

Mapping the Culinary Tourist: Archetypes and Market Segmentation in a Latin American Coastal Destination

CARTOGRAFIANDO AL TURISTA GASTRONÓMICO: ARQUETIPOS Y SEGMENTACIÓN EN UN DESTINO COSTERO LATINOAMERICANO

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Abstract

Purpose: To segment the culinary tourism market in a mature, culture-based coastal destination by characterizing visitor archetypes through attitudinal, behavioral, and sociodemographic variables, thereby providing a foundation for developing management strategies applicable to analogous contexts.

Methodology: A K-means cluster analysis was performed on a sample of 385 tourists surveyed in a Latin American coastal destination (La Serena-Coquimbo, Chile), with the resulting segmentation subsequently validated through discriminant analysis.

Results: Three distinct archetypes were identified: The “Moderate” (49.4%), who exhibit positive attitudes but face economic constraints; the “Indifferent” (22.9%), characterized by a low interest in gastronomy; and the “Premium” (27.8%), who possess high purchasing power and a strong appreciation for culinary authenticity. The classification model achieved a high predictive accuracy of 95.6%, revealing statistically significant associations between the clusters and the predictor variables.

Implications: The findings provide an empirical foundation for developing differentiated marketing and management strategies aimed at maximizing gastronomic experiences and, consequently, enhancing the competitiveness of coastal destinations in Latin America.

Originality: This research integrates attitudinal and behavioral perspectives within an understudied Latin American coastal context. It elucidates the heterogeneity of demand and positions gastronomy as a strategic pillar for sustainable tourism development.

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Resumen

Propósito: Segmentar el mercado de turismo culinario en un destino costero maduro y de base cultural mediante la caracterización de arquetipos de quienes visitan a partir de variables actitudinales, conductuales y sociodemográficas, proporcionando una base para desarrollar estrategias de gestión aplicables a contextos análogos.

Metodología: Se realizó un análisis de clústeres *K-means* sobre una muestra de 385 turistas encuestados en un destino costero latinoamericano (La Serena-Coquimbo, Chile), y la segmentación resultante fue posteriormente validada mediante análisis discriminante.

Resultados: Se identificaron tres arquetipos distintivos: “Moderados” (49.4%), con actitudes positivas, pero limitaciones económicas; “Indiferentes” (22.9%), con bajo interés gastronómico; y “Premium” (27.8%), con alto poder adquisitivo y fuerte valoración de la autenticidad culinaria. La clasificación logró una precisión del 95.6%, revelando asociaciones estadísticamente significativas entre los clústeres y las variables predictoras.

Implicaciones: Los hallazgos proveen un marco empírico para el diseño de estrategias de marketing y gestión diferenciadas, orientadas a maximizar la experiencia gastronómica y, en consecuencia, la competitividad de destinos costeros en contextos latinoamericanos.

Originalidad: Este trabajo integra perspectivas actitudinales y conductuales en un destino costero latinoamericano poco estudiado, esclareciendo la heterogeneidad de la demanda y posicionando la gastronomía como un pilar estratégico para el desarrollo turístico sostenible.

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INTRODUCTION

Culinary tourism has become a strategic driver for enhancing the development and competitiveness of tourist destinations (Dixit & Prayag, 2022; Fernández & Irimia-Diéguez, 2025). Contemporary literature recognizes culinary experiences not as complementary activities, but as determining factors in visitor satisfaction, fostering a deep and differentiated cultural immersion (Ellis et al., 2018; Richards, 2021). This strategic relevance stems from gastronomy's capacity to synergize cultural heritage, local identity, and productive systems, thereby generating immersive experiences that reinforce sustainability, heritage preservation, and the valorization of local identity products (Pamukçu et al., 2021). Consequently, this synergy fosters territorial development and enhances the competitive differentiation of destinations (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020).

The theoretical foundation rests on three fundamental pillars: market segmentation theory (Dolnicar, 2008; Smith, 1956), which proposes the identification of homogeneous consumer groups as a basis for more effective

positioning and communication strategies; approaches to tourist consumer behavior (Crompton, 1979; Horner & Swarbrooke, 2021; Ji et al., 2016), which emphasize how sociodemographic, motivational, and attitudinal factors shape distinct consumption patterns; and the focus on attitudinal dimensions in culinary tourism (Kim & Eves, 2012), coupled with the analysis of gastronomy's strategic function in destinations (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020). This combined approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the values, motivations, and perceptions underlying visitor behavior and its connection to a destination's identity and positioning.

The integration of these theoretical frameworks is particularly relevant for coastal destinations, where the culinary offerings associated with seafood operate as a strategic component of differentiation and territorial value (Ramos & Pinto, 2024). Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that gastronomy significantly influences visitor motivation and satisfaction, establishing itself as a core element of the tourist experience (Castillo-Palacio et al., 2025; Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021). In this context, understanding

the motivations and perceptions linked to local consumption becomes especially relevant for designing segmentation strategies that reflect the cultural and symbolic particularities of coastal destinations.

In Chile, the La Serena-Coquimbo coastal area represents a well-established tourist hub with significant gastronomic diversification and high visitor numbers (Araya-Pizarro & Álvarez Cortés, 2024). However, despite its recognized tourism importance, research has predominantly focused on general characterization, leaving the attitudinal dimensions guiding visitors' gastronomic behavior largely unexplored. A significant gap persists in studies integrating attitudinal segmentation through multivariate techniques within this context.

