Impact of Local Food as a Tourist Destination Attraction

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Abstract
The increase in the purchasing power of individuals will enhance tour and tourism. Tourism as an experience and excitement is enhanced by the destination's foods. Local foods are foods produced and consumed by tourists in a particular destination. Local foods formed one of the core elements of tourist destinations. This study investigated the influence of local food on tourist destination attraction with a focus on the 'Masa' delicacy in Minna Niger state Nigeria. The study adopts a quantitative research approach surveying 136 respondents including tourists, businessmen, artisans, and students Five restaurants were selected purposively for the study based on accessibility and willingness to participate. The results indicate that local foods are highly important to tourists, especially among the age group 25-35, who accounted for the highest customer patronage. Respondents generally agreed that tourist destination attraction is driven by local foods. In addition, respondents agreed that the uniqueness of local foods enhances pleasure and happiness. The study further found that local foods in destination attractions enhance social prestige and status, especially among the youths in the age group (15-25) which boost vacations among tourists. Respondents further agreed that local foods served as an appealing flavour for tourism destination loyalty and recommendations. However, the concern for hygienic, aesthetic-package, and environmental friendliness should be the utmost consideration. The study suggests that local foods should form part of tourism destination management, however, done in consideration of the purchasing powers of the tourists to enhance the overall experience.

Keywords: *Local Food, Masa, Attraction, Tourist Destination, Nigeria*

1.0 Introduction
It is noted that enjoying food while travelling is not a new thing, but the role of food in tourism has dramatically gained importance among tourism researchers in the past decade, just as food and drink experiences have become more important to travellers (Rousta, & Jamshidi, 2020; Choe, & Kim, 2018; Stone, et. al. 2018). It is on this assertion that it is opined that the value of a destination

could be determined in a better way by applying a more holistic approach towards its food culture (Mc Kercher et. al. 2008).

Food and tourism are thus two twine elements in the hospitality and tourism palace. In whatever perspective one may look at a tourist destination, food either as eating or as a souvenir is an important element for tourists. Different tourist destinations offer a variety of foods as eating or entertainment for tourists, this may hinge on the socio-economic variables of the people, the norms, the religious beliefs, and the influence of peer groups. Tourists and in particular the general public leave their daily routine environment for a serene and relaxed environment for ethnic tourism, historical tourism, cultural tourism, educational tourism, dark tourism, etc. While the tourists are in a tourist destination, the issue of shelter, security, and food becomes imperative; although food may not be the main attraction for embarking on a journey, food seems to be a necessity for tourists.

This means people search for foods at a particular tourist destination before making a final decision. For instance, when you purchase a flight ticket, one of the airline requirements for the passengers is 'choice of food' while on board. This illustrates the importance of food for all customers irrespective of the destination. It is noted that creativity, locality, and special local foods have an effect on the enjoyment of travel serving as a booster for the vacation among tourists (Björk. et.al., 2016). For example, it is observed that consuming local foods significantly contributes to the tourism experience (Santos, et.al. 2020).

Therefore, the recognition of food as an important element to attract tourists to a destination like 'Masa' seems to have influenced and motivated tourists around the globe to visit and revisit the tourist destinations (Raina & Sandilyan, 2021). For example, it is emphasized that tourism related to food is a less addressed topic in academics, but it holds significant value in the real world, especially for modern tourists (Getz et.al., 2014). It is on this assertion that this research is being conducted that focuses on one of the major local foods known as 'Masa' in Minna Niger state Nigeria to address the questions of local food attracts to a tourist destination, enhances social interaction, enhances tourist destination image and promotes a tourist destination.

Masa is cherished for its unique, slightly tangy taste and soft, spongy texture - a combination that sets it apart from other rice-based dishes. Figure 1 provides sample products of Masa delicacy.

Figure 1: Nigeria Local Food 'Masa' (Source: Chef Lola's Kitchen, 2023)

Nigerian Masa, also known as Rice Cakes or Waina, is a popular Traditional Northern Nigerian delicacy, particularly among the Hausa ethnic group. It is made from rice and is often enjoyed as a snack or breakfast meal. Because of its taste and access, it has become a beloved snack or appetizer across the country of Nigeria, especially for occasions like Cultural festivals, Marriage ceremonies, Naming ceremonies, House warming, Conferences, and workshops as snack or breakfast. It is usually served with a spicy pepper sauce or soup as shown in Figure 1.

