

International visitor dining experiences: A conceptual framework

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A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF INTERNATIONAL VISITOR DINING EXPERIENCES WITH LOCAL FOOD IN THE DESTINATION

Abstract

Visitors are increasingly travelling to destinations in search of culinary experiences. As a consequence, many Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) have sought to stimulate visitation by capitalising on the appeal of dining opportunities involving local food. However, such initiatives will only be effective if service providers have a thorough understanding of how visitors respond to the dining experiences that are offered. This paper proposes a conceptual framework of local food related dining by international visitors, by analysing the experiences during the pre-, during and **14**-t-dining phases. With the visitor experience as its core, the framework takes into account **the influence of both internal and external factors on** the visitor experience. It is intended that the proposed framework will provide a more complete understanding of the visitor dining experience in destination settings.

Keywords: travel dining experiences, international visitor, local food, conceptual framework

1. Introduction

The early 21st century has been characterised by the emergence of the so-called experience economy. As part of this phenomenon and as described by Marson (2011), the tourism industry is undergoing a transformation in response to the evolving shape, scope, and nature of visitor activities. Richards (2012) claims that the focus has shifted away from visiting typical 'must see' physical sights, to engaging in 'must experience' tourism activities, in which visitors can discover, participate, and **14**am about everyday life (Robinson & Novelli, 2005). Marson (2011) further implies that **visitors are searching for** and expecting **new, unique and** more meaningful travel **experiences**. One means of offering these is through the prospect of experiencing the cuisine that is endemic to the destination being visited (Richards, 2012).

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The literature has shown that **food-related encounters function not only as a means of physiological sustenance, but as an enhancement of overall destination experiences** (Henderson, Yun, Poon, & Biwei, 2012; Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Evidence from a number of studies has indicated that visitor interest and preferences for food in destination settings can be a significant determinant of destination choices (Bessiere, 1998; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hall & Sharples, 2003). On the other hand, researchers such as Hjalager and Corigliano (2000), Kivela and Crofts (2006), and Nield, Kozak, and LeGrys (2000), postulate the influence of food experiences on visitor perceptions, satisfaction, and intentions to revisit the destination. Moreover, Fields (2002), similar to Hegarty and O'Mahony (2001), affirms that food acts as a gateway for visitors to learn about another culture through a direct engagement with local cuisines in a destination that differs from what they have at home. It is apparent that local food can serve as a means of assisting visitors to appreciate the culture which prevails in a destination (Long, 2004).

The use of local food as a means of luring visitors to one destination rather than another requires a deep understanding of visitor food consumption and experiences (Mitchell & Hall, 2003). Larsen (2007) asserts that to understand visitor experiences meticulously, the view should concern at least: the planning process prior to the actual experience (i.e. the

individual's foreseeing of visitor events through expectancies); the actual undertaking of events or experiences during the trip; and the individual's remembering or recall of these experienced events. However, Ryan (2003) claims that few researchers have scrutinised the visitor experience from the perspective suggested by Larsen (2007). To the authors' knowledge, there has been no previous systematic conceptual modelling in the food-related tourism context analysing visitor consumptive experiences. Although a considerable number of studies have investigated food-related visitor experiences (Chang, et al., 2011; Correia, Moital, da Costa, and Peres, 2008; Kim, Eves, and Scarles, 2009; Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Namkung and Jang, 2007; Ryu and Jang, 2006; Yuksel, 2003), the research base for understanding visitor experiences has not yet been addressed comprehensively from the perspective of the three stages of visitor experience (pre-, during, and post-). Further research is therefore needed to provide an improved understanding of the visitor experience concept when applied to dining with local food in destination settings.

The objective of this paper is to propose a comprehensive framework for analysing visitor experiences when they engage with local food related dining in the destination. The framework is developed on the basis of a review of the relevant literature on visitor experiences in the tourism industry in general and in the dining-related contexts in particular. Taking account of the internal and external factors, the proposed framework views dining experiences as three sequential stages as follows: pre-dining, during-dining, and post-dining.

