

Gastronomy as a factor of tourists' overall experience: a study of Jeonju, South Korea

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Abstract

Purpose – Satisfying the gastronomy experience of tourists becomes the most important strategic aim in the hospitality and tourism industries. This study attempts to prove that there is a distinct and specific market segment related to gastronomy from the overall number of tourist arrival of Jeonju City. Furthermore, this study investigates the different factors that affect the overall experience of tourists. The focus of the study is Jeonju City, a popular gastronomy destination in South Korea.

Design/methodology/approach – Survey questionnaires were distributed to 680 tourists in Jeonju City during two survey periods. Descriptive statistics and regressions were utilized to treat the data. The predictors that affect the overall experience of tourists were identified through the different literature. The hypotheses were formulated and tested to examine the relationship between the assessments of the distinct gastronomy-tourist market and tourists' overall experience.

Findings – The results indicate that there are 17.20% of the respondents indicated that their main reason for traveling was for the food. Descriptive statistics revealed that local food satisfaction, destination image perceived quality, perceived value, tourist expectations, and costs and risks have a positive and significant influence on tourist overall experience.

Originality/value – The findings of this study could provide guidelines for both the hospitality and tourism industries of the country, and tourist destination operators to further positioned approaches to satisfy gastronomy tourists in the “new normal”.

Keywords Gastronomy, Tourist destination, Tourist experience, Jeonju city, South Korea

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Any destination to be considered as a tourist spot should consist of both tangible and intangible products and services within its area. Food is one of the many important resources that should be present. While a new era of tourism occurred and evolved, there is increasing responsiveness about the role of gastronomy in the emergence of different tourism destinations in different cities, regions and countries.

Gastronomy is frequently defined as the art of cooking and good eating; however, this is only one part of the whole picture. Many experts claimed that gastronomy is the study of the connections between culture and food. Others suggest that it is the involvement of the



preparation and cooking to experiencing, experimenting, evolving and documenting the food. Similar to the studies of [Brillant-Savarin \(1994\)](#), [Gillespie and Cousins \(2015\)](#), gastronomy is the art and science of cooking, eating and drinking as a pleasure using different senses.

Experiencing gastronomy is an important attraction together with other tourism activities which might affect destination choice, overall satisfaction and revisit intention of tourists ([Kim et al., 2013](#); [Kim and Eves, 2012](#)). Since local gastronomy can be easily accessed by the tourists as it is an inseparable part of any destination's products, local food became an integral element of a tourist experience ([Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016](#); [Tsai, 2016](#)). Local food also represents intangible customs and heritages that result in the unique characteristics of the destination ([Chang et al., 2018](#); [Kozak and Rimmington, 2000](#); [Kozak et al., 2007](#)).

Gastronomy tourism represents an emerging tourism market for many countries and regions that creates a unique source of competitive advantage for tourist destinations ([Blichfeldt and Halkier, 2013](#)). According to [Morales and Cordova \(2019\)](#), destinations that are aware of the role of food in their tourism success have begun to use their gastronomic potentials in their promotions and positioning in the tourism market as a national identity element. This is equally related to the findings of [Sanchez-Cañizares and Castillo-Canalejo \(2015\)](#), wherein tourists reveal high curiosity in gastronomy as a travel motivation in the Spanish city where they value more this activity.

Jeonju City is known to be the "Perfect Region" that can be found in the southwest part of South Korea. The city is the capital of North Jeolla Province, one of the nine existing provinces of the country. Using the name Jeonju was initiated by King Gyeongdeok during his 16th year as a king when he unified the three states in 757 AD ([Jeonju City Government, 2017a, b, c](#)). The city is known to be the "more Korean City" with preserved history and authentic beauty that is considered as one of the best destinations for both local and foreign visitors eager to experience true Korean traditions and culture through different first-hand activities ([Jeonju City Government, 2017a, b, c](#)).

Moreover, there are several promoted tourist spots in Jeonju City, namely, Gyeonggijeon Shrine, Jeonju Hanok Village, Jeondong Catholic Cathedral, Pungnammun Gate, Nambu Traditional Market, Omokdae and Imokdae, Jeonjuhyanggyo, a local Confucian school, Jaman Mural Village, and Deokjin Park. Among these tourist spots, Jeonju Hanok Village is the most popular according to [UNESCO \(2020\)](#). The city was also branded as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy due to its fortune of traditional home cooking passed down from generation to generation over thousands of years. The city also has active food research, programs to support and nurture local talented chefs, and the capability to host distinctive local food festivals ([Ilbo, 2012](#)).

Despite the present offerings of Jeonju City, it has an incomparable tourist arrival to Seoul City, the capital of South Korea. The city of Seoul has 14 million foreign tourists' arrival for 2019 exceeding its record of 13.6 million in 2016, not to include the local tourists. That makes the capital ranks seventh worldwide in terms of foreign tourists' arrivals ([The Korea Times, 2019](#)). Jeonju City has the potential to reach these statistics, but due to its geographical location and the travel time of 3 hours–3.5 hours from Seoul City, tourists tend to stay in the capital and nearby destinations instead of visiting the city of Jeonju ([Chichi, 2014](#)).

This drastic change in tourist arrival is due to the disastrous impact of COVID-19 that similarly affects the flourishing gastronomy tourism of Jeonju City. The present state is triggering a serious disruption to both the hospitality and tourism industries of the city. The restrictions on in-bound air travel, cruises and accommodations added to the challenges facing by Jeonju City.

