



DIVERSIFIED FACTORS INFLUENCING FOOD CONSUMPTION OF TOURISTS

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Abstract: Food culture plays a crucial driving role in popularizing a place as a tourist places and destinations and serves as a potential and influential attraction in tourism. Consumption of traditional food or cuisine specific to any destination has become a primary drive for optimum satisfaction of the visitors. Various factors such as cultural difference, religious influences, socio-demographic aspects, food-related personality traits, pre-exposure effect/past experience and interest to try for new authentic dishes influence consumption of food of the tourists visiting to a particular place. Food neo-phobia, food familiarity and destination food image have been identified as the most responsible factors affecting the local food preference, consumption and satisfaction of the tourists. Also taste/quality value, health value, price value, emotional value, and prestige value hold a positive effect on tourists' attitude toward local food and act as motivational factors for the tourists to revisit a place for deriving greater contentment. Motivational factors influencing the food consumption has five dimensions: symbolic, obligatory, contrast, extension and pleasure.

Key words: Destination food, Tourists, Food Consumption, Motivational factors

I. INTRODUCTION

Among the three basic needs of human being, food is the most crucial need for someone's survival irrespective of the residence place whether in native place or in some new visiting place. Besides the survival factor, food always plays an active role by providing a sense of satisfaction or satiety to all communities. The culture, social status and heritage of a particular place are reflected by the culinary practice, eatable dishes and dietary habits of its inhabitants. The availability and affordability of various food items in any tourist place decide the rate and frequency of visiting the place by any tourists. The taste, flavor, appearance, quality, quantity as well as price of the food items available in a particular region influence the visitors' mindset to select the place as their destination according to their preferences. Hence food tourism has been become as a center of interest for researchers in the field of tourism as recognition of gastronomy is considered as a key attraction as well as a valuable influencing component of the attraction of various tourist destinations. Local food consumption is nowadays regarded as an important part of the experiences of a tourist as it offers innovative and unique opportunities for learning of various cultural aspects.

Gastronomy or food tourism is defined as the activity of exploration and discovery of culture and history through food, which influences the formation of worth-remembering experiences (Long, 2004). It paves significant ways for regional growth and development (Hall, 2005; McBoyle, 1996). Food is recognized as a vital part of the heritage tourism market and particularly the focus is on rural regions (Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hjalager and Richards, 2002), because local food products increase sustainability, prove authenticity of the destination, strengthen the local economy and creates environmentally friendly infrastructure. Food has been considered as a vital element of tourism experiences as it forms an important destination image by influencing the decision making process for selecting the destination (Ritchie et al., 2011; Lawrence et al., 2012).

There has been a belief of dependency of food consumption behavior dependent on culture (Chang et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2012; Nicolaou et al., 2009). There are certain factors that influence the local destination food choices and consumption of tourists. Various factors like motivation either by self or by others, demographic aspects and physiological factors affect the selection and consumption of any regional food items (Kim et al., 2009; Sengel et al., 2015). Five factors such as cultural/nationality and religious factors, socio-demographic factors, motivational factors, food-related personality traits (including food neo-phobia, food neo-philia and seeking for variety) and previous experience/exposure or food familiarity are considered as the influencing factors for destination food selection and consumption (Mak et al., 2012). Besides these factors, food image perception being a key factor influencing the destination food consumption (Choe and Kim, 2018; Promsivapallop and Kannaovakun, 2019). Thus, this review paper aims at investigating various factors responsible for influencing the consumption of local food products by tourists.

II. FACTORS INFLUENCING TOURIST FOOD CONSUMPTION

Food consumption is recognized as a complex behavior, with cultural, social, psychological and sensory acceptance factors all playing a role in the decision-making process (Köster, 2009; Sobal et al., 2006). These factors can be classified into three broad categories: the individual, the food and the environment (Gains, 1994; Meiselman et al., 1999). The food itself contributes sensory attributes such as flavor, aroma, texture and appearance; whereas the environment presents cultural, social, economic and physical influences. As for the individual, socio-cultural, psychological and physiological factors are recognised to exert direct or indirect effects on food consumption behavior. Amongst these three broad categories, factors relating to 'the individual' are widely accepted to be extremely crucial in explaining the variations in food consumption (Rozin, 2006). Food in the destination presents factors such as sensory attributes, food content, cooking methods (Chang et al., 2010; Cohen & Avieli, 2004). The destination environment contributes factors such as gastronomic image/identity, marketing communications, service encounter and servicescape (i.e., physical elements in a consumption setting's built environment) (Chang et al., 2011; Fox, 2007; Harrington, 2005). Arguably, these factors can be more complex than food consumption in home settings, for there is a substantial change in both the 'food' and the 'environment' components. Above all, tourists' former attitude towards food and eating might change and a different set of motivations might influence their preferences and choice of food in the new and unfamiliar environment. Limited space precludes a full discussion of the wide ranging factors classified under these three categories. Given the focus of this study is on tourist food consumption, the factors pertaining to the tourists are elaborated in the ensuing sections.

