

Gap between Perception and Satisfaction: Exploring Food Tourism in New York

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Abstract *Food is an essential part of any tourism activity. Most tourists are interested in experiencing local culture through its cuisine (WFTA, 2019). However, it is paramount that this food tourism experience is to the satisfaction of the tourists and helps in generating repeat business. The city of New York was selected for the study as it is one of the most visited global destination which has developed an image of being a multi-cultural and vibrant society (DHS, 2018). The present study is focused on exploring the pre-visit food image of New York and the level of satisfaction expressed by tourists after experiencing the local cuisine. The research has the empirical objective to identify the gaps between perception and satisfaction in relation to a culinary tourist of New York. The study is based upon first-hand data collected in New York from a random selection of global tourists visiting the city. The research objectives and related hypothesis were tested in three distinct phases. In the first phase, an exploratory study was conducted with descriptive statistics to find out the salient factors comprising the cuisine image of New York. The second phase was designed to collect data on the same tourist's level of satisfaction of the said culinary image. In the final phase, gap analysis was conducted on predetermined cuisine images by conducting correlation analysis using appropriate statistical tools. Finally, the Effect size of the gap was determined empirically to quantify the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The study aspires to answer the research question - "What is the gap between perception and satisfaction in the mind of a culinary tourist in New York?". This study gives an insight into the tourist's impression of New York's food and dining experience; and gives a fillip to destination promoters by spotlighting the likes and dislikes of food tourists.*

Keywords: *Food Image, Food Tourism, Destination Marketing, Gap Analysis, Food-Tourism Satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

The desire to experience local culture through food has become a common behavior of most tourists. Traditionally, hospitality industry with food, drinks and accommodation was considered a support act for the larger Tourism economy. With the dawn of the new 'Instagram age' food, wine and cuisine have become a tourist attraction in its own right. According to Goldschmidt (2019), Food tourism is no longer a tourism segment, instead it has taken the center stage of tourist experience. World Food Travel Association (2018) now defines Food tourism as the act of traveling for a taste of place in order to get a sense of place. The wider definition and revised interest in Food Tourism, has also made it a candidate for closer scrutiny by tourists and academics alike. In light of this, it has become important

to gauge the gap between perception and satisfaction of food tourism in the mind of tourists. The study is useful for destination marketers and hospitality professional to formulate promotional and operational practices based on this feedback.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Culinary Experience Satisfaction

According to Rimmington and Yüksel (1998), in tourism, traveller is the customer and destination is the business, hence, satisfaction of the traveller is vital for a competitive edge over other destinations. Satisfied customers or tourists give positive word-of-mouth or review, that leads to revisits

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and popularity of the destination. Satisfaction and sharing of positive travel experience influence behavioural intentions leading to more visits (Ladhari, Brun & Morales, 2008). Previous studies on types of dining establishments and travel satisfaction have established linkage between the two (Arora & Singer, 2006; Qin, Prybutok & Zhao, 2010; Sadi & Saricimen, 2010). Customer satisfaction of speciality restaurants of various destinations have also been studied previously (Josiam & Monteiro, 2004; Josiam et al., 2007; Ma, Qu, Njite & Chen, 2011; Tsai & Lu, 2012).

Oliver (1981) describes satisfaction as “summary psychological state” when expectations are either confirmed or disconfirmed along with a prior feeling on the consumption process. UNWTO has defined satisfaction as “a psychological concept involving the feeling of well-being and pleasure that results from obtaining what one hope from an appealing product and/or service” (Rimington & Yüksel, 1998, p. 39). Satisfaction of a culinary experience is complex as it involves various tangible and intangible elements. According to Duttagupta (2013), aspects of food taste, service of the food, the ambience etc. also play a vital role in culinary experience satisfaction. According to Liu and Jang (2009), satisfaction in hospitality industry is dependent on not just the material product but also, employee’s attitude, his/her behaviour and the environment of experience. Previous studies conducted on culinary satisfaction among tourists have discussed various dimensions of satisfaction. The most common dimensions are – service quality, food quality, authenticity, hygiene, atmosphere and price (Hui, Wan & Ho, 2007; Novak, Lopa, & Novak, 2010; Jin, Lee & Huffman, 2012; Jang, Ha & Park, 2012; Tsai & Lu, 2012; Lee, Niode, Simonne & Bruhn, 2012).

