



## Extraordinary or ordinary? Food tourism motivations of Japanese domestic noodle tourists

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Foodways  
Domestic  
Foodies  
Japan  
Sensory appeal  
Reminiscence  
Qualitative

### ABSTRACT

This study investigated food tourist's motivations, using an inductive phenomenological approach. Participants for the study were selected among food tourists who were at least partially motivated to visit specific locations associated with food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production regions. The paper is informed by 26 interviews which were conducted with respondents from the Mizusawa udon village in Japan. The findings indicate that the key motives of Japanese food tourists travelling to the Mizusawa udon village included: media exposure; enhanced awareness; reminiscence and memories; imagined sensory appeal; textural seduction; heritage; authenticity of cooking methods and foodways; and escapism, prestige and self-enhancement. Based on these findings, a range of recommendations are proposed.

### 1. Introduction

Food is a critical economic resource for many places or destinations (Avieli, 2012; Henderson, 2009; Kim & Ellis, 2015). Food acts as a peak experience for some tourists (Quan & Wang, 2004), and can function as both a primary or secondary motive for tourists' mobility. In this regard, Hall and Sharples (2003, p.10) have defined food tourism as “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel”. This definition of food tourism has been well documented and adopted by many previous studies (e.g., Chang & Yuan, 2011; Park, Reisinger, & Kang, 2008; Presenza & Iocca, 2012; Sanchez-Canizares & Lopez-Guzman, 2012; Smith & Costello, 2009). For example, Presenza and Iocca (2012) describe food tourism as travel behaviour motivated by a desire to experience certain foods. Whereas, Smith and Costello (2009) define food as being a principle resource, which encourages individuals to travel and visit a destination specifically for the unique food products that are offered.

Tourist motivations associated with food selection and consumption whilst on holidays have become one of the five mostly studied areas in the field of food tourism over the past two decades (Ellis, Park, Kim, & Yeoman, 2018). Following Fields' (2002) theoretical proposition, a number of empirical studies have attempted to understand what exactly motivates tourists to consume a certain type of food on holiday (e.g.,

Kim & Eves, 2012; Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009, 2013; Kim, Goh, & Yuan, 2010).

It is encouraging to note that we have witnessed growth in academic debate related to the topic of food tourism motivations. Nevertheless, a number of critical gaps remain in the literature (Getz & Robinson, 2014; Robinson, Anderson, & Vujcic, 2014). Previous studies have predominantly collected research data among leisure or pleasure tourists in the general context of dining preferences (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010; Ji, Wong, Eves, & Scarles, 2016; Kim et al., 2009, 2013; Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2017; Wu, Raab, Chang, & Krishen, 2018). For instance, Ji et al. (2016) examined international tourists' food consumption and travel outcomes in Macao, whereas Chang et al. (2010) and Wu et al. (2018) evaluated the motivational factors underlying Chinese tourists' food preferences and consumption in Australia and in the U.S. This raises a critical question in terms of whether or not previous studies have fully examined motivations from a ‘foodies’ and food tourist perspective (Hall & Sharples, 2003). In this regard, McKercher, Okumus, and Okumus (2008) determined that prior studies were labelled food tourism for their own sake to take advantage of this attractive concept and thus create an attractive proposition of possible economic benefits of food tourism and its related activities.

Secondly, the vast majority of previous studies on tourist motivations associated with food choice and selection have tended to adopt a limited theoretical and methodological approach. Nonetheless, this might be due to the positivist ontological and epistemological

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approaches used (Chang & Yuan, 2011; Hu, Banyai, & Smith, 2013; Ji et al., 2016; Kim & Eves, 2012; Kim et al., 2013; Mak et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2018). Currently, we know relatively little about food tourists' motivations, as most studies have been conducted using primarily quantitative methods with measures and scales which are rooted in a popular theoretical model of motivation. This is known as the push-pull theory of motivation factors, involving push factors or socio-psychological motives and pull factors, related to the attributes of a destination. However, such a myopic approach fails to provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon studied. Furthermore, an interpretivist paradigm involving participant observation, interviews and/or focus groups from a phenomenological approach (Chang et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2009) would be more appropriate to gain a deeper insight into actual food tourist motivations.

Thirdly, the existing studies on food tourism have tended to focus on international tourists from an inbound tourism perspective (Chang et al., 2010; Choe & Kim, 2018; Horng & Tsai, 2012; Ji et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2013; Mak et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2018). However, such a limited and narrow focus tends to overlook the fact that domestic tourists' food tourism motivations cannot be understood by the same lens as an international tourist perspective. This is due to the fact that their accessibility to and social-cultural familiarity with domestic food and food production regions is much greater than international tourists. Yet, the existing literature does not reflect this, although a number of geographical locations have been recognised as important food tourism destinations for domestic tourists. For example, Hoi An, has been recognised as the capital of Vietnamese food culture and a food tourism destination in Vietnam (Avieli, 2012). Furthermore, Kim and Ellis (2015) have argued that Kagawa, Gunma and Akita prefectures have been the mecca of Japanese udon noodle tourism destinations for Japanese tourists, for some time.

Udon is one of the most popular Japanese staple foods, which has been familiar to many Japanese for a long time regardless of their socio-demographics. That is why udon noodle tourism may offer a less exciting and unique experience as it is classified within the category of the national diet, which can be enjoyed at home by a significant number of Japanese people. In spite of this fact, udon noodles produced in widely recognised udon regions such as Mizusawa udon village are still viewed as 'unique' and 'authentic' enough, to encourage people to specifically travel to such areas to sample them (Kim, 2015, 2016; Kim & Ellis, 2015).

