

# The street food experiences of the local-guided tour in the meal-sharing economy: the case of Bangkok

Ibrahim Cifci

*Istanbul Universitesi, Istanbul, Turkey*

Ozan Atsız

*Yozgat Bozok University, Yozgat, Turkey, and*

Vikas Gupta

*Amity School of Hospitality, Amity University, Noida, India*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to understand the components of the street food experiences of the local-guided tour in the meal-sharing economy based on the online reviews of tourists who experienced a meal-sharing activity with a local guide in Bangkok.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Based on the qualitative approach, this study involved a content analysis of 384 narratives on Withlocals.

**Findings** – The study identified five components that embrace the street food experience: a local guide's attributes, perceived food authenticity, local culture, perceived hygiene or cleanliness. Results also revealed that the Thai street foods are unique and authentic and can reach this experience level through a local guide.

**Originality/value** – Although the importance of international travellers' street food experiences and the popularity of the meal-sharing economy platforms are rapidly growing, there is no study which had combined both of these phenomena together to date. It is the first attempt to reveal the components of street food experiences in a meal-sharing platform.

**Keywords** Meal-sharing economy, Street food experience, Local-guided tours, Bangkok

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Meal-sharing platforms are the most important area utilized by international travellers who desire to experience local culture (Privitera and Abushena, 2019). These platforms provide an opportunity for travellers to enhance their experience by learning local foods' ingredients and cooking methods as well as tasting local foods on-site (Atsız *et al.*, 2021a, b). Experiences in the meal-sharing economy extents take place in locals' homes, a restaurant that was determined by locals and a food tour, which is organized by a local guide (Hotrec, 2018; Mhlanga, 2020; Zurek, 2016). Among these, food or gastronomy tours are one of the most offered services in the sharing economy services (Melián-González *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, street food tours are featured as one of the top five food tours worldwide as of 2021 (Withlocals, 2021). Experiencing street foods through a local guide enables travellers to make a contact with the host destination's local culture (Atsız *et al.*, 2021a), and these tours can be a source of authentic experiences for travellers (Melián-González *et al.*, 2019).

Street foods have become an integral element of a destination image and play a cornerstone role in attracting tourists and encouraging positive tourist behaviour (Privitera and Nesci, 2015). Numerous studies (e.g. Bhimji, 2010; Newman and Burnett, 2013) agreed that street foods reflect locals' real lives at a destination. The street foods in the local areas of a specific destination are based on fresh and indigenously sourced ingredients and varied recipes, which allow tourists to involve deeply in the relationship between food and territory



and simultaneously shorten the gap among them by serving as a way of interaction (Sengel *et al.*, 2015). Many destinations such as Thailand, Malaysia, India and Singapore attract international tourists through their street food image (Torres Chavarria and Phakdeekauksorn, 2017) since modern travellers seek intense food experiences through street foods linked to the authenticity of local cultures (Choi *et al.*, 2013; Privitera and Nesci, 2015).

In this sense, locally guided tours enable tourists to experience the street's flavours, which might be considered a way to escape from the mundanity of daily routine (Paulauskaite *et al.*, 2017). Street foods also allow tourists to taste, learn and gain knowledge about the native destinations' culture through its cuisines for a short period. Locally guided culinary tours are formally organized by travel agencies that involve local taste and dining customs (Ko, 2015). However, locally guided culinary tours in the meal-sharing economy areas allow tourists to participate in locals' life through an interactive way by involving with authentic clues concerning a destination. In this regard, numerous studies (e.g. Mhlanga, 2020; Veen and Dagevos, 2019; Zurek, 2016) noted that meal-sharing economy platforms boost travellers' experiences by providing a sense of authenticity with the novel, engaging and sensual food experiences. Through these platforms, hosts offer travellers a multi-communication-based experience using their resources, which is considered a unique experience element (Joo, 2017).

The tourism and hospitality industry is also appealing for micro-entrepreneurship activities in the informal sharing economy (Williams and Horodnic, 2017). Thus, examining the street food experiences of travellers within the scope of the meal-sharing economy can make a significant contribution to the field (Melián-González *et al.*, 2019). It will also identify how street food involvement with locals may shape travellers' perceptions of a destination image and their corresponding future travel behaviours. Previous studies on the meal-sharing economy have addressed several issues, including the potential of meal-sharing on reducing food waste (Falcone and Imbert, 2017), tourists' motivation (Ketter, 2019), economic practices of the meal-sharing economy (Veen and Dagevos, 2019) and its social-innovation aspects (Dagevos and Veen, 2020). The negative factors linked with the meal-sharing economy in the restaurant sector are an ongoing discussion in this field (Mhlanga, 2020; Veen and Dagevos, 2019).

The locally guided street food tours in the meal-sharing economy may become a medium to contribute to the overall tourism revenues by assisting local street food vendors who have become legal following the government regulations in several countries. Moreover, exploring the components of meal-sharing experiences linked with local guiding may contribute to the inclusive development of the meal-sharing economy platforms in a better way for the formal economy than harming them. In similar veins, only a few studies (e.g. Batle *et al.*, 2019; Dredge and Gyimóthy, 2015; Melián-González *et al.*, 2019) have highlighted the importance of the meal sharing economy tours and call for more studies to enhancing the attractiveness of destinations. Nevertheless, travellers' experiences in such platforms were neglected previously, which prompted this research.

