

The effects of gastronomic experience and food image towards the gastronomic products of local tourism on the intention to eat local foods: The case of Hatay

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Gastronomic Experience,
Intention to Eat,
Local Food,
Food Image.

Destinations offer various tastes to visitors as tourism products. Experiencing these delicacies is considered necessary for the tourists' travel motivation. Tourists travel to these destinations to increase their travel motivations and to have unique gastronomic experiences. In this sense, this study aims to determine the effects of gastronomic experience and food image on the individuals' intentions to eat Hatay's local foods. In this context, data of the study was collected from 371 individuals who had gastronomic experiences in the province of Hatay, using the survey technique. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data. In this context, validity, reliability, and path analyses were performed. As a result of the path analysis, it was concluded that gastronomic experience and food image have significant impacts on the intention to eat local foods.

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1. Introduction


While tourism destinations offer gastronomic experiences to tourists, they also aim to increase the frequency of repeated visits and the sense of loyalty by ensuring the permanence of these experiences (Okumus et al., 2007). It can be said that gastronomic products not only meet the biological requirements of the individual but also increase the cultural experience. In this context, gastronomic tourism can not only enhance the experience with its attractive elements but also take on the role of preventing the negativities for the destination, where the gastronomic experience is enjoyed (Torres, 2002). In order to experience gastronomic tourism products, activities such as participating in cooking courses, visiting gastronomy museums, visiting wine and food factories, experiencing street delicacies, visiting gastronomy markets, participating in gastronomy festivals, gastronomic tours, and consuming local foods are used as experience enhancers by the tourists (Quan & Wang, 2004; Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017; Antón et al., 2019). Consuming, purchasing, recommending, and revisiting these gastronomic products are expressed as elements that enhance the experiences of tourists (Son & Xu, 2013; Saad et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020a). Accordingly, it can be said that the variety of products and services offered in the destinations of gastronomic tourism increases curiosity and interest in food, as well as travel motivation (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). In this context, the gastronomic experience


constitutes the most basic point of travel and affects other experiences of tourists such as entertainment, education, aesthetics, and innovation (Santos et al., 2020). Although the main purpose of destination visits is not the gastronomic experience due to the diversity of the increasing tourism, the controlled provision of this process may allow local gastronomic products to become important. From this point of view, it is very important to control the perceptions and practices around eating and drinking, which is a crucial income-generating part of tourism. While local gastronomic products allow destinations to differ, they also increase their preferableness. On the other hand, marketing strategies for gastronomic products must be managed correctly in order for these products to be standardized and attractive. However, due to the nature of gastronomic products, the on-site and instant presentations eliminate the chances of eradicating possible mistakes, which can lead to negative courses for gastronomic experiences.

The social statuses, economic levels, and environmental factors of individuals have significant effects on the provision of gastronomic experience. In addition to these elements, the memory of the experience, the people with whom you have been together during the experience, entertainment, educative work, and escaping from the ordinary enable the level of experience to be determined. With its satisfaction-enhancing role, the gastronomic experience is an important factor in tourists' intention to

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Research paper

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revisit the destination (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020b). For this reason, while gastronomic experiences support the intention to eat local foods and the purchasing intention, they also influence food image, destination recall, perceived authenticity, quality of life, and attachment to the destination (Robinson & Clifford, 2012; Chi et al., 2013; Tsai, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2019; Hsu & Scott, 2020; Brune et al., 2021). In the formation of destination experiences, tourists' participations in activities such as consuming local foods and street foods, or visiting food-wine festivals, food fairs, gastronomic museums, and local food markets during their travels are sine-qua-non.

Important determinants of the food image include previous gastronomic experiences and sources of information. Marketing strategy is used through social media, websites, and promotional arguments to ensure positive food images for the destinations. In addition, food image requires addressing local foods and gastronomic elements with the level of perception. These factors affect tourists' familiarity with touristic products (Lee et al., 2011; Seo et al., 2013). In particular, tourists who have positive perceptions towards the images of the touristic destination and local products present the behavior of visiting the destination again, recommending the destination and its local products to others, and purchasing local products (Kim et al., 2014; Seo et al., 2017; Okumus et al., 2018; Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Chi et al., 2019).

Studies on the experience reveal that the competent execution of marketing strategies increases customer loyalty and positively contributes to the images of destinations being visited and recommended (Oppermann, 2000; Chen & Chen, 2010). Compared to other types of tourism, local gastronomic experiences reveal that it is effective in increasing tourists' travel motivation and providing positive images of the destinations (Mitchell & Hall, 2003; Quan & Wang, 2004; Kim & Eves, 2012).

