

Factors Influencing Tourists' Perception towards Bangladeshi Foods

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Abstract

Identification of tourists' perception regarding the foods of a destination and the pivotal factors those outline and influence their perceptions can help the Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and related stakeholders to shape market driven offerings and to augment positive brand image of that destination. Notwithstanding having great potential of food tourism, there is no study exists in Bangladesh that exclusively attempted to cover this area. Moreover, none of the study in Bangladesh principally tried yet to discover tourists' perception towards Bangladeshi foods (BF). Consequently, this study was a step to fulfill the recognized gaps as well as, an initiative to append empirical findings in the existing literature of food tourism. Both exploratory (desk research and literature review) and descriptive (survey method) research designs were utilized to conduct the current study. Probabilistic Stratified Random Sampling (SRS) technique was used to gather the primary data from 520 sample respondents and the data were collected from 7 popular tourist destinations located at the 4 different regions of Bangladesh. Descriptive statistics (Frequency distribution) and multivariate interdependence data analysis technique (factor analysis) were used to analyze the collected data. Although, this study found that tourists have positive perception towards BF however, the present study clarified and recommends that scope are still available to enhance it further. This study also discovered that tourists' perception regarding BF is formed and influenced by the 4 principal factors labeled as Food diversity representing Bangladeshi culture, Image of the Bangladeshi foods, Unique characteristics of the Bangladeshi foods, and Good value for money. DMOs and related stakeholders can use this study as a reference to develop food tourism in Bangladesh and to enhance the overall brand image of Bangladesh. Moreover, this study also contributes to the food tourism literature and minimizes the known literature gap for developing countries.

Keywords: Food Tourism, Bangladeshi Foods, Perception, Food Culture, and Destination Brand Image

1. Introduction

Travel and tourism is one of the fastest growing industries (Dwyer and Spurr, 2010) and day by day, it is contributing more and more to the world economy (WTTC, 2016a). Following the global trends, in the recent years, the travel and tourism industry has also recorded as one of the largest growing industries for Bangladesh (WTTC, 2016b; Hassan et al., 2013). Major tourist attractions of Bangladesh covered numerous natural, cultural, and historical attractions including three United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage sites (UNESCO, 2016). Although, many developing countries like Bangladesh faced a high growth in their travel and tourism sector over the last two decades (Hassan et al., 2013), the scenario was quite different for Bangladesh. Surprisingly, in spite of passing 44 years after liberation, Bangladesh is far behind to get a competitive position and to achieve reasonable market share in travel and tourism not only globally but also in the Asia Pacific and South Asia regions (World Economic Forum, 2015). Despite of having all the potential to flourish, tourism in Bangladesh has been growing at a very slow rate however last couples of years are exception. In the recent years, this emerging industry has started to contribute significantly to the national economy of Bangladesh (WTTC, 2016b). According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) in 2015, the total contribution of Travel and Tourism to the national GDP of Bangladesh was BDT 809.6bn (4.7% of the total GDP) and was forecasted to rise by 6.4% per annum to BDT 1,596.0bn (5% of the total GDP) in 2026 (WTTC, 2016b). However, to keep the growth rate as forecasted, Bangladesh needs to focus on new forms of tourism to attract both international and domestic tourists as the typical natural, cultural, and historical attractions are facing fierce competition in the global tourism market.

Food Tourism (FT) has grown considerably in recent years and has also become one of the most dynamic and creative segments of tourism. Both Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and tourism stakeholders are now well aware about the importance of gastronomy in order to diversify their offerings as well as, to stimulate their local, regional, and national economic development (UNWTO, 2012). FT defined as tourists' food related activities at the destination such as - dining, purchasing local foods, and experiencing the unique characteristics of food-producing region (Richards, 2002). According to Douglas and Derret (2001:2019), "culinary tourist is defined as the special interest tourist whose major activities at the destination are food-related and for whom food tourism is an important, if not primary, reason influencing his travel behaviour". The

relationship between food and tourism also provide a good ground for local economic development (UNWTO, 2012). Moreover, good food experiences at a destination also help to create and enhance positive destination brand image thus supports to market the destination more effectively as well as, to ornament the local culture to attract more tourists (OECD, 2009; Hjalager & Richards, 2002). Therefore, cuisine of a specific destination is an utmost important aspect to form the quality of tourists' holiday experiences. Apart from this, brand image of a destination also significantly depends on the local food culture. There are many places around the world which are extremely popular not only for its attractions but also for its rich food culture. According to UNWTO (2012), around the world, brand images of many influential destinations are related with varying levels of intensity to gastronomy values. By way of example, it is possible to give a non-exhaustive list that includes Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Belgium, Portugal, USA, Brazil, Peru, Mexico, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, Chile, Malaysia, Japan, Indonesia, China, and Singapore (UNWTO, 2012). Moreover, in 2010, the Mediterranean diet of Spain, Greece, Italy, and Morocco were included in the UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity (UNWTO, 2012). Therefore, identification of tourists' perception regarding the foods of a destination along with other FT development factors will certainly help the DMOs and related stakeholders to reshaping their offerings as well as, will also provide them a strong ground to work on to enhance the positive brand image of that destination. Consequently, it will also help to attract large number of tourists to that destination.

