

Culinary fans vs culinary critics: characteristics and behavior

Culinary fans
vs culinary
critics

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Received 25 October 2019
Revised 4 February 2020
Accepted 5 February 2020

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the current study is to profile Orlando and Florida culinary fans and compare them to culinary critics on several factors, including sociodemographics, psychographics, and travel behavior characteristics, and to identify potential factors that explain visitors' tendency to promote or criticize the cuisine of a destination. The study also seeks to identify the image attributes that explain the likelihood to visit for culinary fans and critics.

Design/methodology/approach – Online survey responses from 4,082 participants were analyzed using Qualtrics for survey design and Amazon's Mechanical Turk for data collection.

Findings – Demographic differences between culinary fans and critics were identified and significant relationships between perceptions of a destination's cuisine and various elements of the visitor experience were found.

Research limitations/implications – The current study extends the literature on the characteristics of culinary tourists by showing a significant relationship between perceptions of a destination's cuisine and various elements of the visitor experience, such as destination image, satisfaction, number of past trips, and revisit intentions. Future studies should look at a greater number of distinct and geographically diverse destinations to test the generalizability of the current study's findings.

Practical implications – The results of this study provide implication for destination marketers in general and for those of Orlando and Florida in particular, especially in using cuisine as a potential core offering rather than a peripheral tourism product.

Originality/value – This study is believed to be the first to compare culinary fans and culinary critics, thereby extending the literature and demonstrating several differences between the two groups.

Keywords Culinary tourism, Gourmet tourism, Food tourism, Cuisine, Destination image, Satisfaction, Loyalty

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Gastronomic potential or local cuisine of a destination is considered a major factor affecting tourists' destination choice, travel experiences, and decisions to return to the same destination (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010; Getz, 2000; Robinson and Getz, 2014; Sotiriadis, 2015; Seo *et al.*, 2017; Silkes *et al.*, 2013; Stavrianea *et al.*, 2017), with food purchases constituting about one-third of all tourist spending (World Health Organization, 2015). The gastronomic component of destinations not only attracts visitors, but also increases their understanding of uniqueness and distinctive features of a destination (Antón *et al.*, 2019). In particular, authentic cuisines, availability of restaurants, food outlets such as street food, night bazaars, and food and beverage festivals can increase the attractiveness of a destination (Henderson, 2016; Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Sotiriadis, 2015).

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Although many destinations cannot deliver authentic food experiences (Hillel *et al.*, 2013), authentic gastronomic brands have become a distinct tendency in recent years due to their potential for unique culinary experiences. According to the [World Food Travel Association \(2019\)](#), authenticity is the first motivator for food-loving travelers. Therefore, local cuisine, especially authentic cuisine, has become a strategic asset for destination marketing (Robinson and Getz, 2014). The local cuisine of a destination reflects identities, daily lifestyles, religions, beliefs, habits, traditions, and customs of a society (Sormaz *et al.*, 2016). Examples of culinary resources and events include tea ceremonies in China and Japan ([Camellia Tea Ceremony, 2019](#); Wong, 2016), winery tours, wine tasting, fine dining and wedding ceremonies at wineries in France ([Wine Paths, 2019](#)), Italy ([Cellar Tours, 2019](#)), Spain (Back *et al.*, 2018) and California ([Visit Napa Valley, 2019](#)), farm tours in Florida ([Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 2019c](#)), rose harvesting in Turkey ([Daily Sabah, 2016](#)) and beer festivals in Europe ([La Tréfle, 2018](#)), to name but a few.

Culinary tourists seek ethnic and local food ingredients, providing unique taste and flavor experiences (Silkes *et al.*, 2013). Even though some travelers may refuse some local products due to health conditions (e.g. food allergies) or psychological factors (e.g. food neophobia), local foods are attractive and unique choices for many travelers (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016) and provide excitement, relaxation, escapism, status and education as a form of entertainment (Hillel *et al.*, 2013; Ryu and Jang, 2006; Sparks, 2007).

Therefore, gastronomy tourism or culinary tourism, as a component of cultural tourism, has recently been receiving increased attention from both academics and tourism organizations, with the United Nations World Tourism Organization having hosted its fifth *World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism* in Spain in 2019 (UNWTO, 2019). Some researchers have evaluated destinations' gastronomic potential by describing their products, cuisine, natural and cultural resources (Hjalager and Corigliano, 2000; Okumus and Cetin, 2018; Robinson *et al.*, 2018), while others have studied the characteristics of culinary tourists (Ignatov, 2003; Ignatov and Smith, 2006; Lang Research, 2001; Noseworthy *et al.*, 2005; Sohn and Yuan, 2013).

Despite these studies with implications about the characteristics of culinary travelers, there is a lack of attention to differences between those with a positive attitude towards a destination's culinary offerings (referred to as "culinary fans") and those with a negative attitude towards a destination's culinary offerings (referred to as "culinary critics"). Understanding the profiles of both culinary fans and critics and how they differ in sociodemographic and behavioral characteristics would help in better explaining how to tap into the culinary tourism market. This information would be helpful for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and local industry stakeholders to make strategic decisions in product and market development for successfully tapping culinary tourism potentials of the destination. Further, while consumption of food is both a physical necessity and a recreational activity, and an integral part of the tourism experience that all visitors must indulge in, the impact of the effect of local cuisine on the visitor experience is often neglected in tourist destination studies (Sengel *et al.*, 2015).

Thus, the purpose of the current study is to identify and compare the characteristics of culinary fans and culinary critics of two tourist destinations in the U.S.A., Orlando (a metropolis in central Florida) and Florida (the state overall). More specifically, the study aims to compare fans and critics of these destinations on several factors, including sociodemographics, psychographics, and behavioral characteristics. The study also aims to identify the image attributes that explain the likelihood to visit for culinary critics and fans, thereby extending the literature in this neglected area and providing significant practical implications for both culinary tourism specifically and destination marketing overall.

