



Vietnamese Cuisine in the Experience Economy and the Cultural Industry: From Culinary Heritage to Experiential Value and Creative Resource

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KEYWORDS: Vietnamese cuisine, experience economy, gastronomic tourism, cultural industries, gastrodiploacy, culinary heritage, cultural tourism.

ABSTRACT: Food has become a central component of contemporary tourism experience and an increasingly important resource for cultural and creative industries. This article examines Vietnamese cuisine at the intersection of the experience economy and the cultural-industry perspective, asking how culinary heritage can be converted into experiential value without weakening the cultural practices and communities that sustain it. The study adopts a qualitative, conceptual and policy-oriented design based on document analysis and triangulation of three bodies of evidence: seminal and recent scholarship on experience design, gastronomic tourism, cultural capital, destination branding and heritage communication; Vietnamese policy documents on cultural development and cultural industries; and verified institutional evidence on Vietnam's gastronomic recognition. The analysis integrates Pine and Gilmore's four realms of experience with research on culinary tourism, place attachment, storytelling, gastrodiploacy and community-based heritage conservation. Results indicate that Vietnam possesses substantial culinary capital rooted in regional diversity, street-food and market culture, agricultural and craft-village systems, and everyday social practices. This capital is increasingly visible internationally: the MICHELIN Guide expanded from 103 selected establishments in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in 2023 to 181 establishments across Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang in 2025, including nine One MICHELIN Star restaurants and two MICHELIN Green Star restaurants; Hanoi was named World's Best Culinary City Destination 2024, and Vietnam was recognised as Asia's Best Culinary Destination 2025. The article argues, however, that recognition alone does not constitute sustainable cultural-industry value. Conversion requires deliberate experience design, co-creation, place-based storytelling, destination branding, cultural media and gastrodiploacy, while authenticity, community agency, sustainability and responsible digitalisation operate as cross-cutting safeguards. An integrated Culinary Heritage-Experience-Cultural Industry Framework is proposed to connect community-held culinary capital with memorable visitor experiences, scalable creative outputs, local development and national soft power. The study concludes that Vietnam should treat cuisine not merely as a tourism attraction but as a living cultural resource whose economic expansion must remain anchored in cultural fidelity and community participation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, food has moved from the periphery to the centre of tourism research, destination strategy and cultural-economy policy. Gastronomy is now understood not simply as a supporting service for travel but as a form of cultural encounter through which visitors experience place, identity, memory and everyday life. The World Tourism Organization has emphasised the close relationship between tourism and culture, while the OECD has shown how food experiences can support destination differentiation, local economic development and the wider experience economy (OECD, 2012; UNWTO, 2018). In this sense, cuisine is simultaneously a consumable product, a social practice and a medium through which places become meaningful.

This shift is especially intelligible through two influential conceptual traditions. The first is the experience economy. Pine and Gilmore (1998) argue that economic value increasingly emerges from the staging of memorable experiences rather than from the provision of goods and services alone. The second is the cultural and creative economy, where cultural expressions can be understood as forms of cultural capital that generate both cultural and economic value (Throsby, 2001) and as inputs to creative production and trade (UNCTAD, 2010). Cuisine is located directly at the intersection of these two traditions: it is inherited and continuously recreated cultural practice, but it is also an experience that can be designed, communicated and connected to tourism, media, branding and other creative sectors.

Vietnam offers a particularly relevant case for examining this convergence. Vietnamese food has long circulated internationally through migration, restaurants, tourism and media, but recent institutional recognition has made its global profile more visible. The MICHELIN Guide entered Vietnam in 2023 with an inaugural selection of 103 establishments in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, expanded to Da Nang in 2024, and by 2025 listed 181 establishments across the three cities, including nine One MICHELIN Star restaurants, two MICHELIN Green Star restaurants, 63 Bib Gourmand venues and 109 MICHELIN Selected establishments (MICHELIN Guide, 2023, 2024, 2025). At the destination level, Hanoi received the World's Best Culinary City Destination award in 2024, while Vietnam was recognised as Asia's Best Culinary Destination in 2025 (World Culinary Awards, 2024; Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2025). These developments indicate increasing international legibility of Vietnamese cuisine as a tourism and cultural asset.