Eating is always a physiological need which requires immediate fulfillment whether one is at home or visiting a destination. The consumption of diverse food in travel is unique because it occurs outside the regular environment of visitors and tourists (Mak, Lumbers, & Eves, 2012). On the other hand, recent research has found that, tourists spend about 40% of their budget on food when they are travelling a destination (Boyne, Williams, & Hall, 2002). According to the Restaurant & Foodservice Market Research Handbook, 50% of the restaurants' revenue usually generated by travelers (Graziani, 2003). Moreover, different studies proved that there is mutual benefit relationship exist between the rich food culture and the tourism industry development at a destination. Reynolds (1993) asserts that food, like other elements of travel such as transportation, accommodation, activities, and attractions plays an essential role in forming tourists' travel experiences. Therefore, FT can be a new dimension to focus and work on for the DMOs and related stakeholders to expand the travel and tourism market of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a country full with vast range of unique and diversified foods and rich food culture. In its long history, unique tradition, and enriched culture, food is a very significant component. Hence, DMOs and related stakeholders can take most prospective steps for the development of FT in Bangladesh. Moreover, many influential texts on food and tourism covered that, perceptions regarding foods is the key reason to travel and to visit a specific destination (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009) and some researchers claimed that food tourism will become even more important in coming future (Steinmetz, 2010). So, an investigation on tourists' perception towards Bangladeshi foods (BF) is a very rational necessity of the current time.

The availability of local unique foods is vital for developing and promoting tourism destination to global arena. Unique food experiences at a destination not only attract large number of tourists but also help to establish the destination as a brand. Many developed and developing countries have already realized the importance of food for attracting more tourists to experience their attractions and destinations (George & Maria, 2003). Moreover, several studies on food tourism have already been conducted by the well known scholars, researchers, and national tourism bodies in many developed and developing economies. For example, Euro-toques in Europe: 3500 artisan cooks in defense of "eating well" by Pedro Subijana, Food and the tourism experience: study on Netherlands by Greg Richards, Azerbaijan: Aromas and tastes of the East with a European twist by Larisa Javansir, Brazil and its Paths of Flavor by Pedro Hoffman, The Egyptian food tourism experience by Egyptian Tourism Authority, Food and wine tourism in Georgia by Georgia national tourism administration, Gastronomic Tourism in Korea: Globalizing Hansik by Jeon Young-Chan, A taste of Moscow by Sergey Shipico (UNWTO, 2012). Although, some studies have already conducted on price, quality, hygiene, and culture of BF however, it is clearly evident that, there is no study exists in Bangladesh that exclusively tried to cover food tourism or food and tourism together. Moreover, none of the study in Bangladesh principally tried yet to discover the tourists' perception towards BF. In addition, knowing the current state of perception of tourists' towards BF will be also helpful to develop and enhance the positive image of Bangladesh to the global tourism market. Therefore, this study was a step to fulfil the identified gaps as well as an initiative to add empirical findings in the existing literature of food tourism under the context of Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010: 150), "a motivated person is ready to act. How the person acts is influenced by his or her own perception of the situation". Therefore, perception means how people think about something. People can form different perceptions of same stimulus. Moreover, Kotler and Keller (2009: 163) stated that "perceptions are more important than the reality, as it is perceptions that will affect consumers' actual behaviour". On the other hand, positive perception regarding something can create advantageous position in the

market and vice versa. Solomon, Marshall, and Stuart (2000) stated that perception is the process by which people select, organize, and interpret information from the outside world. People receive information in the form of sensations by their sensory receptors: eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and fingers. Afterwards, people interpret the sensations by their knowledge and past experiences. Therefore, perception depends not only on the physical stimuli, but also on the stimuli's relationship to the surroundings filed and on conditions within each of us.

Food is of high significance because food has great impact on tourists and it influences tourists' destination selection process, as the most popular destinations have positive image regarding their foods in the tourists' mind (Bonn et al., 2005). Food industry has considered as one of the challenging industries of the world. Moreover, to identify attitudes and perceptions regarding food is very complex and the underlying reasons are many. Other studies supported that, now people of many countries eat away from their home and the spending on foods is increasing day by day (Boyne, Williams, & Hall, 2002; Graziani, 2003). Bangladesh is no different from this. With urbanization and modern outlook, in Bangladesh, now-a-days eating different cuisines have become the hobby of the people rather than a mere means to stay alive. Therefore, Food obviously plays a major role in tourism thus, services related to food are very crucial to cater the tourism market properly. On the other hand, consumer's attitude towards a specific food influences his/her food choice and acceptability. Apart from the attitude, the required and preferred food items at a destination also vastly depend on the cultural and geographical background of the guests (MacDonald, 1997).

