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Erose Sthapit, Peter Björk & Senthilkumaran Piramanayagam (2021) Domestic tourists and local food consumption: motivations, positive emotions and savouring processes, *Annals of Leisure Research*, DOI: 10.1080/11745398.2021.1993287

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis *Annals of Leisure Research* on 19 Oct 2021 available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/11745398.2021.1993287>

Please cite the original version:

Erose Sthapit, Peter Björk & Senthilkumaran Piramanayagam (2021) Domestic tourists and local food consumption: motivations, positive emotions and savouring processes, *Annals of Leisure Research*, DOI: 10.1080/11745398.2021.1993287

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## **Domestic tourists and local food consumption: Motivations, positive emotions and savouring processes**

### **Abstract**

This study examines the motivation for local food consumption amongst domestic tourists. It integrates the positive psychology concept of savouring by examining the positive emotions savoured by domestic tourists on the basis of broaden-and-build theory, including the savouring processes used when recalling their recent local food experiences. Data were collected only from Indian residents using a self-administered open-ended web-based questionnaire. Empirical findings revealed that out of the 178 respondents, more than half reported tasting local food as one of the main motivations for undertaking their particular trip. The two main motivations for tasting local food were to experience something new and experience the local culture. The most common positive emotion savoured by guests when remembering their local food experiences was joy, followed by love. Taste and socialising with friends and family members were identified as the dominant factors that intensified respondents' savouring of their recent local food experiences.

Keyword: motivation, positive emotion, memorable local food experience, savouring, India

### **Introduction**

The growing popularity of local food amongst domestic and international tourists is increasingly being recognised by destinations as contributing towards the development of a destination's economy and culture (Chen & Huang, 2018). According to Chang, Kivela and Mak (2010), local food refers to food prepared using the traditional methods of a particular area, if not with local ingredients (Chang, Kivela & Mak, 2010) and that close geographical proximity between production and consumption areas is an important criterion in defining local food (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). Others defines local food as food that is grown or produced in a local area; it can be specialty food or regionally branded food that represents a local identity (Kim & Choe, 2019) and as food prepared from local ingredients, as well as local food specialties at a particular destination (Sthapit, 2017). Local food is part of the cultural heritage of the geographical areas visited by tourists (Sthapit, Coudounaris & Björk, 2019) and its consumption provides entertainment and opportunities to learn about the local culture (Suhartanto, Chen, Mohi & Sosianika, 2018). This study defined 'local food' as food prepared using the traditional methods both regional and national and the production and sourcing of the material aspects including local food specialties at a particular destination. Local food also covers all food types, including fruit, meat, milk, preserves, confectionery, and pastries, all of which tourists can engage with during local food experiences.

Local food consumption is an integral part of the overall experience during travel (Kline, Lee & Knollenberg, 2018) and is becoming one of the main channels for tourists to better appreciate local culture (Sthapit et al., 2019). However, focus has predominantly been on Western countries and international tourists in studies examining local food experiences (Sthapit et al., 2019). The inherent differences between domestic and international markets, specifically the social-cultural familiarity of domestic tourists with a country's local food and their accessibility to food production regions (Kim, Park & Lamb, 2019), highlight the need for studies that focus particularly on domestic market. This gap in the literature has consequences for tourism stakeholders (Williamson & Hassanli, 2020), for example, limited knowledge of domestic tourists' preferences for local food and cuisine to meet their needs and in developing promotional strategies, and research; hence, exploring the understandings of domestic tourists' food experiences in a travel destination is beneficial (Zhang, Li, Yang & Zhang, 2018).

Local food has become a pull factor for tourists to visit a particular destination (Kim et al., 2019) and is a major contributor to the overall travel experience (Kline et al., 2018). Although motivational factors are considered important drivers influencing the local food consumption of tourists (Mak, Lumbers & Eves, 2012), fewer studies examined the motivation to consume local food among domestic tourists (Williamson & Hassanli, 2020). Existing studies have examined tourists' motivations concerning food choice by employing mainly quantitative methods (Kim et al., 2019) and that additional exploration is required to further identify the range of drivers influencing the local food consumption of tourists (Birch & Memery, 2020) by employing a qualitative approach (Park, Kim & Xu, 2020).

These local food experiences affect tourists' emotions (Choe & Kim, 2019; Stone, Soulard, Migacz & Wolf, 2018) and trigger both positive and negative emotional reactions, such as anger, disappointment, happiness, joy, pleasure and excitement (Mak et al., 2012), which are elicited during consumption (Sthapit, Björk & Coudounaris, 2017). In existing studies on food consumption emotions have been conducted in the context of heritage tourism (Su & Hsu, 2013), ethnic food (Bu, Kim & Son, 2013), festivals (Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Palmer & Probert, 2015), rural settings (Sthapit et al., 2017), ethnic restaurants (Jang & Ha, 2015), fast food (Aydin, Eser & Korkmaz, 2018) and specific destinations (Sthapit, 2017). Other studies on tourists' local food consumption have considered the foodscape (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019) and its impact on other constructs, including satisfaction and behavioural intention (Piramanayagam, Sud & Seal, 2020). However, studies on tourist's emotional dimensions of local food experiences are lacking (Sthapit et al., 2017).

