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Factors in tourists' food decision processes: a US-based case study

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to empirically test an existing conceptual model from Mak *et al.* (2012a, 2012b) to discern which factors have the most influence on food choices when travelers visit destinations with different options, i.e. local foods, other than those available in their home environments.

Design/methodology/approach – The quantitative study surveyed 330 travelers and used descriptive analyses of all the variables involved. A hierarchical linear regression was calculated to predict for the dependent variable of local cuisine consumption, based on the independent variables of culture and religion, socio-demographic factors, motivational factors, food trait personality and exposure effect/past experience.

Findings – Culture, motivational factors and food-related personality traits were consistently significant predictors of local food consumption.

Research limitations/implications – Limitations include using an English-only online questionnaire and self-reported bias. The impacting delimitation relates to data collection from US travelers and thus limiting generalizability findings.

Practical implications – The study explained factors involved in travelers' decision to consume local foods at a destination. Government, tourism-related organizations, producers and service providers gain information to improve products, increase interest, create additional employment opportunities, increase tax revenues that assist local communities and increase consumption of local foods, products and services.

Originality/value – The limited availability of research on this topic prompted the interest of the researchers. Mak *et al.* (2012b) provide a conceptual model that was first tested empirically in this study. It

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presents a five factors impacting tourist food consumption at a destination. Local food consumption of tourists was tested using the aforementioned conceptual model.

Keywords Tourist decision-making, Food-related personality traits, Travel behavior, Food choices

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Tourism serves as a mode for people to experience new things and get away from everyday patterns and routines encountered in their lives. For many, food is a central aspect of the tourist experience (Quan and Wang, 2004; Richards, 2002). Food has substantial influence, it plays an important role for millions of tourists worldwide. Food can be a support factor when the main reason for travel is something other than a gastronomic focus, although it plays an important role in the satisfaction that travelers sense at the end of their trip (Mak *et al.*, 2012b). For many, food becomes an important aspect of the memories brought back from travel experiences (Fields, 2002); also capable of providing an instant approach to gaining access to another culture (Croce and Perri, 2010).

Food is then widely recognized as an important factor in tourism, but its specific role is not always clearly defined (Tsai, 2013). Relevant published works such as Gurbaskan Akyuz (2019) and Zhang *et al.* (2019) have tested similar models for explaining local food consumption, making this a recent area of focus in travel and tourism. An additional study provided empirical application of the consumption value theory to tourists' local food consumption (Choe and Kim, 2018). However, this study seeks to specifically test the food consumption model developed by Mak *et al.* (2012b) because of the complexity and inclusion of variables believed to measure propensity or lack thereof for consumption of local foods at destinations. The research study further adds to the model developed by Mak *et al.*, after an extensive literature search focusing on factors involved. By using hierarchical linear regression, the study controls for the variables involved, by building on. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to empirically test the model developed by Mak *et al.* (2012b), to determine the factors involved in a traveler's food consumption choices while away from home, while improving the understanding of the role that food has on travelers' experiences. By increasing the understanding of travelers' food-related choices and factors involved, the study seeks to increase knowledge in the field, as it provides operators with practical information helpful in better catering to visitors. The limited availability of research on the topic prompted the interest of the researchers to search and develop an improved understanding of the said relationship. The model presented in Figure 1 presents five factors having an impact on tourist food consumption at a destination. The following research question was developed for this study: Can the propensity for local food consumption of tourists be empirically tested using the conceptual model proposed by Mak *et al.* (2012b)?

Literature review

Studies by social psychologists illustrate human behavior to be goal-oriented (Heider, 1958; Lewin, 1951); hence, people make decisions to travel to a particular destination based on their goals or motivational factors. Motivational factors associated with traveling could be excitement to travel to a new destination, exploring tourist spots, experiencing culture and tradition of the region, tasting different foods and cuisine available in the area and experiencing adventures that are particular to the destination. These preferences are influenced by various components which include religious and cultural beliefs, socio-economic background, motivations to travel and past experiences. The factors interconnected are believed to have a significant impact on travelers' food choices. The