Regardless of being a gastronomy destination of South Korea and considering the present challenges from the COVID-19 situation, this undertaking intends to discover whether there is a distinct gastronomy market visiting Jeonju City despite its geographical location before and during the pandemic. Resulting to the unforeseen and unpredictable Hurricane of

COVID-19, this paper also explores whether local food satisfaction, destination image, perceived quality, perceived value, tourists' expectations, and cost and risks have significantly affected the overall experience of tourists to the gastronomy offerings of Jeonju City. This undertaking sets a new perception as two attempts of data gathering were conducted before and during the wave of COVID-19 in Jeonju City, South Korea.

2. Literature review

2.1 Tourist destination and gastronomy market

There are several factors why a tourist will visit a destination. Mainly, tourists visit a destination because of a specific motivation and it is the foundation of any travel-related events. As a result, food-related motivations became one of those motivations of tourists to visit a destination. Based on the study of the [World Food Travel Association \(2020\)](#), gastronomy tourists visit different countries at the same rate as other kinds of tourists but they usually spend and allocate a specific amount of funds on gastronomic experiences in local tourism. It is recognized that the influence of this market on the status of a country's economy has amplified in recent years as the results of continuous searching for unusual flavors of people to gastronomy tourism ([Uçuk, 2018](#)). Gastronomic market travels to an area outside of their residential places. Hence, while fulfilling other tourism activities, they tend to satisfy one of their vital needs as a person which is to eat. This is similar to the study carried out by [Akmese et al. \(2019\)](#) that the gastronomic market appreciates different destinations with its specific dish by seeing and tasting local delicacies.

On the other hand, there are few to none research related to gastronomy that was published that discussed the distinct gastronomic market segment of Jeonju City. However, since the city was designated as the "Creative City for Gastronomy", Jeonju has been working diligently with the UNESCO mission statement to preserve traditional heritage, sustainability, and tourism development ([UNESCO, 2020](#)). This scenario is similar to the study of [López-Guzmán et al. \(2017\)](#) wherein gastronomy is used as a source of motivation in tourist arrivals in Latin America. Even the region is characterized as a recognized gastronomic destination, it still has little studies and published literature.

2.2 Food satisfaction in relation to the overall experience of tourists

Local food satisfaction is the range of pleasure by each tourist's overall experience that fulfills oneself that may happen before, during, and after the trip together with all the tangible and intangible products that feature a destination ([Severt et al., 2007](#)). Overall experience and local food satisfaction are related and formed by the judgment of one's expectation in comparing before and after destination experience.

In the tourism perspective, food satisfaction and experience are referred to as the comparison of pre-travel and post-travel expectations ([Chen and Chen, 2010](#)), though the negative experience of unsatisfied tourists is a possibility to be also an outcome ([Reisinger and Turner, 2003](#)). This relationship is revealed in several studies regarding the contributions of local food satisfaction to the overall experience of a gastronomic tourist. Furthermore, the existence of different types of tourists, including gastronomic tourists, has a different basis of their high or low satisfaction in the local gastronomy when satisfying their overall experience ([Bukharov and Berezka, 2018](#); [Pérez Gálvez et al., 2020](#)).

2.3 Destination image in relation to the overall experience of tourists

A destination is defined as intermingling relationships of tourists' space and products providing a whole experience according to the tourists' itinerary, the purpose of travel, cultural background and previous experience ([Fuchs and Weiermair, 2003](#)). [Chi and Qu \(2008\)](#) define the destination image as an individual's rational image of the knowledge, feelings and

overall perception of a specific desired destination. According to [Tasci et al. \(2007\)](#) destination image is a system of one's opinions, thoughts, feelings, visualizations and intentions toward the destination.

Various studies revealed that destination image is significant in terms of its effects on the behavior of the tourists in terms of destination choice, decision-making and satisfaction ([Court and Lupton, 1997](#); [Schroeder, 1996](#); [Ross, 1993](#)). Destination image is also one of the significant factors to the tourists' travel judgment and plans to satisfy tourists' overall experience ([Chen et al., 2013](#)). The findings of [Chiu and Cheng \(2016\)](#) reveal that the destination image has a direct influence on the overall experience of tourists. Both affective and cognitive images experienced by the tourist had positive influences on their satisfaction that predicted their overall experience and destination loyalty. In the same way, the relationship between destination image and overall experience revealed that the affective image had a direct influence on tourist overall experience. On the other hand, the cognitive image showed no direct relation to the tourist experience. Instead, the study presented that it had an indirect influence on affective image and satisfaction ([Kim and Lee 2015](#)).

2.4 Perceived quality in relation to the overall experience of tourists

In the tourism research of [Chen and Tsai \(2007\)](#), the perceived quality was defined as the tourist's valuation of the delivery service processes in connection with the overall trip experience. Several researchers have presented studies on quality and experience which relate to tangible and intangible tourism products, a few have recommended that perceived quality and overall experience need to be regarded as distinct constructs. This is because observations about the quality are based on the long-term cognitive evaluations of an establishment's product and service delivery while customer experience is an emotional reaction to a specific experience on a short term basis ([Tian-Cole et al., 2002](#); [Rust et al., 1999](#); [Oliver, 1997](#); [Taylor and Baker, 1994](#)).