Hatay, which is an important gastronomy destination, is one of the leading cities in the context of gastronomy tourism (Duman & Saçlı, 2023). It is vital in terms of revealing the gastronomic experiences of the tourists visiting this city for the local gastronomic tourism products and the effect of the food image of this city on the intention to eat local foods. Because of this importance, it should be examined how the gastronomic experience and local food image affect intention to eat local foods in terms of gastronomy tourists. The main purpose of the current research is to examine the effects of gastronomic experience and food image towards the gastronomic products of local tourism on the intention to eat local foods. Considering the research design, the fact that this study starts with the gastronomic experience and at the same time explains the intention to eat local foods together with the food image fills an existing gap in the literature.

2. Conceptual Framework

In this section, the issues of local gastronomic products, gastronomic experience, and food image are discussed in line with the objective of the study.

Local Gastronomic Product

Local and gastronomic products have a very important effect on ensuring the authenticity of the destination elements and on the awareness of the purchasing behaviors of gastronomy tourists (Mohamed et al., 2020). Ensuring the accessibility of local gastronomic products is effective in the behaviors of tourists towards tourism planning, and this affects the preference of tourists for destinations that offer opportunities to experience these local gastronomic products (Egede, 2013; Tong et al., 2016). At this point, providing unique and authentic dining experiences can only be achieved in environments where local elements are present (Kim et al., 2009). Factors such as cultural experiences, interpersonal relationships, excitement, sensory appeal, and health contribute to the increase in these travel experiences (Kim & Eves, 2012). In this sense, it is important to have access to local gastronomic foods and to have information about these foods. At this point, both internet resources and social media offer the opportunity to reach more information about local foods (Dedeoğlu, 2019).

The presence of local gastronomic products as a niche market in a certain region contributes to providing the spirit of authenticity for the destination, which is important in terms of increasing the intention to eat (Karakuş et al., 2020). Making changes to the product itself has an effect on these authentic feelings (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017). This, in turn, enhances tourists' satisfaction, purchasing, and intentions to eat local foods (Jeaheng & Han, 2020; Kim et al., 2020a).

Especially at this point, entertainment and educational activities, including the preparation, presentation, and tasting of local gastronomic products at destinations, increase the interest of tourists (Chang & Yuan, 2011). Tourists bring their positive experiences about local gastronomic products to their living areas by buying local food and beverages, cookbooks, and kitchenware specific to the destination visited in order to prolong their recall. This situation reveals that there is a positive interaction between the tourist and the destination in terms of a sense of attachment to the place and identification with the place (Chen & Huang, 2016). Local gastronomic elements specific to a particular destination create an image of local food with perceptions, attitudes, and emotions, thereby providing attractiveness (Seo et al., 2013).

Gastronomic Experience

Consumers' individual experiences with the products or services they have purchased through their senses and emotions ensure the establishment of memorability and

strong bonds (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Yuan & Wu, 2008; Tsai, 2016). In this sense, commercial enterprises are continuously focusing on issues that increase the experience level of consumers as a requirement of the strategies of the experience economy. In particular, the necessity of shaping consumer behaviors, memorable experiences, and sincere ties with consumers is emphasized (Clatworthy, 2019). In terms of the subject, the gastronomic experience plays an important role in the choice of the destination and the motivation of tourists (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2020). In this respect, gastronomic experiences are expressed as both experiences in the field of production and experiences in the field of consumption (Mohamed et al., 2020). In addition, although there is no direct gastronomic experience in the travel motivation of tourists, it is expected that gastronomic elements may become attractive during these visits. Gastronomic experiences are shaped by local foods and beverages, the environment in which these products are consumed, the time, and the people who are together (Tikkanen, 2007). In this context, tourists or consumers who are in search of gastronomic experiences want destinations to be extraordinary, pleasurable, entertaining, educative, cohesive, and memorable, apart from eating and drinking. In order to increase this gastronomic experience, both the production consumption processes have important places in providing this experience (Uriely, 2005; Oh et al., 2007; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Saad et al., 2019). More clearly, gastronomic experience occurs depending on being in the processes before, during, or after the products and services (Larsen, 2007; Goolaup et al., 2019). In other words, the gastronomic experiences of the tourists not only contribute to the increase in satisfaction, but also shape the intention to recommend related experiences to others, revisit the destinations, and the destination image (Kim et al., 2020b; Mohamed et al., 2020). On the other hand, gastronomic experiences also trigger tourists' purchasing and consuming behaviors of local foods (Brune et al., 2021). At the same time, local foods, street foods, food-wine festivals, fairs, local markets, cookery courses, gastronomy museums, and gastronomy tours contribute to ensuring destination images, and they enhance memorability (Lee et al., 2011; Park & Ha, 2016; Soltani et al., 2021; Suntikul et al., 2020). Local gastronomic tourism products play an important role in enriching the experiences of tourists and ensuring their permanence (Hall & Mitchell, 2005). By its very nature, the gastronomic experience can be considered as the sum of a rather long process. The reason for this is the process of doing research on gastronomic tourism products before the trip, taking part in gastronomic practices during the trip, and finally recommending or revisiting as a behavioral intention upon completion of the trip. In this context, a holistic approach should be brought to the gastronomic tourism products that play a leading role in the gastronomic experience and the active participation of tourists in gastronomic practices should be ensured.

