

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL FOOD CONSUMPTION AND INTENTIONAL LOYALTY

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Abstract

In the pertinent literature on tourism supply, the relative importance of local food tourism has been subject to considerable discussion. Despite the breadth of such literature, there is a general lack of research on role of local food in tourism in the Middle East, in general and Jordan, in particular. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the local food consumption motivations and their relationship with intentional loyalty for international tourists. The study indicated that the cultural experience is the central motivation for respondents to experience local food. In addition, it showed that the excitement motivation was the high significant predictor of the behavioural intention (loyalty). On the basis of the findings, tourism management in Jordan should add local food to its tourism discourse and improve the nature and scope of the current marketing and promotion strategies of local food.

Key words: *Gastronomy, food consumption, motivation, repeat visitation, intention, Jordan*

JEL Classification: Z390

1. INTRODUCTION

It is acknowledged that the role of food in tourism has increasingly received much consideration and recognition (Hall *et al.*, 2003). Nowadays, several countries are dynamically promoting their local food tourism to boost their destination competitiveness (Lan, Wu & Lee, 2012). Moreover, food has always been a significant component of tourism sector, particularly in destinations remarked for fine food like, such as Italy and France (Henderson, 2009). It is well accepted that local food can also play a vital role as an innovative tourism marketing strategy, and as a tool through which to build economic links and development (Sharples, 2003).

However, traditional food can be defined as a food of a specific feature or features, which distinguishes it clearly from other similar products of the same category in terms of the use of “traditional ingredients” (raw materials or primary products) or “traditional composition” or “traditional type of production and/or processing method” (EUROFIR, 2009). Up to now, present research in gastronomic tourism is scant and is mostly concentrated on wine, and it is demonstrated that “oenotourists” are not necessarily the same people who engage in other, non-oenological Gastronomic activities (UNWTO, 2012).

Generally speaking, Islam, the most widely practiced religion in the Middle East, prohibits eating

pork, blood and drinking alcohol (Forum, 2009). Meat (particularly lamb) is very important in the diet of the Middle East for families that can afford it. Chicken is usually less expensive (Roger, 2000). More specifically, the cooking process in Middle Eastern food normally starts with frying, followed by boiling and fat enrichment (Roger, 2000). In the context of Jordan, 'Mansaf' (cracked wheat or rice with a dried form of yogurt (Jameed)) is considered the popular and iconic food in Jordan (Brittin, 2010). Food tourism sector has grown obviously in Jordan. According to the statistics of Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (2014) the number of employees in tourism Restaurants was 19,512 in 2014 which represents 40% of the whole share of total tourism employees in Jordan. Hitherto there is little published data on different issues related to role of local food in tourism and hospitality in Jordan. Thus, the present study fills a gap in the literature by investigating the motivations of local food consumption for the international tourists in Jordan and its relationship with the intention to repeat visitation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Food consumption in tourism

Hall & Sharples (2003, p. 10) defined food tourism as “the desire to experience a particular type of food or the produce of a specific region”. According to Cohen and Avieli (2004), food consumption in tourism is a distinctive form of eating that happens in foreign or unfamiliar contexts. However, There is a large volume of published studies describing the role of food consumption in the tourism industry in different contexts, for example (Boyne *et al.*, 2003; Meler & Cerovic, 2003; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Kim *et al.*, 2009; Forristal & Lehto, 2009; Pestek & Nikolic, 2011, Bjork & Kauppinen-Raisanen, 2014).

Mallon (1995) suggested that traveling to particular destinations solely for food cannot be ignored, and the regional cuisine could be a critical factor when developing or promoting a tour destination. Quan and Wang (2004) suggest that food tourism activities are considered a principal activity, attraction, and peak experience that can motivate people to travel to a destination. Elsewhere, Mitchell and Hall (2006) argue that gastronomy shapes the social, cultural, economic, and environmental history of destinations and their people. Du Rand, Heath, and Alberts (2003) postulate that the local food grasps much possibility to boost sustainability in tourism, enhance the authenticity of a destination, support the local economy; and offer eco-friendly infrastructure.