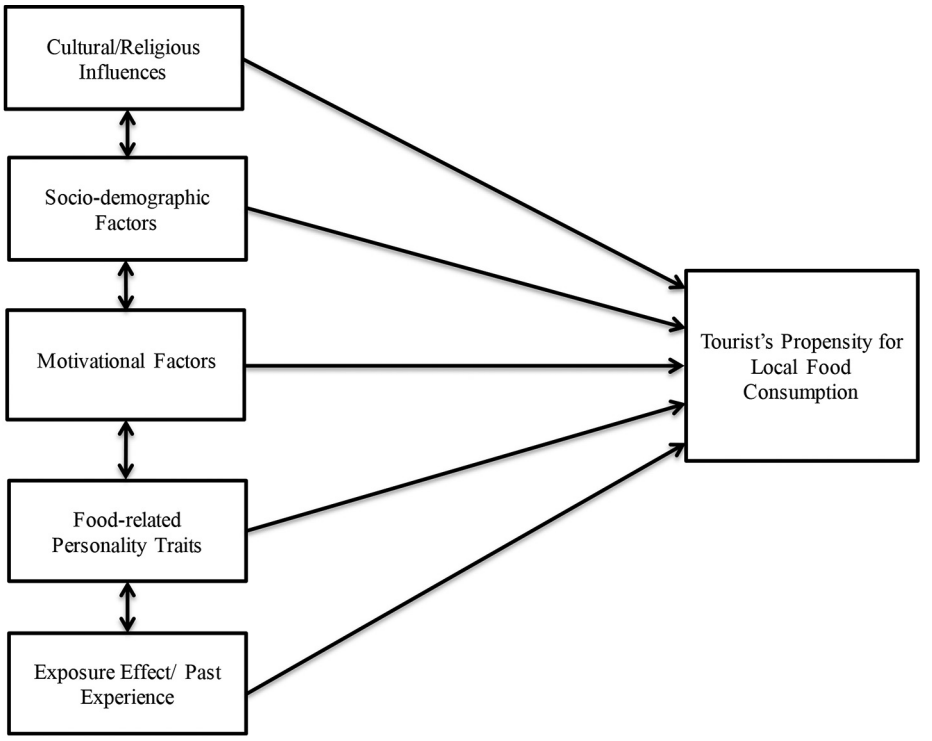

Figure 1
Conceptual framework for the factors influencing travelers' food consumption

Source: Mak *et al*. (2012b)

factors are divided into three sections: environmental, individual and food-related (Randall and Sanjur, 1981). This adds depth to the limited travelers' food-related behavior literature, and beyond Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior which focuses on intentions influencing behavior.

Numerous researchers have studied the different factors of food choices based on the attributes they encountered in their studies. Some characteristics of travelers include spending time during their journey to find food from the local region, visiting local farmers' markets for the typical local foods, spending on buying services and experiences of local foods for the novelty and culture, visiting gourmet schools or learning from local chefs (Boyne *et al*., 2003). These characteristics provide clarity into the fact that people travel to different destinations with a purpose; however, they fail to provide insight on how these characteristics are developed within travelers.

This research intends to understand the factors that have the most significant influence on food choices made by travelers when visiting destinations with different food choices, i.e. local foods, other than those available in their home environments using the existing Mak *et al.'s* (2012b) conceptual model to explore the topic further and to understand the motivations for food choices of travelers. It is important to further research the traveler's past experiences, demographic information, culture, socio-economic background and other factors associated with their food decision-making process.

Over the past few decades, scholarly articles and literature have increased rapidly in the field of food and travelers' consumption; however, there are definitional gray areas. The current study introduces an up-to-date rationale for different types of factors associated with motivations of people making food-related choices at travel destinations relevant to twenty-first century travelers. Travelers today make decisions based on internet-based tools that include social media, travel blogs and vlogs and websites (Frías *et al.*, 2008). Vast amounts of available information are broadly tailored to the needs of travelers. This information helps make their decisions before leaving for a trip (Hwang *et al.*, 2005). The desire to taste foods at a travel destination is ignited by the use of the internet, and motivations to travel to the destination are also factored to the information they conceived before leaving (Frías *et al.*, 2008). These definitions are used to explain the impact on the decisions of food consumption at the traveling destinations that could help in further discussions.

Factors influencing travelers' food consumption away from home

Individual appreciation for food varies with each person, as well as the circumstances. Eating out is a way to acquire convenient meal options, it also becomes an opportunity to enjoy something new, to share with others and learn about the items they have never tried (Köster, 2009), depending on the individual. Apart from the satisfaction of the biological need for eating, restaurant establishments provide an environment where people can spend time enjoying food and beverage items with friends and/or family (Warde and Martens, 2000). Individuals differ in preferences for elements such as where food is prepared and provided, from simple service of basic foods to upscale environments where luxury items are served.

