

Culinary Tourism as A Destination Attraction: An Empirical Examination of Tourists' Food Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the factors influencing tourists' revisit intentions for local food in Tabriz, highlighting its potential as a culinary destination. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the study provides a comprehensive assessment. Utilising descriptive and inferential statistics, this study examines the impact of various aspects of the local food experience, including food characteristics, identity, and ethnicity dimensions, on tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF). The findings reveal that although the city's gastronomy was not initially ranked as an attraction, all factors related to traditional foods satisfied most tourists, with souvenirs and traditional food quality significantly enhancing tourists' positive perception of the destination. Multiple linear regression analysis indicates that the diversity of local food (DVS) and the quality of ingredients (IGD) are significant predictors of RVINTLF, while dining customs (DCUS) show marginal significance, and other factors have no significant impact. The ANOVA F-test confirmed the model's overall significance ($F = 6.763$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 30% of the variance in RVINTLF. Additionally, T-tests and ANOVA tests showed that sociodemographic characteristics had no significant impact on RVINTLF.

Keywords: culinary tourism, satisfaction, ethnicity, traditional food, diversity, uniqueness

Introduction

The tourism industry, one of the largest economic sectors globally, plays a crucial role in generating income, creating employment opportunities, and ultimately enhancing societies' prosperity and well-being. According to the World Bank's annual economic reports, this sector contributed 10.4% to global GDP and 9.9% to total employment, creating 313 million jobs in 2017 (Moreira, 2019). In recent decades, food tourism, an emerging tourism segment, has grown significantly worldwide and has become one of the most dynamic segments of the tourism industry (Privitera, Nedelcu, & Nicula, 2018)). With the increased focus on tourists' food-related activities in various countries, the first World Food Tourism Association was established in 2015 to improve the quality of public and private sector management in the field of food tourism (UNWTO, 2015). Additionally, the substantial number of food tourism articles published between 1994 and 2017 illustrate the global attention to this segment of tourism during that period (Ellis, Park, Kim, & Yeoman, 2018).

Food and culinary experiences are based on authentic local food that reflects the local culture (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Thus, local food has become an important tourist attraction and an essential element of the tourism experience in a destination (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). This sector, due to its non-seasonal nature, can revitalise the economies of certain regions that are already well-known as culinary destinations (Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2015). Food tourism will have a strong impact on the local food supply system (Hall, 2020) by creating and developing various occupations, ranging from major careers in hotels to small-scale businesses (Aleffi & Cavicchi, 2020; Di-Clemente, Hernández-Mogollón, & López-Guzmán, 2020). Therefore, by promoting the food culture of a certain region, a new stimulus for development can be achieved (A. H. Lee, Wall, & Kovacs, 2015).

Unfortunately, despite its potential, Tabriz has not been successful at attracting tourists or fully utilise its power to motivate them to visit (Aghdam; Golzari, Dalir, & Babayi, 2018). This study reveals the need for innovative tourism marketing strategies that are based on creating an effective image for emerging segments in the global tourism industry. Therefore, identifying recent

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motivation factors for tourists and ground-breaking styles of hosting potential tourists should be top priorities. In other words, needs assessments (Beerli & Martin, 2004) and feasibility studies are fundamentally necessary phases in tourism development plans for any region (Munjal, Sharma, & Menon, 2016).

Considering the rapidly growing demand for food tourism side (Baldacchino, 2015), countries and regions that can portray themselves as credible suppliers will attract international tourists and succeed in this competitive market, thereby reaping greater benefits (Brunori & Rossi, 2000). As this emerging phenomenon is dynamic (Avieli, 2013) and non-seasonal (Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2015), marketing and investment in food tourism can significantly contribute to a region's economy (Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007), regardless of whether it features tangible attractions such as historical monuments or museums. Employment in this dimension of tourism is not limited to a particular group, allowing a wide range of services to be provided by people with different specialties, which would have a versatile impact on national income and employment (Jiménez-Beltrán, López-Guzmán, & González Santa Cruz, 2016; Vicky, 2020). This could help eradicate the vicious circle of poverty and unemployment (Celebi, Pirnar, & Eris, 2020), leading to economic prosperity (Avieli, 2013; Sidali, Kastenholz, & Bianchi, 2015).

Given the extensive literature on food tourism, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by focusing specifically on Tabriz, a city where traditional foods have not yet been considered a major tourist attraction. While previous research has investigated various aspects of food tourism in well-established destinations, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding emerging culinary destinations. To address this gap in the literature, this study examines the level of tourist satisfaction with their food-related experiences. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and structured questionnaires, the researchers obtained a general overview from tourists' perspectives on the current situation in the city. This evaluation assesses the region's potential for hosting food tourists by identifying weaknesses and problems and exploring favourable factors involved in food tourism. According to Renko et al., higher satisfaction can lead to the creation of a positive food image (Peštek & Činjurević, 2014), thus, this attempt would provide a foundation for future inspections concerning branding a city as a culinary destination, enabling it to benefit from this emerging area of tourism.

Hypotheses Testing:

To examine the factors influencing tourists' intentions to revisit for local food in Tabriz, several hypotheses were developed based on the literature review and the conceptual framework. The hypotheses identify the key attributes of a local food experience that significantly impact revisit intention. By testing these hypotheses, this research seeks to provide insights into which culinary offerings are most influential in shaping tourists' intentions to return, thereby aiding in the strategic development of Tabriz as a prominent culinary destination. The following hypotheses were proposed for this study:

Null hypothesis (H0)

H01: The diversity of local food (DVS) has no significant effect on tourists' revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF).

