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Original Article

Gastronomic Identity: A Review of the Environment, Culture and Economy Effect on Culinary Tourism

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Gastronomic identity encapsulates an individual's cultural background and food choices wherever they go to work or visit as tourists. The study evaluated various factors that are considered to influence gastronomic identity. The dominant environmental elements include geography and climate, which impact available agricultural products and the adaptability of new products due to trends, fashion, or demand from increased travel. The cultural elements included religions, history, ethnic diversity, innovations, capabilities, traditions, beliefs, and values. The tourism industry is not only affected by the environment but also by cultural and culinary heritage and the cost of living. Tourism is a way to promote traditions and customs. Eating habits are a matter of culture, a product of codes of conduct and the structure of social relationships. This study aimed to establish how Kenya's vast cultures satiate their gastronomic identities while appreciating other cultures' ethnic foods with the current economic situation. The study used a desktop review of studies in gastronomic identity. Findings will be used to provide information on gastronomic tourism. Understanding these concepts can be valuable when relating food choices, defining culinary tourism strategies, and local restaurant concepts.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an essential sector in many countries as it is a multi-faceted industry. The industry relies on other sectors for its success; failure to that it does not flourish. The agriculture sector, which is highly informed by peoples' customs and habits, produces foods that are in demand by the populace and tourists. According to Dixit and Prayag (2022), gastronomic tourism is a niche proliferating informed by the education and employment of persons from different locations or destinations to different regions. These people could also be tourists, especially when sent to work in a separate area other than their residence. Gastronomy includes flavour, food, tradition, environment, and history Baldwin (2018). Gastronomic identity plays a significant role in the sensory aspects of food, especially in food preparation, presentation, and taste. Thus, gastronomic tourism is emerging as a substantial component of lived experiences for consumers, notwithstanding their origin, as it influences food menu selection in any destination Dixit (2020). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2021) defines tourism as the movement of people outside their usual place of residence for a specific reason. The reasons could either be social, cultural, or economic related.

Culinary tourism is travel driven mainly by the desire to experience and consume food. Researchers have argued that culinary tourism, as a fundamental component of cultural tourism, is significantly shaped by geographic locations, environmental characteristics, and the socio-cultural dynamics of destinations (Ji et al., 2017). Ellis et al. (2018) maintain that culinary tourism not only allows for the elucidation of culture and identity but also enhances communities through a consistent rise in tourist mobility, driven by the increasing desire to experience foreign or exotic delicacies as a central aspect of visitors' holiday experiences (World Food Travel Association, 2020). Thus, from the visitor experience perspective, culinary tourism stimulates heightened local gastronomy interest and fosters slow tourism in rural and urban settings (de la Barre & Brouder, 2013). The gastronomic identity

of an individual is informed by the how, where, when, and why eating is essential to society and all participants in the food service industry (Ondieki et al., 2017). When developing menus for various events and services (on order or buffet), the food service industry considers the origins of the client and the guests attending the event or even partaking of the meals to be served. Each community has some form of understanding of nutrition that guides or informs the food items to be prepared for different meals. For example, one will not miss having tea for breakfast in many communities. However, considering the day's activities, most will have a different menu item. The sampled communities by Ondieki et al. (2017) will serve whole meals for breakfast when they have events like weddings. This includes *Ugali* (maize meal), vegetables, buttermilk, protein, and assorted beverages.

The resources available to culinary tourists in prosperous emerging nations vary. However, they all have particular plans to encourage the use of distinctive local cuisine to increase the allure of their travel destinations. According to Mitchell and Hall (2001), particular tactics created to promote wine and food tourism were credited with the success of culinary tourism in Australia and Canada. A person's origin and food choices shed light on their culture, traditions, and heritage and develop their pride and identification among peers (Dixit, 2019). This allows domestic and international visitors to enjoy the meal experience in the food outlets. Beyond dietary values and gastronomic identity, local foods have diverse values that include but are not limited to history, local customs, and national and ethnic traditions (Choe & Kim, 2018). Research examining food aversions during food experiences with items not similar to the home environment is emerging to aid in menu preparation (Fakhimi et al., 2021). Many external forces inform gastronomic identity, the key being the economic environment. No matter the religious tradition, cultural background, or the type of work one is engaged in (Hall & Prayag, 2019), financial resources limit the accessibility of food items considered traditional for one to have.

