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Key Determinants of Food Preparation Attributes in Staging Memorable Experiences: Perspectives of Hotel Managers in Western Kenya

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This exploratory research sought to identify important food preparation factors and attributes in staging memorable experiences. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 166 hotel managers drawn from 62 hotels in Western Kenya. Descriptive statistics, factor and regression analysis in SPSS were used to analyze data collected. A three-factor solution: food preparation process, food preparation benefit and food preparation input resulted. Implications of these results are discussed in light of the increasing demand for distinctive experiences in the hospitality and tourism industry.

KEYWORDS *key determinants, food preparation, experience, Western Kenya*

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INTRODUCTION

Through the centuries, food has defined nations and inspired travelers to seek out the world's finest epicurean delights (International Tourism Trade Fairs Association [ITTFa], 2011). Travelers are continuously traversing countries and patronizing various hospitality facilities, which offer food and beverage, in search of products that satisfy their individual needs. These needs range from nutritional (Blichfeldt & Therkelsen, 2010; Meler & Cerovic, 2003), social (Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Sims, 2009) to unique food experiences (Blichfeldt & Therkelsen, 2010; Henderson, 2009; Meler & Cerovic, 2003; Steinmetz, 2010). Guests bring with them different expectations and experience demands (Johns & Kivela, 2001), which hospitality businesses must strive to meet or exceed in order to remain viable. Today's hospitality visitors have become more adventurous and open to new experiences (Meler & Cerovic, 2003; Milman, 2009). Milman (2009, p. 383), in particular, noted that "goods and services are no longer enough for consumers, and the contemporary customer wants an experience to supplement or substitute for a traditional commodity." This makes it necessary for hospitality business operators to adopt varied approaches in providing unique experience. As a result, the basis of the hospitality economy is slightly shifting from service delivery to staging experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) that guests expect from a given hospitality facility.

Staging memorable experiences, however, require the adoption of new or existing hospitality product offerings, both tangible and intangible. It is against this background that this exploratory study sought to identify key food preparation determinants that can be used in staging food-based experience in hotels within Western Kenya. The term *staging food-based experience* has been used in this study to refer to the process of using goods and services to engage customers in a manner that creates memorable event. In this context, the article principally focuses on the food component with special reference to food preparation attributes in the hospitality establishments like hotels.

In order to identify key food preparation determinants in staging food-based experience, three research questions were explored:

- RQ1:* What food preparation attributes are perceived by hotel managers as important in staging food-based experience within hotels in Western Kenya?
- RQ2:* Which key food preparation factors do hotel managers in Western Kenya perceive as important in staging food-based experience?
- RQ3:* Is there a model that best describes the relationship between food preparations attributes and the identified key factors in staging food-based experience?

The significance of this research is that the food preparation factors identified, other than being used as a strategy to maximize guests experience for hospitality practitioners, can be employed in promotional initiatives of food related tourism. The model can be applied in other destinations to develop food related tourism especially in developing countries, which are striving to diversify their tourism products.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Food, Tourists, and Tourism

For the past years, food has found usage in several disciplines of tourism, including meeting tourists' biological and functional needs to eat, and in regional tourism promotion and marketing (Steinmetz, 2010). Studies in literature reveal a close relationship between food, tourists, and tourism (Henderson, 2004; Quan & Wang, 2004; Steinmetz, 2010). According to Zahari et al. (2009), a large proportion of tourists' experience is spent either consuming food and drink or deciding what and where to eat. Food plays an important role in tourist attraction, tourists' experience satisfaction, tourists' motivation, and tourists' pleasure and entertainment (Henderson, 2009; Y. G. Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Quan & Wang, 2004; Sims, 2009; Tikkanen, 2007; Zahari, Jalis, Zulfily, Radzi, & Othman, 2009). Several researchers have also considered food as one of the most important elements in tourists' destination choice and decision to travel (Y. H. Kim, Yuan, Goh, & Antun, 2009; Zahari et al., 2009). The increasing popularity of world food as a critical tourism component (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Hall & Sharples, 2003; Henderson, 2004, 2009; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Quan & Wang, 2004) is continually inspiring studies on food, hospitality and tourism. For a very long time, food has not been seriously considered for the role it plays in modeling food-based experience at a destination (Wolf, 2006). However, it is only recently that food has truly been recognized for the significant role it plays in the overall tourist experience (ITTFA, 2011). In this context, Wolf (2006) and ITTFA (2011) acknowledged the emergence of food as the only aspect of visitors' experience that still holds potential for further development in the global tourism industry.