1.1 The Study Area

Minna is one of the 36 Federal Republic of Nigeria States in North Central, and it is the toll gate to the South West and South Eastern States. It is the capital city of Niger State with geographical coordinates of approximately between latitude 09º 025" N and 09 º 04" N; and longitude 06 º 015" E and 06 º 0 35" E with an average elevation/altitude of 299 meters (Ojigi et al., 2013). The city sits at the crossroads of several major highways connecting northern and southern Nigeria (Aiyedun et al., 2017). The population is approximately 355,000 people, making it one of the major urban centres in Niger State. The inhabitants speak three main languages, including Nupe. Hausa, and Gbangi. The vegetation is predominantly Savanna, characterised by grassland and scattered trees. It is an agrarian State producing rice, yam, and corn, one of the closest States to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The climate in Minna is classified as tropical Savanna, with a distinct wet and dry season. (Ir et al., 2020). During the wet season, which typically runs from May to October, the town experiences heavy rainfall and high humidity. On the other hand, the dry season lasts from November to April and is characterised by hot temperatures and minimal rainfall (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Niger Sate Map (Source: @jeremiahaluwong, 2018)

2.0 Literature Review

The current literature review focused on foods generally as they related to tourists, tourism destinations and destination management. Bearing in mind the term food here could also refer to culinary or cuisine.

2.1 The Food

The food generally may not be the key reason for embarking on a tour among tourists and visitors, however, its presence may serve as a booster to tourists, guests, and visitors to a tourist destination, especially local food. It is opined that local food dishes and food products at destinations have become influencing factors around the globe to visit and recommend destinations among tourists. (Raina & Sandilyan, 2021). It is also reported that that consuming local food significantly influences the tourist experience (Santos, et al. 2020). Foods, especially local foods like Masa promote a tourist destination, thereby, building the attractiveness of a potential tourist destination. For instance, there is a general observation among scholars that local foods influence tourists' tours, open access to foreign markets, and increase foreign exchange earnings (Otengei & Ahebwa, 2021).

Food is therefore described as any nourishing substance that is eaten, drunk, or otherwise taken into the body to sustain life, provide energy, promote growth, and enhance good living. Food is regarded as one of the main components of tourist consumption which contributes to tourism sustainability especially among underdeveloped countries like Nigeria (Iamkovaia, et al., 2019). This could be attributed to the fact that when tourists embark on a tour, it is the desire to gain new experience and food is one of such experiences. Thus, the entire destination choices are usually driven by tourists' interests in and/or food preferences (Li, et al., 2020). Hence, understanding tourist food choices should be taken as an important driver of business innovation and food-chain management (Raj & Griffin, 2017). For instance, the influence of local flavours influenced the demand and supply of local foods, although, the desire to stick to familiar food choices may motivate the demand and supply for a particular destination. It further posits that local food is an important motivating factor influencing tourists' decisions to travel to tourist destinations. Local foods on the other hand play a significant role in shaping tourists' decision-making behavior (Soltani, et al., 2021; Prayag et al., 2020).

The consumption of local food is therefore essential in influencing the overall tourist experience (Kandampully et al., 2018; Mak et al., 2017). However, while some studies examined food consumption within the tourism and hospitality sector more generally but noted that few studies focused on the importance of local food experiences in influencing tourists' attitudes toward destination food offerings and destination image (Okumus, 2020; Choe & Kim, 2019) which is the intention of this study to investigate.

The consumption of local food has a significant economic influence in a tourism community. For example, it is reported that 30–40% of a foreign tourist's budget is allocated to eating food or purchasing it as a gift at a tourist destination (Choe & Kim, 2019). This, therefore, has substantial economic effects on tourism destination attraction. It is further noted that the value of local food consumption has significant implications for tourism destinations (Mak et al., 2017). However, the influence of local food consumption on tourist behaviour remains a less studied topic as only a few studies focused on it (Choe, et al., 2018).

2.2 Local Food and Destination Image

It is argued that local food experiential value and local food consumption are considered as important in influencing food tourists' attitudes toward local foods and thus play a significant role in shaping food destination image (Soltani, et al., 2021). It is further supported that the relationship

between experiential value, consumption value, tourists' attitude and food destination image in food tourism is imperative because it influences tourists' behaviours (Gannon, et al., 2017). Similarly, food and drink experiences strongly affect the development and promotion of a destination image (Stone et al., 2018). For instance, travellers who rate local food highly, sometimes perceived the destination as attractive and expressed overall satisfaction. However, it is posited that few studies on food tourism found that local gastronomy is linked to the destination image (Choe & Kim, 2018).

