

## ANTECEDENTS OF GASTRONOMY DESTINATION BRAND EQUITY: AN EXAMINATION OF GASTRONOMY EXPERIENCE, MOTIVATION, AND DESTINATION SATISFACTION

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to test the relationships among gastronomic experience, motivation, destination satisfaction, and gastronomy destination brand equity. Data (n:600) was gathered from domestic visitors visiting Gaziantep in March, April to May 2018. Scale development to measure gastronomy experiences and scale adaptation process of destination brand equity were carried out. The relationships among the variables were examined with structural equation modeling. According to the findings, except H5 and H8, all hypotheses are significant in the research model. At the end of the study, significant theoretical and managerial implications were provided for the tourism providers and destination marketers, and managers.

### Keywords

Gaziantep  
gastronomy motivation  
gastronomy experience  
destination brand equity

### Article History

Received 15 October 2021  
Revised 13 September 2022  
Accepted 22 September 2022  
Published online 18 Oct. 2022

### INTRODUCTION

Destination branding is an influential tool, and it has an important role in building image positively and increasing an emotional connection between travelers and destination (Morgan et al., 2007). Destination brand equity studies are notable research field to understand the tourist's perceptions about destination visited. These studies have some important contributions to destination marketers and managers in terms of building effective marketing and managerial strategies by exploring tourist perception of destinations. Furthermore, not only the core elements of destination brand

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equity suggested by Aaker (1991) but also the different components including experience, motivations, and satisfaction which are considered antecedents of brand equity are widely investigated in the relevant literature.

Richards (2002) stressed the importance of the tourist experience by arguing that the focus should be on experiencing tourism activities beyond physically seeing the touristic places. Visitors are searching for new and different experiences which have the potential to enhance destination images and loyalty. With the rise of gastronomy tourism, a destination tries to distinguish itself from other destinations by providing local food/cuisine to their visitors (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Local food and experiencing different tastes are a good way to explore a different culture (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Gastronomic products, which are shown as an important source of destination attractiveness in the destination branding studies, are one of the main components that destinations should focus on. Therefore, the strengthening of destination brands with local culinary resources and increasing brand values offer significant advantages to destination stakeholders (Horng et al., 2012). In terms of exploring different cultures or understanding the local culture, gastronomy experience and motivations could give valuable information to destination stakeholders by also examining relationship destination brand equity.

Previous studies show that tourist motivations are closely related to brand equity dimensions in destination branding research (San Martin & Bosque, 2008; Lee, 2009; Liu, 2020). In addition, the link between tourist satisfaction and customer loyalty, also the relation between tourist motivation and tourist experience are frequently examined in tourism and hospitality literature (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Barnes et al., 2014; Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). Even though there are numerous studies focusing on examining the relationship between the constructs in the hypothetical model of the current study, there is a research gap examining the relationship between the constructs in the gastronomy destinations context. Additionally, due to limited studies identifying the effects of gastronomy experience and gastronomy motivations on gastronomy destination brand equity, this study addresses this gap and provides an original and valuable contribution to gastronomy experience and destination branding literature by testing the hypothetical model proposed. Thereby the main objective of the present study is to examine the research model. Although previous research has examined dimensions of gastronomy experience in various aspects (Sthapit et al, 2019, 2020; Atsız et al., 2022), limited studies have been employed from social and marketing perspectives as suggested by Quan

and Wang (2004). Thus, developing a scale of gastronomy experience based on this perspective is the other objective of the current study.

The current work contributes to the existing body of literature by examining the effects of gastronomy experiences and motivations, and destination satisfaction on destination brand equity. Moreover, this work tests the mediating impact of gastronomy motivation and destination satisfaction on relations between gastronomy experience and destination brand equity. Therefore, empirical results of the current study provide greater knowledge that the gastronomy experience and motivations are important elements contributing to developing a competitive advantage based on destination brand equity and building effective branding strategies.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

In this section, the gastronomy experience was discussed within the scope of the model suggested by Quan and Wang (2004) who handled the topic with the context of social science and marketing approach. Subsequently, gastronomy motivations, destination satisfaction, and consumer-based destination brand equity were widely discussed. Finally, hypotheses were developed in line with the literature, i.e. quantitative and qualitative studies.

### **Gastronomy experience**

Today, factors such as changing economic conditions, differentiation of competition, and changed consumption habits have reduced the dominance of traditional marketing approaches (Yetiş, 2016, p. 117). In the scope of experience economy suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999), a large number of studies have been conducted to examine the experience and reveal dimensions of it in various contexts. When definitions of experience by different authors are evaluated, it can be said that there is no common definition. For example, according to Mossberg (2007, p. 70), "experience is a concept that affects the consumer emotionally, physically, intellectually, and spiritually as a result of the combination of many elements". Furthermore, the concept of experience differs according to the discipline in which it is discussed. For example, in the fields of sociology and psychology, experience is considered a subjective and cognitive activity that ensures the development of the individual, while in the anthropological

perspective, experience refers to the way individuals live their own culture (Uşaklı, 2016).

There is a large body of literature examining experiences related to tourism experience in the different types of tourism. Gastronomy/food experience is one of the important kinds of experience in total tourism experience and is broadly investigated in the gastronomy and tourism literature. Kivela and Crofts (2006) emphasize that the food experience within the touristic experience is an experience that appeals to the senses and gives pleasure, and state that this is an experiential element (dimension) of the tourism experience. Similarly, Mak et al. (2013) stress that eating is an experiential part of tourist experiences, expressing eating as a pleasurable tourist activity that appeals to our five senses. Gastronomy experience focuses on individual tasting, experience, research, discovery, and knowledge about food or wine (Kivela & Crofts, 2006).

