

Food Image and Acceptability of Local Cuisine: Exploring Culinary Tourism in Delhi

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Abstract

Culinary tourism has the potential for being an essential source for destination promotion in India. One of the primary assumptions of this concept is the acceptability of local cuisine by tourists. The current paper explores this issue by trying to find the acceptability of new and local cuisine by travellers. The acceptability of local cuisine is tested via a modified Food Neophobia Scale (FNS) that scores the psychological behaviour of rejecting new or unknown food. The second part of the paper explores the 'Food image' of Delhi. The food image is ascertained by an empirical study on tourists using a self-administered survey. The results are analysed using descriptive statistics.

Keywords: Food tourism, Food image, Food Heritage, Food Neophobia, Destination Promotion.

1. Introduction

Destination promotion in Tourism is usually done through traditional resources such as climate, heritage and culture (French, 1995). Karim (2010), says food and cuisine also play a significant role in branding and promoting a destination. In many countries of

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the world, like Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, USA(California), food and wine tourism is a major revenue generation source. Eating and drinking are much more than just a meal; these activities of the tourist can promote economic growth, socio-cultural stability and boost exports of indigenous products (World Food Travel Association, 2018). In India, however, we have ignored culinary tourism to a large extent. Most of our tourism campaign is based around forts, music, language, culture. Rarely have we promoted our rich culinary heritage to attract tourist, both local and international (Upadhyay& Sharma, 2013). The cuisine of India is as diverse and rich as its history, art and culture. Every state, district, village of this country has its uniqueness in food (Achaya, 1994). Tourism and hospitality sector must realise this and take steps to promote destination via its cuisine.

1.1 Objective of the study

The main objectives of the study were(i) to understand the food image of Delhi; (ii) to explore the acceptability of local cuisine for culinary tourism.

2. Research Methodology

A mixed methodology method was adopted for the study; both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to determine Delhi's food image and dining habit of culinary tourists in Delhi. The city of Delhi was selected as it is the culturally diverse capital city of the country and also a major entry point for global tourists.

An extensive review of the literature suggested a gap in the conceptual study of the dining habits of tourists in India. To get a better insight before preparing the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a focus group interview. The group comprised of 8 adults of both sex who are frequent travellers and self-proclaimed foodies. The idea of the focus group was to find and validate possible variables concerning food and travel as required for the study. The focus group discussions led to 18 variables that eventually formed the food image factors of Delhi. These 18 variables were incorporated into the survey questionnaire for gathering data. The survey tool was modified post a small pilot

study conducted on 30 tourists of Delhi. The changes were mostly limited to minor changes in the structure and form of questions.

The main instrument for data collection was a self-administered and structured questionnaire that recorded the participant responses. An online version of the survey was also designed to find out the travellers' opinion on food's image, and dining habits using a 5-point Likert scale. To explore the acceptability of local cuisine, a standard FNS (Food Neophobia Scale) tool by Pliner and Hobden (1992) was modified to suit the current research scope. Food neophobia is the extent to which a person may reject new food items, dishes or cuisine. Food neophilia, on the other hand, is the tendency to seek something new (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009). The original FNS is a one-dimensional scale that has ten items and the respondents answer on a 7-point Likert scale. The total score of the scale accesses an individual's level of food neophobia. A score below 35 is considered Neophilic or Hedonic behaviour (Zhao et al., 2020).

The samples for the survey were taken from domestic as well as foreign tourists visiting Delhi. The survey sites selected were prominent food hubs in Delhi, well known for culinary tourism. 55% of the respondents filled the survey at these locations – Chandni Chowk, Jama Masjid, Darya Ganj, Pandara Road, Connaught Place (outside Sarvana Bhavan) and Chittranjan Park Market. Rest, 45% of the data was collected online by targeting food apps and social media food groups.