2.3 Local Food and Social Interaction

Food and social integration cannot be under-emphasized. For instance, local food is observed to bring sustainability practices and financial independence to local entrepreneurs (Sidali, et al., 2015). However, foods in relation to special occasions like honeymoons, anniversaries, and birthdays were frequently connected to a food memory (Stone, et al., 2017). Notwithstanding, the food itself may be included in the memory, but without the celebration, the experience may not occur. For example, Choe et al. (2018) found that social interaction did not necessarily generate a positive attitude toward local food, however, food experiences seem to improve and promote a destination image which formed part of this research study.

3.0 Materials and Methods

This study adopts quantitative research techniques because the researcher aims to explore the views of customers, guests, foreigners and travellers who see local food 'Masa' as one of the delicacies. Five (5) popular local food restaurants were purposely selected among eighteen (18) based on accessibility to customers and willingness to partake in the survey. These restaurants are Hajiya YarYaye Restaurant and Masa Tunga, Badeggi Masa Joint, Hajiya Jamila Maimasa Beside 1st Bank, Hajiya Abu Maimasa Maitumbi, and Bauchi Masa Shiroro Road. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were administered, and one hundred and thirty-six (136) were returned. Among the 136 respondents that participated in the survey, were 46 Tourists, Businessmen and others, 38 Artisans, 28 Public servants and 24 students. These respondents were chosen using the purposive sample technique.

The questionnaire designed covers a destination food attraction, social interaction, destination image and destination promotion. In line with the suggestion by Tang and Zeng (2021), the responses were classified into 1.0 -1.80 (Strongly disagree), 1.81-2.60 (Disagree), 2.61-3.40 (True to some extent), 3.41 – 4.20 (Agree), and 4.21 – 5.00 (Strongly Agree). The instrument's reliability was determined using the Cronbach Alpha procedure (Cronbach, 1951). Thus, the reliability coefficients were 0.811 for Destination food attraction, social interaction (0.755), Destination image (0.822) and Destination promotion (0.790). Descriptive (percentages, mean, and bar charts) and inferential statistics were used for data analysis.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Age Distribution of the Respondents in the Study Area

Figure 3 reveals that the highest number (44 = 32.4%) of customers who patronized local food 'Masa' falls within the ages of 25-35 followed by the age group (38 =27.9%) classified as youths age group (15-25), while the least number of customers (18 = 13.2%) falls between the 45 and

above age group. This is in line with the studies of Kandampully et al. (2017) and Qiu et al. (2020) that age matters in attracting customers to a destination.

Figure 3: Age Distribution of the Respondents
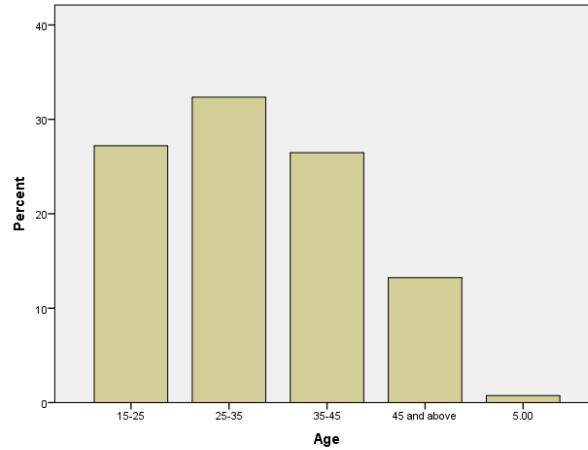
4.2 Occupational Distribution of the Respondents in the Study Area

Figure 4 provides information on the customers' occupations. It shows that the majority (33 = 24.3%) of these customers are tourists, followed by businessmen (32 = 23.5%) who run businesses in the state, while the least are public servants (12 = 8.8%). Although others could be government officials, NGOs, and foreigners who come to the state for workshops and conferences ranked third with (27= 19.9%). This illustrates the importance of the purchasing power of an individual towards food consumption in a tourism destination.