H02: The quality of ingredients (IGD) has no significant effect on tourists' revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF).

H03: Dining customs (DCUS) have no significant effect on tourists' revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF).

H04: The quality of local food souvenirs (SVR) has no significant effect on tourists' revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF).

H05: The price of local food (PRC) has no significant effect on tourists' revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF).

H06: The uniqueness of local food (UQU) has no significant effect on tourists' revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF).

H07: The quality of traditional foods (QULT) has no significant effect on tourists' revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF).

H08: Garnishing local food (GRN) has no significant effect on tourists' revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF).

H09: The quality of diningware (DWR) has no significant effect on tourists' revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF).

H010: None of the predictor variables (SVR, DWR, DCUS, UQU, DVS, QULT, PRC, IGD, GRN) have a significant effect on tourists' revisit intentions for local food (RVINTLF).

H011: There is no significant difference in tourists' revisit intentions for local food (RVINTLF) based on different demographic factors.

The study area is as follows:

Geographically, Tabriz is the capital of East Azerbaijan Province and is located at 46° and 25 min east longitude and 38° and 2 min north latitude of the Greenwich meridian. Tabriz has a population of 1,549,453. It is the major heavy industry hub for automobile, machine tool, refinery, and petrochemical, textile, and cement production industries. Tabriz is also the site of some of the most prestigious academic and cultural institutes in the northwest of Iran.

Traditional Tabriz food

The variety and diversity of Tabriz's local cuisine, which includes a diverse range of different categories such as food, beverages, desserts, snacks, sweets, and souvenirs, is truly unique. Traditional foods of Tabriz include numerous meat-based dishes, including various types of Kebabs, Abgousht (meat-based soup), and Köfte (a super meatball), as well as vegan options such as a wide assortment of plant-based soups (made from vegetables and beans) and Dolmas (stuffed leaves, eggplant and pepper), catering to a broad spectrum of cases, accommodating both carnivores and vegetarians alike.

Tabriz's culinary offerings is not only diverse in taste and presentation but also hold special significance and are used in particular national and religious ceremonies. For instance, Köfte is traditionally served on New Year Eve, Sarışil is prepared for religious rituals, and Halva is commonly served at funerals. These unique cultural practises and the significance attached to certain foods serve as attractive features for tourists (Vrasida, Peistikou, & Iliopoulou, 2020). In addition to exquisite dining experiences in Tabriz, the city offers several delectable and high-quality food souvenirs, such as sweets, nuts, and snacks. These food souvenirs serve as delightful reminders for travellers, enticing them to revisit and recommend Tabriz to their relatives, bringing back a piece of Tabriz's culinary delights as souvenirs not only allows travellers to share their experiences but also contributes to transforming the city into an exotic culinary destination.

Literature review

The factors associated with the popularity of a destination for culinary reasons were explored by reviewing relevant literature and the theoretical foundations of food tourism. This was done to assess the city's potential to host tourists who pursue diverse foods in different regions to gain exotic experiences.

Culinary tourism was first mentioned in 1998 by Long (1998). Since then, research in this field has focused on its various dimensions, ranging from its cultural aspects (T. H. Lee, Chao, & Lin, 2018; Raina, Rana, Thakur, & Kohli, 2020) to creating a unique brand and forming a food image (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; A. H. Lee et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2020). For instance, Privitera studied food tourism to explain the relationship between destinations and food events. This study concludes that one of the key values of food experience is its relationship with the place, specific landscapes, and culture of the region. It emphasised the need to modify marketing strategies to focus more on creating a food image based on foods that tell the historical stories of the destination (Privitera et al., 2018).

Food involvement is a multifaceted concept that encompasses not only consumption but also the acquisition of knowledge that guides food choices and the preparation process (Levitt, Zhang, DiPietro, & Meng, 2019). Levitt et al. (2019) improved a tourist's food involvement theory based on Goody's (1982) five food stages: acquisition, preparation, cooking, eating, and disposal. They identified four separate sections reflecting different aspects of food involvement: Food-Related Identity, Food Quality, Social Bonding, and Food Consciousness. On the other hand, food involvement has been identified as a significant factor influencing attitudes and intentions in some research. Choe's study (2018), for instance, addresses this issue by examining the interplay between food involvement, motivation, attitudes and behavioural intentions in food tourist travel planning behaviour. Choe suggested that individuals with higher levels of food involvement are more likely to exhibit deliberate food tourist behaviour (Choe & Kim, 2018).

Improving the quality, taste, and flavour of food (Chi, Chua, Othman, & Karim, 2013; Rahman, Zaman, Hassan, & Wei, 2018) and providing a variety of special and unique foods to tourists is a prerequisite for attracting food tourists (Harrington, 2005; Le & Hoang, 2020). In this sense, the use of local ingredients in the preparation of traditional food (Youn & Kim, 2017) serving ethnic food in traditional dinnerware (Baldacchino, 2015; Tussyadiah, 2006), and garnishing local food (Lan, Wu, & Lee, 2012) can increase the attractiveness of food tourism destinations. Presenting traditional souvenirs (Buczkowska, 2014; Ho, Liu, Yuan, & Liao, 2021), performing dining customs and rituals, and traditional serving methods also play an important role in attracting tourists who seek to experience the culture of the region and its link with local food (T. H. Lee et al. (2018). However, the development of food tourism is closely related to the price of traditional food (Rahman et al., 2018; Widjaja, Jokom, Kristanti, & Wijaya, 2020).

