



Discussion paper

Examining diners' decision-making of local food purchase: The role of menu stimuli and involvement

Lu Lu^{a,*}, Christina Geng-Qing Chi^{b,c}^a Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, School of Sport, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Temple University, 1810 North 13th Street, Speakman Hall 308, Philadelphia, PA 19122-6083, United States^b School of Hospitality Business Management, Carson College of Business, Washington State University, United States^c School of Tourism and Hospitality, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Local food
Visual stimulus
Verbal stimulus
Involvement
Destination marketing

ABSTRACT

This study explores how menu stimuli can influence diners' decision-making of local food (i.e., dishes prepared with locally sourced ingredients) at restaurants. A 2 (diner type: traveler vs. resident) by 3 (menu cues/stimulus: visual vs. verbal vs. control) by 2 (involvement with local food: low vs. high) scenario-based experiment is administered to 830 U.S. consumers. The results reveal that providing local producer's information does not necessarily increase diners' attitudes and purchase intentions when excluding the effects of diner type and involvement. Travelers' responses are more favorable when exposed to a visual and control stimuli (vs. verbal); while residents respond more favorably when the producer's information is available (vs. control). A significant three-way interaction effect is identified. In the low-involvement group, travelers' reactions towards three menu stimuli significantly differ from those of residents. However, both travelers and residents respond equally towards three menu stimuli in the high-involvement group.

1. Introduction

With the growing interests and frequency of dining out, restaurants strive to stay competitive by keeping abreast of consumers' preferences and dining philosophies (Riehle, 2015). The use of locally sourced ingredients has been ranked the *number one* trend in the restaurant industry (National Restaurant Association, 2016). In recent years, local food themed restaurants are sprouting up throughout the U.S. (Alfnes and Sharma, 2010; Sharma et al., 2014). There are over 8400 farmers markets listed USDA's directory, and the local food marketplace continues to thrive (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2015). Local food and beverages provide central attractions at tourist destinations (Mynttinen et al., 2015; Okumus et al., 2007; Robinson and Gets, 2016). When people travel, consuming local food and cuisines has become essential to learning local culture and entertainment (Kim and Eves, 2016).

Local food is considered fresh and tasty, which enhances meal palatability (Darby et al., 2008). Consumers believe that purchasing local food contributes to environmental sustainability and helps support the local economy (e.g., Campbell et al., 2014; Shin et al., 2017). Research also suggests that people tend to trust local food more than food transported from other regions and from big brand producers (Delind, 2006). From a restaurant's perspective, adhering to this "Farm-to-

Table" movement fosters business viability through addressing consumers' concerns. As the local food movement has revolutionized the competitive landscape for local food producers and restaurant businesses, sourcing local ingredients is on a rapid rise and on its way to becoming a permanent mainstream trend (Food and Agribusiness Research, 2013). A foreseeable challenge of this dining trend is that offering local food items may no longer be a differentiating factor but an expectation for restaurants. Therefore, it is critical to monitor not only changes in diners' interest level in consuming local food but also the competitors' practices related to local food marketing. The major body of existing literature is dominantly confined in motivations to consume local food and cuisines (e.g., Seo et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2009, 2013a,b; Shin et al., 2017) and supply issues with local food purchase at restaurants (e.g., Motta and Sharma, 2016; Sharma et al., 2014). However, this growing culinary trend has not received adequate attention from hospitality scholars.

Among previous attempts, Sharma et al. (2014) have argued that scholars should stop scratching the surface of "going local" and start examining why "locally grown foods are clearly becoming popular, [since] their 'localness' may not be the reason for their popularity" (p. 141). Other features, such as attributes of the producers (e.g., local farmers) and the establishment of customer relationships, may be

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: lu.lu0001@temple.edu (L. Lu).

exploited (Sharma et al., 2014). Consumers attribute local food to characteristics that define the local food concept. One critical consideration extends to the food producer including the personality/ethics of the grower, and the farm and its surroundings, which can tell the story behind the food (Martinez et al., 2010). Among these attributes, the importance of acknowledging the source of local ingredients (i.e., producer) has constantly been noted in local food research (e.g., Campbell and DiPietro, 2014; Campbell et al., 2014; Murphy and Smith, 2009; Mynttinen et al., 2015). For example, studies suggest that disclosing the source of local ingredients infuses trust and accountability (e.g., Murphy and Smith, 2009). Having the information of the food producer also increases perceived product quality, which leads to an enriched meal experience and positive evaluations on the dining environment (Campbell and DiPietro, 2014). Thus, using the local producer's information serves as a key menu technique explored in the present study.

In the restaurant marketing literature, studies have underlined the importance of using menu framing to shift diners' attitudes and purchase decisions (e.g., Fakhri et al., 2016; Lo et al., 2017) and the fundamental influence of product involvement on individuals' decision-making (e.g., Campbell et al., 2014; Lim, 2015). To advance existing marketing tactics, it becomes critical for managers to consider who the diners are and where they are from. Because individuals have divergent mindsets when consuming local food during vacations versus following their dining routines (Kim et al., 2009); thus, categorizing diners as travelers or residents is essential in understanding and identifying differences in their responses toward local food cues, and developing meaningful implications for restaurants.