This paper represents a significant contribution to the literature in two ways. Firstly, the proposed conceptual framework contributes to the tourism marketing literature by providing a holistic investigation of the full spectrum of visitor experiences. Secondly, since culinary experiences can enhance the overall experience and help to engage visitors more actively with the destination, the proposed framework offers an improved understanding of food-oriented visitor behaviours. In addition, it expands the literature on culinary tourism by providing insights into dining experiences that are specific to international visitors.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Firstly, a literature review is presented of the visitor experience and how it is shaped. Following this, the existing models proposed by other scholars are analysed. Finally, on the basis of guidance from the relevant literature and previous models, a comprehensive framework is proposed for visitor dining experience with local food, accompanied by the associated methodological procedures with a view to operationalise the model.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising the Visitor Experience

Experience is a broad concept that reflects aspects of daily life and may therefore be interpreted from either within or from outside the management science perspective (Caru & Cova, 2003). Highmore (2002) views experience as relevant to two different states: the moment-by-moment lived experience, and the after experience which is subject to reflection and prescribed meaning. Consistent with this view, Larsen (2007) asserts that experience can be categorised into two. One focuses on what happens here and now in a specific situation, whilst the other one highlights an accumulation over a period of time. Pine and Gilmore (1999), the originators of the term 'experience economy', state that experiences occur within a person who is engaged with an event at a physical, emotional, intellectual or even spiritual level, and is left with memorable impressions.

Considering the growing importance of the experiential aspect of product consumption, Caru and Cova (2003) declare that the concept of experience is a key element in understanding consumption behaviours. Moreover, from an experiential perspective, the consumption experience is no longer limited to some pre-purchase or post-purchase activities, but involves additional activities which influence consumer decisions and future actions. This indicates that the consumption experience is spread out over time and can be divided into several stages of experience (Caru & Cova, 2003).

Mittal, Kumar, and Tsiros (1999) propose the 'Consumption System Theory' (CST) to conceptualise the consumption experience. Mittal et al. (1999) characterise a consumption system as involving three dimensions: a product/service's attribute-level evaluation, satisfaction, and behavioural intention. From a systems perspective, consumption occurs when a bundle of products and services is consumed over time in multiple episodes. The consumption system encompasses a series of activities within the wider process of consumer decision-making, ranging from pre-purchase activities such as need recognition and information search, to post-purchase activities such as satisfaction and future behaviour (Mittal et al., 1999). In terms of examining this system, Mittal et al. (1999) suggest two alternative approaches: cross-sectional and longitudinal. Each type of examination reflects a distinct perspective on the consumer experience. Cross-sectional analysis offers a structural view of consumption experiences, in which three dimensions of the consumption system are interconnected and influence overall consumption. On the other hand, longitudinal analysis provides a process view of the consumption system with the relationships between attribute-level evaluations and satisfaction changing over time. Similarly, satisfaction can also turn into a behavioural intention over time.

13 Given the experiential nature of the tourism and hospitality industry, creating unforgettable experiences for visitors is critical to business success (King, 2002; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). The discussion about consumption experiences in tourism emerged in the early 1960s in Clawson and Knetsch's (1963) study of outdoor recreation, followed by Cohen's (1979) original reference to the term tourist experience. Adapting Mittal et al.'s (1999) Consumption System Theory, Woodside and Dubelaar (2002) introduced their theory of the 'Tourism Consumption System' (TCS) which is relevant to the tourism context. It attempts to achieve a deep understanding of the multiple immediate and downstream relationships amongst events that are experienced by a visitor prior to, during, and following a tourism trip. A set of related travel thoughts, decisions, and behaviours evolve along these stages when consuming tourism-related products. The central proposition of TCS theory is that the thoughts, decisions, and behaviours regarding one activity at one stage of tourism consumption experience, will influence the thoughts, decisions, and behaviours for activities occurring at other stages. In addition, visitor backgrounds (e.g. demographic and social) and destination service providers are included in Woodside and Dubelaar's (2002) theory as the influential variables of visitor decisions and behaviours.

