

CONSUMING LOCAL FOOD FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: THE THEORY OF CONSUMPTION APPROACH¹

Sürdürülebilir Turizm için Yerel Gıda Tüketimi: Tüketim Teorisi Yaklaşımı

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Seza Zerman
Karabük Üniversitesi
sezazerman@karabuk.edu.tr
Orcid ID: 0000-0002-3898-5605

Dr. Umut Kadir Oğuz
Karabük Üniversitesi
umutoguz@karabuk.edu.tr
Orcid ID: 0000-0001-9186-7379

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Samet Gökkaya
Karabük Üniversitesi
sametgokkaya@karabuk.edu.tr
Orcid ID: 0000-0002-6946-2030

Abstract

Locally sourced food is one of the drivers of sustainability and, consequently, a vital dimension for sustainable tourism. "Why people consume local food" and the motivations behind their intention and behavior are vital dimensions of local food consumption. Using the Theory of Consumption as the framework, this study attempts to conceptually answer 1) What are the main values that trigger local food consumption? and 2) What are the applications of consumption values in the context of local food? Providing the answers based on the previous literature and empirical evidence, theoretical and practical implications are discussed, and future directions are proposed.

Key Words: *Local food, Sustainability, Sustainable Tourism Theory of Consumption*

Öz

Yerel gıda, sürdürülebilirliğin ve sürdürülebilir turizmde önemli bir itici güçtür. "İnsanların neden yerel yiyecekleri tükettiği" yiyecekleri tüketme niyetleri ve davranışlarının ardındaki motivasyonlar, yerel gıda tüketiminde yine önemli noktaları oluşturmaktadır. Tüketim Teorisini çerçeve olarak kullanan bu çalışma, kavramsal olarak 1) Yerel gıda tüketimini tetikleyen temel değerler nelerdir? 2) Yerel gıda

¹ Bu makale, 12-14 Kasım 2021 tarihindeki ISTC 3. Uluslararası Sürdürülebilir Turizm Kongresi'nde online olarak sunulan Local Food as a Component of Sustainable Tourism: The Theory of Consumption Perspective başlıklı bildirinin genişletilmiş halidir.

bağlamında tüketim değerlerinin uygulamaları nelerdir? sorularına cevap aramayı amaçlamaktadır. Alan yazın taraması ve ampirik çalışmalar incelenerek elde edilen cevaplarla teorik ve pratik çıkarımlar tartışılmıştır. Ayrıca gelecek çalışmalar için önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yerel Gıda, *Sürdürülebilirlik, Sürdürülebilir Turizm, Tüketim Teorisi*

Introduction

Engaging local partners and agents for a developed local food system to protect health and the environment is becoming increasingly essential for producers, governments, and policymakers. For example, the United States Environmental Protection Agency partners with local communities and agents to open year-around locally sourced markets; plans cooperative grocery stores; creates community kitchens and food hubs; and develops community gardens in central locations (EPA, 2021).

In addition to the connection of local food with economic and environmental development, alternative food networks, and traditional and local food consumption attempts are strongly connected to sustainable tourism in economic and environmental aspects (Sims, 2009). In case of limited reliable information and limited trust in global food companies, local food becomes a solution for trustable consumption (Brunori & Galli, 2016). Additionally, consumers' awareness about industrial food and its impacts, motivates them to find out alternatives to industrial food. These alternatives include but are not limited to organic, sustainable, and local food (Lang & Lemmerer, 2019).

Recently, local food consumption has been associated with sustainability issues in terms of health, environment, and welfare (Bianchi & Mortimer, 2015). The local food system is also a tool to improve employment and incomes for the local community; therefore, it should be understood in detail (Martinez, 2010). From this financial perspective, local food can be an alternative food consumption choice and as a consequence, has a chance to achieve price premiums (Hasselbach & Roosen, 2015).

Due to the above-mentioned impacts and the contributions of local food to development, sustainability, and sustainable tourism, it is important to answer the question "Who buys local food and why?" to target the right people for the marketing of local food by producers, grocery stores, and restaurants (Low, 2015). Local food is certainly essential input for the restaurant and food service industry (Lang & Lemmerer, 2019); and understanding the local food consumption intention can help restaurants owners and managers; local farmer's markets, and grocery store managers to establish and plan effective marketing and elevate local food consumption (Shin, Kim, & Severt, 2021).