While Florida as a destination (the "mother brand") naturally includes Orlando (the "child brand"), the state and the Orlando area are marketed by distinct destination marketing organizations (DMOs) (VisitFlorida and VisitOrlando), and perceptions of the state as a whole

may be quite different from those of the Orlando area specifically. With many attractions, theme parks, water parks, sports, recreation, outdoor activities, beaches, natural parks and springs, shopping centers, broad accommodation availability and international airports, Orlando as a metropolis and Florida as a state are leading destinations for visitors globally (VisitOrlando, 2019; State of Florida, 2019). The tourism industry contributes to Orlando's economy with 75 million visitors in 2018 (Orlando Business Journal, 2019) and over \$50 billion in economic impact annually (Orlando Economic Partnership, 2019). Similarly, Florida is the top travel destination in the world with 126.1 million visitors reported in 2018 (State of Florida, 2019; Visit Florida, 2019). Thus, comparison of culinary critics and fans of these destinations would set a benchmark for other destinations with different tourism and gastronomic potentials.

2. Literature review

2.1 Culinary tourism

Culinary tourism research has been conducted since Belisle's (1983) article on the interplay between tourism and food production. However, it is only more recently (since 2008) that this area has seen unprecedented growth in terms of academic articles, textbooks, special issues of journals and other publications, and conferences (Ellis *et al.*, 2018). The terms "culinary tourism," "food tourism," and "gastronomy tourism" are used interchangeably by both academics (Hornig and Tsai, 2012; Sánchez-Cañizares and López-Guzmán, 2012) and practitioners. The UNWTO's *Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness* defines gastronomy tourism as "a type of tourism activity which is characterized by the visitor's experience linked with food and related products and activities while travelling," and goes on to say that it may also involve other related activities (UNWTO, n.d.). Such activities may include visits to local producers, food festivals, and cooking classes (UNWTO, n.d.). The organization also considers wine tourism to be a "crucial component of gastronomy tourism" (UNWTO, 2016, p. 1). Another frequently used definition of food in tourism is "visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel" (Hall and Sharples, 2003, p. 10).

There are also a number of definitions that claim culinary tourism to be virtually any tourist experience involving a destination's culinary offerings (Presenza and Chiappa, 2013). Such definitions, however, may be too general, leading to almost any tourist experience involving food to be classified as culinary tourism (McKercher *et al.*, 2008), which would effectively encompass most tourism experiences. Culinary tourism must, therefore, be more specific. Montanari (2009) referred to food as a "cultural reference point," containing information about the culture and geography of a destination, while Metro-Roland (2013) discussed food as representative of the cultural heritage of a destination. In a recent study, Ellis *et al.* (2018) found food to be a cultural experience, with authenticity of prime importance. Activities involving tourists and relating to food may not, on their own, be sufficient to be categorized as culinary tourism, motivation is also an important consideration (Adeyinka-Oji and Khoo-Lattimore, 2013; Hall, 2006). For the purposes of the current study, therefore, culinary tourism is believed to be tourist activities where an interest in culinary or other food-related experiences are the primary motivator (Hall, 2006), and not all tourist destinations will therefore necessarily be culinary tourism destinations.

2.2 Culinary tourism destinations

Food may be effectively used to promote and position a destination (Hjalager and Richards, 2002), with a growing number of destinations promoting their cuisine as a core tourism

product (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010). This is particularly relevant to destinations with well-known cuisines, Thailand, Italy and France being prime examples of such destinations that have been promoting culinary tourism (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010). In fact, a number of destinations show cuisine to be one of their primary tourism draws, e.g. Italy (Boyne *et al.*, 2002), Hong Kong (Au and Law, 2002), and Turkey (Rimington and Yuksel, 1998). Food can be used in developing a destination image (Quan and Wang, 2004), as well as in representing a destination's cultural identity (Frochot, 2003). Regions with strong food cultures are able to take advantage of this asset in marketing their tourism product in order to attract visitors who are interested in new gastronomic experiences (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010), and to stimulate international visitation (Horng *et al.*, 2012).

A significant relationship has been found between the food image of a destination and tourists' intentions to visit (Ab Karim and Chi, 2010), and destinations that boast a strong or unique food culture can reap a number of benefits. Food-based activities have been found to significantly impact visitors' levels of satisfaction, return intentions, and positive word of mouth (Stone *et al.*, 2019). When marketing a cuisine (local, regional, or national) to potential culinary tourists, however, it is imperative that the product is appropriately packaged and marketed with a consistent image if the full positive impact is to be attained (Horng *et al.*, 2012). The development of "culinary neighborhoods" within a city may also draw culinary tourists to certain areas (Beiriger, 2015). Thus, while some destinations have the advantage of well-known cuisines that draw visitors, it is possible to create a strong culinary brand in order to attract culinary tourists with the right packaging and marketing and the promotion of traditional products or dishes. This has been shown to the case in a study by Alonso *et al.* (2018) examining the potential for developing culinary tourism in Lima, Peru.

2.3 Culinary tourism potential of Orlando and Florida

With a warm climate and a variety of land characteristics, Florida has a large agricultural industry providing plentiful plantation and farming sources of fresh ingredients. The diverse demographic (White 72.5 percent, Hispanic 28.6 percent, Black 23.9 percent, Asian 3.4 percent, Native American 0.1 percent,) and cultural profile shape the unique food culture of the region (Population USA, 2019). According to Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (2019a), Florida has 9.45 million acres utilized by 47,000 commercial farms and ranches. Florida ranks first in the US in the value of production of cucumbers, grapefruit, oranges, squash, sugarcane, fresh market snap beans, and fresh market tomatoes, and second in the value of production of bell peppers, strawberries, watermelons, fresh market cabbage and fresh market sweet corn (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 2019a). Livestock and other farm products such as honey have also become strengths of Florida (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 2019a, b). Florida is also a wine producing state, with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services listing 23 certified Florida farm wineries with tasting rooms open to the public on its website (Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, n.d.). The native *Muscadine* grapes used for winemaking in Florida have also been shown to possess extensive health benefits that have not been effectively communicated to consumers (Alonso, 2014).

