Towards a structural model of the tourist experience: an illustration from food experiences in tourism

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Abstract

The tourist experience has for a long time been one-sidedly understood as either the peak experience, or the consumer experience. For a better understanding of the tourist experience, this paper tries to build a conceptual model, in which both dimension of the tourist experience are integrated as a structured and interrelated whole. The position and role of each experiential component, such as eating, sleeping, transportation and so on in tourism can be more clearly understood in terms of this model. For an illustration of the model, food experience in tourism is examined in detail. It is demonstrated that food consumption in tourism can be either the peak touristic experience or the supporting consumer experience, dependent upon specific circumstances.

Keywords: Tourist experience; Peak touristic experience; Supporting consumer experience; Food consumption; Gastronomy

1. Introduction

In the age of postmodernity, the experiences of consumers play an increasingly important role in economic and social life. It is claimed that we are witnessing the emergence of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Tourism is surely one of the pioneer examples of the experience economy. From the 1970s onwards the tourist experience has become one of the most popular academic topics, reflected in the constant growth of the social science literature on the tourist experience during the last three decades (Cohen, 1979, 1988; Dann, 1977; Dann & Jacobsen, 2002; Gottlieb, 1982; Graburn, 1989; Hennig, 2002; Lanfant, Alcock, & Bruner, 1995; Lee & Crompton, 1992; MacCannell, 1973, 1976; McCabe, 2002; Mergen, 1986; Mitchell, 1983; Neumann, 1992; Ryan, 1997a, b; Redfoot, 1984; Urry, 1990, 2002; Van, 1980; Vukonic, 1996; Wang, 1999, 2002; to list only a few).

Despite the growth of literature on the tourist experience, a fundamental issue remains puzzling: What are the components that constitute the tourist experience per se? Is the tourist experience single-dimensional or multi-dimensional? For example, it is easy for us to understand the experience of the Niagara Fall as a key component of the tourist experience. However, it is still controversial and unclear how to define the positions and the roles of eating, sleeping and transportation experiences necessary to the journey to the Niagara Fall.

In social science literature on the tourist experience, most researchers focus on the experience in sharp contrast to the daily experience. The tourist experience is thus understood as the “pure”, “net” or “peak” experience, usually derived from the attractions, rather than “mixed”, “gross” or “supporting” experience such as eating, sleeping and so on. Those experiences that are regarded as the extension of the daily experience to the tourist journey, such as the experience of accommodation and transport, are mostly either ignored or taken for granted.

By contrast, as the tourists increasingly demand a higher standard in quality services, particularly for quality food and hospitality, such “secondary”, “derivative” and “supporting” experiences have caught the full attention in the tourism industry on the one hand and in the literature on hospitality on the other. Indeed, from a destination marketer’s or the tourism industry’s...
perspective, the tourist is a consumer, and the economic and marketing significance of the tourist activity lies in its consumption and spending. Even the experiences of attractions that are in contrast to the daily experience, are itself a part of total consumption of tourism product. Thus, in the marketing/management literature, the tourist experience is all about consumer experiences (e.g., Moutinho, 1987; Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999; Woodside et al., 2000).

Thus, in deciphering the tourist experience, there is a discrepancy between the social science approach and the marketing/management approach. The latter treats the tourist experience as consumer experience, whereas the former regards the tourist experience as peak experience. Both approaches catch some important and essential dimensions of the tourist experience. However, both approaches only partially portray the essence of the tourist experience. Therefore, to further advance the study of tourist experiences, it is necessary to transcend the academic schism in both approaches, based on a re-conceptualization of the structure of the tourist experience.

It is against this academic background that this paper sets its task to build a conceptual model of the structure of the tourist experience, in which both dimensions of the tourist experience are integrated. For an illustration of this model, food consumption in tourism is selected as one of the most typical examples that can be used to exemplify the relationship between the supporting consumer experience and the peak touristic experience. Overall, this paper is aimed to provide a conceptual framework for identifying the position and the role of various components in the total tourist experience, and hence to conceptually clarify ambiguities that exist in the studies of the tourist experience.