[Espejel et al. \(2009\)](#) discussed that the influence of perceived quality attributes on consumers' experience is significantly different among the different levels of consumer satisfaction with regards to their local food experience. This is related to the empirical findings of [Wang \(2013\)](#) and [Shah et al. \(2020\)](#) that perceptions toward the quality of visual packaging directly influence consumer's food and brand preferences. The findings also reveal that the perception of food and service quality significantly impacts the level of customers' overall experience. Moreover, the impacts of food and service quality on customers' experience depending on the different categories of restaurants they dine in. This suggests that the important role of the food establishments' tangible and intangible quality induces favorable behavioral customers' perceived quality ([Ha and Jang, 2012](#)). Thus, the researchers also pointed out that perceived quality has a relation to the overall experience of tourists.

2.5 Perceived value in relation to the overall experience of tourists

The customer's valuation of the services based on the perceptions of what is received and what is given is defined as the perceived value ([Zeithaml, 1988](#)). [Lovelock \(2000\)](#) presented that perceived value is the product between perceived benefits and perceived costs. It is viewed as a combination of both monetary and non-monetary prices including other factors such as time, search costs, and convenience.

The Equity Theory formulated by [Oliver and Swan \(1989\)](#), consumer experience reflects when there is greater value on what is received compared to what is spent by the consumer. This is indeed a reflection to the several studies that when tourists perceive that the level and quality of tourism products consumed is greater than the value of money paid, they will feel a positive experience towards the services received ([Song et al., 2012](#); [Chen and Chen, 2010](#); [Haug and Su, 2010](#)). In essence, the tourist overall experience is directly affected by

perceived value. Tourists with a higher perception of the destination value are to be expected to experience greater tourism experience with the destination (Song *et al.*, 2012; Haung and Su, 2010; Chen and Chen, 2010; Um *et al.*, 2006).

2.6 Tourist expectation in relation to the overall experience of tourists

The studies of Millan and Esteban (2004) and Oliver (1997) reveal that expectation is an important factor of experience. Tourist expectation is an effective aspect in the service industry like tourism and hospitality (Sadeh *et al.*, 2012). According to the study of (Lather *et al.*, 2012), the stages of expectation and experience have vital significance as to sustainable development of tourism destination is concerned. Contrary to the studies of Akama and Kieti (2003) tourists commonly have initial expectations before the consumption of tourism products and services. These expectations were molded from advertisements and word of mouth insights from other consumers during the previous experience. However, the results of the study of del Bosque *et al.* (2006) recommend that tourist expectations are formed from tourists' experience, service satisfaction level, communication with the service provider and the tourist's perceived image of the service.

Several studies have shown that the perceived value and expectation attainment of tourists have a significant relationship with the over-all experience. It affects the decision-making whether to visit a specific destination. The potential of gastronomy tourism to gain high perceived value with its destination attractiveness is important to tourists in motivating oneself to travel and make a positive contribution to the industry after the fulfillment of the tourists' expectations (Bukharov and Berezka, 2018). It is also evident in the case of the hospitality and tourism establishments in the city of Quito in Ecuador, wherein the importance of the local gastronomy as one of the vital parts of the tourism sector escalates the interest of foreign tourists to visit the city (Pérez Gálvez *et al.*, 2020; Sanchez-Canizares and Castillo-Canalejo, 2015). The findings in the undertaking of Shah *et al.* (2020) also reveal that the customers' perceived value and expectations depend on the different tangible and intangible products of a destination.

2.7 Costs and risks in relation to the overall experience of tourists

It is a normal consumer behavior that any tourist will reflect both costs and risks before the visit to a certain destination. Costs and risks levels might be different in the eyes of different individual tourists. According to the studies of Aqueveque (2006) and Darnell and Johnson (2001), low cost and risk associated with a tourist destination can encourage repetitive visitations that might affect the socioeconomic of the destination. Moreover, the low costs and risks that tourists identify in a specific tourist destination can influence its reputation for safety and encourage repeat visitation (Kozak *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, tourists' perceptions towards costs and risks are influenced by many factors such as experience, personal characteristics, and environmental forces such as political stability, economic conditions and others.

As a result, rational tourists customarily choose to travel to destinations that offer low costs and low risks. In the service sector where food service is included, costs and risks are a different concept from the perceived value (Cronin *et al.*, 2000). The study of Pisinik and Snoj (2007) presents costs and risks as an independent variable that causes disutility in different aspects. Moreover, costs and risks can be considered as sacrifice factors which include the element of price and non-price components such as the time and effort invested prior, during, and after the travel (Monroe, 1990) and Zeithaml (1988). According to Tasci and Boylu (2010), the costs and risks associated with the tourists' purchasing behavior may also include social attractiveness and self-security. Therefore, costs and risks are negatively related to tourist's experience towards a destination and it can adversely affect the overall experience. Tourists

who experience lower costs and risk are more likely to have greater satisfaction with regards to the overall experience in the destination.”

2.8 Relationship of variables to the overall experience of tourists

There are different motivations of travelers in the choice of a tourist destination. Study shows that there is a direct relationship between tourist overall experience towards gastronomy and their expenditure and risk-taking in visiting a destination. Tourists reveal complex interest in food as a travel motivation in the Spanish city, where they value aspects related to the value of money and security more positively. However, the preparedness to pay more to try local food also affects the end experience of the tourists (Sanchez-Cañizares and Castillo-Canalejo 2015).

