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Food and Tourism Destination Image: Moderating Effect of Local Food Consumption

This study aims to explore factors affecting destination image by focusing on local food and their actual consumption by the tourists. Theoretical concepts and research are lacking in explaining how local food work in destination branding and how actual consumption may affect destination image. By doing so, the study contributes to research on food image, local food experience, and destination image. This paper empirically investigates the moderating effect of the local food consumption on the relationship between food and destination image. The path analysis result shows that local food consumption moderates the relationship between tourist perception of local food and destination image. International tourists agreed that local food consumption, as part of the cultural resources undoubtedly amplify the image of Sabah as a tourism destination. The feedback and promising insights from the international tourists' proved that authorities should take proactive action in promoting the local food of Sabah in addition to its core tourism products.

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Introduction

Two vital factors influence the development of destination image (Ashworth &
Goodall, 2013; Baloglu, 1997; Baloglu and McCleary,1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993;
Manhas, Manrai, & Manrai, 2016; Pike & Page, 2014; Walmsley & Young, 1998). The first
factor relates to a person's emotionality and rationality, which ultimately influences
destination choice or behavioural intention (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Prayag, Hosany, Muskat, &
Del Chiappa, 2017). Prayag et al. (2017) contend that tourism destination assessment can
assist tourism management in identifying strengths and weaknesses, in turn, able to predict
tourists' behaviour and intentions. The second factor is the outcome that emerges from two
significant aspects of image dimensions which are perceptual/cognitive and affective (Li, Cai,
Lehto, & Huang, 2010).

Tourists evaluate a tourism destination's available resources and its attractions based
on their perception of value and importance (Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010; Tapachai
& Waryszak, 2000). The tourists' emotions and feeling are influenced by the personal touch
or emotional components that a destination offers (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Phou,
2013; D. Kim & Perdue, 2011). Visitation is more likely when tourists value the destination
resources/attraction (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Govers, Go, & Kumar, 2007; Qu, Kim,
& Im, 2011; Wang & Hsu, 2010; Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014). Kim and Perdue (2011) posit
that a destinations core products including attractions, facilities, services, and activities
influence the destination image.

In addition to core tourism products, the local cultural attributes of the destination
such as history, heritage, including food contribute to the popularity of a destination (Björk,
Björk, Kauppinen-Räisänen, & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016; Folgado-Fernández, Hernández-
Mogollón, & Duarte, 2017; Jalis, Zahari, Zulkifly, & Othman, 2007; Royo-Vela, 2009;
Timothy, 2011). Food as a part of culture is recognized as one of the important elements, an

element not easily ignored by travellers (Timothy, 2011). Food becomes a 'focal point' for travel decision-making and the hallmark attraction of a number of destinations around the world (Björk et al., 2016; Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017). Tourists or travellers encounter and experience the varieties of food and beverages, and learn about the food cultures and heritage of that particular country or destination (Jalis et al., 2007; Royo-Vela, 2009). It is undeniable that food, as a cultural element, could create and strengthen the destination image. Tourists' level of consumption is assumed to moderate the relationship between cultural resources and the destination image (K. Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012).

Issues

Sabah, in Malaysia, is one of the most visited destinations in the South East Asian region (Musa & Thirumoorthi, 2016). Its attractions range from the breath-taking natural wonders such as mountains, jungles, islands and flora, and fauna, to the colourful cultures of its multi-ethnic inhabitants (Som, Marzuki, Yousefi, & AbuKhalifeh, 2012). This is evident through a positive growth of tourist receipts both from domestic and international tourists. Sabah received 2.5 million visitors in 2008, a number that rose to 4 million in 2015 (Tourism Malaysia, 2015). The primary reasons for visitation include rainforests, remote reefs and traditional tribes (Som et al., 2012). Zain, Zahari, Hanafiah, and Zulkifly (2016) revealed that most international tourists positively perceived Sabah as having unique natural marine resources, great natural treasures, and diverse cultural resources.