2.1 Culinary Tourism and Food Tourism Concepts

Definition of the term "Culinary Tourism" is given from a historical and critical perspective by multiple authors (Hornig & Tsai, 2011). Tourist can experience the culture of a destination via its local cuisine. A tourist may have a unique experience of a destination by preparing, consuming and serving its local food (Long, 2004, p. 21). The present paper also explains how researchers have deliberated on the idea of food being a motive for travel and also an important travel activity (Ignatov and Smith 2006, p. 238) Hall and Mitchell (2005, p. 74) define 'food tourism' as "a visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing attributes of

specialist food production region are the primary motivation factor for travel". The definition given above has been challenged by Tikkannen (2007). According to him, culinary tourism is part of local culture and is important for the promotion of a destination.

The study on culinary tourism has been dealt with in different aspects. The earliest studies in this field tried to find a relation between Gastronomy and culture (Bernard & Domínguez, 2000; Long, 2003; Rozin, 1982; Scarpato, 1999). The later authors have tried to focus on strategic development, planning and marketing aspects of culinary tourism (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Sharples, 2003). Most tourists try to learn and enjoy the unique culture of any destination he or she visits. This culture also extends to the local cuisine of this place (Canizares & Guzman, 2011). Hence gastronomy plays a vital role in promoting the culture (Dos Santos & Antonini, 2004) tourists like to explore new lands by tasting unfamiliar food of the region Molz (2007). Many western researchers have studied the motivations and characteristics of culinary tourists. Sandra Mari´a Sa´nchez-Can˜izaresa and Toma´s Lo´pez-Guzma´nb (2011) have done a similar study on Culinary Tourism in the city of Cordoba in Spain.

2.2 Relation between Food and Travel

Hornig and Tsai (2011) have discussed the relation between food and travel. Some traits of successful tourist destination such as pleasant weather, good transportation, historical monuments, unique or popular cuisine, and natural beauty are mentioned. Previous studies linking food and travel in terms of culture, policy and community development are available. (e.g. Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000; Boyne et al., 2003). An extensive study was conducted in the U.K. about the role of food in travel by Enteleca Research and Consultancy (2000) by (Smith et al., 2010) shows that 72% of tourists to the United Kingdom were interested in local cuisine during their visit. A similar study in Scotland shows that 40% of the travel budget is spent on food alone (Boyne et al., 2002). According to Pomero (2005), culinary tourism in Australia and Canada generated \$1 billion annually and could generate as much as \$7.2 billion by 2010. The above discussion and related statistics are clear evidence to indicate that food plays a vital role in

tourism promotion and can be a positive driver for boosting the local economy (Telfer & Wall, 2000).

2.3 Food Image and Destination Promotion

Branding of a destination, especially a region or a state has become an important marketing strategy for many government agencies, involved in Tourism promotion (Lee & Arcodia, 2011). Greater brand loyalty, when seen among tourists, will be resulting in positive travel intention of the traveller (Horng et al., 2012). According to (Lertputtarak, 2012) the primary factor to measure food image is the unique cuisine available at a destination and the particular way that food is served to the tourist giving value for money. Jeou-Shyan Horng and Chen-Tsang (Simon) Tsai in 2012, explains the recent trends in Tourism and lays emphasis on the importance of culinary tourism in promotion of a tourist destination. Culinary tourism has been described as a niche market as compared to the traditional tourism business. Culinary tourism can be an important marketing tool for emerging tourism markets globally. Historically, researchers have failed to address the supply side of the culinary tourism industry.

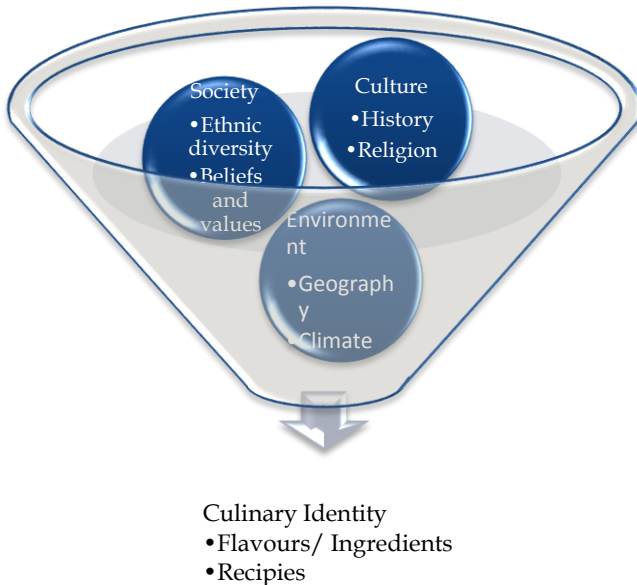


Fig. 1: A modified model of culinary identity

(Source: Harrington, 2005)

