

PROPOSING A RESEARCH MODEL OF DESTINATION LOYALTY: THE CASE OF GASTRONOMIC TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: *Malaysia is among the popular countries in Asia and the Asia Pacific to be visited by foreign tourists. Recently, the number of international tourist arrivals and receipts in Malaysia show an unstable movement and decreasing pattern from year 2010 to 2019. This situations indicate a problem in terms of destination loyalty because loyal tourists can facilitate the destination to increase tourist arrivals through their repeat visit to the existing destination and recommending the destination to the others such as families and friends. Malaysia is resided with multi-racial residents, which makes it rich with gastronomic resources. Therefore, tourism management in Malaysia should takes advantages of its gastronomic resources to enhance loyalty among tourists. Hence, this study intends to propose a new research framework to enhance destination loyalty among tourists for gastronomic tourism. This framework comprises three latent constructs: food related motivation, food satisfaction and destination loyalty. This model is proposed to be tested among international tourists visiting Malaysia. Therefore, three direct effects and one indirect effect are proposed in this study.*

Keywords: *Gastronomic Tourism, Food-Related Motivation, Food Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty*

Introduction

Lee (2015) claimed that gastronomic tourism is a journey to a specific destination that is rich with gastronomic resources to gain recreational experiences or have entertainment purposes such as taking a trip to primary or secondary manufacturers of food products, gastronomical festivals, fairs, events, food tastings, cooking demonstrations, or any activity related to food and nutrition. However, gastronomy is not just about foods, but it also reflects the heritage and traditions of people in a certain community (UNWTO, 2021). As supported by Sandybayev (2019) claimed that culinary pleasures are one of the best ways to comprehend and appreciate the culture of a particular community or nation. Hence, food is also considered an integral

component of the tourism sector since most destinations use it as advertisement and marketing campaigns. Malaysia is among the popular countries in Asia and the Asia Pacific to be visited by foreign tourists (Nasir et al., 2021). Therefore, all states in Malaysia promote its tourism products attractively to the tourists (Ab Ghani et. al, 2021) in order to increase their arrivals. Unfortunately, from 2010 to 2019, the international tourist arrivals and receipts indicate an unstable movement and decreasing pattern (Tourism Malaysia, 2021). However, Malaysia is blessed with multicultural citizens such as Malays, Chinese, Indians and several other ethnic groups. Hence, Malaysia should take this advantage to emphasise its gastronomic tourism to capture more international tourists to visit this country. Furthermore, foreign tourists would appreciate the heritage and traditions of people in Malaysia by tasting cuisines served by the locals. This is to ensure the foreign tourists loyal to Malaysia's tourist destinations since tourist destinations' success depends on tourist loyalty to the destination (Alrawadieh et al., 2019). A high level of destination loyalty among tourists would increase tourist arrivals and receipts since loyal tourists would repeat visits to the destination and recommend other potential tourists (Mohamad et al., 2019). Hence, it is important to identify the predicting factors.

Literature Review

The literature review will discuss three important latent constructs: destination loyalty, food related motivation and food satisfaction especially in terms of its definitions, important and its causes and effects relationships between one another. Eventually, this section demonstrates the proposed framework of this study consisting these three variables.

Destination Loyalty

The concept of destination loyalty refers to tourists' obvious preference for the destination and their commitment to participate in activities held at that particular destination (Deng and Tang, 2020). Based on this definition, tourists prefer a certain destination because they offer tasty and unique cuisine during their visit. On top of that, they are actively involved in activities held in certain destinations because tourists gain valuable experience participating in activities like food preparation and food festivals. They would know the types of local food available in certain destinations and the ingredients required to prepare foods. Normally, destination loyalty comprises attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, whereby behavioural approach entails obtaining a tourism product or service or a repeated manner among tourists (Lacap, 2019). On the other hand, attitudinal loyalty is reflected when the tourists hold a positive attitude and intend to suggest to the potential tourists. Consequently, loyal tourists provide advantages to the tourist destination/ tourism spot by spreading positive word-of-mouth to the other people when they go back to their hometowns or home countries. Loyal tourists also tend to revisit the destination, thereby increasing their purchase on tourism products and services during their visit to a certain tourist destination (Nasir et al., 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to maintain tourist loyalty because it determines the success of the destination.

