



Gender Differences Based Upon Psycho-Centric Profiles in Food Tourism

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Abstract: This exploratory study examines 275 sampled culinary tourists across multiple travel profile types to test for differences between gender. With exception to the local, budget, and vegetarian profiles, statistically significant differences between male and female travelers were indicated in the adventurer, ambiance, authentic, eclectic, gourmet, novice, organic, social, trendy profiles. Additionally, differences in social media influence was also found. Knowledge of these differences opens up room for additional study concerning differences between travel groups in their decision making when composed of a mixture of men and women or all men or all women. This study provides theory extending by providing support that significant gender differences across food tourist profiles and is practically significant to businesses in understanding their various visitor segments when designing their food events as attractions.

Keywords: culinary tourism, food and beverage, experience, destination, psycho-culinary profile

1. INTRODUCTION

The food and beverage experience is significant to tourist destination enjoyment (Torres 2002; Lin et al. 2011). Though there has always been a strong interest in a destination's food and beverage offerings (food tourism), with increased demand in food tourism, there has been an increase in food tourism research. Food tourism research is defined as a travelers' motivation in experiencing and learning about the food possibilities and experiences offered by a destination (Nelson, 2016). Because of the increased demand, studies have found that destinations are beginning to use and design culinary experiences as attractions (Getz and Robinson, 2014). People incorporating the appreciation of food and drink has become more mainstream with 53% of leisure travelers choosing their next destination based in part on the food and drink options offered by the community (Wolf, 2020). These tourists are among many discovering that the enjoyment of a destination's food and beverage offerings creates a better destination experience (Henderson, 2009).

2. FOOD TOURISM

As food tourism has grown so has the research about motivations and preferences of tourists who have a primary interest in food. Cultural tourism planners need to always stay current on trends specifically targeting this dynamic market to translate the meaning of the experience to attendees (Skift, 2019). Food tourism has become more than a niche market with more people including food and beverage experiences as reasons they are drawn to a community (Everett, 2016; Stone and Migacz, 2016). Researchers have attempted to determine reasons for the increased interest in food tourism. The varied reasons are: 1) that food travel engages more senses than other travel activities, 2) a traveler can experience multiple activities in a day compounding the possibilities of the experience, and 3) while they may not return to the prime attraction (Empire State Building) they are likely to return to their favorite restaurants and pubs (World Food Travel Association, 2020). There also has been an increase in heritage tourism based on the increase in education levels and increased exposure to more information (television shows and the internet). Engaging in unique food and beverage experiences can help visitors learn more about the culture and heritage of an area. A 2020 Food Travel Monitor revealed that 79% of visitors learn about local food and drink when they visit a destination. (World Food Travel Association, 2020). Food tourists are more likely to explore off the beaten paths in a community and travel further

away from their hotel for a memorable culinary experience. They equate unique culinary experiences as adding to the overall uniqueness of the travel experience (Skift, 2019).

Mandala Research (2013) reported that 30% of study respondents showed that culinary planning was a factor in destination choice, 26% took one or more trips to sought out culinary activities, and 19% participated in available unplanned culinary activities. Another study found that people in higher and lower income brackets were saving money in order to splurge on food and drink experiences when traveling. Some are solely seeking better quality while some are seeking sharing or bragging rights (Wolf, 2020). However, not all tourists are food tourists. Food tourism is defined by a person visiting a community with either a primary or secondary motivation to frequent restaurants, food festivals, food tours, and food and drink tastings (Hall and Sharples, 2003; Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Kim, Duncan & Jai, 2014; Wagner, 2001). Wolf (2002) defines culinary tourism as travel for food. Gastronomy is also recognized as a significant element affecting the overall tourism experience (Correia, Moital, Da Costa & Peres, 2008, Okumus, Okumus & McKercher, 2007). Based on the fact that interest in food has become a big draw for travelers, more time and energy is being invested into special culinary offerings (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Tsai and Wang, 2017). A community's food offerings generates attention that attracts both tourists and locals (Back, Okumus, & Tasci, 2020; Dimitrovski & Crespi-Vallbona, 2017). Local food can boost the image of a destination as it represents national, regional, and personal uniqueness (Bessiere, 1998). The increased demand has leads to the need to study the specific tourists that travel to these events both socio-demographically and psycho-graphically.