2.4 Food Image of Delhi

Acharya (1994), in his book *Indian Food – A historical companion*, says that all communality that lives in India has a distinct food ethos. Most of these are influenced by Aryan beliefs and practices. However, Muslim and European influence is also not to be undermined.

A detailed study of food-related portals and blogs such as Zomato and Trip adviser show that most popular cuisines of Delhi NCR are 'North Indian', 'Mughlai', 'Street Food', 'Chinese', 'South Indian' and 'Desserts'. It is noted that 'Gulati' restaurant at Pandara road and 'Karims' of Jama Masjid are among the most popular restaurants of Delhi. The food of Delhi has multiple influences, including Punjabi, Mughlai, Jain, Bengali etc. The iconic standout dishes are 'Chole Bhature', 'Daulat kiChaat', 'Bhalla Papdi' etc. According to official DTTDC (n.d.) website, the cuisine of Old Delhi is a treasure trove for food lovers and historians alike. 'ParanthewaliGali' and 'Moti Mahal' are few must-go places (O'Brien, 2003).

Popular food critic and historian, Pushpesh Pant (2013) has compared food of Delhi to a LachhaParantha (layered bread), where each layer adds to the diverse character of its cuisine. The city's cuisine has changed over the centuries from the times of Hindu Rajput rulers like Tomar and Chauhan (9th to 12th century) promoting Marwari, Kayasth or Baniya food of Old Delhi (Vishal, 2015; Dekaphukan, 2019). The Muslim rulers like Ghori, Mamluk and Mughals brought about the 'Karim' style rich non-vegetarian cuisine to Delhi. The British rule gave Delhi a taste for 'Keventers' (Milk Shake) and 'Wenger's' (Patisserie). Post partition, an influx of Punjabi refugees, gave Delhi its taste for butter chicken (Moti Mahal) and dal makhani (black Lentils) (Soofi, 2010). Post-Independent industrialisation brought about a large number of migrants from Bengal and South India, resulting in the opening of Bengali Mithai shops and Udipi restaurants. The expansion of Delhi into the National Capital Region (NCR) and growth of services and I.T.sectors post 2000 has resulted in the popularity of many new dishes like Momos, Thukpa, LittiChokha, Vada Pao, etc. (Gupta & Gordon, 2004). The last two decades also saw major growth in global travel resulting in a global palate for Delhi. Dishes

like Sushi, Shawarma, Kimchi or Tacos are no longer alien on a Delhi walla's plate (Dehlvi & Khan, 2017).

3. Results and Discussion

The result for the first objective – 'To understand the food image of Delhi' is based upon descriptive statistics and review of the literature. The second objective – 'To explore the acceptability of local cuisine for culinary tourism' in Delhi was met by a focus group discussion and survey using a self-administrated and structured questionnaire. The researcher collected 400 samples via a survey of culinary tourists in Delhi; however, only 387 valid responses were found useable and were finally recorded.

3.1 Food image of Delhi

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for Delhi. A study of all 18 attributes of Delhi's cuisine image indicates that most respondents have a positive view of Delhi's cuisine image (mean values ranging from 6.07 to 4.19). Keeping a benchmark of > 5.5 mean score being high, we notice that 6 out of 18 attributes of Delhi fall under this category. The highest mean attributes are 'Delhi offers delicious food' (6.07), 'Delhi offers unique cultural experience' (5.88), 'Delhi offers good quality of food' (5.74), 'Delhi offers a variety of food options' (5.68), 'Delhi offers a reasonable price for dining-out' (5.64) and 'Delhi offers easy access to restaurants' (5.54). The attributes that did not attract very high mean scores (< 5) were 4 in number. The low scoring attributes were 'Delhi offers exotic cooking methods' (4.85), 'Delhi offers vegetarian food options' (4.53), 'Delhi offers much literature on food and tourism' (4.38), 'Delhi offers package food walks and tours' (4.19).