Food Image

Food image can be expressed as the formation of a positive perception of gastronomic tourism products specific to a particular destination (Hsu & Scott, 2020). According to Lin (2006), food image is defined as “the main characteristics of the foods of a particular region”. Moreover, it is the overall impression created in the minds of tourists for each gastronomic destination. In order to strengthen this mental perception, destinations actively use gastronomic tourism products to increase the image of food, such as local food-wine festivals, gastronomy museums, cooking competitions, gastronomy routes and tours, cooking courses, gastronomy applications, and description panels (Okumus et al., 2013; Sun et al., 2015; Antón et al., 2019). The development of the destination image, depending on the provision of the food image, prioritizes authentic gastronomic elements by making them more visible (Seo et al., 2017). Evaluation of the perceptions and experiences as a result of the intention to eat local foods and the elements of gastronomy tourism by tourists plays an important role in the formation of food image. Increasing familiarity with the products of gastronomy tourism improves the image of the destination. In the formation of this familiarity, gastronomic experience and information sources are effective (Lee et al., 2011; Chi et al., 2013). Destinations actively use information resources such as social networks and websites in order to capture positive images. Therefore, an increase in tourists' satisfaction after the perceived positive food image has an impact on their commitment to the place, their intention to revisit, and to recommend them to their friends (Lertputtarak, 2012; Widjaja et al., 2020). In addition, the atmosphere, decor, service equipment, and the presence of local foods and beverages in the catering businesses provide a strong gastronomic experience, and it is predicted that this situation may contribute to the development of a positive food image. Moreover, this experience and the subsequent recommendation behavior may play an important role in providing a perception of a positive food image for the destination. Therefore, this gastronomic food image may positively affect the intention to eat local foods. In this sense, studies in the literature prove this situation (Çırak & Gümüş, 2021). In addition, the cognitive images of foods have positive effects on the intention to eat, while the emotional images of the foods do not have positive effects on the intention to eat (Seo, Yun, & Kim, 2017).

In line with the literature review, the hypotheses developed within the scope of the objective of the study and the research design is as follows:

H1: Gastronomic experience has significant and positive effects on the intention to eat local foods.

H2: Food image has significant and positive effects on the intention to eat local foods.

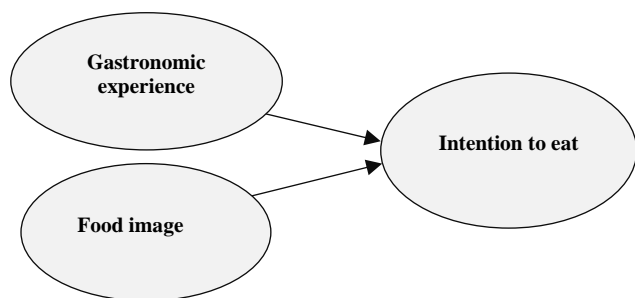


Figure 1: Research Design

Source: Authors

3. Method

Population and Sample of the Research

The population of the research consisted of domestic tourists visiting the province of Hatay. From this population, 371 individuals, consisting of people who have had gastronomic experience, were selected as samples by means of purposive sampling. The reason why Hatay was determined as a sample is that Hatay is one of the provinces where many civilizations lived in Turkey. Therefore, it is a city with horizontal and vertical multicultural structures. In addition, the fact that Hatay is a province included in the UNESCO's creative cities network in the field of gastronomy in Türkiye (UNESCO, 2022) and is a city rich in gastronomic culture has been effective in the selection of Hatay as the study group. This city is very important with its many local dishes and local restaurants developed based on its rich cultural background (Keskin et al., 2022).

