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A Conceptual Review of “Foodies” in Tourism¹

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Abstract

In recent years, many tourism destinations have begun to highlight their local cuisine culture, their food-related events and local restaurants in order to increase the number of their visitors. However, for the purpose of attracting foodies to these destinations, it is important to have knowledge about this market segment. While “foodie” was a concept related to popular culture at first, after 2000s the concept was introduced to consumer behaviour literature. In its simplest way, foodie refers to a person who loves food but it is also about whether a person identifies himself/herself as a foodie or not. To specify their characteristics and position them in tourism context, their levels of involvement in food-related activities, their attitudes towards food and beverages, their food-related experiences and their travel behaviors should be understood so that they can have a place within gastronomic tourism as a niche market and some special marketing efforts can be adapted more easily. This conceptual study presents a review of literature on foodie discourse with their profiles, typologies and travel behaviors.

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INTRODUCTION

Food and beverages are indispensable components of tourism and mostly the focus of accommodation services. Food and beverage quality has generally been discussed as a hygiene factor in hospitality literature. In other words, poor food-related experiences negatively affects tourist experiences and this leads to negative promotion for tourism businesses and destinations. But food and beverage quality has become an important issue apart from food safety and hygiene. Now food and beverages are the core of gastronomy field and they are dealt in tourism literature at different levels. The relationship between gastronomy and tourism has attracted attention of tourism managers, marketing experts and academics. Today, it has been recognized that food and beverages have an essential place in defining cultures and determining travel motivations. For example, recent research has shown that the motivations of almost %40 of international tourists are related to gastronomy or food in their destination choice (Getz et al., 2014).

In recent years, many tourism destinations have begun to highlight their popular and local chefs, their local cuisine cultures, their food-related events and local restaurants in order to increase the number of their visitors with food-related motivations. Although these destinations have made some efforts to attract foodies specifically, there is not much information about this market segment (Kline and Lee, 2015). In this regard, it is very important for both to classify foodies and examine their unique characteristics which can be different from gastro-tourists. This can only be performed by determining their choices of food related activities and their travel behaviors. To understand and know foodies would help tourism destinations decide which local food and beverages and food-related experiences they should promote, market and develop (Kline and Lee, 2015; Getz and Robinson, 2014).

Even though there are many studies around the world (MacLaurin et al., 2007; Sanchez- Canizeras ve Lopez-Guzman, 2012) or in Turkey (Şahin ve Ünver, 2015; Bekar ve Kılıç, 2014) on the segmentation, profiling or behavior of food tourists or gastro-tourists, foodie concept has not been analyzed in tourism literature in a detailed way (Kline and Lee, 2015), nor it has been introduced to the literature in Turkey at all. There is a practical requirement for examination and understanding of foodies especially in terms of their destination choices and travel motivations for gaining food-related experiences even though they are recognized as a niche market by Andersson et al. (2016). As a niche segment, foodies are thought to be a favourable market for destinations which stand out with their cuisine. Additionally, little is known about the travel behavior of different types of foodies (Getz and Robinson, 2012; Robinson and Getz, 2012; Kline and Lee, 2015; Getz et al., 2014; Andersson et al., 2016), or even basic demographic and lifestyle (Cairns et al., 2010; De Long, 2006; Green, 2013; Johnston and Bauman, 2009; Scelzi and La Fortuna, 2015) information. The purpose of current study is to present an overview of foodie concept and especially give a detailed information about their profiles, typologies and travel behaviors on the grounds of existing foodie literature.

The Definition of “Foodie”

Consumers’ increasing role in the gastronomic experience production process has been triggered by the emergence of the “foodie” which is a concept also regarded as a significant influence in the development of food-

related destinations (Richards, 2015). Foodie concept has been defined and discussed in different contexts by many authors so far. According to Oxford English Dictionary, this concept was used in 1980 in an article published in New York Times for the first time. However, it gained popularity in USA specially with Barr and Levy's (1984) work titled "Official Foodie Handbook". Barr and Levy (1984) defines the term as people who talk about food everywhere all the time, are interested in food almost obsessively, salivate while telling about restaurants, recipes or even radicchio and do not think that they are talking nonsense or unnecessary things during their meetings with friends or relatives and regard food as a significant art like painting or drama.