Food researchers coincide in understanding that factors impacting food consumption while away from home can be grouped into three general classifications: the characteristics of the environment, the individual and the food itself (Randall and Sanjur, 1981). The food items contribute to sensory attributes such as flavor, aroma, texture and appearance. The environment provides cultural and religious influences. Individuals are influenced by factors that include socio-demographic, motivational and personal traits. Among the categories, factors relating to the individual are widely accepted to be crucial in explaining variations in food consumption (Rozin, 2006), becoming the focus of the current research.

Environmental

Environmental factors were previously studied and described by several researchers who added to the literature of how food is consumed by travelers (Randall and Sanjur, 1981; Shin *et al.*, 2017); however, very few studies add to the literature of environmental factors associated with food consumption. Randall and Sanjur (1981) illustrate that environmental factors include season, employment, mobility, degree of urbanization, size of household and stage of family. This study adds to the notion of cultural and religious influences, which is also considered as an environmental factor for the purpose of this study. Culture and religion have an indisputable impact on travelers' decision-making ability.

Cultural and religious influences

Understanding the role of culture and religion on food consumption is an important aspect of learning the decision-making process of travelers. The role of culture and religion on food consumption of travelers is a complex issue. The food choices vary by individual and the culture. Various religious practices and beliefs also restrict followers from consuming food that does not resonate with the values of their religion.

Generally, it is assumed that travelers are more curious about local food at tourist destinations. These curiosities could be satisfied with the consumption of local food while traveling. However, Saroglou and Cohen (2011) assert that the culture and religion of the traveler have a significant amount of impact on the overall food consumption while they travel. Religion and culture are socially accepted and sustained systems designed to transmit values, norms, beliefs, symbols and practices (Cohen, 2009). Hence for the purpose of this study, culture and religion are both combined as one variable.

Cleveland and Laroche (2007) express that culture is related to consumers' attitudes and behaviors, and their actions of acquisitions of the goods and services are influenced by their background. Goodenough (1981) adds that culture is a system of shared cognitions which enables people to choose what to do and their approach, sharing a set of characteristics, attitudes, behaviors and values. Rossi and O'Higgins (1980) explain that culture is a system of knowledge and beliefs, set by human minds, based on unconscious logic. In food-related matters, culture is a major determinant affecting types of ingredients considered appropriate to eat (Atkins and Bowler, 2001; Logue, 2004). It defines how food is classified as acceptable or unacceptable, good or bad within a particular group (Mäkelä, 2000). Basic foods, cooking techniques and flavor principles are the three key factors differentiating a cuisine (Rozin and Rozin, 1981). Flavor principles and profiles refer to distinctive seasoning combinations characterizing different cuisines.

Similar to culture, religious upbringing plays a crucial role in food choices made by tourists (Khan, 1981; Mynttinen *et al.*, 2015). Religious beliefs have a strong influence on food consumption when certain foods are prohibited as in the example of Islam and Judaism, particular preparation methods are mandated (e.g. halal and kosher), or fasting or feasting practices are observed (e.g. Ramadan) (Packard and McWilliams, 1993). These practices and restrictions can result in stable and rigid food habits (Khan, 1981) and, thus, affect food consumption not just in a person's home environment but also while traveling.

H1A. A person's culture predicts his/her propensity for local food consumption while traveling away from home.

H1B. A person's religion predicts his/her propensity for local food consumption while traveling away from home.

Individual

Scholars previously studied personal (individual) factors affecting the food choices of travelers. Wolf (2002) defines gastronomic tourism as travel in search of food and drink which provides a unique and memorable experience. Johns and Clarke (2001) note that the traveling experience has a huge impact on tourists and their overall experience of tourist destinations. Finkelstein (1989) illustrated that individuals' food experience also has a negative impact, calling them "manufactured images." These include word of mouth or a review from someone with preconceived notions before reaching the destination (Zhang *et al.*, 2010). With the internet, it is common to see reviews on social media websites where one could find every small detail about tourist destinations. These preconceived notions could diminish the real experience for the individual. Nevertheless, tourist destinations are rapidly becoming popular for their food and beverages (Hjalager, 2002). It is important for researchers to study the individual effects on food choices. In this study, we consider socio-demographic, motivational and personality trait factors, further discussed in this section.

Socio-demographic factors and food consumption

Several scholars illustrate that socio-demographic factors influence tourist preferences toward local food at tourist destinations (Kim *et al.*, 2009; Khan, 1981). Scholars have indicated that gender, age, education, income, marital status and country are amongst the significant factors that influence the socio-demographic preferences of the tourists.