Therefore, attention should be paid to increasing the quality of food (Di-Clemente et al., 2020; Ha & Jang, 2010) by offering

delicious tastes and attractive flavours (L. Lin and Mao (2015) can create a positive attitude among tourists towards local food (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Raina et al., 2020). This experience would be enriched by providing an opportunity for tourists to socialise during the ethnic dining experiences (Raina et al., 2020). Eventually, this would lead to the formation of a unique food image (Chi et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2020), which subsequently encourages intention to revisit and willingness to recommend the destination to others (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Choe & Kim, 2018; Widjaja et al., 2020). This strategy is effective for developing a successful food tourism destination (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010; Choe & Kim, 2018). Effective cooperation between the government, restaurants, and other stakeholders is essential to create a sense of identity in the destination image (Le & Hoang, 2020; Wang & Meng, 2016). To achieve this, it is necessary to identify the region's typical food sources and products and adapt them to the local culture to ensure that those foods are exotic and authentic, reflecting the region's history, identity, and ethnicity (Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Le & Hoang, 2020).

In regions where local food is rooted in their cultural identity, it is possible to capture food tourists' attention and choose them as authentic food tourism destination (Le & Hoang, 2020; Sanchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2015). Accordingly, destination officials and managers to prioritise strategies for creating a food image and marketing (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Silkes, Cai, & Lehto, 2013). The development and promotion of culinary tourism are essential, particularly in areas that are not yet known as food destinations (A. H. Lee et al. (2015).

Therefore, according to research conducted in different countries known as food tourism destinations, some of the basic factors influencing the provision of food to tourists include diversity, uniqueness, price, and quality. Additional factors include garnishing local food, preparing these foods from local and indigenous raw materials, and incorporating supplementary traditional elements such as performing dining customs and rituals, serving food in ethnic dinnerware, and offering quality local food souvenirs as samples and reminders.

While the existing literature on food tourism extensively covers established culinary destinations, a notable gap exists concerning regions that are not yet recognised as food tourism hotspots. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the factors that contribute to emerging destinations' potential to attract food tourists. By investigating tourist satisfaction with food-related experiences and identifying key elements that influence perceptions, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how lesser-known regions can develop and promote their culinary identity. The originality of this study lies in its focus on regions with untapped food tourism potential, utilising a qualitative descriptive approach and structured questionnaires to gather tourists' insights.

Furthermore, the analysis phase of this research will critically evaluate the collected data to identify strengths and weaknesses in the current food tourism offerings in these regions. This comprehensive analysis will help identify specific attributes that can be leveraged to create a unique food image and areas that require improvement to meet tourists' expectations. By providing actionable insights and practical recommendations, this study aims to fill the existing gap in the literature and effectively offer strategies for branding and marketing emerging culinary destinations.

Methodology and data

The current study is a feasibility study aimed at evaluating the potential of Tabriz as a specific food tourism destination. In most food tourism studies (about 70 percent) descriptive methods have been used, and the data collection method in 60% of cases was questionnaires (Okumus, Koseoglu, & Ma, 2018). Following this approach, the current study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive assessment. This approach allows for a thorough evaluation of the region's potential by capturing both in-depth insights and statistical trends. The study's design identifies the region's weaknesses and strengths, thereby informing the development of a targeted tourism development scheme.

In the theoretical (qualitative) phase, information was gathered through a comprehensive library and documentary literature review. This phase involved an examination of existing studies on food tourism to identify key factors influencing tourist satisfaction and food-related experiences. The insights from this review informed the development of the questionnaire items.

In the empirical (quantitative) section, data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed following a rigorous scale development process, incorporating existing validated scales where applicable and developing new items to capture specific aspects of the Tabriz food tourism experience.

The process began by generating scale items based on a literature review and expert consultations. Items were designed to measure key variables such as diversity, quality, price, local ingredients, dinnerware, customs, uniqueness, and souvenirs. Each item was reviewed for content validity by a panel of experts in tourism and culinary studies. There were also questions regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents who remained anonymous to ensure the security and convenience of their responses.

Before deployment, the questionnaire underwent pilot testing with a small sample of tourists visiting Tabriz. This phase ensures item clarity, relevance, and reliability. Feedback from the pilot test led to refinement of the wording and structure.

For quantitative surveys, random sampling of tourists visiting the region will be employed to ensure a representative sample and generalizability of findings. To ensure that participants had local food experiences, we included a preliminary question in the survey asking if they had tried local foods in Tabriz. Only those who answered affirmatively were included in the study. The surveys utilised a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "very dissatisfied" and 5 represents "very satisfied".

Data analysis

Descriptive Statistics:

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic characteristics of the sample and the distribution of responses for each item. This analysis provides a general overview of tourist satisfaction levels in terms of various aspects of food-related experiences.

In social studies that use a Likert scale to collect information, a comparison of the mean value with a fixed number provides a practical outline of the data, indicating the level of satisfaction with each factor. The questionnaires used a 5-point Likert scale, with the number 3, which is synonymous with neutral, being the basis for analysis. Scores higher than 3 indicates a more desired level of satisfaction. In the descriptive analysis based on relative frequency, the percentages of satisfied, neutral, and dissatisfied respondents for each factor were evaluated. If the current status of a factor is deemed fulfilling on average from the tourists' perspective, the factor is considered appropriate; otherwise, improvement in the factor's condition would be necessary.

Inferential Statistics:

Inferential statistical techniques, including t-tests, one-way analysis of variance, and multiple regression analysis, were employed to examine the relationships between variables in this study. T-tests were utilised to compare the means of different groups, such as gender and marital status, to assess whether there were significant differences in the Revisit Intention for Local Food (RVINTLF) among these demographic segments. One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of education level, age group, and occupation status on RVINTLF, determining whether significant differences exist in revisit intentions across these groups.