Due to increasingly demanding, divers, and individualistic patterns of behavior; measuring tourists' perception towards food is a challenging topic (Tuncalp, 1973). Tourists' perception regarding food depends on many factors and the choice of foods generally encompasses by variety of influences including personal taste, perceptions towards value, functional needs, symbolic interaction, as well as social and cultural factors (Marshall, 1995). Moreover, one of the major factors that affect our food choices and preferences is our biological reactions results from consuming the food. During food consumption, the brain receives different sensory inputs (visual, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, or trigeminal) and information from physiologically distinct sensory modes then integrated in the final sensory perception (Prescott 2004; Small & Prescott 2005). Such reactions are related to the perception of sensory modalities and physiological post digestive effects. For example, how we perceive some of the basic tastes, such as our preference for sweet or rejection of bitter tastes mostly predetermined (Drewnowski, 1997).

Image of a food also influenced consumers' perception towards that food. Liljander et al. (2009) revealed that, food image influence consumers' perception. One of the prime elements which influence consumers' perception towards a food is the quality. Moreover, Food quality of a destination not only assists to build consumers' perception but also helps to construct and enhance the image of that destination. Worldwide, there are many destinations available which are famous only for its unique foods (UNWTO, 2012). On the other hand, food quality depends on many crucial elements. One of the elements is ingredients from which food is being prepared. A Food which made from fresh ingredients is contains high quality as well as, create strong positive perception in the mind of consumers. Shaharudin, Ismail, Mansor, Elias, Jalil, & Omar (2011) clarified that food quality is becoming a crucial factor that significantly affects consumers. In addition, presentation of foods also played a vital role in the mind of tourists whilst they visit any destination. Namkung et al. (2007) argue that, food presentation is an important component that constitutes food quality and notably affects the appetite of tourists and their perceptions to food quality. This is especially applicable for local foods of a destination where to stimulate the consumers demand, more lucrative presentation of them are utmost necessary compare with other kinds of non local foods. Supportively, Johnson (2016) states that people are captivated by the appearance of the foods and love to eat them.

According to Whitehall, Kerkhoven, Freeling and Villarion (2006) fresh food is relatively a recent phenomenon in parallel with the consumers' modern growing awareness of nutrition, food quality, and healthy lifestyle. Therefore, it is an important variable need to be learned by all the parties who are involved in the food industries to satisfy the needs and wants of their target consumers. In addition to fresh foods, producers also need to maintain standard hygiene of their foods. Standard hygiene of foods not only ensures positive perception but also increase the safety and security concern in the consumers' mind. Today, tourists demand better hygiene food environment at a destination because eating safe food will allow them not only to stay away from food-borne illness during their visit but also will support them to enjoy the destination most (Miles, Braxton & Frewer, 1999). The other important factor of forming positive perception towards food is price. Munusamy and Wong (2008) proved that there is a significant positive relationship between price and consumers' perception regarding foods. Consumers' perception towards the food would be negative if the price of the food is comparatively higher even if the quality of the food is good, made from fresh ingredients, and maintain proper hygiene. Supportively, previous studies stated that consumer intention is influenced by monetary cost (Grunert et al, 2004). Therefore, high price of the foods at a destination can deteriorate the image of the destination and can reduce the level of tourists' satisfaction.

Food varied from culture to culture and this cultural variation gives the food image of uniqueness.

However, uniqueness of a food is mainly determined by the consumers who consume that. Mattiacci and Vignali (2004) highlighted that, for consumers, unique food products seem to have a distinctive and superior quality with respect to the general ones thus producers can position their unique food products in premium price range and gain a higher profit margin. Similarly, Favalli, Skov, and Byrne (2013:177) stated that, "through unique food products consumers attempt to differentiate themselves with qualitative aspects, for example - organic food consumption, veganism, vegetarianism and cultural identification and ethnocentrism (Chambers, Lobb, Butler, Harvey, & Bruce Traill, 2007; Fandos & Flavian, 2006; Fischler, 1988)". Moreover, Food characteristics (chemical and nutritional compositions, physical structure, and properties etc.); consumer characteristics (physiological, demographic, behavioral, psychological etc.); consumers' environment (family and cultural habits, religion, education, fashion, price, or convenience etc.) also influence consumers' perception to accept or reject a food (Shepherd 1989; Shepherd & Sparks 1994). Other factors that also have considerable effect on consumers' perception towards food are flavor, taste, and deliciousness. In addition, historical and cultural value, variety of street foods at tourist destinations, regional variation in foods, and memorial significance also play vital role in creating positive perception regarding foods in tourists' mind (UNWTO, 2012). On the other hand, other scholars suggested that, branding for food tourism related with couple of indicators such as- unique and distinctive style of cooking, food and food quality, advertisement, payment (prices and costs), regional condition, historical and cultural aspect of the region, and people skill for delivering services (Mirtaghiyan et al., 2013).

