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Features, Drivers, and Outcomes of Food Tourism

Introduction

Food is increasingly becoming a central aspect in staging memorable experiences within the tourism and hospitality sector (Kunasegaran et al., 2019; de Albuquerque Meneguel et al., 2019; Cetin et al., 2017) and it is a major motivation for travelling (Okumus et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2020). Food is therefore important for at least three different sets of reasons. First, it can be a major pull factor to a tourism destination (Su et al., 2020) and the major travel motivation as travelers might be attracted by a specific cuisine (Robinson et al., 2018) whose authenticity could depend critically on the place where the food is produced (Kim et al., 2019) and those producing it. Accordingly, the cultural, religious and psychological drivers and motivations of food tourism consumption have been only partially covered by extant literature (e.g., Lai et al., 2019; Yeap et al., 2019) and need to be investigated in more depth by means of empirical studies leveraging both small and big data about travelers and tourists (Mariani et al., 2018, 2021). Second, while food is certainly about gastronomic products, it is also about processes and about innovation of gastronomic products and processes that rests on knowledge, craftsmanship, and traditions (de Albuquerque Meneguel et al., 2019). New cooking techniques, science of cooking and molecular gastronomy gradually inspire daily cooking activities and haute cuisine techniques attract more adventure travelers globally. Increasingly food has been included in tourism services and experiences in an ubiquitous way (McKercher et al., 2008) and in light of the most recent technological advancements in services (Mariani and Borghi, 2019). As such, it is critical to understand what features of food products and production processes are functional for tourism firms to create or co-create with tourists compelling tourism experiences. Third, food tourism is gradually more important for tourism destinations to enhance their competitiveness, economic performance, attractiveness, and for their place/destination marketing (Okumus et al., 2007) and branding (Lai et al., 2018) strategies. As such, the mechanisms that allow food tourism to make a difference in terms of competitiveness and appeal need further investigation as well as factors pertaining to sustainability (Everett and Slocum, 2013). Overall, this Special Issue aimed at shedding more light on the characteristics, drivers and outcomes of food tourism. We particularly

welcomed empirical studies addressing a variety of topics in food tourism and adopting qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

Hopefully, this will be a well cited issue as food tourism is increasingly covered by major travel, tourism, and hospitality journals. This topic is currently covered in a very fragmented way as food tourism research is relatively novel and only around 300 journal articles have been published on the topic scattered across many disciplines. However what is missing is a collection of cutting edge research shedding light on the features, drivers and outcomes of food tourism to build an overarching framework around the phenomenon. In this Special Issue, the contributing authors explore the *Features, Drivers, and Outcomes of Food Tourism* and explain how food tourism can help destinations as well as tourism, hospitality and foodservice industries to overcome a number of challenges.

An overview on papers in this special issue

This special issue contains eleven scientific articles that cover a broad range of issues, topics and initiatives in *Food Tourism* including: sustainability, creativity, food tourism experiences, local cuisines, diaspora marketing, food festivals, street food consumption, online marketing, and health hazards. These articles have adopted various methodological approaches using different methods such as customer surveys, manager surveys, experimental designs, text mining, content analysis, case studies and some innovative statistical analytic techniques. We are happy to provide this rich and varied collection to scholars and peers in our field.

In the article titled “**Motivations, self-congruity and restaurant innovativeness as antecedents of a creative-food tourism experience: the moderating effect of first-time and repeat tourists**” Gomez-Rico et al. (2022) analyzed the drivers of a creative food tourism experience (CFTE) and its effect on the tourists’ perceived authenticity and satisfaction. Data was obtained about 407 food tourists who traveled to visit a creative restaurant, and subsequently analyzed using structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Results confirm the relevance of emotional and social motivations to enjoy a CFTE and the need to align the target tourists’ self-concept and restaurant positioning. Restaurant innovativeness was found to be the most vital driver of CFTE, which suggests that entrepreneurship in gastronomy is critical to boosting food tourism.

The article titled **“Not just food: Exploring the influence of food blog engagement on intention to taste and to visit”** by Mainolfi et al. (2022) examined the effect of several factors such as perceived enjoyment, blogger credibility and homophily on readers’ engagement with food blogs, as well as the influence of blog engagement on intentions to follow blogger’s recommendations. Based on an online survey with a sample of 821 blog readers (Italian and American), the authors proposed and tested a model deploying structural equation modelling. They found that perceived enjoyment and homophily significantly impact on blog engagement, which, in turn, positively influences both intention to taste and visit. Furthermore, blogger credibility does not influence blog engagement.

In the article titled **“Addressing sustainable food management in hotels: proposing a framework and examining hotel groups”** Ruiz Molina et al. (2022) investigated sustainable food management in hotels, taking into account the various facets of the food supply chain. For this purpose, several dimensions were proposed for dealing with sustainable food management, involving all aspects of food supply chains that may be relevant for hotel decision-making. Results confirmed that the quality and the quantity of the information provided by hotels are limited and that hotel managers and users neglect a number of aspects of sustainable food management identified in the framework.

The article titled **“Searching memories of pleasures in local cuisine: How nostalgia and hedonic values affect tourists’ behavior at hot spring destinations?”** by Lin et al., (2022) developed a causal relationship model of nostalgia, hedonic values, and tourists’ intentions for local cuisine in historic hot springs. For data analysis, the authors used the purposive sampling model and surveyed three hundred and fifteen Taiwanese tourists visiting the Beitou Hot Spring, Taiwan. Covariance-based structural equation modeling was used to find that higher levels of tourists’ perceived nostalgia are associated with stronger perceived hedonic values based on dining experiences. Tourists’ perceived hedonic values mediate the relationships between nostalgia and tourists’ intentions for local cuisine.

