

Authentic experiential gastronomy: A meta-analysis of cross-regional perspectives on tourism and cultural identity

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Abstract

This study employs *authenticity* as a framework to propose a clear understanding of how an authentic gastronomic experience could be marketed to reflect cultural identities. It is based on a meta-analysis of existing studies that have examined gastronomy tourism and authentic food tourism experiences to propose dimensions that can serve as a guide for destinations to promote their authentic local foods to tourists. The meta-analysis of studies between 1995-2021 from different geographical backgrounds reveals consensus over three broad dimensions of authentic gastronomy experiences. We assert that authentic gastronomy experiences must be created by considering attributes such as socio-cultural, quality and value, and environmental factors. We draw implications from the results to propose strategies for creating gastronomic experiences that engage key stakeholders to take practical actions.

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Introduction

Gastronomy has long transcended national borders through wars, migration, colonisation, and cultural exchange, creating a dynamic interplay between global and local foodways (Seyitoğlu, 2021; Baggini, 2025). While this diffusion has enriched multiculturalism and gastronomic diversity (Buettner, 2008), it has also led to the marginalisation of indigenous cuisines within many destinations. In several parts of the Global South, local foods, knowledge systems, and culinary techniques have been displaced or overshadowed by foreign cuisines deemed more prestigious or marketable (Coté, 2016). This hegemony of foreign gastronomy not only raises questions of cultural identity but also challenges the sustainability and authenticity of local food traditions (Finnis, 2012; Zhang, Chen, & Hu, 2019; Apak & Guerbuez, 2023).

Authentic gastronomy, as used in this paper, refers to food that genuinely reflects a community's cultural identity and traditions while fulfilling consumers' deeper desires for meaning, connection, and belonging. The pursuit of authenticity has become a defining feature of modern tourism, motivating travellers to seek "real" experiences through local cuisines (MacCannell, 1973; Beverland, 2005; Hillel, Belhassen, & Shani, 2013; Zhang et al., 2019). Authentic food encounters not only enhance satisfaction, revisit intention, and destination image (Shafeizadeh, Alotaibi & Tao, 2021; Kim & Huang, 2021) but also offer destinations a sustainable avenue for competitive advantage (Dixit, 2020; Home et al., 2020). However, despite its significance, authenticity in gastronomy tourism remains a conceptually fragmented construct.

While "authenticity" is often invoked as a hallmark of successful gastronomic destinations, most studies treat it as a static attribute, neglecting its dynamic, co-created, and contextual nature. This reductionism limits theoretical advancement and weakens the industry's capacity to translate local distinctiveness into measurable value. Further, current research remains fragmented across contexts—examining isolated aspects such as ingredients, ambience, or presentation—without explaining how authenticity is collectively constructed among producers, consumers, and settings. Moreover, destinations overshadowed by international gastronomy lack evidence-based designs for developing authentic gastronomic experiences that reconcile local heritage with global appeal.

This paper addresses these gaps through a meta-analysis of 50 studies published between 1995 and 2021 on gastronomic tourism and food authenticity. The paper contributes theoretically by integrating diverse perspectives into a coherent analytical framework and empirically by identifying recurring authenticity dimensions and their interrelationships. Practically, it offers destination managers, marketers, and policymakers actionable insights for designing and promoting authentic gastronomic experiences that sustain cultural identity while enhancing competitiveness. To guide this synthesis, the study poses the following questions: 1) What recurring dimensions of authenticity emerge from the past 26 years of gastronomic tourism research? 2) How do

these dimensions interact to form a cohesive framework for understanding the authentic gastronomic experience?

Authentic gastronomic experiences have gained traction across diverse destinations—Colombia, China, Germany, Ghana, Spain, Turkey, and the United States (Seyitoğlu & Ivanov, 2020; Atsız, Cifci & Law, 2021; Batat, 2021; Pérez Gálvez et al., 2021). Yet, the challenge persists: how can destinations historically shaped by foreign culinary influences reposition themselves through localised authenticity? To what extent can they reduce dependency on imported gastronomic models while appealing to international visitors? As gastronomy becomes an increasingly powerful pull factor in destination marketing (Agyeiwaah, Otoo, Suntikul, & Huang, 2019), understanding and operationalising authenticity remains crucial—particularly given the rise of tourists who exhibit either food curiosity or food neophobia (Gündoğan & Akin, 2023).

Authentic gastronomy: A theoretical framework

The linkage between authentic gastronomy and tourism has implications for place development as it offers a stage for branding and marketing destinations (Richards, 2012; Vázquez-Martínez, Sanchís-Pedregosa & Leal-Rodríguez, 2019). This is particularly crucial for places seeking to harness their economic growth through tourism. While food tourism is linked with gastronomy tourism, a broad range of terms have also been found, such as culinary tourism and cuisine tourism (Horng & Tsai, 2010; Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). Nonetheless, culinary generally refers to the cooking styles, whereas gastronomy is about the art of production and consumption of food and beverages (Horng & Tsai, 2010). This form of consumption is closely linked to the service dimension of a destination's economy and cultural identity, thereby making it an essential component of economic development (Naruetharadhol & Gebsumbut, 2020). Importantly, the connection of gastronomy with culture makes it an important context to examine authenticity (Ferrari & Gilli, 2015). Gastronomy typologies provide evidence of specific consumer groups, such as authenticity seekers who regard local food experience as an important part of their travel (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017).

