Does a healthy diet travel? Motivations, satisfaction, and loyalty with plant-based food dining at destinations.

Abstract

Purpose: The research objectives were to: (1) examine the relationship among motivations, satisfaction and loyalty with plant-based food dining at destinations; (2) determine if and how the attractiveness of eating plant-based foods moderates satisfaction and loyalty; and (3) investigate potential differences in visitor background information and consumption characteristics.

Design/methodology/approach: A survey was conducted at tourist attractions in southern Taiwan and 274 valid questionnaires were obtained. The relationships among motivations, satisfaction and loyalty were investigated when eating plant-based foods during travel.

Findings: The results indicated a positive relationship between motivations and satisfaction/loyalty in plant-based food dining. Motivations for plant-based food dining were comprised of four domains (physical, cultural, interpersonal, and prestige) and satisfaction and loyalty had three (overall satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to recommend).

Research implications: Motivations had a significant effect on satisfaction and loyalty; food attractiveness did not moderate the effect of motivations on satisfaction/loyalty; and background characteristics influenced satisfaction and loyalty.

Practical implications: Marketers of plant-based restaurants must make a greater effort to understand the distinctive demographic and dietary characteristics of the people who comprise the core of this market.

Originality/value: This research adds to the limited literature on plant-based and vegetarian dining in tourism destinations. The findings also complement the evidence linking motivations to satisfaction and loyalty when dining.

Keywords: Plant-based food dining, motivations, satisfaction and loyalty, food attractiveness, Taiwan

Introduction

The article '*Food Revolution*' highlights that new approaches are being developed to counteract poor and inadequate dietary choices (Gardiner & Hauser, 2017). These approaches put greater emphasis on plant-based diets and lesser consumption of animal products. Further, U.S. News & World Report (2019) suggests that plant-based diets are good for the environment, the heart, weight, and overall health, and authoritative sources in nutrition agree on the health benefits of eating fruit and vegetables, nuts, whole grains, and other plant-based foods (e.g., Hu, 2003; Lea & Worsley, 2003). This trend toward healthier diets in everyday life is paralleled by greater interest in international and domestic travel as well as gastronomic or food tourism experiences (UNWTO, 2019; Williams, Yuan, & Williams, Jr., 2019). However, do daily diets and eating practices carry over when in tourism destinations? There is little evidence to answer this question and especially with respect to dining on plant-based foods and vegetarian offers.

Previous behavioral studies detail travel motivations, destination images, selection criteria, and satisfaction levels. However, as Agyeiwaah et al. (2019) state, there is a lack of empirical research on the relationships among motivation, experiences, satisfaction, and loyalty with culinary tourism. Even more limited data are available exploring eating vegetarian offers and plant-based foods when traveling. There is also a gap in the understanding about the attractive potential of plant-based food from destination and tourism business perspectives. To address these literature voids, the research objectives were to: (1) examine the relationship among motivations, satisfaction and loyalty with plant-based food dining at destinations; (2) determine if and how the attractiveness of eating plant-based foods moderates satisfaction and loyalty; and (3) investigate potential differences in visitor background information and consumption characteristics.

Figure 1 represents the proposed conceptual model. The four model variables are motivations, satisfaction and loyalty, food attractiveness, and background characteristics. The model builds upon that developed by Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009), which dealt with local food consumption on trips. However, the current model substitutes plant-based foods for local foods and introduces satisfaction and loyalty as a dependent variable. Food attractiveness is used and includes aspects of neophobia/neophilia, which were identified as psychological factors in the original model (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009). Within background characteristics, daily diet regimens and trip characteristics are added to the original model's demographic factors. The rationale for adopting these variables was that studies focusing on planted-based diets are relatively scant; therefore, it is crucial to conduct more investigations in which researchers engage with visitors with plant-based diets and assess their responses about diets during travel experiences.

Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009) used a qualitative, grounded theory approach to developing their model and stated that the model was not generalizable and needed to be tested through empirical research in the future. This research uses the survey method to validate a modified version of their model. Furthermore, the original model did not specify the relationships among the variables and was more of a taxonomical format. The proposed conceptual model specifies three independent (motivations, food attractiveness, and background characteristics) and one dependent variable (satisfaction/loyalty). The dining experience with plant-based foods is placed between motivations, and satisfaction and loyalty, and is the context for this research.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Literature review and hypotheses

Motivations, satisfaction, and loyalty

The importance of dining when traveling has been somewhat neglected in the tourism literature (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Kim, Goh, & Yuan, 2010) although dining is an essential and desired activity (Quan & Wang, 2004). Tourists value dining to the point they are willing to spend up to one third of total travel expenses on food (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Meler & Cerovic, 2003; Bristow & Jenkins, 2018). In a similar vein, according to the report of World Food Travel Association, visitors spend about 25% of travel budgets on food and beverages (World Food Travel Association, 2020). There have been calls for more research on motivation and satisfaction with respect to food consumption in tourism, and some theoretical and empirical studies have resulted.

Kivela, Inbakaran, and Reece (1999) developed a conceptual model for dining satisfaction based on disconfirmation theory. Tang, Wu, and Chang (2007) adopted the four interacting typologies of tourist motivation (biological, cultural, interpersonal, and social status) proposed by McIntosh, Goeldner, and Ritchie (1995), to food consumption motivation during trips. Biological motives in travel are drivers that satisfy basic human needs, including escape and relaxation. Cultural motives relating to experiencing local cuisine and learning about new cultures are connected to interpersonal motives, such as relationship enhancement (interacting with others at meals) and self-development, as well as social status (prestige) motives that enable visitors to gain knowledge and explore novel cuisine through dining experiences, which they can then share with others. Correra et al. (2009) used motivational and satisfaction attributes to segment people selecting to visit restaurants serving Portuguese food. They concluded that motivation was a more effective factor for segmenting gastronomic tourists than satisfaction.

Kim, Goh, and Yuan (2010) employed push and pull theory to measure the motivations of tourists attending a food festival in the Southwest U.S. Kim, Suh, and Eves (2010) investigated the relationships among food personalities and satisfaction and loyalty. Again, their context was food events and festivals, this time in South Korea. They found a relationship between food neophobia - the

extent to which consumers are reluctant to try novel foods (Pliner and Hobden, 1992), and food involvement or neophilia – the tendency to seek to taste something new (Ritchey et al., 2003) - with satisfaction and loyalty for visitors to a local food festival in South Korea. Specifically, these authors concluded there was a positive relationship between food involvement and loyalty, and a negative relationship for food neophobia. Yoon, Lee, and Lee (2010), in a third food themed festival study, used structural equation modeling to determine the influence of perceived food quality on satisfaction and loyalty. Kim and Eves (2012) developed a motivational scale for tourists consuming food and beverages at destinations. Based on a sample of British tourists to South Korea, cultural experience, interpersonal relations, excitement, sensory appeal, and health concerns were found to be the underlying dimensions of motivation. Lee and Hsu (2013) detected a direct relationship between the motivations and satisfaction levels of attendees to aboriginal festivals in Taiwan. Ha and Jang (2010) investigated how hedonic and utilitarian values impacted satisfaction with dining experiences with familiarity in a moderating role at Korean restaurants in the U.S. They found that utilitarian values (reasonable cost, tasty food, food portions, menu variety, and healthy food options) had a stronger impact on satisfaction and behavioral intentions than hedonic (e.g., interior design, Korean music) Heung and Gu (2014) examined the influence of restaurant atmospherics on diners' satisfaction. Based on full-service restaurants in Hong Kong, they identified a positive impact of atmospherics on satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Jiang et al. (2017) tested the relationships of brand equity, motivation, expectations, and behavioral intentions. Their brand equity theoretical model of culinary tourism showed that motivation mediated the relationships among the constructs. Adapted from the findings of Getz et al (2014), Su, Johnson, and O'Mahony (2018) conducted an online survey on the motivations of 'foodies' by using the push-pull theory. They identified three push factors (taste of food, socialization, and cultural experience) and three pull factors (core food-tourism appeals, traditional food appeals, and local destination appeals).