Florida's world-class restaurant scene continues to evolve, with a myriad of award-winning and celebrity chefs opening new restaurants throughout the state and an evolving street food scene (Sherman, 2019). The South Beach Wine and Food Festival held annually in Miami Beach has grown to be one of the largest food and wine festivals in the United States (Park *et al.*, 2008). Having boasted 20,000 attendees over a 3-day period in 2004 (Park *et al.*, 2008), the festival has grown to attract more than 65,000 attendees over a 5-day period in 2019, its 18th year (Cision PR Newswire, 2019). Another major festival, the Epcot International Food and Wine Festival held at Walt Disney World's Epcot theme park in Orlando each year also

continues to grow in both scope and duration. Featuring food and wine from around the globe, wine seminars, wine dinners, celebrity chef cooking demonstrations, and music, the 2019 festival, to be held for the 24th time, will run for an astonishing 87 days (Fickley-Baker, 2019).

With world-class theme parks, attractions, events, resorts, and vacation rentals, Orlando has dining and nightlife districts offering dishes prepared by nationally recognized chefs and local legends, global cuisines, and many farm-to-table options at luxury resorts (VisitOrlando, 2019). Although Orlando is often thought of as a “chain restaurant” destination, with a number of the nation’s top chain restaurant operators headquartered there (e.g. Darden Restaurants, Planet Hollywood, Red Lobster), it also has a burgeoning fine dining scene (Baginski, 2010), which continues to evolve. However, the highly respected *Michelin Guide*, which bestows their coveted star ratings on restaurants around the world, still does not rate restaurants anywhere in Orlando or, indeed, anywhere in Florida, confining their United States ratings to just four cities, Chicago, New York, Washington D.C., and San Francisco (TripSavvy, 2019).

Although Orlando and the State of Florida are well-known for their scenery and their entertainment industry, there is still limited empirical evidence and discussion on their potential for culinary tourism. Academic research on the culinary tourism potential of these destinations would help in identifying strengths and weaknesses that should be addressed in their marketing strategies. As two of the most popular tourist destinations among both domestic and international travelers, these destinations would be expected to yield a comparable number of respondents with different culinary attitudes. The goal is to identify potential factors that explain visitors’ tendency to promote or criticize the cuisine of a destination by comparing fans and critics according to sociodemographic, personality and behavioral differences. Comparing culinary fans and critics of two destinations will help to achieve robustness of findings for external validity.

2.4 Culinary tourists

Cairns *et al.* (2010, p. 592) defined “foodies” as “people with a longstanding passion about eating and learning about food but who are not food professionals.” Such people, whose numbers are said to be increasing around the world, are the ideal target segment for culinary tourism destinations (Kline *et al.*, 2018). A number of studies have investigated the characteristics of foodies and culinary tourists, with different findings revealing them to be quite diverse in nature. Green *et al.* (2015) found those that self-identified as foodies to actively seek special food products, keep up with their local restaurant scene, and photograph their food. Sohn and Yuan (2013) revealed culinary tourists to be idealists, achievers, explorers, belongers, and innovators, while other studies found them to be older, more educated, wealthier, and spend approximately twice as much as generic tourists during their visit (Noseworthy *et al.*, 2005; Ignatov and Smith, 2006). Yet, Lang Research (2001) defined culinary tourists as young and explorative, and Ignatov (2003) found them to have the highest socio-economic profiles and engage in more activities during their travels, staying at spas, hotels, inns, and resorts.

It is evident from the aforementioned studies that these “food enthusiasts” are far from a homogenous group, a conclusion also reached by Kline *et al.* (2018) who found multiple types of foodie tourists with varying social demographics, food activity interests, and dining preferences. Therefore, they suggest that no single marketing strategy will work for all culinary tourists, rather targeting specific groups according to their preferences. They further suggest that existing food tourism destinations be examined in order to determine whether certain types of “foodies” are drawn to particular destinations.

Even though the existing literature on culinary or food tourists reflects some information about their characteristics, there is a lack of research on the characteristics and differences of

culinary fans of a destination compared to those of its culinary critics. Despite the lack of studies, it is logical to assume that these groups may be different in sociodemographics, psychographics and behavioral characteristics. To start with, the local cuisine of a destination, with its unique tastes specific to certain regions and cultures, may be more to the liking of visitors coming from certain regions. Additionally, the more experience a visitor has with a destination, the more familiar with and the more likely to develop a taste for the local cuisine of the destination. Furthermore, as the saying goes “the way to the heart is through the stomach,” and thus, visitors who enjoy the food at a destination may be more fond of, and thus, have a better perception of the destination. Based on these logical arguments, the general assumption of the current study is that culinary fans and culinary critics of Orlando and Florida have different sociodemographic, psychographic, and behavioral characteristics.

3. Methods

For both Orlando and Florida, large datasets were acquired using Qualtrics for survey design and Amazon’s Mechanical Turk for data collection. The sociodemographic characteristics of respondents were measured using the typical sociodemographic variables (i.e. age, gender, level of education, marital status, race/ethnicity, and income level). A psychographic variable (the personality trait of emotion-based/logic-based decision making) was also included. Based on the [Ignatov’s \(2003\)](#) findings that foodies engage in more activities during their travels, staying at spas, hotels, inns, and resorts, emotion-based/logic-based decision making trait was deemed as an appropriate differentiator between culinary fans and culinary critics in the study. For the emotion-based decision-making, [Barchard’s \(2001\)](#) 9-item emotion-based decision-making scale with two factors (emotion-based decision-making (0.73) and logic-based decision-making (0.67), was adapted using a 7-point scale (1 = very inaccurate, 7 = very accurate).