Having studied foodies in Vancouver, Ambrozas (2003) asserts that foodies are socially more conscious, they define themselves as people eating and celebrating good food and they know how to put themselves in an upper place than an average consumer. De Long (2006) refers to "foodie" as a slang term which describes people with a special interest in food despite their lack of expertise. According to Cairns et al. (2010), foodies are people with a passion of eating and learning about food. Likewise in their studies on foodies and their travel preferences, Robinson and Getz (2012) describe foodies as people with a passion towards food. In a survey conducted in 2012 in USA, 44 million people (20% of adult population) are qualified as real foodies because of their interest in trying new food products, their desire towards fresh materials and their quality food presentations (Sloan, 2013). Green (2013) defines foodies as people cooking their own meals with materials they grow in their gardens, experiencing new recipes in upper class restaurants, having an active role in regulations related to food production, sharing their experiences of eating out or cooking online through blogs, cooking with local materials, trying new recipes, following the latest trends in food and beverage industry and travelling for new food-related experiences.

Getz et al. (2014) describe foodies as food lovers, people combining their life styles with food, pleasure and featuring food quality, cooking, food sharing and food-related experiences in their individual and social identities. Vasquez and Chik (2015) claim that being a foodie requires a tendency or a stance towards food consumption and therefore foodies are the people who are curious about and interested in food, are fascinated by food in an intellectual way and appreciate food in an aesthetic way.

The most important characteristics of foodies can be summarized as follows; to love cooking, to learn about food, to identify themselves with these activities, to think about food quality, to share food, to establish a social bond through food-oriented social meetings and to be meticulous while preparing a meal or buying food. In spite of being important to many foodies, healthy eating does not stand out as a unique characteristic of foodies. Foodies are people seeking novelty, new tastes and experiences. Accordingly, a lot of foodies travel and choose where to travel due to these motivations (Getz et al., 2014).

Despite all the definitions above, foodie concept has actually been a controversial issue since its emergence. There are two different discourses on being foodie. According to the first opinion, foodie is a concept reflecting progressively social, cultural and environmental values. On the other hand, according to the second perspective, being foodie is a snobbish and elitist concept (Getz et al., 2014). This issue is also discussed by Johnston and Baumann (2009) who claim that there are two different opinions about foodies. In terms of the first view, foodies

are the people who are democratic, interested in all kinds of food but not snobbish. In this regard, they are into healthy meals, local products, ecological and organic food. In other words, foodie trend is a modern movement in which everyone can participate. According to second opinion, foodies are snobbish, elitist and spoiled gourmets who are influenced by consumption culture and belong to upper class. Foodies are the people who try to be in social groups which require to be knowledgeable and generate cultural capital with food and beverage consumption. These people also like to talk about food-related experiences that can only be afforded by rich and educated people. However, its difference from “gourmet” is explained by Watson et al. (2008) as follows:

“The definition by Barr and Levy (1984) shows the differences between a foodie and a gourmet. Gourmets are regarded as people who is more mature and belong to upper class while foodies are the children of consumption frenzy. Foodies are generally young couples who discuss about meals they try in restaurants and try to make these meals at their home. Foodies save food-related experiences the same as tourists save souvenirs and try to visit famous restaurants.”

Even though these two notions are sometimes used for each other, foodies are very different from gourmets because “*gourmets are epicures of refined taste who may or may not be professionals in food and beverage industry*”. On the other hand, foodies are amateurs who just like food for consumption, research, learning and preparation. Gourmets only desires to eat the best food, but foodies desire to learn everything related to food. Due to this fact, foodies are sometimes regarded as “*obsessively interested in all things related to culinary*” (Popik, 2009).

