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**Shaping gastronomy experience. The case of food tourism  
in Ukraine**

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## **Abstract**

Gastronomy experiences are becoming a fundamental factor that influences a decision in choosing a travel destination as well as being crucial in shaping tourists' satisfaction regarding the overall travel experience. The aim of the study is to identify and explain the simultaneous impact of key factors that influence gastronomic experience and their impact on satisfaction with a trip and the destination's brand. These issues were addressed within the context of Ukraine as it is an overlooked area of academic research, an online survey was conducted, targeting domestic and international tourists. Structural equation modelling was used to assess and reveal proposed hypotheses in the model. The study contributed to the theoretical understanding of key factors that influence gastronomic experience and the relationship between food experience and its role in satisfaction and perceived destination brand. Moreover, the finding showed that past experience and prior knowledge have a positive influence on gastronomy while prior knowledge affects the perceived quality of cuisine and food activities in the destination. Linkages in the model were empirically supported by statistical analyses. The research simultaneously highlighted the importance of gastronomy to tourist destinations for positioning on international and domestic markets. The paper not only provides theoretical but also practical implications. The hospitality and tourism businesses benefit from acknowledging the importance of local food and the local food market. The findings of this study are also deemed to assist destination marketers who observe that tourists have become more demanding in search of unique experiences offered by destinations.

**Keywords:** gastronomy experiences, satisfaction, destination brand image

**JEL Classification System:** L83 Z32

## **Resumo**

As experiências gastronômicas estão a tornar-se um factor fundamental que influencia uma decisão na escolha de um destino de viagem, bem como a sua importância crucial para moldar a satisfação dos turistas relativamente à experiência global de viagem. O objectivo do estudo é explicar o impacto simultâneo de factores-chave que têm influência na experiência gastronómica e o seu impacto na satisfação com a viagem e a marca do destino. Estas questões foram abordadas no contexto da Ucrânia, por ser uma área negligenciada de pesquisa académica,

foi realizada uma pesquisa online, direcionada a turistas nacionais e internacionais, foi realizado um inquérito em linha, dirigido aos turistas nacionais e internacionais. Foi utilizada a modelação de equações estruturais para avaliar e revelar as hipóteses propostas no modelo. O estudo contribuiu para a compreensão teórica de factores-chave que aumentam a experiência gastronómica memorável e a relação entre a experiência alimentar e o seu papel na satisfação e percepção da marca do destino. As ligações no modelo foram empiricamente apoiadas por análises estatísticas. A investigação salientou simultaneamente a importância da gastronomia para destinos turísticos para o posicionamento nos mercados internacionais e nacionais. O estudo não só fornece implicações teóricas mas também práticas. As empresas de hotelaria e turismo beneficiam do reconhecimento da importância da alimentação local e do mercado alimentar local. Os resultados deste estudo são também importantes para o marketing do destino, considerando que os turistas se tornaram mais exigentes na procura de experiências únicas.

**Palavras chave:** experiências gastronómicas, satisfação, imagem de marca do destino

**JEL Classification System: L83 Z32**

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Literature review .....	3
2.1. Gastronomy tourism.....	3
2.2. Gastronomic experience.....	5
2.3.Hypotheses development .....	6
2.3.1. The importance of past experience .....	6
2.3.2. The role of prior knowledge .....	7
2.3.3. The outcomes of food activities .....	8
2.3.4. The outcomes of the perception of restaurant quality.....	9
2.3.5. The outcomes of the perception of gastronomic experiences' quality .....	11
2.3.6. The outcomes of the perception of local cuisine quality .....	12
3. Method... ..	14
3.1. Theoretical framework .....	14
3.2. Questionnaire and measures.....	14
3.3. Sample.....	17
3.4. Study context: gastronomy tourism in Ukraine .....	18
4. Results and discussion .....	22
5. Conclusions.....	29
5.1. Theoretical contributions.....	29
5.2. Practical implications .....	30
5.3. Limitations and recommendations the future research .....	31
6. References .....	33

## List of Tables

Table 3.1. Measurement of variables .....	16
Table 3.2 Profile of respondents .....	18
Table 4.1. Composite reliability, average variance extracted, correlations, and discriminant validity checks.....	22
Table 4.2. Structural model assessment .....	24

## List of Figures

Figure 3.1. Map of Ukrainian gastronomy attractions .....	20
Figure 4.1. Structural model .....	23
Figure 4.2. IPMA results.....	28

## List of Abbreviations

UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organization

SEM – Structural Equation Modelling

CR -Composite reliability

AVE - Average variance extracted

HTMT – Heterarotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations

VIF - Variance Inflation Factor

IPMA – Importance-Performance Map Analysis

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the fast-growing tourism market has integrated the food into its offer to attract visitors and differentiate itself from other destinations by using unique culinary features and traditions (Sthapit et al., 2017; Lai & Wang, 2017). Food has become a vital engine not only for increasing destination attractiveness but also to add value to the place and provide economic benefits. Thus, gastronomy tourism is a way for a destination to prosper with their local cuisine cultures and local products and contribute to the destination brand image. However, the study by Choe and Kim (2018) confirmed that tourists are not interested in consuming 'traditional' tourism products, rather they seek to have new experiences that allow them to fully explore the cultures and traditions of the place.

Due to the fact that historically destinations have been using food as an instrument of attracting tourists, the cuisine has gone beyond the daily routine and become a crucial element of the tourist experience (Sthapit et al., 2017). As Bertella (2011) pointed out, gastronomy tourism is such a type of tourism where tourists have a quest for new experiences that are connected with local cuisine and expanded to experiencing local culture. Gastronomy experiences are considered to be a way of participating in another culture through trying new recipes, and ingredients, meeting locals and visiting places with strong culinary identities (Choe & Kim, 2018). Therefore, Hall et al. (2002) indicated that gastronomy experiences are a window to the culture of the destination. Since consuming food applies to emotions and brings enjoyment, studies suggest that gastronomy experiences contribute to the pre- during and post-evaluation of the trip (Choe & Kim, 2018). Consequently, studies suggest that culinary experiences shape personal satisfaction with the trip.

A large amount of discussion and debates have been done about the importance of creating memorable gastronomy experiences in the destination. There are studies which were done by Leong and Karim (2017), Karim and Chi (2010), Folgado-Fernández (2021), Choe and Kim (2018) and others that analyze the relationship between gastronomy experience satisfaction, revisit intention; food experiences and crafting destination brand, restaurants, and destination promotion; motivation of tourists and food trip. However, the complex approach to the food experiences encounters a wide range of influence factors and links with tourist overall satisfaction and destination brand image remain relatively unexplored.

There is also worth mentioning that in parallel with growth of tourism, the demand of trip to the places of war, military conflicts, disasters have grown over the past decades (Causevic&Lynch,2013). Some researchers such as Causevic and Lynch (2013), Alneng

(2002), Arnaud (2017) address to the tourism as a useful instrument for countries in post-war period which enhances recovering. Despite the emerging streams of research in this field, there is a limited number of works into links between gastronomy tourism and its role in post-war periods. Looking more precisely, there is no research examining the gastronomy experiences in Ukraine. However, due to the ongoing war in the country, there is vital to analyze possible tourism tools which could be used during the post-war time while recovering the national economy will be essential. There is no doubt that battleground on the Ukrainian territory brings devastating consequences to country's heritage as well as makes an attempt to destroy national identity. From this point of view, highlighting the importance of Ukrainian gastronomy as a vital element of the heritage and integral component of the culture is needed.

The study will contribute to the academic literature regarding the gastronomic experience of domestic and international tourists by showing key factors that influence gastronomy experiences and clarifying the relationship between them. Thus, the current research aims through reviewing of existing literature provide a comprehensive picture of food tourism in Ukraine and consider gastronomy experiences as a powerful tool during post-war period. Another goal of the research is to establish the structural model that helps to explain phenomenon of gastronomy experiences examining influencing factors as well as its impact on tourists' satisfaction and destination brand image that is vital indicators for tourism prosperity of the country. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is used as a primer research method using SmartPLS 3 software.

For such a purpose, the current research firstly will overview the existing literature regarding the gastronomy tourism and gastronomy experiences providing the overall picture of this phenomenon. The following chapter will describe the hypothesis development considering various of items. Then, variables such as past experience, prior knowledge, cuisine, restaurants, gastronomy experience, satisfaction, destination brand conflate into the conceptual model. Following this step, the methodology and collected data will be analyzed. The next chapter is devoted for the discussion of obtained results, where hypotheses are tested in the integrated model. Theoretical and managerial implication, limitation and recommendations for the future research will be covered.



## 2. Literature Review

This chapter looks at the theoretical framework of the research. It explains the phenomenon of gastronomy tourism and gastronomy experience discussing different prospect of it based on relevant previous academic research. The chapter further breaks down the discussion of main variables and propose hypothesis which will be tested.

