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# Authenticity and Nostalgia: A Gastronomic Experience of a Local Food Night Market

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# **Authenticity and Nostalgia: A Gastronomic Experience of a Local Food Night Market**

## **Introduction**

Recent years have witnessed many destination marketers utilizing gastronomy as a source of new products and activities to attract tourists and provide recreational opportunities for their residents. Gastronomy is the study of all related to man as he is eating, and as such food is recognized as a key component of tourism (Chaney & Ryan, 2012; Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2011). Offering local food to visitors creates a new component to the image of tourism destinations, which makes combining gastronomy and tourism an attractive strategy for marketing and branding a destination. Furthermore, gastronomy goes beyond food; rather, due to the intrinsic connections between food and culture, researchers widely accept that gastronomy plays a critical role in tourism and destination marketing by not only providing unique local food products, but also conveying a sense of the heritage and cultural identity of the host communities (Chaney & Ryan, 2012; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Sims, 2009). The rise of the experience economy has ushered in a growing role for food experiences in tourism. As stated by Quan and Wang (2004), food experience can be highlighted as the peak experience during one's vacation. Therefore, understanding antecedents and consequences of visitors' food experiences in a destination is of paramount significance to the place.

As visitors are increasingly seeking local experiences characteristics of the places they visit, among the important determinants, authenticity has gained increasing attention in food tourism research (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017; Robinson & Clifford, 2012). Another equally important concept is nostalgia, as producing nostalgia has become a widespread business practice in modern world (Holbrook, 1993; Weaver, 2011). While nostalgia can be associated with a sentimentalized past and evoked through food products and tourism in addition to many others, the relationship between nostalgia and the perceived authenticity warrants greater research attention (Kim, 2005). Therefore, this study attempted to incorporate this concept, as nostalgic feelings can be evoked by an authentic food experience in a setting of hawker-filled street (Robinson & Clifford, 2012). In addition, this research aimed to examine the effects of visitors' food experiences on their attitude towards local food, the image of Macao as a gastronomy tourism destination, and revisit intention (Choe & Kim, 2018).

## **Literature Review**

The concept of authenticity was introduced to the field of tourism by Boorstin (1961) and MacCannell (1973). Tourists are constantly searching for authenticity. In their quest for authentic experiences, tourists tend to look back to those "good old days", which makes nostalgia an important element (Kim, 2005). In discussing food tourism authenticity, Beer (2008) proposed a dualistic view including both the objective and subjective domains that "The legal basis of this authenticity (object authenticity?) is constructed by consensus (constructivist authenticity?), and we may choose to engage with it in whatever way we wish (postmodern authenticity)". Robinson and Clifford (2012) applied this dualistic authenticity framework to a medieval festival and derived two dimensions of food event authenticity: foodservice authenticity and servicescape (or atmosphere) authenticity. They also verified that both aspects of food event authenticity exerted positive influence on visitor experiences. The authenticity of ethnic restaurants could also be

understood from both objective and subjective perspectives: food authenticity and environment authenticity (Liu, Li, DiPietro, & Levitt, 2018). In investigating an Italian food festival, Mason and Paggiaro (2012) highlighted that festivalscape has a direct influence on visitors emotional experiences. When the event is created in a historical setting, the atmosphere is capable of evoking a desire for the past, nostalgia being an emotion (Wilks & Kelly, 2008) and referred to as “an individual’s longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday, or a fondness for possessions and activities associated with days of yore” (Holbrook, 1993, p. 245). Chen, Yeh, and Huan (2014) contended that nostalgia is an important element for a nostalgic restaurant and suggested that nostalgic emotions positively influence experiential value as well as restaurant image.

Many destinations view their food and cuisine as a market strategy that represents a core element of these destinations’ invisible heritages as cultural characteristics and local features embedded in food can be developed into an international brand (Horng & Tsai, 2012). Therefore, unique cuisines can not only enhance the attractiveness of tourism destinations but also improve the culinary cultural image of a destination (Horng & Tsai, 2012). In examining tourists visiting Hong Kong, Choe and Kim (2018) revealed that when tourists have favorable attitudes towards local food, they are likely to perceive Hong Kong as a gastronomy destination, and tend to recommend and revisit Hong Kong for its food as well. Along the similar line, Horng and Tsai (2010) also found that greater brand image is positively associated with a tourist’s travel intention in the context of cultural tourism.

Based on the literature reviewed, a conceptual model was proposed (Figure 1) and hypotheses developed.

H1: Food authenticity is positively related to nostalgia.

H2: Atmosphere authenticity is positively related to nostalgia.