2.2 Factors Influencing the Visitor Experience

From the visitor perspective, destinations are comprehensive bundles of tourism experiential products and services (Zouni & Kouremenos, 2008). Delivery of experience quality for visitors is complex since it is multi-influential and involves mobilising a variety of tourism stakeholders (Jennings & Nickerson, 2006). Considerable effort has been dedicated to examining the underlying factors which impact on the quality of the tourism experience

(Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2012; Nickerson, 2006; Ryan, 2011, 2002). Ryan (2002) asserts that the quality of tourism experience involves not only the attributes provided by tourism suppliers, but also the attributes brought by the visitor. He further explains that quality is shaped by internal factors such as a visitor's motives, past experience, knowledge of the destination, and individual personality. In addition, the quality of the experience is also influenced by external factors such as: the induced marketing images relating to the destination, travel activities, patterns of change at the place, and people with whom the destination is shared (Ryan, 2011).

Consistent with Ryan's view (2002), Nickerson (2006) proposes three factors that influence the quality of the tourism experience: the traveller, the product or destination, and the local population. First, the traveller visits a destination with ideas or expectations about prospective experiences. These ideas or expectations are formed by individual social constructions, perceptions derived from media, product images, preconception knowledge, and visitor past experiences. The second influential factor described by Nickerson (2006) is tourism product and that refers to all experiences with products or services offered by tourism and hospitality business operators (e.g. tour operators, accommodation, food service, transportation and attractions), as well as experiences with public sector (government) services like information about public services. The activities undertaken during travel are also included as the tourism product factor. The final factor affecting the quality of the tourism experience is the quality of life, residence attitude towards tourism and the sense of place fostered by the local population (e.g. host-guest social contacts) (Nickerson, 2006).

The three factors proposed by Nickerson (2006) provide a valuable contribution to understanding the visitor experiences in a more general tourism context. In a detailed examination of food tourism, Mak et al. (2012) recognise three underlying factors affecting the consumption of food-related travel: the tourists, the food in the destination, and the destination environment. Included within tourist related factors are cultural or religious influences, socio-demographic factors, food-related personality traits, exposure effect/past experience, and motivational factors. Components of the destination food factor include food sensory attributes, food content, methods of preparation and cooking, food or cuisine type, food availability, and food price/value and quality are viewed as. Lastly, the destination environment factor involves gastronomic image, marketing communications, contextual influences, service encounters, servicescape, and seasonality are also included as affecting food consumption in tourism (Mak et al., 2012).

The preceding discussions have suggested that the visitor experience is complex. As Volo (2009) has highlighted, its complexity is reflected in the difficulties to define the concept, identify and measure the components, as well as to define how visitor experience changes in keeping with the characteristics of the individual visitor. Many studies have examined the visitor experience from various perspectives. Ritchie and Hudson (2009) identify five major streams of tourism experience research: 1) the conceptualisation of tourism experience; 2) visitor experience, behaviour and decision making models; 3) methodologies related to approaches and procedures of examining experiences; 4) types of experiences; and 5) managerial concerns. Although there is an extensive and growing body of literature discussing the visitor experience, its essence and conceptual structure remains elusive (Jennings et al., 2009; Jurowski, 2009). Several attempts have been made to conceptualise the temporal nature of visitor experience and illustrate it into experiential phases (Clawson &

Knetsch, 1963; Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Knutson, Beck, Kim, & Cha, 2010; Yuan, 2009). These are analysed in a respective manner in the following section.

2.3 Existing Visitor Experience Frameworks

A phasing of experience is proposed by Clawson and Knetsch (1963) in the context of outdoor recreation activity. There are five distinct yet **5** interacting phases of experience that each individual encounters, beginning with planning (**anticipation**), **travel to site**, **on-site activity**, **return travel**, and **recollection**. Although Clawson and Knetsch's recreation experience framework (1963) recognises the individual engagement at different stages of experience, it seems deficient in providing the information about visitors' attitudinal and behavioural dimensions, such as, what and how the visitor thinks, feels, and perceives at each stage of the experience.