### 2.1 Gastronomy tourism

In recent times, usage of the term gastronomy tourism for appellation food-related types of tourism has increased (Dixit & Prayag, 2022). Scientists and practitioners of the tourism sector also widely use definitions such as food tourism, gastro-tourism, wine tourism, gourmet tourism, and culinary tourism (Pavlidis & Markantonatou, 2020). Over the past decades, tourism studies generated a plethora of different definitions in order to describe this type of travel. For example, UNWTO (2012, p.7) stated that *'gastronomic tourism applies to tourists and visitors who plan their trips partially or totally in order to taste the cuisine of the place or to carry out activities related to gastronomy'*. Santich (2004, p.20) described culinary tourism as *'tourism or travel motivated, at least in part, by an interest in food and drink, eating and drinking'*. Long (2008) defined gastronomy tourism as participation in food-related activities mainly because of the desire to discover and experience local culture and traditions. All previously grounded definitions of the gastronomy tourism are important as they cover different prospects of the phenomenon. It worth mentioning that gastrotourism include trips where eating and drinking is not obligatory a main aim of the trip so it might be just a part of the whole journey. Moreover, Long (2008) argues that gastro-trips in modern world are a way to explore traditions of the community and deeply understand the local culture. Thus, from our point of view, food tourism should be considered primarily as an experience which allows thought tastings local products or dishes, participating in the cooking processes, visiting the farms or other venues, learning traditional ways of food preparation to consider intangible heritage.

Broadly speaking, food trips may include visits to local farmers and producers, local food fairs and markets, gastronomy events and festivals, participation in cooking masterclasses, and tastings of meals and beverages (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Moreover, gastronomy tourism provides a huge variety of tourism products and services such as wineries and vineyards, breweries, food trails, cuisine-related seminars, blogs and vlogs of a foodie, thematic magazines, books, and guides (Pratt et al., 2020).

In the contrast, McKercher et al. (2008) argued that the majority of travelers consume

food during their stay in the destinations (dining in restaurants, trying a variety of cuisine styles, buying in local markets and producers) and they are not obligatory supposed to be separated in the different group – food seekers. McKercher and Chan's (2005) pointed out that gastronomy is not always a primary reason for travel even if tourists take part in a wide variety of food-related activities. For this reason, in the current research, we take into consideration general tourists whose primary motivation for visiting Ukraine was not exceptionally culinary. Some studies have revealed that gastronomy emerges as a prominent part of tourists' lived experiences despite the fact of their country of origin, destination choice, cuisine preferences and decision-making processes (Dixit, 2020; Ellis et al., 2018; Henderson, 2009; Robinson et al., 2018).

Timothy and Ron (2013) brought light to the concept that gastronomy tourism and the food itself present are parts of the broader cultural system. They pointed out that local cuisine traditions are a silent but crucial signpost of destinations' heritage that represents a truthful way of living in the community. In this vein, Minihan (2014) and Richards (2015) added that cuisine and gastronomy behaviour represent the cultural practices of the destination. There is an evident fact that local cuisine is significantly influenced by traditions, beliefs, cultural values, history and relationships with nature within a particular community (Chen&Huang, 2018). Climate, environment, and resources have influenced methods of preparing and preserving food. Consequently, the cuisine is an expression of community lifestyle and cultural and natural heritage. Moreover, in some destinations, depending on their historical evolution, people celebrate festivals related to food harvesting (Makoviaa in Ukraine) (Panova,2021). Another example of the influence on eating habits is Mongolian nomads whose patterns, attires, and celebrations were dependent on food availability. Thus, Hillel et al. (2013) argued that cuisine is an integral part of community identity and serves as a tool for understanding and appreciating the local culture.

In recent times, there is widespread assumption that food has switched from the baseline necessity of tourist trips to a significant element of the travel experience (Kim & Eves, 2012). As Ogden et al. (2018) noted, that tourists tend to learn and discover a destination through the food. Moreover, they consider the variety and quality of places offers where food could be consumed are an important factor in their satisfaction. Richards and Hjalager (2002) pointed out that local gastronomy as a tourist product remains a vital factor of destination choice by tourists.

## 2.2 Gastronomic experience

Experience has been considered an intangible process which provokes individual interaction with the process (Kim & Eves, 2012). As a result, individuals focus and concentrate on the activity upon the influence of personal beliefs, senses, emotions, backgrounds, and context in what experience takes place (Knutson et al., 2004). Yuan (2018, p.33) defined experience as:

‘the total outcome involving a combination of customer’s cognitive, affective, emotional, social, and physical responses gained from participating in activities and interacting with both tangible and intangible components in the consumption process, which in turn influences how consumers interpret the world’.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) highlighted that experience is carried out as an impression shaped by personals` engagement with products and services. They also noted that it includes a concentration of sensorial values in the realm of entertainment, education, escape and aesthetics. Moreover, Youngman and Hadzikadic (2014) suggested overall experience is a very wide and complex phenomenon as it compresses a variety of subexperiences which happen within different conditions and on different levels. From these prospects, Baggio (2008) noted that tourism is an example of a social complex occurrence which provides society with a range of experiences. Notably, the latest studies confirm that gastronomy experiences have become the main element of the overall tourism experience (Quan & Wang, 2004).

Over the past years, tourists shifted their way of travel from observing, learning, and exploring to experiential and fully transformative trips (Causevic & Lynch, 2013). Tourism researchers have determined three stages of the evolution of gastronomy experiences (Pratt et al., 2020; Richards, 2015). The first generation of food experiences is focused on creating themed experiences with provoking sensory attributes. The second stage is characterized as co-creation experiences that involve tourists' direct participation. The third stage embarks on an era of integration visitors in local communities, exchanging knowledge between tourists and locals, and creating a network centered on food and cuisine. As tourists’ demands are constantly changing, people nowadays seek to have authentic, culturally rich travel experiences. They are looking for co-creation, and communication with local communities through direct interaction in order to learn about their culture.

According to the findings of Mohamed et al. (2021), gastronomy experiences emerge from four main assets such as intellectual, affective, behavioral, sensory, and effective. More precisely, the intellectual aspect allows people to expand knowledge about the destination by

learning and gaining local-based information. Food experiences give the opportunity to communicate and interact with family or friends once they take part in common food activities (Long, 2008). Moreover, food experiences make people feel pleasure and enjoyment. Last but not least, gastronomy provides tourists with a chance to have a sensorial experience via tastings local cuisine (Li et al., 2021).

There is no doubt that gastronomy tourism is perceived as an effective path to exploring and experiencing a destination in its truthful way. Thus, gastronomy features as an enabler of tourist cultural experiences (Mak et al., 2012). Moreover, Hjalager and Richards (2002) found that gastronomy experiences supply tourists with an atmosphere that contributes to creating memorable experiences. It was also stated that food experiences enhance the value of the destination as they represent the authenticity and identity of the local community. Considering the fact that gastronomy experiences involve visitors in the process of production or consumption of dishes that might be indicated by tourists' prior knowledge, such a type of experience eagers direct interaction with the community ecosystem. As a gateway, tourists receive an immersive experience enhancing further overall satisfaction with the trip (Rachao et al., 2021). Ellis at el. (2018) highlighted that gastronomy contributes to destination branding.

## **2.3. Hypotheses development**

### **2.3.1. The importance of past experience**

In tourism research, past experience has been treated as a factor that directly influences tourists` motivation, perception, evaluation of the trip and overall decision-making activity. It has been discovered that after tourists visit a destination, they rely on their prior experience as their primary source of information. As a result, the cognitive effort is reduced, and the process becomes more natural and harmonic (Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002). Visitors who have past experience with the destination are able to work with accurate information and filter irrelevant ones (Johnson & Russo, 1984). The study conducted by Tse and Crotts (2005) confirmed that tourists who have experience with the destination significantly correlated with a variety of culinary explorations. Ryu and Jang, (2006) identified that past experience is a vital factor in the prediction of the tourist`s food consumption and validating the destinations cuisine quality. Moreover, accumulated experience is perceived as a strong factor that influences not only expectation and perception but also evaluation of the future experience (Campo-Martínez et al.,2010).

As it has been already stated, the degree of tourists' personal affection for tourism activity is continually underpinned by engagement, knowledge, and previous experience (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). For example, a tourist who is interested in gastronomy and food-related activities usually has more experience with such activities. This in turn strengthens gastronomic knowledge. From this point of view, past experience improves knowledge, which is a cognitive reaction to the gastronomy ingested. Thus, it is assumed that a tourist's cognition would produce a stronger perception of the place, its cuisine, activities, and gastronomy level (Ryu & Jang, 2006). Moreover, from the prospects of gastronomy tourism, travelers with strong preferences for the destination's cuisine tend to have more intended recurrent gastronomic experiences. Thus, the perception of food activities and the quality of local cuisine, and restaurants are stronger.

It has been founded that past experience is a vital factor that influences customers' post-evaluation. It is important to take into consideration while exploring customer perception of visiting restaurants. Thus, because of the influence of this variable on customer response to the consumed product, first-time consumers do not perceive the service and product in the same way as repeated tourists. Noteworthy, guests who have previous experience of visiting the restaurant have a tendency to repeat patronage because of more clear understanding of what to expect (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Moreover, repeated visitors tend to have a better perception and higher satisfaction with dining in a familiar place rather than first-time guests.