The meaning of authenticity is varied, contested, and usually context-specific (Wang, 1999; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Timothy & Ron, 2013; Lin, Ren & Chen, 2017). According to Sharpley (1994, p. 130), “authenticity connotes traditional culture and origin, a sense of the genuine, the real or the unique”. Indeed, the attribute of realness or genuineness to authenticity appears to be widespread (see e.g., MacCannell 1973; Taylor 1991; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Argyris et al., 2020). However, authenticity is considered “something much deeper” (Beverland, 2005, p. 460) to include consumers' search for meaning in their lives, which leads to their preference for specific products and experiences that reinforce their desired identities (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). The desire for identity formation is linked with the concept of existential authenticity in the sense that tourists seek to develop an authentic self through the consumption of

a particular product, such as an exotic dish in a certain tourist destination (Sims, 2009; Park & Widyanta, 2022). For other consumers, they connect with authentic products, for example, food and beverages, on an emotional level via their symbolic quality after experiencing the product (Morhart, Guèvremont, Girardin & Grohmann, 2015).

Gastronomy in a localised context is usually defined as authentic “if it is specific to a region, is prepared in a certain way, makes use of traditional preparation methods, combines and/or recombines new with traditional ingredients and is made by a specific person” (Dixit 2020, p. 327). The linkage of authenticity in food experience to a specific region/locality is well documented in the literature and considered a key determinant of tourist travel experiences (Groves, 2001; Richards, 2012; Kalenjuk, Tešanović, Gagić, Erdeji, & Banjac, 2015; Kim et al., 2020). The region or place where the local food is associated produces an image that consumers seek to experience. This is evidenced by the fact that some people can “only experience certain foods at their best in specific places” (Richards, 2012, p.37). Consumers of authentic gastronomic experience look out for some education about the different cultures of the destination, the production techniques of specific foods and drinks (Kim, Park & Xu, 2020), and possible future effects that food fraud practices could have on their health (Chousou & Mattas, 2019). Such curiosities confirm MacCannell’s (1973) argument that consumers align themselves with authenticity based on their knowledge of the product. It also echoes the assertion that some consumers are interested in the source and contents of food products and services (Arthur & Hrac, 2015; Chousou & Mattas, 2019; Arthur, Nikoi, & Benagr, 2020) as it guarantees safety and quality.

In this paper, we conceptualise authentic gastronomy as traditional and local foods noted for their genuineness and rooted in their local culture (Sims, 2009; Chang et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2019). The specificities of food to various communities not only depict their culinary philosophy and authenticity but also reveal traditions, stories, legends, and symbols associated with their cuisines (Zhang et al., 2019). Alongside these attributes of authentic gastronomy are *how they are prepared, served and the physical environment* in which they are carried out (Richards, 2012). Consequently, the authentic qualities of food, associated with places, require effective promotion and marketing to serve as motivation for a tourist to experience.

The success of marketing and promoting gastronomic products of a destination is dependent on, among others, the ability to understand consumers’ gastronomic behaviour – their perceptions (Dixit, 2020). Consumers’ perception plays a key role in determining the authenticity of products. This supports the assertion that authenticity is based on culture and, therefore, is socially constructed (Lin, Ren, & Chen, 2017; Kim, Song, & Youn, 2020). According to Richards (2012), consumer perceptions of authenticity in food experience include *ingredients, preparation, presentation, and settings* (a physical environment where the food is prepared and served). Other perceptions include taste, side dishes, and self-cooking (Jang, Ha, & Park, 2012; Pratt, Suntikul & Agyeiwaah, 2020).

In navigating the process of making authentic gastronomic experiences both appealing and commercially viable, we argue that producers of local cuisines must be mindful of the foreign foods that have dominated their tourism environments and the resulting competition thereof. This reflection is expected to lead to breaking away from marginalising local cuisine. The question that emerges, then, is what attributes should be considered in projecting local cuisines? The first critical need is to identify from the consumer's perspective what authentic gastronomy represents for marketing purposes. Hence, in this study, we choose to identify key characteristics of the gastronomy tourism experience. By implication, food stakeholders must decentre the frame of reference to marginalised cuisines; a process that requires conscious introspection and planning (Safran & Segal, 1996). Identification is connected with engaging stakeholders in authentic gastronomic experiences to implement the possible strategies for creating an authentic gastronomic experience.

Implementing this framework requires assessing how the long-term influence of foreign dominance has shaped local gastronomy—historically, culturally, and epistemologically. It also calls for a decentred perspective—one that shifts attention from dominant foreign gastronomy to the experiences and agency of local culinary traditions.

Methods

This study used a meta-analysis methodology for collecting and analysing data from previous findings to identify important considerations for creating authentic gastronomic experiences. As a popular methodology in psychological research (Durlak & Lipsey, 1991; Glass, 1982), meta-analysis has received widespread acceptance since the 1980s in various disciplines, including education and medical sciences (Slavin, 1984; Lee, Bausell, & Berman, 2001; Mosadeghrad, Esfahani, & Nikafshar, 2017). Although no single definition exists for this approach (Shelby & Vaske, 2008), it is commonly used to describe the statistical analysis of a large body of study results with the aim of integrating research findings. Meta-analysis, therefore, synthesises data from multiple studies to address a specific research question (Field & Gillett, 2010). While the approach is gradually gaining momentum in tourism research (Zhang, Fu, Cai, & Lu, 2014; Wondirad, 2019), many proponents concur that it allows the researcher to take into account a holistic picture offering new insights into a collective body of existing studies (Gretzel & Kennedy-Eden, 2012; Agyeiwaah, McKercher, & Suntikul, 2017).