Agyeiwaah et al. (2019) surveyed foreign tourists attending culinary schools in Thailand and applied SEM to examine the relationships among motivation, experience, satisfaction, and loyalty. They discovered that motivations positively influenced the culinary experiences and satisfaction. Kim, Park, and Lamb (2019) interviewed domestic Japanese tourists visiting an udon noodle village about their trip motivations. Among the motives were imagined sensory appeal, authenticity of cooking methods, escapism, prestige, and self-enhancement. Stone, Migacz, and Wolf (2019) surveyed people from nine countries on the impact of satisfaction with food tourism on intentions to return and recommend the destinations they visited. The researchers found that food experiences influenced overall trip satisfaction and positive dining experiences impacted return intentions and willingness to recommend destinations.

In these studies, researchers have reinforced the positive relationships among motivations and satisfaction levels, and loyalty with dining experiences. Some of the previous works have noted the importance of healthy food choices when dining (e.g., Ha & Jang, 2010; Kim & Eves, 2012). Others have addressed neophobia and neophilia and their effects on dining (e.g., Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Kim, Suh & Eves, 2010; Latimer, Pope, & Wansink, 2015; Mak et al., 2017). However, none of the previous investigations has dealt with plant-based foods as a dining option in destinations. Based on the previously discussed literature, it is expected that plant-based food dining is affected by motivations and the first hypothesis was therefore presented as follows:

- *H1: Motivations influence satisfaction and loyalty with plant-based food dining when traveling.*

Food attractiveness

There are many influences on the attractiveness of food within destinations (Choe & Kim, 2018), including the novelty of eating local food, people's food personalities, and healthy eating tendencies. Generally, the dining within destinations is a balance between localization (the unfamiliar) and

globalization (the familiar). On the one hand, familiarity with certain foods and beverages (e.g., global chain-operated fast food stores and coffee shops) effectively reduces anxiety in unfamiliar environments. On the other hand, curiosity about experiencing new foods satisfies the desire for novelty and has led to greater interest in exploring gastronomic tourism (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Sthapit, 2017). Food is now a major driver of travel experiences and gastronomic tourism has become popular with people who travel with a priority on new culinary experiences (Choe & Kim, 2018; Hussin, 2018; Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020; Stone, Migacz, & Sthapit, 2021) and are "eager to experience specific types of food or local produce" (Hall & Sharples, 2003). Wolf (2006) defined gastronomic tourism as the search for and enjoyment of prepared food and drink that provide unique and memorable gastronomic experiences. There is now a significant literature on gastronomic tourism (e.g., Bessière, 1998; Quan & Wang, 2004; Kivela & Crotts, 2005, 2006; Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007; Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2011; Meneguel, Mundet, & Aulet, 2019) as well as on the associated terms of culinary (e.g., Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Graham, 2021; Jiang et al., 2017; Agyeiwaah et al., 2019) and food tourism (e.g., du Rand & Heath, 2006; Sims, 2010; Sandeep & Paramita, 2021; Su, Johnson & O'Mahony, 2018).

Several studies have shown that the interests and preferences for local food influence destination choices (Hall & Mitchell, 2001; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Long, 2004; Björk & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2019). As one of its main motivations, traveling is thought to stimulate interest in novelty and trying something different. For example, tourists are likely to seek authenticity and are often engaging in learning experiences such as tasting temple cuisine or related activities can generate a pull factor for certain destinations (Gupta & Duggal, 2020; Gupta, Roy, & Promsivapallop, 2020; MacCannell, 1973; Son & Xiao, 2013; Su, Johnson, & O'Mahony, 2020)~~)~~. In their study on the role of food tourism in sustaining local identity, Everett and Aitchison (2010) found a correlation between increased levels of food tourism interest and the retention and development of regional identity, the enhancement of environmental awareness and sustainability, an increase in social

and cultural benefits celebrating the production of local food, and the conservation of traditional heritage, skills and ways of life.