Yet visibility does not by itself explain how culinary heritage generates durable value. Existing writing on Vietnamese food often emphasises dishes, recipes, regional variety and promotional narratives, while paying less attention to the mechanism through which foodways are transformed into memorable experiences, creative outputs and cultural-industry resources. A second gap concerns integration: experience-economy theory, gastronomic-tourism research, cultural-capital theory and cultural-industry policy are often treated separately even though they describe different stages of the same value-creation process. A third gap concerns sustainability. Commercial success can strengthen livelihoods, identity and destination recognition, but it can also produce standardisation, decontextualisation and unequal value capture if the communities that sustain culinary traditions lose control over their representation.

These gaps are significant for Vietnam because national cultural policy increasingly frames culture as an endogenous development resource. Decision No. 2486/QĐ-TTg of 14 November 2025 approves the Strategy for the Development of Vietnam's Cultural Industries to 2030, with a vision to 2045, including a target for cultural industries to contribute approximately 7% of national GDP by 2030. Resolution No. 80-NQ/TW of 7 January 2026 further places cultural development, cultural industries and national soft power within a broader national-development agenda. Cuisine intersects several of these priorities through cultural tourism, design, crafts, media, branding, local specialities and international cultural communication (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2025; Politburo of Vietnam, 2026).

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: (RQ1) How is Vietnamese culinary heritage converted into experiential value? (RQ2) What is Vietnam's current position as an emerging gastronomic destination, and which assets support that position? (RQ3) Under what conditions can cuisine become a sustainable resource for the cultural industry while preserving authenticity and community agency?

The study contributes by constructing an integrated framework linking culinary heritage, experience design, branding and cultural-industry development. It also updates the Vietnamese case with verified institutional evidence through 2025 and incorporates recent Vietnam-based research on place attachment, storytelling, community conservation awareness, heritage communication, interpretation quality and digital preservation. The objective is not to quantify causal effects but to clarify a conversion mechanism that can guide policy, destination management and future empirical testing.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Research design

This article is a conceptual and policy-oriented qualitative study based on document analysis and analytical synthesis. It does not use a single primary dataset and does not estimate causal relationships statistically. Instead, it triangulates theoretical scholarship, policy documents and institutional evidence in order to explain how culinary heritage may be transformed into experiential and cultural-industry value.

The design is appropriate to the research questions because the central task is mechanism clarification rather than population estimation. The article asks what resources are being converted, through which experiential and institutional mechanisms, and under what safeguards. The resulting framework is therefore interpretive and proposition-building: it organises concepts and evidence in a form that can later be tested through visitor surveys, community studies, destination comparisons and industry-level data.

2.2. Documentary corpus and selection logic

The documentary corpus comprises three groups of material. The first group contains foundational and relevant academic literature on the experience economy, culinary and gastronomic tourism, cultural capital, creative industries, destination branding and gastrodiploacy. Core sources include Pine and Gilmore (1998), Long (2004), Throsby (2001), Everett and Aitchison (2008), Sims (2009), Richards (2015), Rockower (2012), OECD (2012), UNCTAD (2010) and UNWTO (2018). These works define the principal concepts and conversion mechanisms used in the analysis.

The second group consists of recent Vietnam-based studies that provide contextual empirical support. Vu and Nguyen (2026) connect heritage memory, cultural identity and topophilia with sustainable cultural tourism development; Nguyen and Nguyen (2026) demonstrate the contribution of storytelling, co-creation and interactive interpretation to visitor experience and perceived value; Nguyen (2025) examines how sustainable tourism and community participation relate to heritage-conservation awareness; Phuong and Lam (2025) analyse cultural-heritage communication through local community feedback; Ha, Vu and Pham (2026) show that interpretation quality can influence responsible tourist behaviour; and Phuong (2026) examines opportunities and constraints in digital preservation of Vietnamese cultural heritage. These studies are not culinary studies in a narrow sense, but they illuminate the mechanisms through which heritage is experienced, communicated, conserved and digitally extended.

