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Foreign food consumption as an extraordinary experience: A comparative study on the perceived value of Japanese and Thai consumers

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceived value of extraordinary experience and compare it with an ordinary one in the context of food consumption. We examine how Japanese and Thai people perceive local ordinary food and foreign extraordinary food. We used a perceived value scale and past experience for independent variables and customers' general attitudes for dependent variable. We collect survey data in Japan and Thailand and conduct analyses by PLS-SEM. Five factors are extracted as elements of perceived value. The most influential factor of Japanese attitudes toward local food is *conditional value*, followed by *emotional and epistemic value* and *menu variety*. Conversely, *value for money* is the only factor that affects Thai customers' attitudes. In the case of foreign food, Japanese respondents are most affected by *emotional and epistemic value*, followed by *functional value (quality)*, and *menu variety*. *Past experience* has a significant negative effect on consumers' attitude. For Thai respondents, *emotional and epistemic value* is the most influential factor, followed by *functional value (value for money)*, and *past experience*. We found significant differences of perceived value of local food and foreign foods.

Key words: extraordinary experience; foreign food consumption; perceived value; authenticity

1. Introduction

With the internationalization of the service industry, opportunities to experience foreign food are increasing (Kwon, 2017). Because most people are conservative in terms of food preference, it is not easy for consumers to accept the taste and cultural value of foreign food (Brunso & Grunert, 1998). Companies that provide foreign food service may need to adjust the services they offer in other countries by offering different menus and services than what is valued in their home countries. This strategy, however, can lead to the loss of uniqueness. One of the major attractions of foreign food consumption and the source of authenticity is the unusual and novel experience that consumers cannot enjoy in their own food culture (Sakamoto & Allen, 2011). Some consumers voluntarily choose such experiences, even though these experiences do not match their personal preference (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011). This tendency is noticeable in buying behavior, choosing travel destinations, and consuming foreign foods.

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceived value of an extraordinary experience and compare it with an ordinary experience in the context of food consumption. The consumers' evaluation of extraordinary experiences depends on the attributes of the consumers (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Keinan & Kivetz, 2011). However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has compared ordinary and extraordinary experiences by controlling the service contents. In this research, we explore consumers' perceived value of extraordinary foreign food consumption by comparing it with that of ordinary, local

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food consumption. We also empirically examine how these differences of perceived value influence attitudes toward foods. For this study, we collected survey data in Japan and Thailand and conducted analyses by partial-least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

The contributions of this research are (1) comparing the perceived value of extraordinary and ordinary experiences in the context of food consumption, (2) presenting a new perspective on the standardization and localization concerning exports of services, and (3) revealing that consumers seek extraordinary experiences that let them experience authenticity, even if they deviate from their usual preference.

In the next section, we examine the difference between extraordinary and ordinary experiences and then confirm that foreign food consumption can be considered as both an extraordinary and an authentic experience. Next, we develop a scale of perceived value of food consumption and compare the perception of foreign food with that of local food. We also examine the impact of the perceived value of both foreign and local food consumption on consumers' attitudes.

2. Literature review

2.1. Extraordinary experience

People are sometimes bold in their pursuit of extraordinary experiences in order to gain the greatest happiness (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014) or to collect unusual experiences, such as staying at an ice hotel (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011). People may also choose extraordinary experiences at the expense of the happiness and utility that they could have gained had they chosen ordinary experiences (Cooney, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2014).

Extraordinary experiences are defined as those that are uncommon, infrequent, and go beyond the realm of everyday life. On the other hand, ordinary experiences are defined as those that are common, frequent, and within the realm of everyday life (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). Although some researchers argue that because experience is subjective and unique, all experiences are extraordinary and memorable, some others criticize this view (Carù & Cova, 2003). For the purpose of this research, we define both extraordinary and ordinary experiences only by the frequency of these experiences, without discussion the subjective changes they cause.

An extraordinary experience is referred to as a collectable experience (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011) or a special event, compared with an ordinary, mundane event (Zauberman, Ratner, & Kim, 2009). These experiences and events lead to special memories that can lead to self-awareness, happiness, and satisfaction with life (Zauberman et al., 2009). Therefore, an extraordinary experience is typically chosen for a different reason than an ordinary experience is. Consumers are believed to be simultaneously enjoying positive emotions and utility, and negative emotions and unpleasant experiences arising from an extraordinary experience (Alba & Williams, 2013).