It is also important to observe here that nihon sandai udon regions (the production regions of the major three regional udon noodles of Japan - i.e., Kagawa, Gunma and Akita prefectures) was known to only Japanese tourists. Moreover, the growing popularity of international food television programs has meant that this Japanese signature dish (udon noodles) has received growing attention and has witnessed increased international visits to such regions. Domestic tourism in Japan plays a vital role in their economy and can be supported by the fact that in 2014, domestic tourism in Japan accounted for 428 million nights in different types of accommodation, which is 10 times bigger than international inbound tourism (OECD, 2016). From a food tourism perspective, our understanding of what motivates Japanese domestic tourists to visit udon noodle destinations remains limited. This study, hopes to address this gap in our knowledge by focusing on the underlying motives of Japanese domestic tourists who travel to a specific destination to sample handmade udon noodles.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The role of food tourism

The significance of the interrelationship between food and tourism cannot be underestimated, for the meanings of eating can be more intensified when on holiday given that travel experience raises sensory awareness, embodiment and performativity of tourists (Hall & Sharples,

2003; Mitchell & Hall, 2003; Telfer & Wall, 2000). Therefore, tourism can be viewed in a context where food consumption gains special meaning (e.g., social, cultural, economic and environmental), pleasure and symbolic significance (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012).

Food tourism has become popular for a number of reasons. Firstly, local food has the ability to stimulate a destination's economy as a key component of tourist consumption by contributing to regional economic development, thereby creating jobs and increasing tax receipts and foreign exchange (Au & Law, 2002; Hussain, Lema, & Agrusa, 2012). Secondly, food is an effective tool in positioning and promoting destinations (Hjalager & Richards, 2002) and thirdly, food has the capacity to enhance and more effectively express the social, cultural, environmental and geographical characteristics of a specific region (Hall & Sharples, 2003; Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011). Also, food can build the reputation of a destination which would not normally warrant noteworthy appeal to create, improve and convey a positive image of place (Frochot, 2003; Lin et al., 2011; Timothy & Ron, 2013). Moreover, food often appears in the guise of an 'emblem', which can sustain and define a region's identity and help retain the cultural and historical significance of a place (Bessiere, 1998; Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Hussain et al., 2012; Kim & Ellis, 2015).

In addition, food tourism has the capacity to impact upon a number of other areas. It can help simulate the resurgence of regional gastronomies, which in turn creates food heritage and distinctive foodways. Furthermore, it can enhance community pride, a sense of belonging and emotional attachment to a place, which can result in authentic tourist experiences in the context of food tourism (Du Rand, Heath, & Alberts, 2003; Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Fox, 2007; Kim, 2015; Kim & Ellis, 2015; Richards, 2002).

### 2.2. Tourist motivations in food tourism

A limited number of theoretical perspectives are evident in the literature, which focus on food tourist motivations. Nevertheless, Fields (2002) has proposed a conceptual framework of four major motivators of tourists' food consumption that includes physical, cultural, interpersonal, status and prestige motivators. According to Fields (2002), a physical motivator is related to a person's needs such as refreshment and relaxation that cannot be fulfilled in their everyday life, which is the entry level of travel motivations, according to Pearce's (1988) travel career ladder theory. Cultural motivation is more about learning a new culture and its people through direct consumption of novel or authentic local foods. Whereas, an interpersonal motivator refers to the sociability function of meals, where tourists establish strong bonds with family and/or friends and thus create new social relations. Finally, status and prestige motives are associated with self-esteem and the desire to attract attention, as food can help people to stand out from each other and provide increased status and is situated at the higher end of Pearce's (1988) travel career ladder. More recently, food tourism studies have adopted his proposition that tourist motives in food tourism are both multifaceted and multidimensional (Kim et al., 2009, 2013; Kim & Eves, 2012).

Kim et al. (2009)'s study is one of the few that aimed to gain a deeper insight concerning tourist motivations of consuming local foods, with the intention to propose a refined theoretical model for tourist motivations and factors related to food consumption on holiday. Their study adopted a qualitative grounded theory approach using semi-structured interviews with 20 residents in the UK and sought to uncover their interests in tasting local foods. They identified both physiological and socio-demographical factors and identified nine motivational themes, which included: exciting experience; escape from routine; health concern; learning knowledge; authentic experience; togetherness; prestige; sensory appeal; and physical environment.

These findings were subsequently tested by Kim and Eves (2012) using a quantitative approach where five themes of tourist motivations

in food tourism were highlighted. The resultant themes that emerged included cultural experience, sensory appeal, interpersonal relations, excitement, and health concerns. Also, it is interesting to note that [Chang and Yuan \(2011\)](#) and [Hu et al. \(2013\)](#) reported similar findings, where novelty, socialisation, family, and physical experiences of food were the primary motives of food tourists.

Besides the effectiveness of the conceptual model, some studies recognise that demographic and personal factors have an impact on motivational factors. For example, [Kim et al. \(2013\)](#) noticed that males were inclined to have more interest in their cultural experience of local food consumption, whereas females were more concerned about their interpersonal relationship facilitated by the shared dining experience. Some examined tourists' food-related personality traits (e.g., food neophobia and variety-seeking/food neophilia) as a precursor of local food consumption motivation ([Mak et al., 2017](#)) and tourists' food experience and subsequent satisfaction ([Ji et al., 2016](#)). [Mak et al. \(2017\)](#) identified seven motivational dimensions significantly affected by tourists' food-related personality traits, which included novelty and variety, authentic experience and prestige, interpersonal and culture, price/value and assurance, health concern, familiarity and eating habit, and sensory and contextual pleasure. Whereas, [Choe and Kim \(2018\)](#) identified a close relationship between tourists' local food consumption value (e.g., taste or quality value, epistemic value, and emotional value) and their food experience.

As mentioned previously, it seems that a number of studies on motivation have adopted the push and pull theory of motivation in discussing their findings, which include both intrinsic and extrinsic motives ([Ryan & Deci, 2000](#)). The prerogative of [Kim et al. \(2010\)](#) was to develop an instrument to explore food tourist motivations by applying the push-pull theory to examine and conceptualise tourists' behaviour, with regards to their food consumption. Consequently, [Kim et al. \(2010\)](#) report that the push factors of tourist motivations were identified as the state of mind to create or produce a desire to travel and included: escape; relaxation; prestige; health, adventure; social interaction and family togetherness. Whereas, pull factors were identified as the attractiveness of features, attractions and the attributes of the destination itself.

