



Influence of informational and experiential familiarity on image of local foods



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ABSTRACT

This study provided results of an investigation into the influence of familiarity on the image of local food among foreign tourists who visit South Korea, examining the differences in tourists' image of local foods and behavioral intentions to eat local foods based on both experiential and informational familiarity. The results showed that foreign tourists with more experience with local foods had a more positive affective and cognitive image of local food and intention to consume local foods than tourists with little experience with local food. However, the affective image of local foods did not differ significantly when tourists accessed more information sources. Overall, the results of this study indicate that experiential familiarity was more influential than informational familiarity in improving local food image.

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1. Introduction

Food has always been an important part of the tourism industry, especially in places noted for fine food like, for instance, Italy and France (Henderson, 2009). Also, food can be a significant attraction for people who travel (Bessiere, 1998; Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Ryu and Jang, 2006). Although local food is a significant part of the tourist experience, many tourists are uneasy about trying something with which they are unfamiliar. Because tourists experience new culture in an unfamiliar environment during a trip, they perceive more risk in choosing and eating local food than purchasing other tour products. In addition, many tourists tend to conflate local with strange and unfamiliar and become more concerned about hygiene (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). Fischler (1988) argued most people dislike or suspect new food because of both biological and cultural influences, which he called neophobia. Food neophobia would predict that people hesitate to try new foods, and as they become familiar with a cuisine or culture, they become less neophobic about the food (Birch et al., 1987; Luckow et al., 2006; Pliner, 1982; Stein et al., 2003). Increasing familiarity through direct or indirect past food experience could decrease the perceived risk tourists may feel in consuming local food. Thus, familiarity with

local food can reduce tourist concerns about local food in tourist destinations and change the image of local food, an important concept for tourism professionals.

Familiarity is defined as knowledge of a product (Johnson and Russo, 1984; Marks and Olson, 1981). Previous studies have reported that the level of familiarity influenced overall consumer behavior, such as preference, trust, perceived risk, information search, decision time, confidence in decision, and purchase behavior motivation (Baker et al., 1986; Kim et al., 2008; Murray and Schlacter, 1990; Park and Lessig, 1981). Also, several studies have suggested that experience with products affects consumer attitudes and should be included in defining familiarity (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Rao and Sieben, 1992). Familiarity is significant for tourist destinations because of its vital role in tourist destination selection (Baloglu, 2001). Familiarity with a destination includes destination attractions, foods, language, and culture (Chang et al., 2011; Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). Some studies have found that not just past experience but information significantly affect familiarity (Baloglu, 2001; Ha and Perks, 2005; Park and Lessig, 1981). Baloglu (2001) developed the familiarity index, defining familiarity as combination of amount of information (informational familiarity) and previous experience (experiential familiarity) as an integrated concept.

More people have been exposed to a wider array of cuisines under the influence of globalization, even before they begin an overseas trip. Thus, people have the opportunity to become familiar with foreign cuisines. This exposure changes their attitudes toward more unfamiliar cuisines (Hall and Mitchell, 2002; Richards, 2002; Cohen and Avieli, 2004). Moreover, as experiential familiarity and

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informational familiarity increase, image and behavioral intention change positively (Cox and Rich, 1964; Dowling, 1986; Fuchs and Reichel, 2006; Gürhan-Canli and Batra, 2004; Klerck and Sweeney, 2007; Kozak et al., 2007; Lepp and Gibson, 2003; Mitchell, 2001; Mitchell and Vassos, 1998).

Previous studies have found that destination familiarity had a significant relationship with destination image (Baloglu, 2001; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Lee et al., 2008; Hyun et al., 2005; Kwon, 2005; Qu et al., 2010). As destination familiarity influences the image of that destination, familiarity with local food should relate to the image of local food. Some researchers have even found familiarity formed through movie or TV drama can influence the image of local food (Kim and Richardson, 2003; Kwon, 2005).

This increased exposure and familiarity affects not only the image of local food but also the consumption of local food. However, the relationship between familiarity, image, and local food consumption in tourism has largely been ignored. Given the lack of research on the relationship between familiarity and the image of local food, this study stressed how familiarity can be used to enhance the tourist experience, especially as that experience involves local food. Thus, this study explored how familiar tourists are with local foods and how that familiarity related to their consumption of local food. The purpose of this study was to examine the inter-relationships of experiential and informational familiarity (experiences with local food and amount of information tourists gather about local food) with tourist preferences and intentions to eat local food in a destination. To accomplish this purpose, Korea was chosen as a destination and Korean food as local food, because Korean food has been widely acknowledged as healthy, and Korea has become more popular as a tourist destination, especially for the Chinese and Japanese.