According to the literature review, the research hypothesis to be tested are following:

*H1a. Past experience positively influences the perception of the local cuisine quality*

*H1b. Past experience positively influences the perception of the quality of local food activities*

*H1c. Past experience positively influences the perception of the gastronomic experiences' quality*

*H1d. Past experience positively influences the perception of the local restaurants' quality*

### **2.3.2. The role of prior knowledge**

It is recommended by academic literature that knowledge regarding the destination could be divided into informal and formal groups (Alister Mathieson & Wall, 1987). Thus, in the first case, tourists receive information about the place and attraction from relatives, friends, bloggers, or other people who have previous experience visiting the destination; referred to as 'word of mouth'. However, formal knowledge refers to those sources such as travel guidebooks,

journals, other types of printed materials and online types of advertisements (Guan & Jones, 2014). Typically, information obtained from these sources includes details of cuisine, gastronomy traditions and activities of the place as well. Thus, the research by Leong et al. (2017) has highlighted those tourists` knowledge of local gastronomy is closely connected to the dining past experience as well as knowledge which has been gained formally and informally.

In the field of tourism research, empirical studies have confirmed that knowledge about local cuisine could be a factor that motivates gastronomy-interested tourists to be active partakers in local food activities and gastronomic experiences despite the general interest in local food attributes among average tourists. Nonetheless, it has been confirmed that regardless tourists visit the destination for gastro purposes or food is just a part of the overall experience, the presence of knowledge about gastronomy has a positive effect on satisfaction with gastronomy-related activities, and cuisine quality (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Thus, it has a positive influence on the overall perception of the gastronomy of the destination. Moreover, previous studies pointed out that the formation and acquisition of knowledge regarding the gastronomy of the place is a vital cognitive trigger in a tourist's local food taste perception journey. Hence, the knowledge received from the experience of consuming local food through visiting restaurants positively influence the overall perception of local restaurants` quality (Hernández-Rojas & Huete Alcocer, 2021).

Thus, based on the review of previous studies, proposed hypotheses were developed:

*H2a. Prior knowledge positively influences the perception of the local cuisine quality*

*H2b. Prior knowledge positively influences the perception of the local food activities quality*

*H2c. Prior knowledge positively influences the perception of the gastronomic experiences` quality*

*H2d. Prior knowledge positively influences the perception of the local restaurants` quality*

### **2.3.3. The outcomes of food activities**

Concerning food activities dimensions, Karim and Chi (2010) investigated that food activities play a vital role in building destination brand image as well as show a positive correlation with tourist satisfaction. Food activities are perceived as an integral part of the tourist travel experience and could be presented by food-tourism festivals, wine and food regions offer, street food markets, gastronomy-related tours, cooking master classes, visiting

local farms or local food manufacturers, etc. (Karim & Chi, 2010). Food festivals and events as the main contributor to the brand image of the destination and vivid factor of tourist satisfaction remain the most investigated topic by scholars. However, there is a limited number of studies where there is an identified direct link between festivals and their role in brand image formation.

Yang (2010) looked at the effect of the Taiwanese coffee festival on overall tourist satisfaction with the destination. Ryu et al. (2012) has paid attention to the relationship between guest satisfaction, emotions, and tourist revisit intention where they argued that affective and cognitive satisfaction by the festival has a further impact on tourist attitude to the place and level of its satisfaction. Robinson and Clifford (2012) suggested that service escape and hygiene rules, authenticity and service escape are the key determinant of tourist satisfaction by event and destination in perspective. Kim et al. (2010) investigated the correlation between satisfaction and loyalty at Gwangju Kimchi festival in South Korea.

Bjork and Kauppinen-Raisanen (2016) have tested the influence of food masterclasses and tours in Finland. The main findings of the study confirmed that variety, authenticity, and quality of food activities have an extremely strong impact on tourist holiday satisfaction within particular tourist groups. Karim and Chi (2010) discovered the influence of food-related activities on creating brand image comparing Thailand, Italy and France. Results from the study have indicated that France and Italy have built their image as premier food destinations and established themselves as 'land of wine' by using a variety of food activities offers.

Hence, with regard on the findings on the previous studies, hypothesis for further testing were developed:

*H3a. The perception of the local food activities quality positively influences the destination brand image*

*H3b. The perception of the local food activities quality positively influences the tourist satisfaction.*

#### **2.3.4. The outcomes of the perception of restaurant quality**

Another vital attribute of destination gastronomy is restaurants where majority of local food and culinary culture tend to be consumed. Those places are representation of local culinary identity and offer variety of dining experiences, starting from gourmet restaurant where serves high cuisine, local casual cafes offering local meals to street food markets and fast-food places (Vargas-Sánchez & López-Guzmán, 2018).

There is widespread assumption that restaurant is one of main sources of selling food. Although food is focal point, in current times restaurants provide ‘food service experiences. Analysis of existing literature has shown that restaurant service is the combination tangible and intangible elements (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2003). In other words, there is a place where producing and consuming service experience take place simultaneously. There are some defining moments occurs – when provider deliver service to the customer and tend to demonstrate its quality. Thus, these interactions have an impact on further evaluation and satisfaction by visitors. Some previous studies have stated that guests evaluate their dining experience focusing not only on the product itself but also take into account the way in what it was delivered functionally (Kala, 2019; Ryu & Jang, 2006). More precisely, the quality of the dishes might be spectacular but if service is slow or waiter unqualified, the outcomes will dismiss overall satisfaction. Hence, importance of functional quality prevails on the technical one. The research has been found the pricing is a vital attribute for evaluation of the local restaurants and judging their quality (Ryu et al., 2012). Majority of people tend to attend and return to the restaurant while they have a consciousness that they are paying value for money. This determinant varies from individual to individual.

Another aspect of customer satisfaction by dining experience was distinguished service environment. It has been confirmed that environment where service is delivered has substantial impact on people’s reaction to the place, social interaction, and further behavior (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). People tend to choose those places where environment enhance their feeling of pleasure, fulfillment. Moreover, some scholars postulated that such conditions of service as seating arrangements, its dimension and flexibility influence overall evaluation of the restaurant (Chang et al., 2011). Nevertheless, some studies revealed that dining atmosphere and environment has a strong impact on destination brand image. Noteworthy, scholars emphasize that such attributes of dining experience such as availability of multilingual (or at least English) menus, highly qualified staff, various of meal options, are also contribute to positive destination image brand (Karim & Chi, 2010; Lertputtarak, 2012).

Additionally, the perceived quality of the restaurant may affect the customers’ psychological, cognitive, and emotional responses which in turn impact their satisfaction with the restaurant as well as whole gastronomy image of the destination. Based on outcomes of received service, it might also influence peoples’ beliefs and perceived image of the place as emotional response was elicited.

According to the literature review, the research hypothesis to be tested are following:



*H4a. The perception of the local restaurants' quality positively influences the destination brand image*

*H4b. The perception of the local restaurants' quality positively influences the tourist satisfaction.*

### **2.3.5. The outcomes of the perception of gastronomic experiences' quality**

Over the past decades, destinations` desire to differentiate themselves from others and promote their own cultural identity. Destination tourism experts focus on developing unique experiences which turn to creating positive and recognizable brand image (Lucarelli & Brorstrom, 2013). In early tourism literature, Cromton (1979,p.18) defined brand image as *'the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination'*. Sun et al. (2009) added that destination brand image is a tourist own elaboration and interpretation of knowledge, beliefs, assumption, emotional impressions, ideas regarding the place. In recent years, scientists and practitioners of tourist research started to consider local cuisine and gastronomy as one the key element of successful destination branding. Following this concept, Berg and Sevon (2014,p.289) postulated that *'food and gastronomy is directly and indirectly affecting the character of the place and its brand-image'*. In this vein, World Tourism Organization highlighted that *'tourists travel to those destinations that have established a reputation as a place to experiment with quality local products'* (UNWTO, 2020, p.9). Several studies supported that quality is important not only to give memorable experience but also to create distinctive brand image of the destination (Williams et al, 2014). Additionally, Beerli and Martn (2004) argued that gastronomic experience on of the key determinants within 24 elements that contribute to overalldestination brand. Once authentic and unique features are implemented in food experience in the destination it crafts positive gastronomy image and enhance overall destination brand (Horng & Tsai, 2011; Stone et al., 2019).

Another vital prospect aspect of tourist trip is a level of satisfaction. In the competitive economy it is important to understand how tourists evaluate their satisfaction with trip and what factors determine it. Thus, Lopez-Guzman and Sanchez-Canizares (2012) argued that modern tourist no longer satisfied just by product itself, they seek to have authentic cultural experience and discover traditions. In this sense, Martín et al. (2020) argues that cuisine is a pivotal attribute of cultural heritage as richness of local products, recipes present destination identity. Hence, scholars pointed out that gastronomy experience is an exceptional source of tourist satisfaction (Robinson et al., 2018; Ignatov & Smith, 2006). From this prospects, Medina-Viruel et al (2019) supported that level of satisfaction varies and related to food experience which they

receive in the destination. According to results obtained by Guan & Jones (2014), travelers who highly rate quality of gastronomy experience, tend to express satisfaction with whole trip.