Figure 4: Occupational Distribution of the Respondents
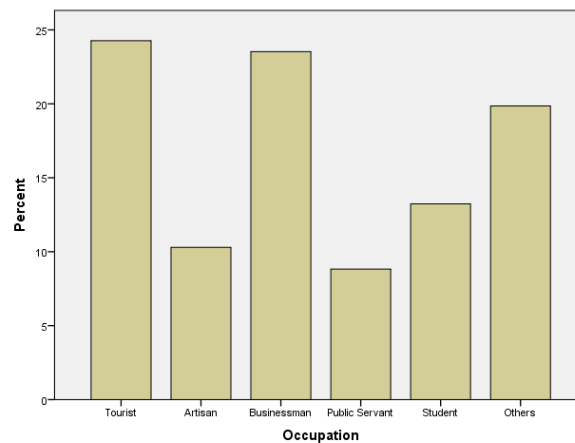
4.3 Income of the Respondents in the Study Area

Table 1 reveals the customers/guests' income that patronized the five selected Masa restaurants. The Table revealed that Tourists, Businessmen and others (Government officials & Foreigners) have the highest income, ranging from ₦200,000 and above. This is followed by Artisans with

between ₦150,000 - ₦200,000, as well as followed by the Public Servants (₦100,000 -₦150,000); while the students' category (between ₦50,000 - ₦100,000) formed the least customers who patronized local food Masa. As earlier observed the purchasing power of a tourists formed major influence on food consumption in a tourist destination.

Table 1: Monthly Income of the Respondents

Occupation	Income Range	Frequency	Percentage
Students	₦50,000 - ₦100,000	24	17.6
Public Servants	₦100,000 -₦150, 000	28	20.6
Artisans	₦150,000 -₦200,000	38	27.9
Tourists/Businessmen/Others (Government officials & Foreigners)	₦200,000 and above	46	33.8
Total		**136**	**100.0**

4.4 Local Food and Destination Attraction

Local food is food that is produced within a short distance of where it is consumed, often accompanied by a social structure and supply chain different from the large-scale supermarket system (Waltz, 2011). This concept varies among individuals but the common feature of this is the uniqueness and distance covered for consumption. In Table 2 respondents agreed (Mean = 3.5809) that the uniqueness of the local foods attracts tourists to a destination. This is in line with the studies conducted by (Santo, et al., 2020; Kandampully, et al., 2018, & Mak, et al., 2017) that destination experience is influenced by local foods. Similarly, Soltani, et al (2021) posited that locals are one of the key elements motivating tourists to a destination.

Thus, the uniqueness of a tourist destination is not only measured by its facilities and accessibilities but also by available local foods that facilitate social engagements among guests. However, the consumption of local foods by international tourists for instance will be influenced by the purchasing power and the number of family members on the tours. Notwithstanding, local foods are essential elements of any tourism destination management. It is not only limited to immediate consumption to satisfy hunger and thirst but extends as souvenirs to friends and colleagues. Similarly, Table 2 also reveals (Mean= 3.8750 and Mean = 3.6912) that tourist destinations with local foods give them pleasure and make them happy. This goes to emphasize the importance of local foods in a tourist destination.

Furthermore, Table 2 reveals that local foods enhance social prestige and status among tourists with a (Mean of 3.3088 and 3.8235) respectively. This result indicates a consensus among respondents that local food is one of the major elements for social interaction and enhancement of memory experience. In line with this assertion, Stone, et al. (2018) opined that special occasions like anniversaries are frequently linked to food memory, although, it is further argued that food itself is not enough to enhance the memory not until the celebration is part of the engagement (Choe, et al., 2018). Conversely, it is noted that local foods enhance tourist tours and boost vacations among tourists (Björk. et.al., 2016).

Furthermore, Table 2 further reveals (Mean = 3.5221) that local foods served as an appealing flavour to tourist destinations. Likewise, it reveals (Mean = 3.7426) that respondents agreed that they wished to recommend both the destination and the local foods to family members and friends

as a result of satisfactory experiences. In line with this result, Gannon et al. (2017) argued that local foods not only promote destination image but also enhance tourist behaviour. Similarly, Stone, et al., (2018) noted that local food promotes destination image. This is the essence that social interaction strengthens social relationships and widens social interaction among tourists, thereby promoting destination images among friends, family members, and contemporary colleagues. It is on this basis that Choe and Kim (2018) argued that local food is linked to the destination image. Therefore, a destination image not only enhances tourist patronage but also promotes future recommendations.