Objective and Significance of the Research

The objective of this study is to determine the effects of gastronomic experience and food image towards local gastronomic tourism products on the intention to eat local foods.

Although restaurants are inherent in the gastronomic experience, the gastronomic experience is not limited to just that. In addition, tourists can have gastronomic experiences through activities such as festivals, food fairs, gastronomic museums, food markets, hotels, food and wine factories, street vendors, fishing, hunting, and picking strawberries or mushrooms. Therefore, this study is considered necessary in terms of revealing these activities that appeal to different gastronomic experiences of tourists.

Data Collection Tools

The data used in the research was collected with the help of the survey technique. The questionnaire used in the research consists of 4 parts. The subscale of “gastronomic experience”, which forms the first part, consists of 22 statements; the subscale of “food image”, which forms the second part, consists of 19 statements; the subscale of “intention to eat”, which forms the third part, consists of 3

statements. The fourth part consists of statements about sociodemographic information and individual questions for the participants. The items on the scale were graded according to the 5-point Likert type.

The study of Kodaş (2018) was used in the adaptation of the "Gastronomic experience" scale. The study of Ab Karim and Chi (2010) was used in the adaptation of the "Food image" scale. In the adaptation of the “Intention to Eat” scale, Seo et al.'s (2013) study was used. Information about the scales used in the research is given in the table below:

Data Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the model developed in the research. First of all, validity and reliability analyses of the scales were made. In this context, the values of internal consistency reliability, construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were analyzed. For internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values were examined. In addition, the construct validity of the scale was evaluated by looking at the CR value. Factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE= Average Variance Extracted) coefficients were used to determine convergent validity.

In addition, VIF (linearity) values, path coefficients, R², and effect size (f²) of the research model were calculated before starting the analysis of the data. In order to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients, t values were calculated by taking 5000 subsamples from the sample with bootstrapping. As a result of the analysis of the structural model used in testing the research hypotheses, the p and t significance values were analyzed.

Validity and Reliability Analyses of the Scales

In the present study, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and CR value are expected to be ≥ 0.70 , to ensure internal consistency. A $CR \geq 0.70$ is also important in terms of ensuring the construct validities of the scales. Factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted coefficients were used to determine convergent validity. In order to ensure convergent validity, factor loadings are expected to be equal to or greater than 0.708 and AVE values to be equal to or greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2018; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). Before starting the validity and reliability analyses, factor loadings were examined and in these reviews, the statements of "my gastronomic experience is only an experience that satisfies my hunger", "gastronomic products that I am familiar with while on holiday are important to me" and "my gastronomic experience is an ordinary experience" and "offers restaurant menus in English" were excluded from the analysis because the factor loadings were below 0.40 and the analysis was repeated. The results of internal

consistency reliability and convergent validity are given in the table 1.

Table 1 shows the measurement model results of the items. According to these findings, it is seen that the Cronbach's Alpha and CR coefficients of the items are ≥ 0.70 , which indicates that the internal consistency reliabilities of the scales are provided. In addition, it can be said that construct validities of the scales are ensured because the CR coefficients are greater than 0.70. In addition, factor loadings are greater than 0.708, and the AVE values higher than 0.50 indicate that convergent validities of the scales are provided.

For discriminant validity, cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker Criteria, and HTMT Criteria were examined. In order to ensure the discriminant validities of the scales, the factor loading of the variable to which the indicator is related should be higher than that of the other variables, and the difference should be at least 0.100; according to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, the AVE square root coefficient of each variable should be greater than the correlation coefficient of the variable with other variables, or the HTMT criterion is expected to be less than 0.90 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). The values for the cross loadings are given in the Table 2.