On the contrary, Cohen and Avieli (2004) asserted that in addition to being a tourism attraction, food consumption might also be a potential impediment to travel enjoyment due to a lack of familiarity with local cuisines, where fulfilling the basic need to eat is more important than the element of novelty and cultural experiences during trips. Molz (2007) also found that visitors might perceive risks when trying the local cultures' food products. For example, people feel excited traveling to a new place yet may worry about adjusting to conditions that differ from their home residences, such as weather, accommodations, health, sanitary conditions, and especially local food in relation to its safety (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Gupta, Roy, & Promsivapallop, 2020), which along with dining etiquette, language barriers, and limited knowledge of local restaurants are impediments to food consumption during trips. Shen, Tseng, and Hsiao (2009), who developed a model of relationships among visitor experiences, motivations, impediments, satisfaction with food, and loyalty, found the major barriers to food consumption motivation was unsanitary conditions and personal preferences (e.g., religion). They further modified Crawford and Godbey's (1987) leisure constraints and Cohen and Avieli's (2004) study of food impediments, indicating that environmental, sanitary, and safety concerns, along with personal preferences and traits were the key impediments to food consumption among visitors. The issue of food safety has become a barrier for some in experiencing novel cuisines in unfamiliar environments. As a result, the consumption of cuisines in exotic or unusual locales can serve as a novelty attraction or alternatively be avoided due to safety concerns (e.g., street foods). Lin and Wang (2011), who compared two groups with rational versus emotional decision-making for food experiences, intentions to revisit, novelty, and food impediments, found that novelty and impediments both influenced food experiences based on rational decisions, but only novelty impacted food experiences for those making emotion-based decisions.

As previously mentioned, people tend to have food personality traits and these are partly represented by food neophobia and neophilia (Kim, Suh, & Eves, 2010; Latimer, Pope, & Wansink, 2015; Ji, Wong, Eves, & Scarles, 2016; Pourfakhimi, Nadim, Prayag, & Mulcahy, 2020; Tuncdogan & Ar, 2018; Wolff & Larsen, 2019). Neophobes are more likely to be more anxious about trying local foods that are unfamiliar to them (Tuorila & Hartmann, 2020); while neophiles will find local dishes more attractive and be keen to sample them. These two poles of human relationships to food represent the "omnivore's dilemma" as developed by Rozin & Rozin (1981, p. 12), which describes how someone "may both seek and withdraw from exotic foods, and the balance may shift…in different circumstances". Mak et al. (2012a, 2012b) extended this concept to the "tourists' paradox," which denotes an oscillation between symbolic and obligatory aspects in terms of food consumption in destinations. Chang et al. (2010) discovered that the dining preferences of food-adventurous people might also be dominated by their core eating behaviors, which reflects the conflict between novelty and familiarity in the tourists' paradox.

Healthy eating also impacts the attractiveness of certain foods and dining styles (Lin, Cui, Xu, & Guia, 2020). As the trend towards healthy eating and sustainable foods gained influence in the 1960s, plant-based diets have become increasingly prevalent among diet options (Nezlek & Forestell, 2020). Significant increases in vegetarian or plant-based eating among consumers and travelers were an outcome. With growing acceptance of the ideas of healthy foods increasing longevity, promoting healthy bodies, and supporting environmental protection, plant-based dining is a popular food choice (Nezlek & Forestell, 2020), especially when sources and quality of meat are uncertain or known to be compromised, or when restaurants prepare delicious, gourmet, or organic food choices. Rather surprisingly, there is a limited amount of past research on plant-based dining experiences when traveling. There are, however, some studies that have been conducted about vegetarian and organic food consumption in the context of hospitality and tourism (Fusté-Forné, 2021; Li, Liu, Cai, & Scott,

2020). Rivera and Shani (2013) conducted research with restaurant operators in Puerto Rico on their attitudes and viewpoints on healthy food. They determined that many restaurant operators were unaware or unfamiliar with the issues relating to plant-based diets or healthy food. Dilek and Fennell (2018) surveyed vegetarians about their hotel choices in Turkey. The three most influential choice factors were environmentally- and animal-friendly, hotel features and facilities, and food and beverage services. The respondents also showed a preference for a separate vegetarian menu and having vegetables on the menu. Bertella (2018) described vegetarian ecofeminism in tourism using case studies from Italy in which the restaurant operators were themselves vegetarians. She found that these entrepreneurs were change agents in their communities by deciding not to include animals on their menus. With a focus on organic foods, Shin and Mattila (2019) tested a conceptual model of the influence of gender and health consciousness. Both main factors had an influence on choices of organic foods; however, it was found that initial choices of an organic item (e.g., a starter) was not always followed by the selection of healthy menu choices, especially among males with low health consciousness.