This study relied on examining the components of a local-guiding service platform (i.e. Withlocals) by drawing on the user-generated content (UGC) obtained through the online reviews posted for local service providers in Bangkok. Though Bangkok's reputation as a street food destination is embedded in its culture, no study had empirically investigated the meal-sharing experiences with locally guided tours. Therefore, this study is the first to explore the street food experiences of tourists who joined meal-sharing activities with a local guide in Bangkok to the authors' knowledge.

This research has significant contributions to the tourism industry in Thailand. First, Thailand has already been known as the most crucial destination across the world in terms of tourism receipts (4th ranked) and tourist arrivals (9th ranked) (McDowall and Wang, 2009). To sustain this success, new products and services are suggested for international travellers. Moreover, modern travellers desire to quest for authentic clues in the destination (Maitland,

2010) by interacting with locals. As a new service innovation, meal-sharing services can enhance travellers' experience and offer a wide range of authentic local culture for travellers that can led them to be satisfied with the destination and its attractions (Atsız *et al.*, 2021a, b).

Furthermore, local guides enable them to interact with locals and their culture (Atsız *et al.*, 2021b). These are perceived by locals as unique or pristine experiences (Atsız *et al.*, 2021a). As one of Thailand's top destinations, Bangkok offers numerous street food opportunities for international travellers (Papadopoulos, 2019). Travellers have a negative perception of street foods due to their health risk, causing them not to try street foods. However, in street food tours organized by a local in the meal-sharing economy platform, local guides give confidence to travellers and may take them to clean places where street food delicacies are offered. As an essential aspect of sustainable tourism, increasing the welfare of local people can be achieved thanks to meal-sharing economy platforms since these areas generate imperative extra revenue for locals. In particular, these research findings will be beneficial for destination planners who want to bring local people's welfare to the desired level in terms of understanding international travellers' experiences in local guide tours.

## Literature review

### *Street food experience*

Street food is defined as follows: "ready-to-eat foods and beverages prepared and sold by vendors, hawkers, stalls, trolley carts notably in streets and public areas" (FAO, 2019). Street foods are often marketed on moveable carts and stalls by vendors for on-site consumption or takeaways in open-air complexes (Toh and Birchenough, 2000). Street food vending is a traditional small-scale business in the informal economy, which constitutes a fundamental income to society, particularly amongst the urban poor (Pang and Toh, 2008). Therefore, for most countries, street food is widely considered a significant business within cultural, social and economic domains and produces a rich tourism resource involving their culinary traditions (Chang *et al.*, 2010; Henderson *et al.*, 2012).

For tourists, eating out on the street offers a wider variety to select from the local cuisine rather than dining in a restaurant. It also allows them to interact more with the host culture through culinary linkages (Henderson *et al.*, 2012). Specifically, street food vending is most common in Southeast Asian countries (e.g. Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand) (Henderson, 2019; Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-auksorn, 2017). As an attractive tourist destination globally, Thailand attracts many tourists to fulfil their travel experiences through various gastronomic activities (Kiatkawsin and Han, 2017). For instance, numerous studies (e.g. Jeaheng and Han, 2020; Lertputtarak, 2012; Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-auksorn, 2017) demonstrate that food is a vital motive for visiting Thailand. Thai street food reflects the way of life for the locals and their culture by offering unique and more meaningful food experiences for tourists (Jeaheng and Han, 2020).

Despite the appreciation of Thai street food's contribution to tourism, there are various deficiencies regarding food safety and hygiene, such as adequate waste disposal system, clean water running, inferior quality ingredients and so on (Belk, 2014; Henderson, 2019; Sabbithi *et al.*, 2017). One of the critical issues concerning street food is the fact that street food practice occurs outside the formal regulation and is, therefore, considered an informal economy (Kusakabe, 2006). Wongleedee (2012) noted that tourists who visited Thailand are entirely aware of all risks. A study by Sirigunna (2015) searched for the food safety trust of tourists who visited Thailand in 2013, and the study showed high confidence in street food vendors in Thailand. Given the perceived image of Thai street food, a survey in Pattaya, Thailand presents that almost all tourists visiting Thailand engage in food-related activities and perceived the Thai food image as an excellent cultural experience, unique serving style, delicious, nourishing food and exotic cooking methods (Lertputtarak, 2012). A current study

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by [Jeaheng and Han \(2020\)](#) presents that tourists visiting Thailand identified Thai street foods with nine dimensions as cultural and local experiences, menu and atmosphere, staff service, core food quality, value for money, product attractiveness, staff proficiency, packaging and portions and tradition and authenticity.

#### *The sharing economy services and local guiding*

The sharing economy is defined as the collaborative economy, collaborative consumption, access economy, platform economy and community-based economy ([Hossain, 2020](#)) and has a wide place in the field of tourism and hospitality. Although it is considered a disruptive innovation in the consumption concept, the perception of sharing economy can be regarded as cheaper, smaller, more valuable and more meaningful when comparing services in the formal economy ([Guttentag and Smith, 2017](#)). The sharing economy initiatives have also transformed the traditional host–guest relationship to an intense sense and allowed the concept of tourism experience to be redesigned ([Heo, 2016](#)). Moreover, online platforms allow locals to share their homes, foods, transportation tools and knowledge. Therefore, sharing economy practices in the tourism and hospitality industry generate an informal channel to decrease unemployment in urban destinations, which have limited job opportunities. Likewise, it assists travellers in accessing several locally produced products at an affordable price ([Guttentag and Smith, 2017](#)). Moreover, by its nature, sharing economy platforms provide more meaningful interactions with locals, thereby facilitating authenticity in a broad sense based on mutual communication and trust ([Paulauskaite et al., 2017](#)).

