

Taste Beyond Travel: A Theoretical Study on Tourist Perception and Satisfaction Towards Street Food Products

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Abstract

Food tourism has become an increasingly important segment of the global tourism industry because travellers today seek authentic and memorable experiences that extend beyond traditional sightseeing activities. Street food products are one such culinary experience that offers tourists a culturally rich experience that is accessible and affordable. Street food is a key to the local traditions, identity and native cuisine, which provides a way for visitors to connect with the place in a meaningful way. Different factors such as quality of food, taste, hygiene, fairness of price, authenticity and service quality are contributed to the perception of tourists in street food products. These perceptions directly impact tourists' satisfaction and their intentions for future visits and positive word of mouth communication. When tourists feel that the experiences, they have had with street food products are satisfactory, they are likely to develop satisfaction toward them. The comprehension of these relationships becomes crucial since tourists' satisfaction is a key factor in destination competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. This is a theoretical paper that explores the perception and satisfaction of tourists regarding street food products by adopting the concepts from the tourism studies, consumer behaviour and satisfaction theories. The conceptual framework of tourist perceptions, the key factors that influence satisfaction, and the impact of street food experiences on tourism development are analysed. The study adds to the theory by offering a comprehensive discussion of the factors influencing the experience of tourists for street food products.

Keywords: Tourist perception, Street food products, Tourist satisfaction, Food tourism, Culinary experience

I. Introduction

The nature of tourism has been significantly transformed in the past few decades, with shifting consumer preferences and motivations (Suhail & Muneer, 2024). Today, tourists are looking not just for sightseeing but also for an experience and cultural immersion. Food has become one of the most important areas of tourism experience, giving visitors the opportunity to learn about the culture, traditions and social practices of the country they are visiting. Culinary tourism has therefore become an increasingly significant topic for the tourism studies and destination management. Street food products are on top of the list of culinary

souvenirs and experiences offered to travellers as they engage in the local culture, and they do not cost too much (Kedla et al., 2025).

Street food products are those food and beverage items that are prepared and sold by the street vendors for immediate consumption in the street (Sezgin & Şanlıer, 2016). These products are convenient, inexpensive, available and 'local'. Street food is a way of life, a way of living, the culture, the heritage, and the food. The street food culture is different from one place to another in the world and adds to each destination's appeal to tourists. These food experiences are often sought by travellers because of their unique opportunity to engage with local communities and understand local life.

Street foods are gaining popularity among tourists and are closely linked to the desire for authenticity and novelty (Sezgin & Şanlıer, 2016). Street food is often prepared according to traditional recipes and local ingredients, making it a popular tourist attraction. Street food is a popular tourist attraction as it is often made using local ingredients and recipes (Gupta et al., 2020). Street food eating is often done in local social contexts that complement the value of the experience, in contrast to standardized restaurant food service. These experiences establish emotional links and memorable travel experiences, affecting tourists' perception of destinations.

But there are several factors that affect tourists perceptions about the street food product. Their evaluations and satisfaction of the food are influenced by elements like food quality, hygiene, safety, pricing, service quality and physical surroundings. Positive perceptions may result in repeat visits and positive recommendations while negative perceptions may decrease the attractiveness of the destination. Tourist satisfaction is thus an important factor that affects the future tourist behaviour and the tourist loyalty towards the destination.

This current research on tourist perception and satisfaction on street food products is gaining relevance in the destinations around the world that have taken culinary tourism as an important source of economic development and cultural preservation. The perception of street foods experience from tourists provides insights for policy makers, tourism planners, and local street food vendors to increase the competitiveness of the destination and the quality of service delivered.

II. Conceptual Understanding of Tourist Perception and Street Food Products

Tourist perception is the process in which tourists interpret, evaluate and give meaning to the tourism experiences with regard to their beliefs, expectations, motivations, and previous experiences (Zhao et al., 2014). Perception is regarded as psychological process because people get information from the senses and make a meaning of it based on their personal and environmental factors. The perception of tourists has an impact on their travel decisions, consumption behavior, satisfaction experience, and preference towards the destination. Perception is an important factor in tourism as it influences the experience and services that are provided to the guests which may be subjective and not merely objective.