In addition, the current concepts that are promoting local food consumption, such as supporting local food consumption through local markets and partnering with local producers; farm to school, farm to table, and farm to fork movements; introduced new aspects both in theory and application. According to Lang and Lemmerer (2019), the advancement in research of local food changed the focus; researchers have been trying to explain antecedents of local food consumption to be able to explain attitudes and behavior towards local food as a first wave and personal values should be included as antecedents (Lang & Lemmerer, 2019).

At this point, the answer of “Who buys local food and why?” becomes an important point to target the right group of people (Low et al., 2015). The Theory of Consumption proposed by Sheth, Newman, & Gross (1991); therefore, can be the framework to understand the rationales and motives behind the consumption of local food from the perspectives of the consumers. Although the segmentation of customers as individuals, local businesses, chain restaurants and so on is beyond the scope of this study, the focus is mainly on individual perspectives, which can be applied to commercial settings as well.

Thus, the research question of this study is as followings:

RQ1: What are the main values that trigger local food consumption?

RQ2: What are the applications of consumption values in the context of local food?

Borrowing from the Theory of Consumption (Sheth, et al., 1991) as an organizing framework, this study aims to answer above-mentioned questions and explain the potential of local food consumption with the values given in the theory.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Sustainability and Local Food Consumption

Local food is generally defined based on the geographical measures such as milage and/or regional boundaries; however, what distance or boundary should be considered for local food definition is a challenging issue (Shin et al., 2021). In the food-related tourism context, although culinary tourism, food tourism, and gastronomy tourism are generally used interchangeably (Zhang, Chen & Hu, 2019). The definition by Hall and Sharples (2003) provides the most common and comprehensive local food definition. According to the authors, food tourism can be defined as traveling and visiting food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and destinations with the main motivation of tasting or experiencing food (Hall & Sharples, 2003). The definition emphasizes the authentic, traditional, and unique aspects of local food and the heritage of local food (Zhang, et al., 2019). In other words, local food has been linked with sustainable consumption and development (Sims, 2009; Zhang et al., 2019). For competitiveness of local chains and local food in various markets and operations, sustainability motivations and practices should be re-considered and tailored based on the characteristics of the supply chains (Brunori & Galli, 2016). As an example of the practices of local food consumption in a different context, Huang et al. (2011) examined the sustainable practices in food services in hospital context and found that serving fair trade coffee and serving locally grown/organic food are two of the practices for achieving sustainable consumption.

In addition to its linkage with sustainability, local food consumption is also linked with values. The connection between local food consumption and personal values and attitudes have already been addressed in the literature (Lang & Lemmerer, 2019). For example, consumer’s price/ value evaluation and willingness to pay for local food is one of the factors of local food consumption and its economic impacts (Low et al., 2015). Huang et al. (2011) found that values such as subjective norms, personal norms, perceived behavior control, attitude toward sustainability, and post-experience on

sustainability leads intention to adapt sustainable practices. One of the limited studies that explained local food consumption intention through the Theory of Consumption perspective was conducted by Shin et al. (2021) with the rationale that states the consumption values and intention are closely related.

Although the interconnected relationship between sustainable tourism, local food, and antecedents of local food consumption has been addressed in the literature, these studies are qualitative in nature and lack a theoretical framework to explain the relationship from a theoretical perspective. Therefore, using the Theory of Consumption as the essential motivation for local food consumption is expected to help the readers to understand local food consumption from a sustainable tourism perspective clearly.

The Theory of Consumption

It is now insufficient to use traditional consumer behavior models to explain postmodern consumers (Candan et al., 2013); therefore, the Theory of Consumption (Sheth et al., 1991) can build a framework to explain consumer behaviors by utilizing the values perspective. By establishing the theory, the authors made an insightful attempt to fulfill two main achievements: First, contribution to a detailed understanding of consumer behavior and intention, and second, to establish a guideline for policy makers, practitioners, and academics. Since local food consumption has already gained attention not only in individual aspects but also in commercial (e.g., Huang et al., 2011), and academic aspects (e.g., Feldmann & Hamm, 2015); utilizing the Theory of Consumption would be relevant to understand and explain the local food consumption, and this understanding gradually impacts and triggers sustainable consumption and sustainable tourism.