Tourists are pursuing new and different food experiences. With a post-Fordist consumption approach, the need for searching for more special, different, and novel food experiences increases the significance of food tourism for the destination and tourism firms (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). In the food experience literature, theoretical and empirical studies (Quan & Wang, 2004; Mkono et al., 2013; Son & Xu, 2013; Ding & Lee, 2017; Aksoy & Kodaş, 2021; Cifci et al., 2021; Atsız et al., 2022) were conducted intensively. But in the few studies pursued within the scope of the interpretative (qualitative) approach, it is seen that the food experience is investigated within the framework of social science and marketing approach (Mkono et al., 2013; Son & Xu, 2013). According to the purpose of the current study, gastronomy experience was explained based on these approaches. Within the scope of social science philosophy, the experience is tried to be conceptualized as a peak experience in the literature. Quan and Wang (2004) stated that peak experience is the opposite of daily routine experience. Motivation, involvement, meanings, and attitudes attributed to the experience, search for authenticity (Volo, 2009). Quan and Wang (2004) tried to conceptualize experiences from two different perspectives: a social, phenomenological vantage point (Cohen, 1979) and a market-driven, consumerist perspective (Mossberg, 2007). The model by Quan and Wang (2004) reveals that food experiences can be peak or supportive according to their relationship with daily experiences under the dimensions of contrast, extension, and intensification. A peak experience is in sharp contrast to the daily experience, while a supportive experience is seen as an extension or intensity of daily experience (Quan and Wang, 2004).

A limited number of studies have empirically tested the theoretical model of the food experience suggested by Quan and Wang (2004). As an illustration, in the qualitative study of Mkono et al. (2013) aimed to validate the conceptual model of Quan and Wang (2004). In the study, tourists' views on 285 restaurants in Zimbabwe, a tourist destination in Africa, were interpreted. The findings indicated that foods are the primary source of destination attraction for some tourists, while for some tourists, the food experience is an extension of the routine at home. It is allegeable to say that this research conducted by Mkono et al. (2013) largely supports the theoretical model of Quan and Wang (2004). Similarly, the study conducted by Son and Xu (2013) aimed to investigate the Buddhist food experience of western tourists. As a result of the thematic analysis of the comments made on travel blogs, six food experience dimensions were determined. One of these experience dimensions is the peak touristic experience.

### **Gastronomy motivation**

When the studies related to travel motivations are reviewed, it is clearly seen that research is performed based on the push and pull theory (Dann, 1977), socio-psychological motives (Crompton, 1979), escape and seeking motives (Iso-Ahola, 1983), and travel career approach (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983); which are considered as dominant theories. Research conducted within the framework of these theories provides foundations for several other studies on understanding tourist motivations and behaviors. Gastronomy motivations which are widely investigated based on these theories are considered the driving force behind the food consumption behavior of tourists. The relevant literature points out that food consumption studies have been examined the motivation of travelers toward local or non-local food (Kim and Eves, 2012; Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). Prior studies examined the psychological factors, social, demographic, cultural, and physiological dimensions (Kim & Eves, 2012; Mak et al., 2013) with the aim to explain tourist food consumption motivations. As one of the first conceptual studies on local food consumption motivations, Fields' (2002) categorization of local food consumption motivations has been a pioneer for many studies, and then studies that aim to examine underlying dimensions of local food consumption motivation have been started. Fields (2002), who approached local food motivations theoretically, argues that travel motivations, suggested by McIntosh and Goeldner (1990), could be adapted to the field as physical, cultural, interpersonal, status, and prestige motivators. Following this theoretical proposition, Kim et al., (2009) conducted

qualitative research using grounded theory and revealed motivational factors for local food consumption, such as escape from routine, health concerns, learning knowledge, authentic experience, togetherness, prestige, sensory appeal, and physical environment. In another study, Kim and Eves (2012) developed a scale of tourist local food consumption motivation and identified 5 dimensions: “cultural experience, sensory appeal, interpersonal relations, excitement, and health concerns”. Considering these studies, gastronomy motivation draws attention as an important factor affecting the local food consumption behavior or i.e. tourists’ intention to consume local food.

### **Destination satisfaction**

Studies to determine the satisfaction levels of customers are carried out based on the basic theories in the literature such as expectancy disconfirmation (Oliver, 1977), cognitive or cognitive dissonance, assimilation-contrast, equality, attribution (Folkes, 1984), affective models (Westbrook, 1987), and performance-only theories (Churchill & Suprenant, 1982). The theories of expectancy disconfirmation and performance only are frequently used in the field of tourism and destination marketing. Tourist satisfaction is considered as a degree of meeting the expectations of the tourists from the destination and emerges as the result of the tourists' assessment of the quality of the products offered by the destinations. Oliver (1999) defines satisfaction as the degree to which a customer's needs and expectations are met at the end of a purchase. Tourist satisfaction is defined as a function of the expectation of the tourist before the trip and the experiences after the trip (Chen & Chen, 2010). Tourist satisfaction of destination which is substantial in the destination choices of potential tourists (Huh et al., 2006) is stated as a significant variable in destination performance measurement (Korzay & Alvarez, 2005).

### **Consumer-based destination brand equity**

Brand equity is defined in customer-based contexts (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003). Aaker (1991, p.15) defines brand equity as *“a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firms’ customers.”* Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) have identified brand equity dimensions theoretically. Aaker (1991) classified brand equity under five dimensions which include: brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and other proprietary brand assets. According to Keller (1993), brand equity model has two components: brand awareness and

brand image. Consumer-based brand equity has been one of the outstanding issues in marketing and management discipline since 1990, and it has been an essential factor in gaining competitiveness for destinations (Horng et al., 2012). In destination branding studies, many scholars have tried to measure customer-based brand equity by Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) brand equity dimensions (e.g. Boo et al., 2009; Horng et al., 2012; Gomez et al., 2015; Fathabadi et al., 2017; Liu, 2020). In addition to these studies, some other dimensions were suggested (Das & Mukherjee, 2016; Chekalina et al., 2018). However, brand equity, which generally consists of brand image, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty dimensions, is used in destination branding research.