Food Related Motivation

There are many reasons travellers or tourists visit one particular destination. Basically, tourists visit a destination because of motivation. Gurbaskan Akyuz (2019) claimed that food is one of the main considerations and motivations for tourists to select destinations to travel. As supported by Ji et al. (2016) claimed that consumption of food had been one of the many activities of tourists travelling to a certain destination. In addition, the tourist's exposure towards travel shows, magazines, and the like, have initiated various motivations for them to travel to the destination, including local food of a particular destination which may intensify their interest in local cuisines and stimulate their motivation to experience local dishes (Tasi, 2016). Hence, this has initiated an intention among scholars to investigate on (i) motivations

among tourists to consume local food and beverage consumption at a tourism destination (Kim et al., 2013; Son & Xu, 2013; Kim & Eves, 2016); (ii) motivations among tourists to consume food tourism products (Fields, 2002; Dimitrovski & Montserrat, 2016); (iii) motivations to consume food and wine festivals and events (Park, Reisinger, & Kang, 2008; Kim et al., 2010) or (iv) motivations for visiting wine regions (Alebaki, Menexes, & Koutsouris, 2015). However, Su et al. (2020) claimed that there has been a lack number of research that focus on travel motivation toward visiting a food tourism destination. Therefore, it is important to focus on this aspect because tourists with high motivation in food in one particular destination tend to demonstrate the highest intentions to consume local cuisine, and the visitors exhibit the greatest positive attitudes towards local cuisines (Levitt et al., 2017). In addition, the study by Chen and Huang (2019) found that the food-related motivation of Chinese visitors is an insignificant factor of destination loyalty. Further to this, Agyeiwaah et al. (2019) claimed that tourist motivation directly affects culinary satisfaction. Based on this background. This study proposes two hypotheses:

H1a: Food-related motivation has a significant positive effect on destination loyalty.

H1b: Food-related motivation has a significant positive effect on food satisfaction.

Food Satisfaction

The concept of satisfaction is considered as one of the key constructs which is used to explain consumer behavior in various research frameworks (Konuk, 2019). The pleasurable feeling of tourists experienced after visiting the destination is a form of satisfaction (Khan et al., 2013). Lacap (2019) claimed that satisfaction is related to a visitor's favourable response towards their tourism experience in a food destination in the context of food tourism. Tourism experience in a food destination includes food consumption and participating in food events. Hence, tourist satisfaction with food and beverages can be fulfilled by means of food product attributes by which consumers achieve consumption benefits, which in turn allow them to achieve their life goal (Liu, & Grunert, 2020). Hence, satisfied tourists to the food they consume will contribute to income generation to the destination because they tend to pay more for the foods and recommend others about the foods they consume in a particular destination and revisit the destination to taste the food again. Thus, satisfied tourists play an important role in contributing to the success of a destination. Several studies (Xu & Zhang, 2016; Lin & Kuo, 2016; Masa'deh et al., 2017) found that satisfaction is positively affected destination loyalty. Most importantly, Chen and Huang (2019) study claimed that food satisfaction among tourists in China positively affected destination loyalty. Based on the previous studies, a very limited number of studies examine the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the other tourism constructs. The study by Namkung and Jang (2007) tested how the food quality construct impacts customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Therefore, two more hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Food satisfaction has a significant positive effect on destination loyalty

H3: Food satisfaction mediates the relationship between food-related motivation and destination loyalty.

Based on the proposed hypotheses above, the present study develops a research framework as in Figure 1.

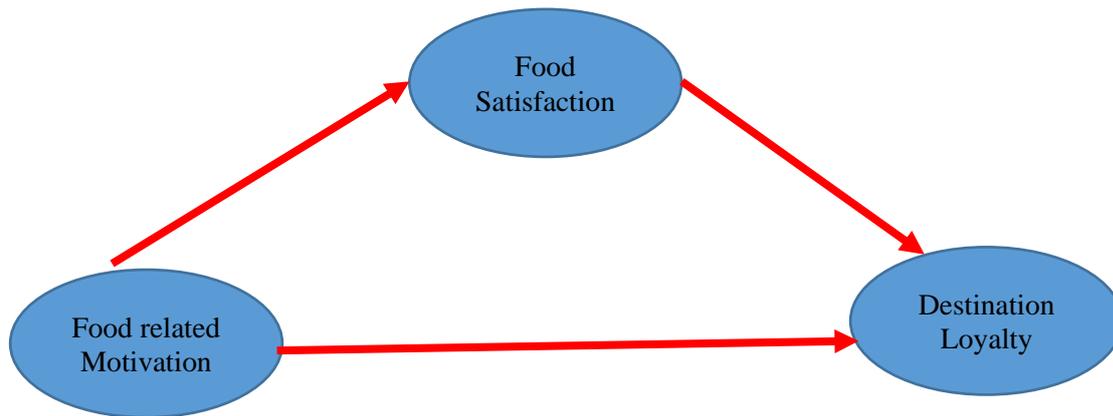


Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

Conclusion

This study proposes to develop a research framework consisting of three constructs: food related motivation, food satisfaction and destination loyalty. This model explicitly improves destination loyalty among foreign visitors in Malaysia. However, this model will focus on gastronomic tourism in Malaysia, whereby the predictors of destination loyalty are food-related motivation and food satisfaction. Four hypotheses have been recommended in this model, whereby three direct effects and one mediating effect. However, to test the hypotheses in this study, future research requires collecting data from respondents and execute structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

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