



## A MODEL FOR TOURISTS' INFORMATION SEARCH BEHAVIOUR ON GHANAIAN CUISINE: A GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

Stephen E. Hiamey, Edem Amenumey

### Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the information-seeking behaviour of international tourists in relation to Ghanaian cuisine. The study employed both the origin and destination context to gain an understanding of international tourists' local food information search process. A grounded theory approach was used for both data collection and analysis. A total of 40 in-depth interviews were conducted in the process. The paper shows that most international tourists do not search or engage in an adequate information search on local food before their journeys. The findings further reveal that contextual conditions such as tourist typology and repeat visit shape tourists' level of knowledge on local food, which in turn affect the information search strategies adopted at the destination. It is concluded that international tourists visiting Ghana are generally ignorant of the local cuisine; therefore, the Ghana Tourism Authority should find innovative ways of getting information on local cuisine to tourists upon arrival into the country.

**Keywords:** Destination, Grounded Theory, Information Search, Knowledge Deficit, Local Food

### INTRODUCTION

Hospitality purchases are high-value purchases (Bronner & de Hoog, 2016; Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008; Senecal & Nantal, 2004), as the product cannot be inspected materially before purchases. To reduce the risks, uncertainty, and insecurity associated with purchasing hospitality and tourism products, international tourists engage in some information search (Lehto, Kim, & Morrison, 2006; Petrick, Li, & Park, 2007). Fodness and Murray (1997, p. 506) posit that information search is "a dynamic process wherein individuals use various amounts and types of information sources in response to internal and external contingencies to facilitate travel planning." The main reason for travel information search, as noted by Choi, Lehto, Morrison, and Jang (2012), is to support decision-making and product choice during the travel decision-making process.

Destination marketers and other tourism service providers are interested in influencing the purchase decisions of international tourists as much as possible. One way of achieving this goal is through knowledge of the information search behaviour and the channels that tourists use (Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Litvin,

Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). To this end, one could see that the tourism literature is replete with several works on international tourists' information search behaviour (Coromina & Camprubi, 2016; Wong & Liu, 2011). The focus of previous studies on travel information search was on themes such as sources of information used (Coromina & Camprubi, 2016; Li, Pan, Zhang, & Smith, 2009; Llodra a-Riera et al., 2015; Lyu & Hwang, 2015), socio-demographic characteristics and information sources used (Murphy & Olaru, 2009; Nishimura, King, & Waryszak, 2012; Lee, Soutar, & Daly, 2007), and online/social media as sources of international tourists' information (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Li & Law, 2007; Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crofts, 2007; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Information search before trips or information searched at the origin for the travel decision-making dominates earlier studies on the subject. Choi et al. (2012) advance that not much has done on the information-seeking behaviour of tourists during their stay at the destination. Again, research on information search on other destination elements such as local food is scanty.

Tourists make decisions on the various elements of the trip at different times (Nishimura, King, & Waryszak, 2007), meaning, information is also searched on those elements including local foods, when needed. Thus, the

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spatio-temporal dimensions of how international tourists seek information on local food are worth investigating. Additionally, specific studies on local food have focused on destination marketing strategies (Du Rand, Heath, & Alberts, 2003; Du Rand & Heath, 2006; Horng & Tsai, 2012; Silkes, Cai, & Lehto, 2013), content of what is being promoted (Horng & Tsai, 2010; Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007), branding (Horng, Lui, Chiu, & Tsai, 2012; Spilkova & Fialova, 2013), and segmentation (Ignatov & Smith, 2006; McKercher, Okumus, & Okumus, 2008). A critical element that is missing in those themes is information search behaviour on local food.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to explore the information search behaviour of international tourists on local foods from their country of origin to the destination and to use grounded theory approach to develop a framework of the process. Given the research paucity on how tourists search for information on local foods in the mainstream tourism literature and the Ghanaian context, this study adopted the grounded theory approach to bring out destination-specific insights. The study, therefore, provides destination marketers with valuable insights into how international tourists obtain information on local foods.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Tourism Information Search

Destination marketers and service providers are interested in how international tourists search for information on specific destination elements (accommodation, attractions, local food, restaurants/shops, transportation etc.). A cursory look at the literature reveals there is no distinction on how tourists search for information on these different elements. It, therefore, becomes difficult to understand the channels used to source for information on them. There are several typologies of information sources available to international tourists on alternative destinations, travel options, accommodation options, and choices in dining and retail shopping (Decrop & Snelders, 2005). The consensus, however, is that it is either internal or external information sources are consulted (Kim, Letho, & Morrison, 2007).

