

HERITAGE BITES

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

Heritage Bites is a cultural food initiative designed to promote and preserve traditional Chinese culinary heritage through pop-up exhibitions across Europe. This project targets increasing global interest in authentic, underrepresented food traditions, combining storytelling, product tasting, and interactive education. To evaluate its feasibility and strategic potential, three complementary analytical frameworks were applied: PEST analysis, Porter's Five Forces model, and SWOT analysis. The PEST analysis highlighted favorable cultural and political conditions for intercultural food initiatives, while Porter's model emphasized moderate competitive pressure with strong opportunities for differentiation. The SWOT analysis identified internal strengths such as cultural authenticity and operational flexibility, alongside external opportunities like partnerships with cultural institutions. The study concludes that Heritage Bites has strong potential for successful implementation if attention is given to regulatory compliance, operational planning, and brand positioning.

Keywords: Chinese traditional food; immersive exhibition; cultural entrepreneurship; SWOT analysis; feasibility study

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Chinese cuisine has gained significant visibility across Europe, yet much of what is available to consumers remains limited to simplified, Westernized versions of a few popular dishes, such as sweet-and-sour chicken, spring rolls, and stir-fried noodles. A 2023 survey by Euromonitor International found that 65% of European consumers associate Chinese cuisine with "fast food," while only 12% could identify regional dishes like Shanxi knife-cut noodles (Statista, 2024). While these forms have helped introduce Chinese food to wider audiences, they often fail to capture its regional richness, cultural significance, or evolving identity.

Food festivals, defined as planned, organized, and purposeful events with high levels of participation—are recognized as excellent platforms for showcasing original culinary products (DERRETT, 2003). Such events attract numerous exhibitors from the food sector and typically involve the production and sale of original, often traditional, food items. They also provide valuable opportunities for marketing, knowledge exchange, and cultural sharing (Jong & Varley, 2018). However, many

traditional food exhibitions remain static and product-centered, prioritizing commercial display over cultural immersion.

In contrast, experiential exhibitions have recently emerged as a powerful tool in event marketing. These immersive events create multi-sensory, emotionally engaging environments that allow attendees to interact directly with the products and the stories behind them. While the term "immersive" was once mostly associated with the gaming industry—defined through increasing levels of user engagement (Jennett et al., 2008) and linked to physical presence in virtual environments (Carrozzino & Bergamasco, 2010). It has now expanded into live events, arts, and culinary experiences.

Fueled by technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and personalized event journeys, immersive exhibitions redefine the audience's role from passive viewer to active participant. Combined with narrative techniques and strong visual aesthetics, these exhibitions offer a compelling way to present food as a cultural experience rather than a mere commodity (Exhibitionglobal, 2023).

Recent examples show how this model can elevate the visibility and cultural value of traditional cuisines. The Baba-Nyonya Festival in Phuket, Thailand, for instance, began as a small local gathering and has since grown into an international cultural attraction (Pattanakinsakul et al., 2025). Similarly, London’s Street Feast integrates street food with unconventional venues—like repurposed warehouses—to create immersive dining experiences that attract younger audiences and promote local food culture (Sima & Vogt, 2017). These examples demonstrate the potential of experiential events to reshape food narratives and foster deeper cultural connections.

Inspired by such models, our project proposes a new approach to promoting Chinese culinary heritage in Europe through immersive, thematic, and experience-driven exhibitions that celebrate the diversity and stories behind traditional Chinese food. Heritage Bites is a developing cultural food initiative that aims to preserve and promote traditional Chinese culinary heritage through interactive, pop-up style exhibitions across Europe. The project envisions creating immersive experiences where visitors can taste, learn about, and connect with authentic regional snacks and the stories behind them. By combining cultural education with innovative event formats, Heritage Bites seeks to foster cross-cultural appreciation and bring traditional food culture closer to modern, international audiences.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This project does not involve laboratory experimentation. Instead, it focuses on assessing the feasibility and strategic positioning of the proposed initiative through qualitative analysis tools commonly used in business and market research.