In accordance with the scientific literature review, the research hypothesis is following:

*H5a. The perception of the gastronomic experiences' quality positively influences the destination brand image*

*H5b. The perception of the gastronomic experiences' quality positively influences the tourist satisfaction.*

### **2.3.6. The outcomes of the perception of local cuisine quality**

Referring to building strong destination brand, scholars always apply to necessity create successful brand image which is the perception of a brand in terms of its qualities and associations, usually organized by the tourists in meaningful ways and held in memory (Aaker, 1991; Cai, 2002; Keller, 1993). Thus, powerful and recognizable destination image immediately contribute to creating overall brand and enhance it as well. Nevertheless, food and cuisine have been distinguished as crucial elements in destination branding. Researches state that while destinations tend to build strong brand focusing on gastronomy tourism, food and cuisine quality became its selling point within tourism branding strategies and national tourism boards (Okumus et al. 2007). Moreover, Berg and Sevón (2014, p.4) postulated that *'food and gastronomy is directly and indirectly affecting the character of the place and its brand-image'*. Additionally, World Tourism Organization (2012, p.9) has been argued that *'tourists travel to those destinations that have established a reputation as a place to experiment with quality local products'*. Several studies confirmed that countries or particular destination which aim to increase their competitiveness, enhance the brand by recognizable and favorable food and cuisine attributes (Lin et al., 2010, Henderson, 2014).

Some scholars state that quality is one of the key elements that determine and shape overall tourist satisfaction. The quality of local cuisine might be explained by variety characteristics of excellence which makes local food sufficient for visitors. For instance, taste, freshness, nutritive value, safety, and type of ingredients. Thus, researchers such Meng et al. (2008), Kozak and Rimmington (2000), Correia (2008) and others have confirmed in their studies that perception of local cuisine is a pivotal element for tourists' satisfaction. Aiming to

better understand the term quality of food they reveal it from different prospects. Hendijani (2016) and Alonso (2011) discovered that using fresh and healthy ingredients in local dishes as well as taste contributes to overall quality of proposed food.

Moreover, Seo et al. (2017) confirmed that availability to taste healthy and safe food during the trip increase the intentions to discover local cuisine and respectively enhance satisfaction. Sthapit (2017) found that quality local food encounters also such a characteristic as novelty, generosity and delicious. However, Chao et al. (2014) focused on food hygiene aspect in the context of satisfaction with local cuisine. Chang et al. (2011) and Correia et al. (2010) suggested that variety of dishes, possibility of different meal combination as well as price are considered to be important attributes for food quality.

Thus, in accordance with scientific literature review, the hypothesis to verify shall be following:

*H6a. The perception of the local cuisine quality positively influences the destination brand image*

*H6b. The perception of the gastronomic local cuisine quality positively influences the tourist satisfaction*

### **3. Method**

This chapter addresses the explanation of the methodology that has been used in the research paper. It introduces the research philosophy of the paper and how it was applied. The chapter also goes on to show the method of the data collection and presents the description of all measurements of the survey. It explains the data analysis strategy and tools that were involved in the research processes. Moreover, the chapter reveals the sample features as well as emphasizes the area of the research area to provide a better understanding of the context.

#### **3.1 Theoretical framework**

The research was done with a positivist and deductive approach, with the application of quantitative techniques. The positivist approach has been used in order to verify prior hypothesis by showing the relationship between casual, explanatory factors (independent variables) and outcomes (dependent variables) (Park et al., 2020). As research attempts to explain the complexity of gastronomy experience phenomenon, positivist approach has been selected due to its capability to show correlation among variety of variables and verify the influence of explanatory factors as well as outcomes (Schrag, 1992). Thus, positivist approach facilitates the explanation and prediction of tourist behavior regarding gastronomy experiences in Ukraine and its influence on destination brand.

#### **3.2 Questionnaire and measures**

In order to collect data, an internet-based questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was created through the literature review by implementing the measurement scales for each item from different research that were done by Leong and Karim (2017), Folgado-Fernández (2021), Moral-Cuadra (2020), Karim and Chi (2010), Berbel-Pineda (2019) and based on the evaluation of items via the Likert – scale. To ensure reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the questions, constructs, and items were based on relevant previous research and adjusted to the validity of the context (*see Table 3.1*).

The internet questionnaire was primarily disseminated by social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, and emails. Those channels of distribution for the questionnaire were chosen based on the report of the State Agency of Tourism Development (2022) in Ukraine which stated that such social media are considered to be the most popular

and the most used sources to search info, make bookings, communicate and other tourism-related purposes while travelling. The technique of snowball was implemented by asking respondents to spread the link for the question form. Involved virtual snowball (Baltar & Brunet, 2012) as a data collection strategy was chosen as the most suitable way to target the hard-to-reach population (Heckathorn, 2011) since answers from international and domestic tourists who visited Ukraine are not easily accessible. It is also important to mention that snowball sampling is subject to various biases (Heckathorn, 2011). Thus, it is quite important to verify accurate community and target the appropriate group from the beginning as the first participants who will be asked to encourage others to take part in the survey have the strongest impact on the overall sample and future results.

All participants who have joined the survey took part voluntarily and participate on the basis of informed consent as they were previously advised about the purpose, benefits, and risks and provided with sufficient information about future implication of the results. Collected data do not include personally identifiable information so the questionnaire is completely anonymous. The data collection and analysing process follows confidentially principles and respect participants' privacy. The paper keeps the objectivity of data analysis, discussion and interpretation of the results as well as acknowledged of using academic works of other authors following the APA referencing system.

The questionnaire was created and divided into six sections. Thus, in the first part respondents were asked to fill out their demographic profile indicating age, gender, profession, country, education level and the existence of gastronomic experience during the visit to Ukraine. The next parts were called to evaluate their gastronomic experience within the context of the trip. The second segment consists of the questions related to food-image dimensions aiming to measure various aspects of experience such as perception of Ukrainian cuisine, restaurant sector and food-related tourism activities. A five-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree to 7 - strongly agree) was used. The third part of the survey encompasses questions regarding tourist behavior and asked them to indicate their gastronomic experience as well as clarify their level of knowledge about local foods and evaluate prior gastro experience. In this part, a five-point Likert scale (1 – not important to 7 - very important) was involved to describe a gastronomic experience in Ukraine while a five-point Likert scale (1 - strongly disagree to 7- strongly agree) was used for the rest of constructs. The fourth section includes questions that belong to a perception of the overall destination brand where respondents via the previously mentioned five-point Likert scale showed their perception of the Ukrainian brand as a tourist destination. The last part of the questions was created to ask people to evaluate participants' satisfaction

with the trip to Ukraine

**Table 3.1** Measurement of variables

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Item</b>
<b>Knowledge</b> Leong, Q.-L., Ab Karim, S., Awang, K.W. and Abu Bakar, A.Z. (2017).	Read about local food prior to travel Aware about local eating customs Knowledgeable about local food Informed about popular local food Informed of the location of popular local food
<b>Past experience</b> Leong, Q.-L., Ab Karim, S., Awang, K.W. and Abu Bakar, A.Z. (2017).	Enjoyable Good service quality Learnt about local food culture Enhanced travel experience
<b>Destination brand</b> José A. Folgado-Fernández, José M. Hernández- Mogollón & Paulo Duarte (2021)	Good infrastructures Well trained/good workmanship Good living and working conditions Communication of an appealing vision of the country Attractive image I will recommend this destination to family and friends
<b>Food/Cuisine</b> Shahrim Ab Karim & Christina Geng-Qing Chi (2010)	Offers variety of foods Offers good quality of food Offers regionally produced food products Offers attractive food presentation Offers exotic cooking methods Offers delicious food
<b>Dining/Restaurant</b> Shahrim Ab Karim & Christina Geng-Qing Chi (2010)	Offers reasonable price for dining out Offers many attractive restaurants Offers easy access to restaurants Offers varieties of specialty restaurants Offers friendly service personnel Offers restaurants menus in English
<b>Food-related tourism activities</b> Shahrim Ab Karim & Christina Geng-Qing Chi (2010)	Offers food and wine regions Offers package tours related to food and wine Offers unique cultural experience Offers opportunity to visit street market Offers unique street food vendors Offers various food activities, e.g. cooking classes and farm visits Offers much literature on food and tourism
<b>Gastronomic experience</b> Moral-Cuadra, S., Acero de la Cruz, R., Rueda López, R. and Salinas Cuadrado, E. (2020).	Quality of the dishes Price Installation Atmosphere of the establishment Innovation and new flavours of the dishes Service and hospitality Experience with the traditional gastronomy Offers genuine gastronomic products

<b>Satisfaction</b>		How important is gastronomy for you as a destination choice when travelling?
Berbel-Pineda, J.M.,	J.M.,	How important are gastronomic experiences for you when you choose a destination for your trip?
Palacios-Florencio, B.,	B.,	How important is gastronomy for you in relation with the satisfaction of your trip?
Ramírez-Hurtado, J.M. and Santos-Roldán, L. (2019).	J.M. and L. (2019).	My level of satisfaction with the gastronomy has been significant

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Source: authors analysis

SmartPLS 3 software (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015) was used as a tool to estimate the proposed conceptual model by means of partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). Henseler et al. (2009) argued that PLS-SEM evaluates the measurement model, which reviews the constructs' validity and reliability, as well as the structural model, which examines the hypothetical relationships between independent and dependent items. Moreover, one of the advantages of using this method lies in its minimal requirement for the size of the sample and residual distribution.

Thus, this algorithm is effective for studies where research is prediction-oriented or deals with complex models (Usakli & Kucukergin, 2018). The validity and reliability of the structural model were examined by various tests. Speaking more precisely, applying to suggestions of Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2017), during the testing the reliability, convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity were examined.