Other arguments in the literature suggest that food in itself can impede tourism activities by affecting tourists' attitudes, their decisions and behaviors regarding consumption of certain foods (Gross & Brown, 2008; Tikkanen, 2007). Gross and Brown (2008), in particular, asserted that food can be a very powerful influence on feelings of involvement and place attachment thereby affecting tourists' attitudes. Religion, belief systems, ethnicity, geographical disparity, unfamiliarity, authenticity, and hygiene are some of the factors that can influence consumer attitudes towards certain foods (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Henderson, 2009; Griffith, 2006; Y. H. Kim et al., 2009). The

argument above calls for careful selection of food products to be offered by hospitality operations based on certain food preparation attributes. Griffith (2006) for instance considers food hygiene as a matter of significance that requires formal systems of regulation, inspection and control in order to build and retain tourist confidence. According to Henderson (2009), these hygiene procedures would assist in guaranteeing standards and prevention of food poisoning, outbreaks and diseases. This would, in turn, assure tourists of food safety in a given destination (Larsen, Brun, Ogaard, & Selstad, 2007), which would influence their behaviors and attitudes towards unfamiliar foods. As such, perceptions of food as a central element in motivating tourists to travel permeate many influential texts on food and tourism (e.g., Henderson, 2009; Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Y. G. Kim et al., 2009; Kivela & Crofts, 2006). For example, Y. H. Kim et al. (2009, p. 54) asserted that “the desire to travel and taste unique and authentic dishes is becoming one of the biggest paradigms in the tourism industry.” Therefore, staging food-based experiences for guests, requires hoteliers and restaurateurs to have an understanding of what it is that can be done to engage guests’ in the development of various product offerings.

Perspectives of Food-Based Experiences

According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), an experience occurs when a company uses goods and services to engage customers in a manner that creates memorable event. Experiences are now seen as the latest economic progression: extract commodities, make goods, deliver services, and stage experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Experiences just like the tangible goods (food) and intangible services are important aspects of tourists’ needs. Kamel, Melo, de Souza, Lima, and Lopes (2008) observed that there is a tendency by service industry providers to lump experiences with other offerings such as services and goods in order to sell them better. Kamel et al. (2008 p. 3), however, contended, “experiences are distinct economic offering, as different from services as services are from goods.” A similar thought is shared by (Smith, 2006) who pointed out that experiences are distinct memorable and personal sensations involving multiple dimensions ranging from customer participation to connection or environmental relationship. This concept of experiences being distinct, memorable and personal sensation has been described using four realms in literature as: entertainment, educational, escapist, and aesthetic; whereby the richest experiences encompass aspects of all the four realms (Smith, 2006). Other researchers (Henderson, 2009; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Gross & Brown, 2008; Kivela & Crofts, 2006) however, have argued that consumer feelings and memories shape experiences based on other hospitality products on offer such as food. The kind of experiences provided in this context have the power to modify guests preferences and

tastes as well as permeate guests' experiences of the hospitality facility visited (Johns & Kivela, 2001).

The aforementioned argument, while suggesting that experience can be a distinct hospitality or tourism product (Kamel et al., 2008; Smith, 2006), implies that other product offerings such as food or services are important in creating memorable experiences (Henderson, 2009; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Gross & Brown, 2008; Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Kivela and Crofts (2006) in particular warn against underestimation of other products offering, especially food, in the final food-based experience. This is because guests often place considerable emphasis on the feelings and experience a destination is likely to offer, by carefully selecting that special restaurant and/or food that might fulfill a particular personal desire (Hjalager & Richards, 2002). This argument supports Kivela and Chu (2001) proposition that guests not only search for new tastes in the choice of food and beverages, but also lookout for new food-related experiences in a destination when dining out. This is because of the great value guests attach to food experience of the countries being visited as well as the social-cultural attractions being experienced (Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

There is mixed reaction as to what really determine demand for food-based experiences. Blichfeldt and Therkelsen (2010) assert that the demand for food-based experiences is highly dependent upon the every-day life of guests. This may sometimes mean that extensions of or contrasts to every-day food consumption by guests is high in demand (Quan & Wang, 2004). Blichfeldt and Therkelsen (2010) further argue that the assumption of peak experiences naturally resulting from contrasts to every-day consumption may be misleading. Blichfeldt and Therkelsen (2010, p. 9) noted, "Significant food experiences may equally well be the result of extensions and contrasts to every-day food consumption." This suggest that food in it itself may result to highly appreciated peak experiences even though it was only meant to serve a nutritional purpose. However, this would depend on all offers the guest would come across, the service encountered, the social rapport with travel companions and a multitude of other contextual factors such as being in contact with the producers, host community among others.