3. PSYCHO-CULINARY PROFILES

Market segmentation studies promote the collective use of sociodemographic variables (gender, age, income, educational level, and stage in family life cycle) as well as psychographic factors (lifestyles, activities, interests, and opinions) (Hsu, Kang, & Wolfe, 2002; Moscardo, Pearce, & Morrison, 2001; Plog, 2002). In order to better understand and market to a segment, it is important to be able to determine the motivational factors. The World Food Travel Association has been a leader in food tourism research, producing the 2016 and 2020 Food Travel Monitor Research Reports that have differentiated food travelers. The World Travel Food Association created the following categories of food tourists (2016) including the Adventurer, Ambiance, Authentic, Budget, Eclectic, Gourmet, Innovative, Localist, Novice, Organic, Social, Trendy, and Vegetarian.

The adventurer enjoys trying new culinary experiences and foods, no matter how bizarre or different. (Includes culinary experiences/attractions with highly unique offerings.) The ambiance seeker prefers experiences that have an obvious mood or tone (Romantic restaurants, themed restaurants). The authentic tourist prefers real food made by real people (Ethnic attractions). The budget minded food tourist seeks a quality experience for a cheap price and do not need to spend large amounts to have a good time. The eclectic food tourist desires the incorporation of a wide variety of culinary experiences, a little bit of everything. The gourmet tourist choose culinary experiences based upon their reputations, "only the best will do." (e.g., 5-star restaurants). The innovative food tourist prefers high amounts of experimentation and are always trying new things. The localist food tourist prefers local businesses instead of chains and corporations. They will be frequenting "mom and pop" stores and restaurants unique to that certain area. The novice food tourist prefers beginner culinary tourism experiences seeking culinary experiences that are pretty standard, or a "safe bet." The organic food tourist desires organic and naturally grown foods and ingredients including agriculture, organic food stores, and such as examples. The social food tourist seeks culinary experiences which provide a setting where people can meet, talk, eat, and drink. This includes bars, clubs, and festivals. The trendy food tourist are early adopters, always ahead of the new trends seeking culinary hotspots that are "hip" or "cool." Finally, the vegetarian food tourist does not eat meat and is seeking vegetarian and vegan experiences.

4. GENDER SEGMENTATION RESEARCH

Existing tourism research suggests differences based on gender and travel motivations within certain sectors of the tourism industry. For example, Anastassova (2002) found 'the majority of female tourists are mostly interested in sightseeing and visits to Bulgarian villages and folklore festivals, which confirms their cognitive motivation. Conversely, male tourists are commonly motivated to participate in activities related to nature, such as hiking in the forest, fishing and angling, and doing sports, all physical in nature.' This pattern has been confirmed in Kaufman et al. (2008) heritage tourism research

where women's attitudes were significantly more preservationist minded than men's attitudes. Another body of research has offered further support those differences exist between gender concerning perceived tourism constraints (Hudson, 2000) and travel lifecycles (Collins and Tisdell, 2002). A seminal study conducted by McCleary et al. (1994) found that men and women differed on their lodging preferences whereby women found security and lower price to be more important than men. Clearly, gender differences have been noted in the academic literature for a variety of hospitality and tourism products, yet very little is known about gender differences concerning food tourism.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Purpose of the Study

As an exploratory study, the primary purpose of this research is to determine if there are any differences across gender in the aforementioned introduced psycho-culinary profiles. While more research will be needed to get an in-depth exploration of the differences, if differences exist, it will provide early justification for future deeper investigations. Theoretically, it extends the study of gender into food tourism and will add to the body of knowledge on trip decision making profile analysis. Practically, applying the knowledge of the differences will help communities to better focus their culinary offerings specifically understanding the potential make-up of travel parties and the subsequent pre-destination and at-destination decision making processes of those parties. This exploratory research adopts the aforementioned World Travel Food Association psycho-culinary profiles scales (2016). Additionally, in order to better understand social media driven decisions, social media questions were added to the survey instrument.