In this paper, we conduct a meta-analysis of 50 studies on gastronomic tourism experience of studies published between 1995-2021 through a modified four-step procedure as suggested by Shelby and Vaske (2008): 1. Problem conceptualisation and operationalisation; 2. Data collection and processing; 3. Analysis, and 4. Reporting. We modified this approach to allow more flexibility in both qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the papers chosen to overcome the strengths and weaknesses of each method. Thus, the study started with a clear conceptualisation of research questions since

an effective meta-analysis must have a clear conceptualisation of the research problem (Cooper, Hedges, & Valentine, 2019). Within this stage, the criteria for inclusion and exclusion of papers based on the research question were developed. We chose to select papers that are relevant to the research question and fall within the proposed 26-year period (1995-2021). Following this stage, data collection was conducted through search engines such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and journal websites (Annals of Tourism, Tourism Management, Journal of Sustainable Tourism, International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science, Journal of Culinary Science & Technology, among others). The search was guided by thematic areas of the research question, including “gastronomy experience”, “authenticity”, “authentic gastronomy experience”, and “authenticity and food tourism experience”. Based on the inclusion criteria suggested by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003), we selected papers in line with the purpose of this study. Significantly, the research question and study purpose that focused on creating authentic experiential gastronomy led to three main inclusion criteria: “authentic gastronomy”, “authentic experiential gastronomy” or “authentic food experiences” (Smith, 2006). In this case, studies that have touched on these concepts were included, while others were excluded. Based on this criterion, we found 62 papers on gastronomy and authenticity. Of the 62, the further content analysis revealed that 12 of the papers did not address the issues of interest regarding dimensions of authentic gastronomy (e.g., Kivela & Crofts, 2005; Mei, Lerfald & Brătă, 2017; Fusté-Forné, 2021) while others focused on concepts that are not important to the purpose of this study (e.g., Nair, Sinha, & Dileep, 2020). Accordingly, we chose to focus on the 50 papers that have analysed authentic gastronomy or food tourism and authenticity to align with the purpose of the study. Papers downloaded and found relevant within the chosen period were saved in a Dropbox folder for further inspection and processing for analysis.

Our analysis began with an initial content analysis to review each paper qualitatively using qualitative QDA Miner software (Agyeiwaah, 2020; Anthony, 2015). After step-by-step scoping and scheming of these papers using qualitative software, they were further uploaded to SPSS for more statistical analysis that allows frequency counts, percentages, and cross-tabulations to be computed for interpretations. The upload of the papers started with the coding of the earlier papers, to the most recent ones for easy tracking. Papers were entered with additional information on the year of publication, authors, regions/countries, the method used, themes and objectives, and measures employed to conceptualise authentic food experience. These entries were necessary as part of addressing the research questions and allowing rigorous quantitative analysis of the data. In presenting the various dimensions, we follow the literature findings that certain food attributes, such as atmosphere, represent an environmental factor as authenticity occurs within a specific geographical landscape or environment (see Home et al., 2020), while those relating to tradition and ingredients represent broad dimensions of socio-cultural issues. Sims (2009) argues that “tourist socially constructs authentic relationships between local food and place”, denoting a combination of the social and cultural context

of the authentic gastronomic experience. The final category, quality and value, has also been found as a dimension in gastronomic research and is used here as part of the broad categorisation of the identified dimensions (Ferrari & Gilli, 2015; de Albuquerque Menegueta, Mundet, Aulet, 2019).

After a successful entry into the SPSS software, we conducted a descriptive statistical analysis of individual studies to identify patterns across the studies. Our initial analysis involved simple frequency counts of different journals and their number of publications. This analysis was followed by a series of cross-tabulations of various topics and periods of that topic, methods across geographical regions, and dimensions of authentic gastronomy experience across different world regions. Following this third step was reporting details of the specific findings and their interpretations.

Findings

Following the theoretical framework, it was imperative to identify the main dimensions of authentic gastronomy experiences and how these dimensions could guide the process of creating an authentic gastronomic experience for tourists. Before such analysis, a general overview of the published sources was worth illustrating to demonstrate the growing academic work on this area of interest (see Table 1). Hence, in this section, we provide a brief overview of the published papers used and their geographical regions. This is followed by the topical areas of these selected studies and dimensions of authentic gastronomy experience.

Table 1: Inventory of publications

S/N	Author	Journal/ Book/ Thesis	Title	Research Setting	Methods	Dimension(s) of authentic gastro- nomic experience
1	Björk & Kaup- pinen-Räsä- nen (2014)	Nutrition & Food Science	Culi- nary-gas- tronomic tourism – a search for local food experiences	Finland	Quantita- tive	Culinary-gas- tronomic food experiences are founded on local, original, and au- thentic food that represents the local food culture.
2	Tsai & Lu (2012)	Interna- tional Journal of Hos- pitality Manage- ment	Authentic dining ex- periences in ethnic theme res- taurants	Taiwan	Quantita- tive	Environmental concerns (e.g., au- thentic Thai exte- rior design), local food concerns (e.g., authentic Thai dishes using authentic Thai ingredients) and employee con- cerns (e.g., only Thais preparing Thai food).
3	Lu & Fin (1995)	The Soci- ological Quarterly	The Pres- entation of Ethnic Authentici- ty: Chinese Food as a Social Ac- complish- ment	United States of America	Qualitative	Authenticity is a social construc- tion; ethnic food (genuine) and product prepara- tion should use the same ingredi- ents and process- es as found in the homeland.
4	Ghanem (2019)	Journal of Ser- vice Sci- ence and Man- agement	The Behavio- ral Intention of Tourists toward Lo- cal foods: An Applied Research on the Lo- cal Foods served in Egyptian Siwa Oasis	Egypt	Quantita- tive	Authenticity is an element of food tourism motiva- tion. Memorable food experiences cause respond- ents to use the same food items and cooking styles in their homes, to search for the same food items in their home countries, to dine in restau- rants that serve these items and to return again to the destination to retry the same local food.