Furthermore, tourist expectations, destination image, perceived quality and perceived value as predictors of over-all experience were presented by Xia *et al.* (2009). The European customer overall satisfaction index model contains four antecedents of the overall experience. These are tourist expectations, perceived quality, perceived value and destination image (Eklof and Westlund, 2002). The American Customer Satisfaction Index also endorses three antecedents of tourists' over-all experience through the different levels of customer expectations, perceived quality and perceived value (Fornell *et al.*, 1996). This goes with the study of Dmitrovic (2009) that suggests quality, perceived value, image, and costs and risks are determinants of tourist satisfaction. In the same way, a study that steered in Hong Kong about the impact of perceived attractiveness, perceived quality and perceived value on satisfaction are all factors that contribute to the overall experience (Um *et al.*, 2006). In Western Australia, research pertains to the perceived attractiveness, perceived quality, perceived value, perceived risk and satisfaction (Quintal and Polcynski, 2010). Also, an investigation in Thailand discussed the role and influence of destination image, place attachment and personal involvement on visitor experience (Prayag, 2009).

Founded from this literature and references, the present study examines six factors that affect the tourists' overall experience: local food satisfaction, destination image, perceived quality, perceived value, tourist expectation, and costs and risks. This study was pursued in response to limited insights on the overall gastronomic experience of tourists visiting Jeonju City in South Korea. A different angle that scrutinized the determinants of tourists' overall experience would be a significant phase in sustaining the city's title as the gastronomy capital of South Korea amidst the present pandemic situation. For these reasons, the findings of this study have notable influences on the city's Tourism Organization and to the policymakers of South Korea.

2.9 Research objectives

To date, few studies in tourism and gastronomic literature revealed if there is a distinct market segment related to gastronomy from the tourist arrival of Jeonju City. Moreover, few or no study simultaneously investigates the influence of local food satisfaction, destination image, perceived quality, perceived value, expectation attainment, and costs and risks to the overall experience of the tourists in Jeonju City. Therefore, this undertaking identifies (1) the distinct gastronomic market visiting the city, (2) the gastronomy experience of the gastronomy-tourist market, (3) the effect of different factors to the overall experience of tourists towards Jeonju City's gastronomy before and during the pandemic, and lastly (4) the relationship between the assessment of the gastronomy tourist-market and the perceived local tourists' overall experience.

3. Methodology

A printed survey using close-ended questions was utilized for the data gathering on the predictors and criterion variables, as well as on the specific demographic profile of the respondents.

3.1 Research design

The study examined the gastronomy tourist experience in Jeonju City. A descriptive research design was utilized quantitative techniques for data collection and analysis with the use of a survey questionnaire. This design was applied to identify the characteristics of the tourists in terms of their demographic profile and if they represent a distinct gastronomy market segment of the overall tourist market of the city. A descriptive research design is used to explain current issues or problems utilizing data collection to describe the occurrence completely (Fox and Bayat, 2008). It was also significant in identifying the frequencies and trends of gastronomy tourists' overall experience.

3.2 Research framework

Figure 1 presents the research framework showing the links of the independent and dependent variables. Based on past studies, a blend of 6 variables was considered to influence tourist satisfaction with Jeonju City. Kim (2011) carried out a study about the relationships between service orientation, service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. A conceptual framework was introduced and validated. However, no framework has been developed to simultaneously investigate the influences of local food satisfaction, destination image, perceived quality, perceived value, expectation attainment and costs and risks to the overall experience of gastronomic tourists in Jeonju City. Therefore, there is a need to explore and integrate a model to measure the overall experience of the tourists in the gastronomy sector as this is one of the growing trends in the tourism industry and to fulfill the critical gaps reported in the literature.

3.3 Research hypotheses

Based on the proposed research framework, the researchers developed the following hypotheses:

- H1. Local Food Satisfaction has a positive effect on tourists' overall experience.
- H2. Destination Image has a positive effect on tourists' overall experience.
- H3. Perceived Quality has a positive effect on tourists' overall experience.
- H4. Perceived Value has a positive effect on tourists' overall experience.
- H5. Tourist Expectation has a positive effect on tourists' overall experience.
- H6. Costs and Risks has a negative effect on tourists' overall experience.
- H7. Gastronomy Tourists Market Assessment has a positive effect on tourists' overall experience.

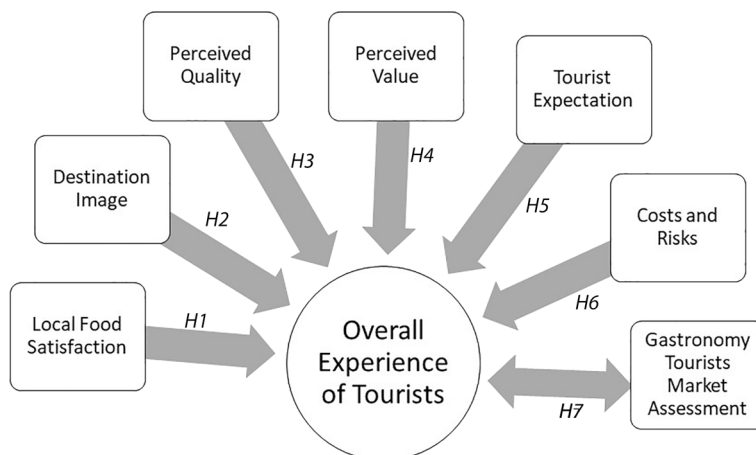


Figure 1.
Proposed research
framework

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- H5. Tourists' Expectation has a positive effect on tourists' overall experience.
- H6. Costs and Risks have a positive effect on tourists' overall experience.
- H7. Relationship between the Assessment of Gastronomy-Tourists Market and the Perception of Tourists' Overall Experience.