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the impact of independent variables (diversity, quality, price, local ingredients, dinnerware, customs, uniqueness, and souvenirs) on the dependent variable (Revisit Intention for Local Food). This analysis helps identify the factors that are significant predictors of tourists' likelihood of revisiting local food destinations, providing insights into the relative importance of each factor in influencing tourist satisfaction and revisit intentions. By employing these inferential statistical techniques, this study uncovers underlying patterns and relationships that can inform strategic decisions on enhancing food tourism in the region.

Residual Analysis:

To ensure the validity of the regression model, residual analysis was conducted. The normality of residuals was assessed using a Normal P-P Plot and a histogram. A good regression model is indicated by residuals that are normally distributed or close to normal. The points spreading around the diagonal line in the P-P Plot and following the direction of the diagonal line, along with a histogram showing a normal distribution pattern, confirmed the normality of the residuals.

Research findings

Sample's sociodemographic profile

The descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics of the sample, out of the 152 tourists who completed the questionnaires, demonstrates that the majority were well-educated and young, with most visitors being female. Specifically, two-thirds of the sample consisted of women, married individuals, and young adults aged 20-39 years. Only half of the respondents were employed, and 34.2% reported having no income. These findings suggest the need for budget-friendly tourism plans tailored to individuals and families.

The relative frequency of observations according to the level of education indicates that over 76% of tourists have a bachelor's degree or higher, demonstrating a high level of tourist social status, which in turn determines special needs, tastes, and expectations.

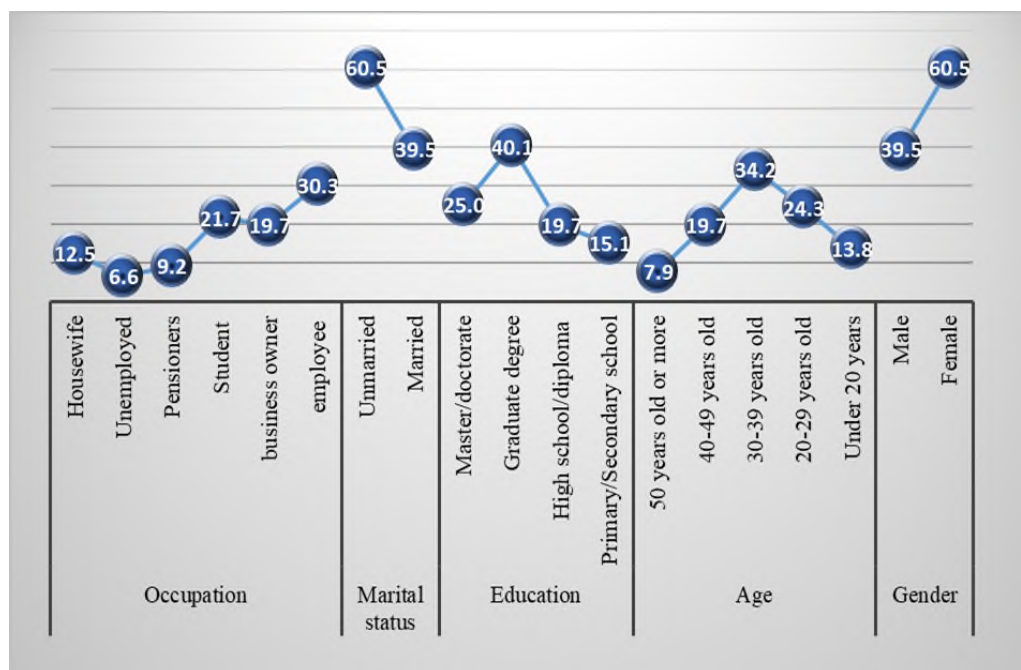


Figure 1. Socio-demographic profile

These statistics should be considered in tourism marketing strategies, including motivations, attraction and advertising channels, and provision of services.

Tourist Attractions and Motivations

According to figure 2, the primary attraction for most tourists (around three-quarters) was the city's historical and cultural richness. While the landscape also attracts visitors, gastronomy has not yet become a significant factor in attracting tourists. These findings highlight the need to enhance gastronomic offerings to broaden the city's appeal.

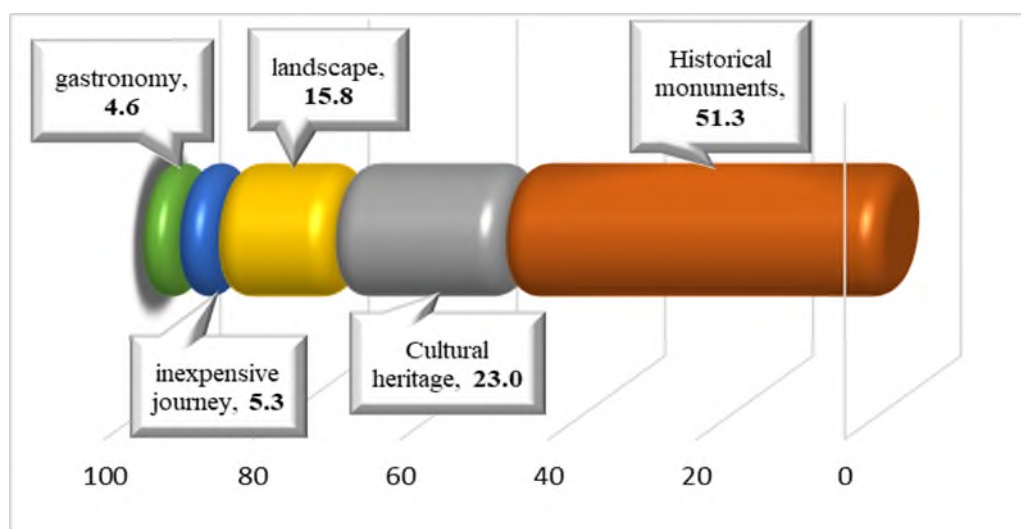


Figure 2. Order of tourist Attractions

Descriptive qualitative analysis of the research findings

This research evaluates the influential factors in the launch of food tourism in Tabriz, a city not yet recognised as a culinary destination. Using a structured questionnaire, opinions were gathered on various parameters divided into two dimensions:

food characteristics, identity, and ethnicity. Food characteristics include diversity, quality, price, and garnishment of local food. Identity and ethnicity encompass traditional serving customs and rituals, dinnerware, local ingredients, uniqueness, and traditional souvenirs.

According to table I, all factors had a mean value above 3, indicating general satisfaction with food-related elements. The highest satisfaction was with local food souvenirs (mean > 4), taste and quality (mean 3.9), garnishing (mean 3.74), diversity, and dining customs (both around 3.7).

Table 1. Tourists' satisfaction with their food experiences in the destination

Dimensions	Factors	Mean Value	Std. Dev.
Food Characteristics	Diversity of local food	3.69	0.067
	Local food prices	3.40	0.074
	Quality of traditional foods	3.91	0.059
	Garnishing local foods	3.74	0.064
Identity and Ethnicity	Traditional eating habits	3.70	0.065
	Traditional dinnerware	3.43	0.077
	Local and ethnic ingredients	3.43	0.065
	Uniqueness of local food	3.30	0.088
	Quality of food souvenirs	4.34	0.051

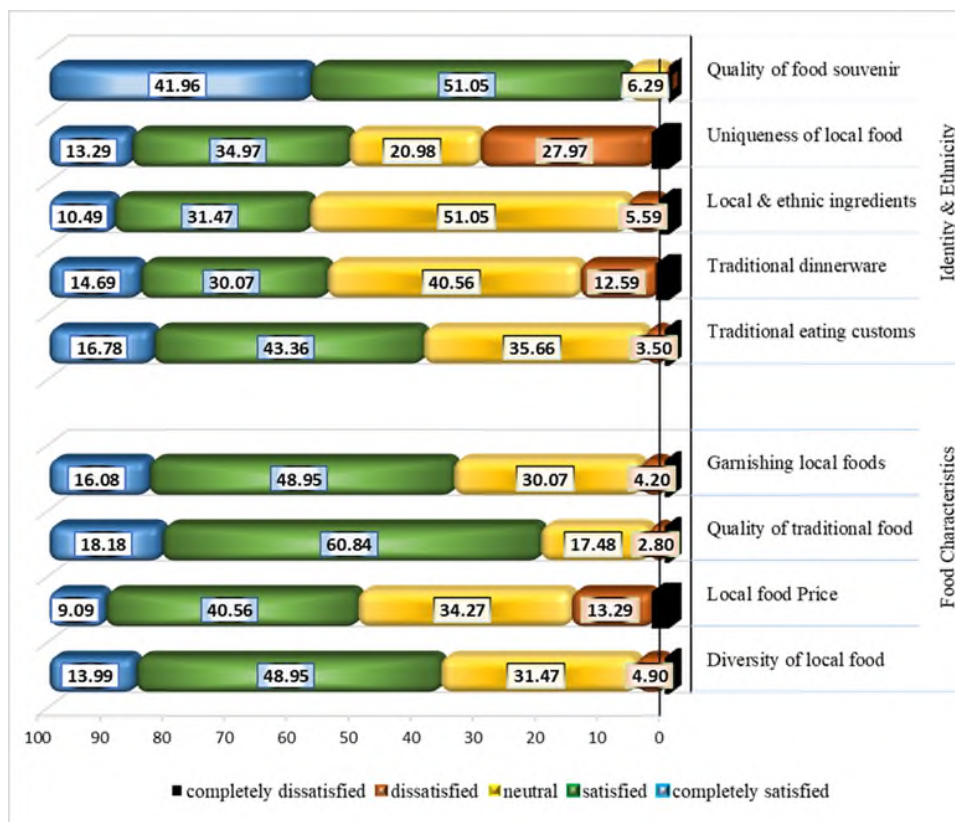


Figure 3. Tourist's satisfaction with the food

Figure 3 confirms these findings, showing higher satisfaction levels for food characteristics than for identity and ethnicity elements. Nearly all tourists are satisfied with souvenirs, with over 90% expressing satisfaction and more than 40% being completely satisfied. These statistics were 80% and 20% for quality. For garnishing, dining customs, and diversity, approximately 60% positive feedback was recorded. The highest level of discontent was related to the uniqueness of local food (around 30%). High neutrality in opinions on local ingredients (50%) and traditional dinnerware (40%) is seen.

Overall, the findings indicate a high level of satisfaction with food characteristics and a need for improvement in identity and ethnic elements. Souvenirs and the quality of traditional food are particularly well-received, while the uniqueness of local food requires attention to enhance tourist satisfaction.

Inferential Statistics

Independent Samples T-Test Results

The results of the independent sample t-test indicated that there was no significant difference in the Revisit Intention for Local Food (RVINTLF) between the groups of marital status and gender ($p > .05$). The effect sizes were small, and the confidence intervals were zero, further supporting the lack of significant difference. Levene's test for equality of variances showed that the variances were equal across groups for both marital status and gender, validating the use of the t-test under the assumption of equal variances.

