



Does location matter? Exploring the spatial patterns of food safety in a tourism destination



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ABSTRACT

Location-based studies for tourism destinations have been conducted from perspectives such as regional geography and systematic geography. However, despite the importance of location, the impact of location on food safety has not yet been studied, even though it might be the most influential aspect of planning and development in a tourism destination. This exploratory study identified locational determinants that are associated with the degree of critical food safety violations in hotel restaurants in the Miami metropolitan area in the United States. The results indicated that proximity to the beach, downtown, city of Miami, and airport had a significant effect on critical food safety violations. Furthermore, considerable local variations in the relationships among variables were explored using a geographically weighted regression. The implications on and suggestions for effective food safety planning and policy related to tourism are discussed.

1. Introduction

Geography focuses on place, space and environment provides a new approach called geography of tourism management. (Hall & Page, 2009; 2014). As explained by Hall (2008), “Without such an approach ... we are forever doomed to see tourism's effects only at the destination scale rather than as part of a broader understanding of mobility” (p. 15). Since 1979, when Pearce (1987) indicated the importance of geography in tourism, exploring spatial patterns of tourism has typically been recognized as an essential component of the geographic approach to tourism (Kang, Kim, & Nicholls, 2014). Such exploration examines what phenomena are presented and how the pattern influence tourism planning and government policy (Mitchell & Murphy, 1991). Because the spatial pattern of tourism is typically a geographic outcome of tourism policy (Kang et al., 2014), geographic locations should be considered when any regulation or policy is applied or implemented.

Given tourism's inherently multi-experiential nature, food safety could be explained as a geographical phenomenon involving visitors and locals dining experiences. Travelers tend to avoid unsafe food and drinks in high rated hotels and restaurants in their travel planning and destination selection (World Health Organization (WTO), 2010). Thus, food safety is now more important than ever as hotels have intensified their focus on the management and provision of a safe, secure and comfortable experience criteria for food service selection. Thus, food

safety in the hotel sector has become a nonnegotiable and essential matter (Gomes, Lemos, Silva, Hora, & Cruz, 2014).

Discussions have emerged among scholars of food safety in the tourism industry in recent years; as MacLaurin (2001) described, “health concerns associated with international and domestic tourism are receiving increased attention by the tourism industry” (p. 332). These discussions have focused on the importance of strategic collaboration between nonprofit organizations and businesses for improving food safety in response to MacLaurin's (2001) suggestion that “this responsibility has to be shared between government authorities (health, tourism, and education), the food industry, the tourism industry, and consumers.” (p. 333).

Food as part of the tourism experience is important because it can affect a tourist's decision making regarding travel (Henderson, 2009) as well as their evaluation of the experience afterward (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Food service affects the destination choice as well as the overall vacation experience for tourists (Sheldon & Fox, 1988). In particular, food safety has become an important factor in travel planning and destination selection (MacLaurin, 2004; Yeung & Yee, 2013). As noted by MacLaurin (2001), “The continued increase in global travel, particularly to emerging destinations, will only heighten the need for continued awareness and proactive management of food safety issues to sustain a favorable consumer opinion, and growth, of the world's tourism industry” (p. 333). Food safety is therefore an important issue

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for both tourists and the industry at every destination and is a crucial element of the global tourist experience and product (Henderson, 2009). Thus, both the tourism industry as well as the foodservice industry are responsible for overseeing food safety at tourism destinations.

Food safety violations often cause foodborne illnesses (Harris, DiPietro, Murphy, & Rivera, 2014). Critical food safety violations are associated with hazardous food safety risk factors identified by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Critical food safety violations are more likely to directly result in foodborne illnesses or food contamination (Harris, DiPietro, Murphy, & Rivera, 2015; Medeiros, Hillers, Kendall, & Mason, 2001). Foodborne illness or disease is defined as foodborne infection or food poisoning that is commonly caused by eating contaminated food (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2017). Preventing foodborne illnesses has been recognized as a prerequisite to improving food safety because such illnesses are typically associated with factors that include the globalization of food supply, changes in the human population, the introduction of pathogens in different geographic areas, and increasing populations of international travelers (World Health Organization, 2002).

According to the CDC, 48 million Americans become ill as a result of foodborne pathogens each year. Approximately, 128,000 people are hospitalized and 3000 die each year because of foodborne illnesses in the U.S. The domestic and/or international transportation of food products increases concerns about foodborne pathogen transmission (Harris, Murphy, DiPietro, & Rivera, 2015). Because of this heightened concern, the assessment of food safety risk has created a precarious situation of food safety violations in foodservice establishments (Henson et al., 2006).

