



A conceptual study of gastronomical quests of tourists: Authenticity or safety and comfort?



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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate tourist behaviors from the perspective of a quest for authenticity in gastronomical experiences. Relying on a review of relevant literature, the current study proposes a conceptual framework that focuses on how the quest for authenticity influences tourists' behaviors in regard to local food consumption. Specifically, the framework defines three tourist types based on the relationships between food consumption and authenticity in three different contexts. Consequently, this study identified authenticity seekers, moderates and comfort seekers in order to describe the expected tourist behaviors, followed by a section detailing the conclusion and implementation.

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1. Introduction

Gastronomy is broadly defined as the art or science of cooking and eating well. From an academic perspective, however, gastronomy is regarded as a field of scientific inquiry that focuses on the relationships between food and culture (Johns & Clarke, 2001; Johns & Kivela, 2001). Relying on the connection between gastronomy and culture, researchers widely accept that gastronomy plays a critical role in tourism and destination marketing (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016a; Boyne, Hall, & Williams, 2003; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Renko, Renko, & Polonijo, 2010). In fact, gastronomy is regarded as a motivating factor for visiting tourist destinations (Fields, 2002; Hsu, Tsai, & Wu, 2009). In some cases where tourists have a strong desire to sample local food and beverages, gastronomy might become a very critical component of tourist experiences (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Thompson & Prideaux, 2009). Thus, the authenticity of local food and its presentation may be one of the dominant attributes that have an effect on the quality perceptions of tourists who are motivated to travel by gastronomical attractions (Sims, 2009). Furthermore, the perceived quality of gastronomical experiences in a destination may have a strong impact on tourists' intention to revisit that place (Jang, Ha, & Park, 2012; Kim, Kim, Goh, & Antun, 2011; Povey, 2011; Tsai & Lu, 2012). Therefore, the authenticity of gastronomical experiences can meet the expectations

of a specific type of tourists (Naoi, 2004) and in this way; the authentic food can make a considerable contribution to destination image (Frost, 2006; Lu, Chi, & Liu, 2015). As a result, destinations recently become more sensitive to shaping of gastronomy and tourist experiences in a harmony and emphasizing the authenticity of food and its provision in a cultural context (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Kim & Eves, 2012). Because it is well understood that authentic food provides uniqueness (Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007) to a destination, and is a crucial component of cultural heritage (Çela, Knowles-Lankford, & Lankford, 2007; Plummer, Telfer, Hashimoto, & Summers, 2005) – which can also result in a location having a competitive advantage (Horng & Tsai, 2012 – many destinations struggle to promote their authentic cuisine as an attractive tourism product for prospective gastronomy-oriented tourists (Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2013).

There are, of course, theoretical underpinnings of the aforementioned practical implications of the relationships among tourism, gastronomy, culture and authenticity. When consuming food abroad, tourists may wish to learn the cultural context in which the food is embedded (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016a; Henderson, 2009). In the relevant literature, prior studies (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014; Fields, 2002; Kim & Eves, 2012; Kim et al., 2009) have conceptually and empirically evidenced that learning through cultural or authentic experience is one of the major motivations for sampling local food in a destination. More specifically, acquiring knowledge about the history, consumption patterns, customs, and norms of local food and its role in the daily life of local people can motivate some tourists to consume local food in its own cultural context. This cultural motivation may lead tourists to seek and discover the local food consumption

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opportunities that are new and exclusive to a destination, which may result in an authentic gastronomic experience if the tourists' expectations of learning local culture behind the food are successfully met. In this way, authentic experience is seen as a new and unique travel experience (Cohen, 1988) by tourists who are characterized by novelty-seeking behaviors and cultural motivations.

The concept of authenticity has been widely examined in the relevant literature mainly from the sociological perspectives (Cohen, 1988; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Dann & Cohen, 1991; Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Groves, 2001). However, from MacCannell's (1976) pioneering studies, researchers have been challenged to make clear definitions because authenticity is a complicated and ambiguous concept. In broader descriptions of authenticity in food consumption within the context of tourism, the authentic characteristics of food products are mainly considered, as well as how they should be used or presented according to local customs and traditions (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003). Therefore, the consumption of local food, which is prepared by the locals with local ingredients and methods in its own region, is regarded as an authentic experience (Kim et al., 2009).

Despite the difficulties of defining the concept, it is clear that authenticity is associated with individual preferences (Ebster & Guist, 2005). While some tourists embark on a quest for authenticity, others lean towards non-authentic experiences. Therefore, it is seen necessary to investigate the tourist behaviors from the perspective of a quest for authenticity in gastronomic experiences. From this perspective, the study compares tourists' quest for authenticity and their propensity to safety and comfort. For this, the study proposes a conceptual model that defines the tourists' typology based on the relationships between their food consumption and authenticity-seeking behaviors in different contexts.

2. Authenticity and its role in food consumption

Authenticity has become one of the most original subjects of tourism sociology, and a wide range of attempts have been made to define the concept. Consequently, the amount of individual definitions for authenticity is almost equal to the number of authors who have written about it (Taylor, 2001). That being said, its many definitions share some common elements; authenticity is usually associated with reality, history, traditions, locality, culture and otherness (Asplet & Cooper, 2000; MacCannell, 1976; Waitt, 2000). Instead of struggling to develop a concrete definition of authenticity, it might be better to examine different perspectives on the concept.

