Tourists’ Approach to Local Food

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Abstract

Although there are various studies that explore tourist behavior in certain settings such as travel and accommodation, the impact of local food on tourist experience is often neglected. Eating is a physical need as well as a cultural and social activity. When tourists eat at a destination they not only satisfy their hunger but also experience the local culture and interact with their hosts. Tourists’ demand for local food occur however in different levels of intensity. Some tourists travel solely for gastronomy in the region, some see local food as a by-product of their cultural experiences, and some others rather familiar food when they travel. Therefore there are differences in how tourists’ approach local food consumption. This study aims to analyze the factors effecting local food demand in tourism in order to identify which tourists are interested in local food as an attraction. A questionnaire has been conducted on 105 tourists in order to reveal differences in motivational, demographic and psychological factors based on their local food experiences at various locations in the Old City district of Istanbul. Based on the analysis of data (one way and two way anova) significant differences were found between various demographic and tripographic factors on tourists’ perceptions of local food. The findings of the study can be used on product design and marketing communications of restaurants and destinations with significant tourist flow in order to target the right audience.

1. Introduction

Tourism is rapidly evolving to become an industry of prime importance for countries and local economies. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2013) reported international arrivals have reached 1,3 billion in 2013 with an
annual growth rate of 4% for the first time in this decade. Starting from the 80s tourism trends started to change, geographical space has attracted more attention and renewed value (Xose, Lopez & Martin, 2006). According to Grande (2001) symbolizing and appreciation of local culture and authenticity have become features of the new trend and gastronomy has started to be recognized as a symbolic value representing territories and culture in tourism.

Cohen and Avieli (2004) reports tourist food consumption has largely been neglected in the hospitality and tourism literature. Gastronomy is also acknowledged as an important factor affecting overall tourism experience (Correia, Moital, Da Costa & Peres, 2008, Okumus, Okumus & McKercher, 2007), however studies designed to analyze tourists’ gastronomy experiences are limited. This was because food has been accepted as a supporting resource (Godfrey & Clarke, 2000) of tourism activity rather than an attraction on its own. However recent years a number of studies related to impact of the tourist food consumption attracted attention. For example, Telfer and Wall (2000) reports that tourists; spending on food makes up one-third of total travel expenditure which also reflects the importance of food consumption in tourism. Local food is a major component for both leisure and business segments of tourism industry and eating is the only activity that prompts all five senses; vision, tactile, auditory, taste and olfaction (Kivela & Crotts, 2005).

Stephan, Smith and Xiao (2008) defined tourism as ‘‘…. Any tourism experience in which one learns about, appreciates or consumes branded local sources’’, in this perspective local food is becoming an important part of cultural character of the destination. According to Richards (2002) apart from satisfying physical need consuming local food also creates an opportunity to learn about local geography, people and culture. Hjalager and Richards (2002) supports this by stating local food is an essential part of the tourism experience since it can serve both as a cultural and an entertaining activity. In the sense of creating a destination image via locality of food; considered as an important factor of a national cultural identity and destination promotion (McKercher, Okumus & Okumus, 2008). Local and regional food can add value to destination because visitors tend to prefer the authentic products of a destination. After all people travel for novel experiences (MacCannel, 1973), travelling does not really make sense, if it was repetition of the same activities back home. Moreover familiarity with local, regional and national cuisine has become a main motivation to travel for some tourists (gastronomy, wine tasting etc…).

Yuksel & Yuksel (2003) reported that people eat out because they are psychologically looking for self-identity motives, not just satisfying hunger and sustenance. Therefore given the expressions from literature, one needs to consider the importance of local food consumption in destinations from cultural, social and economic aspects. Food reflects destinations, cultural and social identity and it plays an important role in destination selection. Gastronomy tourists are even considered as a separate market segment. Local culinary is used by various Destination management organizations and considered as an important part of the brand (Okumus, Kock, Scantlebury & Okumus, 2013). Although it is clear that tourists consume local food in destinations, their perspectives based on different characteristics (e.g. demographic and situational) were not examined in depth. This study aims to investigate differences among various tourist groups’ perceptions of local food.