The merit of including attitudinal and behavioural dimensions is addressed by Yuan (2009). The structural relationships among the major components of hospitality experience, service, and customer satisfaction is developed to propose a better way to understand the experience. Yuan's framework incorporates three important stimuli for consideration by service providers when creating or staging products/services for the customers to experience. These stimuli include the physical product, the service, and the environment. The level of the customer's perceptions, involvement, and interactions with these stimuli leads to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the overall experience. Yuan's (2009) study, however, focuses more on the measurement of perceived quality and satisfaction concepts. For this reason it lacks any consideration of pre-experiences (i.e. expectations) and of the future behavioural intentions phase.

Knutson et al.'s (2010) experience construct framework is more complex than the two frameworks that were discussed previously, and offers a useful indication of the structural relationships between stages of experience. Adopting O'Sullivan and Spangler's (1998) three phases of experience (pre-, participation, and post-), Knutson et al.'s (2010) framework incorporates four major constructs of hospitality experiences, namely: service quality, value, satisfaction, and consumer experiences. The pre-experience stage includes concepts of expectations, promotional activities, word-of-mouth, and personal memories from previous experiences. Expectations function as the foundation for the pre-experience stage and for underpinning perceived quality in the participation (during experience) stage. At the post-experience stage, the key outcomes examined by Knutson et al. (2010) involve personal perceptions of the experience, the value that they attach to the experience, and satisfaction with the experience. However, the linear relationship structures amongst the concepts examined in Knutson et al.'s (2010) framework have indicated the need to adopt of quantitative research approach to measure each construct. Such an approach, as argued by Jennings (2010), may be limited in uncovering the actual experiences that each individual thinks or feels.

Cutler and Carmichael's (2010) framework of visitor experience differs from what have been proposed by Clawson and Knetsch (1963), Yuan (2009) and Knutson et al. (2010). A key strength of Cutler and Carmichael's (2010) framework is that it acknowledges the complexity of visitor experience as multi-phased, multi-influential, and multi-outcome, and thus formulate them into a single conceptual model. In addition, Cutler and Carmichael (2010) consider two realms shaping the visitor experience: the influential and the personal. The

influential realm includes factors outside the individual and consists of physical aspects, and product /service aspects. The personal realm involves elements embedded within each individual visitor such as, knowledge, memories, perceptions, emotions, and self-identity (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010). The outcomes of experience relate to ¹¹all evaluations of a trip, indicated by visitor satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The overall evaluation can influence and is influenced by individual elements and by the experience itself (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010).

Several common characteristics are evident from the frameworks that were noted above. First, Yuan's (2009) framework is similar to Cutler and Carmichael's (2010) in acknowledging the presence of external factors that shape the experience. Both studies incorporate aspects ¹³associated with product/service and physical/environment factors as determinants of the quality of experience outcomes. In the context of the travel dining experience, including these factors is essential since dining involves visitors in the tangible realm including the food, how it is served (i.e. service aspect), and the physical surrounding. Consequently, such factors will visitor evaluations of the quality of their dining experience.

However none of the frameworks that have been discussed consider internal factors as contributing to the visitor experience. The internal factor includes various aspects that are embedded in the individual visitor and may relate to visitor demographics, and travel situational aspects such as travel purpose, length of visit, and travel party. As has been noted by Ryan (2002), such aspects can affect travel-related decisions made by the visitor at each stage of the experience, which in turn influences the quality of the overall experience.

Furthermore, although most of the existing frameworks view and examine experiences as sequential phases, none has been developed with a specific focus on visitor dining experiences with local food in destination settings. This gap is important, given the increasing tendency of international visitors to travel to destinations for local culinary experiences, where this can enhance the overall destination experience (Henderson et al., 2012). A conceptual framework is needed that acknowledges the complexity of the visitor experience as multi-phased, multi-influential, and multi-outcomes, while incorporating suitable elements of the existing studies that have been discussed, in order to understand how international visitors experience local food in destination settings. The present paper therefore aims to address this research gap.