6. SAMPLE

The sample included 275 participants that were recruited using Qualtrics online survey platform. The survey included qualifying questions related to the choosing a travel destination based partially or primarily based on culinary experience possibilities specifically including food and beverage offerings. Demographics identified a roughly equal split between males and females answering the survey.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Research Findings

Discriminant analysis was utilized to determine if there were significant differences between the profile answers of the two gender groupings. Discriminant testing was used on an item-by-item basis as opposed to a group mean basis enabling more specifics to be gleaned. The Box's M test was 2898.51 indicating statistically significant differences at the levels of less than .001, .05, and .10 indicating a high level of statistically significant differences between male and female travelers across almost all items. All assumptions checks were met in accordance with the requirements of MDA.

8. COMPARING GROUPS

All three questions were significantly different for the adventurer psycho-culinary profile yet neither gender considers themselves adventurers scoring themselves low on the adventurous question with a mean of 1.86 for males and 2.45 for females. Again, though there were significant differences in the gender scores, both groups like off the beaten path destinations and enjoy trying new even bizarre culinary experiences but males prefer this to a greater extent. Surprisingly, there was a significant difference with males rating ambiance at 4.17 and females rating ambiance at 3.93 ($p < .001$). Authenticity was important to both groups but significantly higher for men than women with means of 4.44 and 4.00 ($p < .01$). Both genders were primarily neutral in terms of the budget psycho-culinary profile which is not a surprise likely varying with income and not necessarily gender. Of course, value is still important to both groups with males at 3.71 and females at 3.55, respectively. There was a high level of significance showing revealing eclectic trips and food experiences as highly important to men though still important to women. The males sampled wanted variety in their culinary experiences (4.27) and in their trips (4.34) as compared with females desire of variety in culinary experiences (3.89) and travel location (3.72). Both questions about the gourmet psycho-culinary profile were different with a high level of significance revealing that the males sampled seek more exotic and gourmet experiences

more than that woman (4.22 vs. 3.79) as well as top of the line experiences with strong reputations more than females (4.04 vs. 3.38). There were no significant differences based on gender and the local psycho-culinary profile. Both genders seek local businesses and like to support small businesses when possible at high levels with the male sample at 4.44 and the females sampled at 4.02. Females in the sample were more likely to seek culinary experiences that are a safer bet than males in the sample, so more associated with the novice food tourist with males reporting a mean of 3.44 and females at 3.96 ($p < .01$). Males are more in agreement in preferring organic food (4.22 vs. 3.52) and farm to table restaurants when available (4.28 vs. 3.82). Three of the four questions in the social psycho-culinary profile showed significant differences between genders. Males in this sample are more social tourists seeking planned activities than females (4.30 vs. 3.72). Males are seeking more trendy locations when they travel than females. There were no significant differences between genders based on vegetarian or vegan cuisine seeking and it is not surprising due to lower numbers of vegetarians that both males and females reported lower means in this sample of 2.55 and 2.84 respectively. Finally, in this sample males are more active on social media. They are neutral in their response to posting pictures of their food on social media. Males are more likely to choose a destination or a restaurant based on social media posts.

