

A Study on the Precursors for Gastronomic Satisfaction of Tourists in Malaysia

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Abstract: This paper aims to contextualize the idea of food tourism, not only as an attention-grabbing field of research, but in the contention that it can be utilized as a wider theoretical lens to propose a system for rationally identifying preferences of food / gastronomy / culinary tourists. This paper will make an attempt to put forward the insights currently underpinning the latest progress towards a more culturally responsive and critically orientated tourism research. More to the point, this study will be able to facilitate the practitioners to gain insights on the factors affecting satisfaction of tourists which will in turn lead to a boost in visits by foreign tourists to Malaysia. A conceptual framework consisting of 4 independent variables and 1 dependent variable has been proposed. Since there are limited numbers of studies on Gastronomy tourism in Malaysia, there is a need to study this significant topic.

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction, Tourism, Culinary, Cuisine, Food Tourism*

1. Introduction

Tourism is deemed to be one of the most vital export industries (Shahin & Dabestani, 2010; Yong, Keng, & Leng, 1993) and it has been both a reason and the recipient of the long-standing period of economic development witnessed in recent decades (George and Alexander, 2012). Tourism is about spaces and places that are rooted in cultures, economies, and social lives of countries and communities (Saila and Mika, 2011). Tourism has provided enjoyment, variety, respite and amusement to innumerable numbers of traveller and holiday makers. Tourism is a commonly recommended solution for regions that have declined economically (Liu and Wall, 2006; Ramjee et al. 2010; Seetanah, 2011). According to Geoffrey Lacher and Chi-Ok Oh (2012) along with carving the path for industrial diversity, tourism puts forward the promise of generating many employment opportunities, and these new jobs possibly will stimulate accelerated economic development. In what went before, tourism has been frequently linked merely to visual, sightseeing or gazing (Urry, 1990). Nevertheless, this predicament and inadequacy have been conceded by several researchers. Consequently Urry (2002) stated that tourism must take account of diverse "sensecapes", such as "tastescapes" and "smellscapes". In the similar line, Everett & Aitchison (2008) also argued that tourism should be further than just visual gazing and advocates that there should be a place for food tourism within a critical tourism research agenda. Zainal, Zali and Kassim (2010) established that food is an element that characterizes the appeal and charisma of a destination other than the weather, accommodation and striking landscape. Food has a strategic significance in the economy of every country. Concurrently, it has an immense predominance in the institution of a quantitatively and qualitatively satisfactory tourism industry. Food as a marketing device on the macro level has been often disregarded; as the product is mostly perishable, it fluctuates from person to person and disparities are inadequately identified (Boyne, Hall, & Williams, 2003), however through closer inspection, food tourism holds the impending potential to aid the restoration of several communities, whether they are just beginning to gaze at the tourist market or whether they are institutions and establishments streamlining their marketing strategies.

A country's food can be a decisive aspect of a destination's reflection and this idea has constantly been drawn in advertising as well (Lawrence, Wei-Wen and Yu-Ting, 2012). It has also been revealed that tourists pay out nearly 40% of their funds on food when travelling (Boyne, Williams, & Hall, 2002). Thus, food is an important constituent of the tourist product. Besides that, food tourism also profiles gastro destinations such as France, Italy, and California. In developing tourist attractions such as Croatia, Vietnam and Mexico, food portrays a central component of the overall experience (Paul, 2010). The appeal of food to tourists has been documented by destination marketers at a national, regional and local level (Frochot, 2003; Okumus et al., 2006). The availability of good food and an absence of any apprehension concerning food cleanliness have been addressed as a strength and opportunity in the context of food tourism (Joan, 2009). Malaysia and Singapore, as an exemplar, are depicted as

representative of the multiculturalism in both states where Chinese, Indian, Malay, Eurasian, Western, other cuisines and “fusion” food are all on sale from hawker centres to fine dining (STB, 2005; Tourism Malaysia, 2007). According to Tourism Malaysia (2012), it is imperative to focus the spotlight on ASEAN travellers, as in the year 2011, 42 percent (29.4 million) out of the total 70 million travellers who travel to ASEAN countries are travellers from within ASEAN countries. The Malaysian government has also started to give emphasis to gastronomy tourism in Malaysia. It appears that, culinary tourism which is typically deemed only as a sustaining niche product will now showcase Malaysia’s food to be known as “Malaysia Truly a Kitchen” (Zainal, Zali and Kassim, 2010). It is time for the tourism academy to mobilize food tourism out of the ‘grey zone’ of cultural and traditional tourism and recognize its intangible prospects (Scarpato, 2002). Instituted on these perspectives, one can strongly hold that local and regional food is a strong attribute that can append value to a destination and can add towards well-organized marketing of a destination (du Rand Heath and Albert, 2006).