The third group contains policy and institutional evidence relevant to the Vietnamese case. It includes the Strategy for the Development of Vietnam's Cultural Industries to 2030, with a vision to 2045 (Decision No. 2486/QĐ-TTg), Resolution No. 80-NQ/TW on the development of Vietnamese culture, MICHELIN Guide releases for 2023-2025, the World Culinary Awards 2024 result for Hanoi, and the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism's reporting of Vietnam as Asia's Best Culinary Destination 2025. Institutional sources are used descriptively as evidence of recognition, policy direction and market visibility rather than as proof of causal impact.

2.3. Analytical procedure

The analysis proceeds in four stages. First, the theoretical literature is synthesised to identify the principal elements of culinary value creation: cultural capital, participation, immersion, co-creation, narrative, place, branding and creative scaling. Second, Pine and Gilmore's four experience realms are adapted to Vietnamese culinary tourism to clarify how different forms of participation can convert food from a product into a memorable encounter. Third, recent international recognition and Vietnamese policy documents are read as indicators of the institutional environment within which culinary experiences are being scaled. Fourth, the evidence is coded around four safeguards - authenticity, community agency, sustainability and responsible digitalisation - that determine whether commercialisation reinforces or depletes the cultural resource base.

Triangulation is achieved by comparing claims across scholarly, policy and institutional sources. Where an institutional award or ranking is used, the article treats it as a reputational signal rather than as an objective measure of culinary quality. Where Vietnam-based empirical studies are transferred from heritage tourism to culinary analysis, the transfer is made at the level of mechanism - for example, storytelling, place attachment or community participation - rather than assuming that findings from one heritage context automatically generalise to all culinary settings. This distinction limits over-interpretation and preserves the conceptual character of the study.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. From the experience economy to culinary cultural capital

Pine and Gilmore (1998) describe an evolution of economic value from commodities to goods, services and experiences. An experience occurs when an organisation intentionally stages an encounter that engages individuals in a memorable way. Their framework distinguishes four realms - entertainment, educational, esthetic and escapist - along two dimensions: the degree of participation and the mode of connection between the participant and the event. Applied to food, the framework shifts analytical attention from the dish alone to the full encounter: what diners observe, learn, feel, perform and remember.

Long (2004) develops culinary tourism as intentional engagement with the foodways of others, treating food simultaneously as a destination and a medium of cultural exploration. Richards (2015) traces a parallel evolution from themed food experiences to co-created encounters and broader foodscapes in which producers, residents, visitors and place jointly shape value. These approaches position participation and relationality at the centre of gastronomic tourism: the visitor is not simply a consumer of taste but a participant in a culturally situated experience.

A second theoretical bridge is cultural capital. Throsby (2001) conceptualises cultural capital as an asset that embodies and generates cultural value. In culinary settings, this capital is held not only in recipes but also in skills, sensory knowledge, food rituals, ingredient systems, markets, craft practices and social relations. UNCTAD (2010) extends the economic logic by showing how

culture and creativity become inputs to goods, services and creative industries. Cuisine therefore becomes a cultural-industry resource when its living cultural capital is translated into experiences and creative outputs that can circulate without severing the cultural relationships that give them meaning.

These literatures support a central proposition: culinary heritage generates durable value when cultural capital is converted through experience design and then scaled through tourism, media, branding and other creative channels, while the community and sense of place remain visible within the value chain.

3.2. Vietnamese cuisine as experiential and cultural capital

Vietnamese cuisine possesses many of the attributes identified above as sources of experiential value: strong regional differentiation, visible street-food and market culture, close relationships with agricultural landscapes and craft production, and everyday practices of shared eating. Its cultural capital is therefore distributed across both formal and informal settings. A bowl of phở, a market breakfast, a family-run eatery or a village food practice is not valuable solely because of its ingredients; value also lies in preparation techniques, local narratives, the sensory environment, patterns of sociability and the association between food and place.

This place-bounded quality is analytically important. Vu and Nguyen (2026) show, in a broader heritage-tourism context, that heritage memory, cultural identity, topophilia and community engagement are associated with sustainable cultural tourism development. The implication for cuisine is that the attachment between a food practice and its locality can function as a differentiating resource. When destinations retain this connection, culinary experiences become difficult to imitate and can strengthen both visitor memory and resident identity. When the connection is removed, the dish may remain commercially saleable but lose part of the cultural capital that makes it distinctive.