Awareness is considered as the first step of brand equity (Gartner & Konecnik Ruzzier, 2011). According to Aaker (1991), having a high level of awareness for a brand will most likely lead consumers to buy that brand. Destination awareness plays a pivotal role in tourists' destination preferences in the tourism industry (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). Brand awareness is regarded as one of the main components of brand equity in the tourism industry that affects consumers' purchasing decision process and travel intentions (Boo et al., 2009, p. 221). Similarly, perceived quality provides value to consumers by affecting their purchasing intentions and differentiating the brand from competing brands (Pappu et al., 2005, p. 145). The perceived quality of the destination is stated as the comparison between consumers' perceptions of destination performance and service expectations for the destination (Chen, 2011, p. 85). Furthermore, brand image, which is one of destination brand equity dimensions, is defined as the set of associations that connect the consumer to the brand name in the consumer mind and is regarded as the consumer's perceptions about the brand (Keller, 1993). Brand image is an important dimension in the formation of destination branding models (Dedeoğlu et al; 2019). Lastly, brand loyalty is considered as the most important dimension of brand equity (Aaker, 1991). Brand loyalty is designated as the consumer's positive attitude towards a brand and also a determinant of the consumer's intention to purchase a particular brand regularly in the future (Pappu et al., 2005).

### **Relationships between variables and hypothesis**

It can be inferred from the literature that there are positive relationships between experience and brand equity in regard to the relevant experience. For example, Shamim and Butt (2013) determined that brand experience effects customer loyalty and brand equity dimensions. Shen and Liu (2015) revealed a strong relationship between experience and brand equity. In a

tourism destination, tourists' satisfaction is of great importance for the sustainable development of tourism businesses. The results of previous studies show that tourist satisfaction is an important antecedent of customer loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Chi & Qu, 2008), and consequence of tourist motivation (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Devesa et al., 2010) and of tourism experiences (Tsaour et al., 2007; Da Costa Mendes et al., 2010).

Earlier research provided evidence for the strong relations between motivation and experience (Prebensen et al., 2013; Lee, 2015). Mak et al. (2012) state that past experience which is one of significant constructs in food consumption, positively effects the tourist behavior of food consuming. The study by Tsaour et al. (2007) concluded that consumer satisfaction affects consumer loyalty, and that consumer satisfaction mediates the relationship between theme park experience and loyalty. In other words, theme park experiences affect consumer loyalty through satisfaction. In the food experience context, Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016), similarly, revealed that food experience positively affects travel satisfaction. Wu and Liang (2009) also showed that experiential value increases customer satisfaction positively. In the study conducted by Erbaş (2010) with the sample of Starbucks customers, it was determined that experiential marketing increases customer satisfaction and loyalty positively. In another study, Hosany and Gilbert (2010) revealed that destination experiences affect recommend intentions of tourists, and that consumer satisfaction affects consumer loyalty. Also, they designated that the satisfaction variable has a mediating role in the relationship between destination experience and recommend intentions. Jin et al. (2012) examined the relationships among restaurant experience, brand image, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty, and they concluded that brand image and customer satisfaction positively affect brand loyalty. Babolian Hendijani (2016) found that food experience positively increases the level of tourist satisfaction. Besides a number of prior studies (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Chen & Chen, 2010) have suggested that tourist motivations have positive effects on destination loyalty. In addition, touristic experience can positively affect customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. For instance, Brakus et al. (2009) tried to determine the effect of brand experience dimensions on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty and concluded that brand experience has a direct effect on brand loyalty. Therefore, based on the literature above, the research model and following hypotheses are developed.

**H1:** The gastronomy experience has a positive and significant influence on gastronomy motivation.



- H2:** The gastronomy experience has a positive and significant influence on destination brand equity.
- H3:** The gastronomy motivation has a positive and significant influence on destination brand equity.
- H4:** Destination satisfaction has a positive and significant influence on destination brand equity.
- H5:** The gastronomy experience has a positive and significant influence on destination satisfaction.
- H6:** The gastronomy motivation has a positive and significant influence on destination satisfaction.
- H7:** The gastronomy motivation positively mediates the relationships between gastronomy experiences and destination brand equity.
- H8:** The destination satisfaction positively mediates the relationships between gastronomy experiences and destination brand equity.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample and data collection

The fieldwork of this study was carried out in the city of Gaziantep located in southeast Anatolia in Turkey. Since it has been included in UNESCO Creative Cities Network, has approximately 500 traditional and local foods, attracts a large number of visitors, and is considered an important gastronomy/culinary destination in Turkey, this location was chosen. The research sample for qualitative research was selected from domestic travelers who visited Gaziantep and experienced the local food of the city and business owners. For the quantitative method, purposive (judgmental) sampling and convenience sampling were utilized to select the respondents. Visitors who experienced local foods of Gaziantep were selected during their trip to have valid and correct data. Data were collected from those who were willing to participate in the research through convenience sampling from March to May 2018. A total of 624 questionnaires were gathered. Of that, 24 questionnaires were omitted owing to incomplete data. The final data set comprises a total of 600 for analysis and the respondent profile is presented in Table 1.

### Instruments

Gastronomy motivation was measured with a 21-item scale from Kodaş and Özel (2016). In this study, local food consumption motivations were identified with four factors (cultural motives, physical motives,

interpersonal relations, and psychological relaxation). Destination satisfaction with three items was adapted from Ladhari et al. (2008), Yuksel et al. (2010), Žabkar et al., (2010), and Westbrook and Oliver (1981). A scale development process for the gastronomic experience scale and a scale adaptation study for the destination brand equity were carried out.

