

Gastronomy and Tourism: A Psychological Analysis of the Role of Gastronomy in Tourism

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Abstract

There is a famous saying that goes “We are what we eat”- which implies that food is something that not only gives us nourishment and fuels our body, but the food is a symbol of identity. Food is an important part of our cultural heritage. Culinary cultures, including food habits, cooking methods, use of different ingredients, history of origin, and significance of a specific dish or cuisine are an important part of every culture across the world. In the era of globalization where traditions are getting fused with modernity, it is impacting the regional culinary cultures as well. But within this process of fusion, efforts are also being made to promote traditional culinary cultures. Tourism is an effective way to promote local cultures. Local cuisines and even local products could be showcased to the visitors. Gastronomic tourism which is becoming popular helps destinations to develop based on food. Psychology influences the decision-making of the tourist. On one hand, it influences the tourist's motivation to travel, and the choice of a destination, the perception, and attitude towards it. On the other, by understanding tourist psychology, the destination could prepare as per their requirement to provide them with a satisfying and memorable experience. This paper aims to understand the interrelation between gastronomy and tourism and a psychological analysis of gastronomy's role in tourism development.

Keywords: Gastronomy, Tourism, Food, Food culture, Psychology, Tourist.

Introduction

Food is a part of our lives whether at home or outside. It is not just an essential source of nourishment, but it reflects culture, identity, and emotions. It is an integral part of our cultural heritage. So, while traveling people are motivated to try different delicacies and experience new food culture. With this concept tourist destinations developed based on local food culture. Because every place has some unique food practices and unique flavours that are a part of their local culture. In recent times, the relationship between food and tourism has increased manifold which gave rise to the concept of food tourism or gastronomical tourism.

People's food preferences are influenced by a range of psychological factors. It is important for both the tourist and the service providers to understand the psychological factors for an enjoyable and memorable experience.

Gastronomical Tourism: Meaning

The term gastronomy derives from the two Greek words ‘gastros’ meaning stomach and ‘gnomos’ meaning knowledge. Gastronomy can be understood as the systematic study of food practice and knowledge related to food. Gastronomy refers to the comprehensive world of food, drink, and regional foodways.

One of the notable works in gastronomy has been the nineteenth-century research of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *La Physiologie du Gout*, translated into English as *Physiology of Taste*. It was first published in 1825, which highlighted the importance and the specific qualities of different ingredients to construct a delectable harmony in culinary composition.

According to the definition given by UNTWO - “Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure.” (UNTWO n.d.) Tourism allows people to gather a variety of experiences. It gives people a direct experience of a destination, including different landscapes, climates, and lifestyles, as well as food and culture. Traveling allows people to explore and closely observe food and culture that are distinct from their own. Exploring and tasting local and traditional cuisines, as well as attempting to understand their cultures, can add

interesting and unique experiences to the journey. It creates enticing memories of the destination that the tourist takes with them.

Based on the interest of the visitors in experiencing local culinary culture several destinations developed based on their local foods. Food Tourism includes in its discourse ethical and sustainable values based on the territory, the landscape, the sea, local culture, local products, and authenticity, which is something it has in common with current trends of cultural consumption. (Global Report on Food Tourism 2012, 5) Food tourism encompasses traveling to specific locations in order to enjoy culinary cultures which includes both tasting local cuisines and experiencing culinary customs associated with it. (SANTO 2022) It is an important part of tourism as it allows visitors to learn about different cultures through their food and drinks. It creates a memorable gastronomic experience which not only makes the vacation memorable and enticing but also has the potential to influence a traveller's dietary habits and preferences. Such experiences are very powerful sources of memory inscribed into a person's life forever.

Role of psychology in tourism

Psychology has an important role to play in tourism. It determines a person's understanding and selection of a destination and their response to numerous travel experiences. It examines the motivation, perceptions, attitudes, roles, and several factors influencing a person's decision-making. By understanding and identifying different psychological factors associated with tourism, the professionals engaged can fulfill and satisfy customers' needs and preferences, thereby giving them an experience of a lifetime.