According to Etkin and Mogilner (2016), people feel happier with a combination of both ordinary and extraordinary experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the values of both experiences and the reasons they are chosen. Existing research examines the meanings of extraordinary experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993; Lindberg & Østergaard, 2015), the effect of sharing such experiences (Min, Liu, & Kim, 2018), and characteristics of individuals (such as productivity orientation or age) who are willing to consume an extraordinary experience. However, there are few studies that examine the differences in consumers' perceived values regarding extraordinary and ordinary experiences and the influence of these values on consumers' buying behavior. One exception is a study by Minton and Liu (2019) that revealed that consumers who perceive an extraordinary experience from marketing messages

relaxed their self-regulation toward food consumption and indulged themselves by consuming more food. This research is positioned as one that elucidates consumers' attitudes toward these experiences by comparing ordinary and extraordinary experiences.

2.2. Foreign food consumption

Consumers' food experiences are influenced by a variety of factors, including demographics and SNS use (Mhlanga, Hattingh, & Moolman, 2015; Mhlanga & Tichaawa, 2017). Food taste preference is also influenced by consumers' cultural background (Wright, Nancarrow, & Kwok, 2001). Consuming foreign food is an exotic and unusual experience for many, and can be divided into two scenarios. The first is visiting a foreign food restaurant that originated in its home country, and the second is consuming local food as a tourist (Sari & Nazli, 2019). The first cases examine issues such as the perceived value of US consumers toward Chinese (Liu & Jang, 2009) and Thai (Sukalakamala & Boyce, 2007) restaurants that entered the US market. The second cases examine the difference between tourists and local consumers. Taste preferences and perceptions of tourists are different from those of local consumers (Nam & Lee, 2011). According to Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009), tourists' consumption of foreign food is driven by motivational, demographic, and physiological factors. Motivational factors include an exciting experience, escape from routine, and an authentic experience. These factors can be classified as extraordinary experiences. Mak, Lumbers, Eves, and Chang (2012) attempt to identify factors that influence tourist food consumption. According to their study, the influential factors are cultural, religious, sociodemographic, and motivational factors; food-related personality traits; and past experiences. Personality traits comprise not only consumers' tendency to avoid novel food cultures—for example food neophobia—but also their tendency to seek novel experiences—for example, variety-seeking tendency. Additionally, tourists' motivational factor includes those with symbolic meaning such as exploring local culture and enjoying an authentic experience, and the contrast with daily routine. For tourists, this offers an extraordinary experience to connect with a completely different food culture (Goolaup, Soler, & Nunkoo, 2018).

Although many studies have been conducted on foreign food consumption by tourists, there is no comparison with local food consumption. We believe that studies contributing to an analysis of foreign food consumption are limited, because they include only an understanding of the characteristics and cultural differences of the cuisines of each country. This study aims to explore the differences in consumers' perceived value by comparing foreign food consumption with local food consumption.

2.3. Authenticity

Authenticity is one of the criteria considered by consumers seeking experiences through the consumption of foreign foods. Jang, Ha, and Park (2012) examine how the authenticity of Korean restaurants in the United States affect the consumers' perceived value of restaurants. The results of their study indicate that the authenticity of foods and ingredients affects the perceived quality of and positive emotion toward restaurants. However, Youn and Kim (2018) suggest that authenticity is a "double-edged sword" and unfamiliar ingredients raise both the perceived authenticity and the perceived risk of consuming the foods. Özdemir and Seyitoğlu (2017) also revealed that some tourists seek authentic foreign food, while others—comfort seekers—prefer familiar and safe food.

Therefore, the perceived value for the consumption of authentic foreign foods that lead to extraordinary experiences would include a mixture of positive and negative feelings, and it would be different from the perceived value of ordinary experiences.

3. Methodology

Prior research has indicated that consumers' perceived value is linked to customer satisfaction, loyalty toward product/service, and purchase intention (Gallarza & Saura, 2006; Ha & Jang, 2012; Woodruff, 1997). However, there is no agreement on the scale and dimension of consumers' perceived value (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Sweeney & Sautar, 2001). Therefore, we have developed a scale of consumers' perceived value in order to measure the effects of extraordinary and ordinary experiences.

For this research, we developed a measurement scale of consumers' perceived value toward restaurants based on Sweeney and Sautar (2001), who suggested that epistemic value relates to the capacity of the service to arouse curiosity, offer novelty, or satisfy a desire for knowledge, and it may be important for consumers who are considering new experiences. To adjust the items based on the context of foreign and local food consumption, we adopt Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009)'s scale that revealed consumers' motivation toward foreign food consumption.