Food Preparation Attributes

Several food preparation attributes have been examined by researchers with respect to food-based experience. Sparks, Bowen, and Klag (2003), for instance, considered the availability of a variety of dishes as an important attribute for staging memorable experiences. A similar thought is shared by Sajna (2005) who posits that a destination's ability to provide variety of culinary traditions along with a multiplicity of dishes within a culinary tradition adds to its overall attraction and satisfaction as a holiday destination. Tourism literature pertinent to food consumption shows that variety-seeking tendency

towards food plays a crucial role in explaining participation in food related activities. According to Sajna (2005), facets of consumer behavior relating to multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of one's experiences with a product is thought to contribute towards consumers experience regarding that particular product.

Hopkinson and Pujari (1999) subsequently argued that consumers look for hedonically valuable experiences which lie in the aesthetic or the physical enjoyment provided by a product. This in turn results in increased arousal, heightened involvement, perceived freedom, fantasy fulfillment, and escapism (Hopkinson & Pujari, 1999). According to LeBel (2000), hedonic attitudes of consumption in this context involve an emphasis on taste of food, a preference for cultural eating practices, preparation methods, time involved, equipment and expertise involved. LeBel further argued that hedonic attitudes entail a desire for complex cultural dishes or a desire for elaborate and extravagant foods, and a focus on the cultural practices of eating food as well as the end benefits. According to Sajna (2005), food preparation and consumption elements are not purely a physiological sensation. They also involve social pleasure (e.g., participating in the actual cooking), emotional pleasure (e.g., food that evoke pleasant memories), and intellectual pleasure, such as cooking a fine meal, appreciating finer foods, and consuming beverages (LeBel, 2000). Kivela and Crotts (2006) suggested that quantity and not quality is a legitimate source of pleasure that generates what Kivela and Chu (2001) called emotions and experience. Although many studies identify and address factors that affect guests experience relating to food, very few empirical studies have addressed the need for good food-based experience derived from food preparation attributes. Equally, while the relationship between food, tourism, tourists and their experience is affirmed in select social sciences literature, very few studies are reported in the hospitality literature that specifically address staging food-based experience from a management perspective.

METHODS

Data Collection

The design used in collecting and analyzing data for this study was exploratory and descriptive in nature. This design was employed because it allows findings to be generalized into theoretical framework and applied into other situations (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). The population for the study consisted of top level (general managers) and middle level (food and beverage managers, head chefs, restaurant managers, events managers) of hotels within Western Kenya. The sample size was arrived at using multistage sampling. The first step involved clustering of hotels according to governance units (counties) in the Western Kenya. A total of 10 counties were considered

as follows: Bungoma, Busia, Homa Bay, Kakamega, Kisii, Kisumu, Migori, Nyamira, Siaya, and Vihiga. Proportionate random sampling was then used to draw hotels from the clusters as follows: 5 from Bungoma, 5 from Busia, 3 from Homa Bay, 11 from Kakamega, 7 from Kisii, 14 from Kisumu, 4 from Migori, 4 from Nyamira, 3 from Siaya, and 6 from Vihiga. Finally, stratified random sampling was used to draw 184 top and middle level hotel managers dealing in or handling food and food related activities from the 62 hotels.

Self-administered questionnaire was developed in two stages. The first stage involved structuring and developing the instrument based on secondary data analysis on food preparation attributes and food-based experience in hospitality facilities. According to this analysis, 22 items indicative of food preparation attributes relating to experience were generated. The items were used to develop the questionnaire at this stage. The instrument was pretested with 10% of the sample size (i.e., 10% of 184 = 18), which was excluded from the final study. In the second stage of questionnaire development, exploratory and deductive approach was used to operationalize food preparation. Operationalization was based on existing research, researchers' judgment and the responses of the pretest study. This was necessary since food preparation was a key construct of the study. The creation of item pool went through an iterative process of exploratory factor analysis after the pretest study. Nine attributes were eliminated because of cases of multicollinearity (variables that are highly correlated) and singularity (variables that are perfectly correlated) and low factor loadings. Thus, 13 items were generated to operationalize food preparation attributes (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Thirteen Food Preparation Attributes Generated to Evaluate Food-Based Experience