This gap is mirrored in international literature, which reveals a pronounced scarcity of studies adopting an attitudinal-symbolic lens. While a consolidated tradition of segmentation research in coastal destinations certainly exists, it is predominantly centered on recreational, environmental, or sustainability motivations, rather than on experiential gastronomic dimensions (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022, 2025; Forleo & Bredice, 2025; Valls et al., 2018).

Concurrently, recent research has begun to incorporate the gastronomic variable into its segmentation analyses (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021; Pérez-Priego et al., 2019). However, these studies often approach culinary motivations from an instrumental or complementary perspective, without delving into the complex attitudinal systems that capture the symbolic, identity-based, and cultural value dimensions associated with coastal offerings. A conceptual and methodological limitation thus persists in developing tourist taxonomies based on attitudinal positions that articulate the gastronomic experience with the territorial identity and strategic projection of established coastal destinations. To address this gap, a demand-side perspective on culinary tourism was adopted (Richards, 2021), focusing on the food consumption patterns of the mainstream tourist—the largest and most economically significant segment—as a central component of the travel experience.

The research aims to establish an empirically grounded typology of visitor segments based on sociodemographic, behavioral, and attitudinal

dimensions linked to gastronomy. This typology is intended to: 1) the distinction of clusters according to their attitudinal positions; 2) the analysis of their association with sociodemographic variables, behavioral patterns, and specific preferences; and 3) the generation of practical guidance for territorial planning and tourism management in established coastal destinations.

Three principal contributions emerge from the analysis. First, the findings extend attitudinal segmentation theory to a mature Latin American coastal destination, validating its cross-cultural applicability. Second, the results identify a sophisticated domestic “Premium” segment, challenging traditional assumptions about culinary tourism in emerging economies. Third, the analysis reveals an “experiential passivity” towards culinary workshops, a finding with managerial and experience design implications.

The paper is structured as follows: following this introduction, subsequent sections cover the theoretical background, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusions, which outline the main contributions and limitations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Culinary tourism has evolved from occupying a marginal position to establishing itself as an autonomous tourism modality with a determining influence on destination choice and visitor satisfaction (Ellis et al., 2018; Kovalenko et al., 2023). This evolution reflects a paradigm shift in understanding the role of culinary experiences, now recognized as vehicles of cultural authenticity and preservers of intangible heritage (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). In destinations with an established level of maturity, gastronomy emerges as a strategic asset that generates sustainable competitive advantages and contributes to strengthening territorial identity (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020).

Contemporary literature positions gastronomy as a catalyst for tourism development and competitiveness (Dixit & Prayag, 2022; Fernández & Irimia-Diéguez, 2025). Its relevance stems from its capacity to integrate cultural heritage, local identity, and productive systems, thereby generating immersive experiences that, in turn, enhance sustainability

and the valorization of territorially-originated products (Pamukçu et al., 2021). Within this framework, market segmentation theory provides fundamental support. From the pioneering contributions of Smith (1956) to contemporary strategic marketing approaches (Dolnicar, 2008), segmentation is understood as a process that divides heterogeneous markets into homogeneous groups with similar characteristics, needs, and behaviors. In tourism, this method has proven effective in overcoming the limitations of undifferentiated strategies by enabling the formulation of personalized offerings that enhance destination competitiveness.

Segmentation based on attitudinal dimensions complements traditional sociodemographic variables, offering deeper insight into the values and motivations guiding consumption decisions. Recent studies in coastal contexts confirm its effectiveness in identifying market niches based on specific motivations, including the pursuit of cultural authenticity, sustainability preferences, and culinary exploration interests (Carvache-Franco et al., 2021, 2022).

Tourist consumer behavior is shaped by the interplay of sociodemographic, motivational, and attitudinal factors (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2021). Crompton's (1979) motivation theory, which distinguishes between push (internal) and pull (external) factors, constitutes a key analytical framework for understanding the forces driving destination choices and gastronomic experiences. In this vein, attitudinal dimensions have been operationalized through scales that capture motivations linked to local food consumption, novelty seeking, and willingness to participate in authentic culinary experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Ji et al., 2016; Kim & Eves, 2012).

From a sociological perspective, Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction provides a complementary interpretation by viewing food tastes and preferences as markers of social position. "Cultural capital" and "habitus" are expressed in gastronomic choices, where certain consumption patterns operate as strategies of symbolic differentiation. In tourism, this lens has enabled analysis of how culinary consumption becomes a means of reaffirming identity and social distinction (Richards, 2021). Contemporary research highlights the central role of gastronomic experiences in shaping

destination image and competitiveness (Mora et al., 2021).

Concurrently, the literature on sustainability in culinary tourism has documented a persistent gap between pro-environmental attitudes and actual consumption behaviors. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in coastal destinations, where responsible exploitation of marine resources represents a critical dimension of sustainability (Forleo & Bredice, 2025). Research in Mediterranean contexts shows that despite favorable attitudes toward sustainability, factors such as price or convenience tend to prevail in gastronomic decisions (Valls et al., 2018). The specificity of coastal destinations offers a particularly suitable context for examining the interrelationship between gastronomy, tourist motivations, and territorial competitiveness. Culinary offerings associated with seafood operate as differentiating elements and symbols of local identity, generating territorial value and reinforcing destination positioning (Ramos & Pinto, 2024). The development of culinary heritage routes emerges as a strategy to strengthen regional identity and create original tourism products (Duda, 2024). Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that gastronomy significantly influences visitor motivation and satisfaction in coastal areas (Castillo-Palacio et al., 2025; Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021).