Positive emotion, or a pleasurable affective state, is an essential component of a tourism experience and is associated with memorable experiences (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). In the same vein, food experiences are connected with memory (Holtzman, 2006) because they often involve all the senses (Sutton, 2010). Some studies have indicated that local food experience makes travelling more memorable. For example, in his study, Sthapit (2018) showed that for the majority of respondents pleasant local food experiences contributed to the memorability of their trips. Today, offering consumers memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) is a key to being competitive in the tourism industry (Sthapit & Jiménez-Barreto, 2018). Kim, Ritchie and McCormick (2012) developed an instrument to examine the dimensions of an MTE. However, recent studies indicated that one of the flaws is attributed to Kim et al.'s (2012) MTE scale, which restricts the local culture dimension to social interactions, thereby neglecting the role of food as an essential element in memory formation (Piramanayagam et al., 2020). Although some recent studies indicated that MTE is a multidimensional construct, the explicit dimensions of MTE remain incongruent (Sthapit & Jiménez-Barreto, 2018).

The emergence of positive psychology as an integrative research domain (Seligman, 2011) has led to a fresh interest in understanding positive subjective experiences (Bryant, 2003). Positive events, in this context, local food consumption while at a destination, seem to consistently elicit particular savouring responses in individuals, for example, memory-building (Bryant & Veroff, 2007), and they sustain positive feelings by facilitating reminiscence (Bryant, Yarnold, & Morgan, 1991). Therefore, besides MTE, another important mechanism that directs people's attention to positive emotions and helps them stay in the broaden-and-build process is the positive psychology concept of savouring (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007). Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory describes the form and function of a subset of positive emotions, including joy, interest, contentment and love. This theory claims that certain positive emotions broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring physical, social and psychological resources (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). In addition, this theory also posits that the appraisal nature of positive states exerts a lasting effect, which, in addition to broadening the attentional focus, can build resources in an upward and transformative fashion (Fredrickson & Cohn, 2010).

Recent studies suggested that instead of replicating the MTE scale in different contexts and with new samples, integrating the savouring concept, defined as the process of attending to or dealing with positive emotions (Bryant & Veroff, 2007), in the context of food tourism could add to the knowledge regarding tourists' culinary experiences (Sthapit, 2019). Some studies justify using the savouring concept, which is mainly used in the field of positive psychology, by indicating how it is particularly relevant to understanding tourism experiences because these experiences generate a great deal of positive emotions when compared to other life domains (e.g. work) (Chen, Lehto & Cai, 2013). Furthermore, they assert that savouring may be an important mechanism that tourists can employ to manage the desired levels and duration of positive emotions (Halpenny & Yan, 2019). Savouring has been intensively examined in the area of positive psychology (Smith & Bryant, 2016). However, the concept has not been extensively connected with tourism experiences (Sthapit, 2019), particularly in the context of how tourists savour their local food experiences through regulating positive emotions.

To bridge the gaps in the extant literature, the purposes of this study are as follows:

- 1) to examine the general local food preferences of domestic Indian tourists and their motivation for consuming local food and
- 2) to build on food tourism literature and positive psychology by examining the positive emotions savoured by domestic tourists on the basis of broaden-and-build theory as well as the savouring processes they use when recalling their recent local food experiences.

On one hand, this study contributes to the limited discussions on food tourism among domestic tourists (Kim et al., 2019), with a focus on their general local food preferences, motivation for consuming local food, positive emotions savoured by domestic tourists on the basis of broaden-and-build theory and the savouring processes they use when recalling recent local food experiences. On the other hand, the findings provide tourist destinations with the means to enhance domestic tourists' retrospective savouring of positive local food experiences while at their destinations. This constitutes a competitive advantage for those destinations particularly during the post coronavirus outbreak (Tsionas, 2020) when tourism service providers are struggling financially (Skare, Soriano & Porada-Rochon, 2021) and experiencing economic vulnerability (Canh & Thanh, 2020) due to restrictions on international travel (Zenker & Kock, 2020) and with countries closing their international borders (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2021).

## **Literature Review**

### ***Food tourism and local food experiences***

Food tourism can be broadly defined as the participation of tourists in food-related activities during a trip, such as purchasing local foods and consuming local cuisine (Shenoy, 2005). Various terms are interchangeably used to refer to food tourism, including culinary tourism, gourmet tourism and gastronomic tourism (Ellis, Park, Kim & Yeoman, 2019). Enjoying delicious food, eating special meals and experiencing food-related cultural traditions are experiences that are often sought by modern tourists (Tsai & Wang, 2017). Through food tourism, tourists often have the opportunity to have authentic (Sims, 2009) and novel experiences (Ji, Wong, Eves & Scarles, 2016). Food tourism can be considered one of the fastest-growing forms of special interest tourism, with more and more destinations seeking to attract tourists through their local cuisine to diversify their target markets (Wolf, 2014).

Tourist food experiences frequently focus on local, original and authentic foods that represent the local food culture (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019). Local food consumption is an inevitable experience within a travel destination (Hsu et al., 2018). Local food experiences connect visitors to a region through authentic cuisine that symbolises the culture of that destination (Chang, Morrison, Lon & Ho, 2020). Since local food is significantly important as

a tourist attraction, the consumption of local food has a considerable economic influence in a tourism community (Kim, Kim & Heo, 2016).