Information search for travel decision-making begins from internal sources, comprising

information gathered from previous encounters with the destination or similar destinations (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). Tourists consult external sources of information when they need entirely new information (Hyde, 2008; Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2008). Poor quality existing internal information or inadequate internal knowledge of the product and unfamiliar decision-making situations or insufficient and inadequate internal information may necessitate information from external sources (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012).

The personal sources include family, friends, neighbours, and acquaintances whilst the public and non-commercial sources include editorials and reviews in newspapers and magazines. Gursoy and McCleary (2004) simply classify them as destination-specific external information sources (brochures, guides books) and personal external information sources (family and friends, media, and travel consultants) or, as in the case of Barber (2009), marketing-dominated and non-marketing dominated. The use of the internet has been extensively studied (Beldona, 2005; Fodness & Murray, 1997). The internet is now one of the most important sources of information for trip planning due to its flexibility in searching and organizing and the quantity of information that is available at a go (Kambele, Li, & Zhou, 2015; Pan, Li, Zhang, & Smith, 2007).

### Determinants of Information Search Behaviour

Several factors influence international tourists' information search behaviour (Gronflaten, 2009). Luo, Feng, and Cai (2004) state that environmental and individual factors influence consumer behaviour including information search. Factors such as travel motives, prior product knowledge, residency, family life cycle, involvement, the purpose of the trip, and financial constraints all influence the search behaviour of tourists (Cai, Feng, & Breiter, 2004; Carneiro & Crompton, 2010). Fodness and Murray (1997) grouped those factors into personal, situational, and product-related factors.

To sum up the current literature on information search, we find it essential to state that the subject of information search has been studied extensively. However, studies on specific destination elements remain under-researched.



The work of Pearce and Schott (2005) can be cited as one of the few studies that looked at information sources used for specific destination elements (accommodation, activities, attractions, and transportation). This study, therefore, looks at local food, focusing on how international tourists look for information on it from the country of origin and at the destination.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is part of a study on international tourists' experiences with local cuisine and the implications these hold for gastronomy tourism development and to build a theoretical model that explains those experiences. Experiences and sociocultural aspects of consumptive experiences are not wholly accessible with quantitative approaches such as experiments and surveys (Sherry, 1991; Zare, 2019). Therefore, the grounded theory approach was followed both in data collection and analysis of tourists' information seeking behaviour on Ghanaian cuisine. Again, this approach aligns itself to the generation of inductively derived theory from a data set and within a specific context and phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), as is the aim of this study.

### Participants

Participants for this study were international tourists that were present in the study setting at the time of data collection. The criterion for inclusion was whether a tourist had consumed any Ghanaian local dish on his/her journey through Ghana at the time of conducting the interview. At the initial stages of the study, tourists were selected due to their availability (convenience). Subsequent data collection was more focused and purposive (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) based on how an international tourist described himself/herself in terms of travel typology (business, leisure, and volunteer tourist) to see whether their information-seeking behaviour on the destination's food differed and to refine the emerging categories (See Table 1 for demographic data on international tourists).

### 3.2 Procedure and Interviews

Recruitment occurred through personal contact with respondents. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the information-seeking behaviour of international tourists on Ghanaian local foods. The interviews were

conducted at four different locations in Cape Coast between August and December 2015. Two of these locations doubled as accommodation and restaurant units and the other two were just restaurants. The interview guide was in two sections. The first section was on general information and personal data of interviewees. The second section comprised questions on their information seeking behaviour. The basic open questions covered four general areas, with further probes. The first area was on how interviewees got to know about Ghanaian local dishes (e.g. how did you get to know about Ghanaian local dishes before arriving in the country?). The second area was the kind of information they were looking for (e.g. what kind of information were you looking for/what kind of information were you given about Ghanaian cuisine?), the third was on what the information conveyed about the food (e.g. what messages did the information convey about the food and drinks?), and the final area was the contribution of the information to decision-making (e.g. how did the information influence your decision to try the food?). The individual interviews ranged from 30- and 60-minutes, averaging 35 minutes, and were conducted in English. In all, forty (40) interviews were conducted at the time of theoretical saturation (the point where the emergent category has been refined).

### Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the ground rules of constructivist grounded theory analysis. The interviews were transcribed verbatim into text and manually coded. The analysis was in three stages, following the doctrine of constant comparative analysis, a key requirement in grounded theory data analysis (Charmaz, 2006). The first stage was open coding. This involved line-by-line scrutiny of the data, delimiting the actionable words, and events which were refined further through focused coding, where the social process represented by actionable words were identified. The two (line-by-line and focused coding) formed the initial coding stage.