As one of the emerging collaborative economy genres, peer-to-peer dining (i.e. meal-sharing economy) also thrive in culinary destinations ([Honggang and Qunchan, 2015](#)), since local chefs and foodies have become more prone to share their culinary expertise to acquire subsistence income with low investment ([Fang et al., 2016](#)). Therefore, P2P platforms offer a great way for local food experts to attempt micro-entrepreneurship ([Guttentag, 2015](#)) just because this experience appeals to tourists' desire for authenticity within the overall tourism experience. Meal-sharing platforms also allow tourists to have a kind of 'eats like a local' experience at an affordable price in numerous destinations.

The meal-sharing in the sharing economy consists of multiple interactions ([Joo, 2017](#)), which are based on precisely two types of sharing activities at online platforms. One is based on shopping, preparing and experiencing local food with the host, while the other is in the form of experiencing street foods or local restaurants with the host on route pre-organized in the city. By doing so, local guides in meal-sharing platforms connect tourists with the neighbourhood through food, which exactly creates a social benefit for different two parties ([Hotrec, 2018](#)).

[Buonincontri et al. \(2017\)](#) noted that travellers perceived the intensity of real locality experience, which creates a co-creation process based on sharing ideas, thoughts and cultures. Its concept is shaped around the idea of sharing with the combination of food practices and performances ([Davies et al., 2017](#)), which generates experiential learning by a more permanent and transformational effect on the participants ([Sharp et al., 2015](#)). [Ketter \(2019\)](#) noted that the sharing economy allows tourists to encounter and interact with locals with ideals, achievement and self-expression motivations.

[Van Nuenen \(2016\)](#) also noted that the tours in the meal-sharing economy platforms set freedom for hosts to flourish their creativity and personal contact with their guests. The meal-sharing tour experience is happening together with locals, hence generating more social interaction and offering a glimpse into locals' daily lives ([Ketter, 2019](#)). Therefore, it is highly relevant to encountering locals' culture via street food, which primarily reflects some destinations' features ([Privitera and Abushena, 2019](#)). Therefore, according to [Zurek \(2016\)](#), experiencing local food with a host of destinations also offers an authentic and deep food experience. Likewise, [Mhlanga \(2020\)](#) notes that these platforms offer unique and memorable

food experiences to tourists with authenticity. Meal-sharing platforms enable hosts not only to share their knowledge with their guests but also to set a comfortable ambiance for tourists to interact with other users by sharing their tourism experiences, feelings and thoughts (Privitera and Abushena, 2019).

Crucially, however, today's modern tourists, especially such minority groups as food-enthusiasts, have a particularly massive curiosity for experiencing indigenous specialties (Ozdemir and Seyitoğlu, 2017). Favouring the street foods in the destination by tourists supports the existence of the food and thereby the community's sustainability. Similarly, experiencing street food with a locally guided tour could also become a vehicle to partially overcome the risk of street food partially associated with foodborne illness (e.g. food poisoning, diarrhea from unhygienic practices) to ensure they put in place the local safety regulations quickly.

### Research methodology

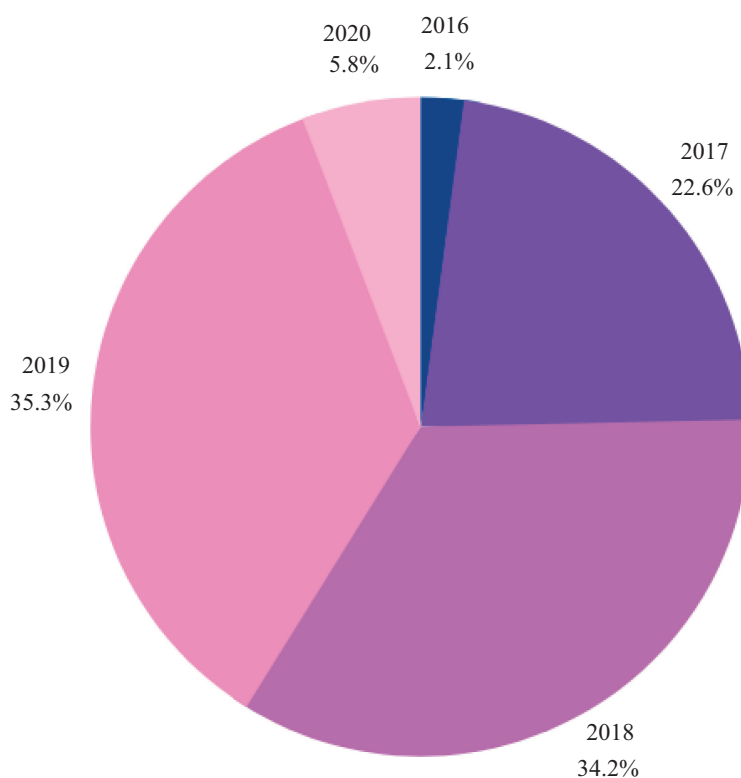
The current study explores the components of street food experience in the context of sharing economy platforms (i.e. local guiding service). A qualitative research approach was adopted, and reviews posted by travellers participating in street food tours accompanying with a local tour were examined on Withlocals. Withlocals is a sharing economy platform that assists travellers in collecting information about services and providers, posting comments and feelings of experience-related content (Hotrec, 2018).