### 3.3. Sample

The targeted population was tourists who have previously visited Ukraine. The chosen approach has allowed us to receive 187 complete answers which is an adequate number to test the proposed hypothesis and the model. The profile of respondents is described in *Table 3.1*. The sociodemographic profile was majority female (76,4%), respondents were mostly aged between 18-29 (76.4%) and 30-9 (20%), having full-time part-time job (45,5%) and students (36.4%). Taking into the consideration Ukrainian target market which is presented by people aged by 20-35 years who aims to have leisure activity and middle age (35-54 years) travelers who visit country with business purpose, the sample of the research covers those segments (SATD, 2022).

Regarding country of origin, most of the respondents are Ukrainians (56.4%), but 43.6% are international visitors, in particular from Poland, Romania, Germany, France, USA, Italy, Portugal, Turkey. According to collected answers, 95% of people stated that they had a gastronomic experience while visiting the country. Additionally, the respondents' profile presents a similarity to the demographic characteristic of respondents from other research where gastronomy tourism and food experiences were studied concerning the fact that the sample

mostly presented by young people high education and stable income (Chen&Huang, 2018).

**Table 3.1.** Profile of respondents

Variable		Percentage	Variable		Percentage
Gender	Female	76.4%	Country of origin	Ukraine	56.4%
	Male	23.6%		Other	43.6%
Age	18-29	76.4%	Gastronomic experience during the trip	Yes	95%
	30-39	20%		No	5%
	40-49	1%			
	50-59	1%			
Professional activity	Student	36.4%	Education	High school	17.5%
	Full-time\part-time job	45.5%		Associate degree	21.3%
		16.4%		Bachelor's degree	43%
	Self-employed\freelance	1.8%		Master's degree	18.2%
	Unemployed				

### 3.4. Study context: gastronomy tourism in Ukraine

Ukraine has great potential for the development of gastronomic tourism (Tourism Economics, 2021). This is facilitated by the multinational nature of the country. Nowadays Ukraine's population consists of communities with a variety of different roots. Ukrainians and representatives of other nations and nationalities have formed a unique ethnocultural face, an integral feature of which are unique culinary traditions. National Ukrainian cuisine is recognized in many countries around the world and attracts foreign tourists. Gastronomic tours include an introduction to traditional cuisine and discovering the peculiarities of food customs (Braichenko et al., 2020).

According to the State Statistical Service, 57,712 restaurants were registered in Ukraine at the end of 2019. The largest number of them are located in the Kyiv region, and the smallest - are in the Ternopil region, and are equal to 4505 and 769 objects, respectively. Thus, we can observe that Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv and Lviv regions the number of food establishments exceeds the average in Ukraine. This is primarily due to the highest number of tourists flows as well as the rate of region attractiveness. Lviv, Odesa and Kyiv oblasts are the leaders in visiting tourists in Ukraine. In addition, an important factor is the population of the administrative centres of the regions, because there is concentrated the main number of restaurants (Panova, 2021).



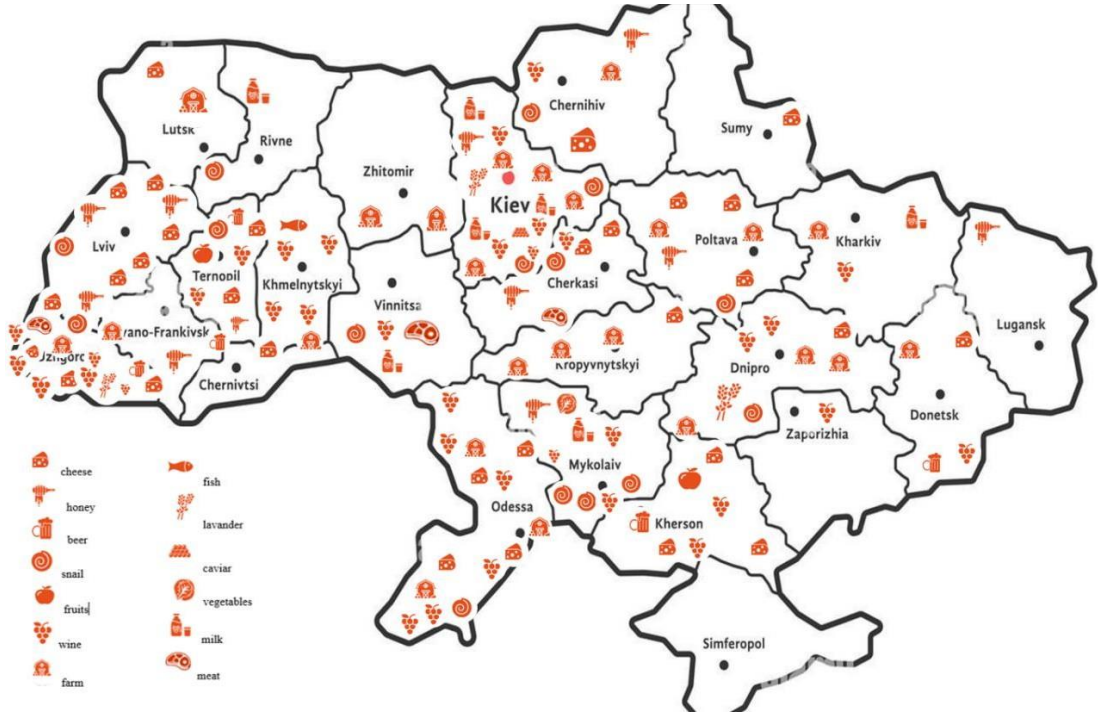
Gastronomy tourism in Ukraine have been under the focus of researchers such as Alekseeva (2019), Basuk (2012), Panova (2021), Braichenko et al., (2020) and others over the last years who were considering the food tourism as perspective industry for the national economy with high potential to grow internationally. Moreover, the concept of gastronomic tourism is being actively developed in the form of a road map, the document will be presented and included in the national strategy for the development of tourism and resorts until 2026. According to the National Tourism Organization of Ukraine, 2018 was named the Year of Gastrotourism (SATD, 2022). Experts and restaurateurs agree that gastronomic tourism is one of the most promising types of tourism in Ukraine, with which the country can be represented on the world market. According to research, tourist flows are increasing in those regions where thematic fairs, tours, public holidays, and festivals are held. Many different gastronomic tours take place in Ukraine, which creates preconditions for the formation of a competitive tourist product in the domestic and foreign markets (SATD, 2022).

Another important example of the growing attention to Ukrainian food was inscribing the culture of Ukrainian borscht cooking on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in June 2022 (UNESCO, 2022). Borsht, the traditional soup mainly cooked with beetroot and potato, is an incredibly important symbol of Ukrainian cultural identity. However, due to the wide consumption of this dish in Russia and other post-Soviet countries the originality of the borsh has been discussed. For a couple of last years, there were active debates on social media concerning where the borsh comes from and what its original recipe of it. Thus, Ukraine applied for including the culture of cooking borsh on UNESCO's List of endangered cultural heritage in 2020 with the hope to receive a decision in 2023. However, as Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the country received a positive answer faster - in July 2022 (UNESCO, 2022). There was a vital step for Ukrainian intangible culture and confirmation of the authenticity of the dish as far as borsh is under the threat because of the Russian invasion.

It should be noted that today in Ukraine Borscht festivals are in demand among tourists, the most popular is held in the village of Borshchiv in Ternopil region. Every year the fat festival traditionally gathers tourists in Petrykivka in the Dnipropetrovsk region. Lviv is famous for its amazing museum-restaurant 'Salo', Zakarpattya and Volyn regions are focused on different sausages festivals. Polissya is famous for its potato harvests and dishes, the Deryn Festival is held annually in Korostyn in the Zhytomyr Region. Transcarpathia is known for the Berlybas Banosh festival, which takes place in the village of Kostylivka, Rakhiv district. Poltava hosts an annual dumpling festival, and a monument to this venerable dish has even been

erected. Every year a festival of national cuisine is held in Lutsk, the main dish of which is dumplings. Moreover, specific interest receives master classes on cooking regional cuisine, or short cooking courses, during which a person not only gains useful knowledge but also gets acquainted with national dishes and traditions (Panova, 2021).

More precisely, the most popular today are trips where the central role plays in experiences with cheese, wine, and honey tourism (see Figure 3.1). About 75 companies officially produce wine in Ukraine. The total area of vineyards is 40,700 hectares, of which 25,600 hectares are set aside for wine production (Braichenko et al., 2020). As a percentage of wine production in Ukraine, the main wineries are located in Odesa (55%), Zakarpattya (15%) and Kherson (15%) regions, which are the centers of wine tourism in Ukraine. Wine tours have received widespread popularity among domestic and international tourists. It covers many aspects: acquaintance with customs, traditions and life of the region, meetings with winemakers, tastings of the best wine samples, and visits to family wineries and vineyards. For example, tourists have the possibility to enjoy Ukrainian wine culture in Wine Culture Center (Shabo village, Odesa region), take a tour through the Ways of wine and taste Ukrainian Bessarabia which includes a wide range of local food and wine producers, visit family winery Kurin" (Kherson), a winery of Prince PM Trubetskoho (Kherson region), Grande Vallee Winery.