- *Gender*: Kim *et al.* (2009) explain that females are more interested and excited about food choices when traveling, as compared to male respondents. In addition, studies suggest that females are more price-sensitive, while being more open to unusual fruits and vegetables, as compared to their counterparts (Ignatov and Smith, 2006; Mitchell and Hall, 2003).
- *Age*: Tse and Crotts (2005) indicate that older generation's consumption and selection of food at tourist destinations is narrow, while Kim *et al.* (2009) suggest that the consumption selection of food is based on healthy choices available at destinations. Khan (1981) explains that elderly people prefer different foods as compared to younger people simply because of changes in their taste and olfactory sensitivity.
- *Education*: Similar to the age variable, travelers with higher education prefer healthy choices of food, while their preference is for local selections (Kim *et al.*, 2009). While travelers with a primary level of education have a neutral perception of local foods available at a destination (Wadolowska *et al.*, 2008).
- *Income*: Travelers with higher income prefer a wider range of food selection and have higher levels of demand for variety and local food, compared to travelers with lower income (Wadolowska *et al.*, 2008). Mak *et al.* (2012b) illustrate that the consumption of food by individuals is a reflection of their social status and self-identity. The social class of travelers determine the food preferences of individuals, for example, middle-class and rich travelers tend to maintain distinctiveness in their class by being open-minded to international and exotic food (Bourdieu, 1984).

In previous food consumption research, socio-demographic factors are documented as being important variables in clarifying variations in food consumption in different contexts (Furst *et al.*, 1996; Khan, 1981; Randall and Sanjur, 1981). Therefore, in this study, gender, age, education, income and occupation are examined.

Heldke (2003) assures that a cultivated taste in foreign cuisines can enhance an individual's sophistication level, important for fostering stature in other social situations.

H2A. The propensity for local food consumption while traveling away from home will be predicted by a person's (a) age, (b) education level, (c) income, (d) gender and (e) marital status.

Food choice motivational factors

Multiple studies illustrate that travelers' food consumption is affected by their motivational factors, in particular, Hall and Mitchell (2001) suggest that food is a major motivational factor for some travelers. Food was discovered to play an important role in overall tourist experiences of travelers and their intention to revisit a destination (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). In a separate study, food motivations varied and their choices had significant impact on their activities at the destination (Ignatov and Smith, 2006). Travelers desire to experience a change or novelty from daily routines. Food choice is an important motivational factor, as it

leverages the tourist to experience the newness which is away from said daily routine experienced at their home location.

Hjalager and Richards (2003) classified food choice motivations into five factors: symbolic, obligatory, contrast, extension and pleasure. The theoretical foundation behind this classification is that food is a part of the attraction for tourists who travel to different destinations. However, food can also be seen as an obstacle for travelers who refrain from eating certain varieties of food served at tourist destinations (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). The two different theoretical foundations are based on two different dimensions of symbolic food consumption by tourists and obligatory food consumption by tourists.

Mak *et al.* (2012a) illustrate that tourists' food consumption is based on symbolic dimensions including cultural theories. Often, cultural norms are designed for certain symbolic reasons, for example, dining out in general is symbolic for some cultures and has a certain esthetic value symbolizing pride and richness. However, local food consumption can seem obligatory by the tourist willing to travel to different destinations (Richards, 2002). Quan and Wang (2004, p. 302) state "a large portion of food consumption in tourism can be seen as the supporting experience for tourists to complete or realize their main purpose of travel." Food consumption experiences can be classified into supporting tourist experience and peak tourist experience. Food can add, contrast or extend the experience of the traveler. Finally, tourism and gastronomy are often regarded as hedonic products (Kemperman *et al.*, 2000; Kivela and Crotts, 2006), for which fun, pleasure or enjoyment is a primary benefit (Carroll and Aaron, 2006). Therefore, the pleasure dimension can be an inherent dimension in food consumption.

H3. Food choice motivational factors predict a person's propensity for local food consumption while traveling away from home.

Food-related personality traits

Travelers' personality traits influence a variety of food-related behaviors and Mak *et al.* (2012b) identified the most common traits which include food neophobia and variety seeking. According to Pliner and Salvy (2006), a traveler's unwillingness to try a new variety of cuisine (food neophobia) is one of the root causes guiding travelers when making food choices. Also, food neophobia can be described as a personality trait that involves a relative predilection for familiar food items over new ones (Pliner and Salvy, 2006). As omnivores, humans will try various food sources, although they will be cautious not to consume harmful foods. Food neophobia is described as a "natural biological correlate of omnivorous exploratory behavior" (Köster *et al.*, 2007, p. 99).

