

Food-Related Behaviours of Female and Male Tourists

Subjects: Behavioral Sciences

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Compared to men, women were more motivated to taste local food, especially with respect to obtaining cultural experience and excitement, promoting interpersonal relations, and as a result of health concerns. In addition, they dined at facilities at their place of stay, as well as at Greek restaurants and taverns at a higher rate compared to men. Women also reported being more satisfied than men by their food experiences during their trips, and was found that during the pandemic they spent, on average, more on food than before.

Keywords: gender ; tourist ; food behaviour ; COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

Gender has been shown to have a significant impact on eating behaviour, food choices, and consumption ^{[1][2][3][4][5]}. Differences between females and males in food-related behaviours are conditioned by evolutionary, biological, psychological, geophysical and social factors ^{[1][2]}. In Western society, the ideal body weight is perceived to be much lower for women than for men. Women, more frequently than men, have an ambivalent relationship with food and give greater importance to healthy eating and to the achievement of an ideal body weight ^[4]. Women are also characterized by a greater nutritional awareness and knowledge compared to men ^{[3][5]}. Women's relationship to food is complex, as a result of the social pressure they experience to maintain a desirable body shape; however, at the same time, they appear to have a greater tendency to dine in groups as compared to men ^[2]. In contrast, men's approach to nutrition is less complicated and more pleasure-oriented ^[3]; men are attracted by fat-rich meals and dine at fast food outlets more frequently than women ^[2].

Food provides much more than sustenance; it is an integral part of culture, a significant component of the global intangible heritage and an increasingly important tourist attraction ^[6]. Food tourism as a niche market is essential in enhancing destinations and connecting visitors' experiences to the culinary culture of a place ^{[7][8][9]}. Food is a way to connect the traditions and the history of a place ^[10]. Local cuisine can contribute to memorable experiences and enhance tourists' integration into local communities ^{[11][12]}. Visitors' expenditure on food constitutes a significant part of people's income in touristic destinations ^[13]; in Greece, for instance, food and beverages consumed by tourists represent 25% of the total tourism annual revenue ^[14]. Thus, connecting food to tourism provides an opportunity for local economic growth, which can be bolstered by the use of gastronomic experiences targeted to destination branding and marketing ^[15]. The literature suggests that tourists' food consumption is shaped by a number of socio-demographic factors, including age, gender, marital status, social status, nationality, educational level, occupation, and income ^{[16][17][18][19]}. Nevertheless, in general, researchers do not stratify their study samples according to socio-demographic characteristics, due to the lack of prior studies that would support this procedure. Even in those cases where study samples are classified by gender, the analysis and interpretation of the results are narrow, and findings are often contradictory.

As a situation that humanity experienced for the first time in recent decades, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that lack of knowledge restricts the ability to manage risks and unpredictability, and revealed the need to comprehend tourism in the social, political, and economic contexts that will shape the future world ^{[20][21]}. Sixty-three per cent of World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) experts believe that the tourism industry will not fully recover before 2024 ^[22]. The pandemic has had a significant impact on tourism dynamics, resulting in changes in travellers' behaviour that require swift, innovative responses ^{[23][24][25]}.

While numerous studies in various settings have confirmed the role of personal characteristics on purchasing behaviours, studies on the role of gender in the decision-making process of tourists are scarce. Academia could assist the food tourism industry in reorienting and adapting itself to the new circumstances by examining how the pandemic affected tourists' consumer behaviour ^{[26][27][28]}. In addition, exploring the food-related behaviour of female and male tourists can provide the theoretical and practical framework in order to gain an understanding of the differences between men and women and develop gender-oriented products and services to address future challenges.

2. Gender and Food Choices While Vacationing

Type of activities, lifestyle, personality, motivations, and cultural values are factors thought to contribute to the behavioural differences observed between male and female tourists [29]. With respect to food choices, research in this area is equivocal, as some studies concluded that gender explains variations in tourists' food consumption and influences to some degree preferences towards local food [16][17][18][30][31][32][33][34][35], while others failed to show these relationships [36][37][38].

The empirical verification of Kim et al.'s [16] model in a British population showed that males were mostly motivated by cultural experience and females by interpersonal relationships when tasting local food while on vacation [17]. Similarly, Campbell [39] reports that male tourists are interested in exploring different or special cultures, and Zhang et al. [40] suggest that females' travel motivations are influenced by their friends or family members. On the other hand, according to Kivela and Crotts [30], men are more interested in consuming local food due to their emphasis on taste. Women remain concerned about the safety of food [16][17][18][19][20][21][22][23][24][25][26][27][28][29][30][31][32][33][34][35][36][37][38][39][40][41][42], their weight status, and avoiding meat consumption and high-calorie foods [43], even while on holidays.

Wądołowska et al. [35] investigated the relationship between demographic variables, food preferences, and food choices in a Polish population. Their research showed that women are more inclined to gain nutritional knowledge about health problems and a healthy diet. For instance, the majority of female respondents highlighted the importance of seeking novel healthy products and taking care of their health. Sengel et al. [32] showed that gender is associated with differences concerning the interest of tourists in local delicacies when visiting the Old City district of Istanbul. Female tourists tended to be more interested in trying unfamiliar foods, probably because food arrangements in traditional families are typically viewed as the responsibility of female housekeepers. The researchers point out that it is not surprising that women are more likely to taste unfamiliar foods instead of the familiar foods they usually cook at home. Due to having a more cautious nature, female tourists are more interested in collecting information about food options at a destination. Males are more loyal to destinations where they have tried local cuisine, and they tend to return solely to taste it once again. They taste local cuisine as a means of escaping the daily routine, likely because they are in search of food variety and may not have the opportunity to do so in their daily lives. Tomassini et al. [34] investigated visitors' motivations for tasting local dishes in restaurants in the Netherlands. Women were more likely to choose local food as part of their habits and daily routines. Practice theory helps to conceptualize such routines as interdependent [44] and as rooted in background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, emotional states, and motivational knowledge [45].