Despite this, there is still a limited understanding of how and to what extent the local food as a single dimension associated with the image of the tourism destination (Björk et al., 2016; Jalis, Che, & Markwell, 2014; Jalis et al., 2007). Figure 1 illustrates the research framework developed to answer the highlighting issue and filling the research gap.
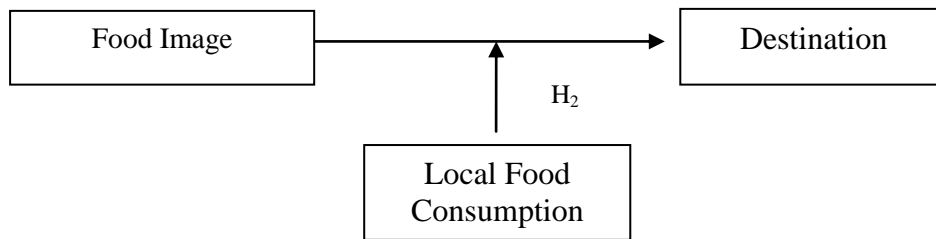
Figure 1: Study framework
Source: Jalis et al. (2014)

Literature Review

Food and tourism

Scholars argue that food is one of the crucial elements that influence intention to visit (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Getz, Robinson, Andersson, & Vujicic, 2014; Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Meethan, & Fields, 2015). This supports the earlier works of Finkelstein (1989) and Mennel, Murcott, and van Otterloo (1992) which noted that food and dining experiences are often relived and retold to a broader non-travelling audience when travelling. These experiences have the power to modify eating and drinking habits and tastes as well as permeate the tourists' experiences of the new locations and countries being visited (Andersson, Mossberg, & Therkelsen, 2017; Björk et al., 2016).

Björk et al. (2016) contended that seasoned tourists attached great value to the local food experience of the countries they visited. They, in fact, stressed that the local food products play a pivotal role in the marketing some of the tourist destinations. Some travel organisations regularly offer gourmet or culinary holidays with Italy and France as top destinations (Getz et al., 2014). Cooking holidays are offered in destinations like Tuscany or Provence in Europe. Getz et al. (2014) reported that tourism and holiday operators in Australia, the United States, Europe and Asian countries like China, India, Thailand,

Malaysia, Vietnam and Japan offer foods tour packages which combine shopping with side-trips to sample the local foods that are available. Local food can add value to the traditional tourism experience, especially for tourists who yearn for more and are always searching for new products and experiences (Björk et al., 2016). Local foods have the potential to create demand for short and weekend holidays, which fall under the niche sector: food tourism (Du Rand & Heath, 2006; Everett & Aitchison, 2008).

However, food tourism is interchangeably used with other terminologies such gastronomic tourism and culinary tourism (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Jalis et al., 2007). Du Rand and Heath (2006) explain food tourists as those whose motive is to visit primary and secondary food operator or manufacturers, food fiestas, restaurants at a particular place and to experience or taste the special food that has been produced by the country or a destination. Everett and Aitchison (2008) highlighted that food tourism occurs when tourists engage with local food products through consumption. Food tourism includes enjoying ethnic and distinctive food products (Y. H. Kim, Kim, & Goh, 2011).

Mennel et al. (1992) denote that food tourism can act as a platform or vehicle for tourism activities that involve exploring and discovering a new culture. Currently, food tourism focuses on development, advertising, and promotion of food and beverage at a particular destination (Yeoman et al., 2015). It involves the showcasing of food and beverage and opportunities for tourists to learn various artisanal techniques and discover local or indigenous food (Yeoman et al., 2015). There are four divisions of food tourism based on the segmentation of motivational factors as suggested by Hall, Sharples, and Smith (2003). The four divisions are segments and labeled as gourmet cuisines or gastronomic tourism followed by culinary tourism, rural or urban tourist, and unlabeled segment. The explanation of each segment can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Division of food, tourism based on the segmentation of motivational factors

Segmentation	Explanation
Gourmet cuisine or gastronomic tourism	Tourists that have high curiosity and interest in food, thus motivate them to travel to a particular destination with the main purpose to visit the restaurant, bazaars, chateau and any activities that related to food.
Culinary tourism	Tourists that have moderate interest and motivational factor in food tourism that involve in food activities as part of a wider range.
Rural or urban tourist	Tourists that have low interest in participating in food, activities and just want to try something different because of curiosity about the food that is offered.
Unlabeled segment	Tourists that have no interest involved in any food activities, in other words, consider food as a subsidiary and not important.

Source: Hall, Sharples, and Smith (2003)

Zelinsky (1985) initially explained gastronomic tourism as travel in the conventional sense to a particular destination to dine only at indigenous or local restaurants. Long (2004) however, broadened the term and the concept of gastronomy tourism from an anthropological perspective, as intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways. Foodways refer to the intersection of food in culture, traditions, and history, tourist's participation in the foodways is either "intentional" or "exploratory" or both "intentional and exploratory." Long (2004)

speculated that the gastronomy 'Other' could be classified into five categories; a) culture; b) region; c) time; d) ethos/religion and; e) socio-economic group. In this context, geography plays a considerable part in gastronomic tourism.