It is important to note that despite the availability of other theoretical approaches to tourist motivations such as [Plog's \(1974\)](#) psychographic profiles, [Cohen's \(1979\)](#) tourist typology, and [Pearce's \(1988\)](#) travel career ladder, previous studies on food tourism motivations have been heavily skewed in favour of the push and pull theory, which is related to socio-psychological motives and the attributes of a destination ([Dann, 1981](#)). In this regard, [Yoo, Yoon, and Park \(2018\)](#) have argued that no single model can adequately understand tourists' motivations in more fragmented and diversified contemporary tourism markets, and suggest a new integrated perspective is required combining the aforementioned psychological models, which reflect the specific research context.

### 3. Research case: Mizusawa udon village in Gunma prefecture, Japan

This study was focused on Mizusawa, a village in the town of Ikaho in Shibukawa city, which is located near the centre of Gunma prefecture, about two hours to the northwest of Tokyo ([Shibukawa City office, 2013](#)). Mizusawa udon outlets are located approximately twenty minutes away from the Shibukawa-Ikaho exit of the Kanetsu Express Way and four kilometres away from famous Ikaho hot springs ([Udon Museum, 2014](#)).

Mizusawa udon, along with Sanuki udon in Kagawa prefecture and Inaniwa udon in Akita prefecture, is one of the most prestigious udon noodles in Japan labelled as 'nihon sandai udon' ([Kim & Ellis, 2015](#)). Gunma prefecture is the second biggest production area for wheat of fine quality in Japan. Mizusawa udon is made from quality local spring water from Mt. Mizusawa, Gunma's locally produced flour and carefully

selected salt, which makes Mizusawa udon unique and distinguishable, due to the thick texture, semi-transparency and lustre of the noodle. The Mizusawa udon is traditionally served cold with a dipping sauce such as soy sauce-based soup or sesame-based soup.

Although no official tourist figures in the Mizusawa udon region from the Bureau of Tourism in the Gunma Prefectural Government were available, Mizusawa udon has been promoted as a major regional tourism attraction along with Mizusawa temple and Ikaho onsen ([Bureau of Tourism, Gunma Prefectural Government, 2013](#)). Gunma prefecture as a whole attracted a total of 233,700 inbound tourists including domestic and international in 2011, and accommodated 881,000 overnight stays and is ranked 16th among 47 Japanese prefectures, compared to Tokyo that holds 1st place with 40.73 million overnight stays (10.3%) ([MLIT, 2012](#)).

The origin of Mizusawa udon dates back to more than 400 years ([Udon Museum, 2014](#)). Two udon noodle shops, namely Tamaruya and Shimizuya opened during the Tensho period (1573–1592) to serve visitors of the Mizusawa Temple, which has a significant history of over 1300 years. The 17th generation proprietor of the Shimizuya udon is thought to be one of the oldest udon shops in Japan and one of the founding members of the Mizusawa Udon Association. Whereas, Tamaruya identifies itself as the 'originator of Mizusawa Udon' ([Kim, 2016](#)). As shown in [Fig. 1](#), there are only 13 restaurants including Tamaruya and Shimizuya (Number 2 and 3 respectively in [Fig. 1](#)) with the Mizusawa udon trademark in Japan.

Mizusawa udon is slightly thicker than other udon noodles, yet very smooth and firm. Mizusawa udon has its registered trademark, which means that without the trademark a restaurant cannot claim to be serving authentic Mizusawa udon ([Gunma Association of Tourism, Local Products, & International Exchange International Relations, 2013](#)). Displaying the registered trademark informs restaurant guests that the Mizusawa udon contains three specific ingredients as referred to earlier and must be prepared in the traditional manner.

## 4. Research methods

### 4.1. Research approach

This study adopted a phenomenological approach in order to grasp the nature of the subjective experience associated with udon noodle consumption, from the perspective of the interviewees involved in this study. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to collect data based on two key benefits. Firstly, this method enabled the researchers to control questions appropriately and avoid ending up with incoherent data, and secondly encouraged tourists to speak freely, eliciting their experiences and thoughts in their own words ([Jennings, 2010](#); [Szarycz, 2009](#)).

Each interview used open-ended questions that promoted two-way communication between the interviewer and interviewee ([Jennings, 2010](#)). Also, during the interviews in addition to asking the prescribed questions in the schedule, the interviewer was able to probe for details and discuss issues raised during the interview. The interview schedule was based around three key open-ended questions: (1) What motivated you to come and consume Mizusawa udon on this occasion? (2) What aspects of Mizusawa udon attracted you to visit and taste? and (3) What anticipations or expectations did you have prior to coming to Mizusawa udon region and eating udon?

### 4.2. Defining samples and data collection

The interviewees were Japanese domestic food tourists and it is interesting to note that the functional use of term, tourists is still questioned ([McCabe, 2009](#)). The term has become more complicated with the changing concept of mobility and tourism in the current digital era, that we experience and discuss about virtual tourism and virtual mobility more frequently. However, to set the context of physical study site, an operational definition of domestic food tourist is helpful.





Fig. 1. Mizusawa udon outlets map (Source: Gunma Prefecture, 2014).

The term, tourism is defined as “the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited” (UNWTO, 2001, p. 13). Within this definition, three dimensions are evident in identifying tourists, that is spatial and temporal and purposeful dimensions to visit. The most important notion of ‘outside the usual environment’ or ‘distance threshold’ has eventuated in a number of different views, from tourism scholars, with a lack of

guidance from UNWTO.