In summary, the literature shows that motivations and attractiveness (or unattractiveness) affect satisfaction, and motivations also have an impact on attractiveness (Hassan, Yazeed, & Abdullah, 2020; Shen et al., 2010; Unguren, Tekin, & Bayirli, 2021). Yet limited research has been conducted on how food attractiveness influences the relationship between motivations, satisfaction and loyalty. As a result, the second hypothesis was proposed as:

- *H2: Food attractiveness moderates the relationship between motivations and satisfaction/loyalty with plant-based food dining when traveling.*

Background characteristics

To stay healthy and also to alleviate the negative impacts on the environment, a plant-based diet has become much discussed issue worldwide (Kessler et al., 2016; Li, Liu, Cai, & Scott, 2020). Healthy and environment-friendly food has been attracting public interest globally (Kamiński, Skonieczna-Żydecka, Nowak, & Stachowska, 2020). As about 86 percent of consumers have one to two plant-based meals per week (Chen & Chien, 2009), plant-based consumption is not only limited to people with strict diets, but also is a trendy diet that appeals to those with different eating habits. Vegetarian Times shows vegetarian demographics as largely female, middle aged, married, and with high-income professions, suggesting superior educational levels (Chen & Chien, 2009). Chen and Hori (2014) also reported that females tend to be more willing to consume plant-based diets than males; the younger generation (particularly those 21-40 years old) sees plant-based diets as popular or fashionable, and are most likely to try it based on peer influence; consumers with college degrees are more willing to try plant-based diets than consumers with high school degrees; and consumers agree that vegetable-based diets protect the environment and ecosystems as well as respecting animal rights.

The attractions of plant-based diets are significantly higher than consumption impediments. Chen, Liu, and Lin (2014) found that environmental awareness and religious beliefs influenced attitudes towards healthy food, where high environmental awareness and passionate religious beliefs increased a person's willingness to adopt a plant-based diet. A positive relationship has also been found between the healthy food consumption motivation and satisfaction as well as loyalty and satisfaction. Yet different religious respondents have a range of plant-based diet preferences, motivations, and impediments (Lin, Tsai, & Yeh, 2006). Based on the literature above, the third hypothesis was formed as follows:

- *H3: Differences in plant-based food dining motivations, satisfaction and loyalty exist among visitors by background characteristics.*

Methodology

Sampling and data analysis

The study sites were popular tourism attractions in Kaohsiung, southern Taiwan and a purposive sampling method was utilized. Respondents were those over 18 years old with previous plant-based food consumption experiences and had traveled to Kaohsiung in the past year and had eaten at plant-based restaurants. A pre-test was conducted to ensure satisfactory reliability and validity of the survey instrument. Afterwards, hard-copy formats of questionnaires were disseminated during April to May 2015. By using an intercept approach, 350 self-administered surveys were distributed and 300 questionnaires were returned. After deleting invalid responses, a total of 274 valid questionnaires was collected (94.5%).

Instrument

The questionnaire was developed to include three key variables: (1) motivations; (2) food attractiveness; and (3) satisfaction and loyalty. The motivations included 15 questions, representing four dimensions: physical (e.g., change daily diet; relaxation), cultural (e.g., expect to gain plant-based diet knowledge via plant-based dining experiences), interpersonal (e.g., increase interactions with plant-based eating friends and family; create memories with travel companions), and social status/prestige motivations (e.g., visit a trendy restaurant; receive recognition by others) (Tang, Wu & Chang, 2007). The food attractiveness section contained 18 questions and incorporated the concept of neophilia and neophobia (Pliner & Hobden, 1992), as well as items such as dining environment and services were adapted from studies of Cohen and Avieli (2004), Shen, Tseng, and Hsiao (2009), and Shen, Tseng, and Tseng (2010). As Saint-Eve et al. indicated (2021), food taste was treated as a controlled variable in this research and thus it was not included in the section of food attraction due the fact that consumers often perceive plant-based foods as having several unpleasant flavors and tastes (e.g., bitter, vegetable-like, earthy). The satisfaction and loyalty section was developed based on the research of Ryu et al. (2012) involving three major questions: (1) *Overall, are you satisfied with your*

plant-based meal at this restaurant? (2) *How likely would you be to return to this restaurant?* and (3) *Would you recommend to your friends and family to dine here?* All items in the three sections were listed in Table 1 and were assessed by *five*-point, Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), and cross-validated by experts in the field.