5	Gregorash (2018)	Authenticity & Tourism: Materialities, Perceptions, Experiences Tourism Social Science Series	Understanding authenticity within gastronomic experiences	Photo-elicitation and food-elicitation	Qualitative	Authenticity is a combination of indigenous ingredients and the cooking methods, place, preparation and history. An authentic gastronomic experience relies only on the recollection of food service and the story behind the image.
6	Cundlach & Neville (2011)	Journal of Brand Management	Authenticity: Further theoretical and practical development	Australia	Qualitative	Craftsperson/ company, Method of production, ingredients and materials, Esthetics, commitments to consistency and quality; relationship to place, heritage and pedigree, exclusivity, genuineness / prioritising craft motives, experience and uniqueness and originality.
7	Hillel et al. (2013)	Tourism Management	What makes a gastronomic destination attractive? Evidence from the Israeli Negev	Israel	Qualitative	Authenticity is offering gastronomic products and experiences that faithfully communicate an intimate link between food, place and the local community. Lack of a sense of community and territorial attachment poses a barrier to the emergence of a gastronomically attractive food image of the region.

8	Home et al. (2020)	Sustainability	The Importance of Being Local: The Role of Authenticity in the Concepts Offered by Non-Themed Domestic Restaurants in Switzerland	Switzerland	Qualitative	4 lenses of authenticity-“tradition”, “place”, “performance”, and “material”. Seasonal and regional ingredients and fitting the restaurant within the cultural and geographical landscape.
9	Hsu & Scott (2020)	Hospitality and Tourism Management	Food experience, place attachment, destination image and the role of food-related personality traits	Macau	Quantitative	Food neophobia has an important moderating effect on the relationship between food experience and place attachment. Food involvement moderated the relationship between food experience and destination image.
10	Kalenjuk et al. (2015)	European Journal of Applied Economics	Offer of authentic food as a condition for gastronomic tourism development	Serbia	Mixed	Authentic gastronomy uses local ingredients as well as traditional methods of processing and serving food
11	Kauppinen-Räsänen et al. (2013)	British Food Journal	Remembered eating experiences described by the self, place, food, context and time	Finland	Qualitative	Authentic food experiences are individual and related to an event or place. Remembered pleasurable experiences come from sensory, emotional, and social bases, such as homemade food.

12	Kim & Song (2020)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	The influence of perceived credibility on purchase intention via competence and authenticity	China	Mixed	Authenticity cues that produce authentic feelings and images of a restaurant; such signals include food, environment, atmosphere and social factors.
13	Kim et al. (2020)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	The chain of effects from authenticity cues to purchase intention: The role of emotions and restaurant image	China	Mixed	Local ingredients and food names that are unfamiliar to mainstream customers, and stories about the origins of a dish, increase customers' perceived authenticity. Authentication by local people enhances consumers' perceived authenticity. Perceived authenticity influences purchase intention through restaurant image and positive emotion.
14	Kim et al. (2020)	Tourism Management Perspectives	Beyond the authentic taste: The tourist experience at a food museum restaurant	China	Qualitative	Local speciality food; unique taste.
15	Latif (2020)	Iowa State University, theses and dissertations	The effect of perceived authenticity of food towards experience and place attachment at the State Fair	Iowa, United States	Quantitative	Place attachment, genuineness, timelessness, tradition, originality and display of Cultural connotations as the basis of authenticity.

16	Li et al. (2019)	Travel and Tourism Research Association	Authenticity and Nostalgia: A Gastronomic Experience of a Local Food Night Market	Macao	Mixed	Authenticity is defined based on nostalgia and the atmosphere of the local food night market.
17	Lunchaprasith & Macleod (2018)	Tourism, culture and communication	Food tourism and the use of authenticity in Thailand	Thailand	Mixed	Accurate presentation of traditional food culture; association of food with traditional stories.
18	Mkono (2011)	Tourist Studies	The Othering of Food in Touristic Eatertainment: A Netnography	Zimbabwe	Qualitative - ethnography	Traditional food authenticity, an authentic tourism experience.
19	Movahed et al. (2020)	Questions Geographical	An analysis of the culinary tourism experience between gender groups in Iran	Iran	Qualitative	Dimensions of novelty, local culture and knowledge acquisition.
20	Özdemir & Seyitoğlu (2020)	Tourism Management Perspectives	A conceptual study of gastronomic quests of tourists: Authenticity or safety and comfort?	Turkey	Qualitative	Authenticity should begin with understanding the suitable environments in which authenticity, food, establishments, challenges and experiences jointly generate a suitable context for tourists' authenticity-seeking behaviours or their willingness to make a completely safe and comfortable holiday.
21	Pavlidis & Markantonitou (2020)	International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science	Gastronomic tourism in Greece and beyond: A thorough review	Greece	Qualitative	Local food, local taste and use of local ingredients

22	Qian, Law & Fan (2020)	Research Article	Exploring tourists' experience at private social dining: Dimensionality and satisfaction	Hong Kong	Qualitative	Authentic dining experiences are associated with three types of experiences: sensory, emotional, and spiritual.
23	Robinson & Clifford, (2012)	Annals of Tourism Research	Authenticity and festival foodservice experiences	Australia	Qualitative	Negotiated authenticity,
24	Sims (2009)	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience	UK	Qualitative	Local food; authenticity; sustainable tourism; rural tourism; culture; place
25	Sthapit (2017)	An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research	Exploring tourists' memorable food experiences: a study of visitors to Santa's official hometown	Finland	Qualitative	Authentic local foods.
26	Zhang et al. (2019)	Sustainability	Authenticity, Quality, and Loyalty: Local Food and Sustainable Tourism Experience	China	Quantitative	Local food; authenticity; quality; the relationships among quality attributes, tourist satisfaction, and tourist loyalty are contingent on the extent to which food tourists perceive the authenticity of rural local food

27	Chousou & Mattas (2019)	British Food Journal	Assessing consumer attitudes and perceptions towards food authenticity	Greece	Quantitative	Organic certificate, traditional and homemade production practices, place of origin certificate, as well as information about the product's origin country and the raw materials production region are significant quality cues that enable consumers to judge food authenticity.
28	Kendall et al. (2019)	Trends in Food Science & Technology	A systematic review of consumer perceptions of food fraud and authenticity: A European perspective	Europe	Systematic literature review	The authenticity of food depends on authenticity attributes such as trust and integrity of the food supply chain.
29	Sukalakamala & Boyce (2007)	Journal of Food-service	Customer perceptions for expectations and acceptance of an authentic dining experience in Thai restaurants	USA	Quantitative	Authentic dining is a combination of factors such as distinct cooking methods, using specific ingredients and traditional kitchen utensils; ambience, as well as a distinct internal and external décor, and music.
30	Antón et al. (2019)	Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management	Impacts of authenticity, degree of adaptation and cultural contrast on travellers' memorable gastronomy experiences	Segovia (Spain).	Quantitative	An authentic food experience enables tourists to learn and understand local culture and traditions.