Street food products are an integral part of the food tourism and consumption of culture (Alfiero et al., 2019). They are mostly sold in the streets, public places, market places and transportation hubs by the

vendors. Street food products are geographical as they are unique to local traditions, ingredients and culinary practices. These types of products can be seen as representations of cultural identity due to their historical significance and community values. Street foods are eaten by tourists not just for their functional benefits but experiential and emotional as well.

Street food perception is multidimensional and consists of multiple attributes; tourists evaluate street food products simultaneously (Harthy et al., 2021). A critical aspect of it is the perception of quality by the tourists who evaluate freshness, taste, look and nutritional quality. The other dimension relates to hygiene and safety perceptions as travelers tend to take into account the level of cleanliness before eating street food. In addition, price perception affects tourists' evaluations as people compare the prices with the expectations of value and quality.

The authenticity perception is especially significant in the framework of food tourism, as many tourists are looking for authentic local experiences (Baby & Joseph, 2023). Traditional cooking methods, local items, and communication with local people are part of the authentic experience of street food. Authentic experiences might be seen as more significant and memorable to tourists than standardized experiences.

Demographic and psychological attributes of tourists are also factors that play a role in the perception process (Aschauer, 2010). Persons' assessment of street food products may vary with their age, cultural background, level of education, travel experience, and preferences. Younger tourists are more likely to be in search of adventure or novelty, while older tourists may be more focused on health and safety concerns. On the other hand, because of their cultural familiarity, international tourists might have other expectations and perceptions than domestic tourists.

The understanding of tourists' perceptions towards street food products is crucial since they can help explain why certain tourists choose to eat street food or not and how the consumption of street food affects their satisfaction. Positive perceptions foster emotional attachment and destination loyalty, while negative perceptions can pose a challenge to tourism experiences.

III. Theoretical Perspectives on Tourist Satisfaction Towards Street Food Products

The satisfaction of tourists is an important concept in tourism and consumer behaviour studies since it is the evaluation of the overall experience of a tourist after consumption (Cohen et al., 2014). Satisfaction is usually a psychological feeling that is triggered by the comparison of one's expectations and experiences. The satisfaction of tourists with the tourism product affects some outcomes such as revisit intentions, recommender behavior, and destination loyalty. There are several theories that explain the development of satisfaction with street food product.

One of the most accepted explanations of understanding satisfaction behavior is the expectation confirmation theory (Hossain & Quaddus, 2011). This theory suggests that people create expectations prior to using products or services. After eating, tourists make comparisons of their real experience with these expectations. Satisfaction is when experiences satisfy or surpass expectation, and dissatisfaction is when experiences do not meet the expectation. Tourists can also be assured of good taste, reasonable price,

cleanliness and authentic cultural experience in street food places. If these expectations are confirmed positively, then there is greater satisfaction.

The TPB model also contributes to the understanding of tourist satisfaction (Abbasi et al., 2021). The theory suggests that individuals' behaviors are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control. Attitudes of tourists towards local food products affect their intention to eat street food. Traveler's tweets and reviews could be a social signal impacting on quality and safety. Perceived behavioral control is tourists' self-efficacy in making the correct food selection without risk to health.

According to the Experience Economy Theory, in today's world, the customers greatly prefer experiences rather than tangible products (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). People tend to go out for memorable experiences that bring emotions and sensations instead of plain consumption activities. Street food products offer experiential value in terms of the appearance, fragrance, flavor, sociality, and cultural immersion. These sizes are unique and have a certain impact on satisfaction.

The theory of equity adds to the concept of satisfaction by proposing that consumers assess how fair their investment and outcomes are (Oliver & Swan, 1989). Visitors compare the amount of money, time and effort they have invested and the benefits that they have gained from a street food experience. If tourists feel that they are getting value for money, they will be satisfied, but if prices do not seem fair, they will be dissatisfied.

All of these theories imply that satisfaction with street food products is multidimensional and shaped by cognitive, emotional and experiential aspects. It is possible to understand these theoretical bases and thus explain the complex nature of tourists' assessment and offer some helpful implications for enhancing culinary tourism experiences.

