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# Innovation in the restaurants industry: A review of the evidence

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**Pedro Miguel Pinto Simão**  
**Adriana Isabel Teixeira da Silva**

DEGEI, Universidade de Aveiro

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## Abstract

Innovation represents a must for any given business or economy as it generates wealth and knowledge which contribute towards the development of tourism destinations. In the context of tourism, these variables are crucial since the innovation phenomenon has been increasing at a very fast pace. In another view, the hospitality and the food and beverage subsectors tend to be the most representative in the tourism economy, by providing the most tourism revenues as well as employment opportunities. However, the food and beverage sector lacks on scientific researches, which means there is still a lot to be debated in this matter. In practical terms, this means that entrepreneurs need to understand customer's needs as well as the main changes that are occurring in the present, in order to predict future actions. There is a clear need for stakeholders to understand the importance of their unique resources and to promote them in order to create competitive and comparative advantages. This paper analyses the influence of innovation in the food and beverage sector by taking a special acknowledgment to the restaurants industry. A deep literature review was undertaken in order to attach the types of innovation to the context of the restaurants industry.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Innovation, Food and Beverage, Restaurants, Stakeholders

## Resumo

A inovação é obrigatória para qualquer empresa ou economia, porque gera riqueza e conhecimento, que contribuem para o desenvolvimento dos destinos turísticos. No contexto do turismo, estas variáveis são cruciais já que o fenómeno da inovação tem incrementado a um ritmo bastante acelerado. Numa outra perspetiva, os sectores do alojamento e da restauração tendem a ser os mais representativos para a economia turística, proporcionando a maioria das receitas turísticas e das oportunidades de emprego. Contudo, o sector da restauração carece de estudos científicos, o que significa que ainda há muito para se debater neste contexto. Em termos práticos, isto significa que os empreendedores têm de compreender as necessidades dos consumidores, bem como as principais mudanças que têm ocorrido no presente, de forma a prever ações futuras. Há uma clara necessidade de os *stakeholders* perceberem a importância dos seus recursos únicos e de os promoverem de forma a criarem vantagens competitivas e comparativas. Este artigo analisa a influência da inovação no sector da restauração, tendo uma especial atenção à indústria dos restaurantes. Foi adotada uma aprofundada revisão de literatura para poder relacionar os tipos de inovação ao contexto da indústria da restauração.

**Palavras-chave:** Turismo, Inovação, Restauração, Restaurantes, *Stakeholders*

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, innovation tends to be a must for any business or region as it is directly related to the creation of wealth and critical knowledge. These phenomena are central towards the construction of a competitive environment, which provides employability, business growth and development as well as the possibility to position a given destination.

When referring to the tourism sector, there is a notorious growth in recent years which needs to be addressed. For example, in Portugal, it currently represents 9, 2% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and directly employs over 450 thousand people (INE, 2008; Publituris, 2014). In Europe, according to Eurostat and the World Tourism Organization, these numbers rise to 14 million people, proving that the tourism sector may even surpass the economic values of the oil and automobile sectors (Eurostat, 2010; UNWTO, 2014). As Mill and Morrison (1992) mention, tourism tends to be the most efficient way for countries to combat their lack of economic growth, providing regional benefits that can and should be used by local agents in order to increase productivity levels.

One issue that has been brought up by many researchers is the fact that the tourism sector is fully dominated with Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs). According to Costa (2005), these business represent over 99% of all the enterprises that are filled in this sector. It is clear that SMTEs have scarce resources and tend to be run by families

and also represent a great asset towards local development (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 2008; Mariani, Buhalis, Longhi, & Vitouladiti, 2014). SMTEs tend, not only, to be crucial for knowledge creation, but are also embedded in an environment overrepresented with networks among the numerous agents (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2012; Saxena, 2005; Simão, 2013).