**Figure 3.1.** Map of Ukrainian gastronomy attractions (authors` elaboration)

Source: own elaboration

Ukraine produces a wide variety of natural products, which are only worth the variety of honey. The main number of apiaries is located in the east and south of the country. In total, honey is produced in 13 regions of Ukraine. The Mykolaiv area occupies the first place in several apiaries with the certificate of organic production - 23 apiaries, it is approximately 7,5 thousand families of bees. There are also many snail farms in Ukraine that can provide the same services as the famous French ones. From 2014 to 2019, 200 snail farms were established in the country. They produce about 800 tons of live snails, in 2019 they exported 30 tons. These productions are in Luhansk, Kyiv, Lviv, Donetsk and Mykolaiv regions.

A necessary direction for the development of gastro tourism at the regional level and in the country as a whole is defining a gastronomic brand. The gastronomic brand of Ukraine enhances the overall image of the country as a producer or exporter of unique high-quality food products (Basuk, 2012). Branding is an important element of a country's development, which is defined as the competitive identity of a particular locality. The main components of the gastronomic brand: a well-developed field of gastronomy; availability of specialists in the field of catering with the use of traditional products; availability of authentic dishes (authentic products); gastronomic events (festivals, competitions). A well-built gastronomic brand is not only food during the trip, but also delicious souvenirs that the tourist brings home. Therefore, it applies to memories of the trip and the desire to cook at home according to the recipes he or she learned during the visit, as well as a tendency to choose restaurants in this city.

#### 4. Results and discussion

Collected data and hypothesis testing were done via PLS-SEM to receive further results that are described as follows. The results have disclosed the standardized factor loadings of all items were significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and superior to 0.6 (minimal value was 0.71). It provided us with confirmation of the reliability of discrete indicators. Moreover, *Table 4.1* and *Figure 4.1* have presented results that Cronbach alphas and composite reliability (CR) indicators are higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017). Consequently, it allows us to argue that the internal consistency reliability was confirmed for all constructs.

**Table 4.1.** Composite reliability, average variance extracted, correlations, and discriminant validity checks.

Latent Variables	$\alpha$	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
(1) Cuisine	0,874	0,904	0,615	<b>0,784</b>	0,437	0,257	0,491	0,493	0,533	0,635	0,433
(2) Destinac_ brand	0,845	0,890	0,619	0,384	<b>0,787</b>	0,538	0,752	0,689	0,658	0,645	0,688
(3) Food_activities	0,856	0,889	0,534	0,217	0,477	<b>0,731</b>	0,718	0,593	0,829	0,580	0,586
(4) Gastro_experience	0,908	0,926	0,613	0,469	0,673	0,643	<b>0,783</b>	0,776	0,701	0,743	0,744
(5) Past_experience	0,911	0,937	0,789	0,473	0,607	0,534	0,801	<b>0,888</b>	0,626	0,787	0,663
(6) Prior_knowledge	0,866	0,904	0,656	0,488	0,565	0,724	0,634	0,563	<b>0,810</b>	0,583	0,619
(7) Restaurants	0,802	0,858	0,504	0,566	0,537	0,489	0,646	0,684	0,493	<b>0,710</b>	0,802
(8) Satisfaction	0,908	0,942	0,845	0,420	0,605	0,549	0,692	0,611	0,557	0,683	<b>0,919</b>

**Note:**  $\alpha$  -Cronbach Alpha; CR -Composite reliability; AVE -Average variance extracted. Bolded numbers are the square roots of AVE. Below the diagonal elements are the correlations between the constructs. Above the diagonal elements are the HTMT ratios

Another vital step was testing convergent validity. As a result, taking into consideration that all constructs` items loaded positively and significantly, convergent validity was confirmed. Furthermore, it was supported due to the fact that CR values were superior to 0.7 the average variance extracted (AVE) surpassed the limit of 0.50 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Consequently, Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion was adjusted to the study in order to try out the

discriminant validity. As could be observed from the diagonal shown in Table 1, the square root of the AVE of each construct is superior to its biggest correlation with any construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). There is important to mention that the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015) was significant. Thus, we could argue from the obtained results in Table 1 that discriminants are valid since HTMT ratios are inferior to 0.85 (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2009).

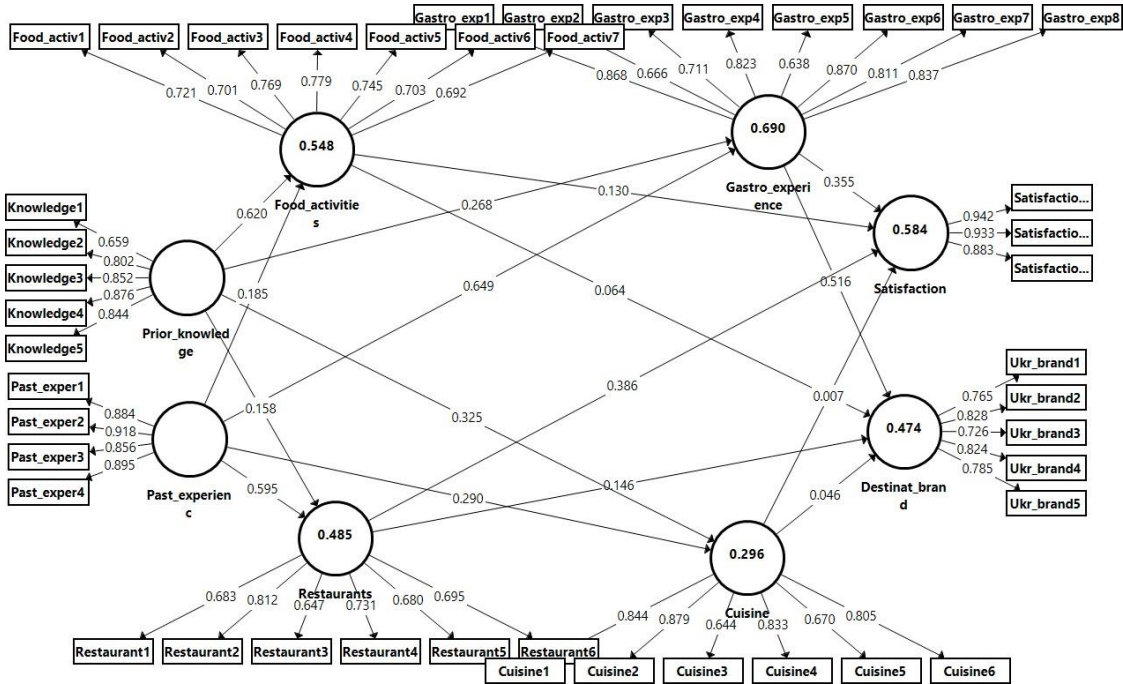


Figure 4.1. Structural model

There is a crucial step prior to quality evaluation – confirmation of the collinearity as it was advised by Hair et al. (2017). Thus, following the obtained results, VIF values ranged from 1.18 to 4.45, meaning that they were inferior to the threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2017), which respectively showed us that confirmation of no collinearity. Furthermore, we also assessed the R<sup>2</sup> (coefficient of the determination) for the six endogenous variables of Cuisine, Destinatio brand, Food activities, Gastro experience, Restaurants and Satisfaction which were 0,296, 0,474, 0,548, 0,690, 0,485 and 0,584, respectively, and superior to the limit of 10% as recommended by Falk and Miller (1992). In relation to the Q<sup>2</sup> values for cuisine; destination brand; food activities; gastronomic experience; restaurants satisfaction (0,155; 0,210; 0,228; 0,359; 0,193; 0,448) the values obtained were positive providing additional support of the model quality.

To test the hypothesis, we conducted a bootstrapping analysis with 5,000 subsamples to evaluate the significance of the parameter estimates (Hair et al., 2017).

**Table 4.2.** Structural model assessment.

<b>Path</b>	<b>Path coefficient</b>	<b>Standard errors</b>	<b><i>t</i> statistics</b>	<b><i>p</i> values</b>
Past_experience → Cuisine	0,290	0,133	2,185	0,029
Past_experience → Food_activities	0,185	0,130	1,425	0,155
Past_experience → Gastro_experience	0,649	0,102	6,370	0,000
Past_experience → Restaurants	0,595	0,123	4,829	0,000
Prior_knowledge → Cuisine	0,325	0,132	2,464	0,014
Prior_knowledge → Food_activities	0,620	0,101	6,147	0,000
Prior_knowledge → Gastro_experience	0,268	0,100	2,690	0,007
Prior_knowledge → Restaurants	0,158	0,119	1,330	0,184
Food_activities → Destinac_ion_brand	0,064	0,123	0,522	0,602
Food_activities → Satisfaction	0,130	0,121	1,080	0,281
Restaurants → Destinac_ion_brand	0,146	0,165	0,883	0,378
Restaurants → Satisfaction	0,386	0,181	2,134	0,033
Gastro_experience → Destinac_ion_brand	0,516	0,139	3,712	0,000
Gastro_experience → Satisfaction	0,355	0,155	2,295	0,022
Cuisine → Destinac_ion_brand	0,046	0,145	0,317	0,752
Cuisine → Satisfaction	0,007	0,114	0,062	0,950

The results presented in *Table 4.2* show that the tourists' past experience influences their perception regarding the cuisine quality ( $\beta = 0.290$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This result provides support for H1a. Thus, the findings coincide with results from the previous research (Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Ryu & Jang, 2006). In another words, previous experience contributes to creation of food memory and influence the following perception and evaluation of cuisine of the destination. This finding is consistent with study of Leong et al. (2017), Ryu and Jang (2006) where past experience has been confirmed to be a significant predictor of visitors' intention to consume local cuisine.