This paper consists of three parts. The first part reviews both the social science and the marketing/management literature on the tourist experience. In addition, the literature on food consumption in tourism is also discussed. The second part works out a conceptual model in which both consumer experience and peak experience in tourism are integrated. In so doing, both types of experiences are analyzed in relation to each other and also in relation to the daily experience. The third part illustrates the conceptual model of the tourist experience through food consumption in tourism. The relationship between food consumption and the tourist experience is examined in detail, and the management implications are discussed.

2. Approaches to the tourist experience

As mentioned above, there are two general approaches to the study of the tourist experience, namely, the social science approach and the marketing/management approach. However, it is misleading to regard each of these approaches as homogeneous. In reality, each of these two general approaches can be further divided into several different sub-approaches.

Generally speaking, within the tourism social science, the tourist experience has been one of the established areas of tourism studies. However, the concrete approaches to the tourist experience vary. Firstly, the tourist experience is studied from a phenomenological approach, which focuses on the subjective experience from the common-sense standpoint of the naïve tourists (Cohen, 1979; Neumann, 1992; Ryan, 1997a). Secondly, the tourist experience is treated from a Durkeimian approach and is equated to a quasi-religious, pilgrimage-like and sacred journey (Graburn, 1989; Hennig, 2002; MacCannell, 1973, 1976; Vukonic, 1996) which offers opportunities of escape from daily drudgery, constraints, anomalies, and profane responsibilities (Dann, 1977) and of experiencing freedom (Gottlieb, 1982; Ryan, 1997b), authenticity (MacCannell, 1973, 1976; Cohen, 1988; Redfoot, 1984; Wang, 1999), novelty and change (Cohen, 1974), the exotic (Wang, 2000), playful childishness (Mergen, 1986; Dann, 1989), “flow” (Mitchell, 1983), meanings (Cohen, 1979), identity (Lanfant et al., 1995) and myth-making (Hennig, 2002; Selwyn, 1996), and so on. Thirdly, the tourist experience, as a subjective psychological process, is treated as the object that can be studied in positivist methods, as exemplified in scientific experiments and other quantitative methods (Pearce, 1982; Lee & Crompton, 1992). Fourthly, there is a critical approach that regards the tourist experience as an institutional pleasure-seeking activity, which unconsciously contributes to the maintenance of the status quo. Thus, just like religion is regarded by Marx as the opiate of the masses, the tourist experience is similarly treated as the opiate of modern tourists (Van, 1980). Fifthly, the tourist experience is essentially treated as a particular type of gaze which incorporates the powers of institutions of tourism industry and mass media and which is trained and shaped by cultures, values and dominant discourses such as romanticism (Urry, 1990).

Despite the variety of the concrete approaches within the social sciences, the tourist experience is “purified” as the experience that is in sharp contrast or opposing to the daily experience. It is claimed that tourists choose travel as a way to experience something different from their daily lives. Such a type of the tourist experience can be termed here “peak experience”.

However, as McCabe (2002) points out, it is misleading to exclude the daily experience from tourism, for the tourist experience as a whole consists of both the peak experience and the supporting experiences such as eating, sleeping and playing. Without the latter, the former simply cannot exist. More importantly, once the
supporting experience goes sour, the total tourist experience would be more or less spoiled, no matter how wonderful the peak experience is. Therefore, it is insufficient to equate the whole tourist experience to the peak experience.

These supporting experiences, which are ignored within the social science literature, are encompassed in the marketing/management literature. From a marketing/management approach, a tourist is completely regarded as a consumer, because she/he is served and forms a commercial exchange relationship with goods suppliers or service deliverers. Even the peak experience is also regarded as part of a consumer experience. Thus, the tourist experience is usually studied from a consumer behavior approach, focusing on the operationability of the research findings (e.g., Moutinho, 1987; Swarbrooke & Horner, 1999; Woodside et al., 2000).