Vietnam's regional diversity provides a wide portfolio of such place-specific assets. Northern, central and southern foodways differ in ingredients, seasoning traditions, preparation techniques and social contexts, while specific cities and localities are associated with particular dishes, markets and craft systems. Rather than treating diversity as an obstacle to a national culinary brand, it can be understood as a portfolio architecture: a shared national culinary identity composed of strongly differentiated local experiences.

The street-food and market environment adds a further experiential advantage. Preparation is often visible, participation barriers are relatively low, and eating occurs within active social spaces rather than isolated service settings. These conditions can transform routine consumption into observation, interaction and immersion. The strategic value lies not in romanticising informality but in recognising that accessibility, visibility and social interaction are components of experience design that formal tourism products can learn from without displacing the communities that created them.

3.3. International recognition and Vietnam's emerging gastronomic position

Recent institutional milestones indicate a strengthening international profile for Vietnamese gastronomy. Table 1 summarises verified developments from 2023 to 2025. The sequence is analytically useful because it shows not only the arrival of external recognition but its widening geographical coverage and increasing depth.

Table 1. Selected international recognition milestones for Vietnamese gastronomy, 2023-2025

Year	Verified milestone	Strategic significance
2023	The inaugural MICHELIN Guide Hanoi & Ho Chi Minh City listed 103 establishments, including four One MICHELIN Star restaurants and 29 Bib Gourmand venues.	Created an internationally recognised quality signal for Vietnam's two largest culinary markets.
2024	The MICHELIN Guide expanded to Da Nang and listed 164 establishments; Vietnam received its first MICHELIN Green Star. Hanoi was named World's Best Culinary City Destination 2024.	Broadened geographic representation and linked culinary quality with sustainability and destination branding.
2025	The MICHELIN Guide listed 181 establishments across Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang, including nine One MICHELIN Star restaurants, two Green Star restaurants and 63 Bib Gourmand venues. Vietnam was recognised as Asia's Best Culinary Destination 2025.	Indicated continued expansion of recognised culinary supply and stronger national-level destination visibility.

Source: Compiled by the author from MICHELIN Guide (2023, 2024, 2025), World Culinary Awards (2024), and Vietnam National Authority of Tourism (2025).

These distinctions should be interpreted carefully. Awards and guide selections do not measure the entire culinary system, nor do they automatically demonstrate sustainable community benefit. Their importance lies in reputational infrastructure. Internationally legible labels can reduce information uncertainty for travellers, concentrate media attention, legitimise investment and place unfamiliar destinations within a recognised comparison set. In other words, they contribute to visibility and trust at the stage where culinary capital is being translated into market recognition.

The 2025 MICHELIN selection is especially relevant because it includes both high-end and accessible categories and continues to recognise street food, family-run venues and traditional dishes alongside contemporary restaurants. This breadth supports an interpretation of Vietnam's gastronomic advantage as heterogeneous rather than elite-only. It also strengthens the argument that the country's culinary brand can combine everyday authenticity with contemporary creative reinterpretation.

The destination awards provide a complementary signal. Hanoi's 2024 global city-level recognition and Vietnam's 2025 Asian destination recognition suggest a movement from individual restaurant reputation toward broader place and national associations. For cultural-industry strategy, this matters because the value of cuisine can extend beyond restaurant revenue to tourism, media, design, local products, education, festivals and national image.

3.4. Staging culinary experiences: co-creation, storytelling and place

The four experience realms become most useful when translated into concrete design decisions. Table 2 applies the framework to Vietnamese culinary tourism and identifies the principal value mechanism associated with each realm.