One-Way ANOVA Results

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of education level on Revisit Intention for Local Food (RVINTLF). This analysis was repeated for different age groups and occupations. The results indicate no significant effect of education level, age group, or occupation status on RVINTLF at the $p < .05$ level. Therefore, we do not reject the null hypothesis for all factors.

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted to assess the homogeneity of variances for RVINTLF across educational levels, age groups, and occupation status. The test results indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met for all comparisons ($p > .05$), indicating that the variances were equal across the different groups.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

We conducted a multiple linear regression analysis to examine the relationship between the dependent variable "Revisit Intention for Local Food" (RVINTLF), which is indicative of the image-forming process, and various factors related to satisfaction with food-related experiences (independent variables). The predictors are: Diversity of local food (DVS), Local food price (PRC), Quality of traditional food (QULT), Garnishing local foods (GRN), Traditional dining customs-ritual (DCUS), Traditional dinnerware (DWR), Local & ethnic ingredients (IGD), Uniqueness of local food (UQU), and Quality of food souvenir (SVR). The aim of this study was to determine whether these predictors significantly influence revisit intentions for local food.

Table 2. Overall fit of the regression model

Mode		Ad usted		Std. Error in Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin- atson	
		-squared	value		Squared Change	F Change	1	df	Sig. F		
1	Square	.548 ^a	.300	.56	.868	.300	6.763	9	14	.000	.055
a. redictors (Constant), SV , D , DCUS, UQU, DVS, QULT, C, IGD, and G											
b. Dependent Variable VI TLF											

The regression model was assessed to determine its efficacy in predicting the "Revisit Intention for Local Food" (RVINTLF) based on several independent variables. The model demonstrated a moderate level of explanatory power, as indicated by an R-Square value of 0.300, suggesting that approximately 30% of the variability in RVINTLF can be explained by the independent variables included in the model. The model's overall significance was confirmed by a significant F-Change statistic ($F = 6.763$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that the predictors collectively contributed to the prediction of RVINTLF. This result implies that the independent variables together have a meaningful impact on the dependent variable.

Table 3. ANOVA F-test

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	45.854	9	5.095	6.763	.000 ^b
	Residual	106.981	14	.753		
	Total	152.836	151			

a. Dependent Variable: RVINTLF

b. Predictors: (Constant), SV, D, DCUS, UQU, DVS, QULT, PRC, IGD, and GRN

However, it is noteworthy that several individual predictors were found to be insignificant in the model. The Standard Error of the Estimate was 0.868, indicating the average deviation of the observed values from the regression line. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistic was 2.055, suggesting no significant autocorrelation in the residuals. Overall, although the model provides valuable insights into the factors influencing RVINTLF, caution should be exercised when interpreting the significance of individual predictors due to the presence of several insignificant variables. This indicates that although the overall model is strong, not all factors contribute equally to predicting tourists' revisit intentions for local food.

Table 4. Effects of the independent variable

M d	Unstandardised		Standardised		t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity	
	Coefficients		Coefficients				ero-order	artial	art	Statistics	
	Std. Error	eta								Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.017	.608			.08	.977					
DVS	.46	.096	.353		4.4	.000	.457	.348	.310	.776	1.89
C	-.001	.091	-.001		-.013	.990	.18	-.001	-.001	.715	1.398
QULT	-.03	.116	-.03		-.29	.780	.5	-.03	-.03	.697	1.435
G	.000	.116	.000		.004	.997	.95	.000	.000	.584	1.71
DCUS	.185	.103	.148		1.787	.076	.37	.148	.15	.718	1.393
D	.035	.089	.033		.396	.69	.31	.033	.08	.696	1.437
IGD	.14	.108	.171		1.984	.049	.35	.164	.139	.664	1.507
UQU	.059	.073	.064		.806	.4	.3	.067	.057	.790	1.67
SV	.10	.13	.075		.976	.331	.47	.08	.069	.831	1.03

a. Dependent Variable: RVINTLF

The regression analysis revealed that the diversity of local food (DVS) and the quality of ingredients (IGD) were significant predictors of revisit intention for local food (RVINTLF). DVS is the most influential factor, followed by IGD. Dining Customs (DCUS) showed marginal significance ($p = .076$), indicating that traditional dining customs can enhance the dining experience and should not be overlooked.

Although the effect of Price (PRC) and Garnishing (GRN) on revisit intention was found to be negligible ($p = .99$), the former constitutes a significant portion of travel expenses, and the latter contributes to visual appeal. Therefore, their role in the overall dining experience is not negligible. Other factors, despite their crucial influence on food involvement in a destination, have a non-significant impact on the dependent variable in the model.

Normality of Residuals

The normality of residuals was assessed using a Normal P-P Plot and a histogram. The Normal P-P Plot of standardised residuals showed that the points closely followed the 45-degree diagonal line, indicating that the residuals were approximately normally distributed. Additionally, the histogram of standardised residuals displayed a bell-shaped distribution centred around zero, further supporting the assumption of normality.

Formal normality tests, including the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, yielded p values greater than 0.05 ($p = 0.200$ and $p = 0.424$, respectively), suggesting no significant deviation from normality. Therefore, the assumption of normality of the residuals in our regression model was satisfied.

