
Part IV: Gastronomy Experiences

12 The role of local gastronomy in destination marketing

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The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Discuss the role of local food in tourism marketing and explore Istanbul as a culinary destination;
- Content analyze hard copy and online official promotional materials;
- Determine themes representing Istanbul as a culinary destination informed from the data;
- Communicate if culinary resources in Istanbul are sufficiently marketed and represented within the official promotional materials;
- Offer a typology of local food representation in destination marketing communications;
- Provide suggestions for destination marketing and culinary tourism.

Keywords: Culinary tourism, destination marketing, gastronomy, food, Turkey

Introduction

The quality of a tourist experience is closely related to a destination's capacity to satisfy tourists' needs. Local gastronomy is among the many factors (e.g. climate, service, scenery) that affect tourist decision-making and destination satisfaction (Henderson, 2016; Sotiriadis, 2015; López-Guzmán et al., 2017). Consuming food is both a physical need and socio-cultural activity. Food is consumed by tourists at a destination not only to satisfy their hunger but also to experience the authentic culture and to interact with the locals. The demand for local foods may occur in various stages of intensity (Almeida & Garrod, 2017). However, local foods are usually listed at the top of activities desired by tourists (Okumus & Cetin, 2018). While food consumption may be an extension of the daily experience, it can sometimes turn into a significant part of unique tourist experiences (Quan & Wang, 2004). Recent studies have called for better understanding of local food experiences and their implications for destination marketers (e.g. Alderighi et al., 2016; Tsai, 2016; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Almeida & Garrod, 2017). For instance, Folgado-Fernández, Hernández-Mogollón and Duarte (2017) surveyed over 600 participants in two popular Spanish gastronomic festivals and proposed that gastronomic experiences have a positive effect on destination image and loyalty. While the role of local food in enhancing positive tourist experience and eventually fostering favorable behavioral intentions is widely acknowledged (e.g. Alderighi et al., 2016; Tsai, 2016; Andersson et al., 2017), the extent to which DMOs dedicate space for gastronomy in their official promotion materials and the volume, quality, and nature of these elements remain under-studied issues.

As an important element in destinations, local gastronomy has attracted increased attention (Lee & Scott, 2015; Ottenbacher et al., 2016) and has been suggested as an effective component of destination marketing (Okumus et al., 2013; Silkes et al., 2013). Food also makes up a major share of tourist consumption at a destination. According to the World Health Organization (2015), about one-third of overall tourist spending goes to food. Therefore, if gastronomy activities are utilized effectively, food can play a crucial role in marketing destinations (Okumus et al., 2013; Seo et al., 2017; Tellstrom et al., 2005) since tourists spend a respectable share of their time in destinations searching for and consuming local foods (Robinson & Getz, 2014; Sotiriadis, 2015). Moreover, local foods at a destination are not only a physical need but also a source of tourist experience (Beer et al., 2015; Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016; Henderson, 2016; Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2015).

Istanbul is one of the world's top ten destinations in terms of international visitors, hosting more than 11 million arrivals annually (McCarthy, 2017). Turkey is a transcontinental country that has borders with eight other countries: Georgia to the northeast, Armenia, the Azerbaijan enclave of Nakhchivan and Iran to the east, Iraq and Syria to the south, and Greece and Bulgaria to the northwest. As the trade center of Turkey, exceeding 17 million in population, Istanbul is also a major destination for locals and immigrants (Turkstat, 2016) and thus, it is a good representation of different cultural groups in Turkey. Rich culinary resources in Turkey are already recognized as popular international dishes (Okumus et al., 2007).

Despite diverse culinary resources in Istanbul, research on utilizing local gastronomy in destination marketing is still scant. Recently, there have been debates as to whether Istanbul can harness its rich local food culture and utilize these gastronomy resources more effectively to market Istanbul as a culinary destination. Given this, this chapter evaluates the representation of food within the offline and online official promotional materials. It also offers recommendations for the more effective use of culinary resources in the destination marketing of Istanbul.

Culinary destinations

Foods at a destination might be described as local if the ingredients are locally produced and served (Sims, 2009). Food tourism, also referred to as culinary, gastronomy and gourmet tourism, is primarily motivated by attending food festivals, visiting wineries and farmers' markets, and trying and experiencing cuisine at a destination (Getz, 2000; Hall and Sharples, 2003; Okumus et al., 2007). Food is also one of the significant factors for traveling activities since it physically and mentally prompts all five senses as an experience-intensive tourist activity. Tourists can be categorized into different typologies, ranging from tourists who have less interest in local food to those who search and travel extensively to experience local food (Boyne et al., 2002). Previous studies confirmed that the majority of tourists perceive local food as an essential part of their experience, which influences the holiday decision making-process (Okumus et al. 2007).

The experience of local foods can satisfy travelers' physical (e.g. hunger, safety), psychological (e.g. esteem, relaxation), social (e.g. interaction, entertainment) and intellectual (e.g. culture, ingredients) needs (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Ryu & Jang, 2006). The availability, diversity and authenticity of gastronomic culture can affect tourists' purchasing decisions, pulling them to the destination and generating positive post-pur-

chase behavior – such as the intention to recommend and return (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Henderson, 2016). However, the effect of local food experiences may vary based on travelers' preferences and motivations. For instance, Almeida and Garrod (2017) proposed that consuming local foods may be either a peak experience or a secondary experience for tourists. The study also clustered tourists based on their level of engagement with local food.

Food associated with a particular region can be used as a promotional material for all types of tourist activities and destination marketing to create a differentiated image for the destination (Nelson, 2016; Pike 2015; Truong et al., 2017). Food is an important factor for travelers, which makes food tourism a large segment rather than an elite, niche market (McKercher et al. 2008; Spilkova & Fialova, 2013). Although there are different stages of intensity for tourists' food interests, harnessing local cuisines to enhance a positive local image and attract a wide segment of tourists is a viable destination marketing strategy (Boyne et al., 2002; Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Silkes et al., 2013).

Local food might be treated as a distinct attribute that differentiates the destination and creates a sustainable, competitive advantage (Everett & Slocum, 2013; Horng et al., 2012). Unlike generic tourism resources, such as sun lust, local food cannot be easily imitated, is unique to each specific region, and has few substitutes (Okumus et al., 2007). Although some travelers avoid tasting local dishes (food neophobia), many adventurous visitors are always curious about ethnic and local food (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014). Therefore, local food can be a sustainable way of creating differentiation by stressing both unique physical and cultural characteristics of local gastronomy (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Silkes et al., 2013). Current research in culinary tourism has concentrated on motivations of tourists, sustainability of local food, and the restaurant industry (Chang et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2009; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Mak et al., 2012; Telfer & Wall, 2000). However, the tactics for utilizing gastronomy in a holistic destination promotional and marketing strategy are neglected in destination marketing literature.

The local gastronomy, representing unique ingredients, combinations, rituals, cooking styles, eating styles, social environment, atmospherics and representation, might be used as effective elements in destination image and brand formation (Andersson et al., 2017; Bessiere, 1998; Horng et al., 2012; Jolliffe, 2016; Okumus & Cetin, 2018; Silkes et al., 2013). With a well-designed marketing communication strategy, destinations can attract culinary tourists who come to the destination with