We conducted interviews with 10 Thai consumers who like Japanese food, for the purpose of determining the applicability of the developed scale. Two marketing academicians, one Japanese and the other Thai, carefully examined the results. We set 30 questions to evaluate consumers' perceived value toward Thai and Japanese food. In addition, as dependent variables, we set five questions concerning customers' general attitudes toward Japanese and Thai food, based on the scale developed by Gallarza and Saura (2006). The questions were then translated into Thai and Japanese using double back translation. Finally, before conducting a survey, we tested this questionnaire on 60 undergraduate and MBA students in Thailand.

Both surveys were conducted in July 2017. Data were collected by internet survey in Japan and by snowball sampling in Thailand. The Japanese respondents were required to have experience in consuming Thai food, while the Thai respondents were required to have experience in consuming Japanese food. In order to avoid bias in respondent profiles, we collected samples with a fair distribution of gender and age groups.

During data collection, the respondents were asked about their perceived value and attitudes toward Thai and Japanese food, rated on a five-point Likert scale. In order to control any effect of past experience, they were also asked to answer questions about the other country, such as whether they have ever travelled to the country, have Japanese/Thai friends, or can speak the Japanese/Thai language.

After removing the responses with missing data, we collected data from 593 Japanese respondents (20s: 147, 30s: 151, 40s: 145, 50s: 150) and 490 Thai respondents (20s: 120, 30s: 125, 40s: 123, 50s: 122). There were no significant differences between men and women when it came to perceived value and attitudes.

4. Results

We conducted four analysis models for this study to analyze Thai and Japanese respondents' perception toward local and foreign food. To compare the results of the four analysis models, the same construct of the measuring model was applied to all models. Based on the proposed construct of perceived value, the analysis model consisted of six perceived value factors as the independent variables and consumer attitude as dependent variables. In the case of foreign food, past experience was added into the model as a control variable, and the moderating effects of past experience were also tested. PLS-SEM was used to test the proposed model. The analysis consisted of three steps. The first step was to test the validity and reliability of the measurement model. The next step was to compare the perceived value

of an extraordinary experience with that of an ordinary experience. We calculated the average factor score of each construct. Finally, we analyzed the structural model to investigate the impact of food perception on consumers' attitudes toward foreign and local foods.

4.1. Testing measurement model

According to the factor loadings of items in the initial analysis, seven items with factor loadings lower than 0.60 in at least one particular model were dropped from all analysis models. Table 1 presents the final construct of the measuring model. The factor loadings of all items were higher than 0.70, representing the high explanatory power of the measuring items.

Table 1
Factor loadings of the construct of perceived value and attitudes toward local and foreign food

	Thai respondents		Japanese respondents	
	Foreign food	Local food	Foreign food	Local food
Emotional and epistemic value: F1				
Reflect my self-image to others	0.75	0.78	0.71	0.80
Enjoyed with food	0.82	0.81	0.85	0.78
Feel novelty	0.85	0.87	0.84	0.85
Exciting	0.84	0.86	0.89	0.86
I cannot eat these foods elsewhere	0.72	0.72	0.84	0.80
Social value: F2				
Create new experiences	0.81	0.82	0.83	0.79
Good experience with family/friends	0.91	0.87	0.89	0.88
Create good relationship with family and friends	0.79	0.80	0.88	0.87
Functional value (quality): F3				
High service quality	0.77	0.73	0.76	0.84
Good decoration and environment	0.77	0.71	0.78	0.85
High quality ingredients	0.81	0.72	0.83	0.89
Beautiful food presentation	0.80	0.74	0.83	0.88
Cooking techniques that make high quality food	0.79	0.78	0.83	0.89
Knowledgeable staff	0.79	0.74	0.76	0.81
Menu variety: F4				
I can try a variety of food so that I am not bored	0.89	0.90	0.92	0.91
There are a variety of foods that fulfill the different needs of my friends	0.89	0.89	0.90	0.92
Conditional value (staff and atmosphere): F5				
Good memory	0.76	0.77	0.78	0.86
Good treat	0.86	0.86	0.85	0.89
Good atmosphere	0.85	0.84	0.89	0.88
Relax moments	0.81	0.78	0.83	0.82
Functional value (value for money): F6				
Reasonable price	0.87	0.83	0.89	0.88
Affordable	0.89	0.88	0.92	0.91
The price is low	0.82	0.71	0.91	0.87
Consumers' attitude				
This is among the first when I choose a restaurant	0.90	0.85	0.78	0.74
I am satisfied with this food	0.86	0.86	0.83	0.86
I always have this kind of food	0.87	0.77	0.80	0.84
I recommend my friends and family to have this kind of food	0.86	0.83	0.85	0.88
I am willing to pay more for this kind of food	0.84	0.75	0.83	0.73

Table 1 Continued

	Thai respondents		Japanese respondents	
	Foreign food	Local food	Foreign food	Local food
Past experience				
I have been in Japan/Thailand	0.80		0.76	
I have Japanese/Thai friend(s)	0.61		0.76	
I can speak Japanese/Thai	0.57		0.55	

All factor loadings are significant at the 1% level.