Cuisine and Food Tourism in New York

Policymakers and scholars globally are constantly planning their cities and networks around food and gastronomy (Cavicchi & Stancova, 2016). Every major city pride itself at being a ‘Food City’ and considers local cuisine as a marker for cultural differentiation. Jennings et al. (2015) have argued in a FAO report that city-based cuisine promotion is the most favoured approach in food tourism marketing as it limits the inherent challenges to a geographical place, which makes it easier to study the causes, impact and governance. New York City (or simply, New York) being one of the most popular tourist destinations is hence apt for study of culinary tourism phenomenon.

Modern American and New York Food

Modern American cuisine is characterised by its diversity of taste and flavours. The cuisine incorporates from different cultures that immigrated to the continent. The cuisine is best

showcased in New York City, which became the melting pot of various cultures in 19th century. Many skilled chefs from around the world had settled in New York. These world class chefs created new imaginative dishes for the rich and famous of the city. Some of the famous dishes created were Waldorf Salad, Eggs Benedict, New York Strip Steak, Vichyssoise, Thousand Island dressing and Lobster Newberg (Beyer, 2007). The dishes were created by chefs of few iconic restaurants, The Delmonico’s, Sherry’s, The Empire Room of Waldorf-Astoria Hotel (McCarthy & Rutherford, 1931).

According to Moyer (2015), many American dishes have roots in other countries. The iconic American dishes like Hot Dogs and Hamburger are inspired from the original German cuisine but reached the heights of popularity in New York City. Pizza is another example; a dish that originated in Italy but developed in various parts of America. Pizza became localized in America, with various versions found in different cities of the country. Chicago version of the dish is called ‘Deep-Dish’ and is characterised by a thick base and raised crust. The version in New York is called ‘The New York Style’ or ‘The New York Slice’ pizza. It is a hand-tossed pizza with thick, round but soft base. The slices are cut thick, so that it may be folded when eaten. In-fact some Pizzeria’s like Eddie and Sam’s in Tampa, Florida claim to use water sourced from New York to prepare their pizza dough (Eddie & Sam’s, 2018). According to Crocker (2005) the popularity of frozen entrees in supermarkets and the popularity of Betty Crocker’s cookbook supported by General Mills was the cultural change after 1950s in America. 1970s saw the rise of celebrity chefs and TV personalities like French cooking expert, Julia Child and English cooking exponent Graham Kerr. The popularity of chefs was also a result of dedicated food channels on television. ‘Food Network’ from Discovery Channel was one of the first dedicated food channels in America. Kearney (2010) says that mid-20th century saw the rise of supermarket meat consumption; this led to reduced popularity of regional meat products. The popularity of meat gained so much in 21st century that Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, a government agency had to issue an advisory for young adults and males to reduce meat consumption and eat more fruits and vegetables (ODPHP, 2015).

Cuisine and Food Tourism of New York

The cuisine of New York is widely perceived as a long list of diverse niche cuisines originating from the various ethnic neighbourhoods of the city (Ray, 2007). The contemporary cuisine of the city has long been associated with the dominant immigrant community that has made its mark on the city’s ever-shifting palate. The pattern of culinary succession started with German and Irish immigrants in mid-19th century, followed by Italian and East European influence by the end of 19th century. In the 20th century the Greek cuisine

becomes popular, followed by Asian cuisine and finally the Latin American cuisines became the influencers of the city's cuisine culture. The cuisine of New York has transformed somewhat in the lines of the evolution of 'modern American cuisine'. The basic principles of French and Continental cuisine have been influenced by Italian, Greek, Asian and Latino influences to create this 21st-century cosmopolitan food culture.