Several studies have used online narratives, reviews or comments to understand and ascertain tourists' feelings, behaviours and experiences (Sangkaew and Zhu, 2020; Simeon *et al.*, 2017). The online areas offer major understandings and advice for destination planners and service providers to comprehend how tourists describe and perceive the destination attractions, experiences and settings (Wu *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, these platforms are regarded as vital data sources for scholars or researchers to investigate tourist experience phenomena (Lu and Stepchenkova, 2015).

Initially, 430 online reviews for Bangkok were included in this research (see Figure 1). According to Figure 1, most travellers participated in the street food tours in 2018 (34.2%) and 2019 (35.3%). Moreover, the least participation in street food tours is provided in 2016 (2.1%). There are some reasons why these participations vary through the years. As an important meal-sharing platform, Withlocals started its services in 2013 in the Netherlands and mainly focused on the European market by offering private food tours (Hotrec, 2018). In time, this platform extended its services to other countries on different continents. Moreover, travellers have recently started to use these services since these areas are not as well known as Airbnb, which is recognized as a sharing accommodation economy platform. These reasons have led to why these reviews vary by year. Another reason may include that some meal-sharing economy platforms (i.e. Withlocals and Eatwith) maintain the confidentiality of the information about their guests' demographic information, and only their online reviews and review date are shared with others.

The fact that caused Bangkok to be a sample of this study is only the thought that food vending is much more widespread in Bangkok among other provinces of Thailand, and it is often listed on the 'The World's Top 10 Cities for Street Food' (Papadopoulos, 2019). Only English-language reviews were taken into consideration for this present research. Furthermore, some reviews posted in a different language and only rated postings (no comments) were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the final data corpus was determined as 384.

Conventional content analysis was applied to data (collected reviews). Following the content analysis method of Strauss and Corbin (1990), the two independent coders examined the data to explore street food experience components. Research data were first broken down



**Figure 1.**  
Distribution of all reviews

into separate items of relevant meaning via open coding (line-by-line coding). Table 1 presents an illustrative example of line-by-line coding. The authors performed a line-by-line and open coding process without interfering with the raw data. During this process, the coders only broke the data into smaller parts to better understand the main picture of reviewers' street food experiences. For example, when a street foodie commented about his/her experience as such, "He took us on a tour where we could taste real, local authentic Thai street food. Almost no tourists around him explained to us the offered local food" (R8). In that case, the coders break it such as "real local authentic," "Thai street food," and "local food," as depicted in Table 1. According to Charmaz (2006), coders should select the most beneficial and logical codes during this step. The coders determined 212 opening codes that shortened the data. The second step of coding, axial coding, involved initial codes' occurrence into meaningful categories (Matteucci and Gnoth, 2017). This phase reduces the research data into a set of factors or themes (Creswell, 2007). In this phase, the coders are likely to identify street food experience components (Sihapit, 2018). As shown in Table 2, the coders gathered the line-by-line codes to clarify the street food experience's main components. This data analysis procedure led to selective coding, which included forming a conceptual framework of street food experience and combined groups obtained from the open and axial coding processes (Matteucci and Gnoth, 2017). Selective coding is the process that attempts to identify the main themes, as shown in Table 2. The authors reread all codes. As a result of this inspection, the coders brought all codes together and reached a consensus on determining the main themes. These themes were compared to current literature benefiting from naming the main

**Table 1.**  
An illustrative  
example of the  
line-by-line coding

| Online narrative (extracted from the Withlocals)   | Line-by-line coding   |
|--|---|
| <p>... He is everything you want and expect in a guide. Friendly, helpful, funny and very knowledgeable. I was very excited that we were heading outside the tourist area and eating in the local markets. Thank you, we had such an amazing afternoon together eating, laughing and learning all about Thai food and culture. . .</p> <p>... A smart and very friendly guy, open for new people. He took us on a tour where we could taste real local authentic Thai street food. Almost no tourists around he explained us the offered local food and gave us background information about it. . .</p> | <p>Friendly, helpful, funny, very knowledgeable, eating in the local markets, eating, laughing and learning all about Thai food, smart, open for new people, real local authentic Thai street food, background information about local food</p> |

**Table 2.**  
The coding process  
in practice

| Open coding (line-by-line coding)   | Axial coding   | Main themes (selective coding)   |
|---|--|--|
| <p>... habits of Thai people, locals' lives, religion of the city, teaching Thai phrases, Thai art, Thai culture, Thai customs, Thai traditions and the history and culture of the city background information about street foods, Bangkok's local food scene, cooking techniques, cooking tips, culinary customs, cultivation, processing, transportation, preparation, apportionment, mixture and balance within each Thai recipe, interesting facts about Thai food and the differences, journey of the recipes, recipes used for the food, street foods' origin, teaching them how to eat, the evolution of street food in Thailand and the history of certain dishes . . .</p> | <p>General local culture and local food culture as the sub-themes of local culture</p> | <p>Local culture that identifies the formation of street food experiences of daily local tours</p> |

