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Segmenting Foodies for a Foodie Destination

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A number of travel destinations have increasingly taken advantage of local culinary talent, unique cuisine, food-related classes and events, and award winning restaurants to attract visitors. While efforts have been made to attract 'foodies' to destinations, very little is known about preferences of different types of foodies. 'Foodies are not all alike' is the underlying premise of this research project that segments current or potential visitors into different categories (e.g. the political foodie, the social media foodie, the upscale foodie, etc.) according to the types of food related activities that they enjoy, and determines basic travel preferences for each group. Understanding foodies at this level can empower destination marketers on how specific food products and experiences can be developed and marketed to the desired foodie types.

The interest in culinary tourism, community food systems, and food sustainability has continued to increase both inside and outside the tourism literature (Green & Dougherty, 2008; Hall & Gössling, 2012; Smith & Xiao, 2008). Much of the supply side focus is placed on the development or marketing of a culinary/ gastronomic destination (Everett, 2012; Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2010; Horng & Tsai, 2012; Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011) and recent research into the demand side focuses on marketing and branding strategies (Chhabra, Lee, Zhao & Scott, 2013; Horng, Liu, Chou & Tsai, 2012). While profile and segmentation studies exist for the culinary tourist (MacLaurin, Bloise, & Mack, 2007; Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012), very few researchers have explored beyond the general notion of the 'foodie', particularly as a potential culinary tourism market. The difference between the culinary tourist and the foodie is not subtle. Foodies engage in food activities on a regular basis (e.g. not only when traveling) and recognize themselves as a foodie (Green, 2013). Getz and Robinson (2014) conducted an online survey of foodies in Australia and have profiled their tastes in food activities. They found most popular food-related events respondents participated in were farmers markets, ethnic or cultural festivals, wine or food tasting events, food-themed festivals, and visiting very expensive restaurants. Their results suggest that foodies enjoy food-related participatory activities (Robinson and Getz, 2014). When asked about their preferred Australian destination food-related experiences, the most preferred experience is "enjoying authentic regional cuisine in local restaurants" (Robinson and Getz, 2012). The current study takes foodie profiling a step further by teasing apart differences in types of foodies. By using cluster analysis, three categories of foodies were constructed, and explored in terms of their differences in food activities enjoyed, travel habits, and self-identity as a foodie.

The food-related activities were adapted from tourism and food studies literature (Bell & Marshall, 2003; MacLaurin, Bloise, & Mack, 2007; Henderson, 2009; Nilsson, 2013; Shenoy, 2005; Tikkanen, 2007; Yun, Hennessey, & MacDonald, 2011). The instrument used was based on a survey previously developed and tested on four smaller populations (author names withheld intentionally, under review), and later tested again using the opt-in marketing database from a large U.S. destination marketing organization (author names withheld intentionally, accepted). While this instrument was used as a foundation for the current study, the items on the scale were refined based on the above literature, and in negotiation with the Asheville, North Carolina (U.S.A.) Convention & Visitor Bureau. The sampling frame for this survey was comprised of travelers who have opted in to the

Asheville marketing database. The survey was created in an online program and was available from March 5 to March 21, 2014. Incentives of a drawing for an Asheville Two-Night Getaway Package with lodging and attraction tickets or one of three pottery pieces were offered to participants. A total of 3,111 useable surveys were collected.

Male and female respondents accounted for 26.2% and 73.8% of the sample respectively. Average age of respondents is 53 years old. Income distribution depicts that majority of respondents earn income bracket of between \$50,000 and \$99,000 (36.8%), followed by between \$20,000 and \$49,000 (16.2%) and annual income more than \$100,000 shows 23.8% of participants.

To identify the underlying dimension of the food-related activities and for the purpose of reducing the number of items, 61 questions pertaining to food-related activities were analyzed using a principal component factor analysis with the Varimax rotation method. Ten factors were identified with 60.795% of the variance explained which is in the acceptable range. The ten factors were named as follows (reliability & explained variance): *Sustainable Agriculture Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.915$; 28.38%), *Social Media Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.841$; 6.302%), *Informed Trendy Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.811$; 5.697%), *Cooking Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.774$; 4.045%), *Drinking Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.789$; 3.854%), *Local Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.817$; 3.204%), *Gardening Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.848$; 2.601%), *Diversity Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.648$; 2.553%), *Do-It-Yourself Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.820$; 2.107%), *Mass Dimension* ($\alpha = 0.538$; 2.052%).