Over the past decade, tourism and hospitality research has studied means to examine consumer perceptions of the food safety of restaurants and improve the safety of the food supply chain (DiPietro & DiPietro, 2017). Some studies have investigated the impact of health inspectors on food safety scores and health inspection violations (Lee, Nelson, & Almanza, 2012). Harris et al. (2014) investigated food safety violations in chain and non-chain restaurants and found that the location of restaurants within a state is important. This finding indicates that the standards of health inspections and food safety violations may differ depending on location. Thus, exploring the spatial patterns of food safety may be a prerequisite to effective food safety planning and policy-making in tourism.

Despite the importance of considering location, however, the previous tourism literature focused on examining destinations has seldom considered the impact of location on food safety in destination management. There has been conflicting research regarding whether the typical behavior of employees is related to a lower number of food safety violations, and/or whether foodservice operations with a restaurant type is related to the extent of food safety violations; however, this issue is beyond the scope of this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the spatial patterns of food safety through a case study of 308 hotel restaurants in the Miami metropolitan area (MMA). Specifically, this study (1) detected local clusters of critical food safety violations at hotel restaurants based on the type and class of hotel, (2) identified locational determinants that are associated with the degree of critical food safety violations (3) explored important local variations (i.e., spatial heterogeneity), in the relationships between locational determinants and the degree of critical food safety violations across the study area. These findings can help tourism/hospitality managers and local destination management organizations (DMOs) better understand the local patterns of food safety violations in a tourism destination and better cultivate location-based food safety planning, policy, and strategy to develop a tourism destination.

2. Literature review

2.1. The importance of food safety in tourism

For nearly 150 years, researchers have investigated food safety through a microbiological examination of foods (Griffith, 2006). Food safety was founded on a scientific understanding of the relationships between adverse health effects and chemical and biological agents in food; consequently, it requires a multidisciplinary approach, including expertise in nutrition, epidemiology, toxicology, civil engineering, architecture, urban planning, health promotion, waste management systems, and consumer affairs (World Tourism Organization, 2006). Thus, food safety has been a major concern in the food service industry over the past two decades (Knight & Warland, 2004).

The food safety of food service establishments is also associated with travel and tourism because tourists can become sick from foodborne illnesses in restaurants and hotels while they travel (Cossar et al., 1990; Dawood, 1989; Fletcher, Maharaj, & James, 2009; MacLaurin, 2001; 2004). Food safety affects potential tourists' decision to choose a location or destination for their future vacations (Kozak, Crotts, & Law, 2007; Michalko, 2004; Thapa, 2004). Potential tourists are sensitive to sanitation; in particular, tourists are more likely to complain about the threat of food poisoning and the lack of food sanitation and facilities on vacation (Lepp & Gibson, 2003). Cossens and Gin (1995) argued that health risks for travelers are most often related to poor food or water. Unhygienic food service practices (i.e., food safety violations) might reduce revenue and harm the reputation of a tourist destination (World Tourism Organization, 2006). Food safety has therefore become an important issue in the tourism industry, particularly for vacation destinations and developing regions (MacLaurin, 2001).

Food service marketing has been amalgamated with context that remains vague in the tourism industry (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, & Baloglu, 2006), whereas studies related to food service have been generally examined in the hospitality industry (Wearne & Morrison, 1993). Although food service in hotels and tourism has its own distinct characteristics, food safety is an important issue in its own industry in terms of tourists. As noted by Holjevac (2003), "Tourism has a bright future, and so does the hotel industry. The hotel of the future is defined by tourism guidelines, that is, the needs of the tourist of the 21st century" (p. 132) in response to Henderson's (2009) suggestion that hotel food is also associated with larger tourist attractions which has sometimes an international appeal. Thus, hotels should provide more sanitary food services to tourists, resulting in a destination with a safer place, space, and environment.

Hotel restaurants and/or bars, regardless of the operating structure of the restaurant or possible brand/chain affiliation, have been a focus of the food service industry for the last two decades. Although the operating structures have changed over time, the relationship between accommodations and food service continues to evolve and represents a significant contribution to the bottom line for hotels. Research has found that hotel restaurants contribute between 20% and 40% of total hotel revenues (Hotel News Now, 2015); the larger the restaurant located within a hotel, the higher the generated profit margins. A positive relationship has been found to exist between the components of brand equity and the restaurant's performance (Kim & Kim, 2005). A spillover impact for the hotel is a negative image of the hotel in the event of any elevated food safety violations in its restaurant. Recently, several hotel food services were subjects of controversy surrounding food security. For example, in 2016, more than 100 members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed a lawsuit in Redwood City, California, against the hotel chain Sofitel because of food poisoning (Field, 2016). The Cape May County and New Jersey Departments of Health reported that 42 customers fell ill as a direct result of foodborne illnesses at the Flanders Hotel in Ocean City after using the hotel's catering services (Nevitt, 2016). The Royal Hawaiian Hotel reported that 114 customers who participated in a wedding

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