Table 1: Results of the Measurement Model

Variables	Statements	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Intention to eat	Intention_to_eat_1	0,888			
	Intention_to_eat_2	0,899	0,922	0,922	0,797
	Intention_to_eat_3	0,89			
Gastronomic experience	Gastronomic_exp_1	0,889			
	Gastronomic_exp_2	0,869			
	Gastronomic_exp_3	0,587			
	Gastronomic_exp_4	0,75			
	Gastronomic_exp_5	0,856			
	Gastronomic_exp_8	0,684			
	Gastronomic_exp_10	0,833	0,949	0,953	0,575
	Gastronomic_exp_11	0,796			
	Gastronomic_exp_12	0,723			
	Gastronomic_exp_13	0,72			
	Gastronomic_exp_14	0,823			
	Gastronomic_exp_17	0,703			
Food image	Gastronomic_exp_19	0,621			
	Gastronomic_exp_20	0,692			
	Food_image_1	0,849			
	Food_image_2	0,789			
	Food_image_3	0,825			
	Food_image_4	0,811			
	Food_image_5	0,779			
	Food_image_6	0,876			
	Food_image_7	0,487			
	Food_image_8	0,582			
	Food_image_9	0,728			
	Food_image_10	0,699	0,954	0,96	0,542
	Food_image_11	0,581			
	Food_image_13	0,572			
	Food_image_14	0,531			
	Food_image_15	0,873			
	Food_image_16	0,881			
	Food_image_17	0,774			
	Food_image_18	0,644			
Food_image_19	0,783				

Source: Authors

Table 2: Results of the Discriminant Validity

Variables	Statements	gastronomic experience	Intention_to_eat	food_image	
Intention_to_eat	Intention_to_eat_1	0,598	0,888	0,605	
	Intention_to_eat_2	0,603	0,899	0,614	
	Intention_to_eat_3	0,599	0,89	0,606	
Gastronomic_experience	Gastronomic_exp._1	0,889	0,597	0,581	
	Gastronomic_exp._2	0,869	0,583	0,569	
	Gastronomic_exp._3	0,587	0,394	0,476	
	Gastronomic_exp._4	0,75	0,504	0,525	
	Gastronomic_exp._5	0,856	0,575	0,553	
	Gastronomic_exp._8	0,684	0,459	0,559	
	Gastronomic_exp._10	0,833	0,559	0,586	
	Gastronomic_exp._11	0,796	0,535	0,539	
	Gastronomic_exp._12	0,723	0,485	0,517	
	Gastronomic_exp._13	0,72	0,484	0,524	
	Gastronomic_exp._14	0,823	0,553	0,529	
	Gastronomic_exp._17	0,703	0,472	0,479	
	Gastronomic_exp._19	0,621	0,417	0,386	
	Gastronomic_exp._20	0,692	0,465	0,436	
	Food_image	Food_image_1	0,608	0,578	0,849
		Food_image_2	0,571	0,538	0,789
Food_image_3		0,599	0,563	0,825	
Food_image_4		0,571	0,553	0,811	
Food_image_5		0,554	0,531	0,779	
Food_image_6		0,607	0,597	0,876	
Food_image_7		0,302	0,332	0,487	
Food_image_8		0,402	0,396	0,582	
Food_image_9		0,513	0,496	0,728	
Food_image_10		0,501	0,476	0,699	
Food_image_11		0,371	0,396	0,581	
Food_image_13		0,397	0,39	0,572	
Food_image_14		0,377	0,362	0,531	
Food_image_15		0,55	0,595	0,873	
Food_image_16		0,546	0,6	0,881	
Food_image_17		0,555	0,528	0,774	
Food_image_18		0,396	0,439	0,644	
Food_image_19		0,526	0,534	0,783	

Source: Authors

In Table 2, cross-loadings were examined and overlapping items were detected in 5 statements. The overlapping items are “it is important for me to use traditional cooking techniques in my local gastronomic experience”, “it is important for me to participate in local gastronomic cooking practices”, “I buy the ingredients used in local gastronomic products to relive that experience at home”, “the gastronomic products I eat while on holiday are made with the cooking technique I know”, “I consume gastronomic products that I have experienced before in my travels”, and “I consume gastronomic products that I have experienced before”, and they were excluded from the analysis, respectively. The analysis was repeated, and it was seen that the expressions measuring the research variable in other items had the highest value in their own variable, and it is possible to say that there is no overlapping item among these items according to the cross-loadings.

Table 3: Results of the Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criteria)

Variables	Gastronomic experience	Intention to eat	Food image
Gastronomic experience	0,759		
Intention to eat	0,672	0,893	
Food image	0,685	0,681	0,736

Source: Authors

The discriminant validity results according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion are given in Table 3. When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that the square root coefficient of each of the variables is greater than the correlation coefficient of the variable with the other variables. This is proof that discriminant validity is achieved according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Table 4: Results of the Discriminant Validity (HTMT Criteria)

Variables	Gastronomic experience	Intention to eat	Food image
Gastronomic experience			
Intention to eat	0,669		
Food image	0,679	0,675	

Source: Authors

In the table above, discriminant validity was evaluated according to HTMT criteria. Henseler et al. (2015) stated that the HTMT criterion should not exceed 0.90, if theoretically close concepts are measured, and it should not exceed 0.85, if distant concepts are measured. When the table is examined, it is seen that the HTMT values are below the threshold value of 0.90. Therefore, discriminant validity is ensured according to cross-loading, Fornell-Larcker criteria, and HTMT criteria. From this point of view, it is possible to say that the discriminant validities of the scales are achieved.