The theory, which simply answers the question why people consume what they consume and why they prefer one over another, proposes five main values:

- Functional value:

It is simply the perceived utility and performance of a product/ service (Sheth et al., 1991). They are more tangible and mainly focus on utilitarian benefits (Wei, Torres, & Hua, 2017), such as price and quality (Candan et al., 2013; Xiao & Kim, 2009). Price, health consciousness, food safety, taste, and sensory aspects are considered as concerns that can be considered functional values in the food service context (Kaur, Dhir, Talwar, & Ghuman, 2021; Shin et al., 2021).

- Emotional value:

It is the perceived utility that is triggered by feelings or affective states (Sheth et al., 1991). It can be either negative such as fear, anger, and guilt, or positive such as loyalty, nostalgia, and excitement when it comes to consumption decisions (Candan et al., 2013).

- Conditional value:

It is utility under specific circumstances (Sheth et al., 1991) such as consumers consuming popcorn only in movies but not at their homes. Specific conditions, and external situations and circumstances such as place, time, and context can be considered as the indicator of conditional value (Shin et al., 2021)

- Social value:

It is mainly the utility established by the association to certain group/ groups (Sheth et al., 1991), and includes the person's comparison with other individuals/ groups in terms of social identity (Dagevos & van Ophem, 2013) and is grounded in contexts such as social class, symbolic value, conspicuous consumption, reference groups and opinion leadership (Candan et al., 2013). In short, recognition and acceptance by a certain group and the prestige of a service or product refer to social value (Kaur et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2021).

- Epistemic value:

It is explained as the utility that is initiated by curiosity or desire for gaining knowledge (Sheth et al., 1991), knowledge or novel and or new experience triggered by the service (Shin et al., 2021). In case the consumers are attracted by the idea of trying new products, they are likely to change brands easily and are expected to be convinced of the price premiums for novelty and originality (Candan et al., 2013).

The above-mentioned values consumption values form and shape the purchase intention independently and to various degrees (Shin et al., 2021); therefore, each and every value can be an indicator of behavior separately or as a group.

The previous studies in the literature already utilized the theory to explain some of the consumer behavior, such as sustainable consumption in the context of place identity (Lee et al., 2015), green product choice and consumption (Lin & Huang, 2012), and organic food consumption (Kushwah, Dhir, Sagar, & Gupta, 2019). The study by Kushwah et al. (2019) examined and established a literature review on facilitators and barriers of organic food consumption and concluded that to propose the theoretical framework for consumption, the Theory of Consumption is one of the leading theories. In the food service context, a recent study attempts to explain food consumption-related behavior, specifically, the use of food delivery application utilizing the mixed method for data analysis. The authors of the study argued that epistemic, social, and conditional values are the top values for food delivery applications (Kaur et al., 2021). Shin et al. (2021) examined the topic specifically for the Generation Z and found that emotional, functional, and epistemic values should be considered as the main values for the stated group, where conditional value was not a statistically significant indicator of intention to purchase local food.

Although several attempts can be found in the literature, the use of the theory to explain local food consumption and sustainable implementations is limited.

Therefore, building on the Theory of Consumption, this study aims to conceptually link the theory to sustainable consumption, specifically local food consumption.

Methodology

This study is designed as a conceptual paper to propose a frame to understand local food consumption as an essential component of sustainable tourism development practices. The main purpose of a conceptual paper is to propose new relationships among existing constructs and integrating them. Establishing arguments logically and completely rather than empirically testing the arguments; therefore, is the focus of a conceptual paper

(Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). According to Whetten (1989), the seven criteria would form a strong scientific paper in terms of theoretical contribution. These seven questions are: What is new? So what?, Why so? Well done?; Done well?, Why now? and Who cares? The paper has not answered all questions in equal detail or importance; however, as it is critical to take a problem-focused approach and clearly explain what is new (Gilson & Goldberg, 2015), this study conceptually argues the Theory of Consumption can define and predict sustainable tourism practices not only for local food consumption but also for other perspectives of sustainable tourism. In addition, Cropanzano (2009) proposes that conceptual studies do not establish new theories but rather provide multilevel insights and extend the existing frames of thinking; and this paper also attempts to integrate sustainable tourism, consumption values, and local food consumption intention.