The next stage of coding was axial coding of data, which reconstituted the data into categories, making connections among them (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). One mutually exclusive category (lack of information) and two non-mutually exclusive categories (inadequate information and inadequate knowledge) emerged. The next stage was to selectively code

**Table 1: Participant Details**

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Country of origin	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Country of Origin
Respondent 1	F	23	Germany	Respondent 26	F	26	Germany
Respondent 2	F	24	Germany	Respondent 27	F	20	Germany
Respondent 3	F	22	USA	Respondent 28	F	21	Denmark
Respondent 4	F	22	USA	Respondent 29	F	21	Demark
Respondent 5	F	23	USA	Respondent 30	F	25	USA
Respondent 6	M	61	Germany	Respondent 31	M	21	USA
Respondent 7	M	24	Switzerland	Respondent 32	M	29	Switzerland
Respondent 8	F	24	Germany	Respondent 33	F	40	Denmark
Respondent 9	F	22	Belgium	Respondent 34	F	21	Netherlands
Respondent 10	F	24	Germany	Respondent 35	F	22	Netherlands
Respondent 11	F	25	Germany	Respondent 36	M	21	Poland
Respondent 12	F	24	Canada	Respondent 37	F	25	USA
Respondent 13	M	32	France	Respondent 38	M	35	Netherlands
Respondent 14	M	24	Germany	Respondent 39	M	19	Belgium
Respondent 15	M	24	Switzerland	Respondent 40	M	20	USA
Respondent 16	F	22	Switzerland	Respondent 26	F	26	Germany
Respondent 17	M	24	Germany	Respondent 27	F	20	Germany
Respondent 18	F	24	Germany	Respondent 28	F	21	Denmark
Respondent 19	F	40	Canada	Respondent 29	F	21	Demark
Respondent 20	F	26	Japan	Respondent 30	F	25	USA
Respondent 21	F	27	USA	Respondent 31	M	21	USA
Respondent 22	F	26	USA	Respondent 32	M	29	Switzerland
Respondent 23	F	28	USA	Respondent 33	F	40	Denmark
Respondent 24	M	24	Germany	Respondent 34	F	21	Netherlands
Respondent 25	M	24	England	Respondent 35	F	22	Netherlands
Respondent 26	F	26	Germany	Respondent 36	M	21	Poland
Respondent 27	F	20	Germany	Respondent 37	F	25	USA
Respondent 28	F	21	Denmark	Respondent 38	M	35	Netherlands
Respondent 29	F	21	Demark	Respondent 39	M	19	Belgium
Respondent 30	F	25	USA	Respondent 40	M	20	USA

the data. This moved beyond mere description of the data to a more analytic stage. The aim of this coding was to generate theoretical properties of the categories by looking at contextual conditions, the intervening conditions, the relationships to other categories, strategies, and consequences. After member checking, it was agreed that an explanatory theory of knowledge deficit (ignorance) of Ghanaian local dishes was prevalent among first time visitors.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Knowledge Deficit

The central theme arrived at in this study is knowledge deficit (ignorance). The concept of ignorance, rather than knowledge, has received little attention in the literature (Townley, 2011). McGoey (2012) also notes that most studies have discussed ignorance as the opposite of knowledge, which should not be the case. The two go together. In other words, one moves from being ignorant to being knowledgeable about something. At any point in time, an individual may show traits of one of the



two. Accordingly, Anwaruddin (2015, p. 742) notes that “‘ignorance’ connotes a deficiency of information. An ignorant individual is believed to have an incomplete or distorted understanding of a given phenomenon.” Consequently, a person is ignorant of a phenomenon if that person does not have a complete understanding of the phenomenon, which may be the result of either the person having little or no information on the phenomenon (knowledge deficit).

### Causes of International Tourists’ Knowledge Deficit of Local Cuisine

Most of the international tourists interviewed for this study did not search for any information on Ghanaian cuisine, neither did they have any prior knowledge of the food before coming to Ghana: *It is not that we did not find information, it is more of we did not search for it. We just came directly without almost any information. Because we like to do it that way. We would like to try new things; we would like to ask people. It is part of the game when you travel* (Respondent 13, a 32-year-old French international tourist).

*Before I came to Ghana, I did not know anything about Ghanaian food* (Respondent 24, a 24-year-old male German international tourist).

The situation is typical of risk takers who love to discover and experience new things. For instance, some international tourists have had encounters with other African countries. They, therefore, concluded that the foods consumed in other African countries were similar; hence, there was no need searching for new information: *I have been living in [sic] another African country for two years, which I have learnt that many of the foods are similar so I did not think there was going to be a big change from what I have been eating* (Respondent 30, a 25-year-old female US international tourist).