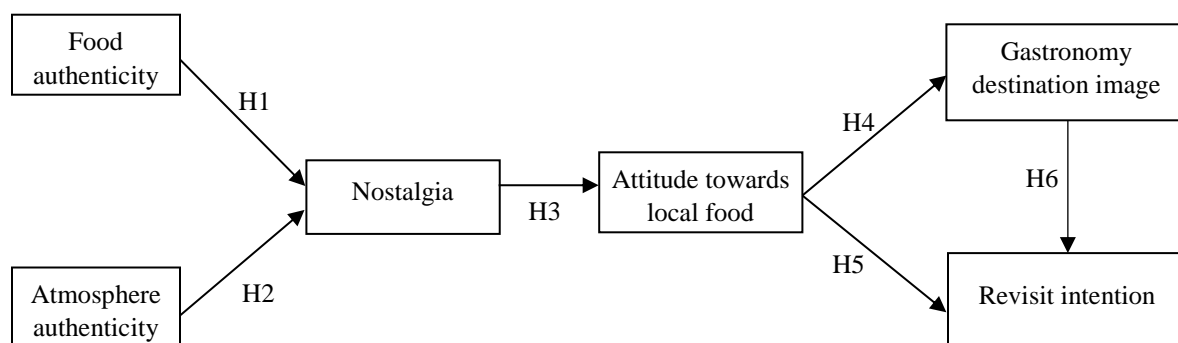
H3: Nostalgia is positively related to attitude towards local food.

H4: Attitude towards local food is positively related to gastronomy destination image.

H5: Attitude towards local food is positively related to revisit intention.

H6: Gastronomy destination image is positively related to revisit intention.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model



## **Methodology**

The research population for this study was defined as tourists attending the Hong Kung Night Market in Macao. The night market is a periodic event, taking place on Saturdays and Sundays. When this study was conducted, the cycle of the event was from June to July. The night market is located along the Ruo de Cinco De Outubro, one of the famous old streets in Macao. This street was the busiest street in the 20th century, which still has a look of the 1940s. The night market mainly sells local traditional street food, snacks, along with traditional crafts. A convenience sampling method was employed. Prior to data collection, the surveyors were trained on interviewee selection and survey administration to enhance the efficiency and ensure survey credibility. The surveyors were also instructed to collect data on all the Saturdays and Sundays during June and July. A convenience sample of 399 tourists was drawn.

Questionnaire was designed for the data collection in English. Using a back-to-back translation method, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese by two bilingual researchers, and back translated into English by a third bilingual research. Modifications were then made to ensure the conceptual consistency of the items in English and Chinese. All items were adopted from relevant literature. The first part of the instrument consisted of 12 items to measure tourists' perceived authenticity of the food night market, among which eight items were used to assess food-related authenticity, and the other four atmosphere-related authenticity (Robinson & Clifford, 2012). The second construct is nostalgia measured with eight items from Chen et al. (2014). A four-item scale was adopted and modified to assess the respondents' attitudes toward local food (Choe & Kim, 2018; Phillips, Asperin, & Wolfe, 2013). Five items were used to measure the respondents' perceived gastronomy destination image of Macao (Choe & Kim, 2018). Intention to revisit Macao as a gastronomy destination was measured with three items (Choe & Kim, 2018). The wordings of all items were modified to fit in the context of the Hong Kung Night Market. The items were measured by a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. In addition, demographic information was gathered, including gender, age, education, marital status, and monthly income.

SPSS24 and AMOS24 were used to analyze the data. First, descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the respondents' profile. Second, a two-stage procedure proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was employed to examine the overall measurement model with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), followed by structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine all the hypothesized paths.

## **Results**

Of the 399 respondents, 58.6% of them were female. As for age, 40.6% of them were between 26 to 35 years old, followed by 27.8% of respondents falling within the range between 36 to 45 years old. Most of the respondents held a bachelor's degree (66.2%). Regarding their marital status, 50.1% of the respondents were single (51%), and 44.6% were married. Their monthly income levels varied, with 45.4% earning an income between MOP 10,001 to 20,000, and 27.6% not exceeding MOP 10,000.

CFA was performed to test the overall measurement model with constructs including food authenticity, atmosphere authenticity, nostalgia, attitude towards local food, gastronomy destination image, and revisit intention to Macao as a gastronomy destination. The first round of

CFA suggested that three items removed from food authenticity and one from atmosphere authenticity due to low loadings. The second round of CFA produced satisfactory results. Multiple fit indices indicated that the overall measurement model fit the data well (CFI = .950, TLI= .943, RMSEA = .057, SRMR = .043). In addition, all the standardized factor loadings were significant at 0.001 level, ranging from .722 to .878. Composite reliability coefficients and extract variance estimates for all the constructs were all above the cutoff values of .70 and .50 respectively, suggesting the measurement model has convergent validity (Table 1). Discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE of each construct with other constructs. The results indicated that the measurement model also demonstrated discriminant validity (Table 2). Therefore, the overall measurement model was acceptable. SEM was then performed to test the hypothesized paths. The structural model also had adequate model fit (CFI = .942, TLI= .936, RMSEA = .060, SRMR = .084). All the paths were significant. In addition, all the relationships were positive suggesting that all six hypotheses were supported (Table 3).