Table 2. Application of the four experience realms to Vietnamese culinary tourism

Realm	Illustrative Vietnamese applications	Primary value mechanism	Main risk if poorly designed
Entertainment	Cooking demonstrations, night-market programmes, food-festival performances	Attention, enjoyment, first contact with culinary culture	Spectacle detached from cultural context
Educational	Cooking classes, ingredient interpretation, market walks, craft-food workshops	Learning, skill acquisition, cultural understanding	Simplification or inaccurate interpretation
Esthetic	Heritage-quarter eateries, riverside settings, craft villages, historic market environments	Immersion in atmosphere and sense of place	Staged environments that displace living practices
Escapist	Farm-to-table participation, harvesting, fishing, village foodways, multi-stage cooking experiences	Active participation, co-creation and personal memory	Intrusive tourism or unequal community benefit

Source: Proposed by the author based on Pine and Gilmore (1998), Long (2004), Richards (2015), and Sims (2009).

Two design principles cut across all four realms. The first is co-creation. Richards (2015) shows that gastronomic experiences increasingly move beyond passive consumption towards participation by producers and consumers within broader foodscapes. In practice, co-creation can involve choosing ingredients, preparing a dish, speaking with producers, learning a technique or participating in a local food event. Such activities do not guarantee authenticity, but they can increase engagement because the visitor contributes to the experience rather than merely receiving it.

The second principle is narrative. Storytelling connects sensory experience to history, landscape, livelihoods and community. Nguyen and Nguyen (2026), in research on heritage destinations in Vietnam, find that storytelling dimensions including co-creation and interactive engagement contribute to heritage experience and perceived value. Although a heritage site and a culinary setting are not identical, the mechanism is transferable: a dish becomes more meaningful when visitors understand why it belongs to a place, how ingredients are produced, who holds the knowledge and how the practice has changed over time.

Interpretation quality is equally important. Ha, Vu and Pham (2026) demonstrate at the Imperial Citadel of Hue that interpretation quality can influence personal norms and responsible tourist behaviour. For culinary tourism, this suggests that interpretation should not stop at taste description. High-quality culinary interpretation can communicate provenance, seasonality, labour, environmental practices, local etiquette and the social meanings of food. The value of interpretation is therefore both experiential and behavioural: it can enrich the visit while encouraging more respectful engagement with the cultural system that produces the experience.

A portfolio approach follows. Vietnam does not need a single flagship culinary product. Heritage-quarter food trails, cooking schools, farm-to-table programmes, craft-village experiences, local-market interpretation, culinary festivals and contemporary restaurant storytelling can occupy different experience realms and serve different audience segments. The strategic requirement is coherence: each experience should remain place-specific while contributing to a broader image of Vietnamese cuisine as diverse, living, participatory and culturally grounded.

3.5. From culinary experience to cultural-industry resource

Beyond the individual visitor, cuisine can generate value at the level of destination branding, national image and cultural production. OECD (2012) identifies food as an important platform for tourism experience, place marketing and local development. Rockower (2012) extends the argument into public diplomacy through the concept of gastrodiploacy: the strategic use of national cuisine to build familiarity, brand recognition and soft power among foreign publics. This is particularly relevant to countries whose food cultures travel more easily than their political or historical narratives.

For Vietnam, cuisine is a relatively low-barrier interface with national culture. Restaurants, recipes, videos, food festivals, travel programmes and diaspora networks allow audiences to encounter Vietnamese culture without first possessing specialised knowledge

about the country. This does not mean that food automatically generates favourable national attitudes; rather, cuisine supplies recurring points of contact through which cultural familiarity can accumulate. When these contacts are linked by coherent, culturally grounded narratives, gastronomy can reinforce destination and nation branding.

The cultural-industry perspective broadens the value chain further. Decision No. 2486/QD-TTg establishes a national strategy for developing cultural industries through 2030 and 2045. Cuisine intersects multiple fields covered by this policy ecosystem: cultural tourism, creative design, handicrafts, media content, branding, festivals and local-product development. The food-based cultural industry therefore extends beyond restaurants to include culinary education, experience design, publishing, audiovisual content, packaging, local-speciality branding, culinary events, crafts and the agricultural and craft-village supply chains that make food experiences possible.

Digital communication is now an important scaling mechanism within this chain. Food videos, documentaries, social media, streaming content, maps, reservation platforms and digital storytelling can extend Vietnamese culinary imagery well beyond physical destinations. Phuong and Lam (2025) show that heritage communication effectiveness is linked with narrative engagement, social interaction and community feedback. The implication for gastronomy is that digital visibility should be evaluated not only by reach but also by cultural accuracy and the capacity to connect audiences with living communities and places.