According to Getz et al. (2014), both of these discourses on foodies have their justifiable sides and there are foodies who fit both of these perspectives. However some activities like dining out in a five-star restaurant or visiting local market every weekend are not sufficient to describe foodies. Indeed foodie means people who love food and it gains meaning in relation to whether a person define himself or herself as a foodie or not. Being a foodie is about self-identification or how one person feels about himself/herself. The theme of self identification in describing foodies is very significant. Therefore it is not completely right to make a foodie definition only by behaviors or activities. Because food is recognized as central to self-identity. Food can build both social identities and personal identities (Bisogni et al., 2002). This connection between food and identity can be best expressed in foodie culture (Solier, 2013) or foodism (Scelzi and La Fortuna, 2015). Foodie culture is comprised of people who are deeply in love with food and it has attracted interest of consumer behaviour researchers mostly in terms of consumption, material culture and psychology (Solier, 2013).

As mentioned above, people can identify themselves as “foodie” according to their interest in and involvement level with food (DeLong, 2006). Foodie context has been used as a quality of self-identity within the scope of postindustrial modernity (Zycherman, 2014) and it is an identifier for reflecting an intellectual activity (Richards, 2002) or a way of presenting life styles. And in doing this, foodies represent themselves e.g. being a foodie in different ways such as posting restaurant reviews, entries on food blogs, sharing food pictures via online platforms (Thanarugchok, 2017).

As it can be deduced, foodie concept was once an issue of popular culture trends, but then it turned into a notion discussed even in academic environments, and although it has been defined in many ways, in this study it is used for describing people who are interested in and have a passion towards food and would like to travel for food or food-related experiences such as workshops, events, festivals or performances.

Foodie Typologies

Foodies differentiate among themselves in terms of their personalities, interests, involvement and travel preferences (Getz et al., 2014). Foodies split up into various groups. Barr and Levy (1984) created seven foodie typologies. This grouping which is the first attempt at classifying foodies, is formed with regard to different interests in food (Green, 2013).

Table 1. Foodie Typology by Barr and Levy (1984)

Foodie Type	Description
Whole-foodier Than Thou	S/he grows her/his own food in her/his own garden naturally; s/he cuts her/his own meat and uses simple materials when cooking.
Squalor Scholar Cook	S/he researches and knows about the history of food and recipes; s/he sticks to traditional recipes; s/he has enough academic and historical knowledge to differentiate a meal or a material from another.
Made in Paris	S/he starts with learning basic cooking techniques in small restaurants; s/he manages to advance with her/his connections in Paris which is the heart of being foodie and live by cooking.
Paris C'est un Dump	Belonging to upper class, s/he spends most of her/his time in luxury restaurants; s/he subscribes to food magazines and is very selective towards food.
Gorgeous East in Me	S/he is keen on ethnic and foreign food; s/he always wants to try new tastes and experience different cultures through food.
Foodies on Ice	S/he regards food as an artistic material and tries to impress others by making statues from ice, cake decors or butter busts.
All-American	S/he is a small town foodie seeking local food and materials which should gain recognition. S/he tries to improve her/his own home-grown products and creates new meals.

Source: Green (2013).

In a study conducted in USA in 2012, it was claimed that foodies were not a homogenous group of people and accordingly foodies were divided into six groups. This classification can be seen at the table below.

Table 2. Foodie Groups by Packaged Facts Study

Foodie Type	Description
Fans of Foreign/Spicy Food	This group covers 30% of all the foodies. These foodies are keen on Italian, Mexican, Asian, Chinese, Spanish, Mediterreanean and Indian food.
Enthusiastic Chefs	Although most of the foodies are consumers rather than producers, most of them are very enthusiastic about trying new recipes, too. It is observed that 8 out of 10 who buy special food products cook new recipes at their homes.
Gourmet Foodies	These group of foodies who are interested in upper class meals spend their money on trying new food in upscale restaurants.
Organic Foodies	These foodies are very careful about all the food products to be natural, eco-friendly, sustainable and organic.
Healthy Foodies	Their priorities are calories and nutritional values of food.
Restaurant Foodies	They want to experience new food and beverages on menus of restaurants they visit. These adventurous foodies prefer food products with bitter, sour and aromatic tastes.