3.4 Research locale

The interrelationships of local food satisfaction, destination image, perceived quality, and perceived value, the expectation of the tourist, and costs and risks were tested with a sample of respondents under the foodservice sector of Jeonju City. The researchers' used the advantage of being located in Jeonju City, as this city was considered by UNESCO last 2012 as the first food craft city in South Korea (UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, the researchers chose Jeonju Hanok Village as the primary location of the study due to its status of being the most visited tourist spot in Jeonju City. Also, it houses different food establishments that offer local Korean food according to the local government of Jeonju City (2017).

3.5 Respondents of the study, sampling and data gathering

Using the population from the data provided by the City Tourism Office of Jeonju City, the number of participants was computed using an online sample size calculator (Raosoft.com). Depicting a 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level and 50% response distribution, and it resulted in 384 samples. In this instance, however, it is very difficult to apply a random sampling methodology to attain the required number of tourist respondents due to the language barrier, cultural background, and the motivation level to participate in the tourists visiting Hanok Village. The population is too large to examine which is why the researchers decided to use convenience sampling, which is the most common appropriate non-probability sampling method in this study. The researchers also believe that the data gathering and sampling technique were done correctly, and it produced the same quality of results and findings compare to other methods.

In this study, tourists with dine-in experience in any food establishments in the locale were the target respondents. Four hundred (400) questionnaires were disseminated but only 392 accomplished questionnaires were valid for the study. To have a deeper impact and perspective, the researchers decided to conduct another attempt at data gathering. The second attempt was executed during the five-day Chuseok celebration in South Korea wherein the government's restrictions for COVID-19 were eased. During the data gathering, the health and sanitary protocols were observed. Target respondents were inquired whether they are comfortable to participate in the study. The second attempt gathered 288 new responses lower than the first attempt as some pandemic-related difficulties were experienced. Overall, this study utilized 680 responses from the local tourists of Jeonju City (Table 1). As suggested by Roscoe (1975), a sample of more than 30 and less than 500 is sufficient for most research.

Since the tourists were preoccupied with their holiday activities, convenience sampling was employed to select the respondents. With the help of a Korean tourism officer of Jeonju Hanok Village, researchers were able to conduct data gathering and established an initial approach with the target respondents to have their participation. Group tourists from different nations were also approached within the area.

Table 1 illustrates the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Of the 680 respondents who provided their gender information, 420 (61.8%) were female, and 260 (38.2%) were male. The largest age group of the respondents was 18–25 years (51%). Around 64% of the respondents were Koreans and respondents from other countries were 36%. In terms of the level of education, 78.2% of the respondents completed college or university degrees, 14.6% completed their high school degree, while only 7.2% of the respondents completed their postgraduate degree.

Table 1.
Summary of the
respondents'
demographic
profile ($n = 680$)

Sex	<i>f</i>	%	Age	<i>f</i>	%
Male	260	38.2	Under 18	2	0.3
Female	420	61.8	18–25	347	51.0
			26–35	120	17.6
			36–45	116	
			45–55	85	
			56 and above	10	
<i>Educational attainment</i>			<i>Nationality</i>		
Completed secondary/high school	99	14.6	Korean	435	64.0
Completed college/university diploma/degree	532	78.2	Non Korean	245	36.0
Completed postgraduate degree	49	7.2			
<i>Length of stay</i>			<i>Frequency of visit</i>		
Less than 1 day	212	31.2	First time	314	53.82
1–2 days	168	24.7	More than once	366	46.18
3–5 days	182	26.8			
about 1 week	15	2.2	<i>Survey Period</i>		
about 2 weeks	80	11.8	Pre-COVID-19	392	57.6
about 1 month	15	2.2	During COVID-19	288	42.4
more than 1 month	8	1.2			

In terms of the length of stay, most of the respondents were staying at Jeonju City in less than 1 day (31.2%) followed by 26.8% of the respondents staying in the city between 3 and 5 days. 24.7% of the respondents were in the city between 1–2 days. While only 1.2% of the respondents already stayed in the city for more than 1 month. Most of the respondents (53.82%) visited the city for the first time while 46.18% visited the city more than once.

3.6 Instrumentation, reliability and validity

During the first data gathering, the survey instrument was written in the English language, but because of the language barrier, the researchers decided to translate the instrument to Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages as these three are the languages of the top tourists of Jeonju Hanok Village according to the tourist arrivals given by the Jeonju City local [Jeonju Local Government \(2017a, b, c\)](#). The instrument was translated by 3 selected university professors in Jeonju city who are fluent in selected languages. Therefore, each question in the instrument contains four languages, namely, English, Korean, Chinese and Japanese. Moreover, as the study attempted a second data gathering, the survey tool was simplified from using four languages to two languages namely English and Korean.

The different items in the survey questionnaire were constructed from different related literature and studies. The instrument contains an introductory statement stating the purpose of the study. The first part covers the profile of the respondents such as sex, age, educational attainment, nationality, length of stay, frequency of visit and the purpose of travel. These items were presented in closed-ended questions and were measured using nominal and ordinal scales. The succeeding sections that constituted the main body of the research are statements with regards to the gastronomic-tourist market whether it represents a distinct market segment from the overall visitor market of the city. The last part of the instrument contains the queries if Jeonju City's gastronomy contributes to the tourist's quality of experience in terms of local food satisfaction, destination image, perceived quality, perceived value, the expectation of the tourists, and cost and risk ([Chang et al., 2018](#); [Kivela and Crotts, 2006](#)).