Attributes

1. Preparing variety of food
 2. Quality of raw food materials used in food preparation
 3. Time taken in preparing food
 4. Variety of food preparation methods
 5. Nutrition content of the final food product
 6. Taste of food prepared
 7. Food storage procedures used
 8. Authenticity and naturalness of final food product
 9. Guests participation in preparation of their own food
 10. Preparing food according to guest' requests
 11. Locally sourced ingredients for food preparation
 12. Appropriate equipment for food preparation
 13. Staff cookery skills
-

The final questionnaire for this study consisted of two main sections. Target respondents' consents were obtained prior to administering the questionnaires. The first section required respondents to give information

regarding their demographic characteristics. These included their position in the hotel, gender, age, and education level. In the second section, respondents were required to evaluate food preparation aspects that they perceived were important in staging food-based experience at the hotel. The 13 food preparation items were used to formulate 13 statements which respondents evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*). A value of 5 was given more weight. A total of 166 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to target respondents, out of which 160 questionnaires were collected back. From the 160 received questionnaires, three were incomplete hence were discarded. Responses from the remaining 157 questionnaires were coded for analysis. This accounted for a strong response rate of 94.5%.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviation) and Multivariate statistics in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency distribution was used to analyze respondents' demographic status while means and standard deviations were used to rank perceived importance of the food preparation attributes under investigation. Multivariate analyses (factor and regression) were used to create correlated variable composites from the original attributes ratings and obtain a relatively small number of variables that explain most of the variances among attributes. The derived factor scores were then applied in subsequent multiple regression analysis to validate the factor model that resulted. The appropriateness of factor analysis was assessed using correlation, measures of sampling adequacy (MSA) and reliability alpha to ensure that the factor analysis was appropriate to the data. In addition, factor analysis was conducted to determine whether the indicators of each latent variable are good and reliable measures. Multiple linear regression analysis was used to validate factor models. To achieve this, regression coefficients were used to estimate linear equation involving the thirteen food preparation attributes that best predict the value of the various factors generated. *F*-statistics in regression was used to test model fitness. *T*-values were used in regression to evaluate the significance of each attribute in a factor structure. Only findings of selected factor and regression analysis are presented in this article.

RESULTS

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 highlights that approximately 63% of the respondents were male, and 37% were female. The sample mainly consisted of respondents in the age group of 31 to 40 (48.4%) followed by 41 to 50 (29.3%). Few participants

TABLE 2 Respondents' Demographic Profile

Demographic characteristic	Frequency	%
Position held at the hotel		
General manager	42	26.8
Food & beverage manager	29	18.5
Chef	60	38.2
Others	26	16.6
Total	157	100.0
Age bracket		
21-30	22	14.0
31-40	76	48.4
41-50	46	29.3
Above 50	13	8.3
Total	157	100.0
Gender		
Male	99	63.1
Female	58	36.9
Total	157	100.0
Education level		
Secondary (KCSE or its equivalent)	26	16.6
College (certificate or diploma)	86	54.8
Undergraduate (B.Sc., BA, BBA, B.Ed., etc.)	36	22.9
Postgraduate (MSc, MBA, MA, PGD, etc.)	9	5.7
Total	157	100.0

fell in the age group above 50 years (8.3%). All respondents possessed some form of education, majority (54.8%) having attained college level education with either certificate or diploma. The sample was composed of mainly chefs (38.2%) followed by general managers at 26.8%. Those who were categorized as others formed the least number of sample response at 16.6%. [Table 2](#) summarizes the respondents' and distribution in the sample.

Ranking of Food Preparation Attributes

Respondents were asked to evaluate food preparation attributes they perceived important in staging food experience on a 5-point scale. The ranking of food preparation attributes are summarized in [Table 3](#) in a descending order. Food nutritional value, food authenticity and naturalness, food taste, and food preparation according to guest request were generally perceived as the four very important food preparation attributes in staging food-based experience. Less important attributes were quality of raw food materials used, food storage procedures, food varieties, and locally sourced ingredients used in food preparation.

