

**An Exploration of Motivational Factors of Post-Secondary Students Visit Korean Restaurants
in Metro Vancouver**

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TOUR 440 – 01: Applied Research in Tourism

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May 7, 2025

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Abstract

Korean cuisine is very popular ethnic food category in Vancouver and other cities. However, little is known about what motivates people to dine at Korean restaurants. This study explores the motivational factors that drive Gen Z post-secondary students to visit Korean restaurants in Metro Vancouver in the Fall of 2024. The research uses a qualitative approach and case study methodology, applying a theoretical framework to identify the factors influencing travelers' food consumption (Mak, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight post-secondary students, and secondary data was gathered from relevant online reviews and social media posts. The findings revealed that the motivations for visiting Korean restaurants are complex. Across five main themes adapted from the theoretical framework, 15 distinct factors were identified. The study also makes recommendations to inform ethnic restaurant management, and to guide future research in this area of tourism studies.

Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly globalized, fostering diverse culinary experiences in urban centers. According to Google data there are 2827 restaurants in the City of Vancouver (Campbell, 2024). In 2018, *The New York Times* highlighted that British Columbia had the best Asian food in North America, and the region's Asian food scene has only grown more extensive since then (Garcha, 2018). Vancouver is renowned for its cultural diversity with a significant portion specializing in ethnic cuisines, including Korean food. However, little is known about what motivates people to dine at Korean restaurants. As one of the most culturally diverse cities in North America, Vancouver showcases a rich tapestry of global cuisines, especially Korean food is popular too by a lot of nationalities.

Vancouver is a global city with a rapidly growing Korean population, having the second-largest Korean community in Canada after Toronto (America Demografia, 2024). The city has experienced a significant increase in its Korean Canadian population over the past decades, leading to the rise of Korean restaurants, churches, and even the development of a "Koreatown" (Kim, 2019). This reflects not only the growth of the Korean community but also the increasing demand for authentic cultural experiences in the city's food scene.

This study examined the motivations behind Gen Z post-secondary students' choices to visit Korean restaurants in Vancouver, focusing on the characteristics of these dining experiences and their relevance to broader culinary tourism trends. Using a qualitative approach and the conceptual framework adapted from (Mak, 2012), this research delved into diverse reasons and personal experiences, offering deeper insights into their behaviors and preferences (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Understanding these motivations is valuable for several stakeholders: restaurant managers can refine offerings to align with customer preferences and enhance service satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, tourists and residents gain appreciation for Vancouver's dynamic food culture, while insights contribute to gastronomy tourism marketing strategies and promotion efforts.

Food tourism, as Hall et al. (2004) describe, is the exploration of destination culture through cuisine, blending cultural and experiential dimensions. Stanley & Stanley (2015) highlights food tourism as a gateway to unique cultural experiences, while Sutiadiningsih et al. (2023) emphasize its connection to traditional foods and values. Tourists' dining choices are shaped by cultural curiosity, preferences, health consciousness, and ethical or environmental considerations (Naderi et al., 2024). These motivations not only attract tourists seeking authentic international flavors but also enhance local culinary appreciation.

The purpose of this study is to explore motivational factors that drive post-secondary students to Korean restaurants in Metro Vancouver. By examining cultural, social, and psychological influences alongside food-related factors, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for gastronomy tourism, restaurant marketing, and customer engagement strategies.

Research Questions

Table 1

Main Research Question and Sub-research Questions

Main Research Question	What factors motivate the post-secondary students to have dining experiences at Korean restaurants in downtown Vancouver?
Sub-research Question 1	How symbolic motivation factors related to authenticity influence post-secondary students' dining experiences at Korean restaurants?
Sub-research Question 2	How obligatory motivating factors include health concerns, price, and convenience affect students' decisions to dine at Korean restaurants?
Sub-research Question 3	How do contrast motivation factors, which refers to people's drive to seek out new and different experiences from their usual habits affect students' decision to dine at Korean restaurants?
Sub-research Question 4	How do extension factors, which are the desire for extending daily food habits and familiar flavors motivate students to dine at Korean restaurants?
Sub-research Question 5	Pleasure factors like sensory appeal, which focuses on the tastes, smells, and visual aesthetics of food, affects students to try Korean restaurants?

Note. This table indicates one main research question and five sub-research questions in this study and adopted from (Mak, 2012)

Literature Review

Definition of Food Tourism

Food tourism, also referred to as culinary tourism, is a growing segment of the tourism industry that allows travelers to explore the culture and heritage of a destination through its food. Food tourism is defined as travel motivation by the desire to enjoy unique and authentic culinary experiences, which are often deeply tied to the cultural identity of a place (Hall et al., 2004). The concept of authenticity plays a central role in food tourism, as it shapes the way tourists perceive and connect with local traditions and lifestyles through food.