However, the tourists' past experience does not influence the quality perception of the food activities, thus H1b is not supported ( $\beta = 0.185$ , *n.s.*). So, it was discovered that within the context of Ukraine, past experience does not influence how people perceive the quality of food activities and this factor is not vital in shaping future peoples' evaluations and perceptions

of quality and variety of activities offered in the destination. This result is contrasted with the study of Karim and Chi (2010) who noted that past experience could shape people's attitude to the food activities on the example of France, Italy and Thailand and Kala (2019) who argued that enhancing and diversifying previous experience help to shape tourists' perception of food activities.

Although, it has been revealed that past experience has a direct impact on gastronomic experience ( $\beta = 0.649, p < 0.05$ ) and perception of restaurants quality ( $\beta = 0.595, p < 0.05$ ) that confirms proposed hypothesis H1d and H1c. Hence, obtained results lies with findings of previous studies (Mak et al., 2012; Leong et al., 2017). The confirmations of those hypothesis, allows us to argue that tourists with more intended recurring experience have stronger preferences with the restaurant as well overall gastronomy, and hence it will better influence their perception of quality of dining places and general food experience. Meanwhile, with regards to previous research, current study confirms that the quality of past experience is a significant component which contributes to perception of overall gastronomy experience during the trip. Additionally, familiarity with the place, specifically destination restaurants, has strong correlation with general gastronomy experience.

Regarding the prior knowledge, the results from the study have been shown that it influences the perception cuisine quality ( $\beta = 0.325, p < 0.05$ ), food activities ( $\beta = 0.620, p < 0.05$ ) as well gastronomic experience ( $\beta = 0.268, p < 0.05$ ). Hence, those findings provide support to H2a, H2b and H2c. Moreover, these results are consistent with previous studies (González&Medina-Viruel., 2019; Guan & Jones, 2014; Leong et al., 2017), who verified the direct impact prior knowledge on perceived quality of cuisine, food activities and general gastronomic experience obtained in the destination of the choice. Hence, formal, or informal knowledge received via different channels of communication has shown a significant impact on tourists' perception not only the quality of local cuisine and food activities but overall attitude towards the experience. As Kivela and Crotts (2006) stated before, our research has also supported assumption that regardless the type of tourists (if food was the main goal or just a part of the trip) knowledgeable tourists about cuisine have higher satisfaction and as a result they would view their food experience more positively. Consequently, quality, validity, reliability of the knowledge about the gastronomy of the destination are important due to its strong relationship with perception of gastronomy experience. Although, the assessment shows that prior knowledge do not influence on perception of restaurant quality ( $\beta = 0.158, n.s.$ ), so the hypothesis H2d was not

confirmed. From this vein, the study has shown that knowledge collected before the restaurant attendance will not influence its perceived quality.

What is more interesting, results disclose that food activities do not have impact on destination brand ( $\beta = 0.064, n.s.$ ) and peoples` satisfaction by the place ( $\beta = 0.130, n.s.$ ), thus hypothesis H3a and H2b were not supported. Despite the fact that some studies were partially in line with proposed hypothesis (Karim & Chi, 2010; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016)) and showed significant association between food activities have and destination brand and satisfaction, our study did not confirm this assumption for tourists who have been to Ukraine.

Taking into the consideration restaurants, the analysis of conducted data via SEM states that it does not impact destination brand ( $\beta = 0.146, n.s.$ ), so hypothesis H4a was refuted. On the other hand, based on the results, perceived restaurant quality positively impacts on overall tourist satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.355, p < 0.05$ ) which allows us to confirm H4b hypothesis. Thus, this observation was in line that most of studies reported (Ryu et al., 2012; Chang et al., 2011). In fact, that technical and functional restaurant quality has a positive and significant for tourist post-evaluation trip and consequently for satisfaction rate which confirms outcomes of Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) research. In contrast, the studies of Karim and Chi (2010), Lai et al. (2017) and Lertputtarak (2012) have not found that positive evaluation of restaurant quality and dining experience contribute for strengthening the destination brand. Nevertheless, the participants of the current research did not find the value of restaurant for Ukrainian brand, respectively did not confirm this correlation.

The findings indicated that gastronomic experience was a significant factor affecting perception of destination brand ( $\beta = 0.516, p < 0.000$ ) and the tourist satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.355, p = 0.022$ ) and this relationship confirmed hypothesis H5a and H2b respectively. This finding was consistent with other studies in tourism and hospitality literature (reference). Thus, obtained results confirmed the findings of Phau et al. (2014) and Silkes et al. (2013) who argued that positive gastronomic experience obtained in the destination contribute not only to creating memorable experience but also to enhancing the overall destination brand-image. This outcome is also in line with Williams et al. (2014) who considered the gastronomic experience as a crucial determinant of brand image. From this prospect, crafting unique and authentic gastronomy experience is a vital condition for creating prominent recognisable brand image (Berg & Sevón, 2014). Therefore, this result will apply to shaping destination brand within Ukrainian prospect too. Taking into consideration satisfaction, the observation has shown also positive and significant relationship with gastronomy experience which is consistent with some previous findings. As Robinson et al. (2018) and Ignatov and Smith (2006) argued gastronomy



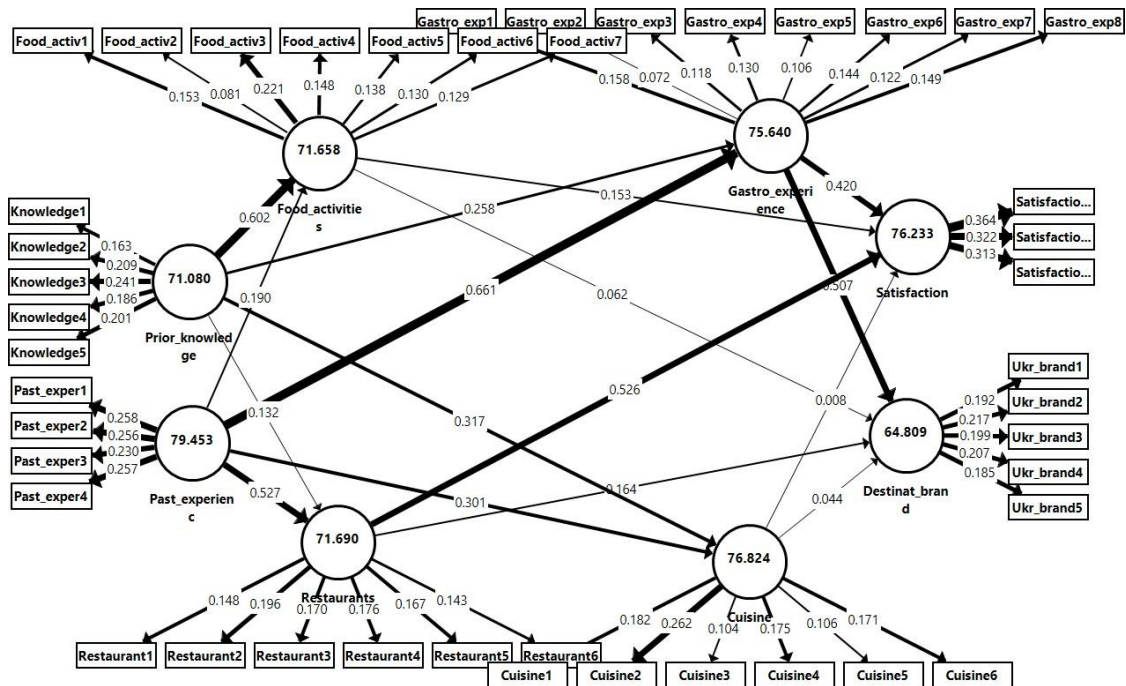
experience is an exceptional source of tourist satisfaction, the same outcome was confirmed. Moreover, some other research previously pointed out that level of satisfaction varies and related to food experience which they receive in the destination (González & Medina-Viruel, 2019). More precisely, Guan & Jones (2014) and Berbel-Pineda et al. (2019) pointed out that travellers who highly rate quality of gastronomy experience, tend to express satisfaction with whole trip.

The study also found that perception of quality of cuisine was not significantly related to the destination brand ( $\beta = 0.046, n.s.$ ) and tourist satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.007, n.s.$ ). Hence, given these results the hypothesis H6a and H6b were not confirmed. Despite the findings from the previous studies that conveyed that quality of food plays a prominent role in tourist satisfaction as well as helps to strengthen destination brand image, respondents of the survey who have travelled to Ukraine did not find this correlation. This fact might be explained by tourist evaluation Ukrainian cuisine through what they tried in restaurant and via different activities. Thus, due to the fact that limited number of restaurants present authentic Ukrainian food, they were not able to distinguish correctly traditional future of cuisine. From this prospect, distinguishing the identity of Ukrainian cuisine and presenting what is real and authentic food requires more attention from tourism policy makers. For the broader spreading awareness of gastronomy traditions and better communication, more marketing materials such as books, brochures, magazines, blogs on social media, vlogs, short films and variety of welcoming events should be taken into the consideration.