In summary, the convergence between segmentation frameworks, attitudinal dimensions, and contextual perspectives of coastal destinations offers an integrative perspective. This approach enables understanding gastronomy not merely as a tourism attraction, but as a symbolic system that articulates identity, sustainability, and territorial development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed using multivariate statistical techniques to identify behavioral patterns. The methodology integrated descriptive, correlational, and segmentation analyses to characterize and differentiate visitor profiles based on their gastronomic motivations and behaviors.

Study Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of visitors to the La Serena-Coquimbo coastal area (Chile), aged 18 years or older, who had engaged in at least one gastronomic consumption experience during their stay between January and June 2024. The sample size was determined at 385 respondents using the infinite population formula with a 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, and maximum variance ($p=q=0.5$). Due to the absence of a sampling frame, non-probability quota sampling was applied, stratified by coastal sector and seasonality to optimize the structural representativeness of the sample.

Data Collection and Research Instrument

Data were collected at strategic points selected according to visitor density and flow in each coastal sector. To ensure temporal representativeness, surveys were administered on different days of the week and time slots (morning/afternoon), covering both weekends and weekdays.

The instrument consisted of a structured 30-item questionnaire organized into three sections. The first section collected six sociodemographic variables: age, gender, educational level, monthly income, occupation, and origin. The second section assessed nine aspects of gastronomic behavior, including visit frequency, average expenditure, type of companions, digital platforms used, restaurant selection criteria, and specific culinary preferences.

The third section measured attitudes through 15 items based on five validated dimensions: connection with culinary tradition and culture, sustainability and social responsibility, experience and participation, social and reputational influence, and quality and perceived value. These items evaluated specific determinants such as culinary authenticity, the appreciation of local products, interaction with producers, social media influence, and price-quality perception.

Content validation was conducted through the judgment of a panel of three independent experts in tourism and gastronomic marketing, followed by a pilot test with 40 tourists to assess item comprehension and consistency. The internal reliability of the scales, measured using

Cronbach's alpha coefficient, ranged from 0.785 to 0.924, exceeding the acceptable internal consistency threshold ($\alpha > 0.70$).

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through three stages. Initially, univariate descriptive analysis was performed to characterize the sociodemographic, behavioral, and attitudinal profile of visitors. Subsequently, a K-means cluster algorithm was applied using the five standardized attitudinal dimensions as active variables, along with four key behavioral and socioeconomic variables (average expenditure, visit frequency, educational level, and income). Variables were standardized using z-scores, and the optimal number of clusters ($k = 3$) was determined using the elbow method, evaluating the progressive reduction of within-cluster sum of squares (WCSS). Finally, linear discriminant analysis was implemented to validate segment stability, complemented by Chi-square tests (adjusted standardized residuals and Cramer's V) for categorical variables and one-way ANOVA (partial η^2) to contrast significant differences between groups.

All analyses were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24 software, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$. The research ensured compliance with ethical principles, guaranteeing informed consent, participant confidentiality, and a secure protocol for data handling.

RESULTS

Tourist Characteristics and Behavior Patterns

The results ($n = 385$) identified a representative profile of domestic tourism in consolidating coastal destinations, characterized by short-range mobility, a predominance of young visitors with high educational attainment, and regional residency. The majority were women (59.0%), with a significant concentration in the 18-25 age group (45.2%). Nearly half held undergraduate university degrees (46.0%), 45.2% were employed, and income levels were predominantly concentrated in the lower brackets, with 35.1% earning less than USD 215 monthly. The vast majority were residents (81.8%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (n=385).

Variable	Category	%
Gender	Male	40.2
	Female	59.0
	Other	0.8
Age	Under 18 years	7.5
	18 - 25 years	45.2
	26 - 35 years	19.2
	36 - 50 years	17.2
	Over 50 years	10.9
Origin	Resident	81.8
	Non-resident	18.2
Education level	Basic or secondary	27.0
	Technical/professional	23.1
	Undergraduate	46.0
	Postgraduate	3.9
Occupation	Student	42.6
	Employee	45.2
	Business owner	2.6
	Retired	2.6
	Homemaker	1.6
	Other	5.4
Monthly income (USD)*	Less than 215	35.1
	215 – 537.9	14.5
	538 – 859.9	13.0
	860 – 1,182.9	10.1
	1,183 – 1,504.9	8.9
	1,505 – 1,827.9	6.5
	1,828 or more	11.9

Note: *1 USD = 930 CLP. Source: Own elaboration.

Descriptive results revealed distinctive consumption habits (Table 2). Occasional consumption (52.2%) predominated, with an average per-person expenditure between USD 22–42.9 (47.3%). Social media served as the

primary information source, with Instagram (57.4%) emerging as the leading channel. The gastronomic experience primarily occurred with friends (37.1%) or family (35.3%), typically in groups of three to four people (46.8%).

Table 2. Gastronomic behavior of visitors (n=385).

Variable	Category	%
Visit frequency	Never	4.2
	Occasionally	52.2
	Once a month	23.6
	Once a week	15.6
	More than once a week	4.4
Avg. spending per person (USD)*	Less than 22	15.6
	22 – 42.9	47.3
	43 – 64.9	21.6
	65 – 85.9	9.1
	86 – 107.9	3.4
	108 or more	3.1
Preferred platform	Instagram	57.4
	Facebook	3.1
	TikTok	21.3
	None	13.2
	Other	4.9
Search method	Social media	60.8
	Google	15.6
	Personal recommendation	16.6
	None	3.4
	Other	3.6
Type of companions	Alone	4.2
	Family	35.3
	Friends	37.1
	Partner	20.3
	Work colleagues	3.1
Total companions	None	4.2
	One	12.2
	Two	21
	Three	24.2
	Four	22.6
	Five or more	15.8

Note: *1 USD = 930 CLP. Source: Own elaboration.

