



Research Paper

Effects of tourists' local food consumption value on attitude, food destination image, and behavioral intention

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ABSTRACT

Despite the importance of understanding food consumption value from tourists' perspectives, few studies have explored how experiencing local food in a destination shapes tourists' consumption value. This study explores the effect of tourists' local food consumption value on their perceptions and behaviors. Tourists' cultural background is used as a moderating variable. The findings show that tourists' local food consumption value effectively explains tourists' attitudes toward local food, food destination image, and behavioral intentions. In addition, the cultural background of tourists partially moderates the relationships between the proposed constructs. This study is the first empirical application of consumption value theory to the context of tourists' local food experiences. It provides insights into appropriate marketing strategies for the restaurant and food tourism industries and offers practical suggestions to destination marketing organizations (DMOs) for using local food as a destination marketing tool.

1. Introduction

In recent years, food tourism has become economically significant. Local food expresses national, regional, and personal identity, and can enhance the image of a destination (Bessière, 1998; Chang et al., 2010; Henderson, 2009). Identifying how experiencing local food shapes tourists' consumption value is essential to understanding tourists' perceptions of a destination and their future behaviors. To promote their local food, food tourism marketers must discover every possible method for improving tourists' local food consumption value (Hall et al., 2003; Mak et al., 2012).

However, few studies have examined the impact of tourists' local food consumption value on tourist behaviors. Particularly, the interrelationships between tourists' local food consumption value, attitudes toward local food, food destination image, and behavioral intention remain unexplored. Furthermore, the effects of tourists' local food consumption value on the aforementioned dimensions should be examined according to tourists' cultural background, as food perception is greatly influenced by the tourists' own food culture. Nevertheless, few studies have attempted to examine the effects of cultural background on tourists' perceptions of local food.

Therefore, this study examines the impact of tourists' local food consumption value on their future behaviors via their attitudes toward local food and food destination image, and examines the moderating

effect of tourists' cultural background on the relationships between tourists' local food consumption value, attitudes toward local food, food destination image, and behavioral intentions. The sample consists of international tourists to Hong Kong, as Hong Kong was recently ranked as one of the "World's best food cities: Readers' choice awards 2014" (Traveler, 2016). Testing tourists' local food consumption value and examining its effects on local food attitude, food destination image, and their behavioral intention in the Hong Kong context contributes to the further development of the food and tourism-related service industry in Hong Kong and other destinations.

2. Research theories and hypotheses

2.1. Food consumption value theory

Consumption value theory posits that consumers' choice behavior is influenced by multiple consumption values which are functional, emotional, social, and epistemic values and each consumption value makes differential contributions depending on the diverse contexts (Sheth et al., 1991). Consumption value refers to the perceived utility acquired from the product consumption (Sheth et al., 1991; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The concept of consumption value has been applied to food consumption in tourism. First, functional value has traditionally been regarded as the main factor influencing consumers' choices

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(Perrea et al., 2015; Sánchez et al., 2006; Sheth et al., 1991; Williams and Soutar, 2009). However, as the definition of functional value is quite broad, previous studies of food or food tourism have alternately conceptualized functional value as quality value, price value, or some other specific functional or utilitarian characteristic (e.g., health function) (Finch et al., 1998; Finch, 2006; Perrea et al., 2015).

Second, tourism activities such as wine tasting or travelling for pleasure are also associated with emotional values, such as enjoyment and fun (Sánchez et al., 2006; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Recognizing the importance of these hedonic factors is necessary when seeking to understand tourist behavior at a destination. Third, any product can have a social value. Consumers driven by social values select products that reflect the norms of their friends or associates or those that convey the social image they wish to project (Elliot et al., 2011; Sheth et al., 1991). In tourism, the individual recognition or prestige gained from the travel experience may relate to its social value (Williams and Soutar, 2009).

In addition, social value is related to interactions between individuals apart from those associated with individual recognition or prestige. Studies have emphasized the importance of interaction value or “togetherness” in food tourism (Goolaup and Mossberg, 2016; Ignatov and Smith, 2006; Kim et al., 2009). Goolaup and Mossberg (2016) explain that an important holiday experience for tourists is socializing with friends and relatives while enjoying food in a natural setting. Social interactions between family members or between food producers and consumers (tourists) is considered an important component of food-related festivals (Williams et al., 2015).

Fourth, curiosity, novelty, and knowledge-seeking values are epistemic in nature (Sheth et al., 1991). One’s knowledge can be enhanced by travel to another country. In particular, consuming cuisine from another culture is likely to provide epistemic value, as most tourists consider local food consumption a novel experience and a means of expanding knowledge or cultural capital (e.g., by learning about new ways of cooking and eating, the origin of the food, or the stories behind particular dishes). Basically, tourists are likely to fulfill their curiosity and desire for novelty by consuming local food.