3. Aim and Objectives

Considering the earlier discussion and based on the literature review, the main aim of this study was set to find out the salient beliefs of tourists towards the BF. Moreover, this study also tried to cover the following specific objectives:

- To identify the principal factors those influence tourists' perception towards the BF.
- Based on the findings draw conclusion and formulate recommendations about how to build and enhance tourists' positive perception regarding BF consequently, which will also support to develop FT in Bangladesh.

4. Methodology

Exploratory research design is useful for isolate key variables and their relationships for further examination, gain more insights for developing an approach to the problem, and establishing priorities for future research (Malhotra & Dash, 2011:72). Therefore, at the initial level of the research, exploratory research design was followed by conducting desk research and by reviewing related literature covering the topics regarding consumers' attitudes and perception towards foods and food tourism of different countries, consumers' food preference and food choices, and their purchase intentions to find out pertinent variables that are suitable to conduct the current study. Moreover, due to having fundamental similarity, Alibabic, Jokic, Mujic, Rudic, Bajramovic and Jukic (2011), Bilgic and Yuksel (2012), Jaafar, Lalp and Mohamed (2013), and Vabo and Hansen (2014) studies were principally considered for the identification of the related variables to carry out the current research. On the other hand, Trochim and Land (1982) argue that quantitative research design act as the glue that holds the whole research project together. Moreover, Descriptive research is useful to determine the perceptions of product characteristics and to determine the degree to which variables are associated (Malhotra & Dash, 2011:74). Therefore, following the exploratory research phase, the current study followed single cross-sectional descriptive research design (survey method) to collect the primary data from the sample respondents.

Bangladesh, a country with several popular destinations located in different regions and each of these destinations and regions has some unique food culture. For the data collection purpose, this study considered four important tourist regions and couple of most popular tourist destinations situated within these regions. From south-eastern region, Cox's Bazar and Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bandarban, Rangamati, and Khagrachari) were considered as, Cox's Bazar is famous for its rich sea food culture, and Chittagong Hill Tracts have long reputation for its tribal and ethnic foods. From southern part, Kuakata was considered since, it is well known to all for its famous long range of dry fishes and sea foods. Sylhet was considered from north-eastern part of the country due to having the reputation for its exclusive tea and distinctive food nature. Finally, north Bengal which is very popular among fruit lovers for its large range of delicious fruits was considered for data collection from northern part of the country. The target population of this study was the tourists (excluding the day visitors) who were in the aforementioned popular tourist destinations as part of their leisure, recreation, and holidays; VFR; business and professional, and/or other tourism purposes during the 8.5 weeks (60 days) data collection period. The sampling frame of this study was consists of receptions, lobbies, lounges, and resting places in the hotels, resorts, and lodges; restaurants and cafes; and the main tourist spots in the Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Rangamati, Khagrachari, Kuakata, Sylhet, and North Bengal.

To ensure every respondent in the population had the equal chance to be selected as a sample, and to ensure population representative sample, probabilistic Stratified Random Sampling (SRS) has been used as the

sampling technique. To ensure SRS sampling, every 10th respondent were was present at the receptions, lobbies, and resting places in the hotels, resorts, and lodges; restaurants and cafes, or passing the specified points in the main tourists spots (identified in the sample frame) was approached for data collection. Further, if the respondents were found eligible (over 18 years of age) and provided their consent to participate in the study, field workers forwarded the survey questionnaire to them and collected the data. Only 130 sample respondents were covered from each region because of limited budget and short time and the total sample size of this study was 520 including both male and female. Missing data of the questionnaires were replaced with the corresponding mean value. The survey questionnaire was consisted of two sections. First section covered the questions regarding the socio-demographic characteristics and it included the items named age, gender, occupation, income, and education. The second section of the questionnaire covered the questions to assess the perception of tourists towards BF. 17 identified variables relating to tourists' perception formation were presented in that section. A five point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree) was used in this section to collect the perception and attitudinal data. The Likert scale was used in this section as it is one of the most effective and popular scales for collecting perception and attitudinal data through direct approach (McLeod, 2008; Bortholomew, 2006). Structured (close-ended) questions have been used to collect the data.

Couple of data analysis methods were used to analyze the collected data by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. They provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures (Trochim, 2006). Therefore, at the initial level, Descriptive statistics (Frequency distribution analysis) were used to profile the respondents based on their socio-demographic characteristics. On the other hand, relationships among sets of many interrelated variables can be examined and represented in terms of a few underlying factors. Factor analysis is an interdependent technique in which an entire set of interdependent relationships is examined. Moreover, it is useful to identify underlying dimensions, or factors, that explain the correlations among a set of variables, and to identify a new, smaller set of uncorrelated variables to replace the original set of correlated variables in subsequent multivariate analysis (Malhorta & Dash, 2011: 588). Child (2006) clarified that, Factor analysis uses mathematical procedures for the simplification of interrelated measures to discover patterns in a set of variables. Therefore, following the descriptive statistics, the current study used one of the multivariate interdependence data analysis techniques – factor analysis to find out the important factors through which tourists' perception towards BF formed and influenced.