It is a general human tendency to find variety of foods to consume, resembling travelers' behavior during their journeys. Travelers seek variety in the services and goods and are constantly motivated to diversify their food choices for improved traveling experiences (Khan, 1981). This trait can be measured using the VARSEEK scale developed by van Trijp and Steenkamp (1992). Mak *et al.* (2012b) illustrate that the concept of variety-seeking is commonly adopted by scholars who study food consumption by travelers. The study proposes that consumers are more likely to seek a variety of sensory attributes than non-sensory attributes. The sensory attributes of variety-seeking behavior are examined by the indication of their optimum stimulation level (Mak *et al.*, 2012b). When the optimum stimulation level decreases, the individual seeks variety or additional stimulation which is the contrast to the fact that travelers avoid new stimuli or variety (van Trijp, 1995). To avoid boredom, travelers choose variety of goods and services to maintain or obtain optimum stimulation level (Ratner *et al.*, 1999; van Trijp, 1995).

H4. Food-related personality traits predict a person's propensity for local food consumption while traveling away from home.

The role of food in the tourist experience

Food plays a significant role in the experience of the tourist during their travel (Wolf, 2002). As previously mentioned, a traveler's motivation to travel is generated by their curiosities, while their notions about the visiting destination are build based on the information they conceive from various mediums (Finkelstein, 1989). Travelers at a destination with primary motivations of food (gastronomic tourism) travel with an intention to eat and experience the food of the destination (Guzel and Apaydin, 2016). However, people whose primary motivation is travel, and experiencing food is secondary or tertiary, are not fully committed to the food experience at a travel destination (Guzel and Apaydin, 2016). The food exposure effect varies according to exposure to the food variety from different parts of the world. Previous work has shown that past food experience, (good or bad) at a destination, can affect the future decisions of travelers (Boyne *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, in this study, an analysis of the effect of the factors of food exposure on travelers was conducted.

Food exposure effect and past experience

As previously mentioned, food neophobia is when travelers are unwilling to try unfamiliar foods (Mak *et al.*, 2012b). However, scholars find that the relationship between food and its selection depends upon the amount of exposure to the food. The increase in exposure to a particular type of food also increases the possibility of travelers to consume the food (Birch *et al.*, 1987; Luckow *et al.*, 2006; Pliner, 1982; Stein *et al.*, 2003). However, it is also equally true that a traveler's past experience with a particular type of food considerably impacts the food choices they make throughout their lives. Travelers make food memories when they consume food and they constantly make a known or unknown note of the quality, type and personal liking. This memory stays with them in future travels, and the decisions they make to consume any food are then based upon positive or negative memories of the food consumed (Barker, 1982).

Obermiller (1985) asserts that the exposure effect is a "positive repetition-effect relationship that results from exposure alone" (p. 18). Travel exposes people to a broad variety of foods, which increases their familiarity with the consumable products. Hence, this repeated exposure to the food type and variety is the basic reason for the increased preferences toward a particular type of food by the travelers (Birch *et al.*, 1987; Luckow *et al.*, 2006; Pliner, 1982; Stein *et al.*, 2003). Travelers can have additional exposure to foreign cuisines through the increased globalization effect (Mak *et al.*, 2012b). Considering the rising influence of globalization, travelers have become more mobile; therefore, the food they consume also becomes more global (Hall and Mitchell, 2002; Richards, 2002).

H5. Food exposure and past experience with different foods predict a person's propensity for local food consumption while traveling away from home.

Methods

Sample. The sample for this study comprised 330 US-based travelers who participated in a Qualtrics online survey via Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were US residents, at least 18 years of age and have traveled to a destination offering food choices different from their home offerings. The participants volunteered for the study and were paid $1.50.

Measures. The questionnaire consisted of six sections. The first section having several limiting items to make sure that the participants qualified for the purpose of this study. The second section consisted of seven items measuring respondents' cultural and religious influences in their food item selection at the destination (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007; Honkanen *et al.*, 2006). The third section included 30 items measuring participants' motivational factors involved in such decision (Cleveland and LaRoche, 2007; Quan and Wang, 2004; Steptoe *et al.*, 1995). The fourth section's 24 items measuring participants' food-related personality traits (Pliner and Hobden, 1992; van Trijp and Steenkamp, 1992). The fifth section focused on seven items measuring the exposure effect/past experiences with food (Cleveland and LaRoche, 2007). Finally, the last section gathered the demographic and socio-economic status of the participants. The majority of the questionnaire comprised five-point Likert-type scales, with the exception of the demographics section which used interval and nominal scales. In the Likert-type sections, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The aforementioned scales were chosen because they measure the constructs within the Mak *et al.* (2012b) model used in the study.