The application of consumption value theory to the food tourism context is appropriate because consumption value theory recognizes the multidimensional structure of consumer value. Therefore, the commonly raised problems of measuring consumer value with only one dimension in the hospitality and tourism fields can be solved by the application of the consumption value concept (Babin et al., 1994; Mathwick et al., 2002; Sweeney and Soutar 2001).

2.2. Relationship between tourists’ local food consumption value and attitude toward local food

First, the quality of tourists’ dining experiences, specifically the taste of the food, sensory aspects of the food, and diverse quality and performance of the food event, is fundamental to creating positive attitudes (Kim and Eves, 2012; Kivela and Crotts, 2006). In addition to taste/quality value, health value is an important consideration when tourists are viewing food options. Several studies have identified health benefits as an important consumption value in the context of tourists’ food consumption (Kim and Eves, 2012; Sparks et al., 2003; Torres, 2002). Torres (2002) also points out that delivering health benefits to health-conscious tourists is important. To enjoy pleasant culinary experiences at a destination, tourists should be free of health risks, especially those related to hygiene and safety issues.

Another salient aspect of functional value is price. Lai (2015) finds that value-conscious customers who believe that Hong Kong tea restaurants offer good value for money are often satisfied customers who develop positive attitudes toward local food offered by Hong Kong tea restaurants. Yee (2015) analyzes the comments from the most well-known food bloggers and concludes that most tourists harbor a positive attitude toward local food when they perceive they are receiving value

for their money and that the price is more economical than the expected cost (Yee, 2015).

Emotional value also affects consumers’ evaluations of hospitality and tourism products (Gursoy et al., 2006; Ha and Jang, 2010; Hyun et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2010; Park, 2004). Diners who perceive themselves as receiving emotional value, such as pleasure, enjoyment, excitement, or relaxation, after eating ethnic food are satisfied and willing to revisit an ethnic restaurant (Ha and Jang, 2010). Tourists consume food for both energy and emotional pleasure. In particular, when they choose to consume local food, which is probably different from their ordinary diet, they often expect to obtain positive emotional benefits.

Prestige value plays an important role in hospitality and tourism (Duman and Mattila, 2005; Ha and Jang, 2013; Perrea et al., 2015; Williams and Soutar, 2009). Chang et al. (2010) find that sharing food with friends at a destination can assert diners’ social status, as tourists who “have been there” and “have eaten foreign food” may be perceived as having high cultural capital (Chang et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2009). Exploring new food at a destination is important, as such experiences in foreign countries are unusual, thus conferring status on the tourists (Fields, 2002). Interactions between travelers during a travel experience also have social value (Williams and Soutar, 2009).

Epistemic value is related to curiosity, novelty, and knowledge. Studies show that epistemic value is an important factor in the hospitality and tourism sector, as it helps create positive attitudes (Ha and Jang, 2013; Jang and Feng, 2007; Oh, 2000; Williams and Soutar, 2009). Consuming local food can provide epistemic value, as tourists generally regard this as something new and are likely to learn about another country’s food culture through such experiences. Based on the preceding discussion of the relationship between tourists’ local food consumption value and their overall attitudes toward local food, the following hypotheses are proposed.

Hypothesis 1-1. Taste/quality value positively affects tourists’ attitudes toward local food.

Hypothesis 1-2. Health value positively affects tourists’ attitudes toward local food.

Hypothesis 1-3. Price value positively affects tourists’ attitudes toward local food.

Hypothesis 1-4. Emotional value positively affects tourists’ attitudes toward local food.

Hypothesis 1-5. Prestige value positively affects tourists’ attitudes toward local food.

Hypothesis 1-6. Interaction value positively affects tourists’ attitudes toward local food.

Hypothesis 1-7. Epistemic value positively affects tourists’ attitudes toward local food.

2.3. Relationship between attitude toward local food and food destination image

Tourists positively evaluate local food in Hong Kong and perceive Hong Kong as a gastronomic destination. Local food and restaurant experiences significantly influence how tourists rate the overall quality of their visit to Hong Kong (Kivela and Crotts, 2005). In a similar manner, Guan (2012) shows that tourists who rate the local cuisine highly also perceive the destination as attractive and express overall satisfaction with their trip. Silkes et al. (2013) find that tourists’ strong appreciation of local food experiences elicits an emotional identification and connection with a destination. Cultural experiences obtained through eating local food leave a persistent impression of a destination long after the trip has ended (Silkes et al., 2013). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

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