The value chain is therefore multi-directional. Tourism can create demand for culinary products; media can stimulate tourism; restaurant recognition can enhance destination reputation; design and craft can elevate food presentation; and local agricultural systems can become part of the visitor experience. Cultural-industry development occurs when these nodes reinforce one another rather than operating as isolated promotional activities.

3.6. Enabling conditions and risks

The conversion of cuisine into a durable cultural-industry resource is not automatic. Four enabling conditions emerge consistently from the literature and the Vietnamese evidence: authenticity, community agency, sustainability and responsible digitalisation. These conditions should be treated as cross-cutting safeguards rather than as separate add-on objectives.

Authenticity concerns the perceived and substantive connection between the experience and the cultural practices from which it derives. Sims (2009) argues that local food can symbolise place and contribute to sustainable tourism precisely because visitors value its connection to local culture. The risk is that commercial staging flattens regional specificity into generic spectacle. Authenticity therefore does not require culinary practices to remain unchanged; it requires that adaptation remain intelligible in relation to provenance, people and cultural meaning.

Community agency concerns who retains knowledge, decision-making and economic value. Everett and Aitchison (2008) show how food tourism can sustain regional identity and local supply chains when local actors remain central. Vietnam-based evidence reinforces the broader principle: Nguyen (2025) identifies community participation as important to changes in heritage-conservation awareness. In culinary contexts, family-run eateries, farmers, craft producers, market vendors, local guides and community organisations are not decorative components of a tourism product; they are holders of the cultural capital on which quality depends. Sustainability has environmental, economic and cultural dimensions. The growth of MICHELIN Green Star recognition in Vietnam from one restaurant in 2024 to two in 2025 signals increasing visibility of sustainable gastronomy within the formal recognition system. Yet sustainability must extend beyond restaurant operations. Local sourcing, seasonality, waste reduction, fair value distribution, viable producer livelihoods and the continuity of knowledge transmission all affect whether culinary development can endure.

Responsible digitalisation concerns both preservation and representation. Phuong (2026) discusses how digital preservation can expand access to Vietnamese cultural heritage while also raising technological, ethical and financial constraints. Culinary knowledge can similarly be documented through digital archives, oral histories, recipe documentation, maps and audiovisual records. However, digital reach can also accelerate decontextualisation if content separates visually attractive food from its social and cultural setting. Responsible digitalisation therefore combines access with provenance, consent, accuracy and community involvement.

Table 3. Safeguards, risks and indicative measures for sustainable culinary value creation

Safeguard	Primary risk	Indicative management focus	Possible indicators
Authenticity	Decontextualisation; standardisation	Maintain provenance, local narratives and recognisable cultural context	Use of local narratives; visitor understanding of provenance; cultural-fidelity review
Community agency	External capture of value; loss of control	Keep producers, residents and knowledge holders involved in design and benefit sharing	Share of local suppliers; community-led experiences; local revenue retention
Sustainability	Resource pressure; unequal benefit; cultural depletion	Integrate environmental, economic and cultural sustainability	Local/seasonal sourcing; waste practices; continuity of craft and food knowledge

Responsible digitalisation	Inaccuracy; oversimplification; detached representation	Use digital tools for preservation, interpretation and faithful promotion	Metadata/provenance quality; community consent; accuracy of digital content; accessibility
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Source: Proposed by the author based on Sims (2009), Everett and Aitchison (2008), Nguyen (2025), Phuong and Lam (2025), Phuong (2026), and the research findings.

3.7. Integrated Culinary Heritage-Experience-Cultural Industry Framework

The preceding findings can be consolidated into a five-stage conversion framework. The framework distinguishes the cultural resource base from the mechanisms that transform and scale it, while treating safeguards as conditions that must operate across the entire chain.