TABLE 3 Ranking of Food Preparation Attributes' Importance in Staging Food-Based Experience

Attributes	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Food nutritional value	4.65	0.505
Food authenticity and naturalness	4.63	0.546
Food taste	4.56	0.559
Food preparation according to guest request	4.52	0.606
Staff cookery skills	4.12	0.710
Food preparation time	4.04	0.706
Food preparation method	4.03	0.693
Guest participation in food preparation	4.02	0.711
Food preparation equipment	4.01	0.698
Locally sourced ingredients used in food preparation	3.91	0.719
Food varieties	3.88	0.683
Food storage procedures	3.85	0.671
Quality of raw food materials used	3.82	0.696

Note. The result are based on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all important*, 2 = *slightly important*, 3 = *important*, 4 = *very important*, 5 = *extremely important*).

Factor Analysis

Principal axis factoring with oblique (direct oblimin) rotation was used for the analysis. The appropriateness of factor analysis was assessed using correlation coefficients, MSA and reliability alpha to ensure that the factor analysis was appropriate to the data. Only factors with eigenvalues equal to or greater than 1 and factor loadings equal to or greater than 0.5 were considered significant. The solution yielded three factors: Food Preparation Process, Food Preparation Benefit, and Food Preparation Input, all accounting for 73.05% of the total variance. The first factor (Food Preparation Process) explained for the greatest percentage of the variance (38.14%) followed by Food Preparation Benefit (20.27%) and finally Food Preparation Input (14.64%). Six items namely guest participation in food preparation, food preparation time, food preparation method, food preparation equipment in use, staff cookery skills and food storage procedures loaded on Food Preparation Process (Table 4). Four items: food authenticity and naturalness, food taste, food nutritional value, and food preparation according to guest request loaded on Food Preparation Benefit. Table 4 further indicates that only three items: locally sourced ingredient used in food preparation, quality of raw food materials used and food varieties loaded on Food Preparation Input. All the factor loadings were $> .7$. This indicated that the data matrix had sufficient correlation to the factor analysis with minimal overlap among the factors. The overall Cronbach's coefficient alpha recorded for the 13 food preparation attributes was $> .7$ (i.e., $\alpha = .787$) indicating an acceptable level of reliability. Cronbach's coefficients registered for the factors were as follows: Food Preparation Process = .964, Food Preparation Benefit = .877 and Food Preparation Input = .831. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value registered was 0.87 with the Bartlett Test of Sphericity being highly significant

TABLE 4 Factor Analysis Statistics and Regression Coefficients of Food Preparation Attributes

Factors and their corresponding variables	Factor analysis statistics					Regression coefficients		
	Factor loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance	Cumulative variance	Comm.	α	<i>t</i> -values	Sig.
Factor 1: Food Preparation Process		4.958	38.137	38.137	.730	.964		
Food preparation time	.935				.873		70.541	.000
Food preparation method	.925				.860		63.258	.000
Guest participation in food preparation	.940				.896		75.418	.000
Staff cookery skills	.865				.747		45.510	.000
Food storage procedures	.856				.738		40.495	.000
Food preparation equipment in use	.900				.814		50.538	.000
Factor 2: Food Preparation Benefit		2.635	20.271	58.408		.877		
Food nutritional value	.751				.562		19.919	.000
Food taste	.801				.655		20.862	.000
Food authenticity and naturalness	.950				.917		80.379	.000
Food preparation according to guest request	.723				.523		18.228	.000
Factor 3: Food Preparation Input		1.904	14.643	73.051		.831		
Locally sourced ingredient used in food preparation	.718				.519		38.089	.000
Quality of raw food materials used	.855				.747		73.531	.000
Food varieties	.802				.645		53.047	.000

Note. α : Cronbach's coefficient alpha test for reliability; Comm. = communality.

(approx. chi-square = 1665.394, $df = 78$, $p < .0001$). The communality of each variable was relatively high, ranging from 0.523 to 0.917, which also indicated that the variances of the original values were captured well by the three factors.