The Role of Authenticity in Dining Experiences

Authenticity, a key motivation for culinary tourism, provides tourists with a sense of connection to a destination's culture. Travelers value authentic dining experiences that incorporate traditional ingredients, methods, and flavors, as they reflect the essence of a community's identity (Hall et al., 2004; Stanley & Stanley, 2015). For instance, in Japan, food tourism is gaining popularity due to its ability to provide immersive and authentic experiences for tourists. Studies highlight that food is the third most important factor when choosing a destination, with travelers looking for authentic and sensory-rich experiences (Park et al., 2019). Traditional dishes such as Mizusawa udon, which has been prepared for over 400 years, exemplify how authenticity enhances culinary experiences. These traditions not only attract tourists but also contribute to preserving cultural heritage (Park et al., 2019). However, in order to maintain appeal in an evolving market, destinations often face the challenge of balancing authenticity with adaptation. Modern diners increasingly prioritize health-conscious options, necessitating modifications to traditional recipes while ensuring the core cultural elements remain intact (Bojarczuk et al., 2024). Overall, authenticity plays a key factor to attract tourists to immerse in food, culture, and history, but different cultures and customs may cause barriers in tourists' connections with traditional cuisines.

The Barriers of Authenticity

Balancing authenticity with evolving market demands is challenging in this modern society. While authenticity increases the attractiveness of culinary tourism, it also introduces challenges. Unfamiliarity with new foods and cultural differences can discourage tourists from engaging with local cuisines. Studies have shown that concerns about food safety are particularly significant, especially when traditional preparation methods differ from modern hygiene standards (Sutiadiningsih et al., 2023). For example, some visitors in Vietnam and Indonesia avoided traditional dishes due to worries about unfamiliar ingredients or preparation practices. Similarly, tourists in Hong Kong reported that they felt uncomfortable with certain local dining customs, which hindered their ability to enjoy authentic food experiences (Correia

et al., 2020). These elements might restrict visitors' interactions with local cuisines and discourage tourists from trying traditional food. However, These barriers can also create opportunities for cultural exchange. Curious travelers may embrace the novelty and adapt to cultural differences, leading to memorable experiences and enhancing their overall experience. Moreover, Correia et al. (2020) introduced that some tourists from different cultural backgrounds may be more likely to share this new experience because of the curiosity and cultural shocks. Overall, the destinations/restaurants could attract tourists in different ways, but the risks and opportunities exist at the same time.

Food Tourism and Sustainable Cultural Preservation

Food tourism is not only a means of individual cultural exploration but also a tool for promoting sustainable tourism and preserving culinary traditions. Authentic food experiences enhance destination branding by showcasing local heritage, fostering community pride, and encouraging the preservation of traditional practices (Molz, 2004; Naderi et al., 2024). As a result, eating and tourism are inseparable. High-context cultures, which emphasize historical and cultural connections, provide particularly rich opportunities for tourists to explore and learn about food-related philosophies and wisdom (Sutiadiningsih et al., 2023). These experiences contribute to a deeper appreciation of the destination's culture, while also supporting sustainable practices by maintaining traditional methods and values (Sutiadiningsih et al., 2023). Food tourism goes beyond the dining experience to promotions of cultural learning, engagement with society, and sustainable destinations. It connects the gaps between history, culture, and gastronomy, providing a unique opportunity for tourists to engage with the authenticity of a destination while also supporting the preservation of its culinary identity.

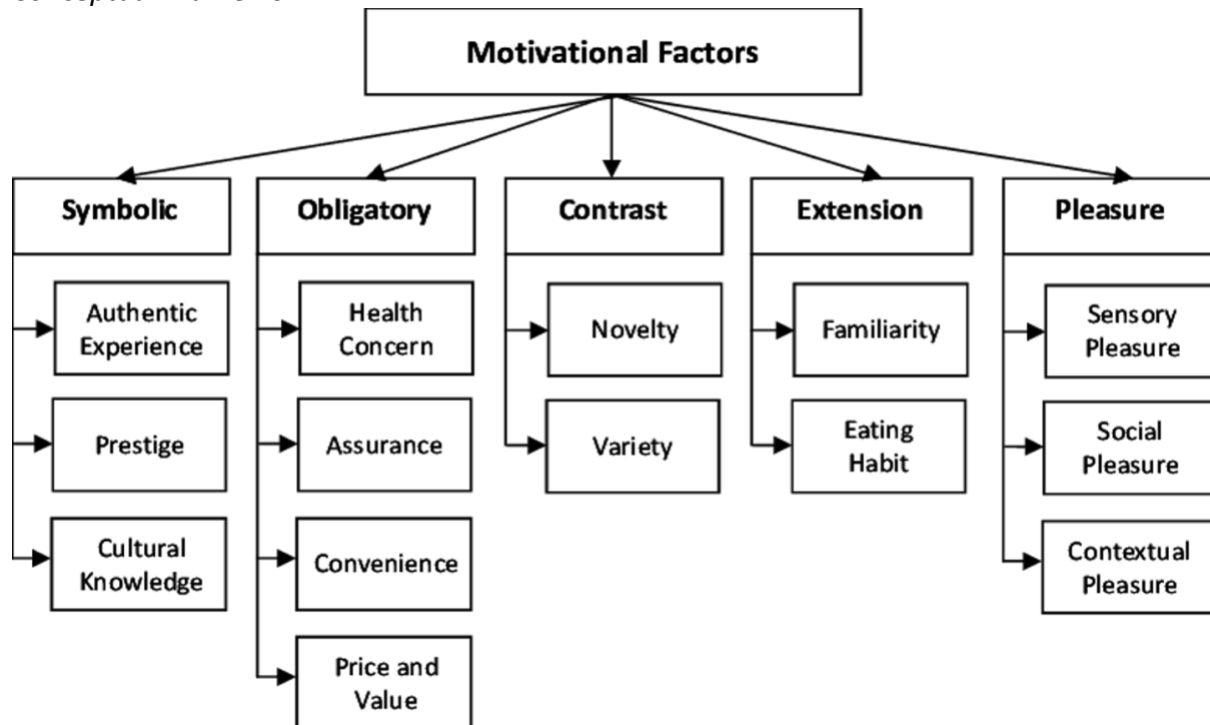
Food tourism serves as a cultural excursion where food is used to interact with a destination's history, artistry, and traditions. It makes a major contribution to destination branding by promoting local culinary traditions, which encourages community pride and helps to preserve cultural heritage. In addition, research emphasizes the relationship between food and cultural heritage, demonstrating that gastronomy not only improves destination branding but also encourages sustainable tourism by maintaining cultural traditions.