To begin, one of the most important aspects of tourism psychology is understanding the tourist's motivation. It aids in determining what motivates tourists in their decision-making process and what makes a given place appealing. Tourist motivation, according to Gnoth, refers to the psychological elements that impact a person's desire to travel or visit specific areas. Internal (psychological) and exterior (situational) realities both impact them. The distinctions between motives (more emotive causes for action) and motivations (more cognitive components of explaining why individuals do what they do) are critical in comprehending tourist motivation. (Gnoth 1997) Thus, motivation is the determinant of why a person is on the journey, whether for pleasure, adventure or to learn about a foreign culture.

Secondly, perception is another factor that influences a visitor. A perceived notion influences how a tourist expects and interprets their destination and surrounding environment would look like. This perceived notion varies from one individual to another backed by their personal experiences, backgrounds, and expectations. By figuring out these factors the service providers at a tourist destination could work towards designing means to satisfy different categories of tourists or visitors.

Thirdly, a tourist's attitude towards the trip influences his subsequent behaviour. Attitude can be defined as the way in which a person views and evaluates something or someone, a predisposition, or a tendency to respond positively or negatively toward a certain idea, object, person, or situation. It is traditionally structured along three dimensions: cognitive (perceptions and beliefs), affective (likes and dislikes, feelings, or evoked emotions), and behavioural (actions or expressed intentions toward the object based upon the "cognitive" and "affective" responses). (Vargas-Sánchez, Plaza-Mejía and Porras-Bueno 2016) A positive attitude of the tourist increases the chances of repeated visits by suggestions and recommendations. However negative attitudes towards a destination deter potential tourists from choosing specific destinations.

Other factors which influence a person's motivation and subsequent selection of a tourist destination are safety, gastronomy, and accommodation.

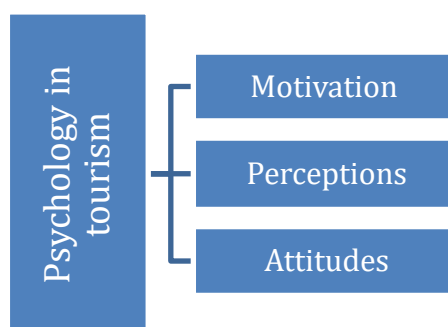


Fig.1 Role of Psychology in Tourism.

Through the understanding of tourist psychology, a destination can prepare to face their needs, preferences, and expectations and thereby deliver satisfied and memorable experiences such that it develops a positive attitude and perception towards the destination and motivates the tourist to visit it again or recommend it to friends and relatives.

Gastronomy and tourism: A psychological analysis

Gastronomic tourism has grown in popularity in recent years. Gastronomic tourism is also popularly known as Food Tourism. This is driven by the growing interest of the people in trying and experiencing new cuisines and understanding different culinary cultures. It encompasses the exploration of local cuisines and food cultures in various destinations. According to researchers Hall and Mitchell, gastronomic tourism can be defined as a form of tourism that involves visiting primary and secondary food producers, attending food festivals, restaurants and dining, and sources of food tasting and experiences that motivate travel. In this context, gastronomic tourism can be seen as a unique blend of food, culture, and travel experiences. (Hall and Mitchell 2004) The psychological study of gastronomic tourism aims at understanding the motivations and behaviours of those who partake in this type of travel. The identification of numerous factors such as sensory experiences, and cultural and emotional connections related to the foods and beverages consumed during the travel experience is one of the key aspects to consider in the psychological analysis of gastronomic tourism.

Gastronomic heritage is a component of cultural heritage, and modern man is becoming increasingly interested in aspects of cultural tradition reconstruction and preservation, authentic cuisine, gastronomic customs and traditions, and the promotion of local products. (Rivza, Kruzmetra and Foris 2017) People today are not just interested in tasting local and traditional foods but also learning the methods of preparing them which involves knowing the ingredients used, ways of resourcing them, and the cultural significance they hold in the local community. So, trying the foods and different culinary traditions of a local community brings them closer to it. Several destinations have grown up along with a farm producing local fruits and vegetables using which fresh cuisines could be prepared to give a firsthand experience of the local gastronomy. As people today are opting for a healthy lifestyle, they are more inclined towards consuming less processed food products and more organic ones. So, such an arrangement attracts such categories of tourists to such specific destinations. Local communities should be made aware of the importance of promoting and safeguarding local products including food, culture, and arts through innovation and creativity. (FORIS, et al. 2021)

People tend to have several conceptions related to the food habits of a region. These concerns are psychological and mostly influenced by cultural norms, religious faiths, or personal preferences. Gastronomic tourism can lead to the breaking or making of certain conceptions or taboos concerning certain local or regional food. Since people's food preferences are influenced by cultural norms, attitudes, faiths, and personal choices, it is a kind of reflection of personal identity. Also experiencing exclusive foods serves as a status symbol to many which can enhance a person's image in front of others.