The sites for participation in gastronomy tourism according to Long (2004) include restaurants, ethnic restaurants, festivals, festive food events mainly dedicated to particular products like apples, peaches, pumpkins, shrimps, oysters and the like, and cooking demonstrations using homegrown, freshly picked products at community festivals. In sum, Long's (2004) work contributes to the understanding of gastronomy tourism in three ways. For one, it defines gastronomy tourism (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010). Secondly, it demonstrates that gastronomy tourism is composed of different categories of activities, implying that culinary tourism is multidimensional (Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014). Finally, it shows that there are, in fact, multiple sites for participating in gastronomy tour (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014).

Destination image

Fakeye and Crompton (1991) defined destination image as tourist insight and perception about a particular destination. Destination image encapsulates tourist thoughts on a place (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993), their impressions (Baloglu, 1997), and unique characteristics of a destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004) that stimulate the tourists' decision to travel to a destination.

Destination image has been recognized as the most prevalent topics in the tourism literature. However, some researchers (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Govers et al., 2007; Manhas et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2014) have claimed that the study of destination image study is mostly theoretical and lacking in operationalization. This is attributed to the nature of tourism products/services, for instance, its complexity, multidimensionality, subjectivity, and

intangibility, which collectively, make it difficult to measure the destination image construct (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

Many studies have shown the significance of food as a determinant of destination image (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Lertputtarak, 2012; Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012). Food is one of the components of destination image (Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012), and Hu and Ritchie (1993) mentioned the importance of food in developing destination attractiveness. Also, food can be an outstanding persuader for travel decisions since it provides pleasurable sensory experience (Babolian Hendijani & Babolian Hendijani, 2016; Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2017), and helps one learn the local culture (Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2017; Okumus & Cetin, 2015).

Interestingly, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) suggested that destination image is made up of two distinct but hierarchically interrelated components: 1) cognitive or perceptual and; 2) affective. The cognitive component is viewed as the sum of beliefs and attitudes of an object leading to some internally accepted picture of its attributes (external forces, pull attributes). The affective element, on the other hand, is how a person feels about the object under consideration (internal forces, push attributes) (Qu et al., 2011).

Research Methodology

As this study explicitly focusses on Sabah, Malaysia, the population and the unit of analysis was the international tourists who had visited Sabah and experienced the state's core tourism products including the culture and the local food. Purposive and convenience sampling was applied in determining and approaching the respondents (Kline, 2015). The survey instrument comprises three major sections whereby Section A comprises of eight items solicited to measure the perception of international tourists towards Sabah cultural food resources (Royo-Vela, 2009). Questions in Section B were concerned with levels of local

food consumption among the foreign tourists (Y. H. Kim et al., 2011). Six items were used in this section. Lastly, Section C with six items focuses explicitly on the international tourist's view toward Sabah as destination image (K. Kim et al., 2012). Respondents were required to translate their view on a five type Likert scale ranging from 1 with "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree."

A pilot study was conducted, and some changes were made before arriving at a final version of the survey instrument in order to improve the reliability and the validity of the survey. With the full cooperation and commitment given by most of the international tourists, a total of 256 questionnaires were successfully obtained. Data were then processed using SPSS version 20 for descriptive and empirical analysis.

The first stage of the analysis involved testing the validity of the research variables. Exploratory factor analyses were conducted for each variable. Principal component extraction with Varimax rotation was applied. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was 0.79 and Bartlett's test was significant at the 0.00 level. The criterion for the significance of factor loadings was set at 0.60 as per proposed by Kline (2015). Multiple regression was applied to answer the research hypotheses. Moderation analyses were conducted using techniques based on standard multiple regression and hierarchical regression analyses (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2013).