### ***Local food consumption motivations, food neophilia and phobia***

Motivation is one of the most important driving forces behind the local food consumption of tourists (Kim & Eves, 2012). Few studies have examined tourists' motivations for tasting local food and their related consumption experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). For example, Fields (2003) proposed four categories of motivations for local food consumption, namely physical motivators, cultural motivators, interpersonal motivators and status and prestige motivators. Another study by Kim et al. (2009) expanded on Fields' (2003) four factors to include nine motivations for local food consumption by tourists: physical surroundings, health concerns, excitement, prestige, escaping from routine, togetherness, acquiring knowledge, sensory appeal and authenticity. These motivations can be grouped into two main categories: the symbolic dimension (cultural and educational aspects, including preparation and presentation) and the obligatory dimension (perceived risk presented by foreign and unfamiliar food and cuisines during travel) (Mak et al., 2012). Kim et al.'s (2009) excitement and prestige belong to the symbolic dimension while health concerns and physical surroundings pertain to the obligatory dimension. In addition, Kim and Eves (2012) identified five motivations for tourists to consume local food, including excitement, cultural experience, sensory appeal, interpersonal relationship and health concern.

Food neophilia and phobia are regarded as an important influence on tourist food preferences at a visited destination (Ji et al., 2016). According to Tuncdogan and Ar (2018), food neophiliacs are generally open to experience, extraversion and the need for cognition and touch. Neophiliacs have positive perceptions of unusual foods and view encounters with new foods as an adventurous part of travel, social events or dining-out experiences (Veeck, 2010), including increased salivary responses and high levels of pleasantness towards novel or familiar food items (Capiola & Raudenbush, 2012).

Food neophobia refers to 'a reluctance towards and-or an avoidance of novel food' (Pliner & Hobden, 1992, p.105). This is in stark contrast to the ease with which food neophilic approach novel foods (Raudenbush & Capiola, 2012). Neophobic tendencies are affected by an individual's motivation to seek out new and/or exciting experiences; thus, an adventurous person will generally be more neophilic (Pliner & Hobden, 1992). The shift from neophilic to neophobic tendencies may be attributed to previous bad experiences with a similar food (Rozin & Rozin, 1981).

This double bind of seeking novelty and variety (neophilia) while avoiding the unfamiliar due to a natural distrust of food (neophobia) is outlined by Rozin (1976) as the 'omnivore's paradox' or, as it is more popularly known, the 'omnivore's dilemma' (Houghton, 2020). In addition, local food experiences may vary greatly from daily food experiences and could be distinguished in the dimension of extraordinary to ordinary (Urry, 2002), which has been shown for food experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2017). 'Extraordinary' refers to something perceived as unusual and new (Arnould & Price, 1993) while 'ordinary' relates to something defined as usual, frequent (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014) and mundane (Caru & Cova, 2003). Moreover, some studies on local food consumption indicate that tourists often face a 'novelty-familiarity' dining dilemma (Mak et al., 2012; Mkono, Markwell & Wilson, 2013). Tourists who seek novelty are more willing to try new foods and may modify their predisposed neophobic tendencies, motivating them to try novel and different food and beverages, which they would not consume in their ordinary lives (Chang, Kivela & Mak, 2011). However, not all tourists are a voyeuring gourmand (Wolff & Larsen, 2019) and they seek familiar foods while at a destination (Lin, Cui, Marin & Xu, 2019), providing an ontological comfort of home (Quan & Wang, 2004).

***Savouring, link to positive emotions and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions***

According to Bryant and Veroff (2007), savouring is a process by which individuals respond to, appreciate and enhance their positive experiences and which transmits the dynamic, interactive and transactional nature of positive emotions. Through savouring, people intentionally engage in thoughts and behaviours that regulate their positive feelings, and these savouring responses can increase the intensity, duration and frequency of such feelings (Smith & Bryant, 2017). For instance, taking mental photographs of special experiences, such as birthdays or holiday celebrations, can facilitate one's ability to later recall and enjoy the memory of the event. Slowing down and focussing on specific thoughts or physical sensations, for example, when tasting chocolate or wine, are also ways of savouring positive experiences during consumption (Smith & Bryant, 2019). In the context of tourism, the amount of positive emotions generated has been reported to be three times greater than the positive emotions experienced during regular, non-vacation weekends (Mitas, Yarnal, Adams & Ram, 2012). Chen et al. (2013) also observed that vacationers experience more frequent positive emotions. Therefore, tourists have more opportunities to savour positive emotions (Halpenny & Yan, 2019). In addition, in the context of this study, savouring is linked to the tourists ability attend to positive emotions and recall the memory of recent local food experiences.

Bryant and Veroff (2007) proposed that there are three components to savouring: savouring through anticipation, savouring through reminiscing and savouring the moment. Savouring through anticipation is broadly future oriented, whereby one enjoys the positive emotions that come from contemplating the future. Savouring through reminiscing occurs when one looks back on the past and appreciates the positive emotions that arise from that reminiscence. Finally, savouring the moment occurs while positive emotions are linked to a positive event in the present moment. According to Bryant (2003), people tend to be most capable of savouring through reminiscence and least capable of savouring through anticipation while past-focussed savouring interventions increase people's awareness and enjoyment of earlier positive experiences (Smith et al., 2014). Savouring past travel experiences can get people to experience different positive emotions, including joy, interest, contentment and love (Filep, Cao, Jiang & DeLacy, 2013), which can increase the memorability of tourists' food experiences (Sthapit, 2019). Savouring has been positively associated with improved well-being, better life satisfaction and positive affect and happiness (Quoidbach, Berry, Hansenne & Mikolajczak, 2010).