Data collection and analysis. Data collection began after the Institutional Review Board's approval of the survey instrument. The data collection was within the context of individuals who have traveled to destinations away from their home setting, representative of the study's population, employing the appropriate qualification settings in Amazon Mechanical Turk (it has the capability to limit respondents by geographic locations of choice) and qualifying questions administered to eliminate non-representing individuals. After an initial pilot study, where the survey was found to be appropriate for the study, an online survey was used, starting on September 15, 2015, via Amazon Mechanical Turk. The Qualtrics online survey instrument availability window was a one-week period. Participants were only allowed to participate one time.

The data were collected and entered into SPSS 21.0 for analysis. To determine that data was appropriate for analysis, it went through a screening procedure. Descriptive analyses of all the variables in the study were performed. The data were checked for accuracy of data entry, missing values and detection of univariate and multivariate outliers. The data was checked for fit between the distributions of all the variables and to verify if the data met the assumptions of multivariate analysis. Next, Cronbach's alpha was tested to determine the internal consistency of the scale items. The Cronbach's alpha values range between zero and one, with higher values indicating better reliability of the construct (Hair *et al.*, 1995). To confirm whether the measurement scales used to operationalize the independent variables showed similar underlying dimensions as the original scales, factor analysis with maximum likelihood estimation was used. Based on the following results, all initial factors were used in the study. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) reported at 0.665 for local food consumption, 0.0641 for culture and religion, 0.782 for food choice motivational factors, 0.942 for food related personality traits and 0.831 for exposure effect/past experience. The coefficients show the variables not to be composed of multiple factors or components. Hierarchical regression was performed using the variables in the study to control the variables in the study, with the intent to determine whether added variables show a significant improvement. The process of building on with the addition of each variable in the study was accomplished with blocks in the nested regression.

Results

Prior to the analysis of the data set, certain checks were performed to avoid statistical difficulties in the results. The data was downloaded from Qualtrics and checked for

accuracy and missing values. The total number of surveys started was 354, of those, 335 were completed. Five were deleted because of large sections of incomplete responses, leaving 330 cases for analysis. In the resulting data set, there were no significant missing values. The highest incidence of missing values for the variables studied was within the demographics variables, with the largest missing value being 0.9 per cent for age, followed by 0.6 per cent for the level of education and by marital status at 0.3 per cent.

Normality and linearity were tested with no collinearity found. In preparation for the hypothesis testing, the data was prepared further by calculating the averages for each scale within the mechanism. To facilitate the hierarchical regression analysis, dummy variables were created for the demographic variables of gender, ethnicity and marital status. The analysis differs in its order from the questionnaire, as the survey instrument was constructed with demographics questions in the last section to maintain respondents engaged first in the topic at hand.

Demographic profile of the participants. Approximately 52.6 per cent of the travelers in the study were male and 47.4 per cent were female. The majority of travelers were Caucasian at 73.0 per cent. The majority of travelers in the study were single, with 44.7 per cent of respondents. The largest share of travelers in the study had a four-year college degree with 38.7 per cent. The prevalent group in terms of household income was found between $25,001 and $49,999 with 31.2 per cent of respondents.

Table I presents the travel behavior of questionnaire respondents, as it relates to the current study. The majority of travelers or 83.0 per cent had traveled more than five times to another city within the USA. The larger group of travelers, 42.4 per cent, has been abroad. The prevalent length of stay was four to six nights with 40.3 per cent. A large percentage of the participants agree and strongly agree, 76.4 per cent combined, that they consume local cuisine when traveling, being the dependent variable (DV) in the study.

Results of the hierarchical regression. Hierarchical linear regression was calculated to predict for DV of local cuisine consumption, based on the independent variables of culture and religion, socio-demographic factors, motivational factors, food trait personality and exposure effect/past experience. Table II contains the R^2 and significance of each block of the hierarchical regression tested. For the first block, a significant regression equation was found ($F(2.322) = 37.12$, $p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.187. Participants' predicted local food consumption is equal to $3.90 + 0.05$ religion $+ 0.28$ culture, where religion and culture are coded or measured as 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Participants' propensity for local cuisine increased 0.05 in the level of preference for each unit increase in the religion scale and 0.279 for each unit increase in the culture scale. When studied individually Block 1 revealed religion was not a significant predictor of the propensity for local cuisine, ($p = 0.370$); culture was found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.001$).