Theoretical Framework: Five Motivational Factors

This study used the “Five Motivational Factors” mentioned by Mak et al. (2012) as a conceptual framework to assess post-secondary students' motivation in food tourism. This framework categorizes five distinct factors and each of them is described below.

1. **Symbolic:** Seeking authentic experiences, cultural knowledge, and prestige through local food.
2. **Obligatory:** Practical considerations such as health, food safety, price, and convenience.
3. **Contrast:** A desire for novelty and variety by trying new and unfamiliar foods.
4. **Extension:** Presence for familiar taste and eating habits while traveling.
5. **Pleasure:** Sensory pleasure, social pleasure, and overall dining contextual pleasure.

Figure 1.
Conceptual Framework



Note. This figure shows the adapted conceptual framework of this study (Mak et al., 2012).

This approach is appropriate to use in this study, because it contains various factors. For example, it includes the importance of authenticity, cultural heritage, and the balance between tradition and adaptation in food tourism. Therefore, this study used this helpful conceptual framework to efficiently analyze and determine the motivations that drive post-secondary students to visit Korean restaurants in Vancouver.

Methodology

This research uses an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm focuses on understanding the meanings and experiences individuals assign to social phenomena, making it well suited to exploring the subjective motivations behind dining choices (Durberry, 2017). According to Durberry (2017), the interpretive approach dominates the social science paradigm. In other words, how people construct reality in society based on their interactions and experiences.

This study used qualitative approach and case study methodology. According to Williams (2007), case study can attempt to find out more about situations that are less known or poorly understood. By using case study as methodology, it allowed us to gain deeper insights into the post-secondary students' motivations to dine in at Korean restaurants in downtown Vancouver. This approach also allowed us to gain an understanding of food tourism in a multicultural city: Vancouver. We intended to obtain insights that are both transferable and

generalizable to similar contexts by concentrating on a specific example of Korean restaurants in a multicultural metropolitan setting.

Setting, Population and Sampling

Our research was initially located at the Robson Public Market on Robson Street, downtown Vancouver. We selected this site, because it was well-known for its diverse dining experiences. There are about 20 Korean restaurants located within a one-kilometre radius of the Robson Public Market, and many of those offered a variety of cuisines. Another reason why we chose Robson Street above other neighborhoods was that it was easily accessible by public transport, which showed it was convenient for the post-secondary students to visit. However, there were not many secondary students available for our research, so we decided to relocate to the main campus of Capilano University, which provided us easy access to our target population: students.

The key population are the post-secondary students attending universities or colleges in Canada, and they have had dining experience in Korean restaurants in the downtown Vancouver area. These students are an ideal population, because they are most likely to visit and dine in the area that we are researching. Specifically, individuals aged 18-30 who have visited at least once in dining at Korean restaurants in downtown Vancouver were considered suitable for sampling.

Purposive sampling is used for this research as sampling to specifically target objectives with some criteria (Hesse-Biber, 2017), such as post-secondary students attending universities or colleges in Canada who have had dining experiences at Korean restaurants in downtown Vancouver. To gather in-depth insights about student motivations and dining experiences at Korean restaurants in downtown Vancouver, we used two methods, the semi-structured interviews and secondary data. Participants were approached in-person on Robson Street, an area known for its many Korean restaurants that are popular among students due to its closeness to multiple post-secondary institutions.