In pleasurable tourism settings, savouring can serve as the mechanism directing people's attention to positive emotions and encouraging them to engage in the broaden-and-build process (Halpenny & Yan, 2019). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions theory was developed 'to describe the form and function of a subset of positive emotions, including joy, interest, contentment and love' (Fredrickson, 1998, p. 300), and is an overarching framework to understand how positive experiences facilitate favourable outcomes (Fredrickson, 2001). Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) state that these four emotions are sustained while savouring. In other words, broaden-and-build theory posits that experiences of positive emotions can widen individuals' awareness and prompt novel and exploratory thoughts and actions, thereby building up skills and personal resources over time (Fredrickson, 2001).

Many emotions play a role. For example, joy broadens by creating the urge to play, push the limits and be creative (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988). According to Filep et al. (2013), joy is a strong presence during retrospective savouring. Interest broadens by creating the urge to explore, take in new information and experiences and expand the self in the process (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Contentment broadens by creating the urge to savour current life circumstances and integrate these circumstances into new views of self and of the world (Izard, 1977). Love, conceptualised as an amalgam of distinct positive emotions (e.g. joy, interest, contentment) experienced within contexts of safe, close relationships (Izard, 1977), broadens by creating

recurring cycles of urges to play with, explore and savour experiences with loved ones. These various thought-action tendencies—to play, to explore, to savour and integrate or to envision future achievement—each represent ways that positive emotions broaden habitual modes of thinking or acting (Fredrickson, 2001). These positive emotions predict optimal functioning both momentarily and in the long run, and thus the important consideration is that people cultivate them not just as an end in itself but also ‘as a means to achieving psychological growth and improved psychological and physical well-being over time’ (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 1367).

### ***Savouring processes***

Bryant et al. (2011, p. 108) describe a savouring process as ‘a sequence of mental or physical operations that unfold over time and transforms a positive stimulus into positive feelings to which a person attends and savours’. Bryant and Veroff (2007) indicate that savouring processes include four dimensions: thanksgiving (expressing gratitude), marvelling (losing oneself in awe and wonder), basking (focussing on receiving praise or reflecting happily on achievements) and luxuriating (indulging one’s senses or regulating pleasure in response to positive sensations). People who relish enjoyment from an outer source tend to involve in thanksgiving and marvelling, whereas those who savour pleasures resulting from an inner cause tend to engage in basking and luxuriating (Bryant et al., 2011). In other words, world-focussed savouring includes marvelling and thanksgiving while self-focussed savouring comprises basking and luxuriating. Marvelling and luxuriating require a person to be immersed in his or her own experiences, but basking and thanksgiving require a kind of mental reflection. In addition, basking necessitates self-examination and celebrating one’s own pride, thanksgiving involves reflection on what the world has to offer us and why it should be celebrated, marvelling regulates awe and luxuriating regulates physical pleasure (Bryant & Veroff, 2007).

## **Method**

### ***Sampling and data collection***

This study is underpinned by interpretive epistemology, which relies heavily on the views of participants of the subject being investigated (Creswell, 2003). Interpretive methodology is directed at understanding phenomenon from an individual’s perspective and interpretive methods yield insight and understandings of behaviour. These methods usually generate qualitative data and includes open-ended questionnaires (Creswell, 2009). Thus, this study utilised a qualitative approach to expand on food tourism research and the role of savouring by investigating how domestic tourists savour recent local food experiences, including the motivations and emotions linked to these experiences. The justification for the use of open-ended questions in the web-based questionnaire is that such questions do not provide participants with a predetermined set of answer choices, instead allowing the participants to provide responses in their own words. Qualitative studies that utilise open-ended questions allow researchers to take a holistic and comprehensive look at the issues being studied because open-ended responses permit respondents to provide more options and opinions, giving the data more diversity than would be possible with a closed-question or forced-choice questionnaire measure (Allen, 2017). An empirical study was conducted using a self-administered open-ended web-based questionnaire. The sampling criteria for selecting participants were Indian tourists who had tasted local food during a domestic trip in the past three years. Data were collected using the authors’ personal networks (convenience sampling). The key advantages of this sampling technique are that it is cheap, efficient and simple to implement, though the sample might lack clear generalisability (Jager, Putnick & Bornstein, 2017). An email containing a link to the web-based questionnaire was sent to 300 Indian nationals in May 2020, and the web-based questionnaire link was active for four weeks. The questionnaire was in English.

The web-based questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section included one question with a 'yes' or 'no' option ('Did you taste local food during your recent trip?'). Respondents who replied 'no' to the introductory question were not included in the data analysis. The second section contained questions relating to socio-demographic profile (age, gender, marital status and nationality) and trip characteristics (e.g. date of the trip, destination visited). The third section included questions about food preferences in general (e.g. 'Are you generally interested in eating local food and cuisine?', 'When you think about eating, how would you rate yourself?', 'How important are food-related experiences for you while travelling?'). The last section was linked to the on-site local food experience (e.g. setting of the experience, who participated in it, motivation for tasting local food, overall food experience, emotions linked to this experience and what made this local food experience most memorable). Twenty-one questions were included in the web-based questionnaire.