The second scenario refers to people who did little information search on Ghanaian food prior to visiting. This case is typical of some tourists who sign up for host family stays. Some of their specific arrangements require the host families to take care of their food needs, hence, the lack of active search for information on food: *Not specific, it was more like I had a book about Ghana and then I read a little bit about it. However, I thought ok when I come here, I will get more detailed information from my host so I did not read so much* (Respondent 29, a 21-year-

old female Danish international tourist).

The view shared by Respondent 16 epitomizes what other international tourists said about the information that they got on Ghanaian cuisine. They got information on only a few of the popular cuisine such as fufu, banku, and red-red, with fufu being the most mentioned due to its popularity in other international tourists’ narratives and the travel guides that they consulted. *I did not know any food. Just West African food, so, fufu. However, the rest, I did not know anything about them...Not that much* (Respondent 16, a 22-year-old female Swiss international tourist).

The determinants of international tourists’ information search behaviour are complex (Gronflaten, 2009). Luo, Feng, and Cai (2004) point to the fact that environmental and individual factors have some influence on consumer behaviour which includes information search. It is clear from this study that travel motives, prior product knowledge, residency, and purpose of trip (Cai, Feng, & Breiter, 2004; Carneiro & Crompton, 2010) all influenced the search behaviour of tourists.

### Intervening Conditions

Intervening conditions are those conditions that “mitigate or otherwise impact causal conditions of phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 131). The presence of factors such as past personal experiences, knowledgeable friends and family members, and travel guides with some information on Ghanaian cuisine all combined to mean that some international tourists had some knowledge about Ghanaian cuisine. In the case of repeat, visitors’ previous knowledge was essential: *As for me, I have been here before, so I learned to make some of the food. I made it in the US especially the jollof rice so many people know about the jollof rice because we wrote the recipe down and took it home* (Respondent 37, a 25-year-old female American international tourist).

International tourists who fall into this group did not need to search for information on the same food. Information search was for new situations. *Last year I was in Accra [internship] and we had a cafeteria...However, this year I really need information on some new things. There are some foods that I did not try last year. For example, I want to try kelewele, so they showed me where to get the kelewele. I discuss it with them. I also ask people when buying from food vendors*





(Respondent 26, a 26-year-old female German research student).

Generally, most international tourists begin their information search from internal sources (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). These are information committed to memory either through an earlier encounter with the destination or similar destinations. However, when internal information sources do not yield useful information (Fodness & Murray, 1997; Wicks & Schuett, 1991), international tourists consult external sources for entirely new information (Hyde, 2008; Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2008). It is not out of place for some of the interviewees to exhibit such tendencies.

Another group of interviewees consulted friends who are either Ghanaians or had visited Ghana in the past for information on Ghanaian cuisine: *Some of my colleagues are Ghanaians, so, at lunch time I talked to them. This I consider one of the primary sources, because if you can talk about it at lunch why must you spend the time on the internet and in books looking for what you want to know* (Respondent 32, a 29-year-old male Swiss international tourist).

*From my fiancé's mother. She can cook it. She was only here [Ghana] for two weeks* (Respondent 16, a 22-year-old female Swiss international tourist).

Vacation decision-making, like many other decisions in life, is influenced by friends and family members (Jang, Lee, Lee, & Hong, 2007). Consequently, consulting family members and friends for information on a destination is very much part of the information search behaviour of international tourists. These are important personal non-marketing information sources (Barber, 2009; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004) since they are not deliberate information from destination marketing organisations. Again, the influence of interpersonal and word-of-mouth information is ranked as the most important source of information when making a purchase decision (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). The other important issue is the very nature of the hospitality product which in many cases cannot be evaluated before purchase (Senecal & Nantal, 2004). Therefore, the account of other people is very important in the purchase decision (Lewis & Chambers, 2000).

The individual context of information seeking behaviour is still relevant. Some international tourists rely on formal external

information sources if they do not have enough internal information on a destination or a product (Hyde, 2008; Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2008, 2012). They use both online and offline sources of information: *I was going to stay for five weeks so I needed some information. I must know something about what to eat. I googled* (Respondent 3, a 22-year-old female American international tourist).

