**Sharing, caring, learning:**

**Role of local food in domestic trips**

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**ABSTRACT**

Due to the social, economic and environmental benefits of tourists’ consumption of local food, national and local governments have developed specific strategies targeting food tourists. However, food tourists are not a homogenous group, with the importance of including local food within domestic trips varying between them. As domestic tourists are a key market for regional destinations, their motivations to purchase local food was initially examined in this study and four dimensions were identified: Culture; Interpersonal; Health & Taste; Emotion. Next, a conceptual model which identifies factors that influence the centrality of local food experiences in domestic trips was empirically tested. Results highlight that high-centrality local food tourists are motivated by opportunities where they can develop social relationships with friends, family, local food enterprises, and community. Satisfaction with previous local food experiences was also found to be a predictor. The discussion provides theoretical and managerial implications with avenues for further research highlighted.

**KEYWORDS**

Local food tourism; centrality; motivation; satisfaction; Australian domestic tourists

**INTRODUCTION**

Growing concerns over the industrialisation and standardisation of food production and distribution systems have led to increasing focus on local food systems by scholars, producers and policymakers (Wittman, Beckie, & Hergesheimer, 2012). Within tourism research, the benefits of local food systems are chronicled widely from environmental, social, economic and health perspectives (Sims, 2009). Although consumption of local food is not the primary motivation to visit a regional destination (Frisvoll, Forbord, & Blekesaune, 2016), food related activities remain an important factor in the overall destination experience (Ellis, Park, Kim, & Yeoman, 2018). In Australia, food and wine is a key element of national and regional tourism strategies (see Destination NSW, n.d.; Tourism Australia, 2019a), highlighting the need to understand tourists that have a propensity to experience local food when travelling. Given that domestic tourists are the primary market for regional destinations in Australia (Tourism Australia, 2019b), and acknowledging that tourists who consume local food are not a homogenous group (McKercher, Okumus, & Okumus, 2008), this exploratory study aims to understand Australian tourists who consider local food experiences as a central element in their domestic trips. Specifically, the study has two research objectives: (i) identify motivational factors influencing consumption of local food by domestic tourists, (ii) develop and empirically test a model for high-centrality tourists.

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Tourist motivation is an emergent field of study in relation to food tourism (Frisvoll et al., 2016). Early studies have identified motivational factors connected to cultural experience, interpersonal relation, excitement, sensory appeal, and health concerns (see Kim & Eves, 2012; Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2013; Madaleno, Eusébio, & Varum, 2017). In relation to Australian consumers, while purchasing local food at home is connected with the environment and increased knowledge (Birch, Memery, & Kanakaratne, 2018; Carson, Hamel, Giarrocco, Baylor, & Mathews, 2016), research is required to establish if these factors influence purchase behavior of Australians when travelling domestically.Thus, it is proposed:

*H1: Australian domestic tourists are motivated to purchase local food for a) cultural experience, b) interpersonal relation, c) excitement, d) sensory appeal, and e) health concerns.*

The centrality of local food differs between tourist segments (Frisvoll et al., 2016; McKercher et al., 2008). While Australians who perceive themselves as ’foodies’ have high levels of involvement in food activities (Getz & Robinson, 2014), the centrality of local food within domestic trips is yet to be examined. As motivation influences local food consumption (Kim & Eves, 2012), the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2: Tourist motivation will affect the centrality of local food to domestic tourists.*

Studies have identified that socio-demographic factors including age (Madaleno et al., 2017), gender (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009), occupation and income (Kim et al., 2013), education (Getz & Robinson, 2014), trip purpose and travel party (Frisvoll et al., 2016) influence local food purchase behaviour. Consequently, it is proposed:

*H3: Socio-demographic factors will affect the centrality of local food to domestic tourists.*

Within food tourism research, satisfaction has been widely researched due to its impact on loyalty (Teeroovengadum, Seetanah, & Nunkoo, 2018). While tourists’ level of knowledge positively affects their satisfaction (Lee, Lin, Lee, Yeh, & Lee, 2015), further research is required to understand its relationship with centrality. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: Satisfaction will affect the centrality of local food to domestic tourists.*

**METHODS**

To empirically test the model, survey data was collected, n=518, with participation criterion: Australian residents who had experienced local food during a domestic trip within the last 12 months. For the purpose of this study, local food could be purchased a) directly from producers; b) through intermediaries e.g. restaurants; or c) via food tourism activities e.g. farmgate tours. To test H1, 30 motivational items from studies that examined motivation to purchase local food were included within the survey (Birch et al., 2018; Carson et al., 2016; Kim & Eves, 2012).