The culinary tourism of the city emanates from the desire of the tourist to experience a wide range of activities, including sampling of local cuisine. The culinary tourism of New York is driven via multiple channels like, restaurant visits, sampling street food, visiting cocktail and wine bars, taking city food walks and pub hopping tours, discovering iconic dishes and eateries of the city etc. Previous findings on the subject include, Hall (2012) who argues that 'Food has an integral part of tourist's impact on the city's economic benefits.' Richards (2015) studied the role of food in marketing of destination and he concluded, among other theories that food can be as significant as a landscape to a tourist as it provides a direct connect to the landscape. The culinary tourism of New York confirms to the said arguments.

Research Gap

A study of the available literature on the subject indicates that selected work has taken place in the field of culinary tourism, themes such as Segmentation and Typography of a culinary tourist (e.g. Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Horng & Tsai, 2011); Destination branding and role of Food image in tourism marketing has been studied by (B. Okumus et al., 2007); Food, travel and culinary preferences in Indian context researched by (Updhyay, 2013). Cuisine as a tourism recourse has been a subject of study by many (e.g. Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012); Role of Food events and festivals in destination marketing (Lee & Crompton 1992); Marketing to Culinary Tourist (Silkes et al., 2013); Satisfaction, intention, behaviour and decision making of Culinary Tourist has been a subject of study for some more researchers including (Ryu & Han, 2010); Wine tourism is another related field of study (Alonso & Bressan, 2013). The study of the above-mentioned research also indicate that food tourism research has been limited by geographical spread, as most studies have been conducted in France, Italy, Spain, Australia, Turkey, Singapore, Thailand etc. There is also a gap in literature on studies conducted by Asian researchers on Western Food cultures. The present study makes a modest attempt to bridge these gaps.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

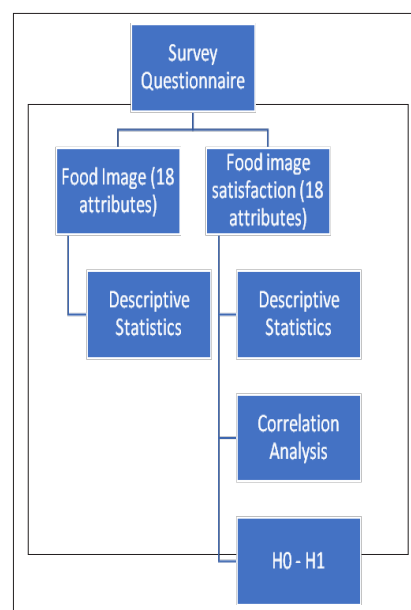
The research is based on a mix method approach where both qualitative and quantitative data has been used to study the gap between tourist's perception and satisfaction of

food tourism. The study was conducted in Spring of 2019 in New York City. The survey tools for the study were developed based on focus group discussion and In-depth interview conducted on the side-lines of 'Think-Tank 2030', a Tourism workshop held in New York. The focus group was instrumental in understanding the attributes of Food Tourism from a global perspective. The final instrument was self-administered at key food hubs of New York city. The survey sites selected for the study were - Times square, Oculus Plaza, Manhattan, 5th Avenue (outside Empire State building), Rockefeller Centre and NYC Pennsylvania station. A total of 401 samples were collected, out of which 388 samples were found suitable for data analysis. The objective of the study was 'to identify the gaps between perception and satisfaction in relation to a culinary tourist'. The objective and research question lead to the following hypothesis for the research:

H₀: There is a significant gap between tourist's perception and satisfaction in relation to culinary tourism in New York.

H₁: Tourist's perception is matched with his/her satisfaction in culinary tourism of New York.

The research objectives and related hypothesis were tested in three distinct phases. In the first phase, an exploratory study was conducted with descriptive statistics to find out the salient factors comprising the cuisine image of New York. The second phase was designed to collect data on the same tourist's level of satisfaction of the said culinary image. In the final phase, gap analysis was conducted on predetermined cuisine images by conducting correlation analysis using Wilcoxon signed-rank test as the statistical tool. Finally, the Effect size of the gap (r) was determined empirically to quantify the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.



Source: Researchers modified from Duttagupta (2013) and Karim (2006).