Crompton and McKay (1997) argue that there have been three related factors why motivation is central in event research; it is a main concept to create better tourism products and services, it is connected directly to tourist satisfaction, and it is an essential element in better understanding the tourists’ decision making process. Similarly Hall *et al.* (2003) state that what motivates food visitors to travel has considered one of the most significant topics of tourism studies. Therefore, food might be a crucial motivator for some tourists and a secondary side for others (Hall & Sharples, 2003). Following this, motivations of visiting food events could be different from those of attending general events or festivals. This difference might be placed in the character of a food event, which is mainly required by the desire to consume food and participate in its different activities (Kim, Goh & Yuan 2010). Fields (2002) states that motivation for local food consumption could be attributed to four main dimensions: physics, culture, communication, and reputation. The physical dimension indicates the relaxation of body and mind, whereas the cultural

dimension refers to experience of the local culture, the social dimension involves having a meal with families, relatives and friends to reinforce relationship and strengthen connections. Reputation dimension includes self-esteem, recognition and desire to attract other individuals’ attention through enjoying unusual food. Kim, Goh and Yuan (2010, p. 56) have developed an instrument to explore food tourists’ motivations using push and pull theory. They conclude that “Three factors emerged from the 14 push items: Knowledge and Learning, Fun and New Experiences, and Relaxation with Family. Three factors were generated from the 14 pull items: Area Quality and Value, Quality of Event, and Food Variety. The instrument can be tested and further validated in other food tourism settings”.

A search of the literature revealed few studies which indicate why visitors make gastronomy tours, particularly in the context of the Middle East region. Thus, this prospective study was designed to investigate the motivations of international tourists for local food consumption in Jordan and its relationship to behavioural intention to revisit Jordan.

III. METHODOLOGY

A review of different pertinent academic publications was conducted. A self-administrated questionnaire was designed to measure respondents’ demographics, local food motivations and its relationship to repeat visitation construct. The different measurements of the questionnaire were adopted from previous studies and literature review. Thus, the questionnaire items were adapted from the local food consumption motivations scale (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2012) and the dimension of intentional loyalty (Zeithaml, Leonard and Parasauraman, 1996). Both sets of scales had been previously validated and applied in many studies and different contexts. The local food consumption scale was measured in this study by five Likert scales, which ranged from ‘extremely disagree’ to 5 ‘extremely agree’. Whilst the dimension of intentional loyalty was also measured by five Likert scale, which ranged from ‘extremely unlikely’ to 5 ‘extremely likely’.

The study used a convenience sample of (120) international tourists. The questionnaire copies were distributed at 3 Hotels, 5 Restaurants, 3 travel agencies, and Foreign Languages Center at the University of Jordan in Amman. The data collection was conducted from November 2014 to May 2015. By the end of the questionnaire period, data had been collected from 107 tourists. Data were analyzed using SPSS 17.0 for

Windows. Descriptive statistics were first used to profile the characteristics of the sampled tourists. Regression analyses were performed to examine the relationships between local food consumption motivations and loyalty behavioral intention.

IV.IV RESULTS

Demographics

The results, as shown in Table 1, indicate that (53.3%) of the tourists were male and (46.7%) of them were females. The age category (18-34) was the major age group at (82.2%). The age category, 50-59 (1.9%), represented the smallest age group in this study. The study respondents were characterized by high educational level, thus the largest proportion of the respondents had an undergraduate level education (51.4%), followed by those who had a post-graduate degree (43.8%). The distribution of the tourists' nationality showed that most of the international tourists came from Bulgaria (12.4%), China (11.4%), and Italy (11.4%). The other respondents were from a variety of countries from Europe, Asia, and North America.

In relation to the question, 'Where do you prefer to have your meal in Jordan?' The majority of the respondents indicated that they prefer to have their meals at the Restaurants (52.3%).