According to a psychological analysis of gastronomic tourism, individuals are motivated to explore and experience different culinary cultures. (Akdağ and Demir 2021) This motivation stems from an interest in the various gastronomic traditions found in various regions. Furthermore, gastronomic tourism is seen as a way to connect with local communities, immerse oneself in local culture, and gain a deeper understanding of a destination's history, traditions, and social dynamics through its food. (Stanišić, Kostic and Mišeljić 2018) According to Wolf, culinary tourism is defined as traveling to discover the food and beverages of a destination and to enjoy rare gastronomy experiences (Akdağ & Demir, 2021).

From a psychological point of view, gastronomic tourism is just more than deriving pleasure from eating and drinking. Travelling allows an individual to explore and experience new cultures and foods. With gastronomic tourism one can immerse in the culinary history of a destination. Gastronomic tourism offers a multifaceted experience starting from motivation to emotions and ultimately to a sense of psychological satisfaction. Psychological factors influencing gastronomy can be internal and external factors. Internal factors are more personal which include enjoying and experiencing new food and deriving satisfaction from it. It also includes appreciating the unique flavours, methods, and efforts engaged in the process of preparation. External factors include the intention of the person to develop a sense of connectedness with the local communities, learning more about the culinary traditions and culture through food such as engaging in the process of preparing a dish, from resourcing the ingredients to preparing to presenting it. In a way, the person tries to indulge in the process from scratch and not just taste and appreciate it.

In gastronomic tourism people search for the local and authentic. “Local” according to a study by Sims is a term that is geographical and can be defined as products from a specific area. However, she observed the term to be too narrow and would denote only the local ingredients. (Sims 2009) At a destination people search for authentic and local products, at several points of time people do have doubts about the authenticity of the local products served to them but they still go ahead with it. (Sims 2009)

Social media plays an important role in influencing the psychology of the tourist. Television shows, travel magazines, websites, food, and travel blogs all help to pique people's interest in a destination. Television channels that feature travel and food shows are making significant contributions to the growth of this connection between food, culture, and tourism. These shows feature well-renowned chefs and celebrities who travel to diverse geographical locations across the continents and partake in local and indigenous cuisines along with learning how to prepare them. With that, they speak about the ingredients used and narrate the stories behind the history and origin of the dish and its relevance within the specific culture to which it belongs. Such shows create a sense of inquisitiveness in the minds of the people who wish to indulge themselves in a similar experience. This connection between food and tourism was initially visualized through television shows and now other social media platforms can be seen promoting it. (Baruah and Jain 2022)

Regional economic development is another factor that gastronomic tourism brings in. Nowadays people are attracted to local cultures, local cuisines, and local products. Because what people eat is an important part of a culture and people and communities are identified through food. There is a popular saying that goes, “We are what we eat.” The meaning of this saying extends beyond the purpose of food as a physiological need, but from the standpoint of culture, we identify people and places through local cuisines. (Richards n.d., 3) For instance, India is a diverse country with a diverse genre of culinary culture. Every locality, every region, and every state and every country is known for its distinct culinary heritage. Keeping this in mind the local people can promote their local and traditional food and culture to the visitors. In the process, if the food products are sourced locally at the same time involving the local population in food preparation and other services, it tends to generate employment opportunities resulting in economic growth. (Baruah and Jain 2022)