2. Literature Review

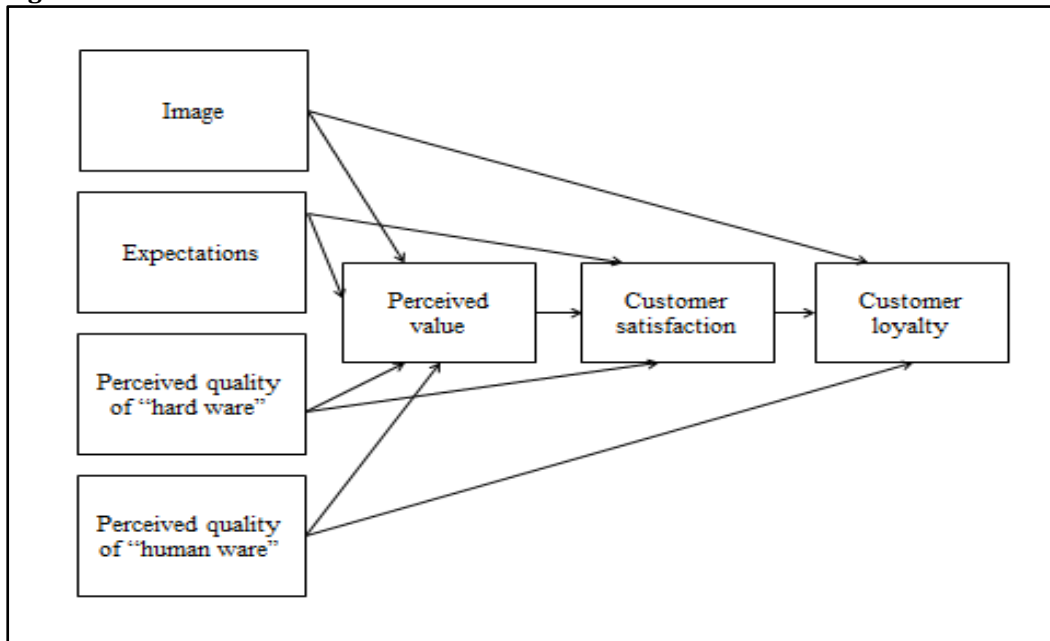
Food and tourism enclose an exceedingly close connection. Food is a vital tourism resource (Henderson, 2004; Quan and Wang, 2004). It is essential for physical nourishment which tourists inevitably require while travelling. However food can be a chief and crucial motivator which gratifies a variety of physiological and other needs and wants (Joan, 2009; Tikkanen, 2007). Food consumption in the broad perspective is acknowledged as an anthology of contextual and evolving social customs, (Athena, Margaret, and Anita, 2012) where food no longer merely sets out as provisions but in addition an approach to relate to other people in social, cultural and political terms (Oosterveer, 2006). Hall and Mitchell (2001) define food tourism as “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and / or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the motivating factor for travel” (p. 308). In her book, *Exotic Appetites*, Lisa Heldke (2003) attributes to gastronomic tourists as “food adventurers” who are on a continuous pursuit for newness in their eating experiences. She elucidates that food lovers are “those people for whom eating is an expedition into the unknown, a pursuit of the strange” (p. xxi). Relying heavily on associations of food as symbolic of geographical or cultural differences, culinary tourism provides opportunities for tourists to “taste” the contrariety. Gastronomic experiences render an important role in shaping perceptions and contentment with the overall travel *savoir-faire* (Neild et al., 2000; Remington and Yuksel, 1998) and food apparently demonstrates the power to invade on tourist mind-sets, choices and behavior (Hjalanger and Corigliano, 2000). As regards to gastronomic tourism, Santich (2004) postulates that it is “tourism or travel motivated, at least in part, by an interest in food and drink, eating and drinking” (p. 20). Santich in continuation also affirms that gastronomic tourism is about involving yourself in another culture, connected with a particular place and people.