Regression Analysis Results

To validate the identified factor models (food preparation process, food preparation benefit and food preparation output), multiple regression analysis was conducted. Factor scores of the different factors derived in factor analysis were entered as dependent variables with their constituent variables as independent variables. This method was also used to estimate the significance of the relationship between each predictor variable and the factors. Three significant models resulted (using enter and backward method). These included food preparation process model ($F_{6, 150} = 92050.914$, $p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = 1.00$), food preparation benefit model ($F_{4, 152} = 13662.841$, $p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .997$), and food preparation input model ($F_{3, 153} = 13892.583$, $p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .996$). The high values of adjusted R -squared indicated that the data points were close to the values predicted by the multiple regression equation and that as a group the independent variables (constituent variables in a factor) were good predictors of the corresponding factors. All the regression coefficients registered for the attributes were highly significant ($p < .0001$).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Experience has been a subject of discussion by several scholars in the hospitality industry research (Blichfeldt & Therkelsen, 2010; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Gross & Brown, 2008; Johns & Kivela, 2001; Kamel et al., 2008; Meler & Cerovic, 2003; Milman, 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Smith, 2006; Zahari et al., 2009). This exploratory research aimed to identify key food preparation determinants that can be used in staging food-based experience in hotels within Western Kenya. The mean ranking results indicated that the study participants perceived all the 13 food preparation attributes under investigation as important attributes in staging food-based experiences, since all the means were greater than three (Table 3). Despite this, some attributes were perceived more important than others. Factor analysis results suggest a three-factor solution that may be used as a summary measure of the food preparation indicators that make up each factor. These three factors comprise a set of observable variables (perceived by hotel managers) that define food-based experience with Food Preparation Process, Food Preparation Benefit and Food Preparation Input. Regression analysis results indicated

that constituent variables in each of the factor significantly predicted that factor.

Food Preparation Process Factor

The results suggested that Food Preparation Process accounted for the greatest percentage (38.14%) of the total variance explained. This implies that food preparation process was the most critical factor in staging food-based experience as perceived by the hotel managers. These results support Sims (2009) emphasis on the need to engage guests in activities that add value to their travel experience. Of the six food preparation attributes that loaded on Food Preparation Process factor (Table 4), guest participation in food preparation had the highest factor loadings (.94). The study findings depict a perceived need for hoteliers to involve their guests in the process of product development. The product development process in this context would be the food preparation process, which in turn would provide an opportunity for social contact. This in turn is believed to add to the social and learning experiences sought after by tourists (Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Sajna, 2005). Involving guests in the product development process would boost their confidence and acceptability of the product under consideration (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). This study suggests that hoteliers, especially in the Western Kenya, should consider those attributes that hotel managers perceived important in staging food-based experience. The presence of skilled cookery staff as well as sharing of space between guests and cooking staff is regarded a facet of tourism product (Henderson, 2009) which contributes to authentic experience. The food preparation equipment in use together with time and preparation method would ensure satisfaction, which is an element of memorable experience.

Food Preparation Benefit Factor

Food Preparation Benefit accounted for the second largest percentage (20.27%) of the total variance explained (Table 4), thus was perceived the second key food preparation factor in staging food-based experience. This factor refers to the benefits resulting from food preparation, which shapes various food experiences. Consumers are always looking for the benefits a product would offer. Hoteliers should therefore develop products in a manner consistent to the benefits of a product. According to Steinmetz (2010), these benefits are related to the biological or functional needs of guests regarding their food requirements. The so-called benefits are considered to contribute towards staging food-based experiences (LeBel, 2000). If adopted, this approach would contribute towards winning customers trust and loyalty by hospitality operators in the Western Kenya.

Of the four items that loaded on the Food Preparation Benefit factor food authenticity and naturalness loaded highly (Table 4). Several researchers (Henderson, 2009; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Griffith, 2006; Y. H. Kim et al., 2009) have reported authenticity as an element in food tourism. These researchers believe that authentic products contribute to food-based experience and provide motivation for visitors to come to a location (Sims, 2009) or patronize a given hotel. The finding of this study is therefore in line with the above purported argument. The findings further supports (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Sims, 2009) preposition that most consumers nowadays prefer food products prepared in their natural form for health and nutritional reasons.

Food Preparation Input Factor

Food Preparation Input accounted for the least percentage (14.64%) of the total variance explained by the three factors. Of the three items that loaded on the Food Preparation Input factor, quality of raw food materials had the highest factor loading (Table 4). All the other items, however, significantly predicted the Food Preparation Input factor as indicated by regression coefficients results. Quality of raw food materials often determines the resultant product, which plays a critical role in staging memorable food-based experience in a given hospitality facility. The study suggests that, just like the process and benefit aspects of food preparation are important in staging experience; the input component also plays a crucial role in staging memorable food-based experience. Food preparation process together with food preparation input factors will partly determine food preparation benefit factor. For instance, the quality of raw materials can be combined with staff cookery skills and the preparation method employed, which determine the resulting product benefit such as product quality and taste.