For the remaining hypotheses, a single-item self-classification approach was applied. The use of single item is a valid approach to segmentation (Ying, Wen, Law, Wang, & Norman, 2018) and has been widely applied in studies segmenting special interest tourists (see McKercher et al., 2008). Thus, to measure the dependent variable, survey respondents were asked to rate the level of importance in purchasing local food on domestic trips: extremely important, somewhat important, not at all important. Socio-demographic items included age, gender, occupation, income, education, trip purpose, and travel party. A single item measure for satisfaction was included in the survey, which is appropriate when researchers aim to reduce respondent fatigue while increasing face validity (Fisher, Matthews, & Gibbons, 2016).

To test length and readability, the pilot survey was administered to ten academics and specialists, with minor adjustments to grammar and structure made. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.

**ANALYSIS**

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed on 30 motivational items. The sample exceeded the minimum requirement of 150 subjects, all items correlated 0.3 with at least one other item, and no variables’ correlation coefficients were above 0.9 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Factors with an eigenvalue larger than 1 were retained with a cut off 0.4 applied for loadings to be salient to the factor. Partially supporting H1, four factors were generated with Cronbach alpha values all above 0.7 threshold (Table 1). Within the *Culture* factor,tourists’ desire for authentic, unique experiences that enhance their knowledge of the locality and its connection to food are highlighted. The *Interpersonal* factor reflects tourists’ use of local food to develop social relationships. Comparable to Australian residents’ purchase of local food at home (Carson et al., 2016), the study extends theoretical models of tourists’ interpersonal motivations by identifying the social value domestic tourists gain through developing connections with local food enterprises.

The *Health & Taste* factorcombines sensory appeal and health constructs from Kim and Eves (2012). Here, tourists are motivated by the perceived freshness, taste, smell and nutritional value of local food. Finally, the *Emotion* factorreflects feelings arising from the experience of local food, highlighting the importance of affirming benefits gained from participation in local food experiences. Mean scores were calculated for further analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

**Insert Table 1 about here.**

As only 3% of respondents (n=15) considered local food *not at all important* to their domestic trips, these were excluded from future analysis; with a dichotomous dependant variable for centrality of local food, High (1) - Moderate (0). Those coded 1 are hereafter referred to as *high-centrality tourists*. Binary logistic regression analysis, which predicts a discrete outcome from a set of variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), was considered suitable to test H2-H4. The model was statistically significant and correctly classified 74% of cases. From 12 independent variables, 3 were significant, with interpersonal motivation and satisfaction significant predictors of high-centrality tourists (Table 2). Supporting H2, motivation affected centrality although only interpersonal motivation was a significant predictor of high-centrality tourists. A one unit increase in interpersonal motivation score increased centrality by 5.2. H4 was supported, with a one unit increase in satisfaction score increasing the likelihood of a high-centrality tourist by 1.8. Compared to tourists travelling alone, purchasing local food was of less importance to those traveling with friends and family.

**Insert Table 2 about here.**

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

To contribute theoretical and practical findings for stakeholders involved in local food tourism, this study examined high-centrality tourists. Such tourists made two-thirds as many local food purchases as other tourists and undertook more specialist food activities, highlighting the value of understanding this segment. Extending earlier research (Kim & Eves, 2012; Kim et al., 2013; Madaleno et al., 2017), the study initially examined Australians’ motivations to purchase local food on domestic trips with four dimensions identified. However only interpersonal motivation is a predictor for high- centrality tourists. Consequently, within promotional strategies local food enterprises should focus on social aspects of local food and its capacity to strengthen relationships during trips or at home as gifts. Further, promotion should highlight how local food experiences provide opportunities to learn about the history of local food enterprises, the connections to the destination, and its environmental benefits.