The purchasing power of an individual is determined by the work they are engaged in on a day-to-day basis. Since food is considered a basic need, there must be a way to access it for consumption. Kenya has made steady progress in attaining Sustainable Development Goal #2 (SDG Goal #2), which aims to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition (Ramos et al., 2020). The Global Nutrition Report (2018) indicates inadequate dietary intake among adults of several food groups, including vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds, meat, and other sources of nutrients. This inadequacy can be attributed to a turbulent economic situation in the country. Byrd et al. (2017) established that many household heads are aware of their dietary needs and deficiencies, but resource constraints (revenue) and food price changes determine the morphing of gastronomic identities.

The impact of food tourism is enormous and can improve the overall economy of any country. Cultural diversity informs many aspects of life in a given locality. When people relocate to places that are not their homes, they have to adapt to the locality that they are in. Local culture and tradition of a given destination present new things to the new resident in an attractive manner. Hence, it becomes appreciated as an authentic experience, though it can quickly become an “aesthetic” item as it loses originality to conform to the customers' demands (Kesimoglu, 2015). Gastronomic tourism is an emerging niche that significantly contributes to the sustainability of tourism development. GE du Rand et al.'s (2016) framework for gastronomic tourism resources suggests that several variables, including cuisine, destination geography, culture, and the availability of additional tourism support infrastructure, are necessary to succeed. Research has indicated that a destination's environment and culture significantly determine its particular culinary character. Despite the advantages that a destination might gain from establishing culinary tourism, studies have demonstrated that research on the subject is still scarce in Kenya and that the industry is still in its early stages of development. For instance, Jebotip (2021) contends that

although there is high potential for gastronomic tourism development in Kenya, it has not been developed due to over-emphasis on traditional beach and safari tourism. Therefore, this study aims to establish the impact of the country's environment, culture, and economic situation on the gastronomic identity of people from Uasin Gishu, Nairobi, and Murang'a Counties in Kenya.

Development of Food Choice Patterns

A person is believed to morph into the region where he or she was born. This denotes that the individual will have eating habits and food selection criteria based on their background. The patterns are significantly informed by the available foods and diversity the person is exposed to while growing. Chen and Antonelli (2020) state that a person's resources, social framework, food context, personal factors, and ideals generate a set of influences in their lives. Personal systems in food choice-related situations are shaped by personal state, features of food, and socio-economic factors (Shepherd, 1996). Moreover, a person's taste and preferences are sharpened by their perception. Steenkamp (1997) further explains the phenomenon that food properties (sensory perception), environmental factors (marketing, word of mouth, and economic factors), and personal factors inform food choice patterns.

Factors that Affect Food Choices and Eating Habits

The environment is a critical player in informing an individual's eating pattern. Growing up in a region that does not encourage one to partake in certain foods, they consider it strange when they find others doing so. Also, seasons do not match, which informs the type of produce that will be farmed in a region. The counties under study have different seasons and rely on others for fresh produce to have a variety of fresh produce. Thus, it is easier for someone from either county to make a home away from home in a new place. The environment shapes the palate to what is easily accessible for an individual. Gastronomy is an essential part of an individual's identity, but it is not just feeding; it means experiencing the culture

and developing an interest in visiting the place where it is done daily (Lopez et al., 2019; p700). According to Chen and Antonelli (2020), environmental health and human choices in global food systems have many challenges before they can be declared from farm to fork. Swinburn et al. (2011, p378) stated that a person's selection of certain food products results from interactions between individual factors and the environment. Often, one will make food choices based on one's cultural background and information about the available options. The embeddedness of cultural background in an individual has evolved with time to accommodate changes to the natural environment, physical needs, lifestyle, and technological development to inform individual food choices. Studies have highlighted that many people eat more processed foods as they are more affordable than whole foods prepared at home.