4. Results and Interpretations

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants

The table below shows the findings regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants and the results regarding the individual questions.

Table 5: Results on the sociodemographic characteristics

Characteristics	Groups	f	%
Gender	Female	187	50,4
	Male	184	49,6
Age	18-24	106	28,6
	25-34	85	22,9
	35-44	97	26,1
	45-54	60	16,2
	55 or higher	23	6,2
Marital Status	Single	183	49,3
	Married	185	49,9
Educational Level	Primary School	7	1,9
	High School	51	13,7
	Associate Degree	104	28,0
	Bachelor's Degree	176	47,4
	Postgraduate Education	32	8,6
Occupation	Public sector	138	37,2
	Private sector	65	17,5
	Retiree	12	3,2
	Housewife	24	6,5
	Shopkeeper	29	7,8
	Student	103	27,8
Monthly Income	3000 Turkish Liras or Less	124	33,4
	3001- 5000 Turkish Liras	18	4,9
	5001- 7000 Turkish Liras	53	14,3
	7001- 10000 Turkish Liras	74	19,9
	10001 Turkish Liras or More	102	27,5

Source: Authors

When the table given above is examined in terms of sociodemographic characteristics, it is seen that the majority of the participants (F=187, 50.4%) are women. Considering the age groups, it is understood that the people belonging to the age group (18-24) are in the majority (F=106, 28.6%). While it is seen that 185 (49.9%) of the participants in the research are married, it is seen that the majority (F=176, 47.4%) have bachelor's degrees in the analysis made on the basis of educational level. In the evaluation made according to occupational groups, it is seen that 37.2% (138 individuals) of the participants work in the public sector, while on the basis of monthly income, the income level of 124 (33.4%) participants is 3000 TL or less.

Testing of the Research Model and the Results

The structural equation model created before testing the research hypotheses is given below.

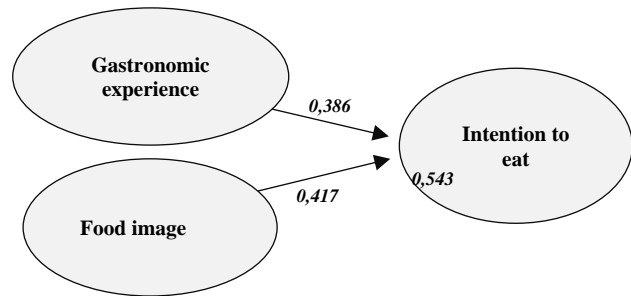


Figure 2: Structural Equation Modeling

Source: Authors

VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values, path coefficients, R², and effect size (f²) of the research model were calculated. In order to evaluate the significance of the path coefficients, t values were calculated by taking 5000 subsamples from the sample with bootstrapping.

Before starting the analysis of the hypotheses, it was tested whether there was a linearity problem between the variables. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) coefficients were used to test the linearity and this value was expected not to exceed 5 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). In order to determine the percentage of exogenous (independent) variables explaining the endogenous (dependent) variable, R² and f² values, which expresses the share of each exogenous (independent) variable in the exogenous (dependent) variable's disclosure rate, were examined. An f² value between 0.02 and 0.15 means low effect size, between 0.15-0.35 means medium effect size, and above 0.35 means strong effect size (Cohen, 1988). VIF, R², and f² values of the research model are given in the table below.

Table 6: Results of the Research Model

Variables	VIF	R ²	f ²
gastronomic_experience	1,886		0,173
intention_to_eat	1,886	0,543	
food_image	1,886		0,202

Source: Authors

When Table 6 is examined, the VIF values, as Hair et al. (2014) stated, are below the threshold value of 5. According to the values in the table, it is seen that there is no linearity problem between the variables. The calculation of the R² value for intention to eat as approximately 54% indicates that the disclosure rate is medium. When f² values are examined, it can be said that they have medium effect sizes for both exogenous variables, with 0.173 for gastronomic experience and 0.202 for food image.