A cluster analysis using ten factors extracted in factor analysis was performed to determine if the respondents in this study could be effectively segmented into unique food tourists. In addition, the cluster analysis was performed to examine how these clusters can be substantiated with travel patterns, restaurant preferences and travel experiences preferences variables. Two different styles of cluster analysis techniques were conducted, hierarchical cluster analysis and a K-mean clustering technique. Examination of a K-mean cluster analysis demonstrated that a three-cluster solution was deemed to be most appropriate. Cluster 1 was named "Pragmatists" due to their relatively neutral agreement on food-related activities. In the meantime, Cluster 2 was named "Vanguards" because their agreement on food-related activities appears to be very strong and more positive than Cluster 1 and Cluster 3. The Cluster 3 was named "Questers" because their responses to food-related activities turn out to be somewhat negative, showing that members of Cluster 3 are the least supportive group. Cluster analysis elaborates that among a total of 2948 respondents, 1289 respondents were grouped into the first cluster (43.9%), 1105 respondents (37.6%) were grouped into the second cluster, and 543 respondents (18.5%) were grouped into the third cluster.

Chi-square analysis and ANOVA were employed to analyze the profile of tourism-related activities. Specifically, gender, age, income, travel party size, frequency to visit and length to stay were subjected to the three clusters. Overall, Chi-square analysis depicts that there are more study respondents under Cluster 1 than the other two clusters. Cluster 2 has more respondents than Cluster 3. With respect to respondents' gender distribution, Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 demonstrate similar portions, showing that male respondents are less than one-third of female respondents, while male respondents in Cluster 3 are an half of female respondents, though there are more female respondents than male over segments. Likewise, income distribution shows that almost an half of members in Cluster 2 earn their income of between \$50,000 and \$99,000 bracket (49.3%) while the portion of Cluster 1 (44.2%) and Cluster 3 (42.2%) is smaller than Cluster 2. Interestingly, members

in Cluster 3 regarding annual income more than \$150,000 are found more than those of Cluster 1 and Cluster 2.

In regard to frequency to visit, about 40% of respondents in this study have never visited the study area (41.2%) and about one-third have visited Asheville once before (27.0%). Within the segments, about an half members of Cluster 3 have never visited the study area (50.6%) while the frequency to visit observed in Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 drops significantly (43.8% and 33.5%, respectively). Interestingly, there are some respondents who have visited the study area more than four times (12.1%, 13.8% and 9.7%, accordingly.)

The mean scores on these three clusters were subjected to ANOVA and all ten factors to the four cluster solution appeared to be different one another ($p < 0.000$), as is shown in Table 2. In addition, popularity of food-related activities was compared across cluster segments. Overall, all of the members in the three clusters preferred local food and cooking activities while Do-It-Yourself (DIY) were the least popular activities. Specifically, Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 demonstrate similarities regarding popular food-related activities except for a few activities; social media activities (9th and 6th), drinking activities (6th and 7th), and mass activities (7th and 9th).

Eight food-related travel behavior variables using ANOVA were subjected to analyze how they differ one another from the three clusters. This section wants to describe that people tend to seek out special experiences while on vacation and curiosity about their visiting destination can lead them to travel to perform food-related behaviors. Interestingly, results show that people have common psychological perspectives because as shown in the table 3 the most popular activity while on vacation is seeking out special types of food products such as local food, artisanal or heritage food, followed by local drink products such as wine, beer, mead, and moonshine, though the level of agreement on food-related travel behavior is different each other. Another common interesting result noted is that people are not interested in traveling a bit long distance to experience activities such as visiting a brewery, winery, and a half-day cooking class, except that members in Cluster 3 are willing to travel to visit a winery.

Next, we examined which attributes are important in finding a restaurant. In sum, people prefer a restaurant that sources their food locally and sources from a high standard of welfare as well as an independently owned restaurant, while a well-known chain restaurant is the least important factor in finding a restaurant along with featuring foods. Statistically, results show that people over the three clusters are not much significantly different each other on a budget-friendly factor and featuring vegetarian, vegan, and/or gluten-free menu options. Additionally, this section examined if study respondents consider themselves foodie. For the study purpose, foodie was defined as someone who has a strong interest in food, a foodie could be interested in eating high quality food, cooking with local foods or trying new recipes, following trends in nutrition, restaurants, chefs, or food, or traveling to try new foods or drinks. The self-reported question asked respondents to measure themselves foodie using a 7-point semantic differential scale. Members in Cluster 2 believed that they are very likely a foodie while members in Cluster 3 are less agreed with being a foodie. A summary profile of each cluster will be provided in the visual presentation.

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