2. Literature review

2.1. Food choice and consumption

The sociological and psychological literature often discusses food choice and consumption. Many researchers have studied food choice in various fields because food choice relates directly to food consumption. Previous studies have explored what influences food choice: taste, health, social status, and cost (Lewin, 1951), individual and social factors (Worsley et al., 1983), health concerns (Lindeman and Stark, 1999; Wandel, 1994), food habits and eating patterns (Sanjur, 1982), emotional states (Gibson, 2006; Connors et al., 2001), environmental factors and convenience (time and effort; Connors et al., 2001), and values focusing on cognitive and motivational factors (Rappoport et al., 1993). Frust et al. (1996) discusses a conceptual model of the process of food choice, consisting of *life course*, *influences*, and *personal system*. *Life courses* (such as the personal roles, social, cultural, and physical environments) affect a set of “*influences*” (including ideals, personal factors, resources, social framework, and food context) and these “*influences*” affect “*personal systems*” such as value negotiations and strategies. According to Frust et al. (1996), ideals as one influence derive from cultural and symbolic factors like social status and symbolic meanings people associate with food. Personal factors mean individual needs and preferences based on psychological and physiological factors. Some people tend to choose foods because of physiological factors (e.g., allergic response and hunger) and psychological factors (e.g., emotional cues, moods, and feelings). Resources, which can be tangible like money, equipment, and space or intangible like skills and knowledge, can affect degree of availability in food choice decisions. Social framework means interpersonal relationships and social roles with families and household, friends, or in the work place. Food context involves the environment for food choice like physical surroundings and social climate,

and specific food supply factors, including seasonal or market factors. Steptoe et al. (1995) addressed nine motives for daily food choices: health, mood, convenience, sensory appeal, natural content, price, weight control, familiarity, and ethical concern using the model of Food Choice Questionnaire. They explained familiarity as “how important it is for the person to eat their accustomed diet, rather than being adventurous in food choices” (Steptoe et al., 1995, p. 281).

Some researchers have studied the influences of hedonic and utilitarian values on food consumption, including food preference and food intake (Peryam and Pilgrim, 1957; Bell and Marshall, 2003; Köster, 2003; Cardello et al., 2000; de Graaf et al., 2005). Hedonic consumption is pleasure-oriented, which is based on sensual pleasure, fantasy, and fun, while utilitarian consumption is goal-oriented. Utilitarian consumption is mainly driven by the desire to fill a basic need or to accomplish a functional task (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). Hedonic values like entertainment, emotional worth, and situational factors are more subjective and personal than utilitarian values because they derive from a need for fun, although all consumption experiences and situations do not lead to the same emotional state. Thus, hedonic consumption could satisfy consumers, providing an exciting experience, and thus, may have a significant effect on food consumption (de Faria et al., 2011; Ryu et al., 2012).

Food consumption in tourism is a unique form of eating that occurs in a foreign and/or unfamiliar context (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). Cultural, social, psychological, physiological, environmental, and sensory acceptance factors influence tourist food consumption (Randall and Sanjur, 1981; Mak et al., 2012; Y.G. Kim et al., 2009). Mak et al. (2012) addressed five motives for tourist food consumption: cultural and religious influences, socio-demographic factors, food-related personality traits, exposure effect and past experience, and motivational factors. Y.G. Kim et al. (2009) proposed motivational factors (exciting experience, escape from routine, health concern, learning knowledge, authentic experience, togetherness, prestige, sensory appeal), demographic factors, and physiological factors (food neophilia and food neophobia) as influences on consumption of local food. For local food to appeal to tourists, exposure effect and past experience, excitement, and escape from routine were more important than for general food consumers (Quan and Wang, 2004; Chang et al., 2010, 2011; Kivela and Crofts, 2006). Quan and Wang (2004) noted that the experience of food consumption involved peak touristic experiences, supporting consumer experience, and daily routine experience. They explained that peak and supporting experience are distinct from daily routine. Moreover, food as peak touristic experience, which is similar to authentic experience and contrasts with daily experience, differed from supporting consumer experience.

2.2. Familiarity: experiential familiarity and informational familiarity

According to Cohen (1972), tourists travel in quest of novelty, yet most of them need an environmental bubble (a certain degree of familiarity) to fully enjoy the tourist experience. Chang et al. (2010) also found that tourists who are enthusiastic in sampling local food may still have a dominant ‘core’ food preference, reflecting the tourist paradox: wanting both novelty and familiarity.

Familiarity has been studied in both consumer and marketing research. According to Luhmann (1979), familiarity is an understanding of current actions, while trust focuses on beliefs about the future actions. In other words, “familiarity is a specific activity with cognizance based on previous experience or learning of how to use the particular interface” (Gafen, 2000). Marks and Olson (1981) mentioned familiarity as the individual’s cognitive architecture on a particular product, and Alba and Hutchinson (1987) explained

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