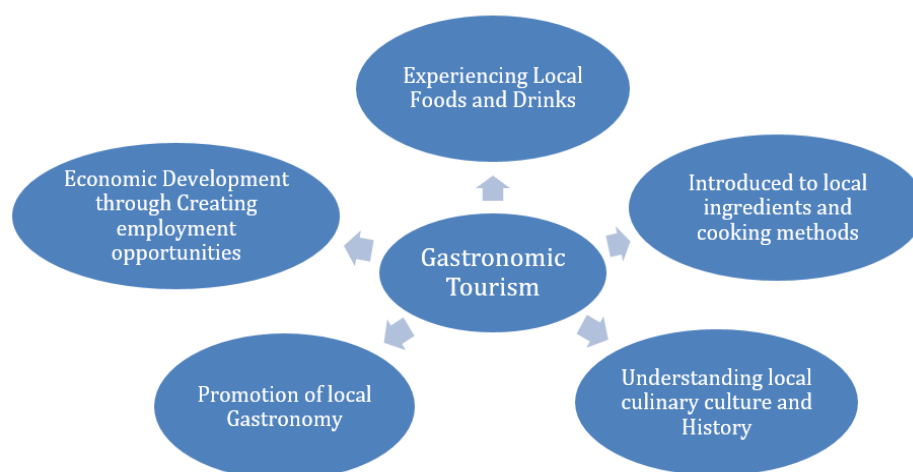


Fig. 2 Gastronomic Tourism

While travelling people tend to buy and carry mementos as a sign of visiting a place. An exhibition of local food products, dried or fresh, famous sweets, and beverages like wine can serve the purpose. Several destinations did develop based on local varieties of wine, tea, coffee, and dried foods such as dried fruits, etc. In India, in recent years wine tourism developed in Nashik, “Sula Vineyards”, which has captured almost 80 % of the Indian Wine market. Another is the Grover Zampa Vineyard, which is the oldest winemaker in India. (India's Most Scenic Vineyards You Should Visit 2023) Assam and Darjeeling are famous for tea and are the largest producer of tea in India. In Assam, there are resorts that provide tea-tasting facilities for a large variety of tea along with enjoying the plush greenery of the tea gardens.

The Role of Culture in Gastronomic Tourism

Culture is important in gastronomic tourism because it leads to the exploration and appreciation of various culinary traditions. For people who wish to travel to explore, learn, and experience different culinary cultures, gastronomic tourism is a popular means of tourism amounts those sections of people. As it provides an in-depth understanding of rituals, cultural patterns, and values that are connected to a destination's food practice. Furthermore, such cultural factors influence people's perceptions and expectations of different gastronomic experiences. Individuals, for instance, may relate specific dishes or ingredients with specific cultures, and this can influence their preferences and choices while participating in gastronomic tourism. From a psychological perspective, discovering and immersing oneself in different culinary practices exposes a person to unique experiences and more excitement. Along with experiences gastronomical experiences also create a sense of connection and belongingness to the culture.

Rural regions with rich culinary cultures have great potential to develop based on gastronomic tourism. It is a natural instinct of the tourist to opt for local products, whether food or other art and craft articles. They tend to buy and carry it with them as a token of memory of visiting the place. According to Taleb Rifai, former Secretary General of UNTWO "Tourists are attracted to local produce and many destinations are centering their product development and marketing accordingly. With food so deeply connected to its origin, this focus allows destinations to market themselves as truly unique, appealing to those travellers who look to feel." (Global Report on Food Tourism 2012, 4) People today are inclined towards a range of new trends in cultural consumption. Travelers search for authentic experiences through local food.

Conclusion

Gastronomic tourism if implemented in a proper and planned manner, has several advantages. It can promote local culinary cultures, local ingredients, and culinary history, to the outer world. It can also aid in achieving sustainable development. Along with culture gastronomic tourism can help in developing the economy of the region by creating employment avenues, creating new jobs, and utilizing talents. A lot of factors influence a person's travel choices. Within that food choices are an important factor people consider while choosing a destination. Gastronomic tourism can be implemented in a more effective way by trying to understand the psychological factors associated with it. If the destinations prepare themselves according to people's personal preferences, and cultural and emotional factors influencing dietary choice, then people can have a memorable experience.

Psychological analysis of gastronomy and tourism shows the significant impact of food and culinary experiences on people's lives. Such culinary exploration satisfies a person's desire and excitement to experience new cuisines and also develops a sense of connection and belongingness to the new culture. It also develops a sense of cultural appreciation and enlarges our horizon of knowledge along with long-lasting memories.

Psychological understanding of gastronomy and tourism is a complex phenomenon and requires further research and exploration to dive deep into understanding the psychological factors influencing a tourist's motivation, attitudes, and preferences in choosing a gastronomy-based destination. More research in this area will provide useful insights for both travellers looking for memorable experiences and tourism industry professionals looking to improve customer satisfaction. We can create exceptional travel experiences that satisfy both our palates and our minds if we recognize the importance of food psychology in tourism contexts.

Disclosure Statement

There is no conflict of interest reported by the authors.

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