Street food experience and destination image: a study on tourist perceptions in Da Lat

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Abstract

Culinary experiences can be seen as one of the initial impressions of a destination for tourists and a significant factor in their decision-making process. It serves as an effective marketing tool for shaping the destination's image. This study explores the causal relationships between street food experiences, particularly those related to local culinary culture, with destination image, satisfaction, and future behavior of tourists. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire from 412 domestic tourists who had experienced street food in Da Lat, a renowned destination in Vietnam. The empirical evidence affirms that when tourists have positive street food experiences, their perception of the destination image is also positive, leading to higher satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth behavior, and a higher likelihood of returning to the destination. The results also emphasize the importance of cultural consumption value in the street food experience through distinctive characteristics. Based on these findings, the study also proposes further research directions and managerial implications for local authorities and businesses aiming to highlight the cultural and emotional aspects of street food experiences, thereby enhancing the destination image in visitors' eyes.

Keywords: Street food experience, Destination image, Local food, Tourist satisfaction, Tourist behaviors

1. Introduction

In recent years, street food has gained significant popularity among tourists worldwide. It offers a unique and authentic culinary experience that allows individuals to immerse themselves in the local culture and taste traditional dishes. Recognizing this growing trend,

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many destinations have started incorporating street food into their tourism offerings. In some countries such as Thailand, France, Japan, or Singapore, the cuisine is positioned as a unique strength that attracts tourists.

Since spending on food and drink makes up more than 21% of independent travelers' total spending and more than 13% of visitors taking package tours, culinary tourism is essential to the growth of the tourism industry (Sengel *et al.*, 2015). Tourists' experiences, preferences, and behavioral intentions are significantly influenced by cuisine (Chi *et al.*, 2013; Nelson, 2016; Lee *et al.*, 2019). Travelers may be left with a lasting memory since it specifically engages their senses of sight, taste, smell, hearing, and touch (Hoang and Tuckova, 2021). From a cultural standpoint, a community's cuisine reflects its history and distinctiveness. The street food experience significantly enhances a destination's appeal (Gupta and Sajnani, 2019). Experiences with street food allow visitors to recognize the unique qualities that set a place apart from others (Okumus *et al.*, 2018). The street food experience acts as a mirror reflecting part of the destination's image (Lee *et al.*, 2019), showcasing the authentic local culture to tourists (Sims, 2009). Therefore, it is evident that cuisine has a significant impact on the image of a destination.

The tourists' perception of the street food experience, particularly about typical local culinary aspects and their impact on the overall destination image and their future behaviors, has not been thoroughly examined in prior studies. In culinary tourism, previous studies have delved into various factors related to culinary experiences and their impact on multiple aspects of the tourist experience. For instance, researchers have examined the connection between culinary experiences and destination image (Lee *et al.*, 2019), tourist satisfaction (Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn, 2017), life satisfaction (Lee *et al.*, 2019), tourist adaptability (Gupta and Sajnani, 2019), and future behaviors (Gupta and Sajnani, 2019; Lee *et al.*, 2019). While these studies provide valuable insights into the overall quality aspect of culinary experiences, they often overlook the importance of local distinctive factors in street food experiences. To truly understand and appreciate street food experiences, it is crucial to consider the unique characteristics offered by each destination's local cuisine. These distinctive elements contribute to the authenticity and richness of the culinary experience and play a significant role in shaping tourists' perceptions of the destination and their overall satisfaction. By studying tourists' perceptions of their street food experience, this research aims to fill the gap in the existing literature by exploring the relationship between street food experiences, destination image, tourist satisfaction, and future behaviors. By examining these relationships, this study seeks to uncover the management implications for local authorities and businesses to enhance the street food experience as a key element in promoting a destination's tourism.

Da Lat, a charming city in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, has gained significant attention as a popular tourist destination in recent years. While its picturesque landscapes and pleasant climate have certainly played a role in attracting visitors, another aspect that often captivates tourists is its vibrant street food scene. Street food has become integral to Da Lat's culture and heritage, offering locals and tourists an authentic culinary experience. However, according to Ngo *et al.* (2019), street food activities in Da Lat mainly serve the needs of city

residents and domestic tourists with relatively low-quality, monotonous, and limited hygiene and food safety standards. These factors have limited the ability to meet the diverse needs of tourists and create a compelling attraction for them. These issues are gradually affecting the image of Da Lat in the eyes of tourists. This study aims to explore tourists' perceptions regarding street food experiences in Da Lat and their impact on destination image. It seeks to understand how street food contributes to the tourism experience and influences tourists' future behaviors. By examining these relationships, we can gain insights into the management implications for local authorities and businesses in enhancing the street food experience as a key aspect of tourists' journeys and, ultimately, improving Da Lat's destination image.

The rest of this study is organized as follows. The second section introduces the literature review concerning street food experience, destination image, and tourist behaviors. The methodology of our empirical research is extensively presented in the third section, followed by our empirical findings in the fourth section. The fifth section covers the implications of these findings and concludes the paper.

2. Literature review

2.1 Street food and street food experience

Street food is an essential component of culinary tourism (Gupta and Sajnani, 2019). According to the FAO, street food refers to ready-to-eat food and beverages prepared and/or sold by street vendors or hawkers, particularly in streets and similar locations (Privitera and Nesci, 2015). Street food is thus frequently offered for sale in temporary or mobile food stands, such as food trucks and street carts, in public places. Street food represents the cultural identity of a community or region and thus creates a unique attraction for a destination (Okumus *et al.*, 2018). It is characterized by speedy preparation and on-site serving, reasonable costs, and serving a sizable crowd, primarily in crowded public places and streets. According to the Italian Street Food Association, street food has certain characteristics, including respecting history and tradition, being made from locally produced typical ingredients, respecting ethical factors, linking with the territory, using traditional ingredients, complying with health regulations, incorporating nutritious food, respecting the environment, promoting the region, and being featured on websites (Privitera and Nesci, 2015). It is evident that street food encapsulates various traditional and regional features and is an effective destination marketing tool (Hoang and Tuckova, 2021). As a result, being promoted on destination websites directly affects how the destination's image is formed (Nelson, 2016). This promotion increases the visibility and exposure of the destination to a broader audience, leading to increased interest and potential visitation. Additionally, being featured on reputable destination websites can enhance the destination's credibility and reputation among travelers.