In Block 2, a significant regression equation was found ($F(3.321) = 34.96$, $p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.246. Participants' propensity for local cuisine increased by 0.03 in the level of preference for each unit increase in the religion scale, 0.21 for each unit increase in the culture scale and 0.18 for each unit in the motivational factor scale. In Block 2, when studied individually, religion was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p = 0.370$), culture was found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.001$), and motivational factors were found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.001$).

In Block 3, its regression equation was found to be significant ($F(4.320) = 42.96$, $p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.349. Participants' propensity for local cuisine increased by 0.01 in the level of preference for each unit increase in the religion scale, 0.07 for each

Profile	*n*	(%)
Gender		
Male	173	52.6
Female	156	47.4
Age category		
18-24	39	11.9
25-34	136	41.6
35-44	75	22.9
45-54	41	12.5
55-64	25	7.6
65 and above	11	3.4
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	241	73.0
African American	22	6.7
Hispanic	35	10.6
Asian	31	9.4
Other	1	0.3
Citizenship		
US citizen by birth	307	93.0
US citizen by naturalization	20	6.1
Non-US citizen	3	0.9
Marital status		
Single	147	44.7
Live-in partner	49	14.9
Married	105	31.9
Separated	5	1.5
Divorced	19	5.8
Widowed	4	1.2
Education level		
Less than high school	1	0.3
High school/GED	33	10.1
Some college	70	21.3
Two-year college degree	40	12.2
Four-year college degree	127	38.7
Master's degree	40	12.2
Doctoral degree	8	2.4
Professional degree (JD, MD)	9	2.7
Household income		
Under $25,000	65	19.7
$25,001-$49,999	103	31.2
$50,000-$74,999	82	24.8
$75,000-$99,999	33	10.0
$100,000-$149,999	34	10.3
$150,000-$199,999	8	2.4
$200,000-$249,999	3	0.9
$250,000 and over	2	0.6

Table I.
Demographic profile of the respondents

unit increase in the culture scale, 0.17 for each unit in the motivational factor scale and 0.26 for each unit in the food-related personality traits scale. When Block 3 was studied individually, religion was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p = 0.862$), culture was not a significant predictor for the propensity for

Regression block	R^2	R^2 change	F	Sig. F change	p
Block 1 Culture and religion	0.187		37.12	<0.001	<0.001
Block 2 Culture and religion Motivational factors	0.246	0.059	34.96	<0.001	<0.001
Block 3 Culture and religion Motivational factors Food-related personality traits	0.349	0.103	42.96	<0.001	<0.001
Block 4 Culture and religion Motivational factors Food-related personality traits Exposure effect/past experience	0.353	0.003	34.74	0.212	<0.001
Block 5 Culture and religion Motivational factors Food-related personality traits Exposure effect/past experience Socio-demographic factors	0.386	0.033	10.69	0.221	<0.001

Table II.
Hierarchical regression results

local cuisine, ($p = 0.078$), motivational factors were found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.001$), and food-related personality traits were found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.001$).

In Block 4, the regression equation was found to be significant ($F(5.319) = 34.74$, $p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.353. When studied individually, religion was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p = 0.836$), culture was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p = 0.081$), motivational factors were found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.001$), food-related personality traits were found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.001$), and exposure effect/past experience was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p = 0.212$).

Block 4's regression equation was found to be significant ($F(18.306) = 10.69$, $p < 0.001$), with an R^2 of 0.386. When reviewed individually, religion was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p = 0.604$), culture was found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.05$), motivational factors were found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.001$), food-related personality traits were found to be a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p < 0.001$), and exposure effect/past experience was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p = 0.539$).

Looking at socio-demographic factors, gender was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, ($p = 0.491$), in ethnicity, Hispanic, ($p = 0.05$) was significant, while the rest of ethnicities were not significant predictors: African American ($p = 0.198$), Asians ($p = 0.127$), and ($p = 0.421$) for other ethnicities. When studying marital status as a combined variable, it was not a significant predictor for the

propensity for local cuisine, participants living with their partner (p = 0.408), married (p = 0.383), separated (p = 0.702), divorced (p = 0.629), and widowed participants (p = 0.581). The age range scale was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, (p = 0.749). The level of education scale was found to be a marginally significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, (p = 0.06). Finally, an increase in household income was not a significant predictor for the propensity for local cuisine, participants living with their partner (p = 0.458).

Discussion, conclusion, and implications

The purpose of the study was to empirically test a conceptual model of the relationship between the factors that influence travelers' food-related decisions while away from home, with a particular interest in the consumption of local food items, while gaining an understanding of travelers' decision process. Testing of the constructs was performed, deriving from the literature review. The objectives for the study were to examine the relationships between the five main factors themselves, and with the dependent variable.