Behavioral characteristics included a number of variables regarding past visit behavior, future likelihood to visit, information sources, destination choice factors, and perceived destination image. Destination experience was measured by questions asking about the existence and number of past trips, 1-item overall satisfaction with past trips (1 = very dissatisfied, 10 = very satisfied), and 1-item likelihood to visit again (1 = very unlikely, 10 = very likely). After the likelihood to visit, respondents were also asked to rate the importance (1 = very unimportant, 7 = very important) of six reasons to choose the destination for their next vacation including their familiarity, destination image, quality of products and services, premium prices, value for money, overall desirability, and their loyalty to the destination. Based on destination image literature ([Tasci and Gartner, 2007](#); [Tasci et al., 2007](#)), a 14-item image scale was developed to measure the image of different attributes pertaining to product offerings of each destination (1 = extremely poor, 7 = excellent). Furthermore, a 9-item list of information sources was also used to measure their influence on forming images of the destinations; respondents were asked to rank order these information sources, with 1 being “most influential” and 9 least influential. Typical sources that people use to gather information about destinations and other tourism and hospitality products were included in this list. Finally, an open-ended question, “what comes to your mind first when you think of Orlando/Florida,” was asked to see whether food or cuisine is provided as a strength of these destinations.

A total of 2,320 surveys for Orlando and 1,762 surveys for Florida were completed. In analyzing the data, first, the images of Orlando and Florida were compared using *t*-test. Since using large sample sizes is known to create guaranteed statistical significance, the real or practical differences are checked by testing the effect size and reporting eta-squared (η^2) indices as well. The effect size or the degree of association for the interval variables that the culinary fans and culinary critics groups are compared on is measured by eta-squared

($\eta^2 = SS_{\text{effect}} / SS_{\text{total}}$) as the estimate of correlation for the sample (Hays, 1994; Khalilzadeh and Tasci, 2017; Kirk, 1982, 1996; Tabachnick and Fidell, 1989), where a value of 0.01 is considered a small effect, 0.06 a medium effect and 0.14 a large effect (Kirk, 1996, p.751).

Next, respondents were grouped into culinary fans and culinary critics by using the ratings on the “local cuisine” item in the destination image scale. Those respondents who rated the destination with a number ranging 1 to 3 (extremely poor, very poor and poor) were considered as potential critics and thus termed as culinary critics ($n = 256$ for Orlando, $n = 122$ for Florida) while only those who rated the destination with the highest point (7 = excellent) were considered as potential fans ($n = 224$ for Orlando, $n = 187$ for Florida). This segmentation method was arbitrarily decided to be appropriate to differentiate between fandom and critical tendencies and thus sufficiently differentiate between critics and fans. Such a conservative approach was taken for the fan group in order to eliminate any room for potential criticizing tendency in this group and thus differentiate from the critics. Thus, those who rated the “local cuisine” item on the destination scale from 4 to 6 (neither poor nor good, good and very good) were considered to be neither culinary critics nor true culinary fans, and were omitted from the analysis.

These groups were then compared on all sociodemographic, personality, and behavior variables for both destinations. Crosstabs with chi-square test for categorical variables, and *t*-test for continuous variables were utilized in comparing the two groups. Since the numbers of respondents in culinary fans and culinary critics were smaller than 300 for both destinations, effect size measures were not needed in these analyses. Finally, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis was used to identify the relative influence of destination image attributes on the likelihood to visit Orlando and Florida by both culinary critics and culinary fans. SPSS version 24.0 was used for all analyses. Since culinary fans’ ratings of local cuisine attribute is constant (7 or excellent), this attribute was not included in the regression model for fans.

4. Results

First, the image of Orlando and Florida was compared. Results in Table I show that both destinations were rated above the middle point (4) on the 7-point scale. Orlando was rated highest on themed products (e.g. themed hotels, theme parks) (6.19), followed by events and activities for tourists (5.65), and outdoor activities (5.57) while Florida was rated highest on beaches/water attractions (6.14), followed by themed products (e.g. themed hotels, theme parks) (5.88), outdoor activities (5.75), and scenic beauty (5.75), on average. Both destinations’ lowest-rated items were the same, i.e. locals’ hospitable attitude, uniqueness of culture/customs, and cultural/heritage attractions, all of which rated between 4 and 5 on average. Even though *t*-test results revealed significant differences between Orlando and Florida on 10 of the destination image attributes and the overall image rating, the eta-squared ($\eta^2 = SS_{\text{effect}} / SS_{\text{total}}$) measures revealed a small effect on three image attributes (themed products, beaches/water attractions, and cultural/heritage attractions) and a medium effect on one image attribute (scenic beauty). Florida was rated significantly higher on these attributes except for themed products, which was Orlando’s strong image dimension, on average. Orlando and Florida’s destination images are similar on all other attributes. One of these attributes is local cuisine, which was rated as the fourth lowest item for both destinations (4.86 for Orlando, 5.03 for Florida).

When asked what comes to mind when thinking about Orlando and Florida, only 24 of the Florida respondents mentioned food, specifically, Cuban food, seafood, high-quality food, variety of food, Miami food scene, and food delicacies. One respondent mentioned food as a negative aspect of Florida. For Orlando, a mere 3 respondents mentioned food or seafood in their answers.

Image attributes*	Orlando (N = 2,320)		Florida (N = 1,762)		<i>t</i> -test significance	Effect size η^2 **
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Themed products (e.g. theme hotels, theme parks)	6.19	1.141	5.88	1.293	0.000	0.016
Events and activities for tourists	5.65	1.139	5.53	1.193	0.001	0.003
Outdoor activities	5.57	1.199	5.75	1.131	0.000	0.005
Climate/weather conditions	5.51	1.229	5.29	1.532	0.000	0.006
Overall fun and excitement	5.47	1.123	5.47	1.096	0.973	0.000
Overall image	5.45	1.099	5.38	1.178	0.032	0.001
Nightlife and entertainment opportunities	5.40	1.273	5.42	1.243	0.692	0.000
Information resources for tourists	5.38	1.168	5.36	1.227	0.548	0.000
Shopping opportunities	5.32	1.284	5.09	1.244	0.000	0.008
Beaches/water attractions	5.03	1.488	6.14	1.046	0.000	0.015
Scenic beauty	4.92	1.329	5.75	1.160	0.000	0.095
Local cuisine***	4.86	1.265	5.03	1.173	0.000	0.005
Locals' hospitable attitude	4.82	1.271	4.76	1.320	0.151	0.000
Uniqueness of culture/customs	4.25	1.426	4.53	1.412	0.000	0.009
Cultural/heritage attractions	4.21	1.423	4.62	1.341	0.000	0.020