The results of the analysis of the structural model used in testing the research hypotheses are given below. According to these results, in order for the hypotheses to be accepted, the significance values are required to be p<0.05, and T values between -1,960 and +1.960 (Hair et al., 2018).

Table 7 shows the analysis results of the hypothesis tests. According to these results, the effect of gastronomic experience on intention to eat has been found to be significant since the p-value is p<0.05 (p=0.000), and the T value (T=3.849) is above +1.960. Another hypothesis, the effect of food image on intention to eat, has been found to be significant since the p-value is p<0.05 (p=0.000), and the T value (T=4.201) is above +1.960.

5. Conclusions And Implications

In the present study, it has been investigated how domestic tourists visiting Hatay (Türkiye) shape the effects of gastronomic experience and food image towards local gastronomic tourism products on intention to eat local foods. In this context, reliability and validity analyses were applied to the scales used in the collection of research data. Before starting these analyses, factor loadings were controlled, and some statements belonging to the gastronomic experience that remained below 0.40 were excluded from the analysis. Excluded statements are; “my gastronomic experience is only an experience that satisfies my hunger”, “gastronomic products that I am familiar with while on holiday are important to me”, and “my gastronomic experience is an ordinary experience”. Additionally, the statement "offers restaurant menus in English" belonging to the food image was excluded from

the analysis. To test the reliability of the scales, Cronbach's Alpha and CR coefficients were examined, and it was concluded that this value was ≥ 0.70, which is the threshold value. In order to test the validity of the scales, cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker Criteria, and HTMT Criteria were examined. The analysis revealed that these criteria are above the threshold value. From this point of view, it can be said that the reliability and validity of the scales used to collect data in the research are ensured. The partial least squares method of structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the model created for the objective of the research.

Within the scope of the research, the effects of tourists' gastronomic experience on the intention to eat local foods and the effects of food image on the intention to eat local foods were investigated. In the path analyses made for this purpose, it was concluded that gastronomic experience has a significant effect on the intention to eat local foods. Therefore, the H1 hypothesis was accepted. When the values obtained as a result of the analyses are examined, it is seen that the food image has a significant effect on the intention to eat local foods. In other words, the H2 hypothesis was also accepted. Based on these results, it is thought that there are positive perceptions towards the local gastronomic products in the tourist destination, and there is also an important trend in participating in gastronomic activities in the destination.

Practical Implications

In line with the research, it is necessary to make some suggestions to the stakeholders of the tourism industry such as local governments, independent restaurant businesses, hotel businesses, tourist guides, and travel agencies. In this direction, the suggestions made to both destination managers and destination marketers are as follows:

Promotion and marketing strategies for gastronomic tourism products can be developed according to the demographic characteristics of the tourists visiting the region, such as their length of stay, accommodation types, ages, educational levels, marital statuses, and economic levels.

The participation of tourists can be encouraged by organizing gastronomic routes and food tours developed specifically for Hatay. Moreover, the participation of tourists can be achieved through practices such as olive harvest and olive oil production, which have a very important place for the destination. In addition to these, cultural values can be transferred by organizing

Table 7: Results of the Research Model

Variables	Standardized Path Coefficients	T Values	P Values	Accepted/Rejected
gastronomic_experience -> intention_to_eat	0,386	3,849	0	Accepted
food_image -> intention_to_eat	0,417	4,201	0	Accepted

Source: Authors

gastronomic tours and forgotten dishes can be exhibited together with their rituals.

With the participation of the stakeholders of gastronomy tourism, digital platforms and social networks can be established to promote the local products of gastronomy tourism and their active uses can be ensured. A gastronomy guide including local restaurants, museums, and food markets can be prepared and offered to tourists. In addition, information is provided by developing applications that include the locations of local products and the dates on which they are presented to promote gastronomy tourism. In particular, the promotional brochures of the region can include information about what, where, how, and with whom to eat for tourists looking for local food experiences.

On the other hand, sections based on the local products of gastronomy tourism can be created and presented on the menus of the establishments for the guests staying. Moreover, it is necessary to pay attention to adapt to the tastes of the guests while including the food and drinks that reflect the culture of the city. Gastronomic tours to experience local foods can be organized in cooperation with tour companies.