2. Food Tourism and Local Food

Food choices and motivations differ across travelers. Hall and Sharples (2004) argue that when defining food tourism there must be a differentiation among those tourist behaviors who consume food as a part of their travel experience and those who select destinations solely influenced by their interest of food. Wolf (2002) defines culinary tourism as travel for searching prepared food and beverages and memorable gastronomic experiences. However, any visit to a restaurant is not considered as food tourism, destination choice of tourists must be shaped by a special interest into culinary, gastronomy, gourmet or cuisine. Food tourism involving visitation to a primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region or tasting the dishes of a particular chef (Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Kim, Duncan & Jai, 2013; Marzo-Navaro & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2012; Wagner, 2001) are considered under food tourism.
Hjalager (2003) categorized culinary tourists based on Cohen’s (1984) phenomenological categorization into four different groups as existential, experimental, diversionary and recreational. The existential gastronomy tourists think their gastronomy knowledge is improved by experiencing local food and beverages. For these tourists, consuming local food, of the region means gaining in-depth knowledge about the destination’s culture. Therefore existential gastronomy tourists eat where only locals eat and value the food that is prepared according to the traditions and avoid high priced restaurants because of their commercial and non-authentic environment. The experimental gastronomy tourists seek trendy and fashionable foods which can be associated with their lifestyles. They prefer designer cafes and restaurants where they consume food and consider food consumption as a way of satisfying their needs associated with prestige. The recreational gastronomy tourists do not seek local food, fancy and complex restaurants, they dishearten by that. The diversionary gastronomy tourists seek quantity and accessibility of food with familiar menu items. They prefer international chain restaurants and avoid unfamiliar food. Therefore tourists might perceive the impact of local food differently based on various motivational factors. However regardless of the main motivation food is an important element of tourist experience.

3. Factors Influencing Local Food Consumption

Determining different needs of various tourist segments would create a better design of local food products. Despite its importance exploring different characteristics of tourists and their perceptions of local food have been neglected in the literature. This study mainly focused on local food choice and preferences of tourists and their characteristics. Based on previous literature authors have created various factors effecting local food consumption in destinations ranging from personal motivators to personal traits. Giesen, Havermans, Douven, Tekelenburg and Jansen (2010) reported that food consumption studies are mostly concerned with understanding the determinants of various food-related behaviors, including liking, preference, choice and intake. Food liking refers to ‘the palatability or pleasure obtained from tasting a given food’. Duarte Alonso, O’neill, Liu and O’shea (2013) also found that quality and taste are major factors affecting restaurant choice.

In defining factors affecting local food consumption, Mak et al. (2012) reports five dimensions; cultural and religious factors, socio-demographic factors, motivational factors, personality and past experience. It is also acknowledged in various studies that food choices are affected by cultural and religious backgrounds (e.g. kosher food). Kim and Scarles (2009) proposes a model of local food consumption containing three main factors including Mak et al. (2012)’s factors and divided into sub-factors; motivational factors (exciting experience, escape from routine, health concern, learning knowledge, authentic experience, togetherness, prestige, sensory appeal, physical), demographic factors (gender, age, education), physiological factors (neophilia or neophobia). Therefore there is a wide variety of local food attributes that might be considered when analyzing tourists’ food consumption behaviors.

3.1. Demographic Factors

Demographic factors were discussed as important affecting tourist food consumption and commonly include indicators such as age, gender, education level, marital status, religious belief and so on. (Kim et al., 2003). Demographic factors are asserted to be important on consuming local food (Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Bobal, Falk, 1996; Khan, 1981; Randall & Sanjur, 1981). Specifically evidence suggests that age, gender, and social status are significant when making food preferences. For example Rozin (2006), states the gender to be a determinant factor affecting local food consumption when comes to meat avoidance, weight concerns and preference of low-calorie foods among respondents in USA. Kivela & Crotts (2005) supports this idea by pointing that males found to be more interested and involved in local food consumption compared to females. Corroborating with this point, several studies have suggested that females are more concerned about the safety of food, whereas males focus on taste more than safety (Flynn, Slovic, Mertz, 1994; Kim et al., 2009; Wadolowska, Babicz-Zelinska, Czarnocinska, 2008). As like females aged people are also considered to be more inclined with natural and healthy food (Kim et al., 2009) and the tendency of eating seafood claimed to be increasing with age (Olsen, 2003).
Kivela & Crotts (2005) suggests that the tourists of different origins have different approaches to food experience. For example Eastern cultures have been found to be avoiding the local food but western cultures are considered to be more interested in trying unfamiliar food (March, 1997; Sheldon & Fox, 1998; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Tse & Crotts, 2005). Additionally it is stated that people with higher income and higher education level are more interested in local food consumption as they don’t only consume food for satisfying a physical need but also consider their sense of taste and relate what they eat with local culture (Wadolowska et al., 2008).