31	Timothy & Ron (2013)	Journal of Heritage Tourism	Understanding heritage cuisines and tourism: identity, image, authenticity, and change	N/A	Editorial	Authentic food implies cultural food served to empower local communities, promote social pride and economic opportunities.
32	Li et al. (2021)	Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	Authentic food experiences bring us back to the past: an investigation of a local food night market	Hong Kong	Quantitative	Authentic food is unique, based on traditions and represents old days' food.
33	Ramírez-Gutiérrez et al. (2020)	Tourism Recreation Research,	Tasting experiences of a destination's local gastronomy on tourist communications	Spain	Qualitative and quantitative	Social communication of gastronomic experiences contributes to understanding the way in which the individual process of experience is constructed, as well as two social practices of constructing touristic awareness and the appropriateness of consumer spaces from visitors' perspective.
34	Ferrari & Gilli (2015)	Book	Authenticity and experience in sustainable food tourism	N/A	Conceptual	Food authenticity is about local food and protected food
35	Hernandez-Rojas et al. (2021)	International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science	Influence of the restaurant brand and gastronomy on tourist loyalty. A study in Córdoba (Spain)	Spain	Quantitative	High-quality traditional cuisine, which uses quality local foods, contributes to the emotional image and the tourist intentions to recommend
36	Ellis et al. (2018)	Tourism Management	What is food tourism?	Conceptual	Cognitive mapping	Food tourism and authenticity are bound by cultural, historical and place aspects of the destination.

37	Cai et al. (2021)	Tourism Management	Performing authenticity: Independent Chinese travellers' tourism dining experiences in Europe.	Europe	Mobile ethnography	Authentic food allows genuine interpersonal relations
38	de Albuquerque Meneguel et al. (2019)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	The role of a high-quality restaurant in stimulating the creation and development of gastronomy tourism	Spain	Qualitative	Food tourism has the potential to communicate a wider experience of the cultural impressions of the destination.
39	Shafieizadeh et al. (2021)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	How do authenticity and quality perceptions affect dining experiences and recommendations of food trucks? The moderating role of perceived risk	USA	Quantitative	Authenticity in food denotes novel, replicable, native, real, genuine and high quality.
40	Hiamey et al. (2021)	International Journal of Tourism Research	Critical success factors for food tourism destinations: A socio-cultural perspective	Ghana	Qualitative	Food authenticity is important, but some factors cannot be sacrificed in the name of authenticity due to the sensory characteristics of food.
41	Seyitoğlu (2020)	Journal of Culinary Science & Technology	Tourist Experiences of Guided Culinary Tours: The Case of Istanbul	Turkey	Qualitative	Indicators of food authenticity include phrases such as food linked to culture, rich with history and story, traditional, and old recipes.

42	Pérez Gálvez et al. (2021)	Journal of Culinary Science & Technology	Segmentation of Tourists that Visit the City of Popayán (Colombia) according to Their Interest in Its Gastronomy	Popayán, Colombia	Quantitative	Tourists' food experience of authenticity implies originality of the food they taste.
43	Stone et al. (2018)	Journal of Travel Research	Elements of Memorable Food, Drink, and Culinary Tourism Experiences	N/A	Qualitative	Authentic foods should not be limited to local cuisine, and they do not have to be local to be memorable. Food authenticity is subjective, and it is based on the traveller's personal definition.
44	Batat (2021)	International Journal of Tourism Research	The role of luxury gastronomy in culinary tourism: An ethnographic study of Michelin-Starred restaurants in France.	France	Qualitative	Luxury gastronomic restaurant promotes authentic quality cuisines with local identity and heritage.
45	Richards (2021)	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality	Evolving research perspectives on food and gastronomic experiences in tourism	N/A	Conceptual	Local food experiences can help construct tourist authenticity for tourism.
46	Atsız (2021)	Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change	Understanding food experience in sharing-economy platforms: insights from Eat with and with locals	Turkey	Qualitative	Authentic gastronomy implies top-notch food, a food with a story behind it, real local cuisine, a variety of traditional foods, homemade, and original foods.

47	Seyitoğlu & Ivanov (2020)	International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science	A conceptual study of the strategic role of gastronomy in tourism destinations	N/A	Conceptual	Authenticity food seekers are concerned about local food.
48	Kim & Huang (2021)	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Understanding local food consumption from an ideological perspective: Locavorism, authenticity, pride, and willingness to visit	USA	Quantitative	Authentic food is local food that is unique.
49	Sidali et al. (2021)	Foods	Development and Validation of the Perceived Authenticity Scale for Cheese Specialties with Protected Designation of Origin	Germany	Quantitative	Authentic food denotes the tradition and originality of food.
50	Pourfakhimi et al. (2021)	International Journal of Tourism Research	The influence of neophobia and enduring food involvement on travelers' perceptions of well-being—Evidence from international visitors to Iran	Iran	Quantitative	Authentic food contributes to perceptions of subjective well-being.