Authenticity has been examined from three different perspectives in accordance with the anthropological and sociological literature. These are objectivist, constructivist and postmodern perspectives (Ebster & Guist, 2005). An objectivist view of authenticity posits that authenticity exists beyond individuals' subjective perceptions and that the authenticity of an object can be measured using expert-defined criteria (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999). However, the constructivist view of authenticity is not in an agreement with this idea, and basically suggests that authenticity depends on individual evaluations and perceptions (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). The postmodern approach rejects the importance of authenticity and posits that it is difficult to draw limits between the authentic and the inauthentic as a result of growing globalization (Rickly-Boyd, 2012; Wang, 1999). For this reason, arguing whether or not an object is authentic is meaningless to the postmodernists.

Specifically, the role of authenticity in the food consumption has been examined in two contexts: (i) the authenticity of restaurant experiences (including non-tourism context), and (ii) the authenticity of gastronomic experiences (especially in a tourism context). In restaurant management field, researchers (Ebster & Guist, 2005; Lego, Wodo, McFee, & Solomon, 2002; Molz, 2004; Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007; Wood & Muñoz, 2007) have mostly focused on ethnic-themed restaurants where customers frequently seek ethnic and cultural

experiences. They found that the authenticity of a restaurant has a critical role on guests' satisfaction. These research studies also documented that the authenticity of restaurants' employees, decor, costume and music, as well as food and beverages, are critically important to guests' perceptions and behaviors (Ebster & Guist, 2005). For instance, Jang et al. (2012) found that the authenticity of food and a restaurant's atmosphere lead customers to develop positive feelings, and this results in guests revisiting and repurchasing behaviors.

For an understanding of the role of authenticity in gastronomic experiences of tourists, it is vital to examine their behaviors related to local food consumption and gastronomy. Four important topics while investigating the associations between authenticity and gastronomy emerge as (i) tourists' motivations for local gastronomy; (ii) the relationship between familiarity and food consumption; (iii) gastronomic experiences and their roles in overall tourism experiences, and (iv) tourists' types depending on their gastronomic motivations.

Recently, the inquiry of the factors that motivate tourists to consume local food has attracted specific academic attention in the mainstream literature about tourist motivations. In this field, researchers primarily focus on how tourists are motivated to sample local delicacies when they are on holiday. This line of research (Fields, 2002; Kim & Eves, 2012; Kim et al., 2009; Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2012) has demonstrated that physiological factors (taste, health, freshness, etc.), cultural factors (learning a new culture, authentic experience, the symbolic meaning of food, etc.), social factors (status, prestige, togetherness, meeting new people, etc.) and psychological factors (escape from routine, exciting experience, etc.) are the main domains of tourists' motivations for consuming local foodstuffs. Furthermore, those motivations are influenced by several variables that constitute tourists' demographics, behaviors, and personal characteristics. Factors that may lead to changes in tourists' motivations to consume local food include gender, education and age (Kim & Eves, 2012; Ryu & Han, 2010; Tse & Crofts, 2005); uncertainty avoidance, length of stay, repeat visits (Tse & Crofts, 2005), and previous behaviors, exposition to local food culture, attitudes and subjective norms (Ryu & Han, 2010). While findings related to demographic characteristics of tourists have produced confusing results, the effects of behavioral variables showed that exposition to local foodstuffs as a result of expended length of stay at a destination, previous consumption of local foods, repeated visits at the same destination or low uncertainty avoidance motivate tourists for sampling local delicacies as well as the favorable impact of positive attitude towards local foodstuffs and positive recommendations or views of people in the reference group of tourists (subjective norms). The empirical or conceptual findings of prior studies also indicate that some tourists' personality characteristics, including neophobia (Cohen & Avieli, 2004) and food involvement (Kim & Eves, 2012), may influence their motivations for local food consumption. In this regard, tourists with strong neophobia (fears for tasting new food) may avoid from local food while tourists characterized by high level of food involvement (i.e. the tendency to be interested in food and food-related activities in daily life) and neophilic tendencies (the desire to taste new foods) are expected to sample local foodstuffs. In essence, the literature on tourist motivations generally states that tourists' intentions to consume local food is a result of their physiological, social, cultural or psychological motivations, and authenticity is a major cultural motivator.

Besides motivations, the familiarity of food is a critical factor in tourist-local food encounters, and this factor can also be a good predictor of whether tourists accept and taste the food (Jang & Kim, 2015). Prior research (Prescott, Young, O'neill, Yau, & Stevens, 2002; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016b) has shown that individuals are more inclined to consume food that they are familiar with, while avoidance behavior is more prevalent when they are exposed to unfamiliar foodstuffs. In the specific context of tourism, a similar mechanism works and tourists (at least, with a specific profile) prefer consuming familiar foods rather than strange ones (Seo, Kim, Oh, & Yun, 2013) due to taste, health or cost concerns. Because authenticity may add a

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