### ***Data analysis and coding: open, axial and selective coding***

The key findings of this study were based on qualitative responses to the web-based questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using grounded theory research design (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A three-stage procedure of open coding, axial coding and selective coding was adopted to analyse the collected data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and were manually undertaken. Firstly, open coding is mainly used to encode data into distinct units of meaning (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2006) recommended selecting the most suitable analytical codes. At this stage, each response was read and analysed separately to identify the emerging ideas and views that appeared repeatedly (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2016) as well as extract specific information and each participant's views (Sthapit, 2018). Secondly, following intensive open coding, axial coding is the act of linking categories to their subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions to form a more precise and complete explanation of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At this stage, the researcher attempts to understand answers to questions such as 'How?' and 'Why?' by locating the phenomenon in its conditional context and denoting response action/interaction over time to certain problems and issues (Shojaeia & Haeri, 2019). Lastly, selective coding involves the integration of the categories that have been developed to form the initial theoretical framework. Table 1 illustrates how the coding was conducted in practice.

Table 1

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***Socio-demographic profile and trip characteristics of the respondents***

All the respondents were Indian nationals who had tasted local food during their trip within India in the past three years. Of the total 178 respondents, 111 were male and 67 were female. Their ages ranged from 19 to 63 years old. The largest age group was aged between 19 and 29 (47%). The majority of the participants were single (91), followed by married (85) and divorced (2).

The respondents' most recent trips took place between May 2018 and March 2020. The travel destinations included numerous domestic locations in India, and many mentioned Goa (16). The duration of stay ranged from 1–180 days, with the majority reporting to have spent more than four days (94), three days (31) four days (29), two days (16) and one day (8) at the destination. The number of people in the travel party ranged from 1 to 50, and many of the respondents travelled in groups of more than two people (113). About 78% travelled for leisure while the rest travelled for business (22%).

### ***Preferences for local food and cuisine, new and familiar foods***



In response to the question, ‘Are you generally interested in eating local food and cuisine?’, almost all the respondents answered ‘yes’ (170 of 178). Regarding the question, ‘When you think about eating, how would you rate yourself?’, 71 agreed ‘I am willing to taste something new,’ followed by ‘I am very willing to taste something new’ (54), ‘I very much prefer familiar foods’ (19), ‘I somewhat prefer familiar foods’ (18) and ‘I prefer familiar foods’ (16).

On the one hand, the majority of the respondents could be categorised as *food neophiliacs* (125) since they exhibited a tendency to seek new food to taste. On the other hand, others preferred familiar foods (53) and exhibited behaviour characteristic of *food neophobia*. This finding supports some studies indicating that not everybody is a voyeuring gourmand (Wolff & Larsen, 2019). In other words, the two groups of respondents could be described as either novelty or familiarity seekers.

Of the 125 food neophiliacs/novelty seekers, 79 were male and 46 were female. In addition, of the 53 respondents who preferred familiar foods (food neophobics), 32 were male and 21 were female. In general, many male respondents had positive perceptions of new foods. This finding supports studies indicating that gender differences can be a relevant factor in terms of food neophilia and neophobia, given that the neophilia and neophobia attitudes of travellers differ according to their gender (Okumus, Dedeoglu & Shi, 2021). The findings showed that the food neophilia and neophobia of male travellers were higher than those of female travellers. The respondents also exhibited significant differences based on age in terms of food neophilia and neophobia. The age group between 19 and 29 years (64) were more curious about novel food while those between 51 and 63 were least curious (8). Many from the same age group (19–29) also preferred familiar foods (19) while only 10 respondents between 51 and 63 indicated the same preference. This finding supports studies indicating that younger tourists exhibit a higher level of food neophilia than older tourists do (Wolff & Larsen, 2019) and contradicts those suggesting that older consumers are more neophobic than their young counterparts (Zhao et al., 2020).

In response to the question ‘How important are local food experiences for you while travelling?’, the majority reported it to be very important (108), followed by important (64) and not important (6). This result shows the significance of local food consumption in respondents’ travel experiences as indicated by some studies (e.g. Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019; Hsu, Robinson & Scott, 2018; Sthapit, 2019). It likewise supports research suggesting that local and regional foods and dishes can be regarded as unique, valuable and rewarding tourist attractions (Fuste-Forne, 2020) and should be used as tools for assisting in the marketing of destination distinctiveness (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016).

### ***Local food experiences and motivation to travel***

In response to the question ‘Was tasting local food one of the major motivations for you to undertake this particular trip?’, more than half the respondents stated ‘yes’ (90) and the others stated ‘no’ (88). Crompton (1979) defines push factors as psychological factors that explain the desire to go on a vacation. On the contrary, for others, tasting the local food was a secondary reason for visiting the tourism destination. A study by a popular travel site revealed that 67% of Indian travellers select their destination based on the local cuisine (Business Standard, 2018).

A potential justification for tasting local food as a primary motive can be attributed to the fact that the majority of the respondents can be characterised as food neophiliacs. In addition, the respondents were travelling within India. The regional cuisines of India have significant variations due to its cultural and physical diversity (Sen, 2015). However, food neophobia can negatively influence the motivation for local food consumption (Kim et al., 2009, 2013; Mak et al., 2012). This finding suggests that many tourists are motivated by local food experiences in their decisions to undertake particular trips and can be considered as foodies, who are defined as ‘people with a passion for food who will travel specifically because of their special interest’

(Getz, Robinson, Andersson & Vujicic, 2014, p. 5); others can be defined as non-culinary tourists (McKercher et al., 2018). This finding supported studies indicating that leisure travellers with an interest in food may primarily base their travel destination decisions on the food of the region and are most likely to participate in a wide variety of food experiences once they arrived at the destination (Birch & Memery, 2020).