It appears that, there are a number of different views on how to define an appropriate distance threshold for studying domestic tourism, but no consensus has been reached, as yet. Govers, Van Hecke, and Cabus (2008) have researched the concept of the ‘usual environment’ and discovered a distance threshold of 20 km in Belgium. However, the perceived distance outside the usual environment differs depending on the size of country/destination, lifestyles and culture. For example, in the USA this distance was reported as 120 km by Yu, Kim, Chen, and

## Schwartz (2012).

As such, identifying tourists by travel distance does not warrant eligible samples. Not only the distance but length of stay (less than a year), and the purpose of visit (other than employment) are two other criteria of defining tourists. Similar to the previous literature (Govers et al., 2008; Yu et al., 2012), this research adopted the self-defined approach. Visitor, who defines himself/herself as a tourist (being outside his/her usual environment) with the primary or secondary purpose of food in the visit, is eligible to participate in this research.

The screening questions utilised inclusion criteria (e.g., residence, purpose of travel and willingness for participation) in order to specifically select only those tourists on a day trip, or overnight stay, who had travelled purposefully to sample Mizusawa udon noodle and identified as true 'food tourists' (Hall & Sharples, 2003).

Interviews were conducted between June and July in 2014 and two specific locations, were useful in securing the commitment of volunteers for this study, including udon outlets and the main bus stop in Mizusawa udon region. From the 56 potential respondents approached, 26 interviewees (13 males and 13 females) satisfied the criteria for involvement in this study and voluntarily took part in the study. In total, 24 interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' consent, and the remaining two interviewees gave their verbal accounts, which were written down by the interviewer. As the native language of the interviewees was Japanese, this was the language used in the interviews. The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 to 40 min and although some of the interviews were quite short, the data that emerged was rich in detail and relevant to the aim of the study. Saturation of data was verified, when it was noted that repetition of feedback was evident in the last few interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

Table 1 highlights the details of the interviewees that took part in this study. It indicates that: five interviewees were in their twenties; six in their thirties; seven in their forties; four in their fifties; two in their sixties and two in their seventies. The vast majority of the interviewees ( $n = 21$ ) lived in the Kanto region, which includes Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama and Ibaraki, which are all located within 200 km of the Mizusawa udon region. Three interviewees were from Nagano and

Niigata, which are the neighbouring prefectures, and only two were from prefectures of Western Japan, including Kyoto and Kagawa. Their travelling distance ranged from approximately 30 km (e.g., Gunma) to 710 km (e.g., Kagawa), and the average travelling distance was a 176 km.

Most of the interviewees travelled to Mizusawa with their companions and some with family members, relatives and friends. Most were first-time visitors to Mizusawa and 30% of them were repeat visitors. Their occupations included office-worker, public officer, student, housewife and professionals, such as nurse and university professor. The great majority of the interviewees consumed udon noodle on a regular basis at home (e.g., once a week and few times a week), which led to them developing an attachment and association with udon noodles. The frequency of eating udon noodles at home, was an important indicator of the level of familiarity and involvement of each interviewee with udon noodle in its daily life. This is associated with their food-related preference or eating habit and personality traits, which can be either a motivational dimension or precursor of food tourism motivations (Chang et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2017; Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2013).

#### 4.3. Data analysis

In analysing the data, three steps can be recognised. The first step involved transcribing the interviews with assigned numbers and back-translation, which involved translating the data, from the target language (i.e., English) back to the source language (i.e., Japanese) to ensure that the equivalence between the languages was fully evaluated (Brislin, 1970). It was important to ensure that the back-translation was undertaken by a bilingual research assistant, as they had both knowledge and proficiency of both languages and were familiar with the study area.

Secondly, after the completion of all the transcriptions and back-translations, thematic analysis of the data was conducted using descriptive and interpretive analysis. Thirdly, as a result of this process, pattern codes were then identified, analysed and reported as the key

**Table 1**  
Interviewees' profile.

No.	Gender	Age	Residence	Occupation	With who	Visit <sup>a</sup>	Frequency <sup>b</sup>
1	M	Mid 30s	Nagano	Office worker	Friend	F	once every two weeks
2	M	Mid 50s	Gunma	Public officer	Wife	R	once a week
3	M	Mid 40s	Saitama	Self-employed	Wife	R	a few times a week
4	M	Mid 20s	Tokyo	Office worker	Friends	F	a few times a year
5	F	Mid 30s	Niigata	Office worker	Partner	F	a few times a year
6	F	Early 20s	Ibaraki	Student	Friend	F	a few times a year
7	M	Mid 40s	Saitama	Professor	Alone	E	once every two weeks
8	F	Late 40s	Gunma	Housewife	Relatives	R	once a week
9	F	Mid 70s	Kagawa	Housewife	Husband	R	more than three times a week
10	M	Mid 30s	Tokyo	Public officer	Friends	F	a few times a week
11	M	Mid 30s	Saitama	Care worker	Alone	F	a few times a month
12	M	Mid 40s	Tokyo	Company employee	Wife	F	once a week
13	M	Early 60s	Tochigi	Self-employed	Friends	R	once a week
14	F	Early 70s	Tokyo	Housewife	Husband	R	a few times a month
15	F	Early 40s	Ibaraki	Nurse	Mother	F	a few times a week
16	F	Mid 20s	Tokyo	Office worker	Friend	F	a few times a week
17	M	Early 30s	Tokyo	Office worker	Wife	F	once every two months
18	F	Mid 20s	Tokyo	Part time worker	Friend	F	a few times a year
19	F	Mid 50s	Kyoto	Housewife	Daughter	F	once a month
20	F	Late 50s	Chiba	Housewife	Friend	F	once a week
21	F	Early 40s	Kanagawa	Office worker	Family	R	once a week
22	F	Early 60s	Tokyo	Office worker	Friend	R	a few times a month
23	M	Late 20s	Tokyo	Public officer	Alone	F	once a week
24	M	Early 30s	Tochigi	Office worker	Alone	F	once every two weeks
25	M	Mid 50s	Niigata	Office worker	Family	F	a few times a month
26	F	Early 40s	Ibaraki	Office worker	Mother	F	once every two weeks

Note:  $N = 26$ .

<sup>a</sup> R and F denotes 'Repeater' and 'First-time visitor' respectively.