Fig. 1: Research Design (Framework) of the Study

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Food Image - Descriptive Statistics

The first part of the analysis was the descriptive statistics for perceived food image of New York. A general overview of the scores indicates that the respondents have a favourable view of New York's cuisine image. The mean ratings range from a high of $\mu = 5.98$ to a low of $\mu = 4.04$. The highest mean rated ($\mu > 5.5$) attributes for New York were 'New York offers good quality of food' ($\mu = 5.98$), 'New York offers delicious food' ($\mu = 5.83$), 'New York offers hygienic food options' ($\mu = 5.8$), 'New York offers variety of food options' ($\mu = 5.72$), 'New York offers many attractive restaurants' ($\mu = 5.65$), 'New York offers variety of speciality restaurants' ($\mu = 5.56$), 'New York offers easy access to restaurants' ($\mu = 5.56$). New York cuisine image attributes with low mean scores ($\mu < 5$) were, 'New York offers unique street food vendors' ($\mu = 4.91$), 'New York offers best street food in the country' ($\mu = 4.87$), 'New York offers regionally produced food products' ($\mu = 4.66$), 'New York offers historic food options' ($\mu = 4.57$), 'New York offers exotic cooking methods' ($\mu = 4.2$), 'New York offers vegetarian food options' ($\mu = 4.15$), 'New York offers package food walks and tours' ($\mu = 4.11$) and 'New York offers much literature on food and tourism' ($\mu = 4.04$).

Satisfaction - Descriptive Statistics

The mean and standard deviation scores suggest that the tourists in general were fairly satisfied with the culinary experience of New York; indicative of the mean scores (μ) ranging from 3.85 to 2.94, on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. 'Getting easy access to restaurants' ($\mu = 3.85$) and 'Getting hygienic food options' ($\mu = 3.79$) were rated highest among the satisfaction scores. Whereas, variables like 'Reasonable priced food' ($\mu = 3.02$) and 'Discovered exotic cooking

methods' ($\mu = 2.94$) were relatively less satisfying to the tourists of New York.

Gap Analysis

Gap analysis between perception (cuisine image) and satisfaction is presented in this section. The respondents in both destinations were asked to rate their perception of cuisine image based on 18 attributes on a 7-point Likert scale. The same respondents also answered questions regarding degree of satisfaction post-experience of the said attributes at the select cities. The satisfaction was measured into a simpler 5-point scale to improve responses and save time taken to fill the questionnaire. The 5-point satisfaction scale was then statistically converted to 7-point Likert scale for further analysis of data.

Correlation Analysis

In order to measure the gap between perception (cuisine image) and satisfaction, a t-test was considered to be the appropriate correlation analysis. However, since a few variables in the study were not normally distributed, it was decided to conduct a non-parametric test. The statistical tool selected was Wilcoxon signed rank test as the test is fairly robust to normality in the data. Also, Wilcoxon signed rank test is based on W statistic, which for large sample with high number of paired observations ($n > 10$), will assume a normal distribution (Lowry, 1998). The test is a paired t-test or in other words, same participants have responded to two related 'before' and 'after' scenarios. The test measures the difference between the medians of 'cuisine image' and 'satisfaction' for 18 variables. The resultant difference is the gap between perception and satisfaction in the mind of a culinary tourist. Table 1 gives the result of Wilcoxon signed-rank test administered for New York.

Table 1: Summary of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to Measure the Difference between Satisfaction of Delhi Cuisine and Perception of New York's Cuisine Image

Cuisine Attributes	Cuisine Perception Mean	Cuisine Satisfaction Mean	Difference Values (Satisfaction – Perception)				
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)	r (Effect Size)
Sampling local cuisine	5.12	4.78	-0.34	0.13	-3.109	0.002	-0.1437
Eating historic dishes	4.57	4.21	-0.36	0.23	-4.506	0.000	-0.2282
Finding a variety of dishes	5.72	5.00	-0.72	0.49	-6.110	0.000	-0.2801
Food quality	5.98	5.06	-0.92	0.49	-7.512	0.000	-0.3450
Food walks/Tours	4.11	4.37	0.26	-0.11	-2.753	0.006	-0.1714
Reasonable priced food	5.09	4.03	-1.06	0.16	-5.995	0.000	-0.2801
Finding attractive restaurant	5.65	4.93	-0.72	0.34	-6.266	0.000	-0.2884