- 01 A PEST analysis (Political, Economic, Social, and Technological) was conducted to evaluate the external macro-environmental factors that may influence the development and implementation of the project. This framework helps identify external drivers and potential challenges from a broader systemic perspective.
- 02 To further assess the competitive environment of the sector, Porter’s Five Forces model was used. This framework examines five key dimensions: the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers,

the threat of substitute products or services, and the intensity of industry rivalry.

- 03 Based on insights from the PEST and Porter’s Five Forces analyses, a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) was performed to evaluate the internal capabilities and external conditions. This approach enables a strategic overview of the project’s potential and areas for improvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

01 PEST analysis

A summary of the main findings from the PEST analysis is presented in Table 1. This table highlights the key external factors—political, economic, social, and technological—that may influence the implementation of the project. These elements provide a structured overview of the macro-environmental opportunities and challenges relevant to the initiative.

Table 1 Summary of PEST Analysis

Factor	Key Insights
Political	EU support for cultural projects; strict food safety and labeling regulations
Economic	Inflation pressure vs. growth of experiential/niche markets; low entry cost
Social	High demand for authenticity and cultural food experiences; need for adaptation
Technological	Social media and digital tools offer reach and engagement; marketing competition

Political

In recent years, European governments and institutions have shown increasing support for cultural diversity and heritage-based initiatives, particularly those that promote intercultural exchange through gastronomy. EU programs such as Creative Europe and Horizon Europe offer funding opportunities for cultural and food innovation projects. Additionally, local municipalities often support cultural events that enrich community life and attract tourism. However, import regulations, food safety standards, and labeling requirements must be strictly followed when introducing non-European food items, which can introduce administrative complexity.

Economic

The current economic landscape in Europe presents both risks and opportunities. On one hand, inflation and economic uncertainty have made consumers more price-sensitive, potentially challenging premium cultural offerings. On the other hand, niche markets—particularly those focused on experience-driven consumption—have continued to grow. The experiential food sector, including food festivals and pop-up events, has shown resilience due to consumers' desire for unique, memorable experiences. Moreover, the relatively low startup costs of mobile or temporary food installations make the model economically accessible.

Social

Social trends strongly favor the project. There is growing public interest in authenticity, sustainability, and cultural storytelling in food. Consumers—especially younger demographics—seek food experiences that connect them to history, identity, and global cultures. The demand for plant-based and health-conscious options also aligns well with traditional fermentation, tea culture, and many Chinese snacks. However, some traditional dishes may require adaptation or explanation to suit European palates and expectations.

Technological

Digital tools significantly enhance the project's scalability and visibility. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are ideal for showcasing visually engaging traditional food processes, which can attract younger audiences. Online ticketing, mobile payment systems, and location-based advertising can streamline operations for pop-up events. Moreover, AI-powered translation tools and QR code-based cultural content access allow non-Chinese-speaking visitors to engage more deeply with the stories behind the food. However, competition for online visibility remains high, and digital marketing strategies must be carefully planned.

02 Porter's Five Forces Analysis

Threat of New Entrants

The barriers to entry for small-scale food events and cultural exhibitions are relatively low. Pop-up event formats typically require limited initial investment, and public interest in niche or ethnic food experiences encourages new initiatives. However, gaining access to premium event venues, building trust with local consumers, and meeting EU food safety regulations may slow down or deter new

entrants. For Heritage Bites, the unique cultural positioning and focus on authenticity can serve as differentiators that help protect the project from generic competitors.

Bargaining Power of Suppliers

Suppliers in this context include ingredient providers, packaging producers, cultural artisans, and venue partners. The project's reliance on authentic Chinese ingredients and artisan products can make it dependent on a limited set of specialized suppliers, particularly for traditional or regional ingredients. This may increase procurement costs or cause delays. Establishing strong partnerships with reliable and certified suppliers—both within Europe and via import channels—will be essential to maintain product quality and consistency.

Bargaining Power of Buyers

Consumers in European urban areas have access to a wide range of food experiences, making their expectations high and their loyalty variable. Their bargaining power is significant—especially when it comes to pricing and quality. However, Heritage Bites targets a niche audience that values cultural authenticity, storytelling, and experiential learning. By offering more than just food—through cultural context and sensory engagement—the project can reduce buyers' price sensitivity and increase perceived value.