Table I.
Comparison of Orlando
and Florida on the
image attributes

Note(s): *Please rate Orlando/Florida as a travel destination in terms of the following attributes on the 7-point scale below (1 = Extremely Poor, 7 = Excellent); **0.01 = a small effect, 0.06 = a medium effect, 0.14 = a large effect; ***This attribute was used to segment respondents into Culinary Fans (those who rated 1 to 3, or Extremely Poor, Very Poor or Poor) and Culinary Critics (those who rated 7 or Excellent)

Using the ratings on local cuisine, respondents were grouped into culinary fans (those who rated excellent) and culinary critics (those who rated extremely poor, very poor, or poor). Then, these groups were compared by sociodemographic, personality, and behavioral characteristics for Orlando and Florida (Table II). Results of *t*-test and chi-square test show some differences among the groups. On age, only Florida respondents are significantly different, culinary fans being older than critics. In gender, females dominate the culinary fans group while males dominate the culinary critics group for both Orlando and Florida. Both Orlando and Florida culinary fans and critics also differ in education level. Although both groups are dominated by college or university graduates followed by high school or vocational school graduates, culinary critics groups are more likely to be college graduates or master's or doctoral degree holders than fans for both Orlando and Florida. In marital status, Orlando culinary fans and critics are similar. However, Florida culinary critics are more likely to be single than fans, who are more likely to be married, living with a partner, or divorced. In race/ethnicity, Florida culinary fans and critics are similar this time, while Orlando culinary critics are more likely to be white/Caucasian and culinary fans being more likely to be African American and Asian. Interestingly, culinary fans and culinary critics are similar in annual income for both Orlando and Florida, where the majority of respondents reported an income category between 15K and 75K USD.

As can be seen in Table II, on the personality trait, both culinary fans and critics rated higher on logic-based decision-making than that on emotion-based decision-making for both destinations. Nonetheless, culinary fans and critics are significantly different on emotion-based decision-making, fans rated higher on emotion-based decision-making traits than critics for both destinations. However, for logic-based decision-making, only Orlando respondents showed significant differences, fans rating significantly higher than critics do.

Culinary fans and critics were compared on their experiences with Orlando or Florida as a travel destination (Table III). Crosstabs with chi-square test showed significant

Sociodemographic and psychographic characteristics	Orlando (<i>n</i> = 480)		Florida (<i>n</i> = 309)		Comparison test (<i>t</i> -test/Chi-square test significance)
	Culinary fans (<i>n</i> = 224)	Culinary critics (<i>n</i> = 256)	Culinary fans (<i>n</i> = 187)	Culinary critics (<i>n</i> = 122)	
Age (χ)	33.59	31.87		31.10	Orlando = 0.059 Florida = 0.001
<i>Gender (%)</i>					
Male	43.0	55.9	37.4	61.5	Orlando = 0.006
Female	57.0	43.4	62.6	38.5	Florida = 0.000
Do not wish to identify		0.8			
<i>Highest level of education (%)</i>					
High school	25.8	17.6	18.7	21.3	Orlando = 0.000
Vocational school/ associate	14.9	5.5	20.9	9.8	Florida = 0.039
College/University	48.9	61.7	46.5	59.8	
Master's or PhD	9.5	15.2	13.4	9.0	
Other	0.9		0.5		
<i>Marital status (%)</i>					
Single	41.2	51.6	34.8	55.7	Orlando = 0.374
Married	37.6	30.9	39.6	25.4	Florida = 0.009
Divorced	7.2	5.9	8.0	5.7	
Separated	1.4	1.6	0.5	0	
Living with a partner	11.8	9.4	16.6	11.5	
Other	0.9	0.8	0.5	1.6	
<i>Race/ethnicity (%)</i>					
White/caucasian	66.1	80.1	67.7	72.1	Orlando = 0.019
African American	10.9	5.9	8.1	7.4	Florida = 0.883
Hispanic	4.5	4.3	7.5	7.4	
Asian	14.9	9.0	12.9	11.5	
Native American	1.4	0.4	0.5	0	
Pacific Islander	0.5	0	0	0	
Other	1.8	0.4	3.2	1.6	
<i>Annual income level (%)</i>					
Under 15,000	21.3	18.0	14.5	20.7	Orlando = 0.130
15,000–24,999	16.3	18.0	17.2	15.7	Florida = 0.831
25,000–34,999	14.9	12.5	19.9	14.9	
35,000–49,999	18.6	17.2	18.3	15.7	
50,000–74,999	14.0	18.8	17.2	19.0	
75,000–99,999	5.4	10.9	7.0	7.4	
100,000–149,999	5.4	3.1	3.8	5.0	
150,000–199,999	2.3	0.4	2.2	1.7	
200,000 or above	1.8	1.2	0	0	
<i>Decision-making characteristics* (χ)</i>					
Emotion-based	4.99	4.17	4.61	3.83	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Logic-based	5.34	4.89	5.31	5.20	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.421

Table II.
Comparison of sociodemographic and psychographic characteristics of culinary fans and culinary critics of Orlando and Florida

differences in the existence of past trips for both destinations; fans are more likely to be visitors, while critics are more likely than fans to be non-visitors for both destinations. In