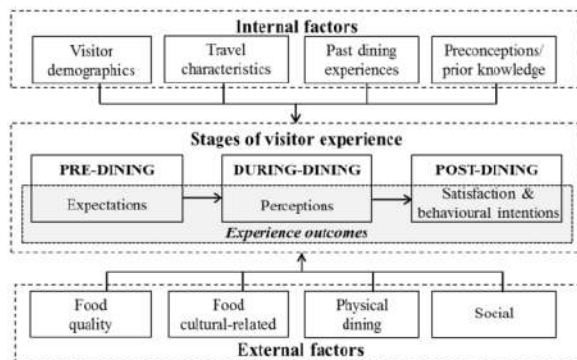
3. Visitor Dining Experience Framework

The framework proposed in this paper characterises the complex nature of visitor experience, as described by Ryan (2011) as multi-phases, multi-influential, and multi-outcomes. The framework is an adaptation of components of Knutson et al.'s stages of experience (2010), of Cutler and Carmichael's personal realm which shape the experience (2010), of Mak et al.'s factors influencing tourist food consumption (2012), and Yuan's (2009) and Knutson et al.'s (2010) structural relationships between experience outcomes components in each stage of experience.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the conceptual framework consists of three major components of the visitor experience as follows:

- Stages of the visitor dining experience

- Influential factors of local food related dining experiences
- The outcomes of experience at each stage of dining



International visitor dining experiences with local food: a conceptual framework
Source: adapted from Cutler and Carmichael (2010), Kautson et al. (2010), Mak et al. (2012), and Yuan (2009)

3.1 Stages and Outcomes of the Visitor Dining Experiences

Within the proposed framework, the multi-phase experiences are represented in three sequential related dining stages experienced by international visitors. Each stage of dining along with its anticipated experience outcomes is discussed as follows.

Pre-dining experience stage. This stage refers to how the visitors foresee the engagement with local food prior to the actual dining experiences. Pre-dining encompasses the expectations that the international visitors have about the likelihood of experiential outcomes pertaining to dining with local food in the visited destination. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2002), expectations are defined as the desires of customers, in particular, what they believe a service or product should or will be. In the tourism context, Fluker and Turner (2000) delineate expectations as the perceived likelihood that a particular action will be followed by a particular outcome. Visitors make decisions based on certain expected outcomes and their reactions to outcomes are in part influenced by what they initially expected (Dickson & Hall, 2006).

Many studies have explored the relationship between expectations and visitor behaviour and experiences (del Bosque, Martin, & de los Salmones, 2009; Fluker & Turner, 2000; Gnoth, 1997; Hsu, Cai, & Li, 2009; Sheng & Chen, 2012; Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007). Gnoth (1997) claims managing visitor expectations is extremely important since expectations can significantly influence visitor choice process and perceptions of destination experience, which in turn, affects visitor overall satisfaction.

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Given that eating plays an integral role in travel, visitors expect that their food related experiences within the destination will be enjoyable and memorable (Kivela & Crotts, 2009), regardless of the primacy of culinary experiences as a travel motivator. This therefore indicates the critical role of selecting an effective measurement to allow the researcher to make an accurate identification of visitor dining expectations.

In their evaluation of the measurement of expectations, Dickson and Hall (2006) propose two alternative approaches: first, conducted before the experience and second, after/post the experience (i.e. retrospective recall). In aggregate, more studies have relied on retrospective recall than have measured expectations at the time of their formulation. Under the retrospective recall approach, the timing for assessing the expectations is undertaken after the experience is over (Dickson & Hall, 2006), assuming that participants are still capable of recalling accurately and report their expectations even after a considerable time has passed. However, such an approach has the subject of critique on the basis of validity since people's ability to recall events, feelings, time periods, expectations, or preferences, are deficient or even sometime exaggerative (Noe & Uysal, 1997).

Considering the limitations of retrospectivity that were discussed previously, the present framework proposes that the measurement of visitor dining expectations is conducted prior to actual visitor encounters with local food consumption in the destination. On this basis, visitors should be probed shortly after their arrival at the destination, though prior to dining with local food. This process is crucial for ensuring that visitor responses about their dining expectations with local food are free of bias from their perceptions of the actual dining activity.