Overview of studies on authentic gastronomy experiences

An overview of the 50 selected papers revealed that gastronomy research has attracted scholarly interest in both academic journals and books (Kim & Huang, 2021; Richards, 2021). As illustrated in Figure 1, the four journals with the highest number of publications in the dataset are the *International Journal of Hospitality Management* (N = 5; 10%), the *International Journal of Tourism Research* (N = 4; 8%), *Tourism Management* (N = 3; 6%), and the *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science* (N = 3; 6%). The selected papers covered over 44 countries, including Australia, Canada, Colombia, China, Egypt, Europe, Germany, Ghana, and Switzerland. About one-tenth of the papers were published in China (10%) and the US (10%). This further elaborates on food tourism as a destination pull factor in China (Hsu & Scott, 2020). There is also evidence of cross-cultural studies between China and the US. For instance, there was a study of ethnic food in four Chinese restaurants in small southern towns in the United States (Lu & Fine, 1995), affirming how research interest in authentic gastronomy is becoming increasingly important.

The methodological analysis demonstrates the predominantly qualitative nature of previous studies, which reflects the subjective nature of authentic gastronomy. Stone et al. (2018) argue that food authenticity is subjective and is based on the traveller's definition, which explains the choice of qualitative approaches to unpack such subjectivity. For example, close to half of the papers (44%) chose qualitative methods of interview and ethnography, while more than a quarter (32%) employed a quantitative method. A small number of conceptual papers were found (14%), and the use of mixed methods was minimal (10%). Importantly, the dominance of qualitative methodologies in the literature could be attributed to the social constructivist/subjective nature of consumers' perceptions of authenticity, which implies that researchers focus more on obtaining in-depth views of consumer behaviour.

The publications captured in this analysis are segmented into five phases (1995-1999, 2005-2009, 2010-2014, 2015-2019, and 2020-2021). Overall, there is a continuous interest in investigating authentic gastronomic experiences. For instance, close to half (46%) were published in 2020-2021, greater than that of 2015-2019 (30%). There is a positive trend in papers as the number of studies increases over the years. Further cross-tabulation of methods employed, and the different year groups revealed the growing interest in mixed methods, but the largest interest remains with qualitative methods.

Topical and dimensional representations of authentic experiences by publications

Our search for thematic areas in the selected literature to address our research questions resulted in five broad topics (Table 2): restaurant and dining experience (16%), gastronomic/food experiences (40%), authenticity and food/beer festivals (36%), food experience and destination image (2.0%), and food, authenticity, and sustainability

(6.0%). More publications are focused on authenticity and food/beer festivals, thus suggesting the importance of authentic gastronomy in research and the wider consumer society. This emphasis highlights the need to localise gastronomic experiences by exploring how local authenticity can be created and effectively marketed (Richards, 2012). Following these five emerging topics, we further identified representations of authentic gastronomic experiences as indicated in Table 3. These representations are further categorised into three broad dimensions of socio-cultural, environment/geographic, and quality/ value factors (Sims, 2009; Ferrari & Gilli, 2015; de Albuquerque Meneguella, Mundet, Aulet, 2019; Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017).

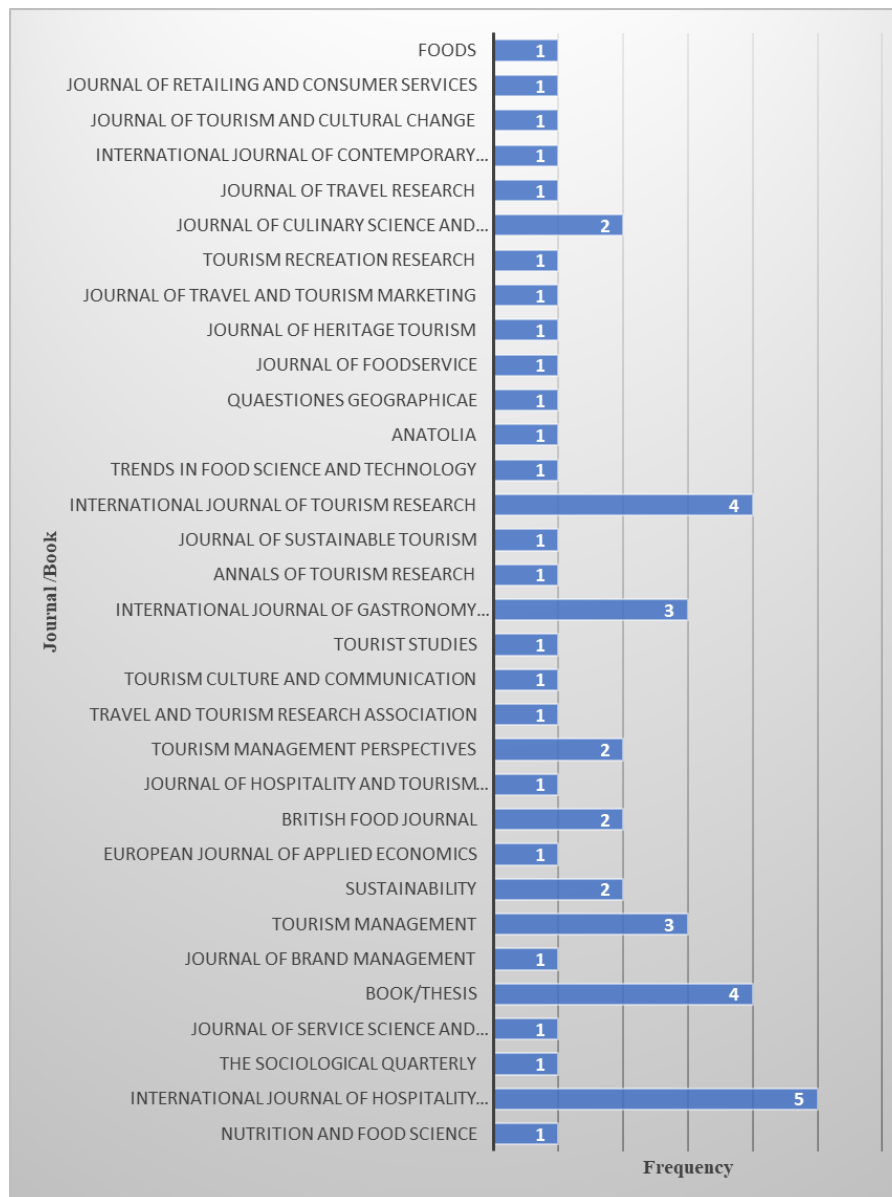


Figure 1: Topical and dimensional representations of authentic experiences by publications