There are numerous agents that reinforce the need to strengthen business relationships that tend to be represented in different enterprises and sectors that can be directly associated with the tourism industry. Therefore, according to the UNWTO (2008), there are seven specific subsectors that fit in the tourism sector in a direct way, namely (i) hospitality, (ii) food and beverage industry, (iii) transport of passengers, (iv) travel agencies and tourism operators, (v) rent-a-car services, (vi) cultural services and (vii) recreational services. Businesses that are framed in any of these sectors tend to work together in distinctive ways in order to generate local economic development as well as to provide a sustainable and competitive environment for tourism practices (Costa, Breda, Costa, & Minguéns, 2008).

Having known the diversity of subsectors associated with tourism, there is a clear need to understand that both the hospitality and the food and beverage industries are the most representative in economic terms (Simão & Breda, 2014a). Even though researchers have a special interest in studying the hospitality sector, little is known about the food and

beverage sector, more precisely the restaurants industry.

The aim of this paper is to understand how innovation can act as a catalyst towards the creation and diffusion of new techniques in the restaurants industry. Since the innovation concept does not possess either a universal definition or strict categories, it is relevant to explain how innovation should be approached in the vision of restaurant entrepreneurs. The need to comprehend this relationship tends to be crucial either for owners to increase their revenues, but also for regions to focus on their comparative advantages. In order to fulfill the objective of this paper, a systematic and deep literature review was undertaken, combining the issues that are essential for the innovation of the restaurants industry. It is believed that a literature review relating both the innovation techniques and knowledge dissemination will represent a solid basis for future studies focusing on the restaurants industry.

## 2. A Look at the Restaurants Industry

The need to fully understand the dynamics of the restaurants industry becomes imminent the moment a destination includes tourism in the development stages of its economy.

Even though its services are destined towards both tourists and local inhabitants, the restaurants industry is the most representative tourism subsector in economic terms (Simão & Breda, 2014b). However, when it comes to scientific research, there is an abysmal gap that demands substantial debate in further researches. Gehrels (2012) explains that

the scarce literature is highly associated with the fact that the restaurants' industry requires "how-to-do" manuals instead of theoretical background. Enterprises are not focusing their efforts in providing reports and instead entrepreneurs aim to establish skills, tasks or practical frameworks that can be applied in order to create a more efficient environment (Janschek, Kieb, & Mercer, 1998). There is also an emerging need to value the know-how of employees as this will generate a consistent assist in the leader's vision (Czinkota, Ronkainen, Moffett, & Michael, 1999).

What also helps this lack of information is the nature of enterprises, which are mostly fit in the SMTEs group. According to the European Commission (2003) these businesses account for less than 250 employees and their turnovers tend to be less than €50 Million. Also, these firms deploy their services focusing on a local context since they lack the capital and the resources to aim for a bigger paradigm. However, in some cases, internationalization strategies may be a viable possibility towards the growth and development of restaurants, helping the creation of a worldwide known brand (Camillo, Connolly & Kim, 2008; Koh, Lee & Boo, 2009; Parso & Kahn, 1992).

Globalization has also lead to the constant technological expansion that affects the current society. Entrepreneurs need to develop consistent strategies and to be aware of the latest trends and information that may be represented in other businesses or regions (Buhalis, 1998). Enterprises that have recently entered the competitive food and beverage market will have to put a

special effort in developing high-tech equipment in order to fulfill consumer's needs (Honjo, 2000). It is up to managers to implement their own vision according to the resources they dispose of as well as the strategies they perceive to be the best towards the growth of the restaurant. This will be decisive as customers will start developing their experience the moment their perceptions are related with previous expectations (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2013).

Simão (2013) studied the restaurants industry and gathered relevant data for a more precise knowledge of the food and beverage sector. First of all, it tends to be a male-dominated industry, on which women are underrepresented in leadership roles. In other words, while men hold the top positions, the few women in charge tend to be their female counterparts, proving that there is lack of opportunities towards females. Also, men earn more than women, but they also occupy most full time jobs (Costa, Carvalho & Breda, 2010; Costa, Carvalho, Caçador & Breda, 2012). However, Thomas (2000) states that restaurants tend differ according to the qualifications of their staff as well as the cuisine they provide which may be extremely beneficial when marketing their services.