During-dining experience stage. This stage relates to the actual encounters with the local food that occur at the destination. It focuses on the perceived quality of the visitor's dining experience. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), perceived quality is defined as a form of overall evaluation, a global judgment, or an attitude toward purchasing products. It occurs after a comparison between expectations and actual perceptions of performance. From the customer perspective, Parasuraman et al. (1988) indicate that perceived quality is a highly subjective and relativistic phenomenon that varies on the basis of who is assessing the product or service. Despite its subjectivity, Yuan and Wu (2008) argue that there is a close relationship between expectations and perceptions concerning the quality of products and services, hence, assessing customers' perceived quality cannot be undertaken without measuring expectations of quality. Having said this, the following proposition is formulated:

Proposition 1: Visitor expectations of dining experiences with local food influence the perceived quality of dining experience with local food.

In addition, adapting Yuan's (2009) study, the proposed framework examines perceived quality of the dining experience with local food on the basis of two dimensions of visitor cognition (thoughts) and emotions (feelings). Cognition arises as a result of all of the relevant dining-related information that is transmitted to the conscious mind through the senses. For instance, what visitors think about the local food that they see, smell, taste, and touch. By contrast, emotion involves visitor affective responses such as, excitement, joy, surprise, disappointment that are evoked during the course of dining experiences.

Post-dining experience stage. This stage refers to all of the experiences after dining which is reflected in visitor satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The literature shows that there are two ways to measure satisfaction, namely transaction-specific and cumulative aspects (Yuan & Wu, 2008). The transaction-specific perspective sees satisfaction as how consumers assess the value that they gain after completing a transaction (Oliver, 1977). The cumulative perspective aligns with the essence of the experience concept and acknowledges consumer expectations and/or experiences that have occurred prior to consumption as part of the whole experience thereby affecting the level of satisfaction at, during and after the process of experiencing (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002). Satisfaction is commonly viewed as an indicator of the quality of an experience (Ryan, 2002). Ryan further affirms that a satisfactory experience involves congruence between expectations and performance, whereas dissatisfaction is reflective of a gap between expectations and the perceived quality of the tourism consumption experience. At the post-dining stage, the proposed framework also examines future behavioural intentions as another outcome of dining experiences. They include the intention to consume local food during future visits to the destination, as well as the willingness to recommend dining experiences involving the local food to others. In light of this view, the proposition is developed as follows:

Proposition 2: Visitors' perceptions of dining experience with local food influence the overall dining satisfaction and visitors' future behavioural intentions.

As mentioned earlier, the proposed framework views local food related dining that the visitors experience as the sequential relationships amongst three stages of dining. Adapting Woodside and Dubelaar's (2002) TCS theory, the framework then acknowledges that each visitor's thought, emotions, and behaviour that evolves from one stage of the dining would affect the thoughts, decisions, and behaviours that emerge at subsequent dining stages. Therefore:

Proposition 3: The experience encountered by international visitors at the pre-dining stage influences the experience at the during-dining stage, with in turn; the experience encountered at the during-dining stage affects the experience at post-dining.

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Furthermore, the sequential nature of dining experience stages proposed in the framework provides a methodological implication in terms of the operationalisation of the framework. As described earlier, to ensure free bias, the examination of experience at pre-dining stage is suggested to be taken prior to visitors undertaking the actual dining experience at the destination. To obtain a comprehensive view concerning various experiences at all dining stages, the research participants who involve in three dining stages should be the same. This means that those who express their expectations prior to local food related dining would be able to describe their perceptions of the actual dining as well as to explain their satisfactions after dining by comparing the actual dining with what they expect before. Undertaking such an approach would allow not only holistic understanding of the local food related dining experiences, but also offers the complexities surround the experiences to emerge.

3.2 Factors Influencing the Visitor Dining Experience

The proposed framework encompasses both internal and external factors and their influence on visitor dining experiences involving local food. As is evident in Figure 1, the internal factor which affects the visitor dining experience is divided into four: visitor demographic profiles, travel characteristics, preconceptions about local food within the destination, and previous dining experiences involving the local food.