Moreover, as far as cuisine was evaluated by multiple items such as quality, variety, exotic cooking methods, taste, the outcome was different than previous studies by Karim & Chi (2010) argued. Another argument is that Ukraine has experienced soviet occupation which resulted issues with identifications of authenticity of traditional food. During the long period the authentic and unique cuisine were purposefully destroyed and assimilated with soviet culture. However, over the independence of Ukraine, rapidly developing restaurant industry and artisan food production in Ukraine have attracted international food tourists and foreign investors. Nonetheless, all too often some of the most popular dishes known all over the world are not seen as part of Ukrainian cooking, national culinary traditions, and Ukrainian cuisine as a brand. Moreover, the country, continue to analyse and rethink culinary traditions and rediscover the abundance of flavors.

Apart from the PLS- SEM results of a structural model, another vital step of the research is the performance importance map analysis (IPMA). Hair et al. (2017) stated that IPMA is based on standardized regression coefficients (importance) and adds an additional dimension

to the analysis that considers the values of the predictor variables. Another words, IPMA is used in order to extend the PLS-SEM results considering performance of each construct. In this vein, IPMA allows us to down results by taking into account both dimension such as importance and performance which is importance for taking managerial decision. Thus, practitioners havean opportunity prioritize their action taking into account the obtained results of IPMA (see Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4.2.** IPMA results

The contribution of using the importance-performance matrix analysis is that it distinguishes vital factors which should be given special attention to providing a memorable gastronomic experience. Speaking more precisely, we could observe from Figure 2 that gastronomy experience is significantly influenced by past experience (0.661) while gastronomy experience has an impact on guest satisfaction (0.420) and destination brand image (0.507) respectively. At the same time, resulted in IPMA presented that Past experience influences a tourist's perception of restaurants (0.557). Interestingly, the results have confirmed the significant importance of prior knowledge with respect to the perception of food activities (0.602).

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1. Theoretical contributions**

Gastronomy tourism, and gastronomy experience, have been receiving attention in recent decades. There is no doubt that the relationship between gastronomy, tourist and destination within the tourism framework are dynamic and complex (McKercher et al., 2008). Previous studies which attempted to examine the influence of gastronomy experiences on tourists' overall satisfaction and destination brand were done in a limited context. Specifically, there is a lack of studies concerning the importance of gastronomy experience for the Ukrainian tourism industry. Thus, the value of gastronomy in the destination could be misleadingly underestimated. The study was designed to provide a complex approach of the gastronomic experience considering its correlation with tourists' satisfaction and destination brand encountering other factors as well as highlight the importance of developing gastronomic tourism in Ukraine. Our reasoning was to investigate how perception of cuisine, restaurant culture, food activities, prior knowledge and past experience impact gastronomy experience and how it further influences the tourist satisfaction and destination brand. The goal was achieved through was done through creating SEM-model. Moreover, as far as paper aimed to clarify the importance of gastronomy for Ukraine, significance of popularization of Ukrainian gastronomy as a tool for prosperity national economy in post- war period was introduced.

Consequently, from the theoretical prospects, the study has enriched the body of the literature regarding the gastronomy experience. The study contributed to the theoretical understanding of key factors that influence memorable gastronomic experiences and the relationship between food experience and its role in satisfaction and perceived destination brand (Choe & Kim, 2018). The current finding identified a linkage between the perception of food activities, cuisine, restaurants, prior knowledge, and past experience. Therefore, obtained results with its statistical testing led to the creation of SEM that shows a complex correlation between gastronomy experience as a central element and multiple items that have a straight impact on it or are perceived as post-evaluation and results of the trip.

The findings of the study contribute to the existing literature by suggesting that past experience and prior knowledge have a positive influence on the gastronomy experience of the tourist in the destination. Furthermore, there was found significant effect of prior knowledge on the perceived quality of cuisine, and food activities in the destination of the choice. The resulting conceptual model allows us to state that the gastronomy experience at the destination is important not only for gaining satisfaction with the quality of food and dining service, but it is crucial for overall satisfaction with the trip. Therefore, the results brought the light to the

concept that tourist satisfaction is shaped by multiple gastronomy features of the destination instead of a single prominent factor. Another vital aspect of the findings is that restaurants play important role in overall tourist satisfaction which confirmed previous studies. Although, restaurants from the Ukrainian prospects did not show significant influence. Taking into consideration destination brand image, testing the model allowed us to conclude that the gastronomy experience is the crucial factor in enriching the destination brand. There was found to consistent impact on past experience on gastronomic experience and on overall satisfaction with the trip and strengthening destination brand respectively.

There is worth mentioning that a lot of previous studies in academic literature paid attention to potential tourist attitudes toward the destination image and primarily on the pre-travel stage (Choe & Kim,2018). Moreover, Ryu and Jang (2006) postulated that an impressive food experience helps to enhance the brand image of the country, increase the level of tourist satisfaction as well as encourage them to return. Thus, the current study is consistent with previous findings (Choe & Kim, 2018) empirically and theoretically confirm that gastronomy experience affects the destination. Furthermore, in line with previous research, the current findings reveal that the effective gastronomy experience provided in Ukraine might be a powerful tool for further promotion of tourism and strengthening the country's brand image.

## **5.2. Practical implications**

The research provides not only theoretical contribution but also practical implications. Those findings contribute to the understanding of the relationship between gastronomic experience and the variables that compose the model, analysing how through gastronomy experience tourist satisfaction and building distinguishable destination brand could be reached. Moreover, other factors that shape the gastronomy experience in the destination of the choice such as prior knowledge, restaurants, past experience, cuisine, and food activities were considered to show its correlation with other items as they are important for predicting tourist behavior and evaluation of the trip.

The obtained SEM revealed that the dimension of past experience had a great impact on the people's perception of the cuisine quality, restaurant quality as well as on overall gastronomic experience. This result reflects for the destination marketers and policymakers in the manner that real-time food experience could be perceived as a precursor to creating constructive tourist past experience and as a result deliver a positive perception of local cuisine quality, and dining places and increase the value of current food experience in the destination. Therefore, the prior knowledge dimension has shown considerable influence on the perception

of food activities, cuisine quality and gastronomy experience accordingly. Thus, practitioners of the tourism industry are advised to supply tourists with proper information feeds regarding food specialties that should be experienced to gain memorable gastronomy experience, as well as activities and locations where local cuisine might be savored. As a result, accessible and relative food-related information will lead to a higher level of satisfaction for tourists with not only experienced gastronomy by with overall trip.

As Choe and Kim (2018) mentioned before, a variety of tourism stakeholders should work closely to provide and maintain high-quality food and service. Taking into consideration local restaurants, it was found that experiences gained in different dining places greatly influence people's satisfaction with the trip. Destination restaurants have been distinguished as a unique condition to develop place attachment in visitors. Consequently, practitioners of the tourism industry could work more closely with local restaurants to create memorable tourism experiences and project further attractive destination brand image. Furthermore, marketers, policymakers and other stakeholders can utilize restaurants as their flagship experience. Based on the obtained result, practitioners should bear in mind restaurants as strategic selling points where through unique gastronomy experience destination culture will be effectively shown. Additionally, validated by the finding, service providers should consider the linkage between restaurants and the destination itself in that perhaps their ability to showcase local gastronomy that respectively influences further satisfaction with the overall trip. Destination management should emphasize the national food image to effectively promote destination tourism and the country's identity (Seo et al., 2017).

Last but not least, all practical implication listed above, should be actively integrated in the tourism policy strategy of Ukraine. The study confirmed the importance of using food experience within the Ukrainian context. Ukrainian gastronomy, especially with national origin is a strong vehicle to construct attractive, marketable identity and create "right" stories about national culture. There is a need to establish "branded local culinary resources" (Long, 2008) which will used for creating meaningful and recognizable destination brand.

### **5.3. Limitations and future research**

The study is an initial attempt to find the relationship between gastronomy experience in destination and factors that may influence it by building a structural equation model. Even though we shed a light on the topic the study has some limitations which bring fruitful avenues

for future research. Firstly, the current study has a methodological limitation due to the sample size as far as the survey was conducted also mostly among first-time visitors who are not very familiar with the destination and the area of Ukraine. It would be useful to apply for a larger number of respondents and collect answers not only via virtual tools. The researchers could also apply to visitors in different types of servicescapes such as restaurants, food markets, fairs, restaurants, food festivals and other events to obtain deeper insides. There is an evident fact that different environments can influence and shape tourist evaluation as well as it might be used for further destination development. Additionally, taking into the consideration quantitative method of the current study, it has been suggested to use a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of gastronomy experience.

Secondly, the geographical area of the research in Ukraine, however, it would be interesting to collect answers about tourist experiences in other gastronomy destinations, more or less popular. Thus, there could be made a comparison between different` tourist experiences obtained in the destination with different levels of gastronomy tourism. Moreover, we consider that it might be useful to collect answers from respondents with a variety of cultural backgrounds to have an efficient overview of gastronomy experiences in the global context. Thirdly, the study was mainly focused on the demand which makes it difficult to convey the results to other subjects of gastronomy activity such as stakeholders, local communities, or businesses.

Given the current lack of studies concentrated on gastronomy experiences holistically and systematically, the structural model developed is believed to contribute to the bode body of the knowledge in the tourism field as well as deliver theoretical groundwork for further research and finding a practical solution in the tourism sector.

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