Since restaurants rely on costumers it is understandable that entrepreneurs face an extremely dynamic reality, forcing them to be aware of the business' economic state. This explains why this industry has birth rates of 15,7% and death rates of over 16% (INE, 2009) which emphasizes manager's needs to implement long term strategies.

Moreover, according to the Banco de Portugal (2010) death rates in restaurants may reach up to 60% in the first 5 years of existence, but it decrease the longer the business positions itself on the market. Parsa, Self and King (2005) discovered that 90% of restaurants may have to cease their functions since human resources don't put much time and effort in what they should produce. Therefore, Zaritski (2014) claims that leaders must engage their subordinates and train them in order to perform their tasks with utmost accuracy.

What may influence these results in the possible uncertainty associated with the motivation of entrepreneurs, since restaurants require teamwork amongst all human resources as well as a trustworthy environment (Fritsch, Brixly & Falck, 2006; Jovanovic, 1982). The lack of an accurate kind of leadership and the economic depression that limits entrepreneurs' expenses may also explain why death rates are currently increasing (Parsa, Self, Sydnor-Busso & Yoon, 2011)

The area where restaurants are situated tends to be crucial for a leader's long term strategy when selecting the target-market. Restaurants that provide unique experiences but fail to be located in specific locations tend to be unsuccessful in the long run (English, Josiam, Upchurch & Willems, 1996). Also, since this industry tends to be quite fragmented, it is mandatory to understand where visitors and residents are mostly concentrated, in order to increase revenues. Marketing and social networks may be an efficient yet inexpensive way for restaurants to create value and

singularity in a competitive environment (Almeida, 2007; Li, Gray, Lockwood & Buhalis, 2013).

These are the main issues that concern this industry but there is still much more to be brought up in future scientific studies. Next chapter aims to introduce the innovation concept in this industry, providing a view on what entrepreneurs can and should be do in order to create a sustainable environment in their businesses.

### **3. Types of Innovation in the Restaurants Industry**

The need to innovate is central to any entrepreneur that aims to create a sustainable enterprise. However, there are different ways to implement new techniques and to generate higher levels of competitiveness in the tourism sector.

There are numerous definitions of innovation and there is no need to debate the history of this concept, created and further explored by Schumpeter (1934). Also, even though literature tends to be very unclear about a universal definition, the main issues debated in every definition include the deployment of new or improved goods, services, marketing strategies, managing or administrative levels or a better work environment (OECD, 2012). On a recent basis, as Gilmore and Pine (1999) stated, innovation has been fully connected with the way consumers create their experiences. Individuals are better informed and aware of changes, and they seek more than just an efficient service or a sophisticated product. They buy “a package” beforehand, which will prevail

in their mind throughout their lives, which forces stakeholders and entrepreneurs to create unique and singular solutions. Therefore, stakeholders need to strengthen their techniques in order to create loyalty amongst their customers (Aldebert, Dang & Longhi, 2011; Weppen & Cochrane, 2012). In other words, Lashley (2008) highlights that innovation has a special emphasis in costumers’ motivations, desires, attitudes and expectations, as well as perceptions.

All the concern that emerges from changes in the tourism sector demands a specific understanding of the innovation methodologies that are occurring on a current basis (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Local agents need to be fully aware of a destination’s potential in order to create a well-structured plan to increase profitability. Costa (2011) suggests that all entities and individuals should create a framework that gathers all the data concerning science, technology, learning, production, politics, supply and demand in order to prevent any potential flaws.

Hjalager (2010) has provided a very decisive contribution in the field of tourism innovation by categorizing five different types of innovation that can be identified in this sector, namely: (i) process, (ii) product, (iii) managerial, (iv) management and (v) institutional. It is relevant to explain each category and associate them with possible practical enforcements that may occur in the restaurants industry. Also, since there is a constant need to guarantee quality and efficiency, restaurants need to strengthen their innovative methodologies to



increase the tourist experience (Nankervis, Miyamoto, Milton-Smith & Taylor, 2005).