In response to the question, Where did this local food experience take place, many mentioned restaurants (96), hotels (40), street food shops (34), family and friends' homes (6), a resort (1) and a tent (1). The result shows that local food experiences are not limited to traditional and typical restaurant settings, as indicated in recent studies (Sthapit, 2019; Stone et al., 2018). In response to the question 'Who participated in this local food experience with you?', many respondents mentioned family members (91), friends (73), other travellers (5), colleagues (5) and alone (4).

Regarding the question 'What was your motivation for tasting local food during this trip?', some mentioned to experience something new (45) while others stated to experience the local culture (42). Novelty seeking is one important constituent of tourist motivations, and it impacts their choices and behaviours in general and their food choices in particular, as tourists who seek novelty are more willing to try new cuisines (Mak et al., 2012). Cultural experiences have also been studied in the context of tourism as the desire to experience the cultures of different countries or learn about their history (Kim & Eves, 2012). Cultural experiences are considered a key motivator for consuming local food while at a destination and learning about the local food culture (Getz, 2000). These two motivations can be linked to Fields, Hjalager and Richards' (2002) two categories of motivators for food consumption in a tourist destination, namely physical and cultural motivators. Physical motivators are closely connected with the opportunity to taste new and exotic foods while cultural motivators are related to the need to experience different cultures. Food is included amongst cultural motivators because when experiencing new local cuisines, tourists are also experiencing a new culture (Fields, 2002). Others mentioned hunger (12), authentic experience (10), suggested by friends (8) and curiosity (7). This finding suggests that the local food consumption motives of tourists are multidimensional (Mak et al., 2012), demonstrating that the desire to taste local food while at a tourism destination arises from different push factors and is not one-dimensional.

### ***Overall impression of local food experiences and positive emotions***

In response to the question 'Was your local food experience on this trip mainly positive or negative?', the majority of the respondents mentioned positive (136), eight mentioned negative ones and one reported a mixed experience. This finding was highlighted by the following keywords: 'positive', 'mainly positive', 'overall positive', 'very good', 'very definitely positive', 'awesome' and 'amazing'. It was further emphasised by the answers of two respondents. One said, 'The local food experience was positive. The food was worth trying and it did not resemble the taste and cooking style from my region' (25, male, visiting Madkeri). Another said, 'Yes, it was definitely a positive one. Neer dosa with fish meen curry was my memorable food' (30, female, visiting Mysuru).

In response to the question 'Which positive emotions did you strongly feel during your local food experience?', most respondents mentioned joy (120) while others reported love (52). A potential justification for the very strong presence of the emotion joy can be linked to the response that more than half of the respondents mentioned tasting local food as one of their major motivations to undertake the particular trip. Some studies indicate that push motives provide an emotional driver for travel (Jamaludin, Aziz & Mariapan, 2018). In addition, according to the arousal theory of motivation, people are driven to perform actions in order to maintain an optimum level of emotional arousal (Berlyne, 1960). These emotional arousals are elicited by different appraisals (Nyer, 1997), of which goal congruence (motive consistency) or

goal-congruent situations elicit positive emotions. Some studies likewise indicate that visitors who are intrinsically motivated (push motivation) experience more positive emotions (Cini, Kruger & Ellis, 2013). For many tourists in the present study, their primary motives for tasting local food relate to their internal desires, particularly, experiencing something new and the local culture through food, which might have contributed to their positive emotions of joy and love. This finding suggests a possible link between push motivations and positive emotions. Additionally, tourists consume food for both energy and emotional pleasure. When they choose to consume local food, which is probably different from their ordinary diet, they often expect to obtain positive emotional stimulation (Choe & Kim, 2019), which in this context are the emotions of joy and love.

The very strong presence of the emotion of joy during the retrospective savouring process is further highlighted by the responses of two respondents. One said, 'It was joy as the food was literally amazing in taste and its simplicity and authenticity were quite visible from its taste and presentation' (30, male, visiting Mysuru). Another said, 'Joy. I enjoyed the local delicacies as they were delicious, and there was a sense of accomplishment after eating it as we had heard a lot about it from family and friends' (26, female, visiting Mangalore).

### ***Savouring processes***

In response to the question 'What made this local food experience the most memorable?', the respondents mentioned different factors besides the food served. Many reported 'taste' (75), which suggests that tourists' food memories are linked to the sensory attributes of the food (taste). Taste can be linked to the savouring process of luxuriating, which triggers physical pleasure and is a form of self-focussed experiential absorption. The findings support Bryant's (2003) finding that savouring prolongs and intensifies positive emotions by directing people's attention to the sensory aspects of an experience that might be otherwise overlooked (Bryant, 2003), in this case, taste. The significance of taste in the local food experiences of respondents was highlighted by keywords and phrases such as 'each item tasted was delectable', 'the taste', 'taste of food', 'fabulous taste', 'different taste', 'taste of course', 'divine taste', 'rich taste' and 'new taste'. This was further emphasised by the responses of three respondents. One said, 'Its taste, and it is one of the different roti with the combination of red chilli sauce' (28, male, visiting Shivamogga). The second said, 'Taste ... The food was really delicious and I would like to visit that place again to taste the same' (21, female, visiting, Alappuzha).