1.1 CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES

Culture and religion both are recognized as major factors affecting general food consumption. Culture can be defined as a shared set of characteristics, attitudes, behaviors and values that helps groups of people decide what to do and how to go about it (Goodenough, 1971). Culture 'guides' the behavior of a particular group in all affairs of life and designates the socially standardized activities of people, including the human 'food ways'. Accordingly, culture is a major determinant affecting the types of substances that a person considers appropriate to eat (Atkins & Bowler, 2001; Logue, 1991). It defines how food is coded into 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' and 'good' or 'bad' within a particular social group (Mäkelä, 2000). Culture further determines which foods and food qualities are acceptable in terms of their sensory properties. This process is manifested in the existence of culturally specific 'flavour principles'. According to Rozin and Rozin (1981), basic foods, cooking techniques and flavour principles are three major factors that differentiate a cuisine and flavour principles refer to the distinctive seasoning combinations which characterise many cuisines.

Religious background are also considered as crucial determinants affecting food choice and consumption (Khan, 1981). Religious beliefs have an impact on food consumption when certain foods are prohibited (e.g., Islam, Judaism), particular preparation methods are mandated (e.g. *halal*, *kosher*) or fasting or feasting practices are observed (e.g., Ramadan). These practices and restrictions can result in stable and rigid food habits (Khan, 1981) and thus, not just affect food consumption in tourists' home settings, but also in the context of tourism. Using Muslim tourists as an example, Islamic teachings about eating behavior have classified the food broadly into *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (prohibited).

The influences of culture and religion on tourist food consumption have been recognized by a number of hospitality/tourism studies. For example, Japanese, French and Italian tourists were observed as avoiding local food in the host destination and always preferring to eat their own cuisine; whereas American tourists were perceived to have a slight preference for local food in the host destination. Chang et al. (2010) found that tourists' culturally-specific 'core eating behaviour' is a crucial factor affecting their food preferences on holiday. Tourists are generally more willing to accept changes in 'secondary' foods (i.e., foods eaten widely and often, but not daily) and 'peripheral' foods (i.e., foods eaten sporadically) on holiday, yet tend to remain steadfast to 'core' foods (i.e., staples that are consumed almost daily). This supports the core and peripheral foods model in food consumption literature (Kittler & Sucher, 2004) which suggests that core foods are closely associated with a culture and face the biggest resistance to be changed or modified. Chang et al. (2011) found that tourists' own food culture can exert a great deal of influence on their perceptions and evaluation of foreign food, particularly in terms of flavor and cooking method. The finding highlights the importance of understanding the 'cultural distance' (McKercher & Chow, 2001) and culturally-specific 'flavour principles' (Rozin & Rozin, 1981) between tourists' native food culture and the host food culture in affecting tourist food consumption.

1.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Socio-demographic factors commonly include indicators such as age, gender, marital status, education level, occupation and household income to reflect the socio-economic and demographic status of an individual. While closely related to cultural background, socio-demographic factors allow investigations into socio-economic and demographic variables as within-culture determinants of food consumption. Age, gender and social status (or social class) are significant in accounting for variations in food preferences. For example, Khan (1981) contends that owing to diminished taste and olfactory sensitivity, older people tend to display different food preferences as compared to younger persons. Rozin (2006) points out that meat avoidance, weight concerns and preference for low-calorie foods are higher in women in USA. Evidence from the tourism literature suggests that tourist food consumption can be influenced by socio-demographic factors. For instance, Tse and Crotts (2005) found that tourists' age was negatively correlated with the number and range of their culinary explorations. This suggests that elder tourists may consume a narrower range of foods available in a destination. Kim et al. (2009) also identified gender, age and education as three socio-demographic variables that affect tourists' local food consumption. In particular, female interviewees were found to be more interested in and excited about tasting local food when on holiday. Elder interviewees and interviewees with higher education level were found to be more concerned about health and had a stronger desire to understand and experience foreign cultures through local food consumption. Khan (1981) points to the interrelationship between certain socio-demographic factors, such as education,

occupation and age. As he contends, people with a higher education level might have a higher social-status occupation and can be older. On the other hand, since food also serves as a ‘social marker’ which identifies one’s group (Rozin, 2006), social status is one of the pervasive factors affecting the types and quantity of foods eaten and the perceived meanings of foods.