Theoretical Implications

This study, which was conducted to determine the gastronomic experience, food image, and the tourists' intention to eat local foods, was conducted with an empirical approach. This study is supported by studies in the literature such as Chang and Chang (2010), Kodaş (2018), Kim et al. (2020b), Işın and Ünlüönen, (2020), and Yılmaz (2021). In this context, Chi et al. (2013), Antón et al. (2019), and Hsu and Scott (2020) emphasize that gastronomic experience has significant effects on the intention to eat local foods. According to the findings of the present study, it was understood that gastronomic experience and food image have remarkable effects on the intention to eat local foods. Therefore, this study shows parallelism with the studies in the literature. In addition, the positive attitudes of the tourists visiting the destination towards local foods increase their satisfaction with the local foods. Accordingly, touristic experiences increase the satisfaction level of customers (Stone & Migacz, 2016; Kim et al., 2020c; Suhartango et al., 2020; Keskin et al., 2022). In this study, it was determined that gastronomic experiences have positive effects on customer satisfaction, and the findings showed parallelism with the literature. The image created by the food plays an essential role in the formation of the intention to eat local foods. Experiences in the intention to eat local foods support the construction of a positive image for the destination. There is also a relationship between a positive destination image and a memorable tourism experience (Seo et al., 2017; Kim, 2018; Dagustani et al., 2018; Hsu & Scott, 2020). In this study, it was determined that the food image of the destination has effects on the gastronomic experience/intention to eat. This result is similar to

previous studies. In addition, this study helps local tourists to determine and make sense of their gastronomic experiences and intentions to eat local foods. Local food markets, olive groves, vineyards, olive oil factories, museums with gastronomic products, and visits to local restaurants play an effective role in the formation of these gastronomic experiences. Experience-enhancing gastronomic tourism elements are carried out by researchers by focusing on a certain point. In these studies, local food or local restaurant experiences (Kim & Kim, 2019; Soltani et al., 2021), street foods (Lee et al., 2020), local food markets (Pérez Gálvez et al., 2021), food festivals and fairs (Park & Ha, 2016; Ding & Lee, 2017) and gastronomy museums (Kim et al., 2020b) have been investigated only with a focus on the experience on a specific tourism element. A holistic approach was adopted in this study, and all gastronomic tourism elements of the destination were discussed. Thus, local restaurants and markets, fairs and festivals, gastronomy museums, and experiences for street food were determined. In addition, the study focused on the intention to eat local foods. Among the factors affecting the intention to eat local foods are food curiosity, past experiences, motivation, and personality traits (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Skuras et al., 2006; Kim & Eves, 2016; Girgin, 2018). In this study, the destination image that is effective in the formation of the gastronomic experiences of the tourists and the intention to eat local foods are discussed from a holistic perspective.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The present study has some limitations. Firstly, data of the study was compiled from domestic tourists visiting the Hatay (Türkiye) destination, which is the subject of the research. Therefore, the data obtained reflect the experiences and thoughts of domestic tourists. In this context, future studies on the Hatay destination can be repeated on foreign tourists. In this way, it will be possible to compare the data obtained from domestic tourists with the data obtained from foreign tourists. Secondly, the fact that Hatay is a city with rich gastronomic tourism products makes the study special. The fact that this destination is a gastronomy city attracts the attention of tourists thanks to its eating and drinking elements. In particular, the experiences of local gastronomic tourism products of the tourists visiting Gaziantep and Afyonkarahisar, which are gastronomic cities with rich gastronomic tourism products such as the province of Hatay Türkiye, can be examined. In this way, the gastronomic richness of these gastronomy cities can be revealed, and these cities can be compared.

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INFO PAGE

The effects of gastronomic experience and food image towards the gastronomic products of local tourism on the intention to eat local foods: The case of Hatay

Abstract

Destinations offer various tastes to visitors as tourism products. Experiencing these delicacies is considered necessary for the tourists' travel motivation. Tourists travel to these destinations to increase their travel motivations and to have unique gastronomic experiences. In this sense, this study aims to determine the effects of gastronomic experience and food image on the individuals' intentions to eat Hatay's local foods. In this context, data of the study was collected from 371 individuals who had gastronomic experiences in the province of Hatay, using the survey technique. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data. In this context, validity, reliability, and path analyses were performed. As a result of the path analysis, it was concluded that gastronomic experience and food image have significant impacts on the intention to eat local foods.

Keywords: Gastronomic experience, Intention to eat, Local food, Food image

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Adem Ademođlu:	Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition	50%
Memet Şahan:	Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Resources, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition	50%

Author statement: Author(s) declare(s) that All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. **Declaration of**

Conflicting Interests: The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

Ethics Committee Satatement: Ethics committee report is available for this research and it has been documented to the journal.

Ethics committee: Kilis 7 Aralik University Ethics Committee

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