The internet has become an important source of information for travel planning by international tourists (Arsal, Backman, & Baldwin, 2012). This is especially so for leisure tourists who may prefer online sources (Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Lo, Cheung, & Law 2002; Luo, Feng, & Cai, 2004). The use of social media before planning a trip is on the rise because it is regarded as a correct and reliable source (Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011). Although those who searched online admitted to the inadequacy of the information or the difficulty in making meaning of what they read, it is nonetheless the first step to having some knowledge about Ghanaian cuisine. Another important feature in the quote above is how the length of stay influenced the decision to search for information. The nature of the trip influences the level and type of information sought (Osti, Tunner, & King, 2009).

### Contextual Conditions

Context is very important when one is looking at any phenomenon. This is because contextual conditions differ from place to place and their impact on a given phenomenon may not be the same throughout the same destination. International tourists' knowledge deficit on Ghanaian cuisine is moderated by certain contextual factors which are expressed in the typology of international tourists found in this study. These are volunteer international tourists, visits to friends and relations (VFR), and other independent tourists who did not have any acquaintances or associates here in Ghana. These typologies are associated with certain characteristics that offer unique contextual conditions that affect their knowledge deficit and the strategies that they adopted to overcome it. One peculiarity of volunteer programs is the placement within host families or volunteer homes for the volunteers to gain ample cultural experience and immersion. This gives an important contextual condition when it comes to



their information search behaviour. They rely on the programme coordinators for information on everything, including the food to eat (Respondent 14, a 24-year-old male German international tourist). For this group, any knowledge deficit about the food was taken care of by the briefings of the program officers: *I did not look for information. The organisation explained a few of the food to me. The special food here. It was just a little. Not a lot of information* (Respondent 39, a 19-year-old male Belgian international tourist). *Our company, our leader, told us about them when we arrived. We have a cook who cooks for us and she introduced us to them as well* (Respondent 14, a 24-year-old male German international tourist).

Part of Respondent 14's response reflects the important role played by host families and those in charge of taking care of the dietary needs of the volunteers. These destination caregivers (homestay operators, cooks, and program coordinators) support the volunteers with information on the food and the ingredients used in preparing the food (Respondent 17, a 24-year-old male German international tourist). It is more of a cultural learning class in these facilities: *Well, I stayed at a hostel in my first week in Ghana. They had the food catered and so they wanted us to experience all the different types of Ghanaian dishes each day. I was only there for a week* (Respondent 21, a 27-year-old female American international tourist).

*My English was very bad, so, I could not understand a lot...So, she was telling me what the yam, plantain, are used for; what kind of vegetables she was using, but it was still very confusing for me* (Respondent 9, a 22-year-old female Belgian international tourist).

Those who lived in volunteer homes/hostels tapped into the knowledge of other volunteers. These other volunteers had been around for some time and offer some orientation for new members of the group:

*I asked the other volunteers because I was with them so they told me where I could find food to eat and what to eat. The things that I found were like what they told me* (Respondent 29, a 21-year-old female Danish international tourist).

The next contextual condition is visit to friends and relations in Ghana. Visiting friends and relations is one of the most important segments of the tourism market (Asiedu, 2008; Rogerson, 2015). It is a form of tourism where

either (or both) the purpose of the trip or the type of accommodation involves visiting friends and/or relatives (Rogerson, 2015). For such international tourists, information on food at the destination is left in the hands of their hosts rather than individual searches:

*No [information search] I must admit. My friends took me to a restaurant. They told me about a very delightful and very rich fish dish and very basic though but very nice in a restaurant. They explained everything concerning the dish to me* (Respondent 6, a 61-year-old male German business international tourist).

This respondent will have no difficulty in finding what he wants. The context also means that the strategies adopted to overcome knowledge deficit will differ from the next group of international tourists: the independent non-institutionalized tourist (drifter).

The independent non-institutionalized travel segment has always been part of the international tourist segment. They are on their own and do not rely on any formal channels to plan their trip. The activities they undertake are shaped by serendipity. A serendipitous tourist is someone who has no idea of where he/she is going and what to expect (Huang, Norman, Hallo, McGehee, Mcgee, & Geotcheus, 2014). They do not engage in any active information search prior to the trip (Bjork & Kuappinen-Raisanen, 2011; Hyde, 2008). They drift from one place to the other at the destination, relying on their instincts on everything at the destination, including food, and will consult travel guides for information on potential food at the destination, if available: *First, I just saw it on the street. Then I have a travel guide, which I look at. There is also a little bit written about the different kinds of food you have* (Respondent 7, a 24-year-old male Swiss international tourist).

Information in travel guides are sometimes inadequate and may be generic. Therefore, when the international tourist moves out of the zones identified in the guide, as in the case of Respondent 7 and many other drifters who travelled into some remote areas of the country, observation becomes the most important tool in their arsenal.