Taste was the primary selection criterion (40.5%), followed by menu variety (22.9%) and price (22.1%). Regarding preferences, hamburgers and sandwiches (24.6%) stood

out, along with meat-based dishes (23.4%). In terms of beverages, natural juices (31.8%) and alcoholic options (31.2%) were prominent (Figure 1).

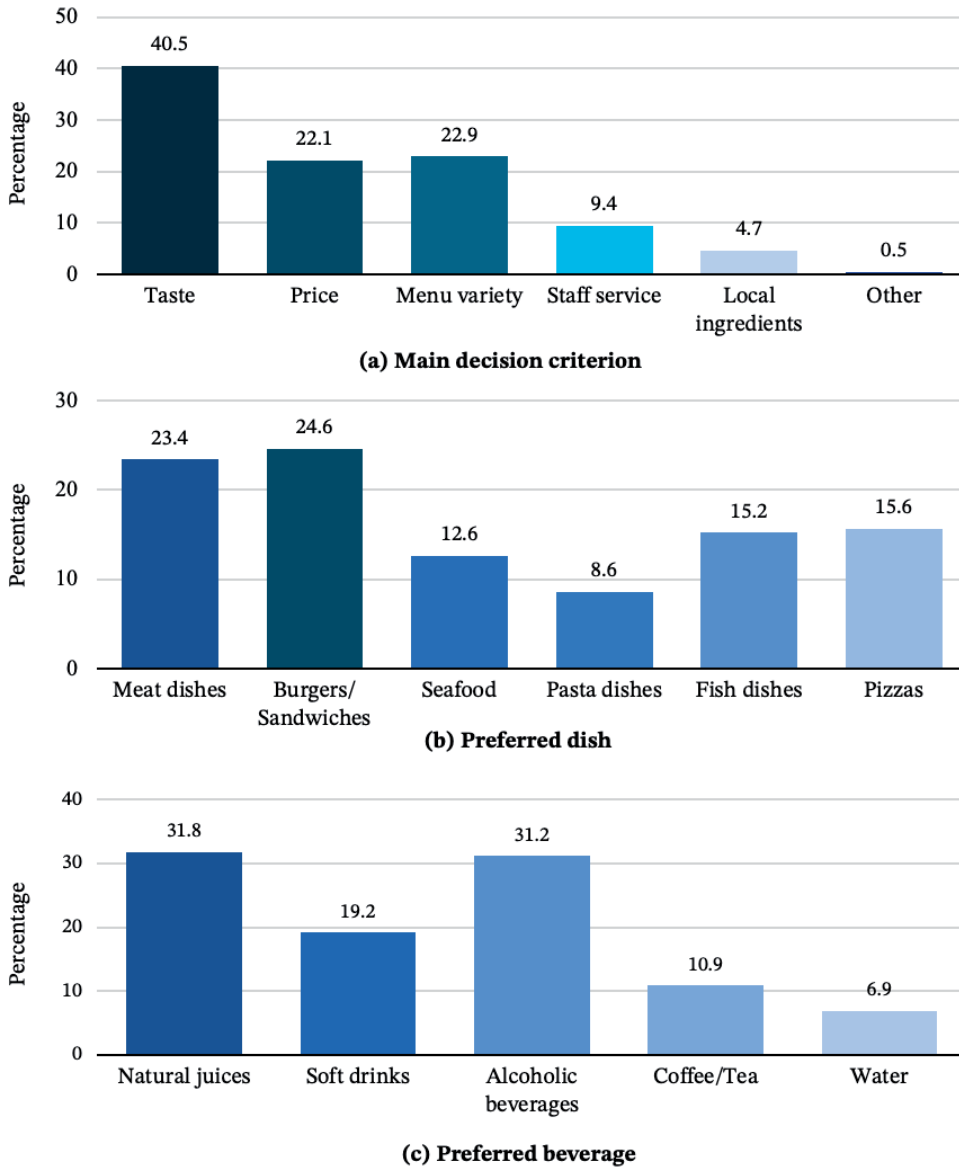


Figure 1. Distribution of main decision criteria, preferred dishes, and beverages (n=385). *Source: Own elaboration.*

This profile characterizes moderate-spending tourists, digitally influenced, with an inclination towards accessible and social gastronomic

options, establishing the reference framework for the subsequent segmentation.

Attitudinal Dimensions Hierarchy

The analysis of the five attitudinal dimensions revealed a clear hierarchy of values in gastronomic preferences (Figure 2).