People are nowadays travelling more for the motives of gastronomy (Bessiere, 1998; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Long, 2004). As a consequence, food tourism, in its wide-ranging sense, has acquired a superior profile as a pull factor in destination marketing (Boniface, 2003; Cohen & Evieli, 2004; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Hjalager & Richards, 2002). According to (Bendegul, Fevzi & Bob, 2007) food can render a pivotal role in setting apart destinations in an evocative manner. Since cuisines are ‘branded’ by nationality; (Chinese, French, Italian, Turkish, Mexican, etc.), the opportunity exists to generate a constructive alliance between a style of food and a destination. Food linked tourism can let tourists accomplish preferred aspirations of recreation, exhilaration, diversion, status, and lifestyle (Frochot, 2003). With deference to food-related matters in destination responsiveness, Sparks et al (2001) and Sparks et al (2003) call attention to the significant contributions a restaurant can put together to a tourism destination. They underline restaurants as a significant constituent of tourist attraction, which may possibly influence tourists’ behaviour and overall satisfaction with a destination.

Figure 1.0 is a basic ECSI model which is a structural equation model with latent variables. The model connects customer satisfaction to its driver, and finally to customer loyalty. The drivers for customer satisfaction are perceived image, customer expectations, perceived quality and lastly the value for money. The perceived quality can be divided into (1) hard ware – the quality of the product or service attributes and (2) human ware – customer interactive elements in the service.

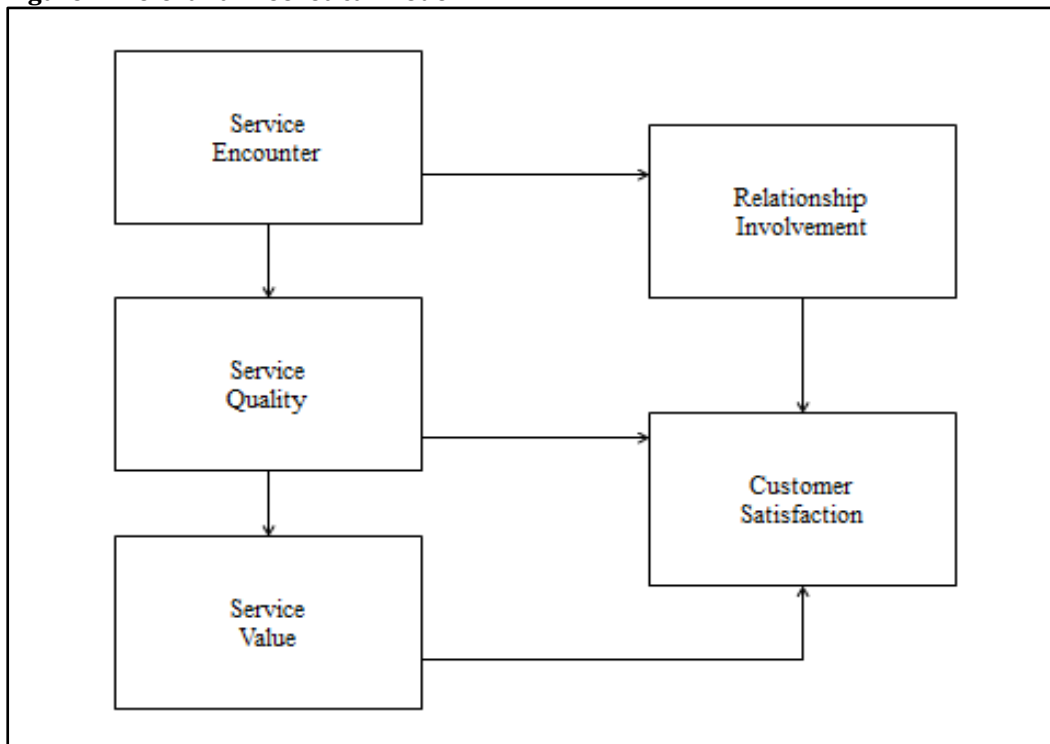
3. Review of Relevant Theoretical Models

Figure 1: Relevant Theoretical Model 1



Adopted from: Juhl, H. J., Kristensen, K., & Ostergaard, P. (2002). Customer satisfaction in European food retailing. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 9, 327-334.