Within the marketing/management literature on the tourist experience, one of the foci is placed on the service quality experienced by tourists, such as hospitality, accommodation, and transportation. The enormous literature on total quality management in tourism and hospitality is an example. However, this literature on hospitality, accommodation and transportation mostly focuses on the operationability of consumer experiences or behaviors, without fully considering the relationship between supporting consumer experiences and peak touristic experiences.

The schism between the tourist experience as the peak experience held in social science literature and as the supporting or general consumer experience held in marketing/management literature is also reflected in the treatments of the experience of food consumption in tourism. Food study in the tourism social science is simply ignored or taken for granted. As Scarpato argued, within the area of cultural tourism study (Hughes, 1996; Korzay & Chon, 2002; McHone & Rungelung, 1999; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999; Ondimu, 2002; Prentice, 2001; Richards, 1996; Russo & Borg, 2002; Ryan, 2002; Stebbins, 1997; Walle, 1996), art, music and history are commonly seen as main cultural resources. Food, along with other phenomena such as religion, events, festivals and architecture is considered to be ‘gray zones’ of cultural tourism (Scarpato, 2002). Such “gray zones” exist not only in cultural tourism, but also in tourism in general. As Hudman suggests, in reality, food has become an increasingly important element in the tourist industry and up to 25% of total tourist expenditure is accounted for by foods (Hudman, 1986). This number is even much higher in today’s tourism. However, social science of the tourist experience lacks sufficient consideration of the role of the experience of food consumption.

By contrast, in the literature on tourist destinations, the importance of foods has been recognized. As more and more researchers focus on the role of food in culture (Hegarty & O’Mahony, 2001; Williams, 1997), food has been regarded as not only being a basic necessity for tourist consumption but also an essential element of regional culture (Jones & Jenkins, 2002). Since food has been proven to be an important means of selling the identity and culture of a destination, food consumption is regarded as one of the important factors in the destination marketing development. The other reason is that food consumption enables local food producers to add value to their products by creating a tourist experience around the raw materials (Hjalager & Richards, 2002a).

Moreover, it is important to recognize that food consumption is not only a means of generating revenues for a destination, but also an important part of the tourist experience (Dittermer, 2001, pp. 356–357; Hjalager & Richards, 2002b; Williams, 1997). Although there is still little literature on foods in tourism, there is much that can be borrowed from the literature on foods in unusual and non-daily contexts such as restaurants (Martens & Warde, 1997; Warde & Martens, 2000) and festivals (Humphrey & Humphrey, 1991). While occasion, ambience, company, and celebration bring special meanings to food consumption, these unusual contexts make food experience a source of pleasure and enjoyment (Humphrey & Humphrey, 1991; Warde & Martens, 2000). Similarly, tourism can be seen as an unusual context in which food consumption gains special meanings and pleasure (Hjalager & Richards, 2002b). No matter whether trying different kinds of food is the main purpose for tourists to travel, food can at least provide extra opportunities for tourists to be in a more memorable and enjoyable holiday atmosphere than they expected. Gastronomy is thus seen as an important source of marketable images and experiences for the tourist. Nevertheless, within the literature on food in tourism, it is still unclear whether food consumption in tourism is regarded as the peak touristic experience or as the supporting consumer experience. Such a question has not been raised. More generally speaking, the relationship of food consumption to tourist experience is still under-conceptualized. Therefore, it is necessary to conceptualize the relationship between food consumption and tourist experience. But before doing that, we need to, first of all, conceptualize the structure of the tourist experience, through which the role of food consumption in the tourist experience can be better viewed.

3. A structural model of the tourist experience

We suggest that both the dimension of the supporting consumer experience and the dimension of peak touristic experience can and should be integrated as a structured whole. In so doing, it is necessary to develop
a conceptual model in which the relationship between these two dimensions can be better understood. Below is an illustration of an integral conceptual model (Fig. 1).