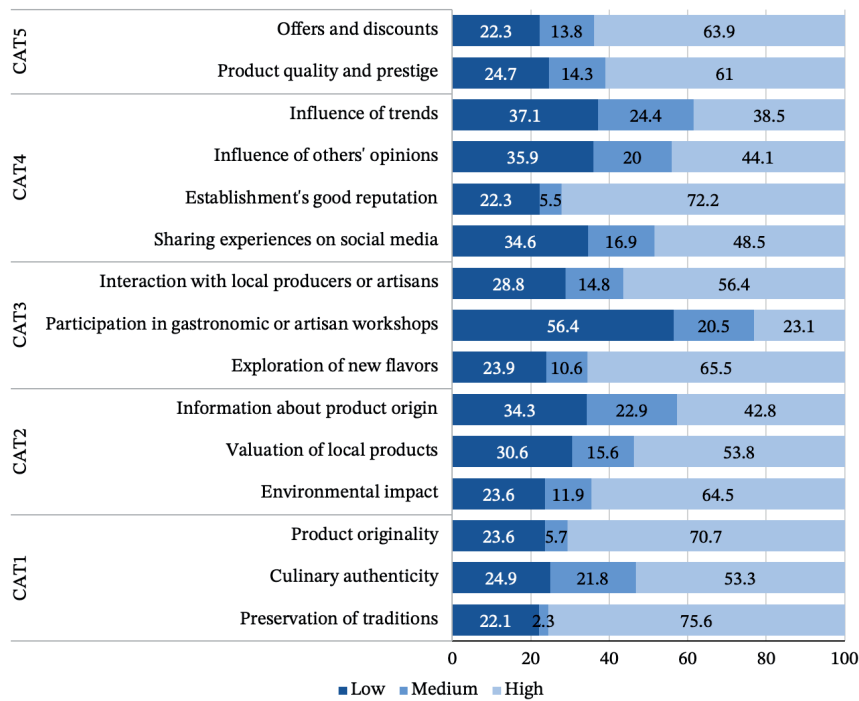


Figure 2. Assessment of gastronomic attitudinal dimensions (n=385). Note: CAT1 = Connection with culinary tradition and culture, CAT2 = Sustainability and social responsibility, CAT3 = Experience and participation, CAT4 = Social and reputational influence, CAT5 = Quality and perceived value. Source: Own elaboration.

The dimension of connection with tradition received the highest assessment, with “preservation of traditions” (75.6%) and “product originality” (70.7%) standing out. This pattern suggests that visitors prioritize experiences that connect them with the local cultural identity.

The sustainability dimension showed heterogeneity. While “environmental impact” was highly valued (64.5%), “information about product origin” recorded the lowest priority within this dimension (42.8%). This indicates that consumers appreciate concrete actions more than detailed informational transparency. Regarding experience and participation, “exploration of new flavors” was valued by 65.5% of respondents, whereas participation in workshops reached only 23.1%. This suggests a clear preference for passive consumption experiences over educational or participatory

ones. Social influence revealed that an establishment’s reputation (72.2%) prevails over sharing on social media (48.5%) or the influence of trends (38.5%). This suggests that decisions are guided more by intrinsic quality criteria than by external social influences.

Finally, quality and perceived value recorded high scores for both quality and prestige (61.0%) and for offers and discounts (63.9%). This reflects a pragmatic stance where perceived value results from the intersection of culinary excellence and economic accessibility.

Cluster Solution and Segmentation Validation

The K-means analysis, performed using nine standardized variables (five attitudinal dimensions and four key behavioral and socioeconomic variables), identified three

optimal clusters (Figure 3). Validation via the elbow method showed a substantial reduction in the within-cluster sum of squares (WCSS) between k=2 (2105.42) and k=3 (1747.75; $\Delta = -357.67$), with only marginal decreases

thereafter. The final distribution was as follows: Cluster 1 – “Moderates” (n=190, 49.4%), Cluster 2 – “Indifferents” (n=88, 22.9%), and Cluster 3 – “Premium” (n=107, 27.8%).

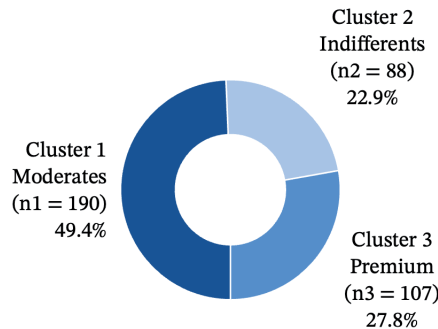


Figure 3. Case distribution by segment (n=385). *Source: Own elaboration.*

The discriminant model demonstrated high predictive accuracy, with 95.6% of original cases and 95.1% under cross-validation correctly classified. The canonical functions explained 100% of the variance. The first function (78.8%, eigenvalue = 5.811) was characterized by strong loadings on the attitudinal dimensions of Tradition (0.913) and Quality (0.649). The second function (21.2%) was defined by socioeconomic loadings for Income (0.846) and Average Spending (0.426). This confirms the central role of attitudinal dimensions as the primary discriminating factors, with a secondary contribution from socioeconomic variables.

Defining Features of Market Segments

Table 3 integrates the results of the one-way ANOVA and the standardized cluster centers, providing a unified view of the discriminatory power and distinctive characteristics of each segment. The analysis confirms the statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) classificatory capacity of all variables, with clearly higher values for the attitudinal dimensions (partial η^2 between 0.581 and 0.829) compared to the socioeconomic and behavioral variables (partial η^2 between 0.099 and 0.529).

Table 3. Discriminatory power and segment profiles.