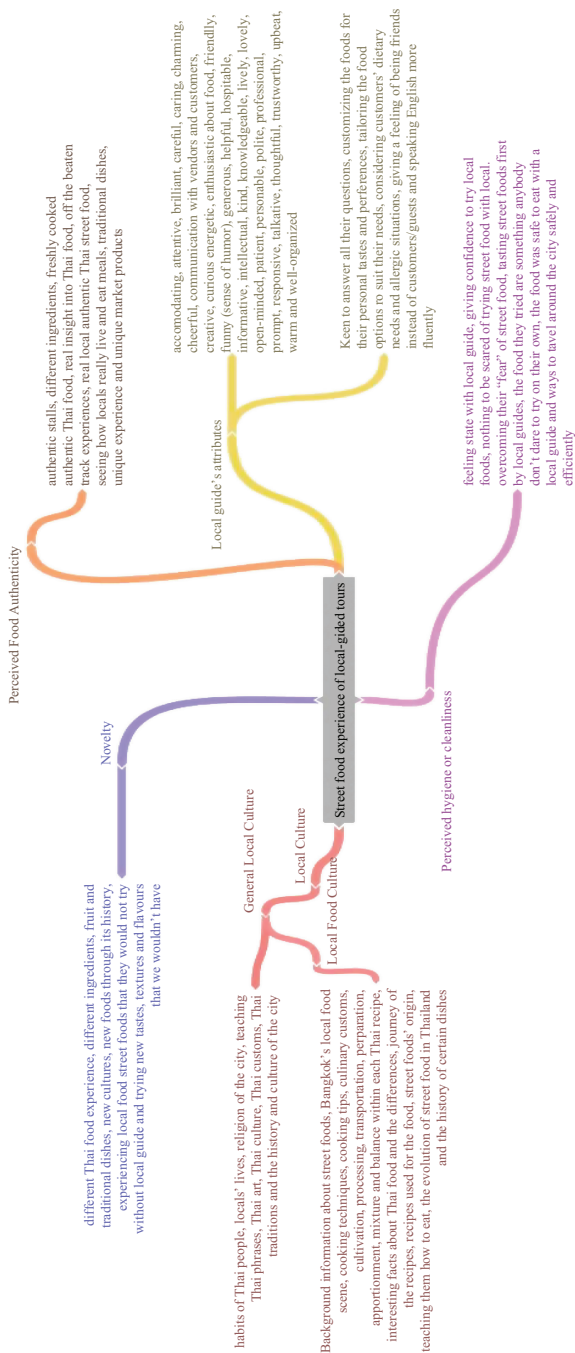
categories. To provide the findings' validity and reliability, we provided the street patrons' online reviews to guide the examination process and used their original reviews in the coding process (Chiovitti and Piran, 2003).

### Findings and discussion

The content analysis of the online reviews identified five components that embrace the street food experience: local guide's attributes, perceived food authenticity, local culture, perceived hygiene or cleanliness, and novelty (see Figure 2). The authors used short quotations of the data to demonstrate the components of the street food experience.

#### *Local guide's attributes*

Most reviews were focused on local guides' characteristics, and many tour members were seen local guides as accommodating, attentive, brilliant, careful, caring, charming, cheerful, communicative with vendors and customers, creative, curious, energetic, enthusiastic about food, friendly, funny (sense of humour), generous, helpful, hospitable, informative,



**Figure 2.** Components of street food experiences in local-guided tours



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intellectual, kind, knowledgeable, lively, lovely, open-minded, patient, personable, polite, professional, prompt, responsive, talkative, thoughtful, trustworthy, upbeat warm and well-organized. In total, two responses further evaluate this as follows:

We loved our guide—knowledgeable, fun, and friendly. We had a great tour that was personalized. (R31)

Friendly, kind, and willing to offer advice about the rest of your stay in Thailand. (R224)

4038

Besides, some reviewers suggested that local guides were keen to answer all their questions, customizing the foods for their tastes and preferences, tailoring the food options to suit their needs, considering customers' dietary needs and allergic situations, giving a feeling of being friends instead of customers/guests and speaking English more fluently. It was revealed that all these attributes enhanced their street food experience, leading to satisfaction from the services and destination. Concerning this aspect:

Everything we tried was delicious, and she customized the food options to cater to our tastes and preferences. (R15)

The farmer's market was amazing! She also made sure that my wife didn't eat any shrimp or mango since she is allergic. Very personal! Highly recommended! (R71)

She is knowledgeable and is super nice. Her English is very good at making street foods easier to learn. (R153)

Several researchers (e.g. [Ap and Wong, 2001](#); [Cohen, 1985](#); [Dahles, 2002](#)) emphasized that a local guide' characteristics such as informative, mentor, educator, hospitable and comfort are pivotal in guided tours to satisfy tour members from the destination and services bought. Furthermore, being knowledgeable about politics, economy, society and culture of the destination can provide tourists to get a better insight into the country ([Çetinkaya and Öter, 2016](#)). Since tour guides are seen as "ambassadors," "culture broker" or "information-giver" for tourists ([Holloway, 1981](#)), tour guides are expected to show their abilities and promote their attractions sincerely ([Ap and Wong, 2001](#)). In food or culinary tours, the role and attributes of guides are of paramount importance. Daily guided culinary tours are seen as pivotal for the destination since guides allow tour members to taste the regional cuisine by learning destination culture and tasting foods ([Seyitoğlu, 2020a](#)). Therefore, tourists participating in culinary tours want to be satisfied with tour guides' performance ([Caber et al., 2018](#)). [Cohen and Avieli \(2004\)](#) considered these tour guides as "culinary brokers," and their characteristics hereby are one of the critical determinants that enhance overall foodies' experience ([Seyitoğlu, 2020b](#)). Moreover, their attributes such as being communicative, professional and good relations with customers influence overall tourists' tour satisfaction ([Wong, 2001](#)).