Based on the seven main questions (What is new?, So what?, Why so?, Well done?, Done well?, Why now?, and Who cares?) stated in the essential work of Whetten (1989), this study tries to address and fulfill above-mentioned questions by utilizing the Theory of Consumption as the tool to explain local food consumption from a conceptual perspective. In short, utilizing the Theory of Consumption, “why would people consume local food and what their motives” are the main focus of this study, together with the values that motivate people to consume a sustainable type of food. The assumption behind this attempt is the close connection of local food with sustainability and the values of individuals as a motivation for their consumption process.

Discussion

For food supply chains, one of the keys to compete with other actors in the market is sustainability practices and the assessment of sustainability and local food that are seen as the alternative to global supply since small, diverse, and sustainable consumption has an advantage over big, standardized, and destructive nature of industrialized food (Brunori & Galli, 2016). Besides, the recent crises related to food already showed that the efforts to ensure the market’s function by public low-makers are not sufficient: the commodities on a global scale are not moving on a free scale, and this creates the bottleneck of the supply chain management in terms of unpredictable and unintended outbreaks of disease and dishonest behavior. As a result, concerns and anxieties are amplified by a lack of information and transparency (Brunori & Galli, 2016). These improper conditions in a macro scale and individuals’ personal concerns on a micro-scale push the interest for local food and not only ensure food safety but also ensures the sustainable consumption within the tourism context.

However, although the constructs and concepts are well-defined individually, the connection among sustainability, local food, and local food consumption values still needs more research, especially in the tourism context. Thus, given the values in the theory, the application and explanation in practice are essential to be understood. Based on the local food literature and the various applications of the consumption values, the application of local food can be summarized as follows:

- Functional value of local food:

The tangible aspects of a service/ product, such as taste, quality, and price, are closely related to functional value. Therefore, calorie information, portion size, nutritional information, price information, and value for money are expected to establish the functional value in the local food context. Compared to other intangible values, such as epistemic, conditional, or social values, functional value as a tangible information source, such as food safety concerns and health consciousness, is less considered in food service (Kaur et al., 2021). On the contrary, Shin et al. (2021) argue that it is one of the main parameters for the local food choice and highlighting superior quality and freshness and indicating the source producer of local food in the restaurant's menu would work to emphasize the functional value.

The source and producers of the local food should be communicated with the customers to clarify the functional value in any given local food setting such as restaurants, public markets, and institutions (school cafeterias, hospitals, and so on) to trigger the functional value. A detailed and clear explanation of any type of information about food can ensure the functional value, which is considered as one of the main parameters of consumer decision and behavior.

- Emotional value of local food:

The utility that triggers feelings, both in positive and negative ways, forms the emotional value. Thus, emphasizing the harms of mass production or industrial food can be utilized to trigger negative emotions as well as triggering the positive emotional aspects such as pleasure and joy of supporting local producers and local communities. Shin et al., (2021) propose that connecting local food with emotional dimensions that leads to experience and memorable experience such as cooking classes or tasting events and triggering emotions through environmental factors such as light, music, temperature, and layout can first establish a holistic experience, which then forms the emotional aspect of local food and service. Connecting the local food with stories, which are the main source of emotion and less critical mental state would be another way to trigger emotional values for local food. Accordingly, storytelling practices tailored for local food, its producers, and its travel from farm to restaurant would emerge as the new concept for local food consumption.