The framework clarifies a key analytical distinction. Culinary heritage is the resource base, not the final economic product. Experience design converts the resource into visitor value; branding, media and policy scale that value; and cultural-industry outcomes appear only when the process produces repeatable economic and reputational effects. At the same time, the safeguards operate recursively: if commercial scaling weakens authenticity, community agency or sustainability, the resource base itself is depleted and future experiential value declines.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings support a shift from product-centred to system-centred thinking about Vietnamese cuisine. Culinary development is often discussed through iconic dishes or restaurant promotion, but the experience-economy perspective suggests that the dish is only one component of value. The more defensible source of differentiation lies in the combination of food, place, people, narrative, participation and atmosphere. This explains why experiences linked to markets, neighbourhoods, farms, craft villages and long-standing local practices can create value that is difficult to replicate elsewhere.

The analysis also strengthens the distinction between recognition and conversion. Vietnam's recent MICHELIN expansion and destination awards indicate rising visibility, but reputational signals are intermediate assets rather than end outcomes. A guide selection can orient international attention; an award can support destination positioning; neither ensures that benefits reach local producers or that culinary knowledge remains viable. Sustainable cultural-industry development therefore requires mechanisms that connect recognition to local supply chains, community participation, creative content and repeatable experiences.

Recent Vietnam-based heritage research provides useful empirical support for this conversion logic. Vu and Nguyen (2026) foreground identity, memory, topophilia and community engagement; Nguyen and Nguyen (2026) show how storytelling and co-creation strengthen heritage experience; Ha, Vu and Pham (2026) demonstrate that interpretation quality can influence responsible behaviour; Nguyen (2025) identifies the role of participation in conservation awareness; and Phuong and Lam (2025) emphasise community feedback in heritage communication. Taken together, these studies suggest that heritage value is mediated by interpretation, participation and place attachment rather than transferred automatically from resource to visitor. Vietnamese culinary tourism is likely to operate through the same broad mechanism.

The cultural-industry perspective adds a second layer to this interpretation. If culinary heritage is treated only as tourism content, much of its creative potential is missed. Cuisine can generate media, design, publishing, education, branded local products, festivals, experiential retail, craft collaboration and international cultural communication. These extensions are especially relevant under Vietnam's 2025 cultural-industries strategy, which seeks to strengthen the contribution and competitiveness of cultural sectors. The policy opportunity is therefore cross-sectoral: gastronomy can act as a connecting platform among tourism, agriculture, crafts, media, design and place branding. Comparable Vietnamese evidence outside gastronomy also supports this cross-sectoral conversion logic. Research on brocade weaving in the Northern mountainous region similarly treats a traditional cultural asset as a resource for developing distinctive tourism products, illustrating how locally grounded heritage can be mobilised within tourism-oriented value creation (Pham et al., 2025).

Gastrodiplomacy provides a further reason to pursue this integration. Rockower (2012) frames cuisine as an accessible form of public diplomacy capable of building familiarity among foreign audiences. Vietnamese food already has substantial international circulation, but circulation alone does not guarantee a coherent national image. A stronger approach would connect overseas restaurants, diaspora networks, culinary events, destination campaigns, food media and cultural institutions around narratives that are recognisably Vietnamese while still preserving regional diversity. The strategic objective is not to standardise cuisine but to make diversity legible within a shared national cultural proposition.

Digitalisation introduces both opportunity and risk. Digital content can expand the audience for Vietnamese food at low marginal cost and can preserve vulnerable knowledge through documentation. Yet platform logic often rewards visual novelty and simplification, which can detach dishes from their context. The implication is that digital performance should not be judged only through views or engagement. Cultural accuracy, attribution, provenance, community consent and the capacity to stimulate meaningful physical or educational engagement are equally important measures.

Finally, the framework suggests that sustainability is not merely a constraint on growth but a condition of long-term value creation. Culinary cultural capital is renewable only if the practices, people and ecological systems that reproduce it remain viable. Economic growth that undermines local sourcing, excludes knowledge holders or converts distinctive practices into generic products may increase short-term consumption while reducing the resource on which future differentiation depends. Sustainable culinary policy should therefore be evaluated by both market outcomes and the health of the cultural resource base.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

This study examined Vietnamese cuisine at the intersection of the experience economy and the cultural industry. It argued that culinary heritage becomes economically and culturally valuable not through the dish alone but through a broader conversion process in which community-held cultural capital is staged as a memorable, place-based experience and then scaled through tourism, branding, media, gastrodiploacy and cultural-industry policy.