In Fig. 1, the tourist experience consists of two dimensions, namely, the dimension of the peak touristic experience and the dimension of the supporting consumer experience. The former mainly refers to the experience of the attractions that constitute the major motivations to tourism. By contrast, the latter mainly refers to the experiences of gratifying basic consumer needs on the journey, such as eating, sleeping and transport, which do not constitute the major motivations to tourism.

Conceptually, there are two points in the relationships between these two dimensions of experiences in tourism. Firstly, the dimension of the peak touristic experience is, and should be, conceptually differentiated from the dimension of the supporting consumer experience. This differentiation is crucial for a better re-conceptualization of the interrelationships between them. On the one hand, the total tourist experience cannot be equated to supporting consumer experience. If the attractions that constitute the major motivation to pleasure travel are disappointing, then, even the high quality of other consumer services such as accommodation cannot fully compensate for this deficiency and regret. On the other hand, however, the experience of attraction, as peak touristic experience, cannot replace supporting consumer experience. As Ryan (1994, p. 300) puts it, “the availability of ease and comfort etc. are not in themselves predictors of high degrees of satisfaction, but their absence can generate dissatisfaction.” And this is particularly so for mass package holiday-makers (Ryan, 1994, p. 300). The total tourist experience might be spoiled if the supporting consumer experience went sour, even if the peak touristic experience of attractions is good. Therefore, the total quality of the tourist experience relies on the mutual support and reinforcement between these dimensions. However, the relationship of each component of the tourist experience to tourist satisfaction cannot be understood mechanically.

“[S]atisfaction arises from the perceived attributes of the destination matching expectation” (Ryan, 1994, p. 304). Thus, how each component of the tourist experience contributes to tourist satisfaction partly depends on degrees and types of expectations on the one hand, and partly depends on tourists’ own adaptability through which the importance of that which is disappointing is down valued and tourists find compensatory aspects of the holiday to enjoy (Ryan, 1994).

Secondly, the dimension of the peak touristic experience and the supporting consumer experience can be interchangeable under certain conditions. On the one hand, some components of the supporting consumer experience can turn to be peak experience. For example, a tourist with the original motivation of sightseeing may find that local foods are so attractive that she or he goes to a food festival instead of a famous sightseeing. Here, vernacular foods come out as a peak, rather than supporting experience, and hence help enhance the level of overall satisfaction on the journey. On the other hand, the experience of attractions may sometimes turn out to be supporting consumer experience. For example, a young man may have a romantic affair with a female tourist on a beach holiday. Here, the peak experience of the attraction—the beach—becomes a background for the romantic encounter and hence turns to be the supporting consumer experience, secondary to the peak romantic experience in the beach resort.

The difference between the peak touristic experience and the supporting consumer experience can be further elaborated through their respective relationships to the daily experience. According to Parker (1983), there are three types of relationship between work and leisure, namely, “extension”, “opposition” and “neutrality”. Similarly, there are also three specific relationships between the tourist experience and the daily experience. First, the tourist experience is the experience in sharp contrast or opposition to the daily experience. Second, it is the extension of the daily experience. Third, it is the intensification of the daily experience. In order to further differentiate the peak touristic experience from the supporting consumer experience, we need to analyze how both dimensions are related to the daily experience.

The social science literature on the tourist experience as reviewed above regards the tourist experience as the peak touristic experience, being in sharp contrast to the daily experience. Their relationships can thus be characteristically summarized by a series of “opposition” between the daily and the peak experiences, such as “the ordinary” vs. “the extraordinary”, “routine” vs. “unusual”, “the familiar” vs. “novel”, “the profane” vs. “the sacred”, and so on.