The criterion variable, local food satisfaction was measured using nine (9) items modified from [Dmitrovic et al. \(2009\)](#), [Oliver \(1980\)](#), [Taylor and Baker \(1994\)](#), and [Wu et al. \(2008\)](#). The

destination image in this study was measured using the five components of tourism destination suggested by Buhalis (2000) which include service, attractions, amenities and atmosphere. Perceived quality, the present research uses five items adopted from Xia *et al.* (2009), Hui *et al.* (2007) and Chen and Tsai (2007). Perceived value has been measured using four dimensions (price, time and effort). These dimensions were employed by Xia *et al.* (2009), Chen and Tsai (2007), Bolton and Drew (1991) and Oliver and Swan (1989) in their undertakings. Tourist expectation was measured using three dimensions from the study by Fornell *et al.* (1996). Finally, the costs and risks construct was measured using three items: price, time and effort. Twenty-nine items were used to measure the predictor variables. A four-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) – strongly disagree to (4) – strongly agree was used to measure the independent and dependent variables.

The content of the questionnaire underwent a face and content validity test. The instrument was evaluated in terms of its feasibility, readability, consistency of style and formatting, and the clarity of the language used (Haladyna, 1999; Trochim, 2001; DeVon *et al.*, 2007). The researchers selected experts from the field of tourism, hospitality and gastronomy. Six experts participated; one from gastronomy, two from tourism and three from hospitality, who are all research-oriented professionals and industry practitioners. Another validation made with the instrument was a pilot testing on 30 respondents in May 2019. Table 2 shows the result of the pilot testing wherein the majority of the items used to measure the variables had a mean score of more than 3.0, which was more than the average score of the four-point Likert scale.

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), the closer the Cronbach's alpha is to 1, the higher its internal consistency reliability. The alpha values for the variables are as follows: V1: Gastronomy-Tourist Market Experience ($\alpha = 0.823$), V2: Local Food Satisfaction ($\alpha = 0.921$), V3: Destination Image ($\alpha = 0.814$), V4: Perceived Quality ($\alpha = 0.973$), V5: Perceived Value ($\alpha = 0.806$), V6: Tourist Expectations ($\alpha = 0.849$), V7: Costs and risks ($\alpha = 0.732$). Except for V7, all variables have alpha scores of above 0.80, which indicates that the items used to measure the constructs are reliable and satisfactory (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013; Nunnally, 1978).

3.7 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to investigate the assessments of the gastronomy-tourist market towards the gastronomy offerings of Jeonju City. The data collected were analyzed using the mean score, SD and linear regression to test if the selected constructs affect the overall experience of tourists in Jeonju City. To test the hypothesis of whether the distinct gastronomy tourist-market experience and the overall experience of Jeonju City's tourists have a significant relationship with each other descriptive statistics were also used. IBM SPSS ver 21.0 software was used in treating this study.

4. Results

This study sought the perceptions of tourists after they experienced the gastronomy offerings of Jeonju City, South Korea. The results of the analysis were summarized as follows:

4.1 Distinct gastronomy-tourist market and their gastronomy experience

One of the demographic characteristics sought by this study is the respondents' main purpose of visits. Table 3 presents that before the existence of COVID-19, the majority of the respondents visited Jeonju City to spend holiday and pleasure (68.11%), but remarkably 21.94% declared that their main reason for traveling to the city was for food. On the other hand, 66.33% of the respondents stayed in the city to visit friends and relatives. It was

Table 2.
Pilot test results-
Cronbach's
Alpha ($n = 30$)

Variables	A
<i>V1: Gastronomy-tourist market experience</i>	0.823
When I travel to Jeonju, it is important to experience different local food from different tourist spots	
When I travel to Jeonju, I need to try street food in different tourist spots	
When I usually travel to Jeonju, I visit the city because I want to take a rest or relaxation and trying local food is just an option	
I only visit Jeonju when there is a local food festival happening	
I usually visit Jeonju because I want to escape from the daily routine and rarely trying local food	
When I visit Jeonju, I still take my meal from foreign restaurants	
When I travel to Jeonju as a tourist, I need to dine out	
<i>V2: Local food satisfaction</i>	0.921
I enjoyed my visit to Jeonju City for its local food	
I am satisfied with my decision to visit Jeonju to try local food	
I prefer Jeonju City to experience Korean local food	
I have positive feelings regarding Jeonju's local food	
This experience is exactly what I need to satisfy my Korean food cravings	
My choice to pursue this trip to look for local delicacies is a good decision	
This trip has a pleasant dining experience	
My dining experience was better than expected	
I rate Jeonju City as a better destination to try local Korean food as compared to similar destinations	
<i>V3: Destination image</i>	0.814
I think the outside image of local food establishments is eye-catching	
I think the interior image of local food establishments is stunning	
I think the image of food servers are notable	
I think the image of staff in welcoming food-tourists as guests are outstanding	
I think the image of festivals related to local food is attractive	
<i>V4: Perceived quality</i>	0.973
I believe the quality of local food preparation is outstanding	
I believe the quality of the local food presentation is outstanding	
I believe the quality of food service is extraordinary	
I believe the taste of local food is incomparable	
I believe the serving size of local food is acceptable	
<i>V5: Perceived value</i>	0.806
In terms of money, traveling to Jeonju City to try local Korean food is practical	
In terms of time, traveling to Jeonju City to try local Korean food is worth it	
In terms of effort, traveling to Jeonju City to try local Korean food is reasonable	
I consider traveling to Jeonju City to try local Korean food is expensive	
<i>V6: Expectations of the tourists</i>	0.849
My expectation of local food quality was met	
My expectation of the city's local food image is remarkable	
My expectation of spending my money, time, and effort are acceptable	
<i>V7: Cost and risks</i>	0.732
I consider traveling to Jeonju City expensive	
I have to spend more time to visit Jeonju City	
I have to put more effort to visit Jeonju City	

followed by holiday visitors with 18.40% and tourists travel for the food with 10.76%. Out of 680 respondents, [Table 3](#) also revealed that most respondents (47.06%) traveled to Jeonju City with the purpose of holiday or leisure, followed by visiting friends or relatives (31.62). While 17.20% travel to the city with the purpose of the food.

