

Hui Ting Leow / Abang Azlan Mohamad / May Chiun Lo / T. Ramayah / Ying Sin Chin

# Local Food Consumption Value Towards Food Destination Image in Sarawak: The Moderating Impact of Food Satisfaction

## Abstract

This study explores the role of local food consumption in enhancing Sarawak's image as a food destination, focusing on the moderating impact of food satisfaction. Drawing on a cross-sectional analysis using a self-administered questionnaire, the study investigates the influence of taste and quality value, health value, price value, emotional value, and prestige value on the food destination image. The sample consists of 181 tourists who visited Sarawak, providing insights into visitors' diverse perspectives and preferences. The data was further analysed using SPSS 28.0 and WarpPLS 8.0. The findings reveal that taste, quality, health, emotional, and prestige value significantly affect the food destination image. However, the study has shown that price value has no significant impact. Surprisingly, food satisfaction does not moderate the relationship between local food consumption value and food destination image. Theoretical implications highlight the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping consumers' perceptions. In contrast, practical implications suggest strategic considerations for culinary destinations in marketing campaigns and pricing strategies. Overall, this study contributes valuable insights for destination marketers aiming to attract tourists interested in unique culinary experiences and enhance their overall perception of the destination.

*Keywords:* food tourism, local food consumption value, food satisfaction, food destination image, Sarawak's local cuisine

## 1. Introduction

Food tourism, defined by Stone et al. (2018), entails seeking and enjoying unique food and beverage experiences, both domestically and internationally. In recent years, this tourism form has gained economic significance, with food considered a major tourist attraction (Tsai & Wang, 2017). Understanding how tourists' interactions with local food impact their preferences, experiences of a destination, and future behaviour is crucial for comprehending their overall perception of the destination (Choe & Kim, 2018). Previous studies by Thong et al. (2023) and Thong (2023) emphasize the importance of identifying tourists' preferences and experiences to increase profitability in the tourism industry, considering the rapidly changing demands among tourists. Visitors' diverse food consumption preferences can influence their mental impression of a culinary destination, as tourists evaluate its image based on the perceived value they anticipate acquiring.

---

**Hui Ting Leow**, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Faculty of Economics and Business, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia; e-mail: 70179@siswa.unimas.my

**Abang Azlan Mohamad**, PhD, Associate Professor, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Faculty of Economics and Business, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6266-8450>; e-mail: maazlan@unimas.my

**May Chiun Lo**, PhD, Professor, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Faculty of Economics and Business, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0767-7834>; e-mail: mclo@unimas.my

**T. Ramayah**, Professor, School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7580-7058>; e-mail: ramayah@usm.my

**Ying Sin Chin**, PhD Candidate, Corresponding Author, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Faculty of Economics and Business, Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia; ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4477-496X>; e-mail: cynthiachin95@gmail.com

Previous research indicates that the food destination image and behavioural intention are shaped by actual food consumption, with tourists' perspectives on local cuisine influencing their perception of a gastronomic destination (Choe & Kim, 2018). These culinary experiences contribute to cultural heritage, expand tourism options, boost the destination's food image, and stimulate the local economy (Di Giovine et al., 2017; Choe & Kim, 2018; Privitera et al., 2018). Consequently, destination marketers leverage distinctive local food to highlight the location's uniqueness, create promotional culinary campaigns and events, and enhance tourists' overall experience and the likelihood of revisiting (Yasami et al., 2021).

Sarawak, a Malaysian state, is renowned for its diverse cultural heritage shaped by various ethnic groups, contributing to its rich history and traditions (Sageng et al., 2020). They are often referred to as Bumi Kenyalang. Sarawak is celebrated for its indigenous cuisines, featuring well-regarded specialities like Kek Lapis Sarawak, "Ayam Pansuh," and Sarawak Laksa. Recently, Kuching City received UNESCO's recognition as a Creative City of Gastronomy, adding to the region's culinary prestige. However, this acknowledgement challenges local food businesses looking to expand and establish their brands. To navigate these challenges, food and beverage providers can observe and learn from the gourmet products and events offered by more established competitors (Jee, 2021).

This study explores the influence of local food consumption on elevating Sarawak's status as a food destination. Notably, there is a gap in existing research regarding the moderating role of food satisfaction in the connection between local food consumption value and food destination image in Sarawak's food tourism context. By addressing this gap, the study seeks to offer insights beneficial to destination marketers and policymakers, aiding in developing effective strategies to foster tourism growth in Sarawak.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Food destination image

Destination image refers to an individual's impression and emotional response to a specific location (Crompton, 1979). As highlighted by Lertputtarak (2012) and Thong et al. (2020), it represents tourists' perceptions of a destination within the tourism industry. Visitors' views and opinions about a place are integral to the overall destination image (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017). Numerous studies, including Gani et al. (2017), Liu et al. (2017), Prayag et al. (2017), Kim (2018), Chi et al. (2019), and Toudert and Bringas-Rábago (2019), have shown that a food destination image significantly influences visitors' assessment of local cuisine and their willingness to revisit. Local cuisine, representing culture and identity, holds a consistent and recognizable role in travel photography, with its impact on a destination's image extensively documented in tourism studies (Kim et al., 2020).

### 2.2. Taste & quality value and food destination image

The perceived value of taste and quality refers to tourists' assessment of food quality and expected performance. Choe and Kim (2019) emphasise that a tourist's dining experience, particularly in terms of food flavour, sensory elements, and overall quality, plays a crucial role in shaping favourable impressions. Scalvedi and Saba (2018) highlight that the primary reasons for embracing a cuisine include its flavour, exceptional quality, and trust in the food supply chain. Improving the flavours and quality of food is suggested to enhance tourists' perceptions of the food destination image. Thus, the hypothesis arising from this discussion is:

*H1: Taste & quality value positively affect the food destination image.*

### 2.3. Health value and food destination image

As described by Thomé et al. (2020), healthy food is gaining popularity for encompassing nutritional requirements. The quality of food, in terms of nutrition and ethnic diet, is associated with improved quality of life,