<sup>b</sup> Frequency means the frequency of eating udon noodle back in home.



themes of this research study (Hay, 2010; Jennings, 2010; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). This strategy enabled the researcher to discover what the textual units being studied could reveal without 'priori' theories or concepts for directing (Jennings, 2010). The verbatim quotes presented within this paper were sourced directly from the interviewees, where selection of the quotes was based on their relevance to the key themes reported in this paper.

## 5. Findings and discussions

### 5.1. Media exposure and enhanced awareness

Media including guidebooks, pamphlets, maps, webpages of tourism authority of Shibukawa and TV and radio programs had a significant role in motivating Japanese domestic tourists to consume Mizusawa udon noodle. It was noticeable, that these factors were more significant for first time visitors, as those who had not heard of Mizusawa udon noodle and its region were solely or in some part motivated to consume udon noodles by their initial media exposure. In most cases, this was through watching TV documentaries. This finding, relates to Urry (1990) in that that tourists' anticipations, expectations and experiences are often constructed and contextualised by mediated or mediated narratives and representations of other lands and peoples or even periods with embedded signs, myths and symbolic meanings. For example, *Interviewee 11* mentioned that before having visited Mizusawa, he had watched a TV documentary on Shimizuaya, one of the oldest Japanese udon noodle shops in Mizusawa, which motivated him to visit Mizusawa as part of his trip to this area of Japan.

Also, it appeared that social media played a crucial role for the younger interviewees (i.e., *Interviewee 4, 6, 16, 18 and 24*) as they all mentioned using social media in determining where they should eat. This finding is consistent with the increasing number of tourism studies, which suggests that the use of social media has transformed the way in which people plan their travels and select their food choices (Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). What occurred most frequently in this study was Tabelog, which combines the Japanese word 'taberu (eat)' with the blog and encourages their customers to post their pictures and comments about their dining experiences. Interviewees who accessed this website indicated that they were motivated to try the most popular udon restaurants that were ranked highly on the website. Such positive views of restaurants could be highly influential in their decision-making processes in relation to which restaurant they were motivated to visit.

### 5.2. Reminiscence and memories

The repeat visitors (interviewees, who had visited the area before) reported that their motives to re-visit were based on their previous trip, which was evidently positive and enjoyable in many respects, which is consistent with research undertaken by Yoo et al. (2018), when observing that motivation levels are influenced by past experiences. They described their previous visits as pleasurable, enjoyable and memorable and wanted to repeat this experience, which was a significant motivating factor for Japanese udon noodle tourists in this study. This finding, is related to the notion of nostalgic reminiscence, identified by Holak and Havlena (1998).

The role of nostalgia, reminiscence or memory has been well documented in the context of (diasporic) roots tourism (Iorio & Corsale, 2013) and homesick tourism (Marschall, 2015). In terms of cooking and eating, culinary nostalgia as a form of personal nostalgia often evokes nostalgic emotions around food production and consumption (Stern, 1992). In this regard, multi-layered contextual information and stories stored in an individual's memory associated with previous food consumption experience served as nostalgic vestiges of times past and thus motivated food tourists' to re-visit the area.

Furthermore, it is important to recognise that people's motivation to

indulge in enjoyable recollection of past events is often formed not only by their direct experience of Mizusawa udon noodle, but also by their past experience of repetitive narrative of significant others, such as families or peer groups. For example, *Interviewee 12* had known about Mizusawa udon since he was a child, because his parents once lived in the neighbourhood of Mizusawa. During his interview, he fondly recounted that his parents repeatedly and enthusiastically told him that Mizusawa udon noodle was special and tasty. He explained that such a repetition of the same story told by his parents, influenced him psychologically and emotionally, and developed his link and attachment to Mizusawa udon noodle, which he had never eaten before. This can be partially explained by cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) from media effects and audience studies, referring to the fact that the more frequent exposure to television programme (and its narrative) the more susceptible to media message and the belief that they are real and valid.

### 5.3. (Imagined) sensory appeal and textural seduction

Similar to previous studies (e.g., Fields, 2002; Kim et al., 2009; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Mak et al., 2013, 2017), Japanese tourists visiting the Mizusawa udon village were motivated by their high expectation of sensory appeal and experience associated with an imagined embodied textural seduction of Mizusawa udon noodle. The sensory and seductive expectation was partially cultivated by their cognitive evaluation of their positive expectations and imagination associated with exceptionally fresh quality water in creating Mizusawa udon noodle. This is related to 'physical environment' (Kim et al., 2009) or 'contextual pleasure' (Mak et al., 2013) as a motivation of local food consumption of tourists. This observation was noted by *Interviewee 10* when reflecting on the importance of local ingredients, namely water, flour and salt, which were used for making udon in the region in its traditional way. In this case, the imagined special qualities of Mizusawa udon noodle played a key role in creating the high sensory appeal and uniqueness.

As such, sensory appeal of food appears to be, one of the most important extrinsic motivators in food choice and people tend to look for particular attributes in a food that engages one or more of their senses (Prescott, Young, O'Neil, You, & Stevens, 2002). Kivela and Crotts (2006) also determined that sensory perception plays an important psychological and physiological role in the appraisal of food and food consumption, especially when it occurs outside the home, which was evident in this study. This is embodied in what *Interviewee 16* had to say about their sensory experience of udon noodle, when referring to the "textural beauty and tasteful hedonism or pleasure" of fresh udon noodle on her tongue. The expected difference in sensory attributes between Mizusawa udon and ready-meal types of udon noodles cooked at home was considered a big draw card for her, as it was for other interviewees, who referred to the tastiness of udon noodle, which could not be experienced with noodles cooked at home.

Furthermore, *Interviewee 16* implied that it was worth visiting Mizusawa to experience the raw udon noodle, given that regular instant noodles did not provide her with the fresh taste and chewiness, she associated with Mizusawa udon. A negative evaluation of wholesomeness and sensory quality can be a significant obstacle to people's daily consumption of mass-manufactured instant foods and noodles in this particular case, which may offer convenience at the cost of taste and sensory pleasure (Costa, Schoolmeester, Dekker, & Jongen, 2007).