Numerous studies have previously confirmed the role of individual visitor characteristics pertaining to socio-demographics and travel characteristics in shaping tourism dining experiences (Hong, Morrison, & Cai, 1996; Kim et al., 2009; Mak et al., 2012; Mattila, 2000; Shenoy, 2005; Tse & Crofts, 2005). For instance, Kim et al. (2009) reveal that visitor's demographic factors, such as, gender, age, and education, significantly influence the visitors' consumption of local food. On the other hand, group of scholars like Joon-Wuk Kwun and Haemooon (2006), Mak et al. (2012), and Ryu and Jang (2006) argue that in addition to the socio-demographic characteristics, a visitor's past experiences and gastronomic images held in the visitor's mind should also be considered as essential elements affecting visitor dining experiences with local food.

Given these views, the measurement of visitor demographic profiles contains five attributes as follows: gender, age group, country of residence, highest education attained, and occupation. At the same time, travel characteristics are measured based on attributes such as, purpose of travel, frequency of visit, length of current visit, and travel party. Visitor preconception about local food was measured by three attributes: level of knowledge about local food, previous information obtained by hearing from others about local food, and previous information obtained by reading the information about the local food. The aforementioned discussion has led to the formulation of the following proposition:

Proposition 4: The visitor dining experience with local food in the destination is influenced by internal factors involving socio-demographics, travel-characteristics, past experiences, and visitors' preconceptions or prior knowledge about local food in visited destination.

As mentioned previously by Ryan (2011) the quality of experience is affected by factors that are external to the visitors as well as by the internal characteristics of the visitors. The proposed framework incorporates external factors influencing local food related dining experiences into four, namely: food quality, food cultural-related, physical dining, and social aspects.

First, with respect to the food quality aspect, the literature has shown that a wide range of attributes measuring food quality. They vary from food presentation or appearance, taste, food health-related characteristics, food quantity and variety (Ha & Jang, 2010; Jang, Ha, & Silkes, 2009; Karim & Chi, 2010; Namkung & Jang, 2007, 2008; Raajpoot, 2002; Ryu & Han, 2010; Verbeke & Lopez, 2005). Sulek and Hensley (2004) argue that food quality is one of the most important elements of the dining experience. For instance, the work of Correia et al. (2008) and Namkung and Jang (2007), investigate the associations between food quality and consumer behaviour concepts like satisfaction, behavioural intention, and loyalty. The attributes for measuring the food quality aspects are partially adopted those in Mak et al. (2012) study which include food ingredients, food appearance, and the taste of the food.

Moreover, Cohen and Avieli (2004) advocate that for some international visitors, eating local food can be an impediment when travelling, especially when the destination has a culinary culture that is distinct from what is familiar in home environments. For this group, named by Fischler (1988) as the *food neophobic* group, issues such as food hygiene, 'strange' food ingredients, unfamiliar tastes, can constrain them from trying the local food (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). In contrast to the *food neophobic* group, other visitors, called *food neophilic*, are more open to searching for novel and even strange dishes (Fischler, 1988). Amongst this group, seeking local food becomes a push motivator for visiting a particular destination (Tikkanen, 2007). Experiences of eating the local food allow them to learn a new culture through coming into contact with local residents, eating like the locals, and exploring new cuisines that they are unlikely to encounter at home (Fields, 2002; Hegarty & O'Mahony, 2001). In addition, Beer (2008) puts forth the role of authenticity that visitors anticipate to experience when dining with the local food in the destination. As Pratt (2007) states, the concept of authenticity evokes a range of meanings such as original, genuine, real, true, true to itself. When applied to food, authenticity is a quality attributed to a range of cuisines that are specific to a particular location. Beyond this, authenticity refers to the story and meaning pertaining to place and culture of the food that is embedded as a representation of culture. Indeed, in many cases, for the *food neophilic* group, it is the stories behind the food, such as, the origins of a particular ethnic food, which may have greater appeal than the food itself (Morgan, Watson, & Hemmington, 2008). Accordingly, the visitors can gain a truly authentic cultural experience (Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007), as well as a more satisfying form of engagement with the surrounding people and places (Pratt, 2007). Given the intensity of cultural interactions that the international visitors may experience when dining with local food, it is imperative to incorporate the food cultural-related aspects such as, methods of cooking and ways of eating, food authenticity, and food familiarity in the proposed framework.