Results

Respondent profile

The majority was female (55.1%) and most of respondents were single (66.8%), followed by married with children (25.2%). The largest age group was 20-29 years-old (42%), followed by 30-39 years-old (24.8%). Most respondents had a college education (58.4%), and the majority was students (31.8%), followed by service industry employees (20.1%). Most respondents visited Kaohsiung for tourism purposes (75.9%); most followed non-plant-based diets (77.7%), and nearly half were traveling to Kaohsiung for the first time (49.6%). The majority traveled via personal vehicles (58.4%), with family and relatives (65%) or friends (26.4%) as travel companions. The expenditures on plant-based meals averaged from $6.25 to $9.35 for each trip.

Confirmatory factor analysis

CFA, was performed to confirm the path structure, including preliminary fit criteria, overall model fit, and internal structure model fit (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Offending estimates could result in poor model fit and be detected in preliminary fit criteria to exclude the estimates exceeding threshold values. Three criteria were used to identity offending estimates: (1) negative or meaningless error estimates; (2) standardized coefficients exceeding or close to 1 (> 0.95); and (3) high standard errors.

Next, convergent validity and discriminant validity were assessed to test the model's goodness-of-fit. The test criteria included factor loadings, individual item reliability, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The factor loadings for each variable should reach a significant

level, and individual item reliability should be greater than 0.20 (Bentler & Wu, 1983; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989). The CR should be above 0.7 and the AVE should be greater than 0.5 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). The scores for standardized factor loadings (SFL) and squared multiple correlation (SMC) were acceptable. Table 1 shows that the model had satisfactory reliability and validity.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The model showed that the plant-based dining motivation item P6 (*try plant-based food due to religious reasons*) should be deleted due to a low factor loading. For food attractiveness, items D3 (*hygiene*, $\lambda = 0.27$; $R^2 = 0.055$), D6 (*spacious*, $\lambda = 0.33$; $R^2 = 0.12$), D11 (*willing to try a dish without knowing the ingredients*, $\lambda = 0.002$; $R^2 = 0.00$), D12 (*willing to try unfamiliar dishes*, $\lambda = 0.075$; $R^2 = 0.0051$) and D13 (*my order is very nutritious*, $\lambda = -0.14$; $R^2 = 0.021$) were deleted due to low λ and R^2. SMC ranged from 0.19 to 0.73 for all motivations, whereas CR was between 0.62 and 0.85. These test statistics indicated satisfactory validity for all dimensions. Further, Cronbach's α results were between 0.614 and 0.87, which represented acceptable reliability for the model. All factor loadings (SFC) ranged from 0.44 to 0.85, demonstrating significant levels. AVE for each dimension was above 0.5, which indicates satisfactory convergent validity for the model (Hair et al., 2010). Overall, the final model illustrated satisfactory reliability and validity.

Model fit

The model was evaluated by three groups of criteria: absolute fit, comparative fit, and parsimonious fit. Absolute fit included the indices χ^2, χ^2/ df, goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Comparative fit comprised the normed fit index (NFI), non-normed fit index (NNFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and incremental fit index (IFI). Parsimonious fit included the

parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI), parsimonious goodness-of-fit index (PGFI), and Hoelter's critical N (CN) (Hair et al., 2010). Table 2 summarizes the goodness-of-fit indices. The model of plant-based dining motivation encompassed 14 indicators (four for the physical dimension; three for the cultural dimension; three for the interpersonal dimension; and four for the prestige dimension) in the final model. Among model fit indices, the RMSEA was slightly higher than the suggested moderate value, whereas CN was smaller than the threshold value (>200). This could have resulted from the relatively small sample size (Yuan & Bentler, 1999).