Moreover, [Table 4](#) revealed that the respondents who traveled to Jeonju strongly agree that it is important to experience different local food ($\bar{x} = 3.71, \sigma = 0.51$) and have a dine-out experience ($\bar{x} = 3.77, \sigma = 0.50$) while others agreed that trying different street food ($\bar{x} = 3.35, \sigma = 0.70$) is also important. The results were supported by other items that respondents

disagree with the concept that trying local food is just an option ($\bar{x} = 2.11, \sigma = 1.02$), visiting the city during festivals only ($\bar{x} = 2.10, \sigma = 1.02$), trying local food rarely ($\bar{x} = 2.14, \sigma = 1.02$) and taking meals from foreign restaurants ($\bar{x} = 2.14, \sigma = 1.02$),

4.2 Hypothesis testing

4.2.1 Overall experience of tourists. Table 5 shows a summary of the overall experience of gastronomic tourists concerning the six selected variables of the study. The results were divided into three categories: pre-COVID-19, during COVID-19 and the combined results of the two. All variables indicate a verbal interpretation of High except for the last variable cost and risks for both survey periods. As the city's tourists rated their experience, destination image was rated with a 3.31 mean score followed by expectations of the tourists ($\bar{x} = 3.23; \sigma = 0.52$). While during the second survey period, the expectation of the tourists ($\bar{x} = 3.76; \sigma = 0.28$) emerge as the highest predictors of tourist overall experience followed by local food satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 3.72; \sigma = 0.48$).

For both survey periods, expectation of the tourist ($\bar{x} = 3.46; \sigma = 0.50$), perceived quality ($\bar{x} = 3.39; \sigma = 0.57$) and destination image ($\bar{x} = 3.38; \sigma = 0.39$) emerge as the most important

	Pre-COVID-19		During COVID-19		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Holiday/pleasure	267	68.11	53	18.40	320	47.06
Visiting friends or relatives	24	6.12	191	66.33	215	31.62
Stopover	5	1.28	13	4.51	18	2.65
For the food	86	21.94	31	10.76	117	17.20
Others	10	2.55			10	1.47
Total	392	100.00	288	100.00	680	100.00

Table 3. Summary of the respondents' purpose of visit (n = 680)

	\bar{x}	σ	Verbal interpretation
1. GTM 1	3.71	0.51	Strongly agree
2. GTM 2	3.35	0.70	Agree
3. GTM 3	2.11	1.02	Disagree
4. GTM 4	2.10	1.02	Disagree
5. GTM 5	2.14	1.02	Disagree
6. GTM 6	2.08	1.03	Disagree
7. GTM 7	3.77	0.50	Strongly agree

Table 4. Responses of gastronomy tourism as a distinct market (n = 117)

	Pre-COVID-19		During COVID-19		Combined		Verbal interpretation*
	\bar{x}	σ	\bar{x}	σ	\bar{x}	σ	
Local food satisfaction	3.10	0.51	3.72	0.48	3.36	0.60	High satisfaction
Destination image	3.31	0.41	3.46	0.36	3.38	0.39	High image
Perceived quality	3.19	0.59	3.66	0.40	3.39	0.57	High quality
Perceived value	3.08	0.56	3.41	0.20	3.22	0.47	High value
Expectation of the tourist	3.23	0.52	3.76	0.28	3.46	0.50	High expectation
Costs and risks	2.11	0.58	2.77	0.46	2.39	0.62	Low cost and risks

Table 5. Summary of tourists' overall experience (pre-COVID-19 n = 392)

predictors of tourists' positive overall experience while *cost and risks* was rated with low verbal interpretation ($\bar{x} = 2.39; \sigma = 0.62$). However, during the second survey period, there is an increase in the mean value of this variable ($\bar{x} = 2.11$ to $\bar{x} = 2.77$) which might be an effect of the present pandemic situation.

To test the hypotheses, linear regressions were run. When all six predictors were regressed with the criterion variable, which is overall tourist experience, the model was found to be fit. **Table 6** shows that all predictors have positive relationships with tourists' overall experience; all six variables predict tourists' overall experience significantly. Local food satisfaction ($\beta = 0.294; p = 0.000$), destination image ($\beta = 0.198; p = 0.000$), perceived quality ($\beta = 0.283; p = 0.000$), perceived value ($\beta = 0.237; p = 0.000$), expectation of the tourist ($\beta = 0.252; p = 0.000$), and costs and risks ($\beta = 0.313; p = 0.000$) emerge as important predictors of tourists' overall experience.

4.2.2 Relationship between the assessments of the gastronomy-tourist market and the perceived tourists' overall experience. As shown in **Table 7**, there is a significant relationship between the assessment of the gastronomy-tourist market of Jeonju City and the perceptions with regards to tourists' overall experience. All variables have *p*-values less than 0.05. All coefficients are positive, with a score of higher than 0.30, which means the correlated dependent and independent variables have a strong relationship with each other (Taylor, 1997; Ramsey, 2016).