Figure 2: Relevant Theoretical Model 2

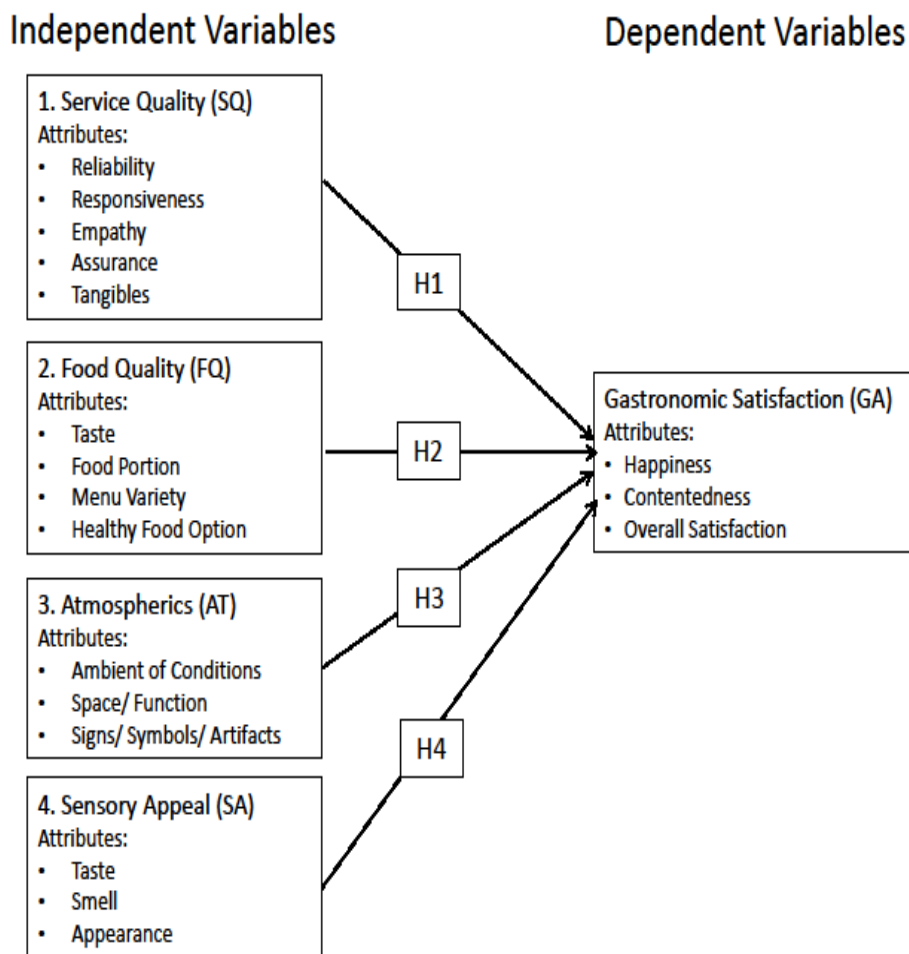


Adopted from: Lin, W. B. (2007). The exploration of customer satisfaction model from a comprehensive perspective. *Expert System with Applications*, 33, 110-121.

Figure 2 is a customer satisfaction model from a comprehensive perspective of relationship involvement, service encounter, service quality, and service value.

Proposed Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

Figure 3: Proposed Conceptual Framework



Adapted from: Ha, J. & Jang, S. C. (2010). Effects of service quality and food quality: The moderating role of atmospherics in an ethnic restaurant segment. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 29, 520-259.

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between five attributes which will affect the customer satisfaction. The proposed conceptual framework consists of variables that appear repetitively in other research framework, thus, the model has been adapted and proposed in this research.