Table 1. *Respondent Profile*

Variables		n: (600)	%
Gender	Female	251	41,8
	Male	349	58,2
Age	15-19	30	5
	20-24	42	7
	25-29	91	15,2
	30-34	114	19
	35-39	96	16
	40-44	79	13,2
	45-49	48	8
	50- 54	33	5,5
	55-59	25	4,2
Monthly Income (TL)	Over 59	42	7
	Up to 1299	100	16,7
	1300-2000	70	11,7
	2001-3000	173	28,8
	3001-4000	125	20,8
Frequency of visit	Over 4000	132	22
	1	188	31,3
	2	181	30,2
Type of Organization	Over 2	231	38,5
	Individual	400	66,7
	Package Tour	200	33,3

### *Gastronomy experience scale*

The scale development process suggested by Devellis (2003) was followed for the development of the gastronomic experience scale. To create an initial pool of items for the gastronomy experience scale, extensive literature review was carried out. In addition, since limited empirical studies were performed to measure gastronomy experience from the marketing perspective, the interview technique was also used in the study to get in-depth information about tourists' gastronomy experience and to enrich the initial item pool in October 2017. Semi-structured interviews were ranged in duration between 7 and 46 min. The interview questions which were developed based on gastronomy experience literature (Quan & Wang, 2004; Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Mak et al., 2013; Mkono et al., 2013) were classified into two categories. The first category is for restaurant business owners

who have offered local food to their visitors (n:5) in Gaziantep. Snowball sampling method was used to determine these enterprises. Snowball sampling is considered a good way to reach convenient interviewees for truthful data. In this process, questions of interviews are related to; visitors' food experience and are as follows; *What are the points that your guests focus on while eating local foods?, How important is it for your guests to experience local food?, What are your observations about the feelings of your guests after experiencing local foods?*. In the second category, questions were asked to reveal the feelings and thoughts of the visitors who experienced local foods to obtain comprehensive information about the gastronomic experience of the visitors through purposeful sampling (n:12). The interview questions are as follows; *Why did you visit Gaziantep? What kind of experiences do you focus on in your Gaziantep trip?, What are your feelings while experiencing local food during your Gaziantep trip?, How do you identify your feelings when you tasted local food in Gaziantep?, How would you identify your gastronomy experience in Gaziantep in general?*. The qualitative data acquired from the interviews were interpreted through descriptive analysis in the context of gastronomy experience as suggested by Quan and Wang (2004) and Mak et al. (2013).

The items in the pool were selected from previous studies and qualitative research findings of this study (Hegarty & O'Mahony, 2001; Richards, 2002; Heldke, 2003; Quan & Wang, 2004; Kivela & Crotts, 2005, 2006; Oh et al., 2007; Beer, 2008; Smith & Costello, 2009; Kim et al., 2009, 2010; Chang et al., 2010; Mak et al., 2013; Mkono et al., 2013; Wijaya et al., 2013; Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014, 2016; Adongo et al., 2015; Ingerson & Kim, 2016; Ding & Lee, 2017). Finally, an item pool consisting of 45 items related to gastronomy experience, including peak and supportive experience dimensions, was obtained in the framework of studies by Quan and Wang (2004) and Mak et al. (2013). To enable to have the content validity of initial items, the scale was submitted to the opinions of nine faculty members who are experts in the field for expert judgment. The number of items in the pool, which consists of 45 items total, was determined as 24 items as a result of the content validity ratio (Lawshe, 1975).

### ***Consumer-based destination brand equity scale***

To measure the destination brand equity of Gaziantep, which is regarded as a gastronomy destination, a scale adaptation process was carried out. First, the literature was reviewed comprehensively to generate an item pool (33 items) and determine the constructs of destination brand equity in

previous research (Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Pappu et al., 2006; Boo et al., 2009; Ferns & Walls, 2012; Horng et al., 2012; Im et al., 2012; Bianchi et al., 2014; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). After expert judgment (ten faculty academicians), four dimensions and 23 items have been determined as a result of the content validity ratio. Destination awareness (5 items), destination brand image (6 items), perceived quality (6 items), and destination brand loyalty (6 items) dimensions were distinguished based on expert reviews.

## RESULTS

### Pilot study and exploratory factor analysis

The pilot study and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were conducted with 120 participants who had previously traveled to Gaziantep. Before ensuring reliability and construct validity, some items have reverse coded in the gastronomy experience scale such as *"The food experience is just one that fulfills my hunger"*, *"Eating meals that I am familiar with while on vacation is important to me"*, *"My food experience is ordinary"*, *"It is important to me that the dishes I experience while on vacation are prepared with the cooking technique I am familiar with."*, *"I consume dishes that I have experienced before when travelling"*. After reliability analyses, Cronbach Alpha coefficients of gastronomy experience (0.799), gastronomy motivation scale (0.907), destination satisfaction (0.859), and destination brand equity (0.925) were satisfactory. Since a bias can occur for research in social sciences, common method variance was controlled before exploratory factor analysis. Thus, Harman's one-factor test was utilized to evaluate. The results indicate that the common factor explains 26% of the total variance for the gastronomy experience scale and 34% for the destination brand equity scale. These results show that there was no problem of common method bias in the current research since the values are under the recommended threshold of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Then, EFA was performed for each construct except for the gastronomy motivation scale. A maximum Likelihood analysis with varimax rotation was used to extract the main factors. Only items with factor loadings higher than 0.30 were taken into account.

The 24 items used to measure domestic visitors' gastronomy experience were subjected to EFA. One item (*My local food experience is new for me*) which is below 0.50 factor loadings is removed and one item (*It is important for me to experience food in local restaurants that appeal to historical textures*) was eliminated from the data set because it is associated with cross-loadings on more than one factor. EFA analysis was re-run with the

remaining items. Bartlett's test of Sphericity (1012,183; df:231) was significant and KMO value of 0.796 was calculated. A three-factor (*peak, supporting and attractionised experience*) with 22 items were extracted with a cumulative explained variance of %42.028.