Flavour is regarded as an essential criterion for food consumption, and so people are most likely to consume food that they evaluate as tasty (Pollard, Steptoe & Wardle, 1998). Therefore, the taste of food in tourism contexts plays a crucial part in adding to the total experience (Kim & Eves, 2012) and to the memorability of the trip experience (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020; Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2018). This finding supports some studies indicating the significance of sensory stimulation in tourist food consumption and its influence on the memorability of the trip (Sthapit, 2017). It also supports studies indicating that food experiences are important for memory because they often involve all five senses (Sutton, 2010); in other words, they are multisensory in nature, with taste being intimately tied to memories (Sthapit, 2019).

Another dominant factor that contributed to the respondents' memorable local food experiences was socialising with friends and family members (19). The significance of socialising with friends and family members in the respondents' local food experiences was highlighted by keywords and phrases such as 'eating local food with my family', 'just fun with friends', 'being with my friends', 'being with family', 'experiencing the food with friends', 'enjoying local food in the company of friends', 'sitting with family members while enjoying the local food', 'company of friends', 'friends', 'having fun and enjoyment with friends', 'eating with my family', 'spending time with friends' and 'family members'. This finding

showed that social pleasure and interaction, including togetherness, has an impact on tourists' memories of local food experiences.

Respondents mentioned that enjoying a local food experience with family and friends contributed to their food memories. This was highlighted by the responses of two respondents. One claimed, 'The fact that I was eating local food with my family made it memorable. We took many pictures of the food that was served and enjoyed all the flavours. It was great' (24, male, visiting Delhi). Another said, 'Spending time with friends was really soothing and along with it the experience of consuming local and freshly prepared food was something really memorable' (33, male, visiting Mangalore). Socialising with friends and family members was identified as the dominant external factor that facilitated savouring by amplifying the intensity of the study respondents' savouring of their local food. According to Bryant and Veroff (2007), sharing an experience as it unfolds is a dominant, culturally universal means of amplifying the joy of positive moments. This factor can be linked to the savouring process of thanksgiving. In this context, it is expressing gratitude for the opportunity to engage in local food consumption with family and friends (an outer source) while on a domestic trip within India.

These findings support studies indicating the importance of interaction value or togetherness in food tourism, as socialising with friends and relatives is an important utility that tourists can achieve during their holidays (Sthapit, 2017). This finding can be linked to the concept of commensality, that is, the practice of eating in the company of others (Fischler, 2011) and promoting communal solidarity, sociability and socialisation that reflect the social organisation of societies (Danesi, 2012). According to Fields (2002), commensality can be regarded as a means of reproducing social relations, and holiday meals have the potential to build personal relationships and strengthen social bonds (Choe & Kim, 2019). Studies have indicated that the commensality of food experiences offers opportunities for conversations, storytelling, family activities and positive memory formation (Kauppinen-Räsänen et al., 2013). Such experiences in a different setting from home can take on special significance and become the main highlight when recalling the travel experience (Sthapit, 2017).

Other respondents mentioned novelty (14), authenticity (2), ambience (3), affordable price (3) and interacting with locals (2).

## **Conclusion**

This study considered motivation, savoured positive emotions and the savouring processes from local food experiences amongst domestic tourists in India. Four main conclusions could be drawn from this study.

Firstly, almost all the respondents reported a general interest in eating local food and cuisine, and many considered local food experiences to be very important while travelling. More than half also mentioned that local food was one of the major motivations to undertake their trip while the rest stated that it was not. The respondents exhibited significant differences based on gender and age in terms of food neophilia and food neophobia. This finding is in line with the dilemma of omnivores—consumers (travellers)—who will always have positive or negative perceptions towards unfamiliar/unique foods (Houghton, 2020). In addition, novelty seeking and familiarity co-exist in the context of tourist's local food consumption while at a destination. Wolff and Larsen (2019) assert that tourists who generally seek novelty when travelling are more food neophiliacs and less neophobics; this finding was also evident in the current study.

Secondly, the key motives for tasting local food while at a tourism destination included experience something new and the local culture from food, thus reinforcing existing studies indicating that novelty seeking is a crucial motive in food tourism and food-related personality traits (Ji et al., 2016). Local food experiences can also be viewed as a chance to learn about the local culture (Sthapit et al., 2019), including an opportunity to experience new flavours at

destinations (Williamson & Hassanli, 2020). In addition, local food consumption motivation is more hedonic-driven rather than functional-driven consumption.

Thirdly, from a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to a better understanding of how domestic tourists retrospectively savour their local food experiences, which is demonstrated by applying the positive psychology concept of savouring to local food experiences, particularly, savouring experiences, that is, positive emotion(s) connected with the recent most memorable local food experiences and savouring processes. Out of the four key positive emotions that are sustained while savouring (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), joy was the most prominent and savoured emotion, followed by love in the respondents' reminiscences of their recent memorable local food experiences. None of the participants mentioned interest and contentment. More specifically, the positive emotions savoured by tourists when they recalled their local food experiences were connected with two of the four key positive emotions: joy and interest. The findings of this study support existing research indicating that tourist's local food consumption and positive emotions are related and interact to affect each other (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Sthapit, 2017; Sthapit et al., 2017) and that flavourful encounters can evoke emotional recollections (Stone et al., 2018). In addition, tourist's ability to recall positive emotions linked to local food experiences of a domestic trip in the past three years suggests the need to re-visit the peak model argument that tourists' positive emotions peak during the onsite travel phases and decline very soon afterwards (Mitas et al., 2012) and supports studies indicating that savouring prolongs the savouring process and the duration of positive emotional experiences (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Moreover, given that the connections between interest and contentment and most memorable local food experiences have not been established, this calls for the need to include other emotions in the broaden-and-build theory that might influence tourists' recollection of local food, for example, comfort, stimulation and sentimentality, also referred to as food consumption emotions (Han & Jeong, 2013).