3.2. Motivational Factors

Various studies have found that motivational factors affect tourist food consumption and local food is off primary importance for overall satisfaction of a trip (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2015). Fields (2002) have suggested four motivational factors for tourists to consume local food; physical, cultural, interpersonal and statue motivators. Kim & Scarles (2009) offers nine sub-factors when explaining motivational factor as; exciting experience, escape from routine, health concern, learning knowledge, authentic experience, togetherness, prestige, sensory appeal and physical in their model of local food consumption. The dimensions of tourists’ food motivation have been categorized in two main categories as symbolic dimensions (learning local culture, exciting experience, authenticity, prestige), and obligatory dimensions (health concern, physical need etc.) (Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012). Tasting local food is claimed to be a pleasurable and exciting activity by Kivela and Crotts (2006).

Eating is a basic need of human nature, every tourist eats local food when travelling away from home. Taste, looks, scent of the food and the authenticity of the place are sensory issues perceived by five senses and can be considered as physical motivators (Fields, 2002). Related to this idea Kim et al. (2009) mentioned taste, flavor, smell and visual image of food as physical motivators that reflects sensory appeal as well. Besides representation of the restaurant, decoration, music, lighting and architecture are accepted as aspects of physical environment (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2003; Meiselman, 2000). Travelling is seen as a way of escaping from routine (MacCannell, 1976; Smith, 1994), so the tourists prefer eating in authentic places with traditional atmosphere instead of worldwide food chain restaurants. Eating local food in local restaurants is also accepted to be a way of social and cultural interaction since it gives clues about local way of living, manners, geography, economy and related cues (Getz, 2000).

3.3. Psychological Factors

Apart from given motivational and demographic factors some psychological factors based on personal characteristics, past exposure, variety seeking is also reported to affect local food consumption in destinations. Mainly food neophobia and neophilia have been examined by authors. While explaining these terms, people may naturally dislike or be dubious to taste unfamiliar food (neophobia), on the other hand they also have a curiosity to taste local food (neophilic) (Fischler, 1988). Related to this, willingness of consuming new food and being interested in trying unfamiliar food are mentioned to be push factors for some tourists to try local food at destinations (Quan & Wang, 2004; Chang, Kivela, Mak, 2011). On the other hand, Torres (2002) argues that some tourists might prefer the kind of food they eat back in their origin. Quan & Wang (2004) supports by saying that tourists may stay in western hotel chains in Asia in order to avoid local tastes but if they are in search of novelty they may choose to eat local food as well. Past experience also affect food choice at a destination. The earlier experiences of tourists about food can influence future visits to the destinations. Experienced tourists might be more willing to try different food alternatives compared to first time visitors (Tse & Crotts, 2005; Ryu & Jang, 2006).

4. Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach to study the local food motivations of different tourist groups. A questionnaire has been adopted as the data collection instrument. The participants were asked to evaluate the items of local food attributes based on a five point likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree). The items used in this study included three main dimensions (demographic, motivational, psychological factors) and related items derived from extant literature review (e.g., Giesen et al., 2010; Mak et al.,
2012; Kim & Scarles, 2009; Kim et al., 2003; Rozin, 2006; Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Olsen, 2003; March, 1997; Sheldon & Fox, 1998; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Tse & Crotts, 2005; Wadolowska et al., 2008; Fields, 2002; Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2011; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Kim et al., 2009; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2003; Meiselman, 2000; MacCAnell, 1976; Getz, 2000; Fischler, 1998; Quan & Wang, 2004; Chang et al., 2011; Torres, 2002; Tse & Crotts, 2005; Ryu & Jang, 2006). Respondents’ personal characteristics (demographic factors) and situational factors (travel motivation) were also asked. Data for this study were collected from tourists visiting Istanbul. Food was found to be significant factor affecting tourists satisfaction (Rimmington & Yuksel, 1998). Participants were approached during their visit to Old City area of Istanbul (Sultanahmet) during Dec. 2014 for two weeks. Random sampling was used to select respondents and a total of 105 surveys were collected during this process. The 59 % of the participants were at the age of 30 and below, 41 % of the participants were at the age of 31 and above. 52 of the participants were females and 53 of them were males. Among them 37 were married yet 68 of them were single. While 33,3 % of the participants were accommodated in 4 and 5-stars hotels, 66,7 % of them were staying in 3-stars and lower category hotels. The main motivation of the travelers was leisure oriented.

5. Analyses and Results

The data was analyzed using SPSS. First descriptive statistics were employed then analysis of variance tests were utilized to explore differences among tourist groups. Research findings of the study have shown that that there are significant differences between gender groups based on their tendency to try unfamiliar food, feeling of escape when consuming local food, collecting information before travelling to the destination and their return behavior to taste the local food again. Some difference on marital status was also found such as tendency to see local food as an opportunity to meet with locals. Two way anova was also employed using gender and marital status and significant differences on tendency to recommend were found among married and single tourists based on their gender. The details of the findings are shown below.

| Groups (i)     | Groups (j)     | $\bar{x}_i - \bar{x}_j$ | SE  | $p$  |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-----|-----|
| 4&5-stars hotels                                  | 3-stars hotels  | -0,60                   | 0,206| 0,00|
|                                                 | Boutique hotels | -0,52                   | 0,209| 0,02|
| 3-stars hotels                                   | 4&5-stars hotels| 0,60                    | 0,206| 0,00|
|                                                 | Boutique hotels | 0,08                    | 0,208| 0,70|
| Boutique hotels                                  | 4&5-stars hotels| 0,52                    | 0,209| 0,02|
|                                                 | 3-stars hotels  | -0,08                   | 0,208| 0,70|

Analysis of ratings on “importance of local food on overall trip satisfaction” revealed that there are significant differences ($F=4,88; p<0,05$) between groups of facility type (four - and five–stars, three-stars and boutique hotels). Levene’s test of homogeneity was utilized to determine which post-hoc test shall be used in order to explore different groups. The variances among groups were found to be homogenous ($L=1,44; p>0,05$). The results of LSD post-hoc test are depicted on Table 2.
Post-hoc tests reveal that there are significant differences between tourists staying in 4-5 star hotels and other tourist staying elsewhere. The differences between 3-star hotels and boutique hotels on their “importance of local food on satisfaction” dimension are also significant. Tourists staying in 3-star hotels and boutique hotels attain significantly higher importance to local food considering their overall trip satisfaction than tourists staying in 4- and 5-star hotels.

| Table 3. Gender Differences on Trying Unfamiliar Food |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| Gender | N | M     | SD | SEM | T    | df  | P  |
| Female | 52 | 4.4   | 0.8 | 0.1 | 2.053| 103 | .043 |
| Male   | 53 | 4.1   | 0.9 | 0.1 |       |     |    |

Gender difference analysis show that female tourists are tend to be more interested in trying unfamiliar food compared to male tourists (M=4.4>4.1 & (P<0.05). The reason for this might be attributed to the fact that the food arrangements in traditional families is seen usually a responsibility of females. Therefore it is not surprising that when travelling women feel like to try unfamiliar food instead of the familiar food they cook.

| Table 4. Gender Differences on Considering Consuming Local Food Is A Way Of Escaping From Routine (Nf=52 Nm=53) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gender | N | M    | SD | SEM | T    | df  | P   |
| Female | 52 | 3.3  | 1.2 | 0.2 | -2.742| 103 | .007 |
| Male   | 53 | 3.9  | 0.8 | 0.1 |       |     |    |