Note(s): *1 = Very Inaccurate, 7 = Very Accurate

	Orlando		Florida		<i>t</i> -test and chi square test significance
	Culinary fans (<i>n</i> = 224)	Culinary critics (<i>n</i> = 256)	Culinary fans (<i>n</i> = 187)	Culinary critics (<i>n</i> = 122)	
<i>Have you traveled to Orlando/Florida for vacation purposes so far?</i>					
Yes %	69.6	58.6	79.7	57.4	Orlando = 0.012
No %	30.4	41.4	20.3	42.6	Florida = 0.000
Have you traveled to Orlando for vacation purposes so far? If so, how many times (χ)	3.93	2.93	5.06	3.24	Orlando = 0.217 Florida = 0.003
Please indicate your overall satisfaction with your trip(s) to Orlando/Florida* (χ)	9.13	7.30	9.16	6.74	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Please indicate your likelihood to visit Orlando/Florida** (χ)	8.34	4.73	6.96	3.56	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
<i>Please indicate the importance of the following reasons for you to choose Orlando for your next vacation*** (χ)</i>					
My familiarity with Orlando/Florida	5.23	3.82	4.91	3.52	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Image of attractions and activities in Orlando/Florida	6.32	5.12	6.08	4.94	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Orlando's/Florida's high-quality touristic products and services	6.11	4.57	5.60	4.07	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Orlando's/Florida's premium price products and services	5.39	3.79	4.86	3.42	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Orlando/Florida's touristic products offering high value for money	5.94	4.37	5.20	3.98	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Orlando's/Florida's overall desirability	6.21	4.57	6.14	5.02	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
My loyalty for Orlando/Florida	4.86	2.42	4.11	2.75	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Note(s): *1 = Very Dissatisfied, 10 = Very Satisfied; **1 = Very Unlikely, 10 = Very Likely; ***1 = Very Unimportant, 7 = Very Important					

Table III.
Comparison of travel experience characteristics of culinary fans and culinary critics of Orlando and Florida

terms of the number of past visits, only Florida fans rated significantly higher in number of past visits than critics, on average. On both satisfaction and likelihood to visit, culinary fans rated significantly higher, about 2 points higher on the 10-point scale, than critics, on average. When they were asked the importance of reasons to choose the destination for their next vacation (their familiarity, destination image, quality of products and services, premium prices, value for money, overall desirability, and their loyalty for the destination), culinary fans rated all reasons significantly higher than culinary critics for both destinations, on average. As can be seen in [Table IV](#), culinary fans also rated all image attributes and the overall image significantly higher than those of critics for both destinations, on average.

On information sources that were influential in forming their destination images, prior visit, Internet, and friends and relatives were the top three contenders ([Table V](#)). When

Destination image attributes* (χ)	Orlando		Florida		<i>t</i> -test and chi square test significance
	Culinary fans (<i>n</i> = 224)	Culinary critics (<i>n</i> = 256)	Culinary fans (<i>n</i> = 187)	Culinary critics (<i>n</i> = 122)	
Overall fun and excitement	6.50	4.71	6.47	4.23	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Scenic beauty	6.08	3.73	6.64	4.73	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Beaches/water resources	5.83	4.14	6.76	5.25	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Information resources for tourists	6.38	4.77	6.25	4.22	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Cultural/heritage attractions	5.58	2.86	5.85	3.15	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Outdoor activities	6.57	4.59	6.51	4.61	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Climate/Weather conditions	6.46	4.65	5.95	4.39	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Locals' hospitable attitude	6.23	3.50	5.79	3.60	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Uniqueness of culture/customs	5.70	2.80	5.82	3.14	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Shopping opportunities	6.56	4.28	6.11	3.77	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Nightlife and entertainment opportunities	6.60	4.38	6.37	4.10	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Events and activities for tourists	6.71	4.89	6.34	4.34	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Themed products (e.g. theme hotels, theme parks)	6.75	5.87	6.40	4.93	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000
Overall image	6.52	4.44	6.38	4.18	Orlando = 0.000 Florida = 0.000

Note(s): *1 = Extremely Poor, 7=Excellent

Table IV.
Comparison of culinary fans and culinary critics of Orlando and Florida on destination image attributes

culinary fans and culinary critics were compared on these information sources, few significant differences were identified between Orlando and Florida. Culinary fans of both destinations rely more on general knowledge from school and movies or TV shows than critics did. While Florida culinary fans rely more on prior visit than critics, Orlando culinary critics rely more on travel agency and people from Orlando than fans, and Orlando culinary fans rely more on newspapers/magazines/travel books than critics.

OLS regression analyses were run to identify factors explaining future visit likelihood for culinary fans and culinary critics of both destinations by using destination image attributes as the independent variables. As can be seen from the results summarized in Table VI, for Orlando culinary fans, overall fun and excitement ($\beta = 0.091$) and shopping opportunities ($\beta = 0.211$) explained 20 percent of variance in likelihood to visit. For Orlando critics, overall fun and excitement ($\beta = 0.240$), cultural/heritage attractions ($\beta = 0.149$), local cuisine ($\beta = -0.131$), and overall image ($\beta = 0.270$) explained 30 percent of variance in likelihood to visit, with a negative influence of local cuisine. For Florida culinary fans, only overall image ($\beta = 0.406$) explained 27 percent of variance in likelihood to visit. For Florida culinary critics, themed products ($\beta = -0.230$) and overall image ($\beta = 0.341$) explained 33 percent of variance in likelihood to visit, with a negative influence of themed products.