Of course, even in the peak touristic experience, there are also some components that are the extension and intensification of the daily experience. One such example is self-identity. The peak touristic experience helps the

![Fig. 1. The conceptual model of the tourist experience.](image-url)
tourist not only to extend, but also to intensify, her or his self-identity. However, overall, the peak touristic experience is in sharp contrast to the daily experience. Thus, the relationship of the peak touristic experience to the daily experience can be characterized by a specific arrangement of the three components in a line, with the component “contrast” coming first and other two components lying behind, which is illustrated as following:

“Contrast—extension—intensification”.

By contrast, the supporting consumer experience is mainly characterized by extension, and sometimes by intensification, of the daily experience. For example, when going to an Asian destination, a western tourist may still prefer staying in a western hotel chain and eating western foods. Although tourists seek various and novel experience, they often “bring” their habits and preferences formed at home with them. Thus, even if many risk-taking tourists frequently try novel foods in tourism, it is possible that most tourists are conservative in their basic consumer preferences and prefer eating familiar foods during most of their journey. In this sense, the supporting consumer experience for most tourists is mainly the extension of the daily experience to the tourist journey. Thus, the three components of “contrast”, “extension” and “intensification” regarding the relationships to the daily experience can be ranked in a row, with “extension” first and “contrast” lying in the end, which is illustrated as the following:

“Extension—intensification—contrast”.

Finally, it must be noted that both the peak touristic experience and the supporting experience constitute an organic whole. They are separated only conceptually. However, such conceptual differentiation of the two dimensions helps to better understand the relationship between them. Such a structural model clarifies the loci and the structure of the components of “familiarity” and “novelty” in the total tourist experience and has practical implications for tourism management.

4. Food consumption and its position in the tourist experience

The experience of food consumption in tourism can be analyzed from two perspectives. One is from its relationship to the peak touristic experience. The other is from its relationship to the daily experience. As discussed above, food consumption, as part of tourist experiences, has two relationships to the peak touristic experience. On the one hand, it is differentiated from the latter. On the other hand, it can become, under a certain condition, one of the ingredients of the peak touristic experience. Accordingly, food consumption in tourism also has two relationships to the daily experience. When it is a supporting consumer experience, it is the extension of the daily dining experience. By contrast, when it becomes part of the peak experience in tourism, only then is it a contrast to the daily experience.

4.1. Food as the extension of the ontological comfort of home

Giddens (1984) points out, daily routines supply people with a sense of “ontological security.” Daily routines and habits are a source of comfort, relaxation, ease and security. Daily food consumption, as part of daily routines and habits, can thus be seen as, to paraphrase Giddens, “ontological comfort of home.” Such ontological comfort of home can be extended to travel and hence helps overcome anxieties and unfitness caused by unfamiliar environments on journey.

However, food consumption in tourism is not a simple repeat of the daily eating habits and routines. Even in the daily life, variety and change are necessary complements to the routines and habits. Thus, in tourism, itself a form of change from the daily routine, quest for various foods is one of appealing experiences. However, variety-seeking behaviors are not necessarily opposite to daily or weekly routines. Generally speaking, there are two types of variety-seeking behaviors in food consumption. One is routine rotation of various ingredients across time. For example, one may eat American foods on weekdays, but also regularly eat at Chinese, Mexican or Italian restaurants on weekends. Such a type of variety-seeking behavior can be called “routine variety-seeking” behavior. The other type of variety-seeking behavior can be called “novelty-seeking”. It refers to the situation in which people may eat some foods that they have never tried before. When we say that food consumption in tourism, as the extension of ontological comfort of home, includes variety-seeking behavior, it is the “routine variety-seeking” that is referred to. This kind of routine variety-seeking eating experience in tourism still belongs to the category of the extension of the daily experience.

