement:** The slow food motion, which started in Italy and became common in all the countries, has two basic functions. The first one is to protect the number of endangered animals, plant types and agricultural methods, and the second one is to develop the ability to taste.

**Agro tourism:** In this movement, which started by transforming the farm houses in rural areas into biolodgings or bio-hotels, the guests are able to consume the products, live the production stage and natural environment, and even can cook bread, make jam and collect olives.

**Fusion cuisine:** The fusion cuisine, which is a unique, creative and innovative technique that mainly depends on mixing the food cooking techniques and ingredients of different locations deliberately in the same plate, appeared by combining the western techniques with the Far East technique and ingredients in 1980s. With this idea, establishments aim to provide pleasure and loyalty by presenting the customers the tastes from different cultures in one plate.

### 3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FUSION CUISINE AND TURKISH CUISINE

Tourism has an important function which makes the countries closer to each other. In this approach, the food is an active instruments. In this context, it is important to present tourists the Turkish cuisine culture in the best way. Turkey draws attention from all over the world in terms of its food culture and diversity, and Turkish cuisine culture plays an important role in attracting foreign tourists (Görkem and Öztürk, 2011). Around the world, there are changes existing in food and beverage sector and this is also happening in Turkey, and such changes deeply effect the food-beverage establishments. The fusion cuisine understanding is one of the innovative approaches that appeared in this process.

The first person, who first gave fusion cuisine its current name, is the well-known cuisine chef Norman Van Aiken from Miami. When examining the historical development of this cuisine, although it is called as

Asia fusion in the early years, then in the following years, it is seen that numerous style and number of fusion cuisines were formed with diversities of other country's cuisines.

The requirement for presenting services in parallel to globalization has revealed the fusion term in food and beverage industry. In this frame, food and beverage establishments started to include fusion cuisine applications in order to ensure customer satisfaction (Sica and Mantovani, 2009). The dictionary meaning of the word 'fusion', that is basically a physics term", is stated as *melting, combining, getting together, combination* (Mannur, 2005).

The fusion cuisine, which printed its name on the food culture in recent years, might be defined as creating new cuisines, new food, new tastes by synthesizing different food concepts from the world's cuisines. An example for the fusion cuisine might be given as re-interpreting a kebab from Turkish cuisine and presenting it with a Far East vegetable garniture or with a French cuisine sauce, and thus creating new food and synthesis cuisine culture by that way (Sandıkçı and Çelik, 2007). However, when curry spice is dispersed into the chicken saute which is one of the major meat dishes of Turkish cuisine, a fusion with a mix of Turkish and Indian cuisines might be created. Moreover, the aubergene puree soufflé, which is formed by combining aubergene—has very important place in Turkish cuisine—and the cheese soufflé of French cuisine, is an example of fusion taken from Turkish and French cuisines.

Tastes and flavours that are very unaccustomed to a country's cuisine might come together thanks to fusion cuisine, and a new product might be created in terms of a food-beverage establishment.

The fusion cuisine might be classified with three different methods. One of them is the mixture of close regions with different cultures. In the second method, which is also called "eclectic", a food culture becomes determinative, but techniques or ingredients from other cuisines are also used. And in the last method, without any determinative cuisine, all the world's cuisines are brought together (Pappas, 2011; Oddy, 2003). One of the most important characteristics of Turkish cuisine culture is that, due to having rich food-beverage diversity and culture, such three methods may easily be implemented.

The food culture, which carries the indispensable elements of the geographies, life styles and sense of flavour of the countries and every nation, has ripen for hundreds of years and been inherited from generation to generation, and has almost become the representative of that culture. Every cuisine that was purified from locality and became nationalized, becomes universal at the same time (Akman, 1998). The feeding styles has taken shape according to cultural, geographical, ecological and economical structure that is been involved, and to the historical process. Every nation has a cuisine culture according to its cultural structure. Turkish cuisine culture is also among the most colored and rich cuisines (Güler, 2007).

Turkish cuisine is one of the most developed cuisines in the world since the Turks kept the Spice Route under their control for many years. Spices make the meat life longer as well as has a necessity to season it (Akman ve Mete, 1998). Having possessed the suitable and fertile lands for agriculture, there is both meat and vegetable diversity among the Turks due to farming and animal husbandry. And this richness arises from the reason that the Turkish nation had constituted the oldest societies of the world. The richness of the types in Turkish cuisine depends on many factors. Turkey's geographical location and the historical process it had gone through are among the factors that play important role in the emergence of diversity in the formation of Turkish cuisine culture (Tezcan, 2000; Kadioğlu, 1997).

In Turkey, the food culture of all civilizations and races which had passed from Anatolia for centuries were followed in time by the food and refreshments habits of the people in the wide geography of the Ottoman Empire. When we add to all these, the success of the new generation Turkish cuisine chefs in combining with the world's cuisines, a clean sheet was turned in the Turkish gastronomy.

There are food cultures spreading by keeping its origins from east to west and north to south, as well as there are food types that undergo changes with people and climate characteristics of the region and spread in such way. These food had undergone some changes toward the frame of mind, desire and needs of the people created them, or socio-economic conditions. Therefore, a brand new food model appeared by combining a few products together. This is called fusion cuisine.

Turkish cuisine rather displays a local characteristics and has not been tied to world fusion, and with this aspect, it succeeded to protect its origin. Without moving away from the origin, combining these methods creatively with new techniques and materials which have not been used before and giving them another form provides the fusion to be effectively implemented in Turkish cuisine. And while this includes unique, rooted and local flavours, on the other hand, might create combinations and presentations which can appeal to the international food tastes (Kadioğlu, 1997). As the Turkish Cuisine culture is that wide, colored and rich cuisine culture, it increases the feasibility of the fusion cuisine (Köroğlu et al., 2007).

It is stated that the Turkish cuisine, which has improved and enriched by the effect of the civilizations which had lived in Turkey, is included in the richest three cuisines worldwide, and has the characteristic of the most nutritious cuisine in the world (Denizer, 2008).

In the research made by Akman and Hasipek (2000) on 1000 foreign tourists putting up at holiday villages in Antalya, the ideas of the tourists on Turkish cuisine were tried to be revealed. The tourists stated that they tasted the meat dishes at the most from Turkish cuisine, and that the soups are inadequate in respect of type. The primary issue that the tourists complain about

Turkish cuisine is that the foodstuff in Turkish cuisine are fatty.

As result, the changing process experienced in the whole world also affected the food-beverage establishments, and a brand new product called fusion cuisine has appeared. The richness of Turkish cuisine presents important opportunities and strengths the competitiveness of Turkey in this area.

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