### **Information Search Strategy Used at the Destination by International Tourists**

Strategies are how individuals handle situations or problems with intended consequences. In the field of information



search behaviour, Glonflaten (2009) posits that information search strategy is the combination of information sources and channels used by international tourists when searching for information with the aim of making travel/purchase decision. The information search strategies adopted by the respondents included asking locals, asking those who sell the food, and consulting the menu to obtain information. These information sources fall into non-marketing (locals) and marketing (service providers). In terms of information channels, two channels came up: face-to-face and printed offline materials (menus).

Consulting locals for information is part of the non-marketing information sources that international tourists use at the destination while service providers and menus form part of the marketing information sources that international tourists can use: *I asked my friend who lives here what were some good Ghanaian foods and she told me a few Ghanaian dishes. Nevertheless, mostly I have just been looking at the menu and seeing local dishes and choosing them* (Respondent 23, a 28-year-old female American international tourist).

*We have just been asking the women who sell the food about what was in each pot, looking at the food, and deciding which one to eat* (Respondent 30, a 25-year-old female American international tourist).

Face-to-face information channels from marketing sources have some advantages, prominent among which is getting first-hand information; however, the downside of induced selling is equally true: *This is sometimes not easy. If you ask a question, there is a tendency for the sellers to answer in a way that makes the probability of selling the thing higher. Sometimes it is not informative. For instance, if you would ask "is it very spicy", then the vendor will notice you do not want it spicy. She would have the tendency to say it is not very spicy, though it might be very spicy. Because otherwise, she might fear to lose business* (Respondent 6, a 61-year-old male German business international tourist).

International tourists do not rely on only one source or channel when searching for information on a destination. Several sources and channels are used either at the same time or at different times and occasions. The strategy adopted is context-specific:

*I have two neighbours whom I consult a lot about what they eat. Nevertheless, I also ask people when I am on the street and I see that someone offers food* (Respondent 26, a 26-year-old female German research student).

Neighbours could be consulted while they are at home; however, when tourists are away from the home environment, it is food vendors who are consulted depending on the item on sale. This is explained by the process model in international tourist information seeking behaviour (Choi, Lehto, Morrison, & Jang, 2012) where information is gathered for and within specific times (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2012) for specific purposes.

### **Consequences of the Strategies Adopted by International Tourists**

Consequences are the outcomes of the strategies that international tourists adopt to overcome some level of ignorance in relation to Ghanaian foods. A positive outcome will be when the strategy leads to a favorable outcome or directly affects the decision-making process. An unfavorable outcome will be one in which the strategy adopted does not directly influence purchase decision: *Yes, it does influence (information received). If somebody recommends a specific restaurant or dish then you go there. You trust the person, and you trust the food. Otherwise, you go back and crash them* (Respondent 38, a 35-year-old male Dutch business international tourist).

The information that is given acts as the first line of defense especially for first time visitors whose culinary backgrounds are different. Subsequently, as international tourists move through the country and begin to understand how things work, they begin to form their own knowledge base, which helps in future decisions: *Yeah, I think the first decision it (information obtained) influenced me but after when I am making a new decision, I will say ok it is nice, I am going to eat it again or I do not want to eat it again* (Respondent 26, a 26-year-old female German research student).

Relying on the information offered by locals to make first decisions, as painted by Respondent 26, is not out of the norm because one would expect that international tourists, whether acting rationally or irrationally, would, at some point, deviate from the information given to them and make their own decisions. Impersonal sources of information are more





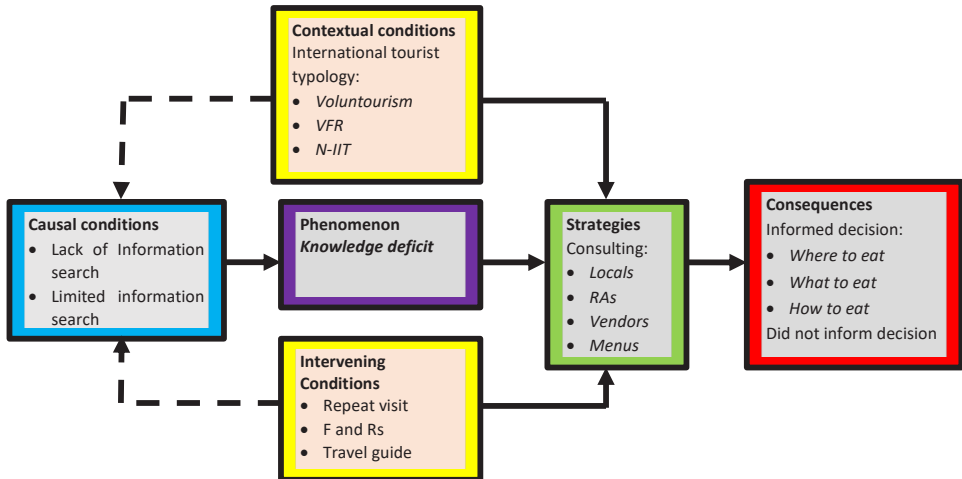
important at the stages of decision-making about the product, especially experience products. However, personal sources become more relevant at later stages (Bei, Chen, & Widdows, 2004; Bronner & de Hoog, 2011; Dodd, Laverie, & Duhan, 2005).