- Conditional value of local food:

The utility in certain circumstances forms the conditional value of a product/ service. Shin et al. (2021) proposed that specific conditions, such as specific place, time, and context, including price discounts, are the indicators of conditional value. Accordingly, "Pick your own" activities and holidays in farmhouses can be the means of consuming local food to support sustainable consumption. Festivals focusing on local food or exhibitions organized specifically to promote local food of certain regions are also opportunities to advertise, promote, and consume local food.

In addition to its long and short term, conscious and unconscious impact on individuals' tourism behavior and decisions (Miao, Im, Fu, Kim, & Zhang, 2021), the current COVID-19 case has already raised a variety of concerns for food safety, and health consciousness and these concerns triggered the change in consumer behavior such as using food

delivery applications for food consumption (Kaur et al., 2021). Considering certain conditions' impact on consumer choice, local food producers should integrate technology and effective applications to market local food to maintain the marketing and sales efforts stable in the long term.

- Social value of local food:

Social value mainly explains the consumption of highly visible products and association with social groups. Shin et al. (2021) state that recognition, prestige, and group acceptance are the motivations of people focusing on social value. Accordingly, the value that is associated with specific groups such as vegans and vegetarians can trigger the social value of local food. From the consumer perspective, responsible and selective eating can bring achievement through consuming local food. By consuming locally sourced nutrition as much as possible, individuals can be considered part of socially responsible communities.

- Epistemic value of local food:

Curiosity, knowledge, and motivation to explore novel experiences are closely related to the epistemic value of consumption. Therefore, promoting the novel aspects of local food such as its impact on sustainable food chains, sustainable developments of local communities, sourcing locally in concept restaurants and serving tasting menus, pop-up menus from local products, providing seasonal products, and serving local food in ethnic restaurants can provide fresh and new menus or eating styles through epistemic value. Shin et al., (2021) suggest that package design and form work for advertisement concerns and trigger curiosity over the package. Therefore, restaurants and food producers should emphasize packaging and serving style of local food.

The above-mentioned aspects of local food consumption and the values related to the preference and consumption lead consumers and local food consumption for sustainable tourism practices due to the relation between local food and sustainability practices. In addition to those aspects, it is also possible to explain the values from corporate perspectives, and the reasons for sourcing locally (or not sourcing locally and the reasons behind this choice) should also be examined in-depth. Understanding the consumption values within the frame of the Theory of Consumption can provide more effective promotion and distribution for local food, which eventually serves sustainable tourism and development practices.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Local food is essential and inevitable part of sustainable tourism experience. Research has shown that food is vital to sustainable tourism development on different levels and aspects (Sims, 2009), and local food and its sub-categories such as fair-trade coffee, farm to table/fork/school practices, and local sourcing, are in the center of sustainability practices via food. Thus, the main purpose of this study was to propose the Theory of Consumption as the frame to understand the local food consumption of individuals. The aim behind this attempt is twofold: one, to understand the current consumption intention and behavior, and two, to predict future intentions; since Sheth et al. (1991)

argue that the Theory of Consumption is powerful not only in describing and explaining behaviors but also predicting them.

Thus, from the theoretical perspective, this study adds to the body of literature by utilizing the Theory of Consumption to explain the local food consumption and integrates the different occasions that the local food can be consumed. At this point, the study is in the same line with the previous studies that explain food consumption from the Theory of Consumption perspective (e.g., Shin et al., 2021).

From the practical perspective, the values and the examples of the consumption values can guide practitioners who oversee sourcing in different hospitality and tourism organizations, such as hotels, restaurants, events and festivals and so on. Local food is particularly essential for food service industry, and restaurants and restaurants, grocery stores, and even university cafeterias are utilizing local food to compete with their competitors (Lang & Lemmerer, 2019; Shin et al., 2021). Therefore, the insights that are explained through a theoretical approach can help the industry to form its communication accordingly.

To maintain sustainable development practices, local food consumption and predicting the future behavior in terms of local food consumption should be examined more in-depth. Future studies can focus on certain domains of local food consumption, such as the consumption values in institutions that prefer local sourcing or different individuals from different demographic backgrounds. Considering the dramatic differences between the generations, future studies can also focus on the consumption values of different generations in the local food and sustainable food consumption context. For example, generation Z has been rising as a strong player in the market (Shin et al., 2021), and future studies can focus on this certain group for further understanding.