The variation in mean scores is indicated by the standard deviation of each attribute. In-general the data set varied from 2.091 s. d. to 1.112 s. d. The attribute with the highest standard deviation was 'Delhi offers vegetarian food options' (2.091). The result suggests that the respondents were highly divided on the issue. In other words, many respondents felt that Delhi's vegetarian food image is high, while many others felt that Delhi does not have a favourable 'vegetarian food' image. The lowest variation was seen in 'Delhi

offers delicious food’ (1.112), suggesting that most respondents agreed on this attribute.

Table 1: Mean ratings of Delhi’s Cuisine image

Mean ratings of Delhi’s Cuisine image			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Delhi offers delicious food	386	6.07	1.112
Delhi offers unique cultural experience	387	5.88	1.129
Delhi offers good quality of food	387	5.74	1.279
Delhi offers variety of food options	387	5.68	1.182
Delhi offers reasonable price for dining-out	387	5.64	1.167
Delhi offers easy access to restaurants	387	5.54	1.247
Delhi offers many attractive restaurants	387	5.47	1.300
Delhi offers hygienic food options	387	5.45	1.632
Delhi offers variety of specialty restaurants	386	5.37	1.389
Delhi offers regionally produced food products	387	5.30	1.388
Delhi offers best street food in the country	387	5.29	1.532
Delhi offers unique street food vendors	385	5.23	1.486
Delhi offers historic food options	387	5.06	1.419
Delhi offers most popular cuisine in the country	387	5.02	1.398
Delhi offers exotic cooking methods	386	4.85	1.591
Delhi offers vegetarian food options	387	4.53	2.091
Delhi offers much literature on food and tourism	387	4.38	1.652
Delhi offers package food walks and tours	387	4.19	1.539

Scale: 1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 7 = *Strongly Agree*

3.2 Acceptability of Local cuisine while travelling

The result is based on the survey using a standard Pliner and Hobden's (1992) Food Neophobia Scale (FNS). The individual scores for acceptability were obtained by summing the 10-item scores, as described by the authors.

Table 2: Local food acceptability using FNS.

Local food acceptability using the Food Neophobia Scale (n = 387)			
Statements	Mean	S.D	
1 I am constantly sampling new and different foods while travelling	2.16	1.05	
2 I don't trust new foods when travelling*	2.64	1.16	
3 If I don't know what is in a food, I won't try it*	3.67	1.27	
4 I like foods from different countries and regions	1.74	1.08	
5 I find local ethnic food too weird to eat*	2.03	0.98	
6 At dinner parties or social events, I will try a new food	1.87	1.01	
7 I am afraid to eat things I have never had before*	2.29	1.15	
8 I am very particular about the foods I will eat when travelling*	3.07	1.25	
9 I will eat almost anything when travelling	3.32	1.47	
10 I like to try local ethnic restaurants when on holiday	2.04	1.09	
FNS sum score	24.83	11.53	
Cronbach's alpha (α)		0.85	

Mean based on 5-point Likert scale where 1 corresponds to Agree extremely 2. Agree moderately 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Disagree moderately 5. Disagree extremely
 * Original scale reversed to generate better comprehension
 1 Disagree extremely 2. Disagree moderately 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Agree moderately 5. Agree extremely

Source: Research data

The data was initially tested for reliability using the alpha model. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = 0.85$) is considered 'Good' as it is well above the minimum requirement of $\alpha = 0.7$, as proposed by Nunnally (1978).