Semi-structured interviews were guided by flexible, open-ended questions that allow for adapting to spontaneous topics that arise during conversation, providing a rich, qualitative understanding of student motivations (Hesse-Biber, 2017). With this method, the study enables more in-depth exploration of individual experiences with flexibility and dynamic interactions for real-time clarification and explanation beyond observation. To maintain ethical standards, a consent form was provided, ensuring the study's trustworthiness.

Secondary data is ideal for gathering large amounts of relevant data efficiently. The reviews offer complementary insights that may be adopted with interview data to improve the overall credibility and depth of the research. To ensure credibility, direct quotes from participants in the interview are used to support data and the research's credibility (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Online Reviews are compared with interview results to confirm similar patterns and trends, enhancing overall research reliability.

This recruitment process included approaching potential participants at peak hours of weekdays, lunch time during the break time between classes and early evening after school. Students are most likely to dine in the area during those time periods. They were informed about the study and asked if they would like to participate in a short interview to share their

dining experiences. Online reviews were effectively collected using specific keywords which were provided in appendix A and selected time periods. Reviews were selected based on their relevance to the student demographic and their experience dining at Korean eateries in downtown Vancouver.

Methods

Semi-Structured Interview

We completed eight interviews in total. While supporting size is usable for our qualitative study, Haenssger (2019) cautions against pre-specifying supporting sizes in qualitative research, as it may overlook the importance of achieving representation and data saturation. Instead, our goal was to ensure sufficient representation of diverse perspectives within the target group. In our case, we aimed to capture a range of experiences from post-secondary students who frequently dine at Korean restaurants in Metro Vancouver. The interviews were held in Robson Street, especially Robson Public Market which is a quiet environment with plenty of tables and chairs. There are also several Korean restaurants that the post-secondary students would most likely visit. We also conducted interviews at Capilano University as it was difficult to assess only the post-secondary student at Robson Street. These settings are appropriate, because they provide a comfortable environment and encourage open conversations while minimizing distractions and efficiently increasing the likelihood of reaching our target students.

One strength of semi-structured interviews is flexibility. This method allows the interviewers to adapt and explore deeper spontaneous topics that arise naturally from the conversation (Hesse-Biber, 2017). This flexibility leads us to investigate unexpected and new aspects of post-secondary students' motivations, while gaining authentic and detailed information directly from them. However, there is also a limitation of semi-structured interviews, which is the potential for recall bias (Hesse-Biber, 2017). This restriction could be applied since students may not remember their eating experiences and the exact reasons that influenced their decisions, especially if their latest dining experience was a long time ago. This could have an influence on the reliability of the data acquired, because it might not accurately reflect their accurate motivations for dining decisions. However, we applied the methods suggested by Yin (2015) to reduce bias. For example, we compared individual interviewer's comments to find out the similarities and differences among their answers, which reduced the inaccurate data. We also overlooked all the data to discover more factors under the same theme with proven evidence from interviewers' comments before finalizing the data analysis process. Overall, the interviewers' comments demonstrated as concrete and logical data, and the bias did not actually occur. As a result, our actions ensure we reduced bias in the research findings.

Secondary Data

This research used secondary data from eight online reviews to understand the post-secondary students' motivations and dining experiences in Vancouver. The data were collected from popular platforms, such as Google Reviews, Yelp, and TripAdvisor. These platforms provide authentic customer experiences, opinions, and dining experiences, which allow us to gain a deeper understanding of our target populations' motivations. The data were collected from public online sources, such as review platforms and social media posts tagged with specific restaurants or hashtags related to Korean dining in Vancouver. The research aims to compare experiences and trends to build an understanding of factors influencing Korean dining decisions. One key strength of secondary data is its accessibility and cost-effectiveness. Secondary data is often readily available to the public, meaning researchers can utilize it without needing special permissions or additional resources to collect it themselves.

The expected data provides qualitative information on the authenticity, price, convenience, and sensory appeal of Korean restaurants. We also collected eight secondary data from three most frequently used online review platforms: TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Yelp. We tried our best to filter the detailed and consistent feedback across the review platforms, and we avoided the vague or overly emotional comments. We also picked the authors who were most likely the post-secondary Gen Z students in Metro Vancouver by detecting the emoji and patterns that Gen Z would normally use/show.

Reviews may show how diners perceive the authenticity of dishes, the atmosphere of the restaurants, and whether they value traditional or modern options. Social media posts likely attract the aesthetic appeal and sensory experiences of the food (Spense et al., 2022), which could reveal motivations tied to pleasure and contrast factors. Secondary data provides a large volume of qualitative data without direct interviews with participants. However, it may lack contextual depth and may not be specifically answered to the research questions. Primary data collection methods like surveys or interviews may be used alongside secondary data to fill in the gaps. Also, a limitation of secondary data is that it may not perfectly align with the specific research questions or objectives we are pursuing. It has been suggested that researchers may face challenges when available data do not fully answer a particular research question.