*Interviewee 7* who was originally from the Shikoku area of Japan, where Kagawa prefecture, nationally renowned for Sanuki udon is located, indicated that he was familiar with the chewy and pleasant taste of Sanuki udon and had developed a special sensory attachment to it. He was motivated to try Mizusawa udon, because he was intent on searching for a similar pleasurable experience to that of Sanuki udon, but also wanted to enjoy a different level of sensory experience, because of the quality of water in Mizusawa udon, which he believed contributed to their chewiness. "I expected Mizusawa udon would be

chewy and pleasant on my tongue and I also knew this area has water of good quality, so I expected, I could enjoy the taste of good water, which should be hidden in noodles” (*Interviewee 7*).

#### 5.4. Heritage and authenticity of cooking methods and foodways

The heritage value and authenticity embedded in the cooking methods and the unique foodways of fresh handmade Mizusawa udon noodle was another key motive for Japanese domestic tourists, which has also been recognised in previous studies where the desire to pursue authenticity was an essential motive for tourists (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006; Hall & Weiler, 1992; Kim et al., 2009, 2013; Mak et al., 2017). This intrinsic value of Mizusawa udon was associated with its long history and a number of interviewees mentioned that the cultural heritage of the study area in Mizusawa was important and linked to the Japanese udon noodle culture and identity. Furthermore, the study area is an area of cultural significance in Japan, with many temples and the area has been developing its reputation for its unique local signature dish, which is evident in what *Interviewee 17* had to say:

Udon is the local speciality of this region as many restaurants have been there gathering at one place.... also there's a history. I felt the Mizusawa temples and Mizusawa udon outlets have been familiar to local people for a long period.

Many of the interviewees that visited the area associated Mizusawa udon region with a strong and distinctive sense of place, by consuming its udon noodle, which can be evoked by the embodied multisensory consumptions (Lockie, 2001). As such, food can function as an emblem of a place (Bessiere, 1998) and Mizusawa has the capacity to achieve this through its food heritage to promote the regional characteristics of the area and sustain some of the traditional meanings held within the community (Kim & Ellis, 2015; Long, 2004; Timothy & Ron, 2013).

Mizusawa udon as the intangible cultural heritage of Mizusawa can only be recognised within the region and the acquisition of the registered trademark can only be acquired by restaurants that offer udon prepared and cooked in the traditional Mizusawa way. Only 13 restaurants have the trademark as proof of credibility, and as a result Mizusawa udon is extremely rare with its associated multi-layered social, cultural and historical values. This scarcity increases the tourists' desire and eagerness to eat Mizusawa udon in loco, informed by the trademark and inherent quality of the noodle. *Interviewee 19* was quite adamant to assert his opinion, that same experience is not possible anywhere else in Japan:

The name Mizusawa udon must be only used for udon offered here in Mizusawa area. I found some restaurants somewhere else before, but then I noticed they all actually say Mizusawa-style (*Interviewee 19*).

When *Interviewee 19* was asked to expand on his answer, he gave the following response, “that wasn't attractive at all, and it's not Mizusawa udon after all. I rather felt I would like to try what is permitted to call itself Mizusawa udon in the original and best place”. Therefore, it became apparent that a number of interviewees had considered every step and procedure used by the udon craftsmen/women? necessary for the finest taste of udon and were of the opinion that the unique methods of production and preparation could not be copied or achieved by amateur cooks within the home or elsewhere. This supports the finding of Alderighi, Bianchi, and Lorenzini (2016) that strong appreciation for a local food speciality has a positive effect on the intention to visit the place or origin in the context of Italian local food specialities regions such as Bresaola dried beef and Fontina cheese.

A number of interviewees also highlighted the unique foodways in Mizusawa udon village, which refers to a number of complex behaviours by which foods are produced, prepared, presented and consumed (Welch & Scarry, 1995). For example, the sesame-based sauce often served with fresh handmade Mizusawa udon was identified as an

important contributor for them to associate with Mizusawa. Typically, udon noodles are eaten with soy sauce or hot soy sauce-based soup with some toppings or garnishes such as vegetable tempura. This observation was confirmed by *Interviewee 1*:

The way they make udon, even how to boil and how to serve, is totally different from how we do at home.... you can taste what is made by craftsmen [and]... you may be able to buy their noodles and try to cook in a similar way at home, but it won't be as good as what you eat in here.

#### 5.5. Escapism, prestige and self-enhancement

The consumption of local foods such as Mizusawa udon on tourist travels can represent an escape-oriented activity, and the act of eating udon in Mizusawa udon village was considered a unique experience. This form of escapism away from home, made interviewees feel liberated and enabled them to avoid eating mass-manufactured udon at home, which in most cases they could not be bothered preparing. Escape from routine is referred to as the willingness to gain rest and recovery and escape from daily routines by leaving behind the modern, personal or interpersonal world and trying different things from what one usually does (Kim et al., 2009, 2010; Wickens, 2002). As such, eating udon noodle in Mizusawa was totally different to the experience at home and is reflected in what *Interviewee 2* had to say about his experience:

Here someone else does that for me for only 1000 yen, and I can have a great taste of cold udon. Then it makes sense to come back sometimes when I do not want to cook for myself at home.

It seems that most interviewees were motivated to travel to Mizusawa, because of their real or perceived need to escape from their routine situations at home. They wanted to indulge in what was more than a simple experience of just a bowl of udon noodle, which can be interpreted as freedom from their daily responsibilities and as an expression of escapism, which is described as ‘diversionary mode’ of tourist experience (Cohen, 1979). Also, the consumption of Mizusawa udon for some was a form of luxury with multi-layered values of heritage, authenticity, history, tradition, uniqueness and craftsmanship. The escape motive had a close connection with the idea of prestige and self-enhancement, which could be fulfilled by the values of Mizusawa udon. By eating Mizusawa udon interviewees could enhance their self-esteem and differentiate themselves from others, which led to feelings of self-satisfaction. These motives can be related to a desire to gain attention (Kim et al., 2009) or recognition (Yoo et al., 2018) and their willingness to share the details of their experiences with family and friends, which was remarked upon by *Interviewee 25*:

When I go to a place and eat a local speciality, I feel like the experience will be accumulated as personal experience inside me forever and what I've eaten, may be able to talk about what kind of person I am back home afterwards.