5. Data Analysis and Findings

5.1 Profile of the Respondents

Following table (Table 1) depicts the socio-demographic profile of the respondents. Respondents' Socio-demographic profile has been prepared based on their socio-demographic characteristics and by conducting descriptive statistics – frequency distribution analysis.

Table 1. Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Type	Frequency	Percentage
Male	284	54.62%	International	96	18.46%
Female	236	45.38%	Domestic	424	81.54%
Total	520	100%	Total	520	100%
Age structure			Profession		
18-30	124	23.84%	Student	66	12.69%
31-40	207	39.81%	Government sector	105	20.19%
41-50	96	18.46%	Corporate sector	187	35.96%
51-60	69	13.27%	Business	81	15.58%
Over 60	24	4.62%	Professionals	38	7.31%
Total	520	100%	Social worker	24	4.62%
Educational level			Free lancer	19	3.65%
Under SSC	23	4.42%	Total	520	100%
SSC	64	12.31%	Average monthly income (BDT)		
HSC	79	15.19%	Less than 20,000	88	16.92%
Undergraduate	189	36.35%	20,000-40,000	95	18.27%
Postgraduate	165	31.73%	40,000-60,000	136	26.15%
Total	520	100%	60,000-80,000	63	12.12%
			80,000-100,000	29	5.58%
			Above 100,000	109	20.96%
			Total	520	100%

A total of 520 respondents participated in this study. Among the respondents, 54.62% (284 respondents) were male and 45.38% (236 respondents) were female. Although, only 96 (18.46%) respondents were international tourists but it is not surprising for Bangladesh where tourism industry is principally dominated by domestic tourists (Amin, 2016). Data were collected from different age groups and the highest number of respondents (207 respondents) was found in the age group of 31-40 years (39.81%) following 124 respondents (the 2nd highest) in the age group of 18–30 years (23.84% of the total respondents). Therefore, it fairly reasonable to say that, tourism industry in Bangladesh, is mainly conquered by young to mid aged tourists also support the findings of Amin (2014) and Rahman and Shil (2012) studies. The present study also found that, most respondents are well educated as, 68.08% of the respondents (354 out of 520 respondents) were found either studying or have completed their undergraduate or postgraduate levels. Moreover, the present study found that 71.73% of the respondents are working either in government or corporate sectors or doing their own business. On the other hand, 38.27% respondents' (199 respondents) monthly average income is between BDT 40,000-80,000. Although, surprisingly this study found that 20.96% (the 2nd highest percentage) of the respondents' monthly average income is over BDT 100,000 however, it is important to remember that the presence of international tourists as respondents might be the underlying reason of this finding.

5.2 Perception Regarding BF

Following table (Table 2) depicts the respondents' scores given to the 17 identified variables to discover the perception of tourists towards BF.

Table 2. Respondents' Perception Scores

No.	Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
V1	Reasonable Price	520	3.5168	1.15307	1.330
V2	Quality Food	520	4.0178	1.22218	1.494
V3	Uniqueness of Food	520	3.4990	1.00618	1.012
V4	Delicious Food Items	520	3.4733	1.08735	1.182
V5	Nutritious Food	520	3.1386	1.19548	1.429
V6	Historical and Cultural Value	520	4.4515	1.26072	1.589
V7	Regional Variations	520	3.4653	1.26745	1.606
V8	Attract Foreigner	520	3.6832	1.24598	1.573
V9	Made from Fresh Ingredients	520	2.8317	1.23177	1.517
V10	Food is Traditional	520	3.2396	1.21336	1.472
V11	Flavored Food	520	3.3564	1.17332	1.377
V12	Paradise for Vegetarians	520	3.3089	1.27227	1.619
V13	Variety of Street Food	520	3.4851	1.23935	1.536
V14	Has Memorial Significance	520	4.1842	1.26450	1.599
V15	Try Repeatedly	520	3.1663	1.20846	1.460
V16	Represent the Country	520	4.4614	1.27670	1.630
V17	Positive Perception	520	4.2812	1.22962	1.426
	Valid N (list wise)	520			