In the article titled **“Food Tourism: Opportunities for SMEs through Diaspora Marketing?”** Bowen (2022) investigated the impact of the diaspora effect on food tourism. The author used mixed methods to develop a deeper understanding of diaspora effects on food tourism using online survey of 169 food producers, with 37 follow-up interviews in Wales and Brittany. Results

confirmed that two avenues for diaspora tourism are available, either through engaging with diaspora networks, such as expatriate networks located outside the country of origin, or through the reverse diaspora effect, of visitors experiencing products and then seeking to purchase them once returned to their countries.

The article titled “**Profiling food festivals by type, name and descriptive content: A population level study**” by Kesgin et al., (2022) classified and described food festivals and examined the patterns in food festival naming and festival descriptions in online media. The study represents the first population-level empirical examination of food festivals in the United States using a purpose-built dataset (N=2626) and builds on text mining techniques to examine food festival communications. Findings identified the festival forms, styles, functions, and their diversity serving as a foundation for future scholarly work.

In the article titled “**Application of the Extended Theory of Planned Behavior to Street Food Consumption: Testing the Effect of Food Neophobia among Indian Consumers**” Nagar et al., (2022) examined how food neophobia, perceived risk and word of mouth about street food vendors affect tourists’ attitude and intention to consume street food. The authors collected data collected from 445 tourists from the Indian urban centre of Jammu and analyzed them by leveraging Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The study found that word of mouth about street food vendors positively and significantly influenced tourists’ attitudes and intention to consume street food, while food neophobia led to negative attitude and intention to consume street food.

The article by Bigi et al. (2022) titled “**Who killed food tourism? Unaware cannibalism in online conversations about travelling in Italy**” addressed the online representation gap of destinations, focusing on Italy, for which official destination promotion materials, tourist guides and web influencers indicate food and wine as crucial drivers to attract visitors. For this purpose, content analysis based on a Bayesian machine-learning technique utilizing Leximancer software was applied to analyse questions and answers posted on TripAdvisor forums by potential and past visitors of four destinations in Italy (Naples, Florence, Parma and Ferrara). Surprisingly the authors found that food-related themes were almost completely absent in the conversations analysed, suggesting that food-related attributes are diminished compared to less sensorial and memorable aspects of the travel experience.

In the article titled “**Defining risk reduction strategies for tourists with specific food needs: A qualitative approach**”, Moraleda et al., (2022) identified the main risk reduction strategies when individuals suffer from coeliac disease (CD) or non-coeliac gluten sensitivity (NCGS) travel. A qualitative approach based on thematic analysis was adopted. The results of 32 semi-structured interviews confirmed the high level of consensus on the main food risk reducers which can be listed as travel information, staff training in safety assurance, legislation, and risk prevention protocols. The findings also suggest that information offered by restaurants, organizations, and tourist destinations lack details about risks for the specific segment of tourists analyzed.

The article titled “**Seafood festivals for local development in Italy and Sweden**” by Pizzichini et al., (2022) focused on festivals taking place in coastal regions whose central element is seafood. Qualitative exploratory case studies of seafood festivals in Italy and Sweden were performed using an analytical model and the findings showed the close relationship between seafood and tourism. The authors suggest that, although the aforementioned relationship takes variable forms, food is a fundamental lever for maritime and coastal tourism and local development.

In the article titled “**The impact of COVID-19 on destination visit intention and local food consumption**”, Dedeoglu et al. (2022) examined the impact of potential Chinese tourists’ local food consumption motivation on their intention to consume local food. Moreover, they also examined the impact of those intentions on their tendency to visit that destination. Data obtained from 264 Chinese respondents for Italian food, and 277 Chinese respondents for Thai food was analyzed utilizing PLS structural equation modeling. The authors found that tourists’ risk perceptions of COVID-19 negatively moderate the effect of cultural experience and novelty on the intention to consume Italian food but tourists’ risk perceptions on Thai food have a diminishing effect on all motivation factors.

Concluding Remarks

This special issue attracted a large number of high-quality submissions from scholars interested in food tourism and hospitality across many countries. This witnesses a growing scholarly “appetite” for food tourism to use a wordplay. The articles in this special issue covered theoretical and practical issues pertaining to food tourism, travelers’ food consumption, health concerns of tourists, and organizational design of destinations using food as an attraction. The papers also

display a variety of methodological approaches, including qualitative methods leveraging on interviews and case studies, quantitative approaches leveraging surveys, experiments, and content analysis, and mixed method approaches combining surveys and interviews. The papers represent contributions from all over the world including USA, UK, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, India, Turkey and China. Together, they show that food is a global resource and central aspect in staging memorable and engaging experiences for travellers during their visits the destinations.

We would like to thank all the authors who responded to the call for papers. Competition for the SI was very high, and therefore the review process was extremely selective. We are particularly grateful to the authors of the papers in the special issue and to the many anonymous reviewers who provided constructive suggestions, valuable time, and feedback.

Finally, we do believe that the articles included in this special issue will be well received by scholars, students, as well as practitioners and managers. More specifically, the studies presented in this special issue emphasized the importance of developing further the scholarly debate on food tourism and food service research across multiple disciplines. We hope that the articles in this special issue will encourage more researchers to join the scholarly debate on the fascinating and innovative research area of food tourism. Last, we believe that several of the practical implications stemming from the studies might support the decision making of tourism and hospitality managers, entrepreneurs, and marketers to see, seize and exploit the opportunities brought about by food in the tourism and hospitality industries, as well as other related sectors.

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