Table 1. Demographics items for the Respondents

Demographic Items	Value	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	53.3
	Female	46.7
Age	18-34	82.2
	35-39	5.6
	40-49	6.5
	50-59	1.9
	+60	3.7
Educational level	Primary	0.0
	Secondary/ high school	4.8
	Diploma	0.0
	Undergraduate	51.4
	Post-graduate	43.8
Nationality	Bulgarian	12.4
	Chinese	11.4
	Italian	11.4
	Russian	7.6
	American	6.7
	German	5.7

	Ukrainian	5.7
	Polish	4.8
	Turkish	4.8
	Dutch	4.8
	Finnish	2.9
	Japanese	2.9
	Indian	1.9
	Uzbek	1.9
	Thai	1.9
	Philippine	1.9
	Korean	1.9
	Taiwanese	1.9
	Kyrgyzstani	1.9
	Kazakhstani	1.9
	English	1.9
Spanish	1.9	
The place of food	Restaurant	52.3
	Hotels	5.6
	Coffee-Shop	5.6
	Your accommodation	27.1
	Other	9.3

The results indicate that the mean score for the local food consumption scale has ranged from 3.27 to 4.40, whereas, the standard deviations ranged between .665 and 1.33. The Cronbach's Alpha for the motivation items was 0.89. The results revealed that the main food consumption motivations for the respondents were the cultural experience ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .750$), sensory appeal ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .670$), excitement ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .665$), and health concern ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .833$).

In relation to the individual items measuring the food consumption motivations for the respondents, the item, 'it offers unique opportunity to experience local culture', which is related to cultural experience, was the most frequent, its mean score being ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .905$). Whereas the item, 'keeps me healthy, which is related to health concern, was the least frequent of the motivation items ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.33$).

Table 2. The Results of the food consumption Motivation Measurement

Measures	Mean	SD	Number of responses (n = 107)
Cultural experience	4.12	.750	96
To discover what this local food taste like	4.14	.984	103
it offers unique opportunity to experience local culture	4.30	.905	103

discover something new	3.91	1.14	105
see the things that I don't normally use	3.89	.994	104
see how other people live	4.15	1.07	103
A special experience	4.24	.938	105
to increase my knowledge about different cultures	4.19	1.07	107
An authentic experience	4.02	1.05	107
Excitement	3.75	.665	103
experience local food in its original location makes me excited	4.30	.828	107
helps me to relax	3.40	1.17	105
feel exhilarated	3.46	.883	103
have an expectation that it is exciting	3.75	1.06	105
Interpersonal relationship	3.87	.725	103
talk to everyone about my local food experience	3.74	1.01	107
having local food increases friendship or kinship	3.67	1.23	105
give advice about local food experience to people who want to travel	4.01	1.01	107
enables me to have an enjoyable time with friends or/and family	4.28	.750	105
Sensory appeal	4.02	.670	103
smells nice	3.65	1.05	105
tastes good	4.36	.921	105
looks nice	3.90	.995	103
is different to the taste of same food in my country	4.22	.944	107
Health concern	3.50	.833	100
it is nutritious	3.59	1.26	100
contains a lot of fresh ingredients produced in a local Area	3.86	.930	105
keeps me healthy	3.27	1.33	105

Tourists' intentional loyalty

The Durbin-Watson (DW) test was employed to check independence and autocorrelation for the current data. However, the independence assumption was satisfied in this data, DW values being between 1.5 and 2.5 (Prusty, 2010). Additionally, the results showed that the collected data had a normal distribution in the current study. A series of linear regression analyses were conducted to test the relationships between food

consumption motivations for tourists and their behavioural intentions to revisit tourism destination in Jordan. The dimensions of behavioural intention, that is, loyalty, served as the dependent variables, whilst cultural experience, excitement, interpersonal relationship, sensory appeal, and health concern were the independent variables

The results of examination of beta coefficients indicated that excitement motivation ($B_u = .73$, $p < .001$), Sensory Appeal ($B_u = .33$, $p < .001$), and cultural experience ($B_u = .26$, $p < .001$) were significant and good predictors for loyalty measure. The overall model explained 58% of variance in loyalty, which was revealed to be statistically significant, $F(5.34) = 9.52$, $p < .001$; whilst, health concern and interpersonal relationship were negative and weak predictors for the loyalty measure. Their beta coefficients were $-.76$, $.02$ respectively.