Table V.
Comparison of culinary fans and culinary critics of Orlando and Florida on importance of information sources in forming destination image

Information sources * (χ)	Orlando		Florida		<i>t</i> -test and chi square test significance
	Culinary fans ($n = 224$)	Culinary critics ($n = 256$)	Culinary fans ($n = 187$)	Culinary critics ($n = 122$)	
<i>Please order the information sources in helping you form an image of Orlando/Florida</i>					
Prior visit	2.89	3.38	2.50	4.02	Orlando = 0.079 Florida = 0.000
General knowledge from school	5.98	5.45	5.48	4.90	Orlando = 0.019 Florida = 0.027
Movies or TV shows	5.35	4.89	5.27	4.58	Orlando = 0.029 Florida = 0.010
Travel agency	5.97	6.61	6.74	6.79	Orlando = 0.002 Florida = 0.829
People from Orlando	5.44	5.72	6.33	6.23	Orlando = 0.018 Florida = 0.713
Friends and relatives	4.08	4.31	3.51	3.88	Orlando = 0.262 Florida = 0.155
Newspapers / magazines / travel books	5.81	5.50	5.72	5.78	Orlando = 0.023 Florida = 0.803
Internet	3.86	3.61	3.81	3.67	Orlando = 0.238 Florida = 0.602
Social media	5.63	5.54	5.65	5.15	Orlando = 0.655 Florida = 0.055

Note(s): *1 = Most Influential, 9 = Least Influential

5. Discussion and implications

5.1 Discussion

This study extends the literature and provides further understanding about culinary tourists by differentiating between culinary fans and culinary critics of two popular tourist destinations in the United States, Orlando and Florida. Study results show that both Orlando and Florida have relatively positive images, with ratings above the middle point (4) on the 7-point scale. Theme parks, beaches, water attractions, events and activities, outdoor activities, and scenic beauty constitute the competitive edge for these destinations but they are not as strong on the culture and heritage front. More specifically, locals' hospitable attitude, uniqueness of culture/customs, cultural/heritage attractions, and local cuisine are not as strong as expected for such popular destinations. When asked what comes to mind when they think of Orlando and Florida, only 24 of the Florida respondents (less than 1.4 percent of total Florida respondents) and just three of the Orlando respondents (a little over 0.1 percent of total Orlando respondents) mentioned food. Of these responses, Cuban food, seafood, high-quality food, variety of food, Miami food scene, and food delicacies were some of the specific answers.

Orlando attracts tourists with theme parks, attractions, events, and vacation rentals ([VisitOrlando, 2019](#)). However, even with extensive dining and nightlife districts, recognized chefs and local legends, global cuisines, and many of farm-to-table opportunities ([VisitOrlando, 2019](#)) as well as a major food and wine festival, Orlando does not have a gastronomic trademark for culinary fans. Similarly, as noted in [Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services \(2017, 2019a, b\)](#), Florida has extensive dining and nightlife, wineries with tasting rooms open to the public, and extensive farming resources within the state. However, the results of the current study reveal that neither Florida nor Orlando has a strong gastronomic appeal of authentic food experiences to attract culinary tourists.

	Orlando				Florida			
	Fans		Critics		Fans		Critics	
	Model fit: $R^2 = 0.205$		Model fit: $R^2 = 0.301$		Model fit: $R^2 = 0.265$		Model fit: $R^2 = 0.333$	
	Adj. $R^2 = 0.152$		Adj. $R^2 = 0.258$		Adj. $R^2 = 0.205$		Adj. $R^2 = 0.238$	
	$f = 3.848$		$f = 6.897$		$f = 4.431$		$f = 3.525$	
	$\alpha = 0.000$		$\alpha = 0.000$		$\alpha = 0.000$		$\alpha = 0.000$	
	β	α	β	α	β	α	β	α
(Constant)	0.309	0.690		0.908		0.437		0.375
Overall fun and excitement	0.091	0.001*	0.240	0.002*	0.116	0.270	0.172	0.198
Scenic beauty	-0.041	0.352	0.051	0.480	-0.005	0.952	0.111	0.288
Beaches/water resources	0.066	0.631	-0.119	0.072	-0.112	0.179	-0.015	0.894
Information resources for tourists	0.018	0.397	0.054	0.417	-0.080	0.373	-0.124	0.326
Cultural/heritage attractions	0.075	0.851	0.149	0.029*	0.062	0.525	0.171	0.083
Outdoor activities	-0.135	0.321	-0.112	0.110	-0.177	0.066	-0.063	0.596
Climate/Weather conditions	0.309	0.075	-0.106	0.097	0.004	0.963	-0.003	0.977
Local cuisine**	-	-	-0.131	0.035*	-	-	0.093	0.384
Locals' hospitable attitude	0.016	0.863	0.005	0.944	0.014	0.887	-0.061	0.533
Uniqueness of culture/customs	0.120	0.223	-0.032	0.642	-0.141	0.105	0.138	0.173
Shopping opportunities	0.211	0.037*	0.031	0.658	0.186	0.054	-0.001	0.989
Nightlife and entertainment opportunities	-0.170	0.057	0.043	0.559	-0.090	0.295	-0.082	0.460
Events and activities for tourists	-0.027	0.773	0.156	0.050	0.112	0.331	0.167	0.235
Themed products (e.g. theme hotels, theme parks)	0.032	0.715	0.015	0.834	-0.003	0.973	-0.230	0.048*
Overall image	-0.069	0.454	0.274	0.002*	0.406	0.000*	0.341	0.010*

Table VI.
Results of regression model test with “likelihood to visit” as the dependent variable for culinary fans and culinary critics of Orlando and Florida

Nonetheless, there are significant differences between culinary fans and culinary critics of the cuisine of these destinations. Culinary fans of both destinations are more likely to be visitors with a higher number of past trips, who are more satisfied with their past trips, and who have a higher likelihood of visiting again than culinary critics. Culinary fans also have a better overall image of both destinations and put more importance on all reasons to visit them for their next vacation. For both culinary fans and critics, however, there were no differences in the top three information sources for forming the destination image of both Orlando and Florida, which were prior visit, Internet, and friends and relatives.

5.2 Theoretical implications

The current study is believed to be the first to compare culinary fans and culinary critics, thereby extending the literature and demonstrating that there are several differences between the two groups, as discussed above. The study also extends the literature on the characteristics of culinary tourists, especially the work of [Kline et al. \(2018\)](#), who found multiple types of foodie tourists with varying social demographics. While Florida culinary fans were found to be significantly older than critics, supporting the findings of [Noseworthy et al. \(2005\)](#) and [Ignatov and Smith \(2006\)](#), interestingly, culinary critics in both groups were found to be less educated than fans, running contrary to the findings of these same authors. Furthermore, the current study found culinary fans to be dominated by females, and more likely than critics to be visitors (rather than non-visitors). The latter finding supports the destination image literature, which finds image to be more realistic after visitation ([Tasci, 2006](#)).