#### *Perceived food authenticity*

Another essential component that identifies street food experience is food authenticity, and it is interpreted differently by street food tourists. Reviewers described this component as authentic stalls, different ingredients, freshly cooked authentic Thai food, a real insight into Thai food, off the beaten track experiences, real local authentic Thai street food, seeing how locals live and eat meals, traditional dishes, unique experience and unique market products. A total of four participants mentioned as follows:

It was great to go to a local market and try various seasonal fruits and freshly cooked authentic Thai food. (R64)

She brought us to great, authentic stalls, which opened our eyes to so many new Thai foods. (R97)

Food authenticity is a key element of the overall tourism-dining experience and involves tourists' participation in traditional local food cultures such as knowing foods, vending areas (street food market), ways of cooking and foods (Kim *et al.*, 2013, 2019). By doing so, travellers get knowledge of the traditions, culture and heritage of locals since it provides them with clues concerning locals eating habits, preparation of street foods and tasting behaviours (Chang *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, local ingredients, local people, street food vendors and local foods enhance tourists' authentic experience (Kim *et al.*, 2009). This sensory assessment enables food tourists' experience more authentic, genuine and real (Robinson and Getz, 2014).

Present studies (e.g. Gupta and Sajnani, 2019; Gupta *et al.*, 2019) suggest that tourists are motivated to try the cultural tastes of a destination and are inspired to engage real-life ways of the locals to acquire the authentic tourist experience. Their cultural and culinary experiences are impacted by their level of questing for authenticity (Ji *et al.*, 2016). As a significant part of the gastronomy experience, street foods are considered an authentic and unlike experience by international travellers (Tse and Crofts, 2005). Moreover, street foods reflect traditional local cultures with numerous kinds of authentic cuisines (Winarno and Allain, 1991). This perceived authenticity influences the overall tourist experience and behavioural intentions, such as word-of-mouth and intention to re-visit (Gupta and Duggal, 2020; Gupta and Sajnani, 2019). A recent study by Jeaheng and Han (2020) indicated that authenticity is considered the main attribute of Thai street foods that would impact overall tourist satisfaction. Thus, Thai street foods' authenticity is thought to increase the overall destination experience and increase destination attractiveness. Moreover, authenticity in the food culture of Thai is expected to increase and stimulate tourists' engagement with the destination (Lunchaprasith and Macleod, 2018).

### *Local culture*

In total, two critical aspects of the local culture were frequently mentioned, i.e. general local culture and local food culture. Habits of Thai people, locals' lives, the religion of the city, teaching Thai phrases, Thai art, Thai culture, Thai customs, Thai traditions and the history and culture of the city were major indicators of the general local culture of the destination. For example, two street foodies reviewed:

In addition to giving us tons of information on the food we enjoyed, he also shared lots of valuable insight into Thai culture, as well as tips for our stay (R182)

He is a wealth of knowledge about Thai history, customs, food, and so on. (R374)

Street food tourists also highlighted the role of the local food aspect. Background information about street foods, Bangkok's local food scene, cooking techniques, cooking tips, culinary customs, cultivation, processing, transportation, preparation, apportionment, mixture and balance within each Thai recipe, interesting facts about Thai food and the differences, the journey of the recipes, recipes used for food, street foods' origin, teaching them how to eat, the evolution of street food in Thailand and the history of certain dishes were mostly mentioned indicators of the local culture of foods. For instance, three reviewers mentioned:

He explained to us the offered local food gave us background information about street foods appetizers, small and large mains, fruits, sweets, a perfect overview to get started with Thai street food. (R8)

As a chef, she has a deep knowledge and appreciation for all the food and meals on display exotic (to us) fruits and showed us how to eat them. (R86)

We not only learned about the typical Thai street food dishes but also the journey of the recipes that lead to the development of each dish. (R202)

The local culture is regarded as a vital attraction for a memorable cultural tourism experience (Cetin and Bilgihan, 2016). Furthermore, food tourists desire to taste not only local foods of a destination but also experience culture, traditions, new knowledge on locality, local people lifestyles, history of locals and unfamiliar cultures through experiencing street foods (Jeaheng and Han, 2020; Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-auksorn, 2017). Street foods generally are a key attraction of a destination that reflects local people, society and culture (Henderson *et al.*, 2012). Thus, street foods are inextricably linked to knowledge of the local culture of a destination. Also, local guided tours are the best way to explore the destination's local cultural attributes (Özdemir and Yolal, 2017; Seyitoğlu, 2020a). Our findings similarly highlighted that they could not get a variety of knowledge on locals' lives, cultures, history and art without a local guide.