Gender differences with respect to neophilia and neophobia can also be relevant when considering visitors' food choices. Male tourists from China were found to be more neophilic toward food compared to their female counterparts, a finding that suggests that women from China, unlike their western counterparts, may be less receptive to new experiences, extraversion, and cognition [31]. Similarly, when examining the motivations of tourists from India, a medium-income country, Indian men demonstrated both food-neophilic and food-neophobic behaviours more frequently than women [33]. In general, in societies where conservative societal values prevail, men seem to favour more than women the consumption of unusual foods as an "adventurous" component of travel, social events, and dining-out experiences [31]. On the contrary, studies conducted in Finland [46] and Sweden [47], indicate that women are more neophilic than men. Last, Olabi et al. [48] and Zhao et al. [49] did not find differences in food neophobia between men and women regarding Lebanese, American and Chinese samples.

On the other hand, the literature suggests that tourists' attitudes with respect to local cuisine experiences at a destination are not dependent on gender. More specifically, a study investigating six restaurants in three mid-sized cities in the Southeastern United States indicated that gender does not influence the attitudes and motivations of tourists to consume local cuisine [38]. In the same line, Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [36] showed that female and male visitors at an annual fair in Helsinki demonstrated similar food motivations toward local food. Lastly, both male and female Slow Food members engage in food-related activities such as tasting local food, purchasing from small-scale producers, reading restaurant menus, participating in local culinary events, and attending cooking classes when possible [37]. These findings are in line with the previous interpretations of the pull effect of food experiences on destination choice and the casual attitude toward food experiences on-site [36].

3. The Pandemic's Effect on Food Choices According to Tourists' Gender

Lazaridis et al. [50] showed that the attitudes of tourists visiting Greece towards food were more positive during the pandemic than the year before; this finding was found to be associated with an increased motivation to experience local food. Tourists who travelled during the pandemic were found to be more knowledgeable and more interested in food and

cuisine; they also spent more money on food and were eager to taste Greek food in traditional Greek restaurants [50]. Despite the fact that the pandemic crisis changed tourism landscapes and tourists' typologies and preferences [51], food remained an essential motivational factor in destination choices [52]. This provided an opportunity for tourism stakeholders to regain consumer confidence by reducing perceived risks and increasing the perceived value associated with these barriers [53]. The pandemic has changed the way people go on holiday, as the severity, vulnerability and threat evaluation play a crucial role in tourists' decision making [54]. Even though both genders faced the same obstacles, female travellers perceived COVID-19 as more severe and expressed willingness to adopt a preventive strategy [55]. Notwithstanding the fact that the pandemic caused emotional difficulties for people worldwide, tourism was seen as an effective means of relieving stress and rejuvenating life [54].

In accordance with the social role theory [56] and the evolutionary psychology paradigm, consumption-related behaviour is gender-related [57]. Specifically, men are more willing to take risks than women; such behaviour has given them a competitive advantage in the process of natural selection [58]. Male and female individuals play different roles and exhibit dissimilar behaviours in society because they are differently socialised. In particular, the early socialisation of females tends to be passive and restrained, whereas the socialisation of males tends to make them more proactive and independent [56]. Ryu and Han [59] investigated New Orleans as one of the top destinations for culinary tourism in the United States. Despite the fact that Hurricane Katrina in 2005 severely affected the city's image, it remains famous for its food, music, culture, events, and festivals among both domestic and international visitors. Tourists' gender was found to play a significant moderating role in the relationships between attitude, past behaviour, and behavioural intention to experience the local cuisine. Participants of both genders were willing to experience local cuisine, but for different reasons. Male tourists tasted local food because of the interaction between attitude and behavioural intention. Female tourists tasted local food once they had a positive prior experience, highlighting the interaction of past behaviour and behavioural intentions. Homburg and Giering [60] found that female customers are more likely to purchase a product repeatedly if pleased by their overall past experience. As a way to make their trip more enjoyable, they would rather consume good local food they already know.

A study that investigated how Polish tourists reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that their travel preferences were independent of gender; however, women were eager to look for local food on holidays [61]. Female respondents often looked for discounts and promotions for well-known brands, shopped second hand, and shared unnecessary items. They also paid more attention to and appreciated the quality of the geographical origin of food and emphasised the importance of traditional, non-genetically modified foods [61]. In another study investigating the experiences of Poles travelling for leisure purposes in the summer season of 2020, the rating given by women in the case of catering services provided in chain cafeterias was higher than that of men [62]. Fast food outlets, restaurants and other food service facilities did not show significant differences. The most frequent change was the avoidance of overcrowded places, a typical post-COVID lockdown behaviour [24][50].

While the effect of risk perception on attitude is the same for both genders, females seem to be more likely to favour less popular destinations than males [63]. This could be explained by the fact that perceived travel risk is gender-specific [64][65]; for instance, the BBC has reported that Asian tourists, particularly working mothers, were subjected to higher emotional distress and depression as a result of being overburdened with family caretaking duties due at home [63]. In addition, according to Bae and Chang [63], the crisis has aggravated gender inequality. Consequently, it is plausible that women perceive risks more gravely than men [63][64][66].

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