4. Discussion of Variables

Customer Satisfaction: In accordance to Correia, Moital, Costa and Peres (2008), consumer satisfaction from a tourism perspective can be described as the degree to which the consumers' performance criterion is being discharged by the destination. Studies demonstrate that there are several components that confer to the dining experience. One of them is atmospherics. Atmospherics can be regarded as one of the important rudiments of dining experience. The atmosphere can have an effect on one's emotions and expectations concerning service and food quality (Baker et al., 1994; Reimer and Kuehn, 2005; Wall and Berry, 2007). According to Ha and Jang (2010), the so-called level of atmospherics can boost or decrease the outcome of perceived quality on satisfaction and affirmative post-consumption behaviours. In addition, atmospherics may perhaps comprise a moderating role in between quality perception and consumer behaviours. The magnitude of service quality as well as food quality also have been highlighted from the previous studies as the customers' sensitivity of quality covers a considerable impact on customers' satisfaction which will pilot towards an affirmative post-consumption behaviour, including

loyalty (Olsen, 2002; Martinez and Martinez, 2010). In the expressions of service quality, research illustrates that a high quality employee service will result in a higher customer satisfaction which will lead to higher levels of affirmative post-consumption behaviour such as revisiting, positive word of mouth or recommending the restaurant to others (Chow et al., 2007; Cronin et al., 2000; Oliver, 1999). Besides service quality, the same pertains to food quality as well. Food quality has been regarded as a main building block of customers' dining experiences which will impinge on the customers' satisfaction which subsequently determines the post behaviours (Kivela et al., 2000; Namkung and Jang, 2007). When customers are satisfied with the gastronomy product (gastronomic satisfaction) it will lead to customer satisfaction. According to Day (1984), customer satisfaction can be characterized as a post purchase evaluative opinion with reference to the purchase decision. Tourist satisfaction has been the focal point of a number of studies (Correia, Moital, Costa and Peres, 2008).

Soderlund and Ohman (2005) examined the function of purchasing intentions as a link involving satisfaction and revisit behaviour. The outcome of the study confirmed that customer satisfaction is decidedly associated to intentions. The unsurpassed theory that elucidates customer satisfaction is the Expectancy-Disconfirmation theory which was pioneered by Lewin (1938). There are three likely situations in this theory: (1) confirmation occurs when actual performance matches expectations; (2) positive disconfirmation occurs when actual performance exceeds expectation which in turns lead to satisfaction; and lastly (3) negative disconfirmation occurs when actual performance is of poorer quality than expected which results in dissatisfaction. This approach to customer satisfaction is purely based on cognitive process of expectations (Oliver, 1980, 1989). On the other hand, researchers assume that merely considering the cognitive aspect may prove insufficient. As a consequence, by bringing into play the performance-based approach, scores of studies persisted to integrate cognitive judgments and affective reactions (Lin, 2004; Mano and Oliver, 1993; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991). According to Ha and Jang (2010), customer satisfaction is viewed as a cognitive assessment of service or food quality and affective aspects brought in through by consumption experiences.

Service Quality: Service quality is defined as consumers' perceptions or subjective judgments of a service's overall excellence or superiority (Aaker and Jacobson, 1994). However, a consumer's subjective judgment of quality can be influenced by the personal service experiences, unique needs, as well as consumption situations (Palmer, 2005). Service quality unlike product quality is difficult to measure due to its inherently abstract and elusive characteristics (Parasuraman et al., 1988). There are two perspectives for service quality: (1) The customer's cognitive evaluation of the service provided (Taylor and Baker, 1994); (2) Multidimensional construct created by an evaluation of attribute performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Service quality can be measured using SERVQUAL which was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988). It consists of five dimensions: Reliability, Responsiveness, Empathy, Assurance, and Tangibles. SERVQUAL has been applied in several studies to assess service quality in service-related situations (Caruana et al., 2000; Lee and Lambert, 2000). However, according to Nam and Lee (2011), there are many researchers (e.g., Carmen, 1990; Ekinci et al., 1998; Parasuraman et al., 1994) thinks that not all dimensions are necessary. According to Nikolich and Sparks (1995), the perceived levels of service in restaurants are based on the relationship between customers and service providers thus in this study, service quality will refers to the level of service provided by the restaurant employees.

Food Quality: Food quality is one of the most critical components of a dining experience (Namkung and Jang, 2007; Sulek and Hensley, 2004). Clark and Wood (1999) found that food quality is one of the major factors that influence customer loyalty in restaurant choice. Besides that, Susskind and Chan (2000) states food quality is a key determinant for visiting a restaurant from the customer's perspective and Mattila (2001) consider food quality as a key predictor of customer loyalty in casual-dining restaurants. Food quality is the most important element of customer satisfaction when it is compared with other aspects of the restaurant. Recently, a positive relationship between food quality and satisfaction or behavioral intentions is tested and found by Namkung and Jang (2007). Food quality can be measured by using several attributes. According to Kivela et al. (2000), the attributes of food quality comprises of tastiness of food, menu variety, and nutrition to examine the effect of excellent food on customer satisfaction and revisit intentions. On the other hand, Raajpoot (2002) uses food presentation, serving size, menu design, and variety of food to measure food quality in the foodservice industry while Namkung and Jang (2007) took presentation, menu item variety, healthy options, taste, freshness, and temperature to judge food quality. According to Sulek and Hensley (2004), there are three general food characteristics that determine the quality: safety, appeal, and dietary acceptability.