#### *Perceived hygiene or cleanliness*

Perceived hygiene or cleanliness is a major issue that reviewers addressed, and it was not only related to using these foods regarding its cleanliness and hygienic aspects but also perceive them as safe when visiting areas offering street foods. To provide tourists with hygiene or cleanliness, local guides were taking them to clean settings, considering tourists' health condition (i.e. allergic) and trying street foods first before customers consume. Interpretive indicators of perceived hygiene or cleanliness emphasized by reviewers are listed as feeling safe with a local guide, giving the confidence to try local foods, nothing to be scared of trying street foods with local, overcoming their "fear" of street food, tasting street foods first by local guides, the food they tried is something anybody does not dare to try on their own, the food was safe to eat with a local guide and ways to travel around the city safely and efficiently. Two reviewers commented:

There is nothing about the guide, but the food we tried is something you don't dare to try on your own. (R193)

She gave us tips on what to look for and how to choose wisely. She is a genuinely lovely lady, enthusiastic, and knows exactly where to go. Be warned though. . . do not eat anything beforehand! Overcoming street food hang-up with her. (R262)

Street foods are sold by vendors and hawkers in the streets or some local public areas and prepared at home or food outlets or stalls to be offered to tourists for consumption in these areas (Rane, 2011). Consumers perceive street foods are risky, and this perceived risk influences their behavioural intention (Choi *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, the purchase decision depends on reducing perceived risk (Gupta *et al.*, 2018). To overcome this issue, street foods' perceived hygiene or cleanliness can be beneficial for travellers (Arvanitoyannis and Krystallis, 2005). Local guides who know and experience street foods in a hygienic setting could be helpful for them.

#### *Novelty*

Interpretive indicators for the pursuit of novelty were described as "different Thai food experience," "different ingredients, fruit and traditional dishes," "new cultures," "new foods through its history," "experiencing local food street foods that they would not try without a local guide" and "trying new tastes, textures and flavours that we would not have." A review by R94 mentioned: "We had much new taste and food that we have never tried before" and R202 commented: "We learned about the typical Thai street food dishes and journey of the recipes that lead to the development of each dish as well as a history of each ingredient."

According to Sutton (2001), no food experience cannot be the "source of distinction, discourse and hence memory" whether a cue of novelty does not exist (p. 199). Hence, the

notion of novelty-in-food tourism literature refers to experience a portion of food for the first time (Stone *et al.*, 2018). Seeking novelty for food tourists is the principal motive for tasting novel flavours outside their daily lives (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Dernalp Çanakçı and Birdir, 2020) to create a memorable tourist experience at the destination (Sthapit, 2017). In particular, learning different cultures, try new foods and seeking novel destination offerings are the vital indicators of questing for novelty for food tourists that can positively be related to food consumption and word-of-mouth (Ji *et al.*, 2016). As a cognitive aspect of epistemic value, the pursuit of novelty for street foods can provide tourists to explore the history and tradition of the destination. It would satisfy travellers' curiosity or enable a closer look into the street foods in their origin (Yeap *et al.*, 2019). In sum, seeking novelty is considered the primary motive for street food tourists to engage in a destination in detail.

### Conclusion and discussion

Local guiding service is much more prevalent among specific tourists. Furthermore, it receives academic attention from tourism and hospitality scholars; however, their experiences at the tours are not well clarified. Most of this research mainly focuses on the daily tour activities offered on such platforms (Melián-González *et al.*, 2019). To fill this gap, this research has covered the experiential aspect of guiding service in the context of street food. In total, five components of the street food experience have occurred in this study: a local guide's attributes, perceived food authenticity, local culture, perceived hygiene or cleanliness and novelty.

#### *Theoretical implications*

From a theoretical standpoint, this research has contributed to the street food experience and the sharing economy literature to elucidate uncultivated points for forthcoming research regarding local-guided tours' street food experiences. The findings revealed that travellers participating in street food tours offered in the meal-sharing economy seek different experiences in the destination. Whilst prior studies have investigated street foodies' experience dimensions, preferences and attitudes (Gupta and Duggal, 2020; Gupta *et al.*, 2018, 2019) and which tour activities are offered in the sharing economy platforms (Melián-González *et al.*, 2019), to the knowledge of the authors, this is the first research that has explored components of street food experiences of local-guided tours. Furthermore, when considering that the usage of meal-sharing experiences of travellers will increase in the future and participants will express their experiences in these sites (Gursoy, 2018), this is timely research to the relevant literature.

Components such as local guide's attributes, perceived food authenticity, local culture, perceived hygiene or cleanliness and novelty are major fragments of the street food experience. The reviewers emphasized that Thai street foods are unique and authentic and can be reached this experience via a local guide. This perceived authenticity will inspire tourists who desire to know the destination and local culture. Furthermore, local guiding performance will enhance their experience during the tour and try new local street foods. Guiding impacts on overall tourist satisfaction (Huang *et al.*, 2010). Local guides' attributes, perceived food authenticity, local culture and novelty components agree with previous studies' findings (Gupta *et al.*, 2018, 2019; Jeaheng and Han, 2020; Seyitoğlu, 2020a, b; Sthapit, 2017). However, 'perceived hygiene or cleanliness' components are not explored in prior studies because this was provided with the help of local guides, and participants trust them due to that they know these street foods. This component will be beneficial for further studies to examine street food experiences of local-guided tours.