The model of food attractiveness had 13 indicators (four for dining environment; four for menu items; and five for service), all indicating an acceptable model based on the model fit indices.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Path analysis

Plant-based dining motivations and satisfaction/loyalty showed satisfactory model fit results. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between plant-based dining motivations and satisfaction/loyalty (coefficient = 0.56, t = 7.34) and indicates that H1 was supported.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Examination of the moderating effect

The moderating effect refers to the effect of the moderating variable; that is, it examines how the moderating variable influences the direction (positive or negative) and degree of relationship between the independent and dependent variables. A multi-group strategy was adopted as proposed by Jaccard and Wan (1996). From Table 3, the results showed that the moderating effect of food attractiveness was not significant (the difference of $\chi^2 = 2.97$ was smaller than the threshold value 3.84). This indicated that food attractiveness did not moderate the effect of plant-based dining motivations on satisfaction. As a result, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. The possible explanation for this might be the assumption

of collinearity between food attractiveness and dining motivations, making the moderating effect insignificant.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Analysis of variance

ANOVA was conducted to examine the differences in plant-based dining motivations, food attractiveness, and satisfaction/loyalty by background characteristics. Differences were detected on plant-based dining motivations based on daily diet, $F= 10.05$, $p < 0.001$; travel frequency, $F= 4.53$, $p < 0.001$; and marital status, $F= 4.34$, $p < 0.05$ (Table 4 and 5). The Scheffe's post hoc method was performed to identify significant differences among sub-groups. The results showed that respondents choosing plant-based meals as a daily diet had a stronger motivation for plant-based dining than meat-eaters. People who visited the plant-based restaurant five times or more reported higher motivation levels for plant-based diet consumption than first-time diners within a year. Those married with children indicated a stronger motivation for plant-based dining than those who were married with no children.

There was a significant difference in food attractiveness depending on whether the respondents traveled with or without a tour group. In general, people traveling on their own had higher scores on plant-based dining attractiveness. Respondents with plant-based diets reported higher satisfaction with the plant-based dining experiences than those with meat-based diets. This result might be explained as a result of those with meat-based diets being unfamiliar with plant-based dining options, or the plant-based offerings not being well-made or tasty. Respondents who had visited the dining destination twice also tended to have higher satisfaction with it than first-time diners. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

[Insert Table 4 here]

[Insert Table 5 here]

Discussions, implications, and conclusions

Discussions and theoretical implications

The major research objectives were to: (1) examine the relationships among motivations, satisfaction and loyalty with plant-based food dining at destinations; (2) determine if and how the attractiveness of eating plant-based foods moderated satisfaction and loyalty; and (3) investigate potential differences in visitor background characteristics and consumption behaviors. As the aforementioned results indicated, all research objectives were successfully attained and are synthesized as follows.

Motivations had a significant effect on satisfaction and loyalty. All major variables (motivations, food attractiveness, and satisfaction/loyalty) showed positive relationships with each other. Furthermore, motivations had a significant effect on satisfaction and loyalty with plant-based dining experiences. This result is consistent with previous studies (Shen, Tseng, & Hsiao, 2009; Yen & Lin, 2014).

Physical motivation had the highest mean score, followed by interpersonal, cultural, and prestige. For the physical dimension, the objectives to *increase metabolism* and *try gourmet food with plant-based recipes* had the highest scores, suggesting that people are mostly motivated by health reasons and the desire for fine food when choosing plant-based options. In addition, the objective to *experience local produce* earned the highest score within the prestige dimension, the third highest score among all items. This supports the previous literature that indicates the desire for popular and gourmet food is the most important factor for gastronomic tourism (Shen, Tseng, & Hsiao, 2009). As for the cultural dimension, *expect to contribute to environmental protection via plant-based dining experiences* scored the highest. This implies that respondents valued the environmental awareness aspect of plant-based dining. Lastly, *share plant-based dining experiences with friends and family after the trip* had the

highest score in the interpersonal dimension. Hence, being able to share plant-based dining experiences with friends and family members was an important motivator for these visitors.

Food attractiveness did not moderate the effect of motivations on satisfaction/loyalty. The results demonstrated an insignificant moderating effect of food attractiveness on the relationship between motivations and satisfaction/loyalty. Further, this insignificant result also indicated that the dimensions of food attractiveness including dining environment, neophobia/neophilia, and service, did not significantly affect satisfaction/loyalty when dining at plant-based restaurants.