As shown on table 4, male tourists attain significantly different and higher rating to "local food consumption as a way of escaping from daily routine" item than females (M= 3.9>3.3 & P=0.007<0.05). The reason for this might be the fact that males are in more search of food variety but they might not have the opportunity during their regular life.

| Table 5. Gender Differences On Collecting Information To What To Eat At A Destination Before Travelling (Nf=52 Nm=53) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gender | N | M    | SD | SEM | T    | df  | P  |
| Female | 52 | 3.7  | 1.1 | 0.2 | 2.047| 103 | .043 |
| Male   | 53 | 3.2  | 1.1 | 0.2 |       |     |    |

Female tourists are found to be more interested in collecting information about what to eat at a destination (M=3.7>3.2 & P≤0.05). Females, as having a more cautious nature may normally collect information before their trips.

| Table 6. Gender Differences On Returning Destinations In Order To Taste The Local Food Again |
|-----------------------------------------------|
| Gender | N | M    | SD | SEM | T    | df  | P  |
| Female | 52 | 3.0  | 1.3 | 0.2 | -2.026| 103 | .045 |
| Male   | 53 | 3.4  | 0.8 | 0.1 |       |     |    |

Table 6 gives clues about being loyal to a destination (M=3.4>3.0 & P=0.045<0.05), and the data proves that males are more loyal to the destinations they tried local food and they prefer to get back solely to try the local food again.
Table 7. Tendency to Recommend Local Food to Others (Two Way Anova Using Gender and Marital Status)

| Variable       | Mean | SD  | N  |
|----------------|------|-----|----|
| Female         |      |     |    |
| Single         | 4,52 | 0,63| 21 |
| Married        | 3,90 | 0,89| 31 |
| Male           |      |     |    |
| Single         | 4,11 | 0,74| 16 |
| Married        | 4,25 | 0,68| 37 |

Source SS  df  MS  F
Gender     0,23  1  0,23  0,84
Marital Status  1,301  1  1,301  2,43
Gender & Marital Status  3,349  1  3,349  0,14*  
Error      54,119  101  0,54

*Significant at P<0,05

As depicted on the table single females are more likely to recommend their local food experiences than married females. On the other hand married males are more likely to spread their experiences of local food to friends and relatives. Therefore married males and single females might be considered as target groups for restaurants that aim to increase their sales through word of mouth marketing.

6. Conclusion

The study has aimed to determine the factors effecting local food consumption of the tourists, so that restaurants located in tourist destinations can develop their marketing strategies according to the results. For example the restaurants that serve tourists might be able to increase the impact of positive word of mouth by especially trying to satisfy married males and single females as these groups tend to have more tendency to share their local food experiences with their friends and relatives. Food is also one of the most shared attributes in social media (Law, Buhalis & Cobanoglu, 2014), concentrating on these groups might improve effectiveness of marketing efforts. There are also significant differences among gender and marital status that the tourists who stay at 4- and 5-star hotels have less interest in local food consumption compared to 3-stars and below and/or boutique hotel guests. Consequently this result could be usefully to infer a tourist profile that has more tendency to consume local food at a destination. In this perspective restaurants should mainly target the 3 star and below or boutique hotel accommodators as their potential targets.

Another finding derived from analysis of variances show that gender difference is an important demographic factor influencing local food. Gender should be taken into consideration while developing management strategies. For instance males tend to be more loyal and the findings prove that they solely get back to the destinations to try local food. Therefore food turns into a travel motivation for males and the females are more concerned to collect information before their trips accordingly managements can direct their advertisement targeted to female tourists.

This study is not free from limitations first of all sample size is comparatively low and the field research was conducted in December. The seasonality does not only affect tourist demand but also availability of various local food. Therefore future studies that collect data during different studies and which uses larger samples might offer more accurate results. Rather than a convenience sample future studies might also use a stratified sample for comparable results among groups. It might also be interesting to identify experiential dimensions of local food consumption of tourist in the future.
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