1.3 FOOD-RELATED PERSONALITY TRAITS

Food-related personality traits refer to individual characteristics that exert a pervasive influence on a broad range of food-related behaviors. In particular, two main types of traits can be identified from the tourism literature: food neophobia and variety-seeking. Food neophobia, or the reluctance to ingest novel foods (Pliner & Salvy, 2006), is at the heart of the mechanism dictating human food choice. Humans, as omnivorous animals, will try various food sources, however, they will, at the same time, be cautious not to ingest toxic or harmful food sources. Food neophobia, therefore, is described as a ‘natural biological correlate of omnivorous exploratory behaviour’ (Köster & Mojet, 2007). According to Pliner and Salvy (2006), food neophobia can be conceptualized as a personality trait involving a relative preference for familiar over novel foods. This condition is stable over time and consistent across situations. However, there are large individual differences in the extent of food neophobia. Pliner and Hobden (1992) developed the Food Neophobia Scale, a ten-item instrument, to measure individual differences in food neophobia. Research shows that when measured with the scale, people who are more neophobic tend to expect various novel foods to taste worse than the less neophobic and thus are generally less willing to taste or choose novel foods (Pliner & Hobden, 1992; Tuorila et al., 1998). Taking a sociological perspective, Fischler (1988) draws a distinction between ‘neophobic’ and ‘neophilic’ tendencies in taste, suggesting that a human has a natural tendency to dislike or suspect new and unfamiliar foods (neophobic) and yet, also has a propensity to search for novel foods (neophilic). Kim et al. (2009) identified food neophobia and neophilia as two of the factors affecting tourists’ inclination to consume local food on holiday. They found that tourists, who have a predisposition to be neophobic, seem to be reluctant to eat exotic food. Chang et al. (2011) suggest that the neophilia concept provides justification for tourists’ inclination to seek various dining experiences when on holiday. Another food-related personality trait that can affect tourist food consumption is variety-seeking. Variety-seeking can be defined as ‘the tendency of individuals to seek diversity in their choices of services and goods’.

2.4 EXPOSURE EFFECT/PAST EXPERIENCES

Based on the food neophobia concept, people generally prefer foods that they are familiar with. The mere exposure effect offers corroboration for this contention. The mere exposure effect refers to a ‘positive repetition-affect relationship that results from exposure alone’ (Obermiller, 1985). In other words, its essence is reflected by the old aphorism ‘familiarity breeds content’. Past experience with a food also can significantly affect food consumption behaviour. Barker (1982) found that an individual’s past experience with a food contribute to the development of ‘food memories’ which are associated with the sensory attributes of the food. The exposure effect and past experience are found to be important factors affecting tourist food consumption. Tourists’ exposure to the local cuisine of a destination, acquired through previous visit can increase the familiarity of that cuisine and thus potentially enhance their preference towards it. The study conducted by Tse and Crotts (2005) supports this, indicating that repetitive visit was found to be positively correlated with both the number and range of tourists’ culinary explorations, whereas first-time visitation was negatively correlated. Likewise, Ryu and Jang (2006) found that past experience is one of the significant predictors of tourists’ intention to consume local cuisine in destinations. Other than past experience obtained from previous visitation, tourists may have increased exposure to different foreign cuisines under heightened globalisation. Given the growing influence of globalisation, not only have tourists become more mobile, the food they eat has also become more international (Hall & Mitchell, 2002b; Richards, 2002). There is an increasing availability of both ethnic restaurants in tourists’ home settings and information sources about foreign cuisines (Cohen & Avieli, 2004), which provide tourists with the opportunity to become acquainted with a variety of foreign cuisines before they travel to the destination where these foreign cuisines originated. This might lead to changes in their travel food consumption behavior.

2.5 MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

A growing body of studies have demonstrated that motivational factors can significantly affect tourist food consumption. First of all, a number of studies explore how food *per se* can be the major, or one of the major, motivations to travel to a destination (Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Long, 2004). Kivela and Crotts (2006) contend that motivation to travel for food/gastronomy is a valid construct and that food plays an important role in affecting the overall tourist experience and intention to revisit a destination. Ignatov and Smith (2006) found that travel motivations and activities differed significantly among different Canadian culinary tourist segments. The four motivators are: physical, cultural, interpersonal and status and prestige motivators. First, food can be a physical motivator as the act of eating is predominately physical in nature involving sensory perceptions to appreciate the food or tourists’ need for sustenance. Second, food can also be a cultural motivator because when tourists are experiencing new local cuisines, they are simultaneously experiencing a new culture. Third, it might serve as an interpersonal motivator as meals taken on a holiday have a social function including building new social relations and strengthening social bonds. Finally, local delicacies can also be a status and prestige motivator, as tourists can build their knowledge of the local cuisine by eating as the locals do and exploring new cuisines and food that they or their friends are not likely to encounter at home. The motivational factors can be theoretically categorised into five main dimensions: symbolic, obligatory, contrast, extension and pleasure.

III. CONCLUSION

Food itself for tourists can act as an attraction as well as motivating factor boosting the tourists for visiting a place again and again. Tourism and gastronomy are often regarded as hedonic products for which fun, pleasure, or enjoyment is a primary benefit that enhances the local food consumption while visiting a place. Socio-cultural, religious and demographic factors, personality traits

of tourists along with food availability, price, destination environment and other associated factors like food neo-phobia, past experience etc. act as primary determinants of local food consumption by the tourists. Understanding tourists' needs and wants in terms of food consumption is of paramount importance to hospitality businesses (Santich, 2007). An in-depth knowledge pertaining to factors influencing tourist food consumption is, therefore, extremely valuable to the hospitality sector in providing the appropriate tourism dining experiences that can lead to tourist satisfaction.

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