Based on the responses from 520 respondents, the present study found that, out of the 17 identified variables only five (5) of the variables have the mean score greater than 4.00 ($M < 4.00$) and 11 of the variables scored between 3.00 to 4.00 ($3.00 < M < 4.00$) and only 1 variable has the score below 3 ($M < 3$). However, Pikkemaat (2004) critically argues that, perception variables' mean scores below 2.75 are interpreted as poor, scores between 2.75 to 3.25 indicate average, scores between 3.25 to 4.00 interpreted as good, and above score 4.00 is excellent. According to these criteria, for the 17 identified variables of the present study, five (5) of the variables (V2, V6, V14, V16, and V17) scored excellent ($M < 4.00$), 8 of the variables (V1, V3, V4, V7, V8, V11, V12, and V13) scored good ($3.25 \leq M \leq 4.00$), 3 of the variables (V5, V10, and V15) scored average ($2.75 \leq M \leq 3.25$), and only 1 variable (V9) scored poor ($M \leq 2.75$). However, among the 5 items that scored excellent, the top 3 items respective to tourists' perception measurement were BF represent the country ($M=4.46$), have historical and cultural value ($M=4.45$), and enjoy positive perception ($M=4.28$). On the other hand, the only variable that scored poor was BF not made from fresh ingredients ($M=2.83$).

5.3 Appropriateness of the Analysis

"Bartlett's test of sphericity is a test statistic used to examine the hypothesis that the variables are uncorrelated in the population. In other words, the population correlation matrix is an identity matrix; each variable correlates perfectly with itself ($r = 1$) but has no correlation with other variables ($r = 0$)" (Malhotra & Dash, 2011:590). Moreover, the test statistic for sphericity is based on the conversion of the correlation matrix's determinants to a chi-square and null hypothesis can be rejected if the value of the test statistic is large. Failure to reject the null

hypothesis will raise the question of the suitability of the factor analysis. Another useful statistic for confirming the suitability of the factor analysis is the Kaiser- Mayer- Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy. Malhotra and Dash (2011:592) stated that, “This index (KMO measure of sampling adequacy) compares the magnitudes of the observed correlation coefficients to the magnitudes of the partial correlation coefficients. Small values of the KMO statistic indicate that the correlations between pairs of variables cannot be explained by other variables and that factor analysis may not be appropriate. Generally, a value greater than 0.5 is desirable”. Following table (Table 3) represents the outputs of the KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity tests-

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.847
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3305.325
df	136	
Sig.	.000	

Table 3 clarifies the appropriateness of the factor analysis of the current study. According to the table 3, the null hypothesis, that the population correlation matrix is an identity matrix, is rejected by the Bartlett's test of sphericity. The approximate chi-square statistics is 3305.325 with 136 degrees of freedom, which is significant at the 0.05 level. Moreover, the value of the KMO statistic (0.847) is also large (>0.5). Therefore, factor analysis can be considered as an appropriate technique for analyzing the collected data further. To analyze the variables ranging from V1 to V17, factor analysis has been used for data reduction. This analysis helped to reveal the most important factors that influence tourists' perception towards BF.

5.4 Factor Analysis

Principle Component Analysis (PCA) is an approach to factor analysis where the total variance in the data is considered. Moreover, PCA is recommended when the primary concern is to determine the minimum number of factors that will account for maximum variance in the data for use in subsequent multivariate analysis. Therefore, for the current study, a PCA with varimax procedure has used to analyze the collected data. Varimax procedure is an orthogonal method that minimizes the number of variables with high loading on a factor, thereby enhancing the interpretability of the factors. Following table (Table 4) represents the output of the PCA with varimax procedure. It is important to remember that, among the identified 17 variables, 4 variables were dropped from the list because of having factor loading score lower than 0.5.

Table 4. Factor Analysis Result of Tourists' Perception towards BF

Component	Factor Loadings*				Communality**
	1	2	3	4	
Cronbach's Alpha (α)	0.850	0.936	0.769	0.710	
Historical and Cultural Value	.776				.607
Regional Variations	.757				.589
Represent the Country	.747				.623
Has Memorial Significance	.635				.519
Positive Perception		.957			.938
Attract Foreigner		.952			.934
Uniqueness of Food			.797		.664
Food is Delicious			.721		.559
Flavored Food			.662		.532
Nutritious Food			.561		.596
Quality Food			.555		.637
Made from Fresh Ingredients				.563	.504
Reasonable Price				.514	.502
Eigenvalues	5.476	1.926	1.845	1.185	
Percentage of total variance***	32.212	11.330	10.856	6.970	
Number of test measures	4	2	5	2	

Here,

*Factor loadings => 0.50

** Communality => 0.50

***Total variance Explained = 60.368%

In order to summarize the information contained in the original variables (17 variables for the current study), a smaller number of factors should be extracted. Although, there are several procedures are suggested and available to determine the number of factors however, the present study only considered two most prominent procedures (determination based on Eigenvalues and determination based on percentage of variance). According

to the determination of factors based on Eigenvalues, only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 would retain. An eigenvalue represents the amount of variance associated with the factor. Therefore, only factors with a variance greater than 1.0 are included. Factors with variance less than 1.0 are no better than a single variable, because, due to standardization, each individual variable has a variance of 1.0. Moreover, it is suggested that, if the number of variables is less than 20, this approach will result in a conservative number of factors. On the other hand, according to the number of factors determination based on percentage of variance, the number of factors extracted is determined so that the cumulative percentage of variance extracted by the factors reaches satisfactory level. Although, the satisfactory level varies problem to problem however, it is suggested that the factors extracted should account for at least 60 percent of the variance (Malhotra and Dash, 2011). Therefore, considering both the approaches, for the present study, 4 factors (see Table 4) have been extracted as eigenvalue was greater than 1.0 for each of the four factors as well as, 60.368 percent of cumulative percentage of variance extracted by these identified four factors.