The results indicate that most respondents exhibit a hedonic behaviour in terms of food choices during travel. The tourist is open to the idea of sampling local cuisine during a vacation, holiday, or even business travel. However, most tourists are wary

of trying food when they are not sure of the ingredients present. A slightly closer study also suggests that most tourists indulge in trying new cuisine during travel ($\mu= 2.16$) and trust new food when travelling ($\mu= 2.64$) *. The data also suggests that most travellers may not consume food if they do not understand its ingredients. ($\mu= 3.67$) * on a reverse scale. The survey gives a clear indication ($\mu= 1.74$) that most tourists like food from various parts of India. Most do not find ethnic food weird or strange ($\mu= 2.03$) *. At parties and social gatherings, people are more open to trying new food ($\mu= 1.87$). Most respondents are not afraid to try something they never had before. ($\mu= 2.29$) *. The answer to "...am very particular about the foods I will eat when travelling" was mostly neutral ($\mu= 3.07$)*. Respondents were found to be relatively picky about their food choice, as evident from statement 8 ($\mu= 3.32$). Most agreed that they wish to try new ethnic restaurants during holidays ($\mu= 2.04$).

The sum scores for neophobia (FNS) were obtained by adding up the 10-item scores, as described by Pliner and Hobden (1992). The reasonably low FNS score of 24.83 indicates the respondents are accepting local cuisine when travelling. A score below 35 is considered Non- Neophobic or Hedonic behaviour (Barcellos et al., 2009).

3.2 Likelihood of visit for food tourism

The respondents were asked how likely they are to visit Delhi for its food and dining experience. The results of the survey are given in table 3. The table shows a mean score of 3.38. The question was asked on a 5-point Likert scale. Delhi has mean values > 3. This may indicate that Delhi has a strong likelihood for tourists to visit, specifically for culinary tourism. This is further validated by similar researches in the past Pomero (2005); Telfer and Wall (2000).

Table 3: The likelihood of visit to Delhi for Culinary Tourism

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
How likely are you to visit DELHI for its food and dining experience?	400	3.38	1.271

Scale: 1 = Most Unlikely; 5 = Most Likely

4. Discussion and Summary

The present study set out to explore the 'Food image' of Delhi and the acceptability of local cuisine by tourists in Delhi. A positive 'Food image' of a destination can result in repeated visits and extension of stay at a destination; this phenomenon has been studied and documented by researchers like Lertputtarak, (2012); Karim and Chi (2010). The current study is part of an ongoing research on Food image and destination branding. The theoretical study of the literature concludes that culinary tourism has a successful record of being a prominent product for tourists in various countries. In India as well, the stakeholders, like Government Tourism departments, Private Tour Operators, Travel agencies, Hospitality and Catering industry, can use culinary tourism to its advantage. The iconic dishes of India are part of India's cultural heritage and form the alternate asset and product for marketing our destinations. The food habit survey indicates that most tourists are adventurous with trying local and ethnic cuisine; however, the restaurant owners, marketers, web site designers must focus on educating tourists about the rich heritage and culture associated with local food.

The empirical study on Delhi' food image indicates that Delhi has a positive food image in the mind of tourists. Delhi's cuisine has an image of being delicious as well as culturally rich. The FNS study concludes that most tourists in Delhi are Food Neophiliac; in other words, they are open to trying new food, dishes or cuisine during travel.

The salient conclusions of the research are as follows. (1) Most respondents have a positive view of Delhi's cuisine image. (2) The most prominent images of Delhi's cuisine are - 'Delhi offers delicious food'; 'Delhi offers unique cultural experience'; 'Delhi offers good quality of food'; 'Delhi offers a variety of food options'; 'Delhi offers a reasonable price for dining-out'; 'Delhi offers easy access to restaurants'. (3) Most tourists are open to the idea of sampling local cuisine during travel. (4) There is a strong likelihood for tourists visiting Delhi specifically for culinary tourism.

The researcher suggests a deeper study into the subject with an empirical analysis of destination image and food image

relationship. The relation between cuisine and travel may also be studied further using qualitative technique with in-depth interviews with stakeholders and a grounded study of the field. The current study makes a modest attempt to bridge the gap in the literature and provide insight for destination promoters and stakeholders in Delhi's hospitality and tourism sector.

5. Limitations

The study is exploratory in nature and does not undertake any causal research or predict any future outcome. The data sampling technique employed here is non- probability sampling; hence the result cannot be generalised to a larger population.

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