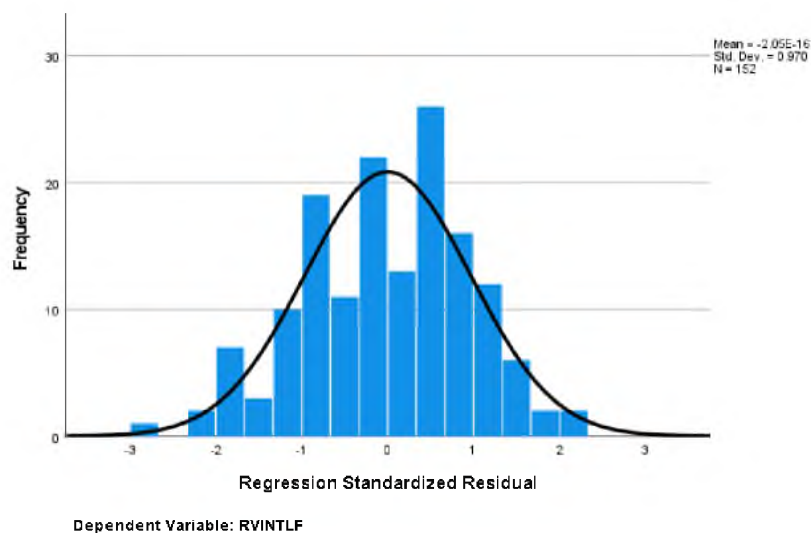


Figure 4. Histogram for normality test

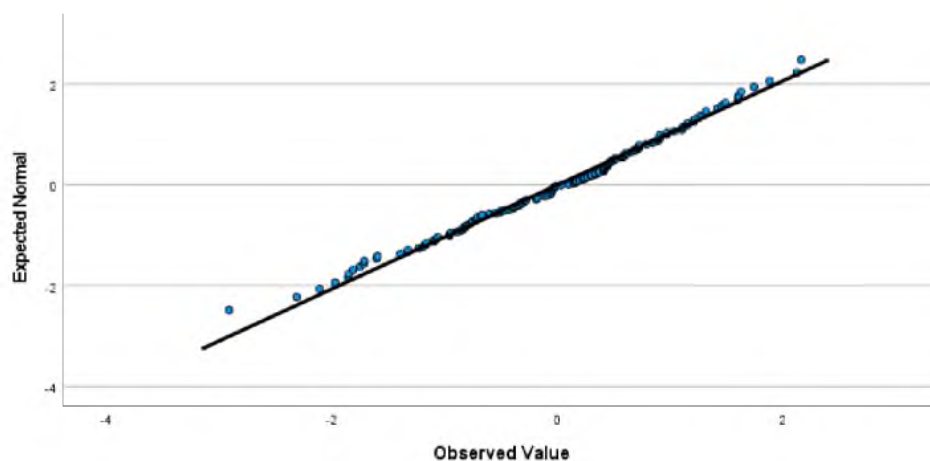


Figure 5. Normal Q-Q Plot of Standardized Residual

Table 5. Tests of normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Standardised Residual	.058	152	.200*	.991	152	.424

*. Here, is a lower bound of true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Reliability of Regression Model

The weak correlations observed in both Zero-order and Partial correlations suggest that the independent variables are not strongly linearly related to each other, nor do they have a strong linear relationship with the dependent variable when controlling for other variables. The acceptable tolerance and VIF values indicate that the regression model does not suffer from multicollinearity, thus supporting the reliability of the regression coefficients and their interpretations.

This detailed analysis provides confidence that the regression model used in this study is appropriate and that the results are not affected by multicollinearity among the independent variables. The model offers valuable insights into the factors influencing RVINTLF, despite the presence of several insignificant individual predictors.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research is original in its focus on regions that are not yet recognised as food tourism destinations. While extensive studies exist in well-known culinary locations, limited research exists on the potential of lesser-known areas. This study fills this gap by not only examining Tabriz but also offering a methodological framework that can be applied to other regions with similar potential. By identifying and analysing the key factors that influence tourist satisfaction and food-related experiences, this research contributes to the broader literature on image formation and branding in the context of food tourism. This study provides practical insights and recommendations for regional development strategies aimed at leveraging local culinary assets to attract tourists and enhance economic prosperity.

This research project developed the tourism industry in Tabriz by benefiting the region's potential as a culinary destination. Our findings reveal several key insights into how traditional foods can enhance Tabriz's appeal to tourists. This discussion section elaborates on these findings, integrating their theoretical and managerial implications.

A preliminary analysis of the factors revealed that almost all of them met tourists' expectations. Therefore, it can be hoped that the efforts to start food tourism will succeed. Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that factors like the diversity of local food, quality of local ingredients, and traditional dining customs significantly influence tourists' likelihood of revisiting for local food, explaining 30% of the variability in revisit intention.

Theoretical implications

Branding a tourism destination is a multifaceted and intricate endeavour, where creating a positive image is a fundamental step in this process (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; Yang et al., 2020). This positive image can be significantly influenced by tourists' intention to revisit and recommend the destination to others (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Satisfying engagement contributes significantly to the formation of a positive image (Chi et al., 2013; Chi & Qu, 2008). Our research examines tourists' perceptions of local food experiences in Tabriz, focusing on their satisfaction with food-related involvement. A higher level of contentment would lay the foundation for portraying a favourable culinary image, ultimately fostering loyalty and encouraging tourists to revisit.

Our findings indicate that food characteristics generally receive high satisfaction ratings across most factors. Elements such as garnishing and diversity, after the quality of traditional food was satisfactory for most tourists. In contrast, the performance of identity and ethnicity elements, except for souvenirs, has been less successful in attracting tourists' attention. As this dimension participates in image forming (Timothy & Ron, 2013) and can elevate a dining experience into a memorable cultural engagement (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016), it is imperative that this dimension is not overlooked or underperformed.