The EFA was conducted with 3 items of the destination satisfaction scale. A single factor with three items extracted with a cumulative explained variance of %71.960. Bartlett's test of Sphericity (200,565; df:3) was significant and a KMO value of 0.707 was calculated. The 24 items used to measure destination brand equity were subjected to EFA. Four items ('*Gaziantep is a very famous destination*', '*My food experience in Gaziantep is consistent with my impression of Gaziantep cuisine*', '*This gastronomy tourism destination fits my personality*', '*I enjoy visiting Gaziantep for gastronomy tourism*') were eliminated from the data set because they are associated with cross-loadings on more than one factor. EFA analysis was re-run with the remaining items and out of 23 items, 19 were retained to generate a four-factor solution, explaining 58.621% of the total variance. Bartlett's test of Sphericity (1329,838; df:171) was significant and a KMO value of 0.888 was found. The four factors were named based on the theoretical framework of destination brand equity: destination brand awareness, destination brand image, perceived quality, and destination brand loyalty.

### **Confirmatory factor analysis**

A covariance based Structural Equations Model (CB-SEM) approach was applied to test the validity of the research model and hypothesis using the LISREL 8.80 software program since CB-SEM is especially suited to test and confirm the well-founded theoretical models (Hair et al., 2011). Moreover, as the data is >200, CB-SEM was performed to analyze the data obtained. For the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and testing of the structural model firstly, a multivariate normality test of the data was performed. Lisrel and Mardia Captcha value is calculated (1235 and  $p < 0.001$ ). To avoid problems of non-normality of the data, CFA with the robust maximum-likelihood method of estimation (ACM) was performed as the data did not meet the condition of multivariate normality. Next, the reliability and validity of each construct were evaluated using CFA before testing the measurement model and structural model.

After CFA, five items of gastronomy experiences, four items of gastronomy motivation, and five items of destination brand equity constructs were removed due to the increasing chi-square value of each construct. The goodness-of-fit statistics, standardized factor loading of

items ( $> 0.50$ ), composite reliability ( $> 0.70$ ) t-statistics ( $> 2.58$ ) and AVE ( $> 0.50$ ) values were satisfactory for each construct. For internal consistency, CR and AVE for the other construct met recommended values before measurement model testing (Hair et al., 2010). Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 depict the summary of these results.

Table 2. *Gastronomy Experiences Scale (CFA)*

Constructs and items	S. Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
<b>Peak Experiences</b>		0.951	0.95	0.74
My local food experience is unique for me	0.81			
My local food experience is an opportunity to learn different cooking techniques.	0.88			
Trying to learn the history of the local food is important to me.	0.91			
Visiting places that represent the food culture is important to me.	0.91			
Using traditional cooking techniques in local dishes important to me.	0.87			
To participate in local cooking practices is important to me	0.83			
I purchase the contains used in local dishes to relive that experience at home.	0.79			
<b>Attractionised Experiences</b>		0.904	0.91	0.71
The traditional presentation of local dishes is important to me.	0.84			
It is important to me that local dishes are delicious.	0.92			
The atmosphere of the place where local food is eaten attracts me.	0.87			
The quality of local food is important to me.	0.72			
<b>Supportive experiences</b>		0.910	0.91	0.63
The food experience is just one that fulfill my hunger	0.68			
Eating dishes that I am familiar with while on vacation is important to me.	0.73			
It is important to me that food and beverage businesses are easily accessible.	0.81			
It is important to me that the portions of the dishes I experience while on vacation are filling.	0.86			
It is important to me that the prices of dishes I experience while on vacation are reasonable.	0.88			
It is important to me that the dishes I experience while on vacation are prepared with the cooking technique I am familiar with.	0.80			

**Notes:** RMSEA: 0.071; NFI: 0.98; NNFI: 0.98; CFI: 0.99; RMR: 0.038; SRMR: 0.041; GFI: 0.90; AGFI: 0.86; Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) /df: 4.009,  $p < .01$  ( $t > 2.58$ ).

Table 3. *Gastronomy Motivation Scale (CFA)*

Constructs and items	S. Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
<b>Cultural</b>		0.938	0.94	0.72
C_Mot1	0.79			
C_Mot2	0.85			
C_Mot3	0.89			
C_Mot4	0.88			
C_Mot5	0.86			
C_Mot6	0.81			

<b>Physical</b>		0.925	0.93	0.76
P_Mot1	0.84			
P_Mot2	0.90			
P_Mot3	0.87			
P_Mot4	0.86			
<b>Interpersonal relations</b>		0.962	0.96	0.86
IR_Mot1	0.87			
IR_Mot2	0.93			
IR_Mot3	0.96			
IR_Mot4	0.94			
<b>Psychological Relaxation</b>		0.977	0.99	0.96
PR_Mot1	0.97			
PR_Mot2	0.99			
PR_Mot3	0.98			

**Notes:** RMSEA: 0.071; NFI: 0.99; NNFI: 0.99; CFI: 0.99; RMR: 0.034; SRMR: 0.039; GFI: 0.88; AGFI: 0.81; Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) /df: 4.03,  $p < .01$  ( $t > 2.58$ ).