Fourthly, many informants reported that taste and socialising with friends and family members made their recent local food experiences memorable. These two factors were identified as the dominant ones that enabled respondents to savour their local food experiences. Taste tends to be a key consideration for most people in nearly all food settings (Kim & Eves, 2012), and tasting local foods on holiday is a kind of pleasurable sensory experience that informs peoples' appraisal and appreciation of food (Kivela & Crofts, 2006), a finding that was also evident in this study. The findings support some studies indicating that savouring prolongs and intensifies the enjoyment of a consumption experience by drawing attention to sensory aspects of the experience (Bryant, 2003; Sthapit, 2019). Additionally, Ignatov and Smith (2006) pointed out that spending time with family and friends is one of the reasons tourists choose to taste local food. They further mentioned that chances to taste local food together with their people can increase the pleasure of travel. Likewise, companions contribute to a memorable dining experience while travelling, more so than dining together at home (Stone, Migacz & Sthapit, 2021). Their findings are also relevant in this context given that mainly family and friends participated in the respondents' local food experiences, with the majority reporting their local food experiences to be positive. Taste can be linked to the savouring process of luxuriating, which triggers physical pleasure and is a form of self-focussed experiential absorption while socialising with friends and family members is related to the savouring process of thanksgiving.

From a managerial point of view, local food had an impact on the recalled experiences when it was perceived as tasty and emphasised the significance of local specialties and taste. Therefore, this study suggests that food service providers, for example, local restaurants, should be more traditional in their choice of ingredients for food preparation in order to maintain the distinctive flavour of local dishes served to domestic tourists. Socialising with friends and

family members also contributed to their memorable local food experiences. Therefore, selecting comfortable and attractive furnishings would help encourage social interaction and the feeling of togetherness as well as offer a refreshing and relaxing atmosphere. Local restaurants offering a large variety of local foods with different flavours may have a competitive advantage over others.

The results of this study are subject to several limitations. As the geographical scope of the study is limited to India, that is, the research subjects were confined to Indian domestic tourists, this hinders the generalisation of the findings. Hence, the generalisation based on the sample may be limited. Studying a larger sample would increase the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the current study gathered data through an open-ended web-based questionnaire and some of the questions prompted a yes or no type of response. This produced quantitative data and limits the qualitative insights that can be gathered. Future research would benefit from the use of in-depth interviewing and cross-cultural assessments to obtain rich data on local food experiences. Moreover, the positive emotions were linked to the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions and restricted to love, joy, interest and contentment. As a result, the data were fitted onto emotions determined beforehand, which is another limitation of this study.

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**Table 1** An example of the coding process in practice (main themes: taste, socialising with friends and family members, novelty, authenticity, ambience, affordable price and interacting with locals)

Open coding (line-by-line coding)	Subthemes (axial coding)	Main theme (selective coding)
<p>'The taste', 'taste', 'taste of the food', 'local flavours', 'its taste', 'it was very tasty', 'fabulous taste', 'different taste', 'taste of course', 'divine taste', 'rich taste', 'new taste', 'taste does not resemble any other region of the state and country', 'special taste', 'spiciness', 'tasty food', 'magical taste', 'delicious', 'unique taste', 'good taste', 'flavour of the dish', 'new taste', 'unique taste'</p>	Taste, local flavours, spiciness	Taste, socialising with friends and family members, novelty, authenticity, ambience, affordable price, and interacting with locals contributed to a memorable local food experience
<p>'Eating local food with my family', 'just fun with friends', 'being with my friends', 'being with family', 'experiencing the food with friends', 'enjoying local food in the company of friends', 'sitting with family members while enjoying the local food', 'company of friends', 'friends', 'having fun and enjoyment with friends', 'eating with my family', 'spending time with friends', 'family members'.</p>	Travelling/spending time/socialising with friends and family members, being with friends, being with family	
<p>'New cuisines', 'trying something unheard of before', 'new variety of food consumed', 'variety of new cuisines', 'something outside normal experience', 'not a usual cuisine', 'quite a new experience'</p>	Novelty, new cuisine, new food, new experience	
<p>'Authenticity of the foods', 'the authenticity', 'local authenticity', 'authentic taste', 'taste of authenticity', 'authentic flavour', 'authentic'</p>	Authenticity, local	
<p>'Ambience', 'ambiance of the place', 'vibe of the place', 'the setting of the place', 'the environment', 'superb surroundings', 'local lights and environment', 'the setting'</p>	Ambience, setting, surroundings, environment	
<p>'Price', 'affordable price' 'affordable cost, 'affordable prices'</p>	Affordable price, cost	
<p>'Local people interaction', 'eating with locals', 'local people', 'eating and talking with local people'</p>	Interacting with locals. eating with local people, talking with local people	