Variable	F-value	p-value	Partial η^2	Moderates (n=190)	Indifferents (n=88)	Premium (n=107)
Tradition & Culture	927.79*	< 0.001	0.829	0.52	-1.67	0.45
Sustainability	389.10*	< 0.001	0.671	0.40	-1.50	0.52
Experience & Participation	264.72*	< 0.001	0.581	0.42	-1.40	0.40
Social Influence	412.92*	< 0.001	0.684	0.49	-1.51	0.37
Quality & Value	468.16*	< 0.001	0.710	0.48	-1.55	0.41
Average Spending	59.26*	< 0.001	0.237	-0.46	0.19	0.66
Visit Frequency	21.09*	< 0.001	0.099	-0.28	0.02	0.47
Education	23.29*	< 0.001	0.109	-0.15	-0.31	0.52
Income	214.34*	< 0.001	0.529	-0.61	-0.04	1.11

Note: *Significant ($p < 0.05$). Z-scores indicate standardized deviations from the sample mean. *Source: Own elaboration.*

Based on the standardized cluster centers, three clearly differentiated profiles were identified:

Moderates (49.4%). This segment exhibits consistently positive attitudes toward all gastronomic dimensions (Z-scores: 0.40-0.52), particularly for Tradition (0.52) and Quality (0.48). However, they show evident budgetary constraints, with both income (-0.61) and average spending (-0.46) below the sample mean. This profile corresponds to tourists who value authentic culinary experiences but operate under financial limitations.

Indifferents (22.9%). This group displays markedly negative attitudes across all gastronomic dimensions (Z-scores: -1.40 to -1.67), which are particularly pronounced for Tradition (-1.67) and Quality (-1.55). Their socioeconomic scores hover near the mean (income: -0.04; spending: 0.19), suggesting that their low gastronomic involvement is not explained by economic constraints but rather by a perception of food as a functional necessity rather than an experiential one.

Premium (27.8%). This segment is distinguished by its high socioeconomic status (income: 1.11; education: 0.52) with above-average spending (0.66) and positive attitudes toward all gastronomic dimensions (Z-scores: 0.37-0.52). They score particularly high on Sustainability (0.52) and Tradition (0.45), reflecting a pursuit of comprehensive culinary experiences that integrate quality, authenticity, and social responsibility.

This characterization provides the basis for examining subsequent sociodemographic and behavioral associations.

Segment Composition and Social Dynamics

Table 4 consolidates the association analyses using Chi-square, confirming statistically significant links between cluster membership and sociodemographic and companionship variables. Occupation emerged as the most robust predictor ($\chi^2(10) = 119.78$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.394$), followed by age group ($\chi^2(12) = 83.89$, $p < 0.001$, $V = 0.330$) and companionship patterns ($\chi^2(8) = 25.78$, $p = 0.001$, $V = 0.183$).

Table 4. Sociodemographic characterization and social patterns by segment. (*Continuation*).

Variable	Category	Moderates (n=190)	Indifferents (n=88)	Premium (n=107)	χ^2	p	Cramer's V
Age	18-25 years	60.0%*	45.5%	18.7%*	83.89	<0.001	0.330
	26-35 years	25.8%	26.1%	24.3%			
	36-50 years	7.4%*	15.9%	35.5%*			
	> 50 years	6.8%*	6.8%	21.5%*			
Occupation	Student	63.7%*	42.0%	5.6%*	119.78	<0.001	0.394
	Employee	25.3%*	47.7%	78.5%*			
	Business owner	0.0%*	1.1%	8.4%*			
	Other occupation*	10.9%	9.2%	7.5%			
Origin	Resident	85.8%	83.0%	73.8%*	6.68	0.035	0.132
	Non-resident	14.2%	17%	26.2%*			
Companion type	Family	34.2%	29.5%	40.2%	25.78	0.001	0.183
	Friends	42.6%	39.8%	25.2%			
	Partner	20.5%	23.9%	26.2%			
	Colleagues	0.0%	3.4%	8.4%			

Table 4. Sociodemographic characterization and social patterns by segment. (Continuation).

	Alone	2.6%	3.4%	0.0%			
Group Size	1 person	13.2%	4.5%*	16.8%	19.50	0.034	0.159
	2 people	21.1%	19.3%	22.4%			
	3 people	26.3%	27.3%	21.5%			
	4 people	21.1%	31.8%*	17.8%			
	5 or more people	12.1%	17.0%	21.5%*			

Note: * Indicates significant adjusted standardized residuals ($|ASR| > 2.0$). “Other Occupation” groups retirees, homemakers, and other categories without significant residuals. Source: Own elaboration.

The “Moderates” segment shows a predominance of students (63.7%) and a concentration in the 18-25 age group (60.0%), with low representation of employees (25.3%) and business owners (0.0%). This composition coherently explains their lower spending capacity identified previously. The “Premium” segment concentrates professionally active profiles (78.5% employees), with significant representation of business owners (8.4%) and a predominance in mature age groups (36-50 years: 35.5%; >50 years: 21.5%). Their lower proportion of students (5.6%) and higher rate of non-residents (26.2%) reinforce their high purchasing power profile. The “Indifferents” show an intermediate composition, without significant residuals in occupation, corroborating that their low gastronomic involvement is not associated with extreme demographic characteristics.

Regarding social patterns, companion type ($\chi^2(8) = 25.78, p = 0.001, \text{Cramer's } V = 0.183$) and group size ($\chi^2(10) = 19.50, p = 0.034, \text{Cramer's } V = 0.159$) showed significant associations with cluster membership. “Moderates” and “Indifferents” favor outings with friends (42.6% and 39.8%, respectively), while “Premium” tourists diversify their companions, with a significant presence of colleagues (8.4%). Regarding group size, “Indifferents” prefer groups of four people (31.8%), while “Premium” tourists more frequently participate in larger groups (≥ 5 people: 21.5%). These findings reveal consistent links between gastronomic attitudinal orientations, sociodemographic profiles, and differentiated behavioral patterns.