Vietnam has a strong resource base for this process. Regional diversity, street-food and market culture, agricultural and craft-village systems, social practices of eating, and a growing contemporary restaurant scene provide multiple forms of culinary capital. International recognition has also deepened: the MICHELIN Guide expanded from 103 establishments in 2023 to 181 in 2025, while Hanoi and Vietnam received major culinary-destination recognition in 2024 and 2025. These developments strengthen visibility but should be understood as reputational infrastructure rather than as proof that sustainable value has already been achieved.

The central finding is conditionality. Cuisine becomes a durable cultural-industry resource only when experience design produces learning, participation, immersion and memory; when scaling mechanisms connect culinary experiences to destination and national narratives; and when authenticity, community agency, sustainability and responsible digitalisation protect the underlying cultural capital. The proposed Culinary Heritage-Experience-Cultural Industry Framework makes these relationships explicit and provides a basis for policy design and future empirical testing.

5.2. Policy and practical recommendations

First, destination authorities should curate place-based culinary experience clusters rather than promote isolated dishes. Food trails, markets, cooking classes, craft villages, farms, heritage neighbourhoods and festivals should be connected through coherent narratives that explain provenance, local history and community knowledge.

Second, experience-design capacity should be strengthened among local operators. Training should go beyond service quality to include interpretation, co-creation, storytelling, visitor participation and responsible experience design. The objective is to increase memorable value without converting local practices into staged stereotypes.

Third, cuisine should be explicitly treated as a cross-cutting cultural-industry resource. Policy coordination should connect tourism, culture, agriculture, crafts, creative design, media, local-product branding and education so that value is captured across the ecosystem rather than concentrated only in restaurants and large tourism firms.

Fourth, community participation and local value retention should be built into programme design and evaluation. Indicators should include the share of local suppliers, participation of family businesses and knowledge holders, community-led experiences, revenue retained locally, and continuity of traditional skills.

Fifth, Vietnam should develop a more coordinated gastrodiploacy architecture linking overseas restaurants, diaspora networks, cultural centres, diplomatic missions, culinary events, travel promotion and digital food media. The objective should be coherent cultural recognition rather than a single standardised national menu.

Sixth, sustainability should become auditable. Culinary initiatives should monitor sourcing, seasonality, waste, producer livelihoods, cultural continuity and the distribution of benefits. MICHELIN Green Star recognition can contribute to visibility, but destination-level sustainability requires broader indicators than restaurant-level awards alone.

Seventh, digital investment should prioritise both preservation and faithful communication. Digital archives of techniques, oral histories and regional foodways can support knowledge continuity, while multimedia content can widen access. Governance should address attribution, consent, provenance and cultural accuracy so that digital reach does not come at the cost of decontextualisation.

Eighth, evaluation systems should move beyond visitor numbers and media reach. Useful outcome measures include visitor learning, place attachment, willingness to recommend, responsible behaviour, consumption of local products, community benefit, international cultural recognition and the resilience of the culinary practices on which experiences depend.

5.3. Limitations and directions for future research

The study is conceptual and relies on secondary evidence. It does not directly measure visitor responses, community outcomes or the economic contribution of culinary experiences. Institutional recognition such as MICHELIN selections and destination awards is used as evidence of visibility and reputation, not as a comprehensive measure of culinary quality or sustainability.

Future research should empirically test the four experience realms in Vietnamese culinary settings and examine how entertainment, education, esthetic immersion and escapist participation influence memorability, perceived authenticity, place attachment and

behavioural intentions. Comparative studies across Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Hue, Hoi An and other culinary destinations could identify whether the same experience mechanisms operate consistently across different foodscapes.

Further research should also investigate value distribution within culinary supply chains, including the extent to which tourism growth benefits small producers, craft villages, farmers, family businesses and informal food vendors. Longitudinal work could examine whether international recognition changes local practices, prices, employment, cultural transmission and destination identity over time. Finally, digital research should assess how different forms of culinary storytelling influence cultural accuracy, visitor expectations and national image among international audiences.

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