Table 1: Profiles of Culinary Tourism by Gender

| Adventurer | Male (mean) | Female (mean) | Significance |
|--|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| I would describe myself as an adventurous traveler. | 1.86 | 2.45 | .001 |
| I prefer off the beaten path destinations when I travel. | 3.87 | 3.32 | .001 |
| I enjoy trying new culinary experiences and foods, no matter how bizarre or different. (Includes culinary experiences/attractions with highly unique offerings.) | 4.35 | 3.93 | .005 |
| Ambiance | | | |
| I seek experiences that have an obvious mood or tone (Romantic restaurants, themed restaurants). | 4.17 | 3.58 | .001 |
| Authentic | | | |
| I prefer authentic food prepared by locals. | 4.44 | 4.00 | .010 |
| Budget | | | |
| I seek a quality experience for a cheap price when I dine on vacation. | 3.71 | 3.55 | .345 |
| Eclectic | | | |
| I desire the incorporation of a wide variety of culinary experiences, a little bit of everything. | 4.34 | 3.89 | .003 |
| I prefer to go to different destinations when I go on vacation than to a place that I have traveled to often. | 4.27 | 3.72 | .001 |
| Gourmet | | | |
| I like to have exotic and gourmet experiences when I travel. | 4.22 | 3.79 | .001 |
| When I travel, I typically choose culinary experiences based upon their reputations, only the best will do (5-star restaurants, top of the line places). | 4.04 | 3.38 | .001 |
| Local | | | |
| I prefer local businesses instead of chains when I travel. | 4.19 | 3.92 | .136 |
| I like to buy from small businesses because I like to support a small business owner's dream. | 4.44 | 4.02 | .094 |
| Novice | | | |
| On vacation, seek culinary experiences that are pretty standard or safe bet. | 3.44 | 3.96 | .003 |
| Organic | | | |
| I prefer organic and naturally grown foods and ingredients | 4.22 | 3.52 | .001 |
| At its heart, farm-to-table means that the food on the table came directly from a specific farm, without going through a store, market, or distributor along the way. I am likely to select this type restaurant if it is available. | 4.28 | 3.82 | .16 |
| Social | | | |

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| | | | |
|--|------|------|------|
| I seek culinary experiences which provide a setting where people can meet, talk, eat, and drink (Includes bars, clubs, and festivals.) | 4.30 | 3.72 | .002 |
| I enjoy planned activities like food tours of the local restaurants. | 4.35 | 3.79 | .011 |
| I enjoy planned activities like beverage tours of the local restaurants. | 3.97 | 3.58 | .118 |
| I enjoy planned activities like mixology classes, wine tastings, beer tastings at local restaurants. | 4.19 | 3.39 | .001 |
| Trendy | | | |
| I prefer to go to trendy destinations when I travel. | 3.93 | 3.47 | .002 |
| Vegetarian | | | |
| I seek out vegetarian or vegan cuisine when I dine out | 2.55 | 2.84 | .127 |
| Social Media | | | |
| I am active on social media. | 4.19 | 3.90 | .008 |
| I like to post pictures of my food on social media. | 3.70 | 3.37 | .018 |
| I have chosen destinations based on posts that I have viewed on social media. | 3.80 | 3.30 | .001 |
| I have chosen restaurants based on posts that I have viewed on social media. | 4.05 | 3.73 | .007 |

*Note: a 5-point likert scale anchored from 1 to 5; 5 = strongly agree; 1= strongly disagree

9. CONCLUSIONS

These significant differences between the food tourists based on gender is intriguing. The stronger scores across many of these attributes of men versus women food tourist point to a slightly more careful measured strategy on the part of these woman tourists. This knowledge of the food tourist extends the theoretical models in showing support for gender differences across these psycho-culinary food profiles. It also gives rise to the need for additional research. For example, it would be interesting to know how many people each of the samples reporting usually make the travel decision for their social unit that is traveling. While we cannot make any assertions on who the main decision maker is when deciding food tourism choices, the slightly more careful or conservatism in approach in this sample of the female may make sense if that person were generally the decision maker for more individuals. The theory building in decision making literature would be served well by a qualitative study about gender asking these particular questions on primary decision maker. It is also helpful for businesses in applying this exploratory research to know that gender definitely matters in food tourism.