Table 2: The five emerging topical areas

Items	Frequency	Percent
Restaurants and dining	8	16.0
Gastronomic/Food experiences	20	40.0
Authenticity and food/beer festivals	18	36.0
Food experience and destination image	1	2.0
Food, authenticity and sustainability	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0

Although several dimensions of authentic gastronomic experience activities are documented in the existing literature, those listed in Table 3 appear to be the more emergent themes in our study. This representation is inferred from consumers’ perceptions of authenticity. Cultures around the world differ, resulting in some instances in the curiosity of people to experience, for example, the norms, values, and social behaviour of places alien to them (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Zhang et al, 2019). Consequently, some tourists travel in search of new cultural experiences, fixed on local cuisines, gastronomic history of a place, local food traditions, and their associated events, the unique way of local food preparation, and the use of specific ingredients that are perceived as authentic (Hernandez-Rojas, Folgado-Fernandez & Palos-Sanchez, 2021). The desire for such experiences usually emanates from the acquired knowledge of the said destination(s) and is transferred to people, particularly in an era where knowledge is widely democratised. Our study confirms this notion, as it emerged from our review that 64% of people’s perceptions of choice for authentic gastronomy are highly embedded in socio-cultural factors. This is represented by people associating authenticity with local foods, culture, history, and traditions, as well as local preparation and ingredients. Indeed, authentic gastronomy is promoted to stimulate pride in the cultural past, conservation ethos, and tourism experiences (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Kim et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). In specific representations, ethnic /local foods represent 24.0%, followed by culture, history, and traditions at 22%, and local preparation and ingredients at 10% and genuine, timely and original (10%) (see Table 3).

The second highest dimensional representation of authentic gastronomy in the publications was quality and value factors (26.0%). According to Ponte & Gibbon (2005, p 7), “quality is cognitively evaluated in different ways depending on what world is used to justify evaluation and action”. This suggests that there are different connotations of quality and, by extension, what people value. In the context of authenticity, quality and product value were linked with attributes such as genuineness, timelines, and originality.

Other words included continuity, modification, and change, as well as novelty in product experiences.

As indicated by Table 4, 10% of the publications identified environmental/ geographical factors as dimensions of authentic gastronomy. According to Arthur & Yamoah (2019), consumers globally are becoming environmentally conscious of the choices they make in the wake of rising consumer savviness and brand awareness. This confirms Schoggen's (1989) argument on the causal relationship between the environment and human behaviour. Consequently, consumers of authenticity in foods are also conscious of the physical environment in which their food is produced or consumed. The findings indicate that consumers associate authenticity with the environment from the perspective of a local atmosphere, as well as being in a local market. They associated nostalgia, the linking of food to place, and a sense of local community. The latter is reminiscent of linking Ugali (cornmeal) to a Kenyan village or Eba, a traditional meal made from cassava in Nigeria and other West African states. Although environmental factors are not as high as others seen above, it connotes the importance of a sense of place for consumers in their consumption of authentic gastronomic experiences.

Table 3: Consumer representations of gastronomic authenticity

Items	Frequency	Percent
Ethnic/local food	12	24.0
Quality/novel tea and food experience	9	18.0
Connection with culture, history and tradition	11	22.0
Local preparation and ingredients	5	10.0
Link food to place and local community	2	4.0
Genuine, timely, and original/reality	5	10.0
Local atmosphere/market/nostalgia	2	4.0
Continuity, modification and change	2	4.0
Unique and old food style	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

Table 4: Broad dimensions of authentic gastronomy experiences

Items	Representation of authentic gastronomy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Socio-cultural factors	1. Ethnic/local food	32	64.0
	2. Connection with culture, history and tradition		
	3. Local preparation and ingredients		
Quality and value factors	1. Genuine, timely, and original/reality	13	26.0
	2. Continuity, modification and change		
	3. Quality/novel tea and food experience		
Environmental/Geographical factors	1. Local atmosphere/market/nostalgia	5	10.0
	2. Linking food to place and the local community		
Total		50	100.0

Discussion and implications

This paper provides both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it has revealed what represents an authentic gastronomic experience in terms of its various attributes, namely, socio-cultural, quality/value, and environmental/geographical factors. Moreover, the dimensional representations of authentic gastronomic experience identified in the study provide a useful context for considering what to offer as an authentic gastronomic experience. Such considerations lead to, among others, consumers’ construction of their identity into an authentic experience (Dixit, 2020). This resonates with the need for local food producers to reflect on the existing food provisions offered in hotels, guest houses, and other tourism spaces. In the reflection of this paper, we critique the current dominance of foreign foods at tourism destinations under the guise of globalisation, which has led to the marginalisation of local food and beverages. Following this position, the paper calls for a shift in focus to local food and beverage, as well as the use of local processes and methods of food production (Gundlach & Neville, 2012; Gregorash, 2018). By implication, our findings on consumer perception of authentic gastronomy, namely cultural antecedents, substantiate the need for a decoupling of food knowledge, production, and service from a non-internationalised perspective.

Secondly, there is a need for dialogue and engagement of stakeholders (regulatory agencies, eateries, hotels, local farmers, food vendors) in the tourism and hospitality space to make a deliberate effort to recognise their role in the current situation and to collectively strategise to bring indigenous cuisine to the mainstream. This has several positive implications, including the creation of employment opportunities for people, particularly in the Global South, where unemployment rates are high (Kuhn, Milasi & Yoon, 2018; Pritadrajati, Kusuma & Saxena, 2021). In areas of foreign gastronomic

influence, there is a need for decentring the frame of reference to marginalised indigenous cuisine, which ought to be reflected in destination marketing efforts as well (Safran & Segal, 1996).