Sensory Appeal: According to Yoon and Park (2011), human senses are powerful and incredible information collection system. From that information, ones' able to create and recreate images of surrounding situations and intuitively and instantaneously process the sensory information to make forthcoming decisions. According to Lindstrom (2005), the studies between sensory appeals and brand effectiveness suggests that consumer brand loyalty results from sensory perceptions of superior brand experience, leadership, as well as clarity. Besides that, the study also shows that all five senses (taste, smell, sight, sound, and touch) have different stages of impact on loyalty. The greatest influence is taste, followed by smell, sound, touch, and sight. Yoon and Park (2011) also suggest that the five senses play an important part in assisting us understanding the world by recalling the resident information stored in our memories, thus, sensory system is important in encoding, retrieving, and reconstructing information. In tourism setting, sensory can be one of the motives in food selection (Lau, Krondl, & Coleman, 1984; Rappaport Peters, Huff-Corzine, & Downey, 1992; Bell & Marshalls, 2003). Besides that, the Food Choices Questionnaire (Stephoe et al., 1995) and the Food Motivations Scale (Martins & Pliner, 1998), suggest that sensory factor is one of the motivations underlying individuals' everyday food choices. Study done by Laureati, Pagliarini, Calcinoni and Bidoglio (2006) found that the most important senses during food consumptions is taste and followed by smell and appearance of food. Susheela (1998) claimed that tasty food will leads the consumers to indulge in tasty food and allow the consumers to experience the variety of local food with different herbs and spices. Besides that, Kim et al. (2009), shows that the appearance of local food such as well displayed and good cooking performance is a motivational factor in providing sensory pleasure to tourists. Dann and Jacobsen (2002) concluded that the sensory experience can be satisfied through the smell and taste of local food during ones' visitation to a destination.

5. Discussions

First and foremost, building and projecting positive and favorable food image for tourist's minds is considered as vital element in promoting Malaysian food worldwide and generating their behaviors owing to the image has been proved to be an imperative element in the selection of a destination for ideal vacation. Food tourism offers a conceptual means of expression to tail a more culturally conscious tourism schema. The rationale of this paper is to consider the inputs of food with particular indication to the magnitude of food tourism and the dynamics which are crucial to its accomplishment. People are now travelling for motives of gastronomy. Food and beverage can form one of the most vital elements of a country's economy as food tourism emerges to be flourishing with tremendous prospects. This research offers an insight and enhanced understanding into a number of refined and practical propositions for practitioners and policy makers on the antecedent contributing to gastronomic satisfaction so that they can plan appropriate strategies that satisfy needs and wants of foreign tourists in Malaysia. This research provides an insight on several refined and practical implications for practitioners and policy makers. The results of this study can assist managers in order to have a better understanding on the antecedent contributing to gastronomic satisfaction so that they manage to project suitable strategies that satisfy tourist's needs and wants.

Probable Limitations of the Study: Firstly this study will be limited to gastronomic satisfaction in Malaysia. The results therefore arrived at, may not be adequate to generalize the perspectives of other countries especially the Western countries. This is owing to the differences in cultural settings and service offerings existing between Malaysia and the rest of the world. Secondly, the study will have its main focus on gastronomic satisfaction. Other aspects of tourism would not be directly covered and hence a holistic approach would not be attained, as relevancy and reliability of findings may be hampered across other dimensions of the service industry, particularly tourism. Thirdly, incomplete or manipulated information would be another concern while collecting questionnaires. Respondents may not be willing to provide precise and accurate information beyond their comfort zone which in their opinion may be personal especially when they have to provide the information in black and white. It cannot be denied that these limitations are well-acknowledged; yet, they will not detract from the significance of findings but merely provide new platforms for future research.

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