Table 4. *Destination Brand Equity Scale (CFA)*

Constructs and items	S. Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
<b>Destination Brand Awareness</b>		0.894	0.89	0.74
I can easily name famous Gaziantep dishes.	0.78			
I am aware of Gaziantep as a gastronomy destination.	0.90			
I can recognize Gaziantep among other similar gastronomy destinations.	0.89			
<b>Destination Brand Image</b>		0.945	0.95	0.86
Visiting Gaziantep is a wonderful opportunity for sampling cuisine.	0.95			
Gaziantep has a rich cuisine culture.	0.97			
Gaziantep's cuisine is diverse.	0.86			
<b>Perceived Quality</b>		0.918	0.92	0.75
Gaziantep's cuisine is better than that of similar destinations.	0.88			
Gaziantep offers excellent quality in gastronomy experiences.	0.94			
Gaziantep offers delicious cuisine.	0.91			
Gaziantep's gastronomy tourism is offered at reasonable prices.	0.72			
<b>Destination Brand Loyalty</b>		0.942	0.94	0.81
Overall, I am loyal to Gaziantep.	0.85			
I would recommend others to visit Gaziantep for gastronomy tourism.	0.92			
Overall, I have confidence in Gaziantep's cuisine.	0.92			
Gaziantep would be my preferred choice for a gastronomy tourism vacation	0.90			

**Notes:** RMSEA: 0.060; NFI: 0.99; NNFI: 0.99; CFI: 0.99; RMR: 0.037; SRMR: 0.034; GFI: 0.92; AGFI: 0.88; Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) /df: 3.18,  $p < .01$  ( $t > 2.58$ )

Table 5. *Destination Satisfaction Scale (CFA)*

Constructs and items	S. Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
<b>Destination Satisfaction</b>		0.876	0.88	0.71
I am happy about my decision to visit Gaziantep	0.79			
I am pleased that I decided to visit the Gaziantep	0.87			
Visit to the Gaziantep exceeded my expectations	0.86			

**Notes:** All fit indices have perfect values.

### Measurement model testing

Anderson and Gerbing (1988) advised a two-step approach for data analysis. After confirming each construct, this approach was followed in this study. To estimate the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model, Cronbach's alphas, composite reliabilities (CR), and the average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated. Table 6 depicts the summary of the measurement model results.

Table 6. *Result of Measurement Model*

Dimension and Items	S. Factor Loadings	R <sup>2</sup>	Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	(CR)	(AVE)
<b>Gastronomy Experiences</b>			0.949	0.82	0.60
Peak	0.89	0.79			
Attractionised	0.65	0.42			
Supportive	0.77	0.59			
<b>Gastronomy Motivation</b>			0,963	0.88	0.65
Cultural	0.84	0.70			
Physical	0.77	0.60			
Interpersonal relations	0.81	0.66			
Psychological Relief	0.81	0.66			
<b>Destination Brand Equity</b>			0.962	0.88	0.72
Destination Brand Awareness	0.83	0.69			
Destination Brand Image	0.88	0.77			
Perceived Quality	0.85	0.72			
Destination Brand Loyalty	0.84	0.71			
<b>Destination Satisfaction</b>			0.876	0.91	0.70
Sat _1	0.80	0.63			
Sat _2	0.87	0.76			
Sat _3	0.85	0.72			

**Notes:** RMSEA: 0.067; NFI: 0.98; NNFI: 0.98; CFI: 0.99; RMR: 0.029; SRMR: 0.040; GFI: 0.990; AGFI: 0.93; Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) /df: 3.67,  $p < .01$  ( $t > 2.58$ ).

For discriminant validity of the measurement model, if square root values of AVE are greater than correlation coefficients ( $\sqrt{AVE} >$  correlations between factors), discriminative validity is achieved (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In the present study, intercorrelation of the constructs and square root values of the AVE which are shown in Table 7 provides adequate evidence of discriminant validity.

Table 7. *Discriminant Validity for the Measurement Model*

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1. Gastronomy Experiences	<b>0.77</b>			
2. Gastronomy Motivations	0.76	<b>0.80</b>		
3. Destination Brand Equity	0.69	0.71	<b>0.84</b>	
4. Destination Satisfaction	0.43	0.54	0.51	<b>0.83</b>

**Note:** The diagonal elements (in bold) denote the square root of AVE



**Structural model testing**

The structural model was conducted to test relations among proposed variables. The results revealed that gastronomy experience positively influenced gastronomy motivation, destination satisfaction, and destination brand equity. No significant relation was found between gastronomy experience and destination satisfaction. Therefore, H5 and H8 are not supported. Figure 1 illustrates path analysis with their associated statistics and the results of structural model are presented in Table 8.