Ethics

The participants were provided with informed consent, and the participants understood and signed the consent forms. The participants understood what this study was about, what types of questions that they were asked, how their responses were shown, and the interviews were recorded for rehearing before the interviews started. The recording of the interviews and notes were used for this study only. The study used pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. The data would be maintained for one year and will be deleted after one year of the completion date of this study to protect participants' privacy. The study was not focused on vulnerable populations. This study was majorly focused on the post-secondary students in Metro Vancouver.

Data Analysis

We developed a four-step process for data analysis, adapted from the Hesse-Biber analysis approach. Our step 1: data preparation involves transcribing and compiling the interview data. This step is beyond the transcribing process; as Hesse-Biber (2017) emphasizes, transcription requires active engagement with the data through deep listening and interpretation. We transcribed the eight interviews, and reviewed eight online reviews from TripAdvisor, Google, and Yelp. We also organized them on Google Docs and ensured the data was in a consistent format for easy access and analysis.

During step 2: data exploration, we carefully reviewed and reread the gathering data. We compared and contrasted each interview with the scripts to ensure credibility. We also created analytic memos to capture the emerging ideas and key patterns. These memos went beyond simple descriptions and helped us begin to synthesize data by linking it to our conceptual framework.

Step 3: The coding process had three levels: descriptive coding, categorical coding, and analytical coding (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Descriptive coding was inductive, and we identified key phrases or concepts from the data, such as “authentic experience” and “value for money.” Categorical coding was deductive, and we grouped descriptive codes into broader categories based on a conceptual framework. Finally, we applied analytical codes. This helps to identify deeper meanings and connections within the data that go beyond mere description (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Throughout this stage, additional notes were made to refine and document coding decisions and ensure consistency.

Our step 4: interpretation focused on ensuring the validity and reliability of our analysis. We applied Kvale’s (1996) three-part model to assess the validity of our findings and ensure the interpretations accurately reflected the participants' views. We applied an inductive-deductive mix on this process. We started inductively and identifying themes, then applied our conceptual framework deductively. We looked for the keywords, such as “authentic experience” or “value”, which helped us identify motivations.

We assigned the easy-to-remember pseudonyms that were different from all interview participants’ names, which allowed them to remain anonymous and clearly distinguishable. For reliability, we double-checked our coding by having at least two researchers independently categorize the same interviews and resolve any discrepancies through discussion, ensuring internal consistency in the coding process. We shared a summary of our analysis results for team members to check and ensure that our interpretations were consistent with the interviews. This feedback enhanced the credibility of the study (Privitera, 2017). The process we conducted was transferrable and the readers could understand the context and apply the similar process to research the motivations with other nationalities in different countries and locations.

To ensure consistency, we documented each step of the analysis process and created a statement that showed the relationship between the categories, themes, and research questions. This transparency and dependability enhanced credibility by showing that the findings are based on a structured approach (Privitera, 2017). We engaged in reflections by discovering our own potential biases, and specifically, the prior assumptions of motivations.

This reflection ensured the confirmability and the findings emerged from the data and would not be affected by preconceived ideas (Privitera, 2017).

Results

We have conducted eight interviews with eight interview participants. We also reviewed eight secondary data from three different online platforms: TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, and Yelp. Moreover, we used the conceptual framework and identified five themes that relate to the main and sub-research questions: symbolic, obligatory, contrast, extension, and pleasure (Mak et al., 2012). We identified one category in symbolic motivation as authenticity, and three categories in obligatory motivation: health, price, and convenience. We also identified three categories in contrast: new and health-assured experience, attractive experience that varies from usual experience, and looking for improved service/experience. Finally, we identified two categories in extension: daily food habits and familiar flavors and six categories in pleasure: tastes, smells, visual appeal, services, welcoming atmosphere, and group gathering. The visual results: the participant list and results map are shown below. We further discuss each category in the following section.