#### *Managerial and practical implications*

The research findings have significant implications for destination planners and local guides. As a micro-entrepreneurship, the meal-sharing economy creates employment and generates

income for locals in urban destinations (Zmysłony *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, these platforms enable to make close interaction between travellers and local guides. Considering the role of tourism's contribution to mutual understanding and respect between peoples and societies (UNWTO, 2020), this interaction may help increase mutual understanding between the two sides. Thus, destination managers can promote the meal-sharing economy platforms to residents to better offer their knowledge to international travellers who visit their destination. By doing so, locals can get extra income from these services, and tourism and hospitality-based services can help to decrease poverty. This principle is mainly associated with sustainable tourism development in the destination. In such platforms, there is no need for a huge initial capital, thus helping locals to enter into these services becomes extremely easy. Therefore, residents who have some knowledge about the destination and its attractions can benefit from these services due to the destination practitioners' and destination management organization's (DMO) promotional efforts. Destination planners should develop some strategies to promote these areas reciprocally. For instance, cleanliness and hygiene are important in the street food markets, and a local guide helps tourists taste these foods for a reasonable amount of money.

A memorable tourism experience is crucial for a long-term marketing strategy in creating loyal travellers for the destination and its services (Seyfi *et al.*, 2020). At this point, activities offered for travellers can be a source of memorable aspects of their experience. Furthermore, when considering the role of local food tours offered in meal-sharing economy platforms, these tours can enhance memorable experiences of travellers in the destination. Finally, street foods can be viewed as the essential part of forming destination image and word of mouth (Lee *et al.*, 2020). Destination planners thus can provide vendors to sell their street foods in a safe, hygienic and clean place. This can enhance destination image and help to mention the destination on social platforms or their surroundings.

The research findings indicated that local guides' attributes are essential during the tours and a level of satisfaction. The local guides in these platforms are offered to show their positive reactions to travellers since they are seen as culinary breakers for tourists. Furthermore, reviewers desired to see unexplored parts of the destination and feel a sense of authenticity, novelty and safety. These components are vital for creating a positive experience. Thus, service providers fulfil these needs for travellers and can improve themselves in terms of gaining more knowledge of the local culture.

Recently, many studies have highlighted the negative effects of the current global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic on sharing economy activities (e.g. Hossain, 2021). Correspondingly, Mont *et al.* (2020) highlighted the importance of leveraging the benefits of the sharing economy in the era of global crises (e.g. COVID-19, climate crisis, economic uncertainty and loss of social connectedness) and hence suggested further studies to examine the way of achieving benefits of sharing economy. By responding to Mont *et al.*'s (2020) suggestions, this study suggest that encouraging the guided meal-sharing activities may ensure/or sustain travellers' positive attitudes and intentions during COVID-19. Because local guides can become a tool in preventing the COVID-19 infection since street foods and their vendors in the meal-sharing tour plan can be evaluated and rated first by local guides in terms of COVID-19 measures. Thereby, travellers can easily enjoy street foods without having any fear of infection.

#### *Limitations and future research directions*

This study has few limitations related to the street food experiences, which provide important research directions for future studies. First, the findings obtained from this research are the destination and only-one activity-specific. Future research can investigate street food experiences in other destinations offering street foods such as Tokyo, Istanbul or Hong Kong. Furthermore, this study only focused on street food tours; other tour activities (namely food, culture or heritage, and city tours) available in the sharing economy can also be investigated.

Second, this study explored the main components of the street food experience and is neglected to understand participants' motivations for these tours. Future research can examine local guides and international travellers' motivational factors to participate in these platforms. Moreover, we focused only on the travellers' perspectives. Thus, local guides', as a service provider, entrepreneurship feature also can be examined in the future since entrepreneurship in the sharing economy is a major issue that should be found out (Alrawadieh and Alrawadieh, 2018).

Third, this research adopted a qualitative method, and content analysis was applied to research data. Future research can examine the relationship between street food quality, service providers' quality, street food experience, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Finally, these platforms are the informal economy in the literature (Williams and Horodnic, 2017), and tax regulation is needed. Future studies can offer destinations a model that is regulated to take taxes from these platforms or locals.

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#### About the authors

Dr Ibrahim Cifci is an assistant professor in the Department of Tourism Management at Istanbul University, Turkey. He obtained his Ph.D. and master's degree in Tourism Management (Turkey). He specializes in tourism studies. His research interests include molecular gastronomy, sustainable tourism and management in tourism. Ibrahim Cifci is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: [ibrahim.cifci@istanbul.edu.tr](mailto:ibrahim.cifci@istanbul.edu.tr)

Dr Ozan Atsız holds a PhD degree and master's degree in Tourism Management (Turkey). Currently he lectures in the Faculty of Tourism at Yozgat Bozok University. His research interests include destination marketing, food experience and length of stay of tourists.

Dr Vikas Gupta is an alumnus of Institute of Hotel Management, Gwalior, MP and holds Master degree in Tourism Management and Bachelor degree in Hospitality and Hotel Administration. He also holds a Diploma in Training and Development from Indian Society for Training and Development. Apart from his academic credentials he possesses exemplary leadership and training skills, making him a really sought after Professional especially in the fields of Food Production and Culinary Arts. He has rich and extensive experience of teaching for more than seven years in both India and abroad with renowned names such as Cafe' Coffee Day, Fiji National University, Amity University and Various Central and State IHM's in India. He is presently working with Amity University, Noida, UP, as an Assistant Professor in the fields of Hospitality. He also has a very good research background with publications in various SCOPUS indexed Emerald Journals i.e. International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Tourism Review, British Food Journal, International Journal of Tourism Cities and Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes. He has also attended and presented research papers in various National and International conferences. He is also a part of various research projects at National Level.

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