5. Discussions and implications of the study

Jeonju City has a substantial distinct gastronomy-tourist market which is evident from the results of this study. It only suggests that aside from spending holiday and leisure, food is one of the motivations of tourists visiting the city. This result is supported by the findings of other researchers (Dongyoung, 2013; Kivela and Crotts, 2006) where gastronomy provides inspiration to travel and it gives positive effects after traveling from one destination.

In the same way, the results manifest that tourists who travel to Jeonju City indicate the importance of dining out in the city and experiencing different local food from different tourist spots. It gives high implications that tourists can be considered as gastronomic

Table 6.
Regression analysis
results (*n* = 680)

Constant	β	<i>p</i> -value
Tourist satisfaction	0.294	0.000
Destination image	0.198	0.000
Perceived quality	0.283	0.000
Perceived value	0.237	0.000
Expectation of the tourist	0.252	0.000
Costs and risks	0.313	0.000

Note(s): Significant at the 0.05 level

Table 7.
Relationship between
the assessment of the
gastronomy tourist
market and the
perceived overall
experience of tourists

	Correlation coefficient	<i>p</i> -value	Verbal interpretation
Local tourist satisfaction	0.724	0.000	significant
Destination image	0.521	0.000	significant
Perceived quality	0.544	0.000	significant
Perceived value	0.498	0.000	significant
Expectation of the tourist	0.613	0.000	significant
Costs and risks	0.408	0.000	significant

tourists as the need to dine out while staying in the city. This result is supported by an earlier study by Kivela and Crofts (2006), Vázquez-Martínez *et al.* (2019) and Gordon (2018) confirming that in other countries, gastronomy is a vital part of sustainable tourism on how to attract the potential markets.

The current study also revealed that all of the variables measured, local food satisfaction, destination image, perceived quality, perceived value and expectations of the tourists established high verbal interpretations during the two survey periods. It only suggests that the higher the level of results is, the higher the overall experience level encountered by the tourists. On the other hand, costs and risks received low verbal interpretation. However, it only implies that based on the items measured the lower the level of results is, the higher the overall experience level encountered by the tourists. The positive relationship between the costs and risks variable and the overall experience of the tourists is unexpected. Various studies have indicated a negative relationship between the two variables, suggesting that the higher the costs and risks are, the lower the satisfaction (Tasci and Boylu, 2010; Yuksel and Yuksel, 2007; Monroe, 1990; Zeithaml, 1988). In this study, however, the tourists indicated that the level of their overall experience in the city remained high despite the costs and risks. This could be due to the probability that the tourists were prepared to absorb any increase in costs and experiencing risky events such as natural calamities or the COVID-19 pandemic while visiting the city was observed as remote possibilities.

Despite the present pandemic situation tourists indicates their appreciation for the gastronomic offerings of the city. The results approved that tourists' positive overall experience depended on different factors. The outcomes would then assist the local and even the national government of South Korea to devise more competitive tourism service schemes to answer the challenges brought by the pandemic. Moreover, the foodservice sector should maintain or even improve their gastronomy offerings that will keep in contributing to the positive experience and revisit the intentions of the tourists.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The current research results give support to the hypotheses established by the researchers. It is expected that the results derived from the framework will serve as a guide for the sustainability of the hospitality and tourism sectors in the entire country. This undertaking will also help the country to maintain and developed more popular tourist destinations in South Korea. Understanding tourists' overall experience will provide meaningful evidence on sustaining tourist destinations further and offering better tourism products and services.

The findings of the study also indicate that tourists have a positive overall experience with their visits to the city. All predictors in the study as a gastronomic tourist destination are positive. Hence, the researchers propose that Jeonju City be positioned as one of the travel destinations in South Korea that promises tourism products and services to support other future tourism campaigns. Even though local food satisfaction is high, monitoring and development of firmer health and sanitary protocols should be performed to overcome the present challenges from the pandemic.

The results may serve as an important input for trend analysis in the "new normal" while strategic plans are also to be considered. The goals are: (1) to identify strategic objectives at the destination level; (2) to prepare tactical and operational plans to balance the risk/cost and other presented predictors; (3) to increase the competitiveness of the city destination; (4) to assign resources efficiently and effectively and (5) to apply the formulated strategies to a different unpopular tourist destination in the entire country.

Lastly, tourism organizations and all food service establishments must work hand-in-hand to create a holistic approach to emphasize the gastronomy offerings of Jeonju City. With local food-related factors affecting the overall experience of tourists, improvement and

sustainability of the city are both possibilities. Local and international marketing efforts should be enhanced towards establishing Jeonju City as a priority destination in South Korea and not only an option.

7. Limitations and future research

As a cross-sectional study, this undertaking has some limitations since the data gathered make implications about the population of interest at a defined time only. As such, inputs for trend analysis in the “new normal” in South Korea’s gastronomy sector should follow up this study to support the recommendations. Moreover, the majority of the respondents were Korean citizens thus, future research should balance the samples from local and foreign tourists hence a comparative study between the two groups can be carried out while shifting the objectives of this study to the new normal standards in the gastronomy sector of the city. Also, an attempt to identify deeper the effect of costs and risks to the experience of tourists should be undertaken to overcome the new challenges caused by the pandemic. It would help hospitality and tourism stakeholders to design specific campaigns targeting those challenges. Finally, it would be also beneficial to conduct an in-depth study to compare the level of satisfaction and complaint among first-time and repeat visitors.

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