With this regard, the main purposes of this study are to 1) examine the influence of disclosing local food producer's information on diners' attitudes and purchase intentions of menu items prepared with locally sourced ingredients at restaurants, and 2) explore the impacts of diner type and personal involvement in determining how consumers process various menu stimuli regarding local food. Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), this study aims to make several contributions to existing literature and restaurant practices. First, findings of this study will contribute to the literature regarding local sourcing at restaurants, and the efficacy of using menu cues to influence diners' decision-making. Second, this research will elucidate how consumers process local food cues differently when they travel versus following the dining routine within their home region. Thus, restaurants could formulate customized menu tactics when promoting local food items to different types of diners. As consumers' needs/interests have driven the growth of the local food trend, examining personal involvement is critical to monitoring customers' dining decisions. Given the limelight on the local food movement, it becomes imperative that restaurant/service managers gain an in-depth understanding of the marketing endeavor and stay competitive (Campbell et al., 2014).

2. Literature review

2.1. Consuming local food: travelers and residents

Local food refers to food grown within a 100-mile radius of a center operation (Green Restaurant Association, 2012). Food is also qualified as local or regional if it travels less than 400 miles from the origin, or within the state where it was grown (Campbell et al., 2014). Consumers endorse locally grown food for a variety of reasons. Locally grown produce not only satisfies the needs for palatability and healthier food but also communicates connotations such as supporting the local economy and attenuating environmental impacts (Delind, 2006). It is reported that 71% of local food buyers consider supporting local farmers and local economy a primary reason when purchasing local products (Carpio and Isengildina-Massa, 2009), while 24% of consumers endorse freshness and tastiness as the primary reason.

According to the existing literature, residents are highly attached to and are concerned with their local communities. A sense of belongingness and community attachment is likely to differentiate locals from non-locals, such as travelers (e.g., Gursoy et al., 2009; Jurowski and Gursoy, 2004).

Local food and wines portray a slice of destination lifestyle through which travelers can experience an authentic local culture while connecting with the destination (Alonso and Liu, 2012). Research suggests that travelers spend approximately one-third of their travel budgets on dining out during vacations (Telfer and Wall, 2000). Travelers dine on local food in a quest for excitement, escapism, knowledge, an authentic experience, social togetherness, health benefits and sensory appeal (Kim et al., 2009, 2013a,b). When people travel, they are attracted to the perceived hedonic value of consuming local food (e.g., entertainment, excitement, and emotional worth), and thus health benefits are less influential in driving travelers' local food purchase (Ryu et al., 2012). Research has shown that food consumed at the destination is identified as the most significant factor contributing to travelers' satisfaction and destination popularity (e.g., Murphy and Smith, 2009). Travelers' interest in local food has resulted in a variety of tourism events such as food festivals and gastronomic tourism (e.g., Kim et al., 2010; Alonso and Liu, 2012). Thus, promoting local food has become a central strategy for both destinations and restaurants to capture customers (Alonso and Liu, 2012; Kim et al., 2009, 2010).

2.2. Menu design and consumer perceptions

Previous studies have found that offering descriptive information for menu items often results in more favorable attitudes and higher purchase intentions (e.g., Wansink et al., 2001). Studies suggest a few reasons that explain this effect (Fischer and De Vries, 2008; Seo et al., 2013). First, consumers rely on heuristics to associate the complicated menu description with better value and quality. Second, a descriptive menu may cause consumers to make inferences about the characteristics of menu items according to the content described (e.g., Grandma's homemade pie). Also, stories behind the meal or the restaurant could add value to the perceived dining experience.

Research shows that travelers who read guidebooks that contain local food images buy more locally grown produce, versus those who receive little information (Okumus et al., 2007). When serving local food at restaurants, using an elaborate menu with descriptions of the source of ingredients, methods of preparation, and local producers could be an effective approach to communicate the quality and origins of food (Murphy and Smith, 2009). Such communication is essential to helping diners anticipate, interpret and appreciate their dishes, which increases the value and pleasure of dining experience (Murphy and Smith, 2009). As many consumers try to learn more about the geographical location of local food and the producers, studies have alluded to the influence of producer's information on consumers' decision-making (e.g., Campbell et al., 2014; Murphy and Smith, 2009). Thus, identifying the producer of local ingredients helps diners understand the food origin and instills a sense of trust and traceability of their food (Murphy and Smith, 2009; Mynttinen et al., 2015). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H1. Consumers generate more favorable *attitudes* (H1a) and *purchase intentions* (H1b) of local food items when information about the local producer is provided, compared to when such information is absent.

2.3. Visual and verbal stimuli

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) offers a theoretical foundation to explain how individuals may process information under different conditions (Petty et al., 1983; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). According to the ELM, consumers process information either through a central route or a peripheral route. Processing information via a central

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7419129>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7419129>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)