

## Effects of Food Image on Tourists' Destination Image and Visit Intention

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### ABSTRACT

*In Korea, recent trends brand destinations using their regional food, realizing that food reflects a country's culture and its people. However, theoretical concepts and research are lacking to explain how food images work in branding destination and what their effects are. Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to identify the attributes and impacts of Korean food image on potential tourists' attitudes and intentions when they visit a destination. The proposed model will test the relationships among destination's food image, destination image, and tourists' visit intention. The results of this study will develop theoretical bases for food tourism, showing how regional food contributes to tourism and adds competitiveness to a destination. Also, it will encourage managerial efforts to focus on using food as a branding tool and a benefit for marketers in terms of brand differentiation.*

**Keywords:** food image, destination image, visit intention, Korean food, branding.

### INTRODUCTION

As competition has grown among destinations, academics and government officials have focused on branding destinations through positive image building. Just as marketers select consistent brand elements for product identification, unique features are emphasized from a destination's architecture, culture, food, festivals, history, and natural resources to create desirable perceptions. Recent trend in brand destinations is using regional food, realizing that food reflects a country's culture and its people. For instance, at the beginning of 2010, the Korean government launched a professional organization to promote its food and announced they are willing to spend more than \$90 million on several projects to enhance tourism awareness through food.

Although food is significant in destination branding, supporting theories and experimental studies do not adequately explain the current phenomenon. The most frequently researched topic in destination branding concerns the influence of destination image on travelers' satisfaction and their buying behavior (Gartner & Tasci, 2007). Theoretical concepts and research are lacking to explain how food images work in branding destination and what their effects are.

Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to identify the attributes and impacts of Korean food image on potential tourists' attitudes and intentions when they visit a destination.

## LITERATURE REIVEW

Destination image is an attitudinal concept consisting of the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a tourist holds of a destination (Crompton, 1979). Reynolds (1965) defines the formation of image as the development of a mental construct based upon a few impressions chosen from a flood of information. Kim and Yoon (2003) suggested affective attributes of a destination image are exotic atmosphere, scenic beauty, climate, recommendations, and availability of travel information. And cognitive attributes are consisted of personal safety, good restaurants, suitable accommodations, friendly people, and unique architecture.

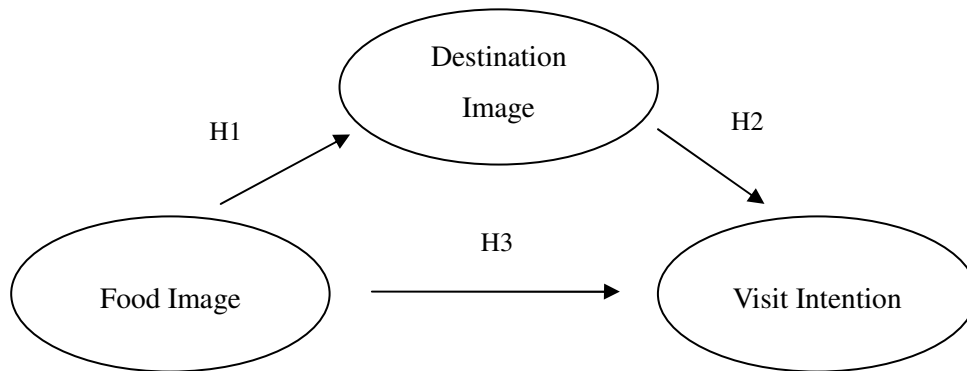
The major role of destination image is to influence tourists' visit intentions toward a destination (Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Tsai, 2007). A theory of Fishbein and Ajzen(1975) that consumers' behavior can be predicted by their attitude has been the most frequently used to explain the correlation between destination images and destination decision choice.

Several studies has shown the significance of food as a determinant of attitudes toward the destination. It has been proved that food is one of the components of destination image (Quan & Wang, 2004). Hu and Ritichie (1986) mentioned food is the fourth most important attribute in tourists' perceptions of destination attractiveness after climate, accommodations, and scenery. Food can be a great motivator for travel decisions as well as one of the main attributes of a country (Heung et al., 2001), since it provides pleasurable sensory experience (Boniface, 2002), and helps one learn the local culture (Shahrim, 2006).

H1: Food image of destination is positively associated with the destination image

H2: Destination image positively effects on tourist's visit intention

H3: Food image of destination is positively associated with tourist' intentions to visit



**Figure1. Conceptual Model of the Effect of Food Image**

## METHODOLOGY

Many studies has shown that firsthand information and experience related to a destination is one of the most important factors in building overall destination image (Baloglu & McCearly, 1999). Therefore, this study provides participants with an opportunity to experience Korean food through Korean food Festival. The Korean cuisine sections are included in a food production class for two weeks at a four-year college in Southwestern region. The students in the class are a convenient sample for this study. To investigate any attitude changes regarding destination image and intention to visit after an experience with Korean food, the pre survey was conducted at the beginning of September. The post survey will be conducted two weeks after Korean food Festival held in November 2010 and the results of the surveys will be compared. For insuring the efficacy of the study, the same procedure is conducting in another class named as control group and the result of this group will be compared with the experiment group. A control group has a similar number and education level of students, but does not related to Korean cuisine class. The sample size of each group is around one hundred. All subjects are verbally asked verbally in their classes to voluntarily participate in the online survey linked to class websites.

The questionnaire with a 7-point Likert scale includes four sections; 1) Attributes of Korean food; 2) Overall destination image of Korea; 3) Visit intention to Korea; 4) Demographic information. Measurements are from Lyn's (2006) food image studies and Chon's (1987) destination image study.

Data analysis for this study will be divided into four sections: 1) A factor analysis will identify the underlying factors of the destination's food image attributes; 2) A series of regression analyses will be conducted in order to test the relationships among the study variables; 3) Analysis of variance will be conducted to assess the moderating effect of the event on the relationship between food image and visit intention; 4) Finally, descriptive statistics will be used to explain the distributions of data.

## IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study may be significant for both the academic and industry fields. First, theoretical bases will be developed for food tourism, showing how regional food contributes to tourism and adds competitiveness to a destination. Second, managerial efforts to focus on using food as a branding tool and a benefit for marketers in terms of brand differentiation will be encouraged.

With regard to limitations, findings may not be generalizable for wider tourist population because of the limited sample. Therefore, the study could be replicated, with a different sample in a different setting. Continued work may lead to better understanding of how food images affect tourists' destination images and visit intentions when compared to other factors.

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