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Results from this study empirically verified that food authenticity and atmosphere authenticity could elicit their nostalgic feelings, which would positively influence their attitude towards local food and make them perceive Macao more as a gastronomy destination and come back for more local food consumption. Therefore, this study highlighted that evaluation of the authenticity of tourism experience, a local food night market experience in this case, is related to the nostalgic feelings toward the distant past (Kim, 2005). Furthermore, atmosphere authenticity is more influential in triggering nostalgia than food authenticity, suggesting that authentic food products plus an interesting setting could render the experience more sentimental. This is in line with Mason and Paggiaro (2012) who claimed that the context where a food festival takes place is of great intrigue to visitors and would influence their behavior consequently. In addition, they asserted that the context or festivalscape is significantly related with their emotional experience and evaluation of the festival. The results also indicated that the authentic and nostalgic food experience can also help create a gastronomy image for a destination that is well known otherwise, and help attract new visitors and diversify its tourism products in the long term (Sims, 2009).

The findings also provide some managerial implications for night market organizers. First, it is necessary to maintain the authenticity of the night market by providing more traditional and tasty local delights. In addition, atmosphere of the night market plays a major role in tourists' food experience. As Hong Kung night market is rather small in scale, it is recommended that more such night markets could be developed. However, when creating more night markets, it is recommended these night markets be extended to neighboring old streets. These would help engage more tourists in gastronomic experiences and enhance Macao's image as a gastronomy destination.

**Table 1.** CFA results

<b>Factor and indicators</b>	<b>Standardized loading</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>
<b>Food authenticity</b>		0.902	0.648
The food & beverage are produced authentic to those old days in Macao	0.812		
The food & beverage are of traditional Macao	0.831		
The food & beverage are unique to those old days in Macao	0.869		
The food & beverage ingredients are authentic to those old days in Macao	0.782		
The food & beverage tastes authentic to those old days in Macao	0.722		
<b>Atmosphere authenticity</b>		0.883	0.715
An authentic traditional Macao atmosphere is created	0.824		
Local hawkers add to the authentic traditional Macao atmosphere	0.860		
The streetscape adds to the authentic traditional Macao atmosphere	0.853		
<b>Nostalgia (The night market makes me feel...)</b>		0.945	0.682
the serenity of simple life	0.802		
searching for some feeling within me	0.860		
revisiting my childhood	0.851		
remembering how things used to be	0.878		
memories in the life of past era	0.863		
the past is better	0.795		
the changing of time	0.764		
remembering something from the past	0.784		
<b>Attitude towards local food (My attitude towards local food &amp; beverage in Macao is...)</b>		0.866	0.617
very pleasant	0.751		
very good	0.791		
very favorable	0.818		
very positive	0.781		
<b>Gastronomy destination image (Overall, I think that Macao, as a tourism destination, provide...)</b>		0.906	0.660
rich food and beverage culture	0.781		
diverse food and beverage	0.778		
traditional food and beverage culture	0.838		
delicious food and beverage	0.859		
unique food and beverage	0.802		
<b>Revisit intention (After experiencing the night market, I would like to ...)</b>		0.849	0.652
revisit Macao to explore diverse local food and beverage in near future	0.793		
travel to Macao for food and beverage in near future	0.820		
come back to Macao to enjoy its food and beverage in near future	0.810		
Note: all factor loadings are significant at .001 level; CR=composite reliability, AVE=average variance extracted (CFI = .950, TLI= .943, RMSEA = .057, SRMR = .043)			

**Table 2.** Correlation Matrix of Constructs

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Food authenticity	<b>0.805</b>					
2 Atmosphere authenticity	0.792	<b>0.846</b>				
3 Nostalgia	0.726	0.788	<b>0.826</b>			
4 Attitude towards local food	0.459	0.550	0.505	<b>0.786</b>		
5 Gastronomy destination image	0.535	0.584	0.506	0.737	<b>0.812</b>	
6 Revisit intention	0.475	0.485	0.443	0.550	0.562	<b>0.808</b>

Note: Diagonal values indicated the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct.

**Table 3.** Path coefficients

Hypothesized Paths	standardized coefficient	t value	
H1: food authenticity --> nostalgia	0.271	3.817***	Support
H2: atmosphere authenticity --> nostalgia	0.580	7.625***	Support
H3: nostalgia --> attitude towards local food	0.556	9.532***	Support
H4: attitude towards local food--> gastronomy destination image	0.755	11.942***	Support
H5: attitude towards local food--> revisit intention	0.340	3.818***	Support
H6: gastronomy destination image --> revisit intention	0.306	3.528***	Support

CFI = .942, TLI = .936, RMSEA = .060, SRMR = .084; \*\*\*p<0.001;

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