Differentiated Consumption and Digital Behaviors

The analysis of culinary preferences revealed statistically significant differences across all evaluated categories (Table 5), with small to medium effect sizes (Cramer’s $V = 0.158-0.234$). The “Moderates” show a marked preference for informal options like burgers and sandwiches (64.2%; residual = 1.8) and a lower inclination towards premium products such as seafood (22.6%; residual = -1.4), reflecting their budget-oriented approach. The “Indifferents” present the most basic pattern, with an aversion to authentic experiences evidenced by their null preference for local ingredients (0.0%; residual = -2.0) and low consumption of seafood (19.3%; residual = -1.5). In contrast, the “Premium” segment stands out for its preference for higher culinary-value products like fish (45.8%; residual = 2.1), seafood (44.9%; residual = 3.3), and local ingredients (11.2%; residual = 3.1).

Beverage preferences reinforce this stratification, with significant differences in coffee and tea consumption ($V = 0.219$), where the “Premium” segment’s proportion is triple that of the “Moderates” (35.5% vs. 14.2%). This choice aligns with more specialized consumption styles and higher cultural capital. In the digital realm, although Instagram predominates across all segments (51.4%-62.1%), the “Premium” segment shows a more diversified information-gathering pattern, with a significantly higher use of other platforms (8.4%; residual = 2.6), which include Facebook (5.6%) and Twitter/X (1.9%). This suggests access to more varied and potentially specialized information sources.

Table 5. Gastronomic preferences and digital behavior by segment.

Variable	Category	Moderates (n=190)	Indifferents (n=88)	Premium (n=107)	χ^2	p	Cramer's V
Food	Meat dishes	44.2%*	59.1%	60.7%	9.67	0.008	0.158
	Burgers/Sandwiches	64.2%*	52.3%	40.2%*	16.25	<0.001	0.205
	Seafood	22.6%*	19.3%*	44.9%*	21.07	<0.001	0.234
	Fish dishes	30.5%	26.1%*	45.8%*	10.10	0.006	0.162
	Local ingredients	3.2%	0.0%*	11.2%*	26.70	0.003	0.186
Beverage	Coffee or Tea	14.2%*	20.5%	35.5%*	18.45	<0.001	0.219
	Natural Juices	66.3%	67.0%	54.2%	5.07	0.079	0.115
	Alcoholic Beverages	60.5%	61.4%	64.5%	0.47	0.793	0.035
Digital platform	Other Platforms	2.1%*	1.1%	8.4%*	26.56	0.009	0.186
	Facebook	1.1%	4.5%	5.6%			
	Twitter/X	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%			

Note: * Indicates significant adjusted standardized residuals ($|ASR| > 2.0$). “Other Platforms” groups categories with significant residuals. Source: Own elaboration.

The observed convergence between attitudinal dispositions, sociodemographic profiles, food preferences, and digital behavior provides empirical validation for the segmentation model, establishing a solid foundation for the interpretive analysis of differential tourist participation dynamics in coastal destinations.

DISCUSSION

The results reveal the existence of three attitudinally distinct segments in the La Serena-Coquimbo coastal area, providing empirical validation for the hypothesis concerning the structural heterogeneity of gastronomic demand in domestic coastal tourism destinations. The identification of the “Moderates” (49.4%), “Indifferents” (22.9%), and “Premium” (27.8%) clusters through K-means analysis, supported by a 95.6% discriminant validation rate, not only confirms the utility of applying multivariate segmentation techniques in regional tourist-gastronomic contexts (Dolnicar et al., 2018) but also challenges conventional management models based on a homogeneous conception of the domestic tourist.

The predominance of the “connection with tradition” dimension over others, such as sustainability or social influence, establishes cultural authenticity as the principal driver of competitive differentiation in coastal

destinations with a consolidated trajectory (Ramos & Pinto, 2024). This finding aligns with the conceptualization of gastronomy’s strategic role in destination positioning (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020), although the present study expands this perspective by demonstrating that, in the Chilean context, authenticity acquires a domestic meaning, associated with the reaffirmation of local identities.

Contrary to patterns documented in international inbound tourism destinations, where premium segments are typically linked to foreign tourists (Richards, 2021), in the analyzed case, this segment is predominantly composed of national visitors with higher spending capacity. This finding signals the emergence of a sophisticated domestic segment that reconfigures consumption patterns and coincides with previous findings on the centrality of food quality in tourist satisfaction, underscoring the need to adapt segmentation models to specific realities by considering the multidimensionality of culinary-gastronomic experiences in different cultural contexts (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). The identified segmentation can be interpreted through the lens of Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of distinction, according to which tastes function as markers of social position. The identified segments express different gastronomic *habitus*: the “Premium” segment, with greater cultural and economic capital, uses the consumption of authentic products (fish, seafood, local

ingredients) and differentiated experiences (specialty coffee or tea) as a means of symbolic distinction.

At the opposite extreme, the “Indifferents” represent a *habitus* where food serves a utilitarian function, prioritizing convenience and price over cultural symbolism. This pattern coincides with the functional typologies described in the literature on tourist consumer behavior (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2021), although here it takes on a specific configuration linked to domestic coastal tourism. The “Moderates,” meanwhile, value authenticity, but their decisions are mediated by economic constraints, opting for perceived value options that balance authenticity and accessibility (Pamukçu et al., 2021). The identified typology collectively demonstrates that culinary preferences transcend the nutritional or hedonic to constitute expressions of identity and social position within the tourism field.