5.5 Identified Factors and Discussion

Table 4 represents the factor loading scores of the 13 variables as rest of the 4 variables (V10, V 12, V13, and V15) were excluded from the list because of having the factor loading score lower than 0.5. The table also depicts the specific variables that are associated with each of the identified 4 factors and the Cronbach's alpha value for each factor. A high Cronbach's alpha value indicates good internal consistency of the items that labeled the respective factor. Moreover, Gliem and Gliem (2003) argue that, when Likert scale used in a study, it is imperative to calculate and report Cronbach's alpha coefficient for ensuring internal consistency of the items as well as to confirm reliability of the scale and measurement.

Factor 1 comprised by 4 items and these items are BF have historical and cultural value (V6), have regional variations (V7), they represent the country (V16), and have memorial significance (V14). Therefore, the factor 1 can be labeled as "*Food diversity representing Bangladeshi culture*". Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha value for this factor was 0.936 indicates the high internal consistency of the items as well as lower measurement error. Tourists taste the food of a destination to get the idea about the food culture of that destination. Present study reveals that, respondents perceive BF have historical and cultural value along with strong memorial significance. They also recognized that, BF varied from region to region in terms of taste and ingredients and the process used to prepare the food. Moreover, there is a strong perception among the respondents that, BF play a pivotal role of country branding thus further facilitates to represent the country to the world in wider extent. So, it is fairly reasonable to articulate that, Bangladeshi culture can be characterized by its food diversity. The study conducted by Ongosi, Gericke, Mbuthia, and Oelofse (2014) in Nairobi, Kenya also found that food diversity has significant impact on food perception. However, in case of Bangladesh, culture and food diversity found based on regions therefore, it is fairly justifiable to declare that, diversity of BF represent the culture as well.

The two items that form Factor 2 are, BF enjoy positive perception (V17) and they attract foreigners (V8). Moreover, these two items came up with great reliability by having Cronbach's alpha value of 0.936. Therefore, this factor can be labeled as "*Image of the Bangladeshi foods*". Many foreigners visit Bangladesh every year for different purposes and they are very much fascinated to taste different Bangladeshi cuisines during their visit. All of these indicate that BF image is very decent. Earlier study conducted by (Roy & Hoque, 2015) on the image of the Cox's Bazar beach as a tourist destination revealed that, the overall image of the Cox's Bazar principally depend on the local food culture of Cox's Bazar. Moreover, it is significantly important to increase the food image for developing positive perception towards the foods at a destination. In addition, positive food image also contributes to enhance the destination brand image. Lertputtarak (2012) conducted a study on the relationship among Destination Image, Food Image, and Revisiting Pattaya, Thailand and found that food image play a significant role on creating food perception and destination image.

Factor 3 comprised by 5 variables and these variables are uniqueness of BF (V3), BF are delicious (V4), flavored (V11), nutritious (V5), and are of good quality (V2). Therefore, the factor can be labeled as "*Unique characteristics of the Bangladeshi foods*". Moreover, this study found satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha value is 0.769) among the variables that formed the factor 3. The findings also support that, BF have rich characteristics, which is vital for building strong positive perception. Shepherd (1989) and Shepherd and Sparks (1994) clarified that, food characteristics (chemical and nutritional composition, physical structure and properties), consumer characteristics (genetic, age group, gender, physiological and psychological state), and consumers' environment (family and cultural habits, religion, education, fashion, price or convenience) influence consumers' decision to accept or reject a food. Moreover, Heldman (2004) argues that, acceptance of a food depends on whether that food responds according to consumer needs and the degree of satisfaction that food is able to provide. Therefore, sensory quality should be considered regarding food acceptance because, consumers seek food with certain sensory characteristic. Respondents of the present study mentioned that, BF are unique in nature, delicious to eat with satisfaction, and flavor of the food is unforgettable. Although, sometime the nutritious value and quality of the food are compromised due to preparing a food delicious and flavored however,

it is different in case of BF as respondents reported that BF are nutritious and good in quality. Thus, it is representing rich characteristics of BF.