The Internet was found to be the most important information source after prior visit, corroborating the findings of [Tasci et al. \(2018\)](#). Culinary fans of both destinations also

showed higher emotion-based decision-making traits, which differs from the those of sports tourists, who were found by [Tasci et al. \(2018\)](#) to have higher logic-based decision-making traits. This finding shows that different types of tourists differ in their decision-making processes. Culinary fans were further found to be more satisfied with their visits and were more likely to revisit, rated all image attributes and the overall destination image more highly, relied more on general knowledge from school, movies or television in choosing the destination, and rated all reasons for choosing the destination for their next vacation more highly than culinary critics.

[Sengel et al. \(2015\)](#) noted that the effect of local cuisine on the visitor experience is often neglected in tourist destination studies, a gap that this study helps to begin to fill. The current study also extends the destination studies literature by showing that there is a significant relationship between perceptions of a destination's cuisine and various elements of the visitor experience, such as destination image, satisfaction, number of past trips, and revisit intentions. This build on [Hjalager and Richards' \(2002\)](#) work on the use of food to effectively promote and position a destination, and on the findings of [Stone et al. \(2019\)](#), who found that food-based activities significantly impact visitors' levels of satisfaction, return intentions, and positive word of mouth. In addition to these theoretical implications there are also a number of practical implications, particularly relevant to destination marketers.

5.3 Practical implications

The results of this study provide implication for destination marketers in general and for those of Orlando and Florida in particular. Although Orlando and Florida have already been rated two of the world's top travel destinations ([Orlando Economic Partnership, 2019](#); [State of Florida, 2019](#)), the tourism industry should focus on the culinary image of the region to increase impressions of the destination. Active experiences such as street foods, food trucks, and gastronomic tours may promote culinary tourism while feeding and entertaining visitors. For this purpose, eased regulations for small businesses and funding programs to preserve and publicize food and beverage traditions, as well as tax reduction policies for small businesses, may be instrumental. The promotion of food and wine festivals should be more prominent and the many "culinary neighborhoods" of the state, especially in major urban areas [such as Park Avenue in Winter Park and West Sand Lake Road (known as "Restaurant Row") in Orlando, Wynwood and Little Havana in Miami, and SoHo in Tampa] should be actively marketed to show that there is more to Florida and Orlando than the typical perceptions of sun, sea, sand and theme parks. As an important component of culinary tourism ([UNWTO, 2016](#)), wine tourism should also be added to the promotion of Florida's culinary offerings, especially given the extensive health benefits of Florida's *Muscadine* wines ([Alonso, 2014](#)) that should be effectively communicated to visitors.

The culinary industry and DMOs need to engage in promoting Orlando and Florida, particularly to older, highly educated, females and to past visitors, shown to be their strongest culinary fans. A strong culinary brand should be created to attract culinary tourists by promoting traditional products and dishes (such as Florida stone crab claws, key lime pie, alligator tail, and conch fritters) in order to develop a unique food image as an integral part of Florida's cultural identity. This can also serve to increase visitors' perceptions of the uniqueness of Florida's culture and customs. An interesting finding of this study is that culinary fans tend to be emotion-based decision-makers, thus their decisions are more likely to be based on "gut-feel" rather than rationality and logic. DMOs must therefore address the emotional side of visiting a destination in their promotional materials and marketing strategy in order to attract these visitors. For both culinary fans and critics, the most important information source for forming destination image is Internet, besides prior visits and word of mouth. DMOs and the tourism industry stakeholders should, therefore, use their websites

strategically in order to promote culinary tourism, especially in influencing those who have not previously visited the state.

In so doing, it will be possible to make cuisine a core rather than peripheral tourism product for these destinations, addressing culinary fans and wooing culinary critics, thereby giving visitors an additional reason to visit and attracting an additional market segment, i.e. culinary tourists.

6. Limitations and future research

This study was designed to identify potential factors that explain visitors' tendency to promote or criticize the cuisine of a destination by comparing culinary fans and critics according to sociodemographic, personality and behavioral differences. Although this study provides significant implications, it is not free from limitations. First, the study only encompassed two destinations and, although they are marketed separately and perceived differently, there may be overlap between Orlando visitors and Florida visitors. Second, culinary fans and culinary critics may have different demographic and psychographic characteristics in other geographic areas, especially more "food-centric" destinations. Future studies should, therefore, look at a greater number of distinct and geographically diverse destinations, as well as destinations more noted for their culinary culture or specific style of cuisine, to test the generalizability of the current study's findings.

Furthermore, the results may signal different implications. Culinary fans may have such a positive attitude based on their positive experiences, or they may have such a positive attitude because of their inherent positive predispositions. It is also not known whether they are fans of the cuisine due to their fandom of the destination, or vice versa. A more in-depth analysis with qualitative techniques to pinpoint the underlying reasons is therefore warranted. As culinary fans are more likely to be visitors than are culinary critics, it would be interesting to know how much their experience of the cuisine might have changed their opinion about the cuisine and what specific aspects of the cuisine (i.e. types of food or specific dishes) caused them to be fans. This would be helpful to DMOs in marketing the destinations to potential culinary tourists.

Lastly, although findings revealed differences between culinary fans and culinary critics of Orlando and Florida, several factors are still unknown. The current study identified fandom using an indirect method by grouping respondents as culinary fans and culinary critics based on their image rating of local cuisine. A direct method whereby respondents state whether they are a fan or a critic of the cuisine of a destination may reveal different results. In addition, the study was conducted utilizing an online platform where respondents provided answers based on their recollections of past experiences. An onsite survey with current visitors may reveal more accurate and precise results and account for memory bias. Thus, this study paves the way for further exploration in this increasingly popular area of tourism, i.e. culinary tourism.

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