Cuisine Attributes	Cuisine Perception Mean	Cuisine Satisfaction Mean	Difference Values (Satisfaction – Perception)				
			Mean	Std. Deviation	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)	r (Effect Size)
Getting easy access to restaurants	5.56	5.27	-0.29	0.41	-2.034	0.042	-0.0940
Finding a variety of specialty restaurants	5.56	4.98	-0.58	0.36	-4.647	0.000	-0.2171
Discovering regionally produced food products	4.66	4.20	-0.46	0.25	-3.712	0.000	-0.1807
Sampling street food	4.87	4.58	-0.29	0.12	-2.441	0.015	-0.1194
Finding unique street food vendors	4.91	4.49	-0.42	0.16	-4.486	0.000	-0.2210
Finding literature on food and tourism	4.04	4.37	0.33	0.19	-1.407	0.160	-0.0754
Discovered exotic cooking methods	4.20	3.90	-0.30	0.08	-4.386	0.000	-0.2280
Sampling delicious food	5.83	4.83	-1.00	0.48	-6.860	0.000	-0.3234
Getting vegetarian food options	4.15	4.34	0.19	-0.07	-3.057	0.002	-0.1589
Getting hygienic food options	5.80	5.19	-0.61	0.30	-5.448	0.000	-0.2529

To analyze the gap between perception and satisfaction between 18 cuisine images or attributes of New York, a Wilcoxon signed rank test was performed and the results are presented in Table 1. The confidence interval for the test was set at 95% and ‘cuisine image perception of New York’ was considered the control group with ‘cuisine satisfaction of New York’ considered as experiment group. This implies that if the mean difference of the paired samples is shown positive it means that the tourists were satisfied beyond their expectation for the given cuisine image for New York. The result in Table 1, shows that there was a gap between perception and satisfaction in all 18 attributes of New York’s cuisine image. The mean difference analysis shows a predominantly negative mean value. There are 15 negative means and only 3 positive means (difference), as shown in Table 1. The (mostly) negative mean difference shows that mean of ‘satisfaction of New York cuisine image’ is lower than the means of ‘perception of New York cuisine image’. Hence, the data suggests that there is a negative gap between perception and satisfaction in the mind of the culinary tourist post visiting New York, regarding cuisine image experience. There were only 3 cuisine images that showed a positive mean difference – ‘Food walks/Tours’; ‘Finding literature on food and tourism’ and ‘Getting vegetarian food options.’

The study of the descriptive analysis was followed by Wilcoxon signed rank test to find difference between pre and post-assessment of New York’s cuisine image in the mind of a tourist. The Wilcoxon signed rank test is a non-parametric test for paired samples, similar to t-test for correlated samples (Lowry, 1998). The result of the Wilcoxon signed rank test is indicated by the study of the resultant Z-scores. The examination of Z-score value along with the two-tailed p-value indicates if there is any significant difference in Perception and Satisfaction scores. A review of the p-values

(sign. two-tailed) indicate that most paired samples in the study are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), except for only one paired variable – ‘Finding literature on food and tourism’. Table1, also indicates that The Wilcoxon signed rank test resulted in Z-scores ranging from -7.512 to -2.034, for significant results. The given range of Z-scores are above the critical value of $Z = \pm 1.645$ at 95% confidence interval (5% significance) for a 2-tailed directional test (Lowry, 1998). As evident from Table 1, all Z – values of the statistically significant pairs are above the critical value ($Z > 1.645$) hence, we may conclude that there is a difference between the median value of ‘Perception’ and ‘Satisfaction’ regarding the cuisine image of New York. Hence, we can reject the null hypothesis ($H_0: \eta = \eta_0$).

The Effect size ‘r’ was then calculated for the given Z – values of New York. The Effect size was calculated using the equation as explained below:

$$r = \frac{Z - \text{value}}{\sqrt{N}}$$

r = Effect size

Z = Z score value of the correlation

\sqrt{N} = Square root of N, where N is the total number of observations.