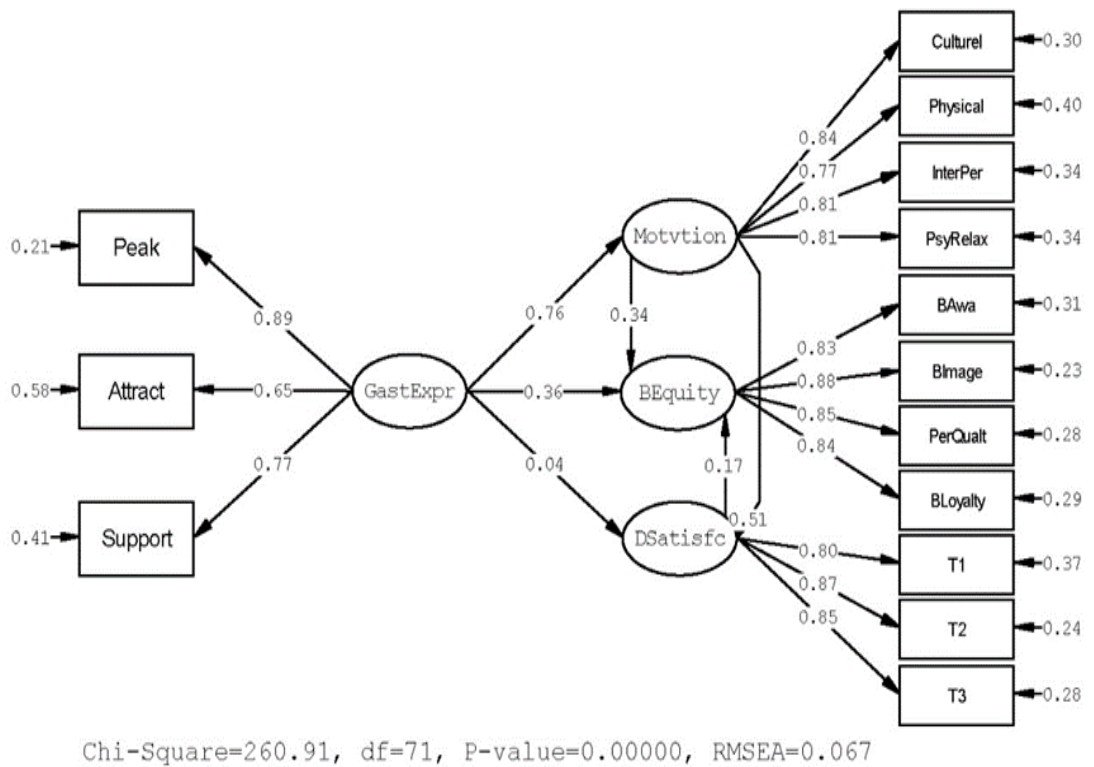


Figure 1. Results of path analysis

For determining the mediating role of gastronomy motivation on the relationship between gastronomy experience and destination brand equity, firstly, relationship between gastronomy experience and destination brand equity was investigated (SEs: 0,69; RMSEA: 0.052; (x2) /df: 2.64; GFI: 0.98; CFI: 0.99; NFI:0.99) are positive and significant. Then gastronomy motivation construct was added in the mediated model (SEs: 0.37; RMSEA: 0.080; (x2) /df: 4.79; GFI: 0.93; CFI: 0.98; NFI:0.98). Therefore, it is alleged that gastronomy motivation has a partial mediation effect between gastronomy experiences and destination brand equity. Thus, H7 was supported.

Table 8. Result of Structural Model Testing

Hypothesized Paths	Standardized Estimates (SEs) Direct Effect	Standardized Estimates (SEs) Indirect Effect	Total Effect	t-statistics	Relations
H1: <i>Gastronomy Experience</i> → <i>Gastronomy Motivation</i>	0.76	-		11.74*	Supported
H2: <i>Gastronomy Experience</i> → <i>Destination Brand Equity</i>	0.36	-		3.67*	Supported
H3: <i>Gastronomy Motivation</i> → <i>Destination Brand Equity</i>	0.34	-		3.50*	Supported
H4: <i>Destination Satisfaction</i> → <i>Destination Brand Equity</i>	0.17	-		3.60*	Supported
H5: <i>Gastronomy Experience</i> → <i>Destination Satisfaction</i>	0.04	-		0.38 <sup>NS</sup>	Not Supported
H6: <i>Gastronomy Motivation</i> → <i>Destination Satisfaction</i>	0.51	-		4.16*	Supported
H7: <i>Gastronomy Experience</i> → <i>Gastronomy Motivation</i> → <i>Destination Brand Equity</i>	0.32	0.37	0.69	10.24*	Supported (Partial)
H8: <i>Gastronomy Experience</i> → <i>Destination Satisfaction</i> → <i>Destination Brand Equity</i>	0.04	-		0.38 <sup>NS</sup>	Not Supported

\*p<0.001, <sup>NS</sup> Not significant

## DISCUSSION

Findings of this work indicated that the SEM analysis supported the relationship between variables except for two hypotheses (H5, H8). A significant and positive relationship (0,76) was found between gastronomy experience and gastronomy motivation. According to this finding, as visitors' perceptions of positive gastronomic experiences increase, their gastronomy motivations will also increase. Similarly, a significant and positive relationship (0.36) was found between the gastronomy experience and destination brand equity. This result points out that the positive gastronomic experiences of visitors are important to affect the destination brand equity. As with visitors' positive gastronomy experiences, their brand perceptions towards the destination will increase. These findings of present study are parallel to the results of previous research (Biedenbach & Marell, 2010; Shen & Liu, 2015; Ding & Tseng, 2015). Furthermore, the results indicated that there is a significant and positive relationship (0,34) between gastronomy motivation and destination brand equity. It can be concluded that as the gastronomic motivation of visitors increase, their perceptions of destination brand also increase. This result is consistent with the results of previous studies in the literature (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Chen & Chen 2010). A significant and positive relationship (0.17) was found between destination satisfaction and destination brand equity. This result is also similar to findings of prior studies (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Da Costa

Mendes et al., 2010). No statistically significant relationship was found between gastronomy experience and destination satisfaction. Therefore, the H5 was rejected. In the current study, it can be claimed that satisfaction with the destination is effective in the emergence of this finding. Therefore, it seems likely that there may be other factors related to destination qualities that affect destination satisfaction. It can be thought that the reasons such as the fact that Gaziantep is perceived as a gastronomy destination by the visitors may influence this result. Another reason is that focusing gastronomy experience is more important for visitors who traveled to Gaziantep for gastronomy purposes.

A significant and positive relationship (0.51) was found between gastronomy motivation and destination satisfaction. Research results explaining the relationship between travel motivation and customer satisfaction (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Meng et al., 2008) support this finding. Yoon and Uysal (2005) concluded in their research that there is a close relationship between travel motivations and tourist satisfaction. In the model in which the mediating effect of gastronomy motivation in the relationship between gastronomy experience and destination brand equity was evaluated; it was concluded that gastronomy motivation had a partial mediation effect between these variables. In other words, it was determined that it would not be enough to concentrate only on gastronomy experiences to create a high level of destination brand image, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand loyalty perceptions of the visitors, but also gastronomy motivation need to be considered to enhance tourists' level of destination brand equity perceptions.