This observation is consistent with what a number of other interviewees had to say, in that eating udon in Mizusawa in loco, was a one-off and special experience. Interviewees treasured this experience as it impacted positively on their life, gave them recognition, status and something to feel proud about. This is related to what Fox (2003) has recognised, in that when people consume food, this can act as a powerful symbol or identity marker of who they really are.

## 6. Implications, conclusions and future studies

### 6.1. Implications and conclusions

It is evident that certain regions in Japan have become touristic icons in recognition of the fresh udon noodles they produce (Kim, 2015;

Kim & Ellis, 2015). Nevertheless, our understanding of the underlying mechanisms and structures through which Japanese domestic tourists are motivated to visit udon noodle destinations remains limited from a food tourism perspective.

Important theoretical and practical implications and recommendations for future research emanated from this research study. Firstly, an initial exposure to media programmes such as television documentaries can act as a trigger that creates awareness, familiarity, interest and a desire to visit a particular location. In this study, this was identified as the Mizusawa udon region, where a positive association with food and place was evident. This is related to what Seo, Kim, Oh, and Yun (2013) have noted in that both experiential and informational familiarity fosters a more realistic image cognitively and affectively to increase one's intention to eat certain foods. As such, it is not surprising that the recent popularity and growth of food tourism has been dramatically enhanced by initial and repeated media exposure, which includes the Mizusawa udon region in Japan. Both traditional media outlets and different social media platforms such as blogs have played an important role in this regard (see Frost et al., 2016; Kim & Ellis, 2015).

This finding is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the important role of different social media platforms and traditional media outlets in their capacity to transmit taste cultures, and promote food tourism (Busby, Huang, & Jarman, 2013; Frost et al., 2016; Kim & Ellis, 2015). This was evident in this study, where a number of interviewees recognised that the status they associated with Mizusawa udon, was influenced by media representation and their media consumption. Nevertheless, what was more important to them was the taste of the noodle, the sensory appeal, their previous experience, and the fact that they did not want to miss the opportunity to sample Mizusawa udon. As a result, the findings of this study seem indicate that interaction with media played a crucial role in the interviewees' construction and contextualisation of their imagination in relation to their sensory appeal and pleasure of food. This has the capacity to impact upon tourists' motivation to visit a place and directly impacts upon their actual experience. This is, in contrast to Ryu and Jang (2006)'s study who found that other people's opinions and suggestions were not a significant factor in their intention to taste local food. These two divergent opinions, clearly call for further studies in this area from a range of perspectives.

In this study, first-time visitors and repeaters demonstrated different levels of awareness, (un)familiarity, interest and motivation. Nonetheless, a number of motives were common between the two groups, which includes imagined sensory appeal and textural seduction. This is an important finding for stakeholders involved in regional tourism development in the area and beyond, as it gives them the capacity to develop their portfolio of regional foods and their foodways more systematically. A well-planned and integrated media plan with a mix of media production has the capacity to work in partnership with media channels and companies. Such an approach would be beneficial in creating more awareness for potential food tourists and remind the repeaters of their positive memories and the opportunity to repeat their experience and ultimately grow food tourism in the regions. The existing contemporary niche market within the realm of leisure and tourism, known as 'foodie' accounts for only a small number of food tourist, but there is potential for this niche area to grow in a similar way to other special interest tourism groups, such as film tourist (Kim & Reijnders, 2018; Roesch, 2009).

Secondly, an important trigger for repeat visitors was their previous experience and personal familiarity with Mizusawa udon noodle, especially the taste and texture of the noodle itself. This finding is consistent with the existing literature, where previous travel experiences to the same location, influences tourist attitudes of place and their likelihood of revisiting the same destination in the future (Huang & Hsu, 2009). This observation is related to the critical role of familiarity regarding tourist's food consumption, as discussed in detail by a number of researchers (Chang et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2012; Seo et al.,

2013; Torres, 2002).

Tourists' attitudes and behaviours toward food choice have often been discussed in relation to food neophilia and neophobia in terms of gaining comfort and decreasing the degree of anxiety in unfamiliar places (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Ji et al., 2016; Mak et al., 2017; Quan & Wang, 2004). However, in this study, it is more relevant to psychological belief in pleasurable multisensory experience and textural seduction that were formed, due largely to their first-hand experience of Mizusawa udon. As such, past memories have cultivated people's culinary nostalgia referring to the emotional longing for a dish from the past (Stern, 1992). In this study, past memories and subsequent familiarity were interwoven and became a physical and emotional anchorage between the Japanese domestic noodle tourists and Mizusawa udon noodle. Moreover, our findings suggest that the bipolar approach of food-related personality traits, namely food neophobia and neophilia (Ji et al., 2016; Mak et al., 2017), in the context of food tourism motivations has its own limitation. This observation is with reference to domestic tourists who are often expected to possess a higher level of socio-cultural familiarity with domestic food and food production regions. As a result, this study expands on current food-related personality traits and food tourism motivations studies, adding a new dimension, which we refer to as 'culinary nostalgia', which requires further research and development.

The fact that Mizusawa udon can be served with the unique dipping sauce made interviewees even more curious about how it would taste compared to udon noodle they had before. They anticipated that trying what was unfamiliar and thus deemed authentic, would lead them to a new discovery that would not be possible elsewhere. This finding seems to confirm that regardless of their previous experiences and expected sensory appeal, the embodied textural seduction around the chewiness of udon noodle and the unique dipping sauce were critical factors influencing their motivation.