Unattractive aspects of food had a stronger effect on the relationship between motivations and satisfaction/loyalty. As a result, marketing strategies for plant-based dining should focus on diminishing dining impediments and enhancing the positive image of plant-based dining choices.

Background characteristics influenced satisfaction and loyalty. Differences were found among demographic groups and their consumption patterns in relation to motivations, food attractiveness, and satisfaction/loyalty. These findings are consistent with Guachalla (2021) by indicating that various people have dissimilar perceptions and satisfaction with plant-based diets due to levels of familiarity with the health considerations related to plant-based foods.

This research adds to the very limited literature on plant-based and vegetarian dining in tourism destinations. Furthermore, it tests, partially validates, and expands a model by Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009) for consuming local food while traveling. The findings also complement the considerable evidence linking motivations to satisfaction and loyalty when dining.

Managerial implications

Does a healthy diet travel? This research provides evidence that the answer to this question is in the positive; there are indeed people who seek out these specialized restaurants and plant-based diet menu offerings at their destinations (Guachalla, 2021).

Previous research by Rivera and Shani (2013) suggested that restaurant operators have limited awareness of the needs of plant-based diners and others who want to eat healthy foods. They also may not understand the distinctive characteristics of these customers. However, Bertella (2018) found that restaurant operators who themselves enjoyed plant-based diets understood the values and requirements of these guests, and especially the desire not to serve animal products, to conserve the environment, and to have strong local community support. The findings of this research support the importance of these values to plant-based food diners in destinations, along with the priorities of eating healthy food, experiencing novel and gourmet food presentations, and trying out local produce and dishes.

The marketers and strategic planners for plant-based restaurants or those with plant-based meal options should make a greater effort to understand the distinctive demographic and dietary characteristics of the people who comprise the core of this market. These consumers generally see plant-based food as part of their daily diets, making frequent visits to plant-based restaurants, and are often married, female, and well-educated. It is important for the food service sector to expand the opportunities for plant-based dining experiences and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. The results showed the most important motivations for plant-based dining were health-based reasons. Restaurant operators should focus on healthy recipes that include organic and gourmet options.

In addition, reducing the barriers to plant-based dining is critical to increasing customer volumes. Two suggestions for managers and operators include: (a) implementing intensive staff training programs, so restaurant wait staff have better knowledge in promoting the overall health benefits of plant-based dining; and (b) developing new marketing and branding that emphasize holistic dining services on plant-based diets. In this way, tourists are likely to foster connectivity or even a sense of belonging to local communities of destinations. Further, restaurant operators should post detailed

information regarding ingredients of menu items on their websites to make the information such as food sourcing, origins of the produce, and kitchen or dining room photos more visible and appealing.

Conclusions

The results indicated a positive relationship between motivations and satisfaction/loyalty in plant-based food dining. Motivations were comprised of four domains (physical, cultural, interpersonal, and prestige) and satisfaction and loyalty had three (overall satisfaction, intention to revisit, and intention to recommend). Motivations had a positive effect on satisfaction and loyalty; however, food attractiveness did not moderate the effect of motivations on satisfaction/loyalty. In addition, background information and consumption characteristics of visitors partially influenced satisfaction and loyalty.

As for the practical implications, plant-based restaurant operators and managers should have a deeper understanding on the target market including, for example, the distinctive characteristics of such people. Overall, this research adds to the limited literature on plant-based diets in tourism destinations. The findings also complement the empirical evidence linking motivations to satisfaction and loyalty when dining.

Limitations and future research needs

This research had several research limitations, one of such limitation of this research was the sample population, which included those who had visited Kaohsiung and had previous plant-based dining experiences. As such, it remains unclear whether the findings can be generalized to other cultures. Therefore, it will be beneficial in the future to examine different areas and cultures for even richer data on this topic. With reference to the variables applied, only a few constructs were examined due to the concern for parsimony. While the current research examined the relationships among motivations, satisfaction and loyalty, future research endeavours can emphasize healthy lifestyles, food safety, food

flavours/tastes, and menu innovation with this type of restaurant and branding, which respond to the main concerns of healthy eaters.

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