Tourism experience can be seen as a holistic consumer experience of a destination (Agapito *et al.*, 2014). The tourist experience at a destination is thus a combination of activities, products, and services that tourists encounter during their stay. Moreover, the culinary experience, like any other travel experience, is subjective and unique to each person (Uriely, 2005). It can be approached

from various perspectives to examine the dimensions of the culinary experience. Approaching the culinary experience from the consumer's perspective includes the peak experience component, differentiating from the daily experience component (Quan and Wang, 2004). Approaching it from the supplier's perspective involves four factors: the character of the restaurant, the character of the food, advice, and commendations (Nelson, 2016). Quality can be categorized into outcome, interpersonal, and physical environmental quality in the street food experience (Lee *et al.*, 2019). The synthesis of research on culinary travel experiences is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Some studies on the food experience

Study	Concept/Features	Dimensions	Research context
Quan and Wang (2004)	The tourist experience is "purified" as the experience or peak experience that sharply contrasts or opposes the daily experience.	Peak touristic experiences Supporting consumer experiences Daily routine experiences	In theory, not applicable in practice
Nelson (2016)	The development of culinary experiences (especially the emergence of unique restaurants) can potentially change a city's image.	Character of restaurants (9) Character of food (3) Advice (2) Commendations (2)	Houston, Texas
Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn (2017)	Characteristics of street food experiences: Convenience 24/7 service Affordability Showcasing local cultural identity Diversity in ingredients and presentation	Affection (3) Hygiene (4) Food quality (8) Service quality (7) Satisfaction (2) Value (1)	Phuket, Thailand
Tsai and Wang (2017)	Experiential value is defined as the antecedent of branding place food image	Consumer Return on Investment (4) Service Excellence (3) Aesthetics (3) Playfulness (4) Place food image (9) Behavioral intention (3)	Tainan, Taiwan
Gupta and Sajnani (2019)	Characteristics of overall culinary experiences for tourists: Attraction Memorability Uniqueness	Perceived food authenticity (4) Cultural disparity (3) Pursuit for authenticity (3) Tourist's ability to adapt (5) Overall perceived experience (5) Word-of-mouth (2) Intention to revisit (2) Food product adaptability (2)	Delhi, India

Study	Concept/Features	Dimensions	Research context
Lee *et al.* (2019)	Characteristics of street food experiences: Attraction Memorability Uniqueness Showcasing local cultural identity Diversity	Outcome quality (3) Interpersonal quality (4) Physical environmental quality (3) Destination image (4) Life satisfaction (4) Word-of-mouth (3)	South Korea
Hsu and Scott (2020)	Local culinary experiences […] are an essential part of a trip and sometimes offer a peak touristic experience	Food experience (12) Food involvement (12) Food neophobia (10) Place attachment (8) Destination image (15)	Macau
Jeaheng *et al.* (2023)	Street food at a destination is seen as an image that depicts the tangible local food varieties and the intangible cultural value of the local people out of the various gastronomic experiences	Perceived quality of street food (Cultural experience, Health and safety of food, Food sensory appeal, Staff service, Physical environment, Meal menu) Cultural difference Perceived reasonable price of street food Involvement in street food Repurchase intention	Thailand

Source: Authors' compilation

The street food experience is a comprehensive combination of all the experiences tourists have while consuming street food in a particular destination. It is not just about enjoying delicious street food or having a roadside drink; it also involves the exciting feeling of interacting with the vendors, witnessing the street food preparation process, sitting by the road while savoring the food, observing the bustling street with passing vehicles, or even participating in hands-on food preparation under the guidance of the vendors. Tourists also get acquainted with each place's unique local culture through this process. Tourists increasingly desire unique local dishes and special dining experiences (Nelson, 2016). This study uses the consumer value theory (Sheth *et al.*, 1991) to assess the quality, social, functional, and cultural outcomes of street food experience. Quality, functionality, and social factors are all reasonably well-represented in the scale that Lee *et al.* (2019) verified. The cultural consequences reflect place identity, particularly the freshness, diversity, and authenticity of the local food options (Sims, 2009). Previous studies have explored the relationship between culinary experiences and place attachment (Hsu and Scott, 2020), destination image (Lee *et al.*, 2019; Hsu and Scott, 2020), tourist satisfaction (Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn, 2017), life satisfaction (Lee *et al.*, 2019), as well as tourist adaptability (Gupta and Sajnani, 2019), and their impact on future behaviors (Tsai and Wang, 2017; Gupta and Sajnani, 2019; Lee *et al.*, 2019; Jeaheng *et al.*, 2023). Research on food tourism, especially

concerning street food, is scarce in Vietnam, particularly in Da Lat. The focus is on tourists' satisfaction with street food quality in Ho Chi Minh City and Da Lat (Tran *et al.*, 2018; Ngo *et al.*, 2019), sensory marketing's effect on street food (Hoang and Tuckova, 2021), and emotion aspects of street food experiences (Pham *et al.*, 2023). However, these studies often focus on the general quality aspect of culinary experiences without considering the local distinctive factors crucial to street food experiences (Privitera and Nesci, 2015; Nelson, 2016; Okumus *et al.*, 2