The information given to international tourists does not end at what to eat and where to find them. Some locals go to the extent of teaching international tourists how to eat the food (Respondent 33, a 40-year-old female Danish volunteer). This practice (showing international tourists how to eat Ghanaian food) is important, given the differences in the culinary culture of the destination and originating regions of international tourists. *Yeah, it did. She told me to try fufu and banku. Moreover, I do not think I would have tried it if she did not tell me to try it.*

*She also showed us how to eat it but I would not have known how to eat it if we just came here and ordered it. Therefore, that was important* (Respondent 23, a 28-year-old female American international tourist).

### The Proposed Model of Information Search Behaviour on Local Food at a Destination

The results of the study feed into a model of information search behaviour on local food. The model has five elements: what causes the phenomenon (central theme), the phenomenon, the strategies adopted to overcome the phenomenon, and the consequences (outcomes of the strategies). However, both contextual and intervening conditions influence the causes of the phenomenon.



**Figure 1: Proposed model to explain information search in relation local food**

VFR- Visit to Friends and Relations

RAs- Restaurant Attendants

F and Rs- Friends and Relations

N-IIT- Non-Institutionalised Independent Tourist

As shown in Figure 1, causal conditions include lack of search and limited search. These are the main causes of ignorance. Additionally, available literature shows that some tourists go to destinations without searching for information on the destination and other elements of the vacation or even at the destination. However, in the case of food, because it is important in the remembered experience (Quan & Wang, 2004), tourists will, at a point in the visit to the destination, seek information on the food,

although they may come into the destination without searching for information. The casual conditions of the phenomenon (knowledge deficit), therefore, is lack of information search and inadequate information search.

Contextual factors, especially identifiable tourist typologies (volunteer, VFRs, and N-IIT), will inform whether one would search for information or not and the amount of time and search that would be done. People who use home stay facilities such as volunteers



and students on short-stay programs rely on their host as well as program coordinators for information on what to eat. There are those who also stay with friends and relations. These groups will not search for information. Even if they do, there is not much devotion to the search. There is the third group: the non-institutionalized independent tourists (N-IIT) who do not rely on any of the two information sources but do not also search for information.

Intervening conditions, especially past experiences, family members, and the use of travel guides all affect the information the tourist has about food at the destination. Repeat visitors have information on what they ate on their past travel whilst those who rely on friends and relations who have experience of the destination have accounts limited to those narratives. The use of travel guides also means that information is limited to what the authors consider important. Because of the generalized nature of these materials, a few pages are dedicated to one topic at a time, unless it is guiding specifically an element of the destination, say, food.

The strategies adopted are influenced by both the contextual and intervening factors. Those who use homestay facilities and volunteer homes, VFRs, and repeat visitors will rely on personal non-commercial information on the first call. The other sources used include vendors, restaurant assistants, menus, and asking locals who have knowledge about the food. It is safe, therefore, to state that the strategies used by tourists will differ although there are some likely convergence since those who venture out of their tourists' bubbles will ask locals and food vendors for information. The strategies that tourists use have consequences for the decisions that are made concerning what to eat, where to eat it, and how to eat it. How to eat is very important when it comes to local food at the destination. There are some specific rituals that must be followed, for instance, eating some local dishes with the fingers. Eating some local foods without some of these rituals breaks the connection that one should have with the food. It is important, therefore, for tourists to be taught this. The other side of the strategies adopted is that, sometimes, all the information received does not affect the final decision international tourists make.

## CONCLUSIONS

The current study is in line with past studies that have looked at the consumption of

local food. However, unlike past ones, this study looked at one important aspect, which is an information search. The study has revealed that, if the element of vacation is not key to visiting the destination, much effort is not devoted to information search on it prior to visiting. An example is local food. Therefore, by looking at the information search behaviour of tourists in relation to local food, a concept of knowledge deficit (ignorance) can be adduced. This is caused by lack of information search, on one side, and limited search, on the other. It is also clear that the type of tourist vis-a-vis the type of accommodation used is important when it comes to information search, apart from the issue of repeat visits, friends, and relations with experience of the destination and the use of travel guides.