Although neither identify as adventurous males are more likely to seek different experiences that are off the beaten path. Destinations that are not as popular could draw in the male foodie tourist by creating more unique culinary experiences. Ambiance is more than just the food it is the home for the experience. Concentrating solely on the food and ignoring the look and feel of a restaurant could not meet the needs of the male food tourist whereas as if the market is the female food tourist less attention needs to be spent on in this area. Both genders are seeking an authentic experience with regards to food being prepared by locals. The marketing material needs to share stories about the restaurant owners and chefs so the tourist can be drawn to a destination providing authentic experiences. Neither gender agreed to seeking a quality experience for a cheap price when they travel. This could be based on the growing trend that people are willing to pay more for quality experiences and that the wording of the item paired quality and cheap which typically do not go together. Male food tourists are seeking different experiences when they travel. Food festivals could be a big draw to meet the needs of this eclectic group. Also, food trails where communities work together to create a food destination pooling in their unique offerings. A person is drawn to an area will be more likely to return if they find they have not experienced everything in one trip. Also, restaurant operators can look to offer seasonal menus. A tourist that enjoys a restaurant may be enticed to return if they know the offerings are unique and could change. Fear of missing out can be a big motivator. According to this study, the male food tourist seeks gourmet and top of the line experiences more so than women in this sample. They are drawn to the finer things and desire a unique experience. Food providers need to highlight these offerings through pictures as well as descriptors of the food and drink. The more the food tourist knows about the restaurant or event, the better to ensure the decision to spend top dollar on dining will be a smart one.

Both genders are supportive of local businesses. Sharing stories about the owners and the history of the restaurant can be a draw. Local businesses should make sure they differentiate their menu offerings from what is available at chains. Highlighting the specialties of the area and giving the background of the origins food will make for a more memorable encounter. The question about whether they are seeking culinary experiences that are a standard or safe bet produced intriguing results. The male food tourist that is seeking a more exotic experience is also seeking one that is a safe or a standard bet. It could mean that although they are seeking an exotic meal, they want to be able to return and find similar standards. The male food tourist is seeking more naturally grown food and ingredients. Both genders seek farm-to-table restaurants. Highlighting the ingredients on the menu and sharing where the food is being brought in from in the community will show the restaurant practices the farm-to-table concept and that they are supporting other locally owned businesses. The male food tourist is more interested social, planned food events. Restaurants can showcase their specialties while working to build relationships with other dining establishments. Sharing pictures of the restaurant with diners socializing is a smart choice to attract the social food tourist. Food tours and tastings can be a great change of pace than a traditional table service meal. Male food tourists prefer trendier destinations. Restaurants should stick to what works for them and not chase after every fad, but they need to remain updated on what is trendy that they can incorporate into their menus. Creating an “instagrammable” dish or creating photo ops for social media can help create buzz which will appeal to an audience that is drawn to trendy destinations.

Both genders tend to disagree that they are seeking vegetarian or vegan cuisine. This is not to say it should be ignored in food provided at events or restaurants. There is still an audience, but not large enough for to be the primary focus. The male food tourist is more active on social media and seeks input in making decisions based upon restaurants and destinations. In creating social media posts destinations and restaurants need to keep in mind what they are seeking based upon psycho-culinary profiles. Additionally, marketers should keep in mind that the decision maker for a social group could be conservative and less risk taking as they have more people to please. In this way, when marketing about highly adventurous things, step by step instructions and more information can lower the perceived risk or food tourism hazard perceived by the a more careful patron.

10. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research is a beginning to uncover differences based on food tourist’s gender. While differences existed between males and females, it is important to note that conclusions cannot be drawn to the actual population based on this exploratory study. Additionally, more information is needed on the dynamics of group travel and group decision making since many travel groups are composed of men and women. The findings in this study show significant differences in the preferences of men and women when traveling as food tourists. Future studies on risk aversion of tourist based on gender may reveal more specific information related to the complex decision process that is involved in travel. For businesses, more information about their segment will help them adjust offerings to the wider preferences matching the needs of a diverse set of segments. This is the first time this scale has been tested on a large audience and it will take many iterations of fine tuning the scale and sampling multiple audiences to create a reliable and valid instrument whose constructs measure the names of the segments in the previously mentioned studies.

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