## CONCLUSION

A field study was applied to analyze the theoretical model proposed in this research. Before analyzing the structural relationships between variables, to measure domestic visitors' gastronomy experience, a scale development process was followed in the scope of a market-driven perspective as proposed by Quan and Wang (2004). EFA and CFA findings from this research demonstrated that gastronomy experience comprises three dimensions, namely "peak experience", "attractionised experience" and "supportive experience". After EFA and CFA, four dimensions of destination brand equity have been found and this finding is in line with earlier research (Fern & Walls, 2012; Horng et al., 2012; Kladou & Khegasis, 2014). The reliability and validity of the gastronomy motivation and destination satisfaction scales were also tested and confirmed. The SEM

results show that except for the fifth and eighth hypotheses, all paths are supported.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

To augment the literature, the current study makes contributions to a better understanding of the relationship among destination satisfaction, experiences and motivations of gastronomy, and destination brand equity in the gastronomy destination context. Thus, the present research has some theoretical implications. First, the current study has examined the impact of gastronomy experiences, motivations, and destination satisfaction on gastronomy destination brand equity. A limited number of previous studies have been performed to examine the associative relationship between variables in the theoretical model of this study (Mora et al., 2021) but have not fully explained in the context of gastronomy destinations. Furthermore, examining the mediating effect of gastronomy motivation on the relationship between gastronomy experience and destination brand equity contribute to the existing body of knowledge.

Second, studies on adapting brand equity scales for gastronomy/culinary destinations are limited. The current research contributes to the destination branding literature because limited studies have been conducted to reveal the dimensions of gastronomy/culinary destination brand equity (Horng et al., 2012; Liu, 2020; Manimont et al., 2021). Third, contrary to the previous studies (Mak et al., 2012, 2017) emphasizing that the concepts of experience and motivation may be closely related, it was revealed that experience and motivation are distinct concepts in this paper. The discriminant validity of the measurement model supports this finding.

Fourth, the present study makes an important contribution to the relevant literature by addressing the lack of a measurement tool for gastronomy experience dimensions consisting of peak experience, supportive experience, and attractionised experiences in terms of both social science and marketing perspectives (Quan & Wang, 2004). Although numerous studies were devoted to explore or comprehend the gastronomy/food/ cuisine experiences in the gastronomy literature in the different contexts (Adongo et al., 2015; Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019; Sthapit et al., 2019; Cifci et al., 2021; Atsız et al., 2022), limited studies were performed to reveal gastronomy experiences in the context of social science and marketing approaches together. The results of the present work show that it is a reliable and valid scale for gastronomy experience.

## Practical Implications

Based on the results of the current study, practical implications could be suggested for destination marketers and managers in the gastronomy tourism setting by examining the interrelationship among brand equity, gastronomy motivation, gastronomy experience, and destination satisfaction. The findings of this study can be used as a strategic tool for a destination focusing on gastronomy experience and motivations that enhance components of destination brand equity. First, within the framework of the relationship between gastronomy experience and brand equity, it is necessary to focus on the distinction between peak and supportive experience, and attractive experience should also be considered by destination marketers or managers and restaurant businesses. Restaurants at the destination need to design their menus considering the components that make up the gastronomic experience. As a matter of fact, according to research findings, visitors' food experiences do not only consist of peak experience. It was revealed that the supportive food experience and attractionised food experiences are also included in the food experiences of the visitors. Therefore, all dimensions that consist of the gastronomic experience should be paid attention to by the practitioners. To enrich the experiences offered to visitors in restaurants reflecting the destination's food culture, culturally informative objects or booklets describing the history of the food and places to eat can be presented to the visitors. In addition, destination-specific food culture can be used in marketing and promotion strategies to improve destination loyalty of tourists.

Second, gastronomy motivations are crucial to understand the tourist preferences, needs, and behavior for the destination marketers. In the current study, gastronomy motivations were found as a significant element in developing destination brand equity. For instance, when considering the positive relationship between gastronomy motivation and destination brand equity, motivational factors consisting of cultural, physical, interpersonal relations, and psychological relaxation should be taken into account by destinations. It can be inferred that visitors who consume the local food with cultural motives have a high level of destination loyalty and high revisit intentions. In addition, destinations should pay attention to the other dimension of motivations to consume food for strengthening tourist loyalty and destination images. In conclusion, to improve destination brand equity with gastronomy experience, push motivations of gastronomy which are related internal and found as a mediating construct must be considered by destination marketers.

Third, a positive relationship between destination satisfaction and destination brand equity was found. This result shows that satisfaction is a significant antecedent of brand equity. Therefore, the effect of destination satisfaction on destination brand components should be taken into account for both destination and businesses such as hotel and restaurant businesses to attract more visitors. For example, satisfied visitors can make positive comments about their experience and recommend the destination to other potential tourists, especially through digital media. Moreover, if visitors have a good memory of the destination and have perceived the high quality of the destination, they will be willing to revisit the destination.

Lastly, since data was gathered before the COVID-19 pandemic, the results do not reflect its effects. However, destination marketers and managers should take precautions to prevent the perceived risks of visitors such as destination risk, health, and psychological risk when building a strong destination brand equity focusing on gastronomy experience and gastronomy motivations. Because potential risk factors related to the destination and tourism business can lead to travel anxiety and affect negatively travel intentions (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020; Shahabi Sorman Abadi et al., 2021).

### **Limitations and future research directions**

Considering the limitations of this study, some suggestions for future research are presented. First, since the current research was carried out in Gaziantep, similar studies can be conducted in other destinations. Differences and similarities can be revealed by comparing the results obtained from future research results. Similar studies can be applied to the sample of international visitors. Because people with different cultures and nationalities do not have exactly the same preferences, experiences, and perceptions of destination brands. Also, it could be required to develop marketing strategies for different segments or nationalities. Since the gastronomy experience scale used in the research was developed for the first time, it is likely to have limitations such as a lack of items for measuring dimensions. Therefore, additional items could be added to improve the scale of the gastronomy experience. Moreover, other factors such as food involvement and food personality traits could be investigated in the hypothetical model in future studies. In addition, apart part from the dimensions of the destination brand equity scale used in this research, future research can be conducted with different dimensions such as perceived brand value and destination brand trust.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper is derived from the first author's doctoral thesis, completed in 2018 at Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Turkey.

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