Source: Sloan (2013). *The Foodie Phenomenon*. Food Technology, 2: 18.

Thanks to these typologies, it is possible to divide foodies into different segments in consumer behavior literature and make more detailed and detailed studies on them as niches.

Foodie Travel Behaviour

Food and beverages are a significant part of tourist experience. Today many tourists travel due to reasons related to food and food-related activities. Getz et al. (2014) describe foodies within tourism context as “people who travel for especially their interest in and passion towards food”. In this sense, foodies are inseparable parts of experience economy. Barr and Levy (1984) state that as the tastes and smells of local food should be experienced at first hand and on site, foodies “love travelling more than ordinary people”. Also according to Thanarugchok (2017), foodies would like to travel across the world to have a meal of a famous chef.

In her study, Fox (2007) described some famous destinations such as Tuscany and Provence as “foodies’ paradise” and admitted that foodies would visit County Cork (Ireland) for its gastronomic identity and build this identity into their self-identities. This study, as one can see, gives evidence to the self-identification concept of foodism with a different perspective e.g. relating a destination’s identity to foodies’ own identities.

Tourism industry has also adopted “foodie” term within literature and has initiated marketing activities for tourists who characterize themselves as “foodies”. For example, Calaveras County Convention and Visitors Bureau operating in California, USA has a website named “GoCalaverasFoodie.com”. On this website, there is information about local restaurants, food events and festivals, special recipes and local chefs (Green, 2013). The rise of foodie culture has also formed many new tourist destinations and enterprises such as restaurants, bars, wineries (Richards, 2015).

Robinson and Getz (2012) have a study on foodies and their travel experiences and they treat foodies as tourists seeking food and beverage experiences or desiring to participate in activities related to food experiences. In the survey study conducted on Australian people who qualify themselves as “foodies”, there are questions regarding their demographical characteristics and their involvement in food-related activities, events and travel activities. The majority of the participants are female, under the age of 40, well-educated and have a higher level of income and involvement in food and beverages. Almost one third of the participants have a food magazine subscription; almost one fifth of them write online food blogs or forums. Six percent of the participants have a food club membership; eleven percent of them have a wine club membership. With regard to their travel behaviours, it is revealed that one third of the participants have planned a trip regarding food-related activities for next year.

Klein and Lee (2015) divide people who describe themselves as foodies into different categories by specifying their travel habits and their favorite food-related activities. Their sample consists of 3000 participants, two third of whom are female and the age average is 53. According to the study results, the food-related activities group under different dimensions such as sustainable agriculture, social media, being informed and following trends, cooking, drinking, local, gardening, diversity, do it yourself and mass. Among participants, the pioneers are the ones who describe themselves as foodies in the first place. The most important activity which these pioneers do while on vacation is to experience authentic food and beverages like local food, cultural food and local beverages.

In their study on foodies and food events, Getz and Robinson (2014) determine that almost thirty percent of 541 participants have travelled for a food-related experience last year and admit that this is an indication of strong bond between foodies and food tourists. In the study, the factors which are regarded as the most important by foodies are found as authenticity, tradition, local food, participating in cooking lessons, learning to cook, naturality and freshness. The authors also assert that tourism marketing activities for foodies can be performed through food and wine festivals and that these festivals should be events where all the family members can gather, people can learn about food and cooking and they should have entertainment and cultural authenticity. In other words, they suggest that more food events which consist of these characteristics should be organized more often in order to provide the participation of foodies in tourism movement.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This conceptual study presents the concept of foodie within the framework of foodie definitions, discourses, typologies and travel behaviour. The aim of this study is to introduce the concept and importance of foodie to tourism behaviour literature and tourism industry especially in Turkey, because there is not any other research on foodies in Turkish tourism literature. For this aim, existing foodie literature has been reviewed.