From a structural perspective, in the category of the extension of daily food habits and routines to tourism, food consumption includes two components: one is the routine stubborn “central” or “core” ingredients and the other is the changeable “peripheral” ingredients (c.f.: Djursaa & Kragh, 1998). No matter how “peripheral” ingredients change, “core” ingredients remain central to the consumer and act as the base for the change of “peripheral” ingredient. For example, for most Chinese consumers from south China, rice is one of the basic “core” food ingredients in their daily dining practices. Potato, on the other hand, is one of “peripheral” ingredients for variety and change. Chinese can sometimes take potato rather than rice as the main ingredient.
of foods. However, it is difficult for them to give up eating rice most of the time and always eat potato instead.

Since food consumption can be merely the extension of food habits formed at home, a large portion of food consumption in tourism can be seen as the supporting experience for tourists to complete or realize their main purpose of travel. In this sense, food consumption can be named as a supporting consumer experience. Its role is either a means to meet the basic need of the body, or to get a sense of the ontological comfort of home when they travel. Thus, food in tourism, as the extension of the ontological home comfort, constitutes a "psychological island of home" for tourists, which helps avoid cultural shocks, such as dining chaos in destinations.

Thus, for destination food suppliers, several implications can be drawn from this theme. First, it is necessary to understand tourists’ food culture such as their eating habits, and make sure the foods used in catering are in congruence with tourists’ habits and customs. Second, it is necessary to segment markets of tourists in terms of their different food habits and preferences. Learning about the cultural differences in tourists’ eating habits will effectively help improve the food service and enhance the customer satisfaction. Third, it is important for the destination developers to understand that food consumption plays an indispensable role in shaping the total tourist experience through offering tourists the ontological comfort of home in novel environments. Once the experience a tourist has in accommodation is unsatisfying, the whole experience of her or his travel would somehow be negatively influenced. Tourists may often need some consistency extended from daily routines while seeking novel and unusual experiences. To be successful for marketing strategies, the marketers and managers of attractions should never ignore the important supporting experiences of its customers, such as the experiences of food consumption.

4.2. Foods as peak touristic experiences

As indicated above, routine variety-seeking food experiences are still within the range of daily or weekly routines, and a large portion of food consumption in tourism can be seen as the extension of daily dining experience. However, under certain situations, tourists may quest for food experiences that are beyond the boundaries of the routine and familiar. Indeed, a deep motive for tourism is to search for novelty and change (Cohen, 1974). Relatedly, even the act of satisfying the most basic needs, such as eating, may sometimes be incorporated into this motive. Thus, tourism, as a context of novelty- or change-seeking, offers tourists new opportunities in food consumption rather than merely maintaining their food habits, routines and preferences.

From a temporal perspective, tourists may sometimes seek novel experiences of foods as part of their total peak experiences. Such novel food experiences consist of two types: first, the ingredients of foods are novel and enjoyable; second, the way food is delivered or consumed is novel. In the second case, what makes it novel is the manner of delivery or consumption. For example, in China, rice is normally cooked in a pan or an electric rice cooker. However, in some tourist destinations in Jiangxi, China, the rice on supply for tourists is cooked in bamboo. Such a novel way of rice cooking or consumption not only adds a particularly pleasant taste to rice, but also brings about a memorable, enjoyable, and hence peak experience.

From a situational perspective, within certain situations, such as going to a local restaurant to meet with old friends, tourists’ may occasionally try some novel foods and unexpectedly achieve a joyful and memorable food experience. Thus, food consumption, mostly treated as supporting consumer experience, can sometimes become part of the peak experience. However, how that food consumption in tourism becomes a part of peak experiences depends on its memorability and intensification in the total quality of the tourist experience. Therefore, even if in the majority of time food consumption in tourism is an extension of the daily experience and can thus be regarded as the supporting consumer experience, it can sometimes and within certain situations turn to be part of peak touristic experiences.