Analysis and Results

Respondent profiles

51.6 percent (n=132) of the respondents were male and 48.4 percent (n=124) were female. 46.1 percent (n=118) of the respondents were aged between 18 and 39 years; 40 to 59 years old represented 37.9 percent (n=97) and 60 years and above, 16 percent (n=41). Tourists from the European continent accounted for 39.8 percent (n=102), 30.2 percent

(n=78) from the Asian region and 22.7 percent (n=58) from the Australasian region (Australia and New Zealand). North Americans (American) made up 3.9 percent (n=10), followed by the Eurasia region (Turkish) with 3.1 percent (n=8). The majority; 90.6 percent (n=232) visited Sabah for business, and it was the first visit for most (71.9 percent; n=184). 80.9 percent (n=207) of the total respondents reported some involvement in eco-tourism/nature tourism activities, and 69.9 percent (n=179) undertook coastal/ island tourism, 67.2 percent (n=172) cultural tourism, 40.2 percent (n=103) adventure tourism, 9.4 percent (n=24) sport tourism, 3.5 percent (n=9) shopping tourism and the smallest proportion, 1.6 percent (n=4), MICE tourism.

Moderating effect of local food consumption

The study hypothesis requires an investigation on the moderating effect of the local food consumption on the relationship between food image and destination image. Studies claimed that tourist perception of local food might trigger destination choice (Björk et al., 2016; Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014). In addition, by consuming local food, tourist interpretation on the destination image may be affected or change (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Lertputtarak, 2012; Jalis et al. (2014). Hierarchical regression analysis has been recommended by Cohen et al. (2013) and was used to test the interaction effects and to confirm the research proposition. This was done by focusing on local food consumption as a moderator and uncovering the effects of tourist perception on food image towards the development of Sabah destination image. In this analysis, the predictor comprised the elements of food image as the independent variable and the local food consumption dimension as moderator while the dependent variable is the destination image dimension (Keith, 2014). The results of the analysis using moderated regression analysis were exhibited in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2
Dependent variable: Destination image		
Independent variable: Food image	.50***	.43***
Dependent variable: Destination image		
Independent variable: Food image		.22***
+Moderating variable: Local food consumption		.36***
R^2	.258	.393
Adj. R^2	.242	.380
F-Change	89.006***	54.853***

*Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p <0.001*

Looking at Table 2 above, food image is able to explain the 25.8 percent (R^2 = .258, F-change = 89.006, p<.001) of the variation in Sabah destination image. The value of (β=.50, p <.001 demonstrated that food image had a significant positive impact on Sabah destination image. In the second step of hierarchical multiple regression, the local food consumption as moderator was entered as the moderating variable to influence the dependent variable. From the second model output, the local food consumption can explain an additional 13.5 percent (R^2 Change =.135) towards the variance of the Sabah destination image. The 13.5 percent R^2 change proved that local food consumption acts as a moderator in the relationship between food image and destination image. Moreover, the beta value (β = .36, p < .001) shows that local food consumption significantly and positively affects Sabah destination image. Thus, it can be claimed that the local food consumption strongly moderates the relationship between Sabah food image and Sabah destination image.

These findings of this study are in line with Kim et al., (2012) who claimed that travel experience reinforced individuals' image of a destination product collectively and will positively affect their intention to revisit. A clear picture also emerged that besides visiting, exploring and experiencing various cultural activities, the local food products are seen contributing to the international tourist experiences (Björk et al., 2016; Jalis et al., 2014). This notion is strengthened when the majority of the foreign tourists perceived the local food as one of the attractions (Hall et al., 2003) and this perception, in fact, was made a reality through their consumption and experienced (Seo, Yun, & Kim, 2017). Higher levels of consumption and experience of the international tourists denoted that the local food as part of the cultural resources undoubtedly increases the Sabah tourism image. Thus, food together with the available core products can be used as a catalyst to generate and boost the state economy (Andersson et al., 2017).

Discussion and Conclusion

It is worth reiterating that food, beverages, and food-related cultures are becoming essential tourism products for Sabah. The findings of this study show that Sabah enjoys a lot of valuable and significant culture resources (Som et al., 2012) as part of its core tourism products. The tourism industry should take proactive action in promoting the local food in addition to its core tourism products.

The results of this study also showed that local food outlets such as ethnic restaurants, food courts, and street stalls are valued by international tourists. As the primary promoter of the country, the Malaysian Tourism Promotional Board (Tourism Malaysia) should enhance their support for tourism stakeholders (e.g., tour operators) providing knowledge on food tourism markets. The familiarization trip, for example, can be organised by Tourism Malaysia in collaboration with the local tour operators and travel agencies. Promotional

activities by the relevant tourism bodies are essential for niche tourism products. Ottenbacher and Harrington (2013) studied the effect of culinary tourism campaign in Germany and concluded that to attract the postmodern tourists; food tourism must be packaged, promoted, priced and positioned, just like any other tourism product or service.

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