We also assessed the scale reliability and validity for each reflective construct and found good psychometric properties. For all factors, the coefficient alpha and composite reliability exceed 0.70 and the AVE is above 0.50, surpassing recommended thresholds (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). For each pair of constructs, we determined discriminant validity using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion. The results of all four models show that almost all square roots of AVE values were higher than the correlation of related latent constructs. This suggested the discriminant validity of the measuring models.

Table 2 shows factor scores of the four models. Thai consumers evaluated the emotional and epistemic value of foreign food higher than that of local foods, while Japanese consumers evaluated the social value of local food higher than that of foreign food. In terms of functional value (quality), Japanese food (foreign food for Thai respondents and local food for Japanese respondents) tended to be evaluated higher. Similarly, Thai food earned higher scores with regard to the functional value (value for money) in both countries. The only common tendency in the comparison between local and foreign food consumption is the perception of menu variety, with local food consumption being rated higher.

Table 2
Average factor scores of perceived value and consumers' attitudes

	Thai		Japanese	
	Foreign food	Local food	Foreign food	Local food
F1	<u>4.81</u>	4.78	4.73	4.77
F2	5.03	5.03	4.57	<u>4.73</u>
F3	<u>5.43</u>	5.28	4.37	<u>5.34</u>
F4	5.38	<u>5.63</u>	4.59	<u>4.97</u>
F5	5.49	5.48	4.70	<u>5.09</u>
F6	5.57	<u>5.91</u>	<u>4.80</u>	4.07
Consumers' attitude	4.64	<u>5.86</u>	4.38	<u>5.00</u>

The bold and underlined factor scores indicate those that are bigger than a corresponding score at 5% significant level.

4.2. Testing structural model

The results shown in Table 3 reveal the impact of perceived value on consumers' attitudes toward restaurants. In the case of local food, the most influential factor of Japanese customers' attitudes toward local food is *conditional value* ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.01$), followed by *emotional and epistemic value* ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05$) and *menu variety* ($\beta = 0.12, p < 0.05$). On the other hand, *value for money* is the only factor that affects Thai customers' attitudes toward local food ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$).

In the case of foreign food, *past experience* was included as a control variable as well as a moderating factor. For Japanese respondents, the most influential factor was *emotional and epistemic value* ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.001$), followed by *functional value (quality)* ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05$), and *menu variety* ($\beta =$

0.13, $p < 0.05$). *Past experience* has a significant negative effect on consumers' attitude ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.001$). For Thai respondents, *emotional and epistemic value* is the most influential factor on consumers' attitudes ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$), followed by *value for money* ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$), and *past experience* ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3
The results of the four structural models

	Japanese				Thai			
	β	s.d.	t	p	β	s.d.	t	p
Local food								
F1	0.16	0.07	2.38	0.02	0.07	0.07	1.02	0.31
F2	0.13	0.07	1.92	0.06	0.12	0.07	1.77	0.08
F3	0.11	0.07	1.51	0.13	0.10	0.06	1.63	0.10
F4	0.12	0.05	2.51	0.01	0.04	0.05	0.85	0.40
F5	0.22	0.07	2.93	0.00	0.12	0.06	1.94	0.05
F6	0.07	0.04	1.74	0.08	0.29	0.05	5.32	0.00
R square	0.45				0.28			
Foreign food								
F1	0.30	0.08	3.81	0.00	0.24	0.06	4.03	0.00
F2	-0.05	0.07	0.70	0.48	0.12	0.07	1.70	0.09
F3	0.16	0.06	2.56	0.01	-0.06	0.07	0.85	0.40
F4	0.13	0.05	2.49	0.01	0.07	0.06	1.27	0.20
F5	0.12	0.08	1.48	0.14	0.02	0.06	0.27	0.79
F6	0.08	0.05	1.63	0.10	0.19	0.05	3.65	0.00
Past experience	-0.14	0.03	4.45	0.00	0.14	0.04	3.72	0.00
F1 * Exp.	-0.01	0.08	0.06	0.95	-0.02	0.06	0.30	0.77
F2 * Exp.	0.11	0.07	1.65	0.10	0.06	0.07	0.91	0.36
F3 * Exp.	-0.03	0.06	0.45	0.65	-0.01	0.08	0.11	0.92
F4 * Exp.	-0.05	0.05	0.96	0.34	-0.09	0.06	1.50	0.13
F5 * Exp.	0.01	0.07	0.15	0.88	0.09	0.07	1.26	0.21
F6 * Exp.	0.00	0.05	0.10	0.92	-0.06	0.06	0.97	0.33
R square	0.44				0.23			