Satisfaction is also a significant predictor for high-centrality tourists, with two-thirds of domestic tourists who were extremely satisfied with previous local food experiences considering it as a central aspect of their trips. As interpersonal motivation increases the willingness of high-centrality tourists to share experiences, promoting review sites such as TripAdvisor is highly recommended. Similarly, having initiatives that facilitate the creation and sharing of content on social media platforms would be helpful, e.g. incentivising the use of hashtags. Encouraging and supporting the use of social media provides opportunities for stakeholders to engage with high-centrality tourists, thus increasing knowledge of local food in a destination which ultimately increases satisfaction (Lee et al., 2015).

From this exploratory study, future avenues of research are identified. Although single-item and multi-item scales for satisfaction have been applied in food tourism research (Lee et al., 2015), similar to studies in other disciplines (Fisher et al., 2016), future research may empirically compare the validity of these approaches in tourism. Additionally, research examining centrality of food in specific contexts such as craft beer may be conducted. Finally, research could investigate the impact of centrality of local food experiences on loyalty to local food purchase.

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**Table 1:** EFA results

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Factors and items | Factor loadings | Grand mean | Eigenvalue | Variance explained |
| Factor 1: Culture (.92\*)  7.An authentic experience  6. Increase knowledge of different cultures  5. A special experience  2. Unique opportunity to understand local cultures  3. Discover new things  1. Learn what local food tastes like  4. See how others live  8. Tasting in original place makes me excited  21. Support local farmers and economy | .74  .70  .70  .70  .66  .62  .58  .55  .46 | 6.09 | 14.49 | 18.46% |
| Factor 2: Interpersonal (.92\*)  17. Give advice about local food experiences to people who want to travel  15. Talk to everybody about my local food experiences  14. Take home as a reminder of a good holiday  23. As a gift for family or friends  16. Local food increases friendship or kinship  20. Like to learn about the history of local food producers  19. Important to taste local food in its original regions  22. Protects the environment  18. Enables me to have an enjoyable time with friends and/or family  13. Removes me from crowds and noise  27. Tastes different | .70  .65  .65  .61  .61  .57  .51  .49  .47  .46  .45 | 5.57 | 2.00 | 17.43% |
| Factor 3: Health and Taste (.85\*)  28. Is nutritious  29. Contains local fresh ingredients  26. Looks nice  25. Tastes good  30. Keeps me healthy  24. Smells nice | .63  .62  .57  .55  .53  .48 | 5.86 | 1.40 | 11.43% |
| Factor 4: Emotion (.86\*)  10. Makes me feel exhilarated  9. Helps me relax  11. Is exciting  12. Makes me not worry about routine | .71  .64  .56  .52 | 5.62 | 1.08 | 10.33% |
| Cumulative variance |  |  |  | 57.65% |

Principal Factor analysis with Varimax rotation. 7-point Likert scale: disagree strongly to agree strongly. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin .963, marvellous; Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity Approx.Chi-square 10493.757 (df435. Sig=.000)

\*Cronbach’s alpha

**Table 2:** Logistic regression analysis results: Predictors of centrality of local food experiences

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | B | S.E | Wald | df | Sig. | Exp(B) |
| Interpersonal motivation | .90 | .24 | 13.71 | 1 | .00 | 2.45 |
| Travel with friends & family | -1.69 | .63 | 7.14 | 1 | .01 | .19 |
| Satisfaction with local food experiences | .59 | .23 | 6.59 | 1 | .01 | 1.81 |

n=503; Statistical significance p < .05. Satisfaction measured 4-point Likert scale dissatisfied to extremely satisfied; Travel party:1:Alone 2: Partner 3:Family 4: Friends 5:Friends & Family; X2=172.644, df=40, p<.0000.; Nagelkerke R2 40%; Hosmer & Lemshow test p=.354