Turning to the physical aspect of dining, Henderson et al. (2012) assert that international visitor dining experiences in the destination can occur in various establishments, from dining exclusively in hotels or restaurants to consuming food at street stalls or in food hawker centres. Dining experiences within these places can stimulate various feelings of involvement and place attachment, depending upon the quality of food and service provision (Pendergast, 2006). Moreover, as argued by Sparks, Bowen, and Klag (2004), these aspects are showcases for the culture and influence overall destination experiences through the process of forming connections with the host culture. With reference to this aspect, Cutler and Carmichael (2010) in their model suggest that the physical aspects of visitor experiences should consider spatial and place-based elements of the destination. In the service context, this often refers to the concept of servicescape – the physical environment that influences perceptions of service – (Bitner, 1992). Meanwhile, the atmosphere of the foodservice is defined as the "individual emotional total experience throughout the entire meal including social experience, comfort, and intimacy" (Hansen, Jensen, & Gustafsson, 2005, p. 145). In the proposed framework, the physical dining aspects refer to the dining atmosphere, type of dining establishment where the experience with local food is occurring (e.g. restaurants or street food stalls), and the cleanliness of the dining environment.

The aforementioned discussion has indicated the salient role of food quality, food culture-related, and physical dining aspects, thus, they are incorporated as factors outside the visitors that affect their dining on local food at each stage of experience. In addition to these aspects,

the literature has noted that the provision of memorable dining experiences is also determined by the capacity of the staff providing the service and delivering the food. For instance, Gibbs and Ritchie (2010) in their study reveal that the capacity of the staff providing the service and delivering the food is considered as one key determinant of the provision of memorable dining experiences. Likewise, Wall and Berry (2007) highlight the significant impact of employee quality on customer expectations towards dining experiences. There has been growing attention in the literature to the importance of dining experience as a means of fulfilling visitor social needs when they travel to a destination (Antun, Frash, Costen, & Runyan, 2010; Batra, 2008; Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Morgan et al., 2008). Ignatov and Smith's (2006) study for example, reveals that spending time with family and friends is a significant reason for choosing to eat local food in a destination setting. Similarly, Kim and Lee's (2012) study also highlights the significant role of other customers as a part of the social aspect in shaping visitor dining expectations. In light of this view, both the interactions with service personnel as well as with other people (e.g. friends, family, and other people in the dining place such as the locals) are considered as the social aspects and are incorporated within the framework as the external influential factor of the visitor dining experiences. Based on the above discussion, it is proposed that:

Proposition 5: The visitor dining experience with local food in the destination is influenced by external factors including food quality aspects, food cultural-related aspects, physical aspects, and social aspects.

4. Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

The literature reviewed in this paper has shown the complexity of the visitor experience as comprising multiple phases, the influence of multiple factors, and multiple outcomes. Meanwhile, considering the increased role of culinary tourism in stimulating international visitation, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of how visitors respond to local food related dining experiences. This conceptual paper should be seen as a preliminary attempt to provide a more profound basis for understanding local food related dining experiences by international visitors in the destination context. The proposed framework views dining experiences as the sequential relationships amongst three stages of dining, where in each stage, both internal and external factors contribute to affecting the outcomes of experiences.

However, the proposed framework is not all-encompassing. It will be important to undertake an empirical assessment of the validity of the framework and propositions that have been proposed. Since the framework has developed comprehensively, it should be assessed comprehensively. In other words, a systematic empirical investigation is required with a view to assessing the complexities and the relationships of various stages, factors, and outcomes involving visitor dining experiences.

Given the current lack of studies focusing on investigating visitor local food related dining experiences systematically, the proposed framework can be adapted into the empirical study both by other researchers and DMOs to provide an in-depth knowledge pertaining to how international visitors experience local food dining. This action is particularly important for DMOs which seek to utilise food tourism as a means of enhancing destination attractiveness.

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