5. Discussion

According to the results, we found that the perception of food values and their effects on consumers' attitudes were varied among consumer's nationality and food types. In the case of Japanese respondents, the influential factors that were common for both local and foreign food were *emotional and epistemic value* and *menu variety*. This indicates that Japanese consumers have concerns about these factors when they decide to choose a restaurant. They are the basic requirements that restaurants in Japan must have. However, *conditional value* was the key factor only in the case of local food—ordinary experience, while in the case of foreign food—extraordinary experience—*quality* of food is the key factor. This means that the staff and the atmosphere are more important when they go to a Japanese restaurant, but they do not expect these in the foreign restaurant. While in the foreign restaurant they expect higher food quality. This may be due to unfamiliarity with the food, so that they choose the restaurant on quality of ingredients. Interestingly, *past experience* shows a negative effect on consumers' attitude. This means if a Japanese consumer has more experience with the country, they will more likely not consumer the food in their country.

Thai consumers share a common concern on the *value for money* of both foreign and local food. This may be due to the economic condition of the country, placing price as a basic criterion in restaurant selection. The key factors concerning foreign food consumption are *emotional and epistemic value* and *past experience*. This implies that Thai consumers look for more emotional elements of consumption during an extraordinary experience. Additionally, the more experience they have with the country, the higher the tendency is to consume the food from that country. This is in contrast to local food, where the concern is only for *value for money*.

In conclusion, Thai consumers value an extraordinary experience in terms of *emotional and epistemic value*, differing from Japanese consumers who value an extraordinary experience as *food quality, emotional and epistemic value*, and *menu variety*.

6. Conclusions

For the purpose of this research, we positioned foreign food consumption as an extraordinary experience, and by comparing it with local food consumption as an ordinary experience, we explore consumers' perceived value of both experiences and the influence on their attitudes. Although the nature of this study is explorative, there are three main contributions. First, we compared the perceived value of extraordinary and ordinary experiences in the context of food consumption. Consumers have different criteria when they choose an extraordinary experience. According to Keinan and Kivetz (2011), people perceive an extraordinary experience just as they would complete a checklist of special events. However, there are few studies investigating the values that are expected by consuming an extraordinary experience versus an ordinary experience. The results of this research clarify the specific differences between extraordinary and ordinary experiences by comparing the perceived value and consumers' attitudes toward foreign and local food consumption in Japan and Thailand.

Second, this research presents a new perspective on an often-discussed issue of standardization/localization of service exports. Existing studies on standardization/localization of products and services have focused on whether products, services, and other marketing activities should be adjusted to the preference of local consumers. The findings of this study reveal that consumers form their attitudes based on different criteria when they have an extraordinary experience such as consuming foreign food. This suggests that discussion should consider the effect of uniqueness.

Finally, this study contributes to authenticity research. Authenticity is a concept that focuses on consumers' experience. This field of research has shown that perceived authenticity enhances customer satisfaction, improves brand image, and increases consumers' willingness to pay for a product or service (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Newman & Dhar, 2014). The results of this study reveal that consumers seek an extraordinary experience that would feel authentic, even if the experience deviates from their usual preference. This is an additional element supporting the importance of offering an authentic experience.

This study also offers some practical contributions. Our research reveals the importance of the awareness of customers' perception toward different cultural services. Both Japanese and Thai consumers have a different orientation toward local and foreign food. Thus, offering emotional and epistemic value is crucial for foreign food service providers, while menu variety is important for local food providers in terms of consumers' positive attitudes. The results of this study suggest that services need not be adjusted to consumer preferences, even when ingredients or items on the menu are novel for local consumers. Instead, this novelty should be emphasized.

Another practical contribution is that a comparison of the results of the analyses of Japanese and Thais reveals that although the factor structure of perceived quality is similar, the influence of each factor on consumers' attitude toward restaurant differs. Therefore, managers will need to change the selling points to be emphasized depending on the country where the restaurant is located.

We have discovered some limitations to this research. Because it was conducted in only two Asian countries, the generalizability of its findings is limited. In addition, Japanese food is popular among Thai people and thus the assumption that it may be unusual for Thai customers may be weak.

For future research, data on the frequency of having foreign food can be used to control the level of uniqueness. In addition, consumers' sociodemographic data can be used as a control variable to examine individual differences.

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