References

- Bianchi, C., & Mortimer, G. (2015). Drivers of local food consumption: a comparative study. *British Food Journal*,117(9)
- Brunori, G., & Galli, F. (2016). Sustainability of local and global food chains: Introduction to the special issue. *Sustainability*, 8(8), 765.
- Candan, B., Ünal, S., & Erciş, A. (2013). Analysing the relationship between consumption values and brand loyalty of young people: A study on personal care products. *Management*, 29, 46.
- Cropanzano, R. (2009). Writing nonempirical articles for Journal of Management: General thoughts and suggestions. *Journal of Management*, 35, 1304-1311.
- EPA (2021),. Local food, Local Places. United States Environmental Protection Agency. Retrieved from: <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places>
- Feldmann, C., & Hamm, U. (2015). Consumers' perceptions and preferences for local food: A review. *Food Quality and Preference*, 40, 152-164.
- Gilson, L. L., & Goldberg, C. B. (2015). Editors' comment: So, what is a conceptual paper?. *Group and Organization Management*, 40 (2) 127-130
- Hall, C.M.; Sharples, L. Chapter 1 – The consumption of experiences or the experience of consumption? An introduction to the tourism of taste. In *Food Tourism Around the World*; Hall, C.M., Sharples, L., Mitchell, R., Macionis, N., Cambourne, B., Eds.; Butterworth-Heinemann: Oxford, UK, 2003; pp. 1–24
- Hasselbach, J. L., & Roosen, J. (2015). Consumer heterogeneity in the willingness to pay for local and organic food. *Journal of Food Products Marketing*, 21(6), 608-625.
- Huang, E., Gregoire, M. B., Tangney, C., & Stone, M. K. (2011). Sustainability in hospital foodservice. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 14(3), 241-255.
- Kaur, P., Dhir, A., Talwar, S., & Ghuman, K. (2021). The value proposition of food delivery apps from the perspective of theory of consumption value. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Kushwah, S., Dhir, A., Sagar, M., & Gupta, B. (2019). Determinants of organic food consumption. A systematic literature review on motives and barriers. *Appetite*, 143, 104402.
- Lang, M., & Lemmerer, A. (2019). How and why restaurant patrons value locally sourced foods and ingredients. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 77, 76-88.
- Lee, C. K., Levy, D. S., & Yap, C. S. F. (2015). How does the theory of consumption values contribute to place identity and sustainable consumption?. *International journal of consumer studies*, 39(6), 597-607.
- Lehtinen, U. (2012). Sustainability and local food procurement: a case study of Finnish public catering. *British Food Journal*.
- Lin, P. C., & Huang, Y. H. (2012). The influence factors on choice behavior regarding green products based on the theory of consumption values. *Journal of Cleaner production*, 22(1), 11-18.

- Low, S. A., Adalja, A., Beaulieu, E., Key, N., Martinez, S., Melton, A., Perez, A., Ralston, K., Stewart, H., Suttles S., Vogel, S., and Jablonski, B., (2015). *Trends in US Local and Regional Food Systems: Report to Congress*.
- Martinez, S. (2010). *Local food systems; concepts, impacts, and issues*. Diane Publishing.
- Miao, L., Im, J., Fu, X., Kim, H., & Zhang, Y. E. (2021). Proximal and distal post-COVID travel behavior. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 88, 103159.
- Sheth, J. N., Newman, B. I., & Gross, B. L. (1991). Why we buy what we buy: A theory of consumption values. *Journal of business research*, 22(2), 159-170.
- Shin, Y. H., Kim, H., & Severt, K. (2021). Predicting college students' intention to purchase local food using the theory of consumption values. *Journal of Foodservice Business Research*, 24(3), 286-309.
- Sims, R. (2009). Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 17(3), 321-336.
- Whetten, D. A. (1989). What constitutes a theoretical contribution?. *Academy of management review*, 14(4), 490-495.
- Zhang, T., Chen, J., & Hu, B. (2019). Authenticity, quality, and loyalty: Local food and sustainable tourism experience. *Sustainability*, 11(12), 3437.