The environmental aspect in moulding one's food choice includes the physical area and the social, economic, sociocultural, and policy environments (Chen & Antonelli, 2020). With the recent change in government and policy, there has been an increase in the environment in a negative way for people to be able to afford basic needs, among them being food. The policies and taxes being levied on the populace affect how they can afford to obtain even a simple meal for their families. The continuous increase in fuel prices, electricity costs, and other levies leave one in a way that they are left to make poor food choices that, in turn, may lead to malnutrition and underperformance in the workplace and school. According to Hardcastle et al. (2015), food choice depends on social and environmental factors informed by psychological influences. This is informed by an individual's cultural background, the work environment, and motivation and reward based on foods one chooses to consume at a given time.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Gastronomic identity is multi-faceted and crucial to individuals as it primarily affects our planet and health. Individual differences and society-related features are equally essential to be understood by policymakers to enhance food availability within

a given country. Given the recent changes in policy, especially on the increased cost of living, the review sought to understand whether the target population and other research inform the gastronomic identity of an individual.

The review used Science Direct, Research Gate, Google Scholar, and MDPI publications. Keywords used for the search were as follows: Food choice criteria, gastronomic tourism, the economic impact on food choice, nutrition, and community. The papers used for the review were in English and used a healthy adult population. A total of 17 papers were reviewed, with three (3) being rejected as they were focused on gastronomic tourism and another set of two (2) dismissed as they were inconclusive on what informs the gastronomic identity of an individual.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The review established that people are more informed about food choices but are limited by environmental factors such as the economy, location, socio-cultural backgrounds, and psychological aspects. Many papers cited the emotional and monetary aspects as leading to an individual's food purchasing pattern (Ondieki et al., 2017; Lopez et al., 2019; Chen & Antonelli, 2020); Dixit & Prayag, 2022). Marketing of food products and influencers also played a significant role in informing food choices, in that if one is following a celebrity and they claim that a specific food product is giving a positive vibe, the followers will tend to try the product or go to a particular restaurant that is serving the product.

Akombi et al. (2017) imbibe that food security public policies need to be improved for better economic and welfare conditions of households. Though this may not be easy to attain given the current international events that affect the economy, gastronomic identity may be morphed to the region that one is in to be able to afford locally available food. This will promote culinary tourism and better diets for the excellent nourishment of the population. This will encourage culinary tourism for the people and promote an understanding of the people's culture and practices in that location. Most of the research

findings indicated that culinary tourists always plan to partake of a meal or drink in a particular region to experience the destination's appeal. This demonstrates that restaurants in any location have to hire the right people for them to be able to provide authentic meals to residents, visitors, and locals who appreciate culture (Chen & Antonelli, 2020; Dixit & Prayag, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

Most foods that are available are seasonal and unique to various locations. The counties initially studied and reviewed have seasons that do not coincide. Hence, the residents obtain food from their original homes to satisfy their needs. Economic growth may positively impact the hospitality industry, allowing it to diversify its menus and hire the right people to produce the correct gastronomic product. With a favourable economic environment, culinary tourism will gain in the destinations and even start attracting new markets. Efficient use of natural resources, preservation of cultural values, diversity, and mutual understanding will enhance culinary tourism and promote the product's sustainability.

The review findings will be helpful to hospitality investors and county government for the development of businesses and public and private policymakers to enhance the development and promotion of diversity and inclusivity.

Recommendations

The review recommends the following studies to enhance tourism and hospitality products: promoting agri-tourism in conjunction with gastronomic identity, the role of inclusivity and diversity in the development of restaurant menus, and assessing economic impacts on the promotion of culinary/ gastronomic tourism.

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