Threat of Substitute Products or Services

Heritage Bites competes with a variety of alternatives: ethnic restaurants, food festivals, cooking classes, and even online cultural content. These substitutes may offer convenience or lower prices. However, few provide the same hybrid experience of education, immersion, and hands-on tasting. The project's focus on temporary, curated, and story-driven experiences helps it stand apart from conventional dining or entertainment options.

Industry Rivalry

The experiential food market is competitive, particularly in culturally diverse cities. Rivalry is especially strong during popular event seasons (e.g., summer festivals, holiday markets). While many competitors offer international cuisine, few focus deeply on the cultural and artisanal aspects of Chinese food heritage. By continuously curating unique themes, collaborating with cultural institutions, and leveraging local partnerships, Heritage

Bites can maintain a dynamic and differentiated position in the market.

03 SWOT Analysis

The overall SWOT results are summarized in Figure 1, with detailed explanations provided in the following subsections.

Strengths

Cultural Uniqueness and Authenticity: Heritage Bites emphasizes regional Chinese traditions and lesser-known food stories, offering a depth of cultural authenticity that distinguishes it from mainstream Asian food businesses.

Flexibility of Pop-up Model: The temporary and mobile format allows testing in multiple locations with lower overhead costs, reducing risk and increasing market adaptability.

Story-Driven Engagement: The integration of storytelling, visual identity, and live interaction provides a memorable customer experience that strengthens emotional connection and brand loyalty.

Growing Global Interest in Chinese Culture: Europe has seen increasing curiosity toward Chinese heritage, language, and cuisine, particularly among younger, globally minded consumers.

Weaknesses

Limited Operational Infrastructure: As a developing project, Heritage Bites may lack established logistics, staffing, and distribution systems, making early execution more fragile.

Ingredient Sourcing Challenges: Access to authentic ingredients and tools might be restricted or expensive due to import limitations, which can affect product quality and consistency.

Brand Recognition in Early Stages: Without prior public exposure, gaining attention among competing events or food

businesses may require significant initial investment in marketing and partnerships.

Opportunities

Collaborations with Cultural Institutions: Museums, embassies, or intercultural organizations may welcome partnerships that align with their mission of promoting cultural exchange.

Alignment with Health and Sustainability Trends: Many traditional Chinese snacks (e.g., fermented or plant-based products) meet growing demand for clean-label, minimally processed foods.

Digital Expansion and Global Reach: The project can extend its reach through digital storytelling, educational content, and even online kits, appealing to audiences beyond physical events.

Support from Public or EU Cultural Grants: Heritage-focused entrepreneurship and cultural diversity initiatives are often eligible for funding from national and European programs.

Threats

Regulatory and Safety Barriers: Complying with European food hygiene, allergen labeling, and event licensing regulations could present bureaucratic and financial hurdles.

Cultural Misunderstanding & Stereotyping: If not carefully framed, unfamiliar foods or practices might be misunderstood or rejected by some consumers.

Economic Volatility: Fluctuating consumer spending, especially during periods of inflation or recession, may limit attendance at non-essential or premium events.

Imitation by Competitors: If successful, the format could be replicated by others, potentially diluting originality if legal or brand protections are not in place.

SWOT ANALYSIS



Figure 1 Summary of SWOT analysis for the Heritage Bites project.

CONCLUSIONS

The Heritage Bites project aims to promote and preserve traditional Chinese food culture through immersive, story-driven pop-up exhibitions across Europe. By introducing underrepresented regional cuisines and culinary practices to international audiences, the project contributes to cultural diversity and gastronomic education.

To evaluate the feasibility and potential of the project, a series of strategic analyses were conducted. The PEST analysis highlighted a favorable socio-cultural environment and growing policy support for cultural exchange and sustainable food practices. The Porter's Five Forces model revealed moderate market competition, with opportunities for differentiation through cultural authenticity and partnerships. Finally, the SWOT analysis identified strong internal assets—such as flexibility and uniqueness—while also pointing to challenges like sourcing and brand recognition. Overall, the analyses support the viability of Heritage Bites as a culturally relevant and market-responsive initiative, provided that careful attention is given to operational planning and stakeholder engagement.

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