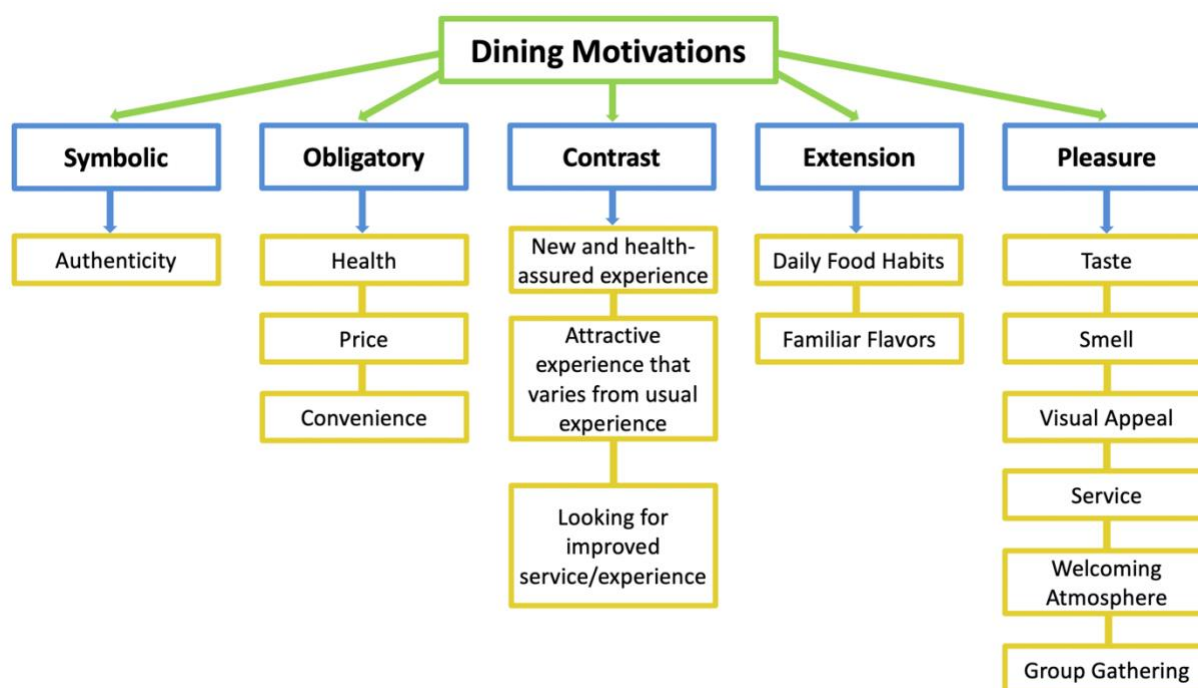
Table 2.
Participants

Pseudonyms	Interview Dates	Gender	Times of Dining at Korean Restaurants
Shawn	October 15, 2024	M	New international student, so still insufficient experience in Vancouver
Amy	October 15, 2024	F	New international student, so still insufficient experience in Vancouver
Sam	October 15, 2024	M	New international student, so still insufficient experience in Vancouver
Peter	October 21, 2024	M	At least once or twice every week
Wendy	October 24, 2024	F	Once a month

Mark	October 15, 2024	M	Once/Twice a month
Lilly	October 24, 2024	F	Once half year
Jackson	October 24, 2024	M	Twice/Once a month

Note. This table includes the interview participants' pseudonyms, interview dates, genders, and frequency of visiting Korean restaurants.

Figure 1.
Result Map



Note. This figure contains the visual results of this study.

Symbolic Motivation

Authenticity is an important symbolic motivation that drives post-secondary students to Korean restaurants. Lilly and Shawn (interviewees) were motivated to try Korean authentic food by the “Korean drama” that they usually watched. Wendy (interviewee) emphasized that “[she preferred] decoration with Korean traditional style than fusion.” Those demonstrate the authentic atmosphere is a key factor that attract the post-secondary students to Korean restaurants.

Specifically, authentic cuisine motivates the post-secondary students to visit Korean restaurants. Peter (interviewee) shared the main motivation that drove him to “have more authentic Korean cuisine,” because “some recipes [were] impossible to make on [his] own”. As a Korean, Peter (interviewee) also discussed that he did not agree with “some restaurants [sold] Korean food with a lot of changes in the recipe,” which showed that he prefer the authentic dining experience). Savannah (online review) also pointed out that he “[will definitely be back]” because of “an authentic Korean BBQ experience” (Huynh, 2024). The recommendations from Koreans, online reviews, Korean drama, adaptation, and authentic cuisines and atmosphere are the key factors that contribute to the symbolic motivation of Korean dining experiences.

Obligatory Motivation

Health, price, and convenience are the three obligatory motivational factors that influence post-secondary students’ decisions to choose Korean restaurants.

Health

Health considerations play a significant role in students’ dining decisions. Amy and Sam (interviewees) emphasized the importance of “food safety and cleanliness,” reflecting a strong concern for hygiene. Jackson (interviewee) highlighted “consistent food quality” as a key factor, indicating the desire for reliability in what they consume. Additionally, health is connected to functionality. Peter and Wendy noted that “spicy food and hot soup [was best] to warm [the body], when [it was] cold weather.” This suggests that health motivations are often tied to comfort and the practical benefits of certain foods. Health-conscious students also consider dietary benefits. Wendy shared that she preferred Korean food because it was “less carbohydrate and sugar,” while Lilly highlighted that “lactic acid bacteria in Kimchi [helped her lose] weight.” Those demonstrate how students know Korean food as a healthy lifestyle choice, focusing on its nutritional benefits and personal health goals.

Price

Price sensitivity is another critical factor that drives post-secondary students visit Korean restaurants. Many participants include Lilly (interviewee), admitted to being “always worried about the price” when choosing where to dine. Jamie (online review) praised Korean restaurants for offering meals “at a great price,” while Wendy found discounts memorable and motivating in her dining experiences. Price is not only related to affordability but also perceived value. Shawn (interviewee) shared that “even though price [was an] important factor, he would still try the food if [he was] very interested in it.” Those suggest that while price is a limiting factor, students are willing to pay more if they are interested in the experience.