IV. Factors Influencing Tourist Perception and Satisfaction Towards Street Food Products

The perception and satisfaction level of the tourists towards street food products can be attributed to several factors that are interrelated and impact the tourists' perception of their experiences. Food quality is regarded as one of the most important determinant as food products which are consumed by tourists are mainly for sensory satisfaction. Food quality involves aspects of taste, freshness, nutrition, aroma, appearance and texture. Sensory stimuli have a strong influence over emotional responses because the pleasant sensory experience helps to develop positive memories for destinations.

The other important factor is hygiene/food safety, which influences tourists' perceptions. Street foods are frequently cooked outdoors, and travelers may be worried about cleanliness and sanitation. Food preparation techniques, the appearance of the food vendor, the cleanliness of the utensils, and the environmental conditions in which the food is prepared are factors that many tourists consider before buying the products. Consumption willingness may decrease due to hygienic risks even if food quality is high.

Tourist satisfaction is greatly affected by price fairness, as they are looking to value based experiences. Likely to add to perceptions of economic value and boost consumption intentions due to affordability.

However, the tourist can become dissatisfied if he/she senses that the price is too high or not in keeping with the quality of service he/she receives. Fair pricing is an important factor in improving tourist experiences, so it is important to highlight.

Authenticity can also be an important element influencing tourists' perception. Nowadays, tourists are looking for experiences that are unique and local and that reflect local culture and traditions. Traditional preparation, indigenous ingredients and region specific specialties are often associated with authentic street food products. Authentic experiences are more than just about eating; they have emotional and cultural significance and make people happier.

The quality of the service, and the way that the vendors serve the food, also affect tourists' perceptions of street food services. Positive interactions, speed of service and communication skills are positive factors in customer experience. Vendors visiting a tourist that provide information about ingredients and methods of food preparation are often appreciated by tourists.

Besides, the environment of the surroundings, the seating arrangements, crowd control and garbage collection are important factors which affect the comfort level of the tourists. Satisfaction is high when the environments are pleasant, as they provide positive emotional experiences when eating.

Tourist perceptions are also influenced by marketing and social media. People often use online reviews, social media content and tips for their consumption decisions. Positive information on the Internet establishes positive expectations and increases the willingness to consume.

V. Implications for Tourism Development and Conclusion

Due to the impact of culinary experiences on tourists' behavior and travel choices, street food tourism has become a significant part of the tourism industry, driving the attractiveness and economic development of destinations. Tourists' perceptions and satisfaction with the street food products play a significant role in the process of the formation of a tourist image and competitive advantage. Food experiences can be lasting components of travelling experiences, and they affect tourists' future action intentions.

Street food products offer economic benefits to the local communities by offering employment opportunities and small scale entrepreneurship. Tourism demand is a key source of earning for many street food vendors and for their sustainability. Greater consumption of local food products by tourists is a way of boosting economic growth in the area and help to maintain the traditional way of life.

Street food products can be leveraged for street food branding and promoting by destination management organizations. Culinary events, food trails and online marketing efforts can enhance destination identity and draw visitors to the destination for a genuine cultural experience. Combining street food experiences with tourism can improve the overall experience and satisfaction of tourists.

To ensure food safety is a priority and will impact on the tourist's perception of the food. Food handlers, sanitation and customer service practices can be addressed in a training programme to improve the quality

standards and boost tourists' confidence. Quality improvement should be ensured and cultural authenticity should be maintained within regulatory frameworks.

Enhanced sustainable tourism practices also need to be addressed as environmental concerns are becoming a major consideration in tourist choices. The management of waste, environmentally-friendly packaging, and clean public areas add to the tourist experience and the destination's sustainability.

VI. Conclusion

To sum up, tourist perception and satisfaction with street food products are complex relations between quality, hygiene, authenticity, price fairness and experiential dimensions. Street foods have been an integral part of the tourism experience as they add cultural, emotional and sensory value to a tourist's experience. Positive perceptions improve satisfaction, destination loyalty and repeat visitation. The knowledge of these relationships can be helpful to tourism stakeholders wishing to better improve the quality of services and make destinations more competitive. Further research can be conducted to investigate contextual and cultural factors which affect tourists' experiences in various tourism settings.

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