The term “foodie” was first emerged in 1984, but in 2000s it began to be an academic focus point. Foodie is someone who is very interested in, very passionate towards food and would like to travel for food or having food-related experiences such as participating in workshops, events, festivals or performances. The most significant discourse of being foodie is self-identification as indicated by Johnston and Baumann (2009), Green (2013) and Getz et al. (2014). When people describe themselves as foodies, they also show that food is a joy and pleasure in their lives and they can not live without any interest in food. While foodies use their constant desire towards food and their knowledge of food for creating and maintaining cultural capital, they also differentiate themselves from other consumers and accordingly they create their own identities (Cairns et al., 2010). Another important point in foodie discussions is that there are two different opinions on the definition of foodies; one asserting that foodie is related to someone snob or gourmet and the other one justifying that foodies are ordinary people with a high level of cultural, social and political consciousness. However most of the studies which have been conducted in defiance of self-identification factor, in other words by firstly asking “Are you a foodie?” with a smooth definition of the term recognize foodie as an ordinary individual with a high involvement with food-related experiences not as a snob or a gourmet. Hence, according to the results of these previous studies, the socio-demographical profile of foodies is essentially distinctive. They are mostly female, at the ages between 30-55, have a higher education and income level and much higher involvement in food-related experiences. Besides this profile, the specified typologies of foodies (Barr and Levy, 1984; Sloan, 2013) may also shed light on individuals who are not aware of themselves to be a foodie.

Even though there is a positive relationship between high involvement in food and travel motivations, making a decision to travel for a new food-related experience does not always require to be a foodie. There should be different factors to attract foodies to specific destinations, events or restaurants. Research show that foodies seek

authenticity, novelty, opportunity to learn and socializing. Foodies are the tourists who consent to pay more in order to have memorable and once in a lifetime experiences and share their stories. In this quest of them, they take advantage of personal recommendations of friends and relatives and their social media connections (Getz et al., 2014).

According to Kline and Lee (2015), the difference between food tourists and foodies is considered important. Foodies participate in food-related activities in a regular basis. They attend this activities not only on vacation but also in their daily lives regularly (Kline and Lee, 2015) and they describe themselves as foodies (Green, 2013); they adopt the idea “you are what you eat” and regard eating almost as a “ritual” (Cairns et al., 2010). Quan and Wang (2004) claim that the segmentation of tourists in terms of their food and beverage habits and preferences is vitally important for tourism industry. In this sense, if the number of studies on foodies is increased, the differences of foodies from food tourists, gastro tourists or wine tourists can be clarified.

In this regard, destinations should promote marketing strategies more different than they do for ordinary tourists so as to attract foodies. Within this frame, some practical implications are suggested as follows:

1. Destinations should present and promote their local food and beverages as something that must be experienced on site and also they should market these unique features through some events like workshops, courses or contests. Because foodies are interested in not only tasting that food or beverage but also learning to cook that meal or trying to cook.

2. Specific destinations which are famous for their local tastes may organize special activities for a specific type of foodies. For example, local food and beverages can be promoted with their natural growing ways and sustainable composition.

Its importance to tourist behaviour literature lies in the fact that it is still a niche segment and niches are known as more profitable (Dalgıç and Leeuw, 1994) than other market segments. The current study can be regarded as a basis for future studies, especially empirical research. Therefore this subject should be developed by future studies, in this sense some suggestions are asserted as follows:

1. For contacting foodies more easily for future studies, the participants of food and wine clubs, cooking lessons or food and wine festivals can be evaluated.

2. Travel personalities, life styles and destination preferences of foodies may be examined.

3. Psychographic profile of foodies in Turkey can be specified and market segmentation may be simplified for tourism managers or marketers.

4. Travel behaviours of foodie typologies can be examined separately for each group.

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