Furthermore, interviewees were motivated by the appreciation of the traditional, historical and cultural values attached to the Mizusawa udon noodle as a form of Japanese intangible food heritage. Despite the ordinary nature of udon noodle in the Japanese context, Mizusawa udon noodle holds a unique status associated with foodways of the region's identity which has transformed into a commodity for tourists, which is similar to the case of Sanuki udon in Kagawa prefecture (Kim & Ellis, 2015).

Within the context of Mizusawa udon noodle, many tourists tended to place a series of multi-layered and multifaceted values on an authentic experience, by demanding products perceived to be historical, traditional, local and unique. Consequently, they were motivated to search for authenticity, which is often associated with historical and heritage values (Sims, 2009). For the Japanese domestic tourists visiting the Mizusawa udon village, this is "the provenance and heritage, the details of where, how and whom of food creation" (Ellis et al., 2018, p. 257). Tourists seeking cultural experience are now paying more attention to the origin of local or regional specialities (Alderighi et al., 2016) and have developed an interest in sampling local food products, which adds value to a destination (Du Rand & Heath, 2006). This was also the case in our study, where interviewees associated a specific place and product with authenticity.

Thirdly, eating Mizusawa udon is closely related to the ideas of escapism, prestige and self-enhancement. Some interviewees wanted to gain a superior feeling and enhance their self-esteem by escaping their everyday life. Although escapism was identified as a stand-alone motivational dimension (Kim et al., 2009), escapism, prestige and/or self-enhancement are inseparable as they are interwoven in people's mind in relation to Japanese udon noodle tourists. Regardless of the above, the notion of escapism is important in the Japanese context, where an increase in feeling alienated, anxious, insecure, restless and being unable to settle, is evidenced in a society where social divisions are more fluid than ever (Rea, 2000). This situation may stimulate people's search for special meanings in a pre-modern place and time, which could be



argued is relevant to Japanese domestic tourists visiting Mizusawa, to sample udon noodles.

In this study, it is evident that domestic tourists' motivation to experience their staple food in the culinary heritage setting is not clearly explained by the renowned classic models of tourist motivation. It is more complex than that, because they have socio-cultural familiarity with this kind of staple food and their perceptions and meanings of this food are evident in their daily lives.

## 6.2. Recommendations for future research

As a result of this study, a number of recommendations have emerged that are important to note. Firstly, the role of media in food tourism promotion and marketing requires further investigation within the domestic tourism space. In particular, how exposure to different forms of media impacts upon first-time visitors to food localities? Previous studies in this area, have been limited within the context of film-induced food tourism (Busby et al., 2013), yet media exposure appears more influential for the first-time visitors. The promotion of food via media channels is a powerful tool for domestic tourists, as they share a common emotional, cultural and historical background. Their experiences are more easily triggered, and their accessibility to domestic food and food production regions is much greater than international tourist. Future researchers need to be mindful of investigating the close relationships between media representations and food tourism and food tourists' behaviours.

Furthermore, research on identifying new food tourism locations from both a domestic and international perspective is required. For example, South East Asian cases are rare, but in practice, countries in this region such as Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia have recently been proactive, in planning and promoting food tourism nationally and internationally. Food tourism in Asia, especially in North-East Asia (e.g., China, South Korea) has undergone a rapid transition of tourism activities from 'food in tourism' to 'food for tourism'. This trend has been influenced by a plethora of recently produced TV programmes on food, culture and travel in a variety of media genres, including documentaries and reality shows. For instance, a successful food and culture documentary programme, entitled 'A Bite of China' (2012, 2014, 2016, 2018) has arguably led to the development of nearly one hundred new (domestic) food tours, which have recently been launched by a plethora of travel agencies (Meng, 2014).

Secondly, reminiscence and positive memories of place played a key role for repeaters to revisit the Mizusawa udon region in this study. Studies on the role of memory in food tourism are limited, though collective memory associated with food production and consumption and culinary nostalgia have been acknowledged in the discourse of culinary nostalgia (Stern, 1992). Evidently, future research on food and memory has the potential to embrace many different aspects of food tourism. For example, an investigation of the structured relationships between food tourism motivations and food-related personality traits including culinary nostalgia holds great potential to enhance our knowledge in this field of study.

Thirdly, the current study adopted an inductive approach, where the key motives identified were: media exposure; enhanced awareness; (un)familiarity and interest; sensory appeal and embodied textural seduction; heritage; authenticity of cooking methods; foodways; escapism; and prestige and self-enhancement. Despite the previously mentioned benefits of qualitative phenomenological approach, one major limitation of present research studies is the fact that case-specific contextual-driven findings from non-random participant selection is relatively limited in generalisability, to a broader research context. Therefore, it is recommended that empirical studies in other locations should be undertaken to enhance generalisability and contribute to motivation theories in the context of food tourism, preferably using mixed methods. More specifically this research might be a gateway into understanding people's inner states (e.g., motivation, desire, and

daydream), given that society, social structures and socialisation processes shape human behaviour, which includes their travel desires and needs (Rojek, 1993; Urry, 1990).

In this study, it has been possible to identify two types of food tourist motives, namely intrinsic and extrinsic, which can be further divided into a number of sub-categories, such as: physical; cultural; interpersonal; status and prestige motives, as suggested by Fields (2002). Alternatively, as Mak et al. (2013, 2017) propose such motivations can be categorised as symbolic (e.g., authentic experience, prestige and status), obligatory (e.g., health concern), contrast (e.g., escape from routine, novelty), extension (e.g., familiarity) and pleasure (e.g., sensory appeal, physical environment).

Previous studies on food tourism have been useful in identifying a range of motives, but such studies have not yet fully explored the extent of the interwoven and multi-layered nature of tourist motivations, given that no single motivation model or theory, can adequately explain all of them. As recommended by Yoo et al. (2018), a more integrated approach is needed, such as identifying peculiar and/or perhaps the unique social cultural contexts of research areas. This is important, given that "food functions as a metaphor for the construction and expression of ethnicity and cultural identity" (Ellis et al., 2018, p.261).

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