Practically, the findings relating to the representations of authentic gastronomic experience are relevant for governments, destination marketing agencies, and local businesses that are seeking to market their destinations. For example, based on tourist expectations of local ingredients and historical tones in both the presentation and ambience (decor), restaurant owners will have to emphasise these attributes in their branding and marketing. Websites and social media handles of destinations that want to position themselves as authentic gastronomic options should take cognisance of these socio-cultural qualities, as well as the environmental factors identified. Further, the study offers these stakeholders the necessary themes to prioritise for marketing, taking into consideration the popular experiences that consumers seek and packaging them accordingly.

In many countries of the Global South, particularly in Africa—where diverse ethnic groups reflect a wide variety of indigenous cuisines—food providers must assure consumers of authenticity by communicating key elements such as preparation methods, ingredients, historical background, cultural significance, traditional practices, and locality (Anquandah, 2013). Such learning experiences can be made available through narratives, labels, and the use of the Internet to attract tourists (Arthur & Hrac, 2015). Alternatively, special themed events such as traditional food festivals, where all the various socio-cultural factors relating to authentic gastronomy can be utilised.

As the modern consumer continues to be conscious of the different elements of what they eat (Bessière, 1998; Solovjova, Yuldasheva & Konnikova, 2022), quality and value factors need not be compromised. Consequently, local food on offer must be genuine, and standards of food experience need to be maintained to guarantee its authenticity. However, considering the dynamics of society, for example, in terms of new technology and inputs emerging, any modifications and changes in food production or services must not affect authenticity. This requires novelty, creativity, and planning in business to safeguard the consumer's authentic food experience.

Although the environment/geographic dimension of authentic food experience is ranked lower in most of the studied publications than other dimensions, consumers need more variations of authenticity. Besides, many consumers are aligned with geographic factors and must be given attention. Consequently, local food providers must take advantage of their geographical locations to commercialise the experience and authenticity of the food they offer. Such food services must be designed creatively to stimulate nostalgia, must be served in a local atmosphere or some form of a natural setting, and, more importantly, must link food to local places and communities (Arthur & Hrac, 2015). In operationalising these strategies, food providers must ensure that the delivery process emphasises locality—serving food and beverages that are locally sourced, prepared, and presented by indigenes—to foster local consciousness and pride.

Finally, as indicated elsewhere (Torres, 2002; Yurtseven, 2011), the promotion of local food and drink bodes well for local farmers and other stakeholders along the value chain. Given the possible multiplier effect, tourism planners must begin to treat this segment of tourism with the much-needed interest. Based on the afore assertions, the paper makes the following propositions: First, authentic gastronomy requires a critical introspection of local food stakeholders and tourism stakeholders, which begins with an assessment of the impact and implications of how historical and contemporary influences have shaped local food cultures and current market dynamics. Second, practitioners must make a conscious effort to reverse the effects of foreign influence on local food culture and heritage by utilising local resources (e.g., ingredients, indigenous people, methods of preparation, environment, etc) to promote local foods and beverages.

Conclusion, limitation, and future research

In a changing global tourism environment with increasing competition, destination marketing organisations need to identify strategies for enhancing tourist experiences to stimulate the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability of the destination. One way of doing this is by creating authentic experiential tourism through gastronomy that emphasises food, culture, tradition, history, and the local environment. This paper explored ways of creating authentic gastronomic experiences.

Our exploration began with an initial meta-analysis of previous studies from 1995 to 2021 that examined authentic gastronomy experiences in various contexts to identify a consensus on what authentic gastronomy represents. These representations provided a blueprint for guiding our proposed strategies of creating authentic gastronomic experiential marketing for former colonies. Overall, our meta-analysis of previous studies indicates that while authentic gastronomic experiences encompass three broad dimensions of socio-cultural, environmental/geographical, as well as quality and value factors, the socio-cultural dimension is the most dominant theme. Marketing the distinctiveness of a destination could be achieved by promoting its authentic gastronomic attributes that represent its people's culture, tradition, quality service, and geographical environment.

While this paper advocates for the strategic adoption of authentic gastronomy as a means of enhancing destination distinctiveness, it is important to recognise the vulnerabilities of the global gastronomic market to external disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic exposed the fragility of face-to-face culinary experiences that rely heavily on mobility, proximity, and sensory engagement. Nevertheless, emerging digital tools and hybrid consumption models—such as virtual tasting sessions, interactive cooking classes, and online storytelling—demonstrate how authenticity can be reimaged through mediated experiences (Matwick & Matwick, 2025). These developments highlight both the adaptability and the evolving nature of authentic gastronomy, suggesting that future research should explore how technological

mediation reshapes the co-creation of gastronomic value and authenticity in tourism. While our study employed a meta-analysis of previous studies to identify what represents authentic gastronomy tourism experiences, our selection of studies is limited to a specified year period of 26 years. The restricted time frame may have excluded earlier foundational works that could have revealed longer-term historical trajectories. Extending the analysis beyond the current period could uncover how the discourse on authenticity in gastronomy has evolved over several decades. Moreover, our selection of papers focused on journal articles and book chapters, and sources such as news materials, magazines, and conference proceedings were excluded. We, therefore, suggest future studies extending the meta-analysis to include other online sources that provide insights into authentic gastronomic experiences in tourism. Future studies should also investigate the levels of consciousness of the existing paradigms among food operators in tourism spaces. Again, there is a need for empirical studies that investigate the relationships, pathways, and hierarchies of engagement of relevant food stakeholders in tourism destinations.

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