The observed dichotomy between the high valuation of flavor exploration (65.5%) and the low interest in participatory activities (23.1%) complicates the conceptualization of “experiential consumption” in culinary tourism (Dixit & Prayag, 2022). This finding suggests that, despite the expansion of immersive experiential tourism (Ellis et al., 2018), passive consumption models persist in coastal contexts, where tasting retains a hegemonic position over active participation. The “Indifferents” segment, characterized by a low valuation of all gastronomic dimensions, replicates functional profiles documented in the literature (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2021), but its relative weight in the Chilean case could be explained by the multifocal nature of domestic coastal tourism, where gastronomy competes with other attractions such as beaches and entertainment.

Regarding sustainability, the pattern of differential valuation, characterized by high interest in environmental impact (64.5%) but lower interest in origin information (42.8%), aligns with international findings on the sustainable consumer paradox (Forleo & Bredice, 2025). This dissociation suggests that tourists internalize the general principles of sustainability but face informational or cognitive barriers that hinder the translation of positive attitudes into concrete behaviors. This delineates a priority research field for understanding how responsible consumption is constructed in Latin American contexts.

Implications for Tourism Management

The internal coherence between attitudinal profiles, sociodemographic characteristics, and consumption patterns provides a consistent empirical basis for segmented destination management and supports the utility of approaches that integrate food-related personality traits in understanding tourist behavior (Ji et al., 2016). The results align with evidence demonstrating that the congruence between expectations and offered gastronomic attributes determines experiential satisfaction (Ali et al., 2020).

Strategically, the need to develop specific value propositions emerges. For the “Premium” segment, whose consistent preferences for sophisticated dishes and premium beverages reflect a pursuit of distinction, the offering should focus on authentic and sustainable gourmet experiences. For the “Moderates,” whose positive attitudes are constrained by budgetary limitations, strategies of “accessible authenticity” that prioritize perceived value are required. For the “Indifferents,” it is crucial to design offerings based on convenience and socialization, integrating gastronomy functionally within the overall coastal experience. The differences in the use of digital platforms also reflect this stratification, broadening the understanding of digital divides in tourism (Carlisle et al., 2023). While Instagram dominates across segments, the “Premium” segment diversifies its information consumption towards Facebook and Twitter/X, providing valuable elements for designing differentiated communication strategies.

The evidence contributes to closing gaps detected in the literature: empirical, by generating contextualized evidence for Latin American coastal destinations; methodological, by integrating attitudinal, behavioral, and socioeconomic dimensions; and contextual, by analyzing an established tourist hub of regional relevance. The findings confirm that the apparent homogeneity of domestic tourism conceals a stratified demand, which questions the efficacy of undifferentiated strategies and supports the relevance of segmentation approaches aimed at specific audiences (Dolnicar et al., 2018).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present study has methodological limitations that open directions for future research. The convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the results, although the applied quota strategies mitigated this effect. Future research could employ probabilistic sampling to validate the representativeness of the segments at a population level.

Three main lines of future research are identified: 1) longitudinal studies assessing the temporal stability of the segments; 2) the incorporation of qualitative methods to deepen the understanding of the underlying determinants of each profile; and 3) experimental research examining the causes of low interest in participatory experiences and exploring informational interventions to strengthen pro-sustainability attitudes.

In summary, this study demonstrates that the integrated application of theoretical frameworks on segmentation, consumer behavior, and attitudinal dimensions allows for the revelation of the underlying architecture of gastronomic demand in coastal destinations. Collectively, the evidence contributes both to the theoretical understanding of gastronomic consumption and to evidence-based regional tourism management.

CONCLUSIONS

By demonstrating that attitudinal segmentation reveals the underlying heterogeneity of seemingly homogeneous markets, this research fundamentally reframes the approach to demand management in established coastal destinations. The identification of three differentiated archetypes (Moderates, Indifferents, and Premium) not only validates the central hypothesis but also fundamentally reframes how demand management in established coastal destinations should be conceived and approached.

From a theoretical perspective, the study provides evidence of the predictive capacity of attitudinal dimensions to explain integrated patterns of gastronomic consumption, overcoming the limitations of exclusively sociodemographic approaches. The observed consistency between attitudinal values,

socioeconomic characteristics, and specific behaviors corroborates the existence of differentiated gastronomic *habitus* that structure the tourist experience. Methodologically, the study validates the applicability of multivariate segmentation techniques in regional tourist-gastronomic contexts, addressing the gap identified in the international literature concerning the scarcity of studies integrating attitudinal variables through cluster analysis.

In the applied domain, the findings challenge the efficacy of undifferentiated strategies and underscore the need for a profound redesign of market approaches. The identified segmentation requires the development of institutional and business capabilities for segmented management that recognizes and responds to the different value logics operating within the territory. This implies not only adapting commercial messages but also comprehensively reconfiguring value propositions, service models, and distribution channels to align with the specific expectations of each segment. For tourism policy, the results advocate for a transition from supply-based planning models to approaches centered on segmented demand, where gastronomy ceases to be considered a complementary service and transforms into a central pillar of the regional tourist experience. This strategic reorientation requires the development of management tools capable of operationalizing the identified segmentation into concrete interventions that coherently articulate the gastronomic offering with the different demand profiles.

In essence, this study goes beyond the descriptive scope of previous research by providing an analytical and operational framework for the segmented management of gastronomic destinations. It establishes the basis for a new generation of tourism strategies that effectively leverage the inherent attitudinal diversity of contemporary markets to promote sustainable and competitive destination development.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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