Convenience

Convenience also significantly influences students' choices. Amy (online review) recommended a Korean restaurant because it was “easily accessible,” which showed the location and availability are crucial factors (Vu, 2024). Students are drawn to Korean restaurants that fit into their daily routines or are located near campuses or transit, making dining decisions simpler. Overall, the results show the health, price, and convenience are the key factors relate to obligatory motivation that drive post-secondary students have Korean dining experience.

Contrast

From the interviews and online reviews, we identified three distinct experiences linked to contrast motivation that attract post-secondary students to Korean restaurants: health-assured dining experiences, unique cultural variety, and improved service quality. First, some students were drawn to health-assured dining experiences. Jackson (interviewee) shared that he was willing to try new cuisine “as long as it is safe to eat and [would not] make [him] sick afterwards,” which emphasized the importance of food safety in trying unfamiliar dishes. Second, other students sought the unique cultural variety. Shawn (interviewee) expressed his interests in “trying some interesting food that [varied] from [his culture],” which reflected a desire for experiences that diverge from their usual meals. Those highlight the appeal of novelty and exploration in contrast motivation. Finally, some students were motivated by the promise of improved service quality. PenguinC (online review) mentioned he “decided to give it another shot [and hoped] to come again,” indicating students' willingness to return for a better overall experience. These findings demonstrate how post-secondary students' contrast motivations—rooted in health, variety, and service quality—play a significant role in their decision to explore Korean cuisine.

Extension

Daily Food Habits

Daily food habits played a significant role in post-secondary students' decisions to dine at Korean restaurants. Interview participants from Asia mentioned a preference for “carbohydrate-based foods [such as] rice and noodles,” which reflected how cultural backgrounds and dietary habits influenced their dining choices. For instance, Peter (interviewee) shared how Korean food brings comfort and nostalgia, noting that “the most familiar taste reminded [him of his home].” These insights highlight the importance of daily dietary habits and demonstrate the students often seek familiarity in their dining experiences with food as a connection to their daily routines and cultural identity. Korean restaurants accommodate these behaviors by serving meals that follow traditional eating patterns, which appeal to students who share similar culinary preferences.

Familiar Flavors

Familiarity with flavors also plays a critical role in attracting students to Korean restaurants, especially through the emotional and cultural resonance of the cuisine. Jackson (interviewee) observed that “adaptation to local culture and ingredients [was] also important,” indicating that local residents are more likely to explore Korean cuisine when they feel familiar with the food. This balance between preserving authenticity and catering to local cuisines strengthens the emotional connection to their comfort food. It also suggests that familiarity, flavors, and cultural adaptation strengthen the appeal of Korean restaurants, and those offer both emotional comfort and a bridge to authentic culinary experiences.

Pleasure

The six pleasure factors (tastes, smells, visual appeal, services, welcoming atmosphere, and group gathering) emerge as primary motivators to attract students to dine at Korean restaurants.

Taste

Taste is consistently ranked as the most influential factor that drive the post-secondary students to Korean restaurant. For instance, Jamie (interviewee) described “tasty food” as her main reason for choosing Korean restaurants, while William (online reviewer) highlighted the “juicy and crispy fried chicken” and the “nicely flavored spicy pork” as standout dishes (Liong, 2024). These examples emphasize the importance of food quality in attracting diners and encouraging repeat visits.

Smell

Smell also contributes to the dining experience, though it was less frequently mentioned. Lilly (interviewee) noted that “smells always attract [her],” showcasing how aromatic dishes can entice customers. On the other hand, variety also plays a role in attracting the students. Shawn (interviewee) shared his preference for “all-you-can-eat services,” demonstrating the Korean restaurants could cater to diverse dining preferences in order to attract the guests who are interested in these diverse preferences.

Visual Appeal

Additionally, visual appeal is also an important factor to influence the students’ dining decisions. Anushka (online reviewer) remarked that she would “definitely come back” to try the “cheesy spicy *buldak*” because it “look[s] so good” (B, 2024). Jackson (interviewer) shared that “presentation of food [was] an important part that attract [him].” Those highlights how aesthetic presentation enhances the perceived value of a meal.

Service Quality & Welcoming Atmosphere

Service quality and a welcoming atmosphere are critical for creating positive dining experiences. Lizzie (online review) highlighted “attentive and friendly staff,” a sentiment echoed by many participants and online reviewers (H, 2024; Vu, 2024). The welcoming atmosphere of Korean restaurants was also a major draw as Savannah (online reviewer) appreciated the “lively and welcoming atmosphere,” noting that being “served pumpkin soup at the beginning of our meal was a nice touch” (Huynh, 2024). In contrast, Wendy (interviewee) described a negative experience elsewhere, where “an Italian server put a dirty tray on the table [when] she was still dining.” Those emphasize the importance of high-quality service in creating positive dining experiences that influence post-secondary students’ decisions to visit Korean restaurants.