In addressing the question of local food as a destination promotion, Table 2 also reveals (Mean = 3.8676) that the uniqueness of local foods promotes a destination. Similarly, respondents agreed (Mean = 4.0441) that the local foods facilitate or increase food culture thereby promoting tourism destinations. It is on this basis that Rousta and Jamshidi (2020) collaborated that food and drinks are essential tools for tours. Similarly, (Mc Kercher et. al. 2008) found that the value of a destination is determined among others by food culture.

Table 2: Local Food Masa Variables (Source: Field Survey, 2023)

Test Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Nigerian local food Masa is unique	3.5809	1.37467
Nigerian local food Masa taste good	3.9118	1.00716
l believe Nigerian local food Masa is nutritious	3.6029	1.07689
l believe Nigerian local food Masa is hygienic	3.5441	1.06017
Eating Nigerian local food Masa gives me pleasure	3.8750	0.97705
Eating Nigerian Local food Masa makes me feel happy	3.6912	1.10564
Nigerian local food Masa is commonly found in occasions	3.5368	1.24072
I believe Nigerian local food Masa offers value for money	3.7941	1.13606
I enjoy the warmth and excitement of Nigerian local food Masa providers	3.6176	1.11594
I believe eating Nigerian local food Masa with my travel companies improves our friendship	3.2574	1.17376
I have a higher social status when eating well-known Nigerian local food Masa	3.1324	1.16625
Eating well-known Nigerian local food Masa gives me prestige	3.3088	1.18955
My friendship or kinship with my travel companion has increased while eating Nigerian local food Masa	3.2353	1.24862
I believe it is valuable to show pictures of my Nigerian local food Masa experiences to others	3.8235	1.06027
Eating Nigerian local food helps me interact with the people l travel with	3.3015	1.21301
My knowledge of Nigerian local food Masa has increased	3.3676	1.15347
I feel relaxed when eating Nigerian local food Masa	3.7132	1.12156
I am happy about my decision to experience Nigerian local food Masa	3.7279	0.95426
Nigerian local food Masa provides appealing flavours	3.5221	1.19236

I would like to recommend Nigerian local food Masa to families and/or friends	3.7426	1.06803
I am satisfied with my decision to experience Nigerian local food Masa	3.6324	1.08053
Nigeria as a tourism destination provides a rich food culture	3.7868	1.13795
Nigeria as a tourism destination provides diverse foods	3.6176	1.14865
Nigeria as a tourism destination provides delicious foods	3.8750	1.27330
Nigeria as a tourism destination provides unique foods	3.8676	1.12090
My knowledge of Nigerian food culture has increased	4.0441	1.14094

5.0 Conclusion

Purchasing and eating foods directly from local growers among tourists not only enhanced local economic sustainability but also empowered local entrepreneurs in creating jobs and marketing their foods. Therefore, the local food system is a tourism marketing, employed by local communities in achieving sustainable and equitable economic growth and development of local people, bearing in mind that food is considered as part of destination tourism management. Nowadays, local foods form part of major tourist motivation because they aim to attract more tourists to destinations and enhance local prosperity. In as much as local foods are important to tourists, the local entrepreneurs and local communities should endeavour to avoid any forms of anger, and disappointment among their tourists, but encourage happiness, joy, pleasure, and excitement that formed the core tour of tourists experience to enhance customer loyalty and destination's patronage.

5.1 Recommendations

Local foods refer to foods generally produced and consumed by consumers with whom producers interact. Tourism as an experience and exciting profession, foods and drinks should enhance these enthusiasms. Thus, local foods should be produced and aesthetically packaged to meet the immediate needs of the target markets. This, therefore, implies that local food producers should be able to study the needs of their customers over a period of time to meet their demand expectations. The production process should be hygienic as well as the environment should be neat to attract tourists. The producers of these local foods should be able to segment the market by packaging their local foods according to the purchasing power of their customers, bearing in mind that individual perceptions and needs vary. While achieving this, local food producers should embark on marketing promo-tools to enhance customer loyalty and patronage.

5.2 Implications

This finding illustrated the importance of food to tourists and destination management. It illustrated the importance of local foods as an instrument of enhancing the socio-economic activities of the local people, and tourism destination, facilitating social interaction, attractiveness and competition among local food restaurants. It further demonstrates enormous tourists' cultural experiences in the lifestyle of a particular destination. Thus, it increases sales and profits of the local food restaurants and local taxes accrued to the government for creating more social amenities. It provides guides for practitioners in the hospitality and tourism industry on local food destination management.

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