The study of ‘r’ in Table 1. indicates that the value of r, for statistically significant pairs, range from -0.3450 to -0.1194. According to Cohen (1988), Effect size is considered small if r is .10 or less. The Effect size is medium when $r \geq .30$ and it is considered large if the value of $r \geq .50$. In the case of New York, only two pairs indicate an Effect size Medium or above – ‘Food quality’ $Z = -0.3450$ and ‘Sampling Delicious food’ $Z = -0.3234$. The majority of the pairs (15 out of 18), show a Less than Medium to Small Effect size ranging from

$Z = -0.2884$ to $Z = -0.1194$. Hence, in conclusion, it may be inferred that although there is a gap between perception and satisfaction for New York cuisine image, however the mostly 'Small' effect size indicates that the gap for New York is not very significant.

CONCLUSION

The present study was undertaken with the aim to identify the perception of New York's Food Image in the minds of tourists before visiting the City and the level of satisfaction after experiencing New York cuisine. The study also investigated any gap between the perception and satisfaction to have a clear understanding of tourist's view of New York cuisine in particular and food tourism, in general. The study was conducted in three stages. In the first part, New York's food tourism attributes were analysed using descriptive statistics. The main findings of the same are: (1) In general, the respondents have a favourable view of New York's cuisine image. (2) Four main cuisine images identified for New York were – (a) Quality of food; (b) Delicious (Tasty) food; (c) Hygienic food; (d) Variety of food.

The second part of the study was conducted to identify the satisfaction levels of tourists regarding New York cuisine image, post experience. The descriptive statistics for satisfaction measure of tourists' culinary tourism experience in New York, suggests the following outcome: (1) Tourists in general were moderately satisfied with the culinary experience of New York. (2) Two most satisfying attributes of New York Cuisine image were – (a) Easy access to restaurants and (b) Hygienic food options. (3) Two most unsatisfactory attributes were – (a) Reasonable priced food and (b) Exotic cooking methods.

The final part of the study was gap analysis between perception and satisfaction. The following conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the results: (1) There is a substantial gap between perception and satisfaction with regards to New York's cuisine image. (2) Two New York cuisine attributes were most disappointing for the tourists – (a) Food Quality and (b) Sampling delicious food. (3) Three attributes were positively satisfying for the tourists – (a) Food Walks/Tours; (b) Food-related literature and (c) Getting Vegetarian Food options.

In summation, the study finds that the global tourists of New York hold a very favorable opinion on cuisine of New York, however, the city falls short of delivering on this high standard. Most tourists think of New York cuisine as one of high quality, delicious and safe to consume, before they visit the city. However, after visit most tourists found the food to disappoint a little on these parameters. The arguably surprising outcome of the study was that many tourists were pleasantly surprised and satisfied by finding vegetarian or Vegan food options in the city. They were also satisfied by

activities like City Food walks and Food Tours along with getting access to food-related information. The results found in the study are consistent with previous studies on food and wine tourism satisfaction conducted in other parts of the world, including a few destinations in India Duttagupta (2013); Hubbard, Mandabach, McDowall and VanLeeuwen (2012); Sa´nchez-Can˜izares and Lo´pez-Guzma´n (2012); Wiberg (2009).

The significance of the study is that it gives an insight into the tourist's impression of New York's food and dining experience. The study also gives a fillip to destination promoters by spotlighting the likes and dislikes of food tourists. The study makes a modest attempt to bridge the gap in food tourism literature by presenting an outsider view of a mega global destination. The study has both macro and micro managerial significance, as the city planners and hospitality professionals can now formulate policies focusing on the shortcomings of the report. The restaurant owners and chefs can revisit menus and tweak recipes to meet the expectations of discerning customers.

The study with a large scope like this comes with many limitations. The primary limitation of the study is that it relies on non-probability sampling, hence the results of the study cannot be extended to the entire population. Secondly, the study is also limited in sample data distribution with majority of respondents being young or middle-aged tourists travelling from India and Europe to New York. The present study is exploratory in nature and is a maiden attempt to understand food tourism in a distant and alien culture. There is further scope to study various other aspects of cuisine and tourist behaviour and also comparing the construct across destinations.

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