Again, strategies adopted at the destination to search for information are shaped first by contextual and intervening conditions. However, the actual search includes asking locals, vendors, restaurant assistants, and menus provided. Whether these strategies affect what is eaten eventually differs from one tourist to the other. However, in most cases, the first instance is shaped by the information received.

## Managerial Implications

As pointed out by Anwanruddin (2015), ignorance is not bad, especially when it comes to marketing communications. Consequently, destination marketers could seize the opportunity to shape the decision-making process at the destination. Although this limited study suggests that some international tourists do not search for information specifically on local food when travelling to destinations, others do. However, they described the information they obtained as an inadequate description of the local food options at the destination. This situation presents very important avenues for marketing. If indeed many important purchase decisions are made at the destination (Woodside & King, 2001), then, destination marketers should invest more resources into marketing local food offerings through the use of guide books, brochures, internet websites, information centres, as well as encouraging travel agents to promote the local food offerings of the destination. This should not be limited to a few dishes. A region by region (county, province) description would be an ideal way of presenting the local dishes of the destination.



Destination marketers should also note the fact that some tourists will not search for information on vacation elements that do not have a direct bearing on their visit. Therefore, there is an opportunity to influence the decision made at the destination by providing tailor-made information to woo tourists at the destination. However, how destination marketers influence the purchase decisions of international tourists will be shaped by a knowledge of the information search behaviour and the channels that they use (Kim, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008), which this study has fulfilled to a large extent.

### Limitations

This study, like others that rely on qualitative methods, has some limitations.

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- Although attempts were made to look at how different typologies of international tourists affect the context and the sources and channels of information used at the destination, it was limited. It is expected that other socio-demographic characteristics could affect how information is sought for at the destination. Additionally, because of the number of respondents used, its generalizability becomes difficult although it has offered some insights into how international tourists look for information on other elements of the vacation before and during their travel. It would be important for the findings to be interpreted with caution. However, it is hoped that the issues identified could be investigated in a large population using quantitative methods.
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## Appendix I

Sample responses to information search	Open coding (line-by-line and focused)	Axial coding	Selective coding
I think most of the information on Ghanaian food comes from informal networks. Most of the people who come to Ghana, maybe you have a partner here or you have a colleague or someone who invited you, normally those Ghanaians will teach you those things. Normally, if you come here, you are placed with an organization, or volunteering may be you have host family or someone and they would be teaching you, oh, this is fufu, this is banku, because if you try looking may be online or in books, you will not get so much information. However, personal relationship that is where you learn about most about the foods.	Thinking, information, Ghanaian food, informal networks, partners, colleagues, host organizations, expectation, teachers, online sources, books, inadequate information, personal relationships, food encountered	Information on Ghanaian food comes from two main source: 1. personal networks. 2. Formal channels. 3. formal channels do not provide adequate information	Inadequate information
Emm the first night I was in Ghana I went to I think it was a chop bar and I just asked them what to take and I had fufu with goat and some nice soup [excitement in her voice]. That is how I got to know about fufu [laughs]. And with the other foods, there was a nice lady in the canteen at the hospital who told me about the different cuisine.	Thinking, arrival, Ghana, chop bar, inquiry, what to eat, fufu recommended, knowing, process, place specific, help	1. No information search before arriving. 2. information sources used on arrival: a. restaurant operators b. Informal networks	Lack of information
Not much. I want to Tanzania last year and I had a friend that was from Ghana and he told me you have some things in like the gari... that is all that I got.	Inadequate search, visit to another country, Ghanaian acquaintance, not much information	Less personal search Informal network Low information	Inadequate knowledge
No. I did have any idea. First, I just saw it on the street. And then I also have a travel guide which I look at. That is also a little bit written about the different kinds of food you have.	Not informed, chance find, looking through guidebook, piecemeal information,	Serendipity Less informed through source used	Inadequate knowledge
Not at all. Not at all. I was very curious about it so I tried as much as I could. But I never like researched about the food.	No effort in finding information, eagerness to know, not committed to a search	Lack of search	Lack of information
We did not have any information. we just came. It is not that we didn't find information. it is more of we didn't search for it. We just came directly almost without almost any information. Because we like to do it that way.	No search, there could be information, lack of search, venturing into the unknown, way of doing things	Lack of search, serendipity	Lack of information

**Table 1: Illustrative Sample of the Coding Process**