Evidence from this study suggests that in order to successfully stage memorable experiences through food preparation, hospitality operators must consider all the three factors: Food Preparation Process, Food Preparation Benefit, and Food Preparation Input as a functional unit. To get the maximum satisfaction from food-based experiences, the study suggests that the three factors should be deployed in staging food-based experience according to their perceived importance. This implies that food preparation process, which was considered the most important factor, should be given first priority followed by the food preparation benefit and lastly food preparation out. The various regression models that resulted could be integrated into one general model of staging food-based experience (Figure 1). The model in Figure 1 can be adopted by hoteliers who are keen on staging memorable food-based experience through food preparation. Staging food-based experience in this manner is thought would lead to repeat visits on the part

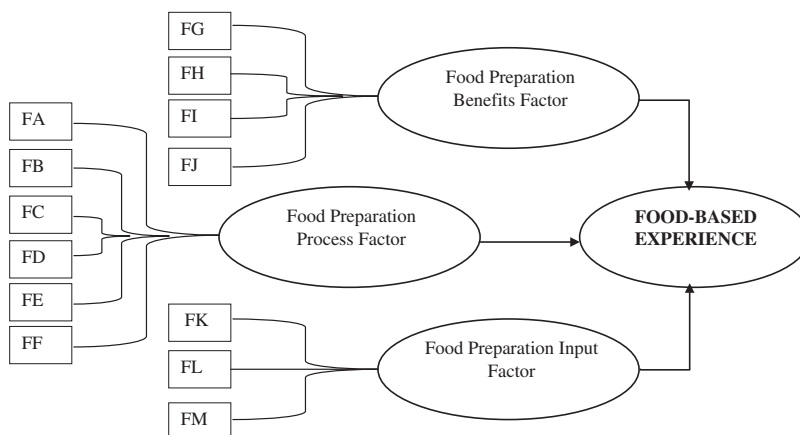


FIGURE 1 An integrated food preparation model for staging food-based experiences.

Note. FA = food preparation time; FB = food preparation method; FC = guest participation in food preparation; FD = staff cookery skills; FE = food storage procedures; FF = food preparation equipment in use; FG = food nutritional value; FH = food taste; FI = food authenticity and naturalness; FJ = food preparation according to guest request; FK = ingredient used in food preparation; FL = quality of raw food materials used; FM = food varieties.

of hospitality guests since it ensures their involvement in the product being consumed (Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study identifies and describes three key determinants of food preparation: food preparation process, food preparation benefit and food preparation input, which are inextricably linked in staging food-based experience in a hotel set up. This study theorizes that food-based experience can be staged through the three factors perceived by hotel managers in Western Kenya. These factors must be considered in order of their importance by hospitality operators focusing on experience as a product. Food preparation process, which explained for the greatest percentage of the variance, must be given precedence, followed by the benefit factor and lastly the input factor. Moreover, food preparation attributes that loaded highly on each of the factors should be given precedence over the other attributes in a factor in the process of staging food-based experience. Of greatest concern would be how hospitality operators engage guests in the food preparation process. Authenticity also came out as one of the most important attributes that hoteliers need to focus on more, regarding staging food-based experience through the food preparation benefit factor. When considering food preparation input as a key factor in staging food-based

experiences, hoteliers and restaurateurs are advised to pay more attention to the quality of raw materials used. This study theorizes that hospitality operations with the best chances for staging memorable food-based experiences are those that combine all the three factors as a joint unit working together. Restaurateurs and hoteliers should therefore strive towards creating unique and memorable food experiences to build excitement and develop a competitive advantage by combining the three factors in the order of priority. In doing so, the model (Figure 1) suggested by the study could be adopted.

It is worth recognizing the limitation of this study in terms of study area and the sample for the study, thus the findings must be interpreted and applied in other situations with these limitations in mind. Hotels' designs, location and policies among other intervening factors might impact how hoteliers and restaurateurs stage food-based experiences with regard to certain food preparation attributes. This area therefore merits further investigation. Perhaps future survey question wording could be enhanced to better link facility design, organization policies and facility location to staging food-based experiences. Given that this was an exploratory study, which focused principally on hotel managers' perspective, this study merits future investigation, guests being the main focus and perhaps a comparison analysis conducted based on the findings of this study.

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