Group Gathering

Group gathering was another significant factor that drove the post-secondary student to dine at a Korean restaurants. Jackson (interviewee) pointed out that Korean restaurants were ideal for “group gatherings (more than 3 people), [because they] had lots of side dishes in every meal.” This suggests that Korean restaurants’ communal dining format fosters social interaction, making them attractive for larger groups. Similarly, PenguinC (online reviewer) enjoyed the “grill-at-your-table setup,” which allowed them to “enjoy everything at [their] pace” (2024). These features highlight how thoughtful details and interactive dining experiences impact customer satisfaction.

These findings reveal six key pleasure factors (tastes, smells, visual appeal, service quality, welcoming atmosphere, and group gathering) that strongly influence post-secondary students’ motivations to choose Korean restaurants. These features not only foster social interaction but also make Korean restaurants a preferred choice for students seeking a vibrant and inclusive dining experience.

Discussion

Summary of Results

The study discovered that the motivation to visit a Korean restaurant in Metro Vancouver is complex and multi-dimensional. A total of 15 factors were identified under five themes, and more than one is experienced simultaneously.

Key Takeaways

The future studies can conduct the interviews at the locations where the target populations usually visit. For example, future studies that explore the motivations of post-secondary students visiting restaurants can conduct interviews at the campuses of post-

secondary institutions, where they are able to reach out to the post-secondary students easily. Moreover, future studies could discover deeply about the motivations of different populations visiting different destinations by referring to the results of the study. In the meanwhile, the future studies could interview the populations who have had relevant experiences at the specific locations, which offer more valuable insights to the studies. Lastly, the future studies could develop the interview questions with balancing different concepts, which help the studies explore the concepts deeply.

Outcomes for Management

- Restaurant managers could decorate their restaurants in traditional style, offer more authentic cuisine, and play cultural-related dramas to attract customers.
- Entrepreneurs could consider opening restaurants in a location that is convenient for customers to dine in.
- Restaurants could offer refreshment (for example, ice cream) to customers after the meals in order to reduce the heavy flavor of the cuisine
- Restaurants could provide options for customers to choose to try the food that adapted to local cultures with appealing visuals to attract the local customers
- Restaurants could maintain and further improve food quality and service to maintain the repeated customers.

The traditional food and customs may cause barriers for the tourists from different cultural backgrounds, because the traditional preparations may differ from modern hygiene standards. Some tourists did not try some traditional food in Vietnam and Indonesia because of the food safety or flavor differences (Sutiadiningsih et al., 2023). At the same time, some tourists from different cultural backgrounds (especially with different context) were confused or not comfortable with different food cultures, which caused barriers for them from local traditional food in Hong Kong (Correia et al., 2020). Similarly, most of the interview participants shared that the food safety was the factor that they cared the most, and one of the interview participants discussed he wanted to try new food with consistent food safety control. Restaurants modified traditional recipes with more adapted options, which ensure the cuisines align with modern food safety standards and the core elements still remain (Bojarczuk et al., 2024). As a result, the tourists and participants care most about the food safety, and the authenticity also becomes a key factor that motivates them to dine in at restaurants.

Moreover, the tourists explored and learned more about the food-related cultures (such as the philosophy and wisdom) through different dimensions in the high-context countries or regions that have strong connections with long history and cultural connections (Sutiadiningsih et al., 2023). Tourists immersed themselves in the authentic food experience, which indicated that the authenticity attracts them to a destination (Park et al., 2019). Correia et al. (2020) introduced that some tourists from different cultural backgrounds may be more likely to share this new experience because of the curiosity and cultural shocks. Likewise, the result of the study showed that the interview participants and online reviews were driven to visit Korean restaurants by exploring authentic food and history. Some of them showed interest in the restaurants with Korean traditional decorations. Overall, the results of the study offer a fresh

perspective on the Gen Z post-secondary students' motivations according to food safety and authenticity. The future research could focus on identifying the motivational factors that drive the international post-secondary students (who are new to the specific locations) to visit the restaurants that offer all-you-can-eat options. The future research could also focus on exploring the likelihood the post-secondary students would visit the restaurants that are open around the campuses. Those directions not only discover the applications of the promotions and alternative food options in the real-life, but also bring new insights to Korean restaurants.

Limitations

The interview questions were not balanced with different concepts was the first limitation of the study. The limitation impacted the transferability, as some parts of results were transferable to the research's questions that balanced concepts. The study suggested that the future studies could balance the interview questions with different concepts. Another limitation of the study was some of the participants who have had less dining experience in Metro Vancouver, while compared to other participants, they were not able to share more insights. The limitation impacted the dependability, which showed that the results would be different under the similar setting. However, although these participants who have had less dining experience in Metro Vancouver, they represented the international students who were new to Metro Vancouver and the study explored these new international students' motivations to visit Korean restaurants in Metro Vancouver. As a result, the Korean restaurants in Metro Vancouver could consider attracting the new international students by offering new and health-assured dining experience (including all-you-can-eat options) and discounts.

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