The rest of the two variables that formed the factor 4 are BF are made from fresh ingredients (V9) and have reasonable price (V1). Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha value 0.710 showed the internal consistency of these two variables. This factor can be labeled as "Good value for money". Price of the food is a vital factor for building positive perception towards it. Ollila (2011) in his study clarified that, high food prices is a barrier to build positive image if food is perceived as expensive and the consumers are not willing to accept the higher prices. The present study found that respondents perceived BF can be obtained at reasonable price and it is made from fresh ingredients. Therefore, altogether it is an expression of the good value for money for the tourists whilst buying and consuming BF.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to find out the salient beliefs of tourists about the foods of Bangladesh. The present study reveals that, respondents strongly believed ($M > 4.0$) that BF have the competence to represent the country, have historical and cultural value, enjoy positive perception, and have memorial significance along with good quality. On the other hand, the present study also found that, respondents agreed ($3.25 \leq M \leq 4.0$) that BF have the capacity to attract foreign tourists, hold reasonable price, are unique and delicious, have rich flavor, and varies according to regions and cultures. Moreover, the study also found respondents' partly agreements ($3.00 \leq M \leq 3.25$) to BF are traditional, have good nutritious value, and tourists are ready to try repeatedly. Surprisingly, respondents' don't believe that BF made from fresh ingredients ($M < 3.0$) therefore, DMOs, local community, hotel and restaurant operators, and food suppliers need to work on this component to enhance the positive perception towards BF. However, considering all of the aforementioned findings and by consolidating them, it is fairly reasonable to conclude that tourists have strong positive perception regarding BF.

The first objective of this study was to identify the factors that influence the perception of tourists towards the BF and this study found four important factors to address the first objective. This study figured out that perception regarding BF are influenced by the factors named *Food diversity representing Bangladeshi culture*, *Image of the Bangladeshi foods*, *Unique characteristics of the Bangladeshi foods*, and *Good value for money*. For Bangladesh, the first factor '*Food diversity representing Bangladeshi culture*' comprised by historical and cultural value, regional variations, country representativeness, and memorial significance. The second factor, '*Image of the Bangladeshi foods*' is comprised by the positive perception and capacity to attract foreigners. Moreover, the third factor, '*Unique characteristics of the Bangladeshi foods*' is shaped by uniqueness, deliciousness, flavor, nutritious, and quality. Finally, the last factor, '*Good value for money*' is shaped by fresh ingredients and reasonable price of the food.

The second objective of this study was to draw conclusion and to formulate recommendations how to build and enhance tourists' positive perception regarding BF thus, will also support to develop FT in Bangladesh. The present study supports that although respondents showed positive perception towards BF however, scopes are still available to enhance it further. Among the 17 identified variables through which tourists' perception towards BF was formed, only five of the variables scored mean score over 4.0 out of a scale of 5. Therefore, DMOs, local communities, hotel and restaurant operators, and food suppliers need to work on the rest of the 12 components to enhance the positive perception towards BF. Moreover, knowledge and awareness regarding BF need to increase to domestic and international tourists in order to develop local food market and FT in Bangladesh. For improving knowledge and awareness about BF, companies and related stakeholders should perform informative and demand stimulating marketing strategies. In addition, to reduce consumers' doubts and cognitive dissonance regarding the adverse health effects of the foods, support should be taken from the scientific experts.

Country having FT potential must be conscious in developing their market offerings and marketing mix. Bangladesh, in spite of having high potential to develop FT has sheer lacking in this regard. The most important goals of BF producers and makers should be to demonstrate and educate tourists about their products, values and benefits they are providing, disseminating the information regarding the ingredients they are using, and addressing the corresponding health benefits to the consumers. Consequently, food producers and makers can increase their sales whilst helping tourists to take better decision as well as, by taking good care of them. Moreover, DMOs, hotel and restaurant operators, food suppliers, and food manufacturers need invest into research and development along with technical and scientific developments of their offerings. Proper plans should be taken and need to enforce to encourage FT in Bangladesh. Electronic and print media need to come forward to promote BF in national and international arena. In addition, as BF culture is very rich as well as, poses extensive variety therefore, Government, DMOs, and related stakeholders should come forward to promote the diversity of food culture of Bangladesh to the world through different effective media for attracting both domestic and international tourists. Consequently, these will ensure national economic development as well.

This research were only examined tourists' salient beliefs and factors affecting their perception towards

BF by collecting data only from 520 respondents from Cox's Bazar, Kuakata, Bandarban, Rangamati, Khagrachari, Sylhet and North Bengal region. Although, these destinations are some of the most popular tourist destinations in Bangladesh however, considering the importance of this kind of research, future research is suggested to cover other major destinations of Bangladesh with larger number of samples from all around the country including good representation of the foreign tourists. Moreover, from demand side, important future research topics should cover tourists' actual buying behaviour, buying and consumption process of BF. On the other hand, from supply side point, future interesting research topic would be the motivations of food manufacturers to develop local foods, the incentives they are giving to tourists to try local foods, and the marketing tactics they are using to stimulate the demand for BF. It would also be interesting to examine collaboration between food manufacturers and health professionals as their interrelationships might influence the development of BF and food tourism of Bangladesh in coming future.

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