The regression analysis underscores that the diversity of local food (DVS) and the local ingredients (IGD) are pivotal in influencing revisit intentions, which is consistent with the existing literature that emphasises the critical role of food diversity and local ingredients in shaping tourists' experiences and satisfaction (Hjalager & Richards, 2003; Kivela & Crotts, 2005). Specifically, the significant positive effects of DVS and IGD on revisit intention highlight the importance of these factors in tourists' decision-making processes. These findings suggest that enhancing these factors can significantly increase tourists' likelihood of revisiting, thereby fostering Tabriz's development as a culinary destination. Strategic efforts should focus on diversifying local food offerings and improving ingredient quality, as these aspects are crucial for creating a favourable culinary image and attracting more tourists, consistent with the theories of food tourism development (Y.-C. Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011; Smith & Costello, 2009).

The findings of this study underscore the critical role that high-quality local food souvenirs, such as traditional chocolates, sweets, and nuts, play in shaping Tabriz's positive culinary image. Tourist satisfaction with these souvenirs suggests that they are an effective tool for fostering a memorable and favourable perception of a destination. This aligns with existing literature, which highlights the importance of unique and high-quality souvenirs in enhancing tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Ho et al., 2021; Suhartanto, 2018; Suttikun & Meepprom, 2021; Vega-Vázquez, Castellanos-Verdugo, & Oviedo-García, 2017). The successful reception of these food souvenirs suggests that Tabriz has a strong foundation to build its culinary tourism strategy.

The quality of traditional food in Tabriz also received commendable satisfaction levels, which resonated with most visitors. This supports the notion that high-quality food is a cornerstone of a positive tourist experience, as emphasised by Chi et al. (2013) and Chi and Qu (2008). Despite its non-significant impact, quality remains a critical aspect of an overall food experience. Continuous improvement in food quality can enhance tourist satisfaction and indirectly support positive revisit intentions.

The high satisfaction rates for garnishing, diversity, and dining customs further reinforce this, indicating that these aspects are integral to creating an enjoyable and immersive culinary experience. These elements significantly contribute to the overall dining experience, enhancing tourists' perception of authenticity and cultural engagement (Kar, Mohanty, & Mohanty, 2023; Walter, 2017).

Within the low-satisfaction groups, uniqueness has the lowest satisfaction score. This suggests that either the traditional foods of Tabriz do not distinguish itself sufficiently from other regions, or different and special foods of the region are not exposed to tourists. According to research conducted by the researchers on traditional foods during this study, the latter is more likely. Given that uniqueness is one of the key factors in branding a tourist destination (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Frochot, 2003), the need for deeper and more specific research on this issue is undeniable.

The issue of pricing that does not meet tourist expectations is another critical finding. It seems that the price could not completely satisfy tourists, and its effect on revisit intention was found to be negligible. However, it is essential to recognise that food costs constitute a substantial portion of travel costs (Jang, Bai, Hong, & O'Leary, 2004), and competitive pricing strategies are essential to ensure that tourists perceive good value for money. Balance affordability with maintaining high standards of quality requires careful consideration to enhance overall tourist satisfaction and encourage revisit intentions.

Managerial implications

Satisfying tourists, both in the field of hospitality issues and specifically in tourist's food, requires proper planning and sound policies. The results of the tools used in the present study were described in detail, but there is no doubt that more and more in-depth studies are needed to join food tourism destinations. Addressing each indicator related to food tourism requires spending time and budget and effective collaboration between local governments, scientific societies, and the tourism industry. Having provided necessities and paved the way for joining food tourism destinations with integrated and purposeful planning, a region would benefit from this emerging phenomenon, thanks to its historically local foods, reaching comprehensive development.

In order to create a unique image of a city, which has not been introduced as a gastronomic place like Tabriz, as a culinary destination, food research should be carried out on a large scale with the cooperation of scientific societies and the regional government to identify the city's traditional foods and to provide an authentic food experience for tourists in the destination. After distinguishing specific foods of the region, recipes and traditional cooking methods should be registered as regions' intangible heritages by national and global committees. As a next step, to cater to a broader audience, including those with limited income, it is essential to offer a range of affordable culinary experiences. This can help attract a diverse group of tourists and ensure that the food experience brings positive emotions towards local food for all.

According to sample's socio-demographic profile, well-educated and young people made up a high proportion of travellers. This indicates that marketing strategies should specifically target these groups. Given that young and educated travellers often seek unique and sophisticated experiences, Tabriz should emphasise its diverse and high-quality culinary offerings to attract this demographic. Additionally, the predominance of female highlights the importance of ensuring safety and accessibility in tourist accommodations and activities.

In terms of tourism attractions, most tourists were motivated to visit the city because of its historical and cultural richness, reflecting the reputation of Tabriz's ancient civilisation. Traditional food is a valid element of a region's history and culture (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Van Westering, 1999). Thus, Positioning these foods as an integral part of the city's historical narrative can attract history and culture enthusiasts to culinary tourism.

It is notable here that, although there are a variety of food souvenirs that tourists would like to bring back home as gifts for themselves or others, there is a need for reconsideration about packaging methods, regarding safety, hygiene, and aesthetic values, to be suitable for tourists to transport to their home. According to Ho et al., the function of packaging is not only facilitating transport by protecting the integrity of the product, but it is also a significant element of the product. While the souvenirs may have been gifts, being aesthetically attractive would enrich visual qualities and give great aesthetic pleasure. Future investigations are recommended to examine the quality of the mentioned factors and the relationship between food souvenirs and the culinary image of the destination.

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