The findings of this study revealed the relationship between the factors influencing travelers' food decisions and their propensity to consume local foods at the tourist destination. Of the study's five main predicting factors, culture within the culture and religion variable, motivational factors, and food-related personality traits were consistently significant predictors of local food consumption. Within socio-demographic factors, specifically being of Hispanic ethnicity was found to be a significant factor attributing to a tendency for local foods. In addition, it was explored if and to what degree the factors impact each other within the group of predicting variables. In this case, it was found that by adding food-related personality traits on Block 3, culture ceased to be a significant predictor. However, in Block 5, socio-demographic factors were added, and culture became a significant predictor again, increasing the propensity to consume local foods. Education level became a marginally significant predictor. Motivational factors and food-related personality traits were consistently significant predictors of local food consumption, throughout all blocks tested.

The findings of the study contribute to the body of knowledge related to the theory introduced by Mak *et al.* (2012b) for a variety of reasons. The findings, primarily, identified and explained the main factors involved in the travelers' decision to consume local foods at a destination. Second, the study tested the proposed theoretical model to explain travelers' food-related behaviors at the destination. Third, the results of the study can be used to theoretically compare to travelers' consumption of other local products or services. In conclusion, the findings of the study have theoretical implications in terms of developing a framework for identifying the factors involved in travelers' decisions related to local consumption. From a practical standpoint, the study provides a better understanding of the travelers' influencing factors in local food consumption. For producers and service providers, this is of assistance to their marketing efforts, to improve their products and to increase interest from potential consumers for their products. An example of practical impact includes the offering of a sample or tasting of menu items so that those travelers averse to purchasing an unknown item can experience before ordering. Thus, providing items of increased interest, perceived value, overall satisfaction and positive consumer behavioral consequences for the local businesses. Destination shareholders and operators would benefit from an increase in consumption of their local foods, products and services. This understanding can motivate menu developers to include local items as a manner to attract sales while assisting in the economic development of the region (Sharma *et al.*, 2014; Kumar and Smith, 2018).

With empirically based information regarding travelers' interests in local foods, businesses can partner and educate government, tourism-related organizations and their employees to maximize the exchange of their products. The findings of the study have theoretical implications in terms of developing a framework for identifying the factors involved in travelers' decisions related to local consumption.

Limitation and delimitations of the study

There are limitations to this study that may plausibly affect the findings. Several were unavoidably inherent with a study's online instrument. The first limitation is an only English language questionnaire used as the survey instrument for the study. Although from the demographic section of the survey, it is assumed that the majority of the respondents read and understand English; some respondents may have not clearly understood the questions because of English not being their native language. The second limitation is self-reported bias. It is important to consider that the analyses conducted in this study were primarily based on self-reported data. Under or over-reporting, favorable or unfavorable experiences because of lack of or poor memory recall may introduce bias. Additionally, the collected responses may not represent the characteristics and perceptions of those who did not participate in the survey.

Food consumption behavior is impacted by a wide range of factors (Köster, 2009), the framework used in this study, a necessary step in the right direction, does not incorporate all possible factors affecting travelers' food consumption. Additionally, several marketing studies have demonstrated that the travelers' market is not homogeneous. Interestingly, analysis of segment-based satisfaction has attracted only limited attention from researchers Yüksel and Yüksel (2003), creating an opportunity for future research on the area.

A major delimitation that affects the study is that the data collected was limited to travelers from the USA, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings to travelers from other countries. The study was limited by time constraints, therefore restraining the ability to obtain responses from individuals from different geographic regions outside the USA.

Future research recommendations

Through testing the hypotheses in the study, empirical evidence of the exposure effect/past experience variable was not a significant predictor of the travelers' consumption of local foods. Further studies may include revision of the scale or the exclusion of the variable after further analysis of the concepts involved. Another recommendation based on the results of this study is to delve deeper into the division of the culture and religion variable, as the results of the study show a disparity within the two factors of the variable. Culture showed an inverse reaction to the addition of food-related personality traits from one block of the hierarchical regression to the next, as expressed in the previous sections of the study, requiring further study, not viable in the present one. The areas showed to be distinct in the factor analysis even though in the model, they are grouped as one variable, and they can coexist one without the other. Further research is recommended in the two areas in the variable, as they relate with each other and how the two work independently. Based on the nature and limitations of the case study, it is recommended to expand on the scope of the study with a broader sample. Another recommended area for future research is impact of price and perceived value on food purchase decisions while traveling. A focus of interest for local foods, as price has been studied at length in other general aspects.

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