#### 4. Process Innovations

The first issue that needs to be addressed is the creation of value in order to further be applied in the tourism industry. Rogers (2007) claims that innovations need to disseminate in order to increase productivity and efficiency levels.

The fact that restaurants rely on processes proves that, as stated by Aiken and Hage (1971) that innovations at this precise level will gradually increase economic and long term benefits. On the other hand, Wang and Kafouros (2009) believe that the capability of a business to innovate depends on its precision to create value and to develop specific processes that can be developed in a given economy. Hjalager (2010) substantiates that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are complementary in process innovations as they generate substantial impact in training, educating and managing human resources. Nevertheless, ICTs tend to boost the creation of new and improved processes that enterprises use as comparative advantages towards the acquisition of new customers.

In restaurants, ICTs are directly related to process innovations as they tend to be extremely helpful when customers request or receive their orders. Pantelidis (2009) studied this phenomenon and verified that entrepreneurs have focused on efficient technological ways to provide food to

their customers. Simão (2014) empowers this though by adding that even though clients seek memorable experiences, they also demand faster services with increased quality. Therefore, restaurant leaders should not worry about investing in ICTs as there is a constant need to increase value and customer satisfaction by implementing efficient processes.

#### 5. Product Innovations

Part of the restaurant experience is directly related to the consumption of food, which proves to be essential towards consumer satisfaction.

Jacob et. al (2003) emphasize that gastronomy and infrastructure are highly representative in customers' expectations and tend to be crucial success factors in restaurants that aim to create value. It is clear that restaurants may become tourist attractions by nature, as customers may visit a specific location just to experience their own products. Also, Weppen and Cochrane (2012) explain that each restaurant conceives its own products, which helps to differentiate these enterprises and to create a specific position in tourists' views.

However, Le et. al (2006) alert to the fact that any business that is implanted in the tourism industry needs to stay completely aware of potential political, cultural and environmental barriers that may turn potential product innovations into useless concepts. The need to create an elaborate strategic plan turns out to be crucial in order to decrease the investment in unprofitable methodologies. Moreover, leaders should wage their efforts into precise marketing

by providing viable and resourceful information that is judged by its target market.

## 6. Managerial Innovations

These innovations are intensely associated with the administrative level of enterprises. In other words, leadership patterns are inserted into this topic.

Ottenbacher and Gnoth (2005) explored the relationship between firm success and human resources and found out that clear guidance and the need to motivate staff tends to be central in any tourism enterprise. Entrepreneurs must focus on their subordinates' individual values, careers and benefits in order to enhance their knowledge and skills (Hall & Williams, 2008; Simão & Breda, 2014b). Simão also (2013) discovered that since employees tend to work at unsocial hours and they tend to earn less than what they deserve, there is a clear need for leaders to address this situation on a constant basis. Developing specific skills and creating a democratic environment on which employees may express their views and criticisms may be decisive to annihilate any negative issues amongst staff members.

Also, as Simão (2014) stressed, human resources not only have to deal with unfriendly working hours, they also face unpaid work at home which increases dissatisfaction levels. Therefore, leaders need to invest in back-office and front-office methodologies that can cope with subordinate's skills and qualifications so that productivity levels can be met while keeping staff happy (Camisón & Monfort-Mir, 2012).

On a general note, it is understandable that these innovations are not necessarily seen and judged by customers, but they are mandatory to increase the competitiveness levels of any business. Since restaurants require human resources at all times, leaders should emphasize their strategies on these innovations since they will generate decisive contributions in the long run.

## 7. Management Innovations

This category of innovation enhances the capability to discover, select and identify specific segments of consumers. Hjalager (2010) underlines that any enterprise that can pinpoint its main assets will strengthen its core brand and collect new customers while receiving positive feedback from the current ones.