Table 3. The Regression Analysis Results

Independent Variables	Loyalty		
	B_u	S.E.	$\beta\alpha$
Intercept	2.51	2.36	-
Cultural Experience	.26	.072	.13
Excitement	.73	.217	.72
Interpersonal Relationship	.02	.170	.03
Sensory Appeal	.33	.166	.38
Health Concern	-.76	.265	-.61
F-statistic (df)	F(5.34)=9.52		
p-value	.000		
R	.77		
Adj. R	.52		
N	40		

Note: B_u = unstandardised beta coefficient;
S.E. = standard error of beta, $\beta\alpha$ = standardised beta coefficient
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

V.DISCUSSION

Overall, the current study found that the local food consumption tourists surveyed in Jordan were male and female, mostly young and middle aged, well-educated and from a variety of countries. Furthermore, the results indicated that most of the research cohort prefers to have their meals at the restaurants in Jordan. This result may be explained by the fact that there are more than 800 tourism Restaurants in Jordan with a variety of local, regional and international types of food. Most of these Restaurants were built with a high quality of design and decoration and also high standards of services.

Additionally, the study revealed that the main local food consumption motivation was the cultural experience. This finding is congruent with that of Frochot (2003) who stated that food experience depicts the images of cultural experience, status, and cultural identity. Such cultural characteristic is typically stemmed from the unique aspects of gastronomy that can only be detected in that specific tourism destination. Correspondingly, Kivela, and Crofts (2006) asserted that some tourists are basically food novelty seekers; therefore they travel to other destinations to seek new experiences and exciting in satisfying their desires. This view was supported by findings of the current study as most of those surveyed agreed that such food tourism experience 'offers unique opportunity to experience local culture'. Correspondingly, Hearty & O'Mahoney (2001) asserted that eating habits assist travellers to better understanding differences between their own culture and a destination culture. However, Bessiere (1998) states that a local food and cuisine can be exceptional tourist attractions in travel destinations because consumption of food takes a role as both an entertaining and a cultural activity.

The study also showed that the tourists' intentional loyalty was significantly predicted by the excitement motivation. This finding seems to be consistent with other research, such as Ross (1993) which found that if visitors have a more enjoyable and excited experience than expected, they are more likely to repeat their experience. Likewise, this result was supported by Gitelson and Crompton (1984) who found that most of the repeat tourists were seeking relaxation. Li *et al.* (2008) suggest that repeat visitation is a potential reaction to the nature of modern life, which stimulates the tourists to seek familiarity and stability with the same destination for aesthetic or utilitarian purposes.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has identified the main local food consumption motivations for international tourists visiting Jordan, and the potential relationship of such motivations with the tourists' intentional loyalty. It is

suggested that the cultural experience is the major motivation to experience local food tourism in Jordan for the study respondents. It is also indicated that the respondents' behavioural intention (loyalty) to repeat visitation to experience Jordanian food was significantly predicted by the excitement motivation. Thus it is crucial to provide an enjoyable food experiences to attract more international tourists and encourage them to repeat their visits to Jordan. However, the current findings add to a growing body of literature on tourism food in the Middle East, in general and Jordan, in particular. Moreover, the findings enhance our understanding of the behavioural intention of the Food tourism participants to repeat visiting Jordan and of its relationship with different causal types of their motivation. Tourism managers, marketers and practitioners should develop the status quo of the tourism marketing and promotion for food tourism in Jordan, because local food could act as a necessity, a novelty or a pull factor in local tourism marketing strategy (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Thus, a more effective tourism promotion should be customized due to the fact that different cultures have different perception and assessment frameworks for food (Niell, Kozak & LeGrys). Moreover, government should encourage the investment in the local food sector to provide a holistic and varied local food tourism experience in Jordan.

A limitation of this study is that the researcher was restricted to undertaking the research at a limited number of sites because of time and cost constraints. An additional limitation is that the questionnaire in this study was written in the English language. A high proportion of the respondents in different sites in Jordan were international tourists who are not native English speakers. Thus, some language barriers issues could be emerged in this case.

Further investigation and experimentation into local food tourism in Jordan is strongly recommended. Further research might be explored the role of local food tourism for local and Arabic tourists. A future study investigating the local food and beverage in the context of the religious tours in Jordan would be very interesting.

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