That food consumption can turn to be a peak touristic experience can be demonstrated by a newly emerging form of tourism, in which the major, sometimes even sole, motivation to tourism is the tastes of foods that are much more various, with longer range of choices, and different from their daily reservoirs of foods. Such a form of tourism includes gastronomic tourism, food festivals, wine tourism, and other food-related events. Under these circumstances, food and beverage can be itself an attraction in a destination, such as Chilli Festival in Singapore food festival (Financial Daily, 2002), Taste of Chicago (Taste Ahead, 2001), Wine Tour in Europe (Johnson, 2000), and Chocolate festival in Suffern, NY and so on. In these cases, foods either constitute an event attraction or act as the gastronomic part of the attractions in destinations, no less significant than other attractions such as landscape or amusement park. In other words, the gastronomic experience can become a major, or one of major motivations, for travel.

For us, what makes this type of food consumption peak touristic experience is motivation, as well as memorability. For example, in food festivals, the major, or the sole, motivation to travel may be the tastes of foods supplied in destinations. Here, foods not only act as an attraction itself, as landscapes or amusement parks are, but also becomes a medium for members of families
and friends to achieve the peak touristic experience together. The consumption of foods in such circumstances is thus no longer merely a supporting consumer experience, but rather the peak touristic experience itself.

The fact that foods consumption can be turned into tourist attractions as the peak, or part of the peak touristic experiences, has several implications for destination marketing and development. First, gastronomic tourism can be one of alternative opportunities for food producers, especially in the rural areas, to add values to their agricultural products. When rural areas have some difficulties in finding a theme to build up their attractions, food can always be a possible and interesting theme to be considered. Second, for those regions that are rich in various and vernacular foods, the culture of foods can be turned into food-related events and hence become tourist capital, through which the local resources of food can be turned into marketable attractions. Third, in addition to the fact that foods can be touristically organized as the sole attraction, food can also be incorporated into the other mega-event tourism as sub-event attraction. In the latter case, the food consumption can also become part of the peak experience. Forth, food festivals or gastronomic tourism are one of sources that help enhance the local identity of a destination community, and hence bring about more community participations. Such community participations and supports are one of social conditions for food-related tourism to be sustainable. Thus, there is no reason why local and traditional foods are seen as trivial and should be ignored in tourism development.

5. Conclusion

Tourism is in a sense involved in our aesthetic or sensual existence. As the body is the major locus of senses (Synnott, 1993), tourism is thus the activity that celebrates the bodily desires (Veijola & Jokinen, 1994; Wang, 1996). In the previous literature in the tourism study, however, tourism is too often linked to the category of the visual, sightseeing or the gaze (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990). Such a deficiency has recently been well recognized by a number of academics. In the second edition of the Tourist Gaze, for example, John Urry has acknowledged the ignorance of the body and other senses of the body in his first edition of the book. In order to balance the visual bias, he claims that tourism should involve various sensescapes, such as soundscapes, smellscapes, tastescapes, geography of touch, in addition to landscapes (Urry, 2002, p. 146). Dann and Jacobsen (2002) have also examined how tourists quest for smellscapes, and a few researchers have related tourism to gastronomy and discussed how the search for tastescapes become a motivation of tourists (Hjalager & Richards, 2002a, b). In short, the non-visual aspects of the tourist experience have been set on research agenda.

This paper is one of pieces of studies on this agenda. It is claimed in this paper that non-visual experiences can be either peak experiences or supporting experiences, dependent upon specific circumstances, but both are important. In order to demonstrate the differentiation and the exchangeability of both the peak experiences and supporting consumer experiences in tourism, a structural model has been developed in this paper, through which the role and position of various experiential components, particularly non-visual experiential components, can be better viewed. For an exemplification of this structural model, in this paper, the role of food consumption in tourism is examined in detail.

It must be noted here, however, that the structural model put forward in this paper is not merely applicable to the analysis of the role of food experiences in tourism. Rather, it has much wider applicability. To put it another way, it is applicable to the analysis of the wider range of experiential factors in tourism, including the experience of hotels, transports, attractions, entertainments and so on. Therefore, in order to confirm the wider range of applicability of the conceptual model, further studies of the position of the experience of hospitality, transport, entertainments, shopping and so on are necessary.

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References


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