In other words, since restaurant firms face daily Business-to-Consumer relationships, there is a constant need to improve these ties and to generate a trustworthy environment (Morais, Dorsch & Backman, 2004). Buhalis (1996) claims that one way to ensure the creation of a positive bond is to create appropriate marketing strategies, by providing, acquiring, processing, analyzing, storing and collecting information and reducing space. This will act as a catalyst towards the business economic structure since consumers are more active, informed and experienced, as well as more skeptical and critical towards innovative models implemented in businesses (Qi, Law & Buhalis, 2013).

Therefore, ICTs may be critical in management innovations, as they boost the singularity of restaurants by

differentiating their global characteristics. Leaders have to know when and how to invest in this category in order to stay competitive while creating a sustainable business.

### 8. Institutional Innovations

The last category of innovation stresses the need to implement new methodologies in the organization context of the firm. Simão and Breda (2014b) proved that these innovations tend to cover for existing flaws or failures.

On the other hand, Altejevic and Doorne (2000) discovered that lifestyle entrepreneurs tend to be more focused on those issues, as they seek perfection in their business. While they are in constant need to implement new changes and innovations at the institutional level, they also pinpoint the need to increase business values as well as individual skills. Basically, these innovations tend to be applied on a constant basis and tend to be most appealing for customers who strive for unique experiences. However, Hjalager (2010) stresses that these innovations are quite difficult to implement in SMTEs as they require a lot of time, effort and resources.

In the restaurants industry it is clear that if these innovations are successful, there is a direct impact in the other innovation categories, meaning that it will boost the benefits associated with that investment. Leaders have to understand that institutional innovations provide comparative advantages, but the resources they spend on these solutions may not be profitable in the long run.

### 9. Conclusion

The need for innovation has become a daily discussion point, brought up by all sorts of researchers and agents. The world is changing and globalization is affecting the way individuals have to face their routine. This proves the constant motivations to implement new techniques and to change the current views in order to generate a stable environment for the present realities, while focusing on a long run perspective.

This paper presented a decisive contribution in the field of innovation connected with the restaurants industry. While there are still scarce theoretical sources to expand this relationship, it is clear that innovation represents a must for restaurant entrepreneurs. However, owners need to comprehend that restaurants are mostly SMTEs, filled with unqualified staff, part-time and seasonal jobs, low payment and scarce possibility towards career development. Therefore, in most cases leaders have to combine available resources with best practices, in order to generate profit and to motivate their staff.

As for the innovation categories, product and process innovations tend to be the ones that are developed by most business as owners seek to create singular experiences by reinforcing local gastronomy and by increasing efficiency levels when conceiving food. On the other hand, institutional innovations are the most expensive and require drastic changes in the organization itself, which may not guarantee the success of a given restaurant. It is mandatory for leaders to plan beforehand and to study the nature

of the competitors and the regional assets in order to create a viable business model and to extract the most benefits from the tourist consumption.

### 10. Limitations and Future Research

The development of this paper has brought up some limitations and potential future studies that could be explored.

As for the limitations, it is important to understand that this paper presents a theoretical review of what has been written on innovation as well as the restaurants industry. Therefore there is more emphasis on the innovation concept since there is more solid background to strengthen that topic. The lack of literature on restaurants acts also as a barrier towards the effectiveness of this study. Also, this study focuses on the restaurants industry, but the food and beverage subsector has many other infrastructures directly associated (such as bars, discotheques, coffee shops) which also require further debate.

As for future studies, there is a great need to implement a questionnaire to restaurant leaders in order to comprehend their views on innovation. It is mandatory to understand if they are willing to innovate and to adapt to changes in the long run. Therefore, future studies should present an empirical study about innovation or any other areas of interest that could fill the numerous gaps in current literature. This field work would provide a great contribution towards what has been written in theoretical terms and would be decisive in constructing a future framework for the food and beverage sector.

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