

Looking through a tourist gaze: the Joy of Missing Out (JOMO) and the case of mussels

Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts (JTHCA)
2021, Vol. 13 (2) pp 01-08
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UITM Press
Submit date: 05th June 2021
Accept date: 06th December 2021
Publish date: 28th December 2021

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Proposed citation:

Fuste-Forne, F. & Hussain, A. (2021). Looking through a tourist gaze: the Joy of Missing Out (JOMO) and the case of mussels. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts*, 13(2), 1-8

Abstract

The diverse possibilities of online avenues and travel experiences have generally led to the fear of Missing Out (FOMO) sentiment. The FOMO encourages people to spend as much time online as possible searching for exploration opportunities. In contraposition to FOMO, a new movement has recently appeared: the Joy of Missing Out (JOMO) refers to the escape from technology. Applying this concept to tourism, JOMO advocates a 'slow' and 'digital-free' environment. This research looks at food tourism as a crucial example of JOMO that looks at outlying regions from a regenerative tourism point of view. Food tourism is explored through an approach of mussels. Drawing on autoethnography, results show that JOMO is associated with activities that provide "intellectual memories" based on feelings of personal fulfilment. Visitor backgrounds and the accumulation of memorable experiences are the factors that motivate JOMO practices that spread community development in rural tourism.

Keywords:

culinary experience, culinary heritage, food tourism, regenerative tourism, sustainable development, slow travel

1 Introduction and context

The wide accessibility of technology and the expansion of the connectivity opportunities derived from social media have led to the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) trend (Przybylski et al., 2019), which appears as a desire to always stay connected. Whereas FOMO refers to the fear of missing what others have done or visited and

commented upon, the Joy of Missing Out (JOMO) approach appeared as a “digital diet” (Gutiérrez, 2015). This trend promotes the disconnection of technology. Applied to tourism, this refers to visits to peripheral areas and to perform activities that contribute to visit, and by extension, life satisfaction (Friman et al., 2017) which equips with the recent notion of regenerative tourism (Hussain, 2021). This research note aims at analysing food tourism as an example of JOMO deviating from the case of mussels as a natural resource and a source of visitor experiences.

As part of the (over)use of technology that people are confronted with today, there are two types of reactions, as indicated by Gutiérrez (2015), which are FOMO and JOMO. FOMO is the fear of missing out on something (Hetz et al., 2015) - is the fear that people experience things that you want to experience (JWT, 2012). The FOMO concept is adopted as a marketing call to action, specifically targeting youth (Hodkinson, 2019), who are more dependent on FOMO's performance (Gutiérrez, 2015).

Gutiérrez (2015) points out that, in particular, FOMO is even more pertinent when travelling. It refers to the need to see every single spot and comment about it on social media, and it does not only affect the trip itself but also the pre and post stages of the tourism experience. In this way, tourism businesses must be able to offer practices and experiences that can be easily shared through social media (SKIFT, 2014). On the other hand, JOMO appeared to be the joy of missing something. According to Putra (2019), JOMO is a travel trend that aims to disconnect from the “virtual life” and relies on a type of journey focused on a motivation to relax and escape from everyday routines (Li et al., 2018). Today, JOMO is the successor to FOMO (Edelman, 2018). The overuse of technology in everyday life drives people to a strong need to break up with technology (Putra, 2019).

In this sense, JOMO's philosophy is readily applicable to destinations that are not overcrowded (Edelman, 2018; Putra, 2019). These phenomena occur primarily in peripheral areas (Fusté-Forné, 2019), for instance in marine and rural environments. JOMO functions best as a short-term disconnect (Aranda & Baig, 2018), especially in slow tourism (Fusté-Forné & Jamal, 2020). This study adds texture to this conversation by analysing the case of mussels from a tourist perspective that seeks a unique experience (see Urry, 1990). Both theoretical and practical implications are outlined.

2 Methodology

This research note presents a new and opportune approach to the study of food tourism. The paper focused on a qualitative methodology from a non-participating observation study (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Drawing on published research and a visual autoethnography, the researchers relied on the understanding of mussels as a food-based tourist attraction that runs to a “transformative” experience. Scarles (2010) defines visual autoethnography “as a fusion of observation and first-hand experience” (p. 909) which is also used in previous food research (see Fusté-Forné, 2020).

3 Results of data analysis and discussion

3.1 Food in tourism systems

Since the first analysis of the interactions between food and tourism carried by Belisle (1983), there has been an impressive amount of food tourism-based research where food tourism was traditionally defined as the journey to a place to visit food producers, festivals, restaurants and other food-based attractions (Hall & Sharples, 2003) to discover another culture through food (Long, 2004).

Food products define the culinary tradition of a place and they are used in many experiences from a tourism perspective. According to Ellis et al. (2018), the food experience value relies on the co-created relationships between food and place and, in this framework, food tourism is a representation of a place, its history and its people - for example pizza and Italy.

Destinations must offer food-based tourism practices as part of visitor experiences that lead visitors to discover local foodscapes that communicate “the processes, contexts, and meanings associated with the production, harvesting, processing, cooking, serving, and consumption of food” (Knollenberg et al., 2020, p.2). As a consequence, the role of gastronomy in destination management and marketing strengthens the protection and promotion of local food-based heritage. Food is an example of the local sense of place consumed by tourists (Tikkanen, 2007). Food does not only emerge as a meaningful landmark for many destinations (Fusté-Forné, 2020) but also as a crucial reason to travel (McKercher, 2020).

According to Cohen and Avieli (2004), authentic ingredients are markers of authenticity. In this paper, mussels are the raw product that illustrates this understanding of food and tourism relationships in peripheries. Tourism experiences that build on mussels are presented in line with recent research which explored the relationships between food and tourism through the case of mussels. From the visual autoethnography work, results reveal the attributes that evoke *memorable gastronomic experiences* and spread *memory-triggering moments* (Williams, Yuan & Williams Jr, 2019) as identified in previous research.

3.2 The role of mussels in food tourism experiences

Hjalager, Johansen, and Rasmussen (2015) previously reported that ‘mussels are Danish *terroir*’, and this research note expands this understanding of wild foods and mussels as *terroir* elsewhere (see also Fusté-Forné, 2019). Destinations all over the world are marketed through food and eating. Mussels are an example. Lund (2015) reveals that mussels “nourish, give pleasure, and, most importantly, connect bodies, activities, and places” (p.21).



Figure 1: Wild mussels in columns (a) and rocks (b) in the Banks Peninsula, New Zealand (own source).



Figure 2: Mussels in Spanish municipal markets of Costa Brava (a) and Costa Daurada (b), Catalonia, Spain (own source).



Figure 3: Plates of mussels in restaurants of coastal destinations in (a) Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain and (b) Picton, New Zealand (own source).

Mussels are part of the natural landscapes of territories, such as happens with the case of New Zealand seascapes (Figure 1) which showcase the role of mussels as wild

foods. In addition, mussels are an iconic product in coastal destinations in countries such as Spain, where they are available as part of the offer of municipal markets (Figure 2). Later, mussels are also integrated into the offer of restaurant menus (Figure 3) where they emerge as a must-eat food. In this sense, Lund (2015) reports that mussels stimulate the senses and in particular a platter of mussels “accentuates the intimacy and sensual pleasures that eating involves” (p.27).

This citation illustrates the role of mussels in the co-creation of memorable food-based experiences which rely on the attributes of authenticity and sociability, and as a source of *slow* emotions - for example, the use of both hands while you eat mussels. In addition, mussels represent an opportunity for marketing purposes, as revealed by Blichfeldt and Halkiera (2014) concerning the branding of Løgstør as “The Town of Mussels” where stakeholders share a common narrative - a story which relies on the process of awarding leisure and tourism value to mussels. These authors also affirm that mussel-based food festivals do not only represent events that make rural areas visible but also reinforce “the equity of the Løgstør brand” (p.1597) which require strong cooperation between private and public stakeholders.

Culinary heritage contributes to the development of both the identity and the image of a region (Kim & Iwashita, 2016). Previous publications confirm that “ethnic pride, national patriotism, familial and regional patrimony, agricultural traditions, and many other markers of identity are safeguarded in part at least by the preservation of gastronomical traditions” (Timothy & Ron, 2013, p.99). Thus, food products (Fusté-Forné, Medina & Mundet, 2020) and food traditions (Yankelevich, 2010) communicate a regional character. This can also be applied to mussels, which emerge as an identity product for several destinations over the world and promote a connection between products, people and places which supports slow tourism as a source for community development.

3.3 Mussels-based food tourism as a source of JOMO

As previously described, JOMO is related to bodily functions that can provide “intellectual souvenirs” which may drive a feeling of self-fulfilment (Thurnell-Read, 2017) which in turn derives from travel satisfaction and life satisfaction (Friman et al., 2017). It also contributes to memorable culinary experiences (Williams, Yuan & Williams Jr, 2019), as with the role of mussels in tourism, and enhances the overall well-being of local communities.

Previous studies (Li et al., 2018; McKercher, 2016; Norton, 2018) have exemplified some products and activities that fit with this travel trend, “far from technology”, such as leisure activities, the discovery of nature, retreat and wellness, which do not only include nature but also cultural experiences. Although this manuscript has applied this concept to tourism of particular interest such as food tourism, further research needs to widen the theoretical and practical implications.

As Putra (2019) indicates, JOMO as a tourism experience is also a lifestyle choice that involves enjoying travel with a disconnect from technology. In addition, effective JOMO needs to be utilized as a complete lifestyle, that is, as a long-term disconnection (Aranda & Baig, 2018) which also matches with recent calls for regenerative tourism (Cave & Dredge, 2020; Hussain, 2021) as a source of positive social change.

Food provides a sustainable relationship between the primary sector and tourism (Hermans, 1981; Telfer & Wall, 1996). For instance, “‘traditional dishes’ may not often be consumed by tourists due to the lack of knowledge, resilience to trying something new and general lack of such dishes in the usual gastronomic offer of restaurants” (Vuković & Terzić, 2020, p. 15). The importance of the study is based on generating knowledge based on the links between mussels and tourism seen in the cultural domain (i.e., markets) and natural landscapes (i.e., rocks), as well as in tourist services (i.e., restaurants). Increased cooperation between local producers and tourist services will result in the creation of mussel-based activities and practices. Likewise, the co-creation of authentic food and beverage tourism experiences (Okumus, 2020) will allow visitors to look at the planet through a JOMO tourist gaze that informs the transformation of food tourism futures.

4 Conclusion

This research note provides a fresh and timely approach to the study of food tourism. Drawing on published research and a visual autoethnography, the researchers studied the role of mussels as a source of “transformative” experience within the context of food tourism. In this respect, results have developed the relationship between the JOMO concept and the case of mussels to promote the sustainability of tourism systems. The regeneration of tourism depends on the manner in which “slow” and “digital” activities and practices motivate responsible visitors and promote individual and social well-being.

5 About the authors

Francesc Fusté-Forné, PhD, is a lecturer and researcher at the University of Girona, Spain. He specialises in rural food tourism and communication and marketing. He studied the food tourism phenomenon in different geographical contexts and at local, regional and national levels. Francesc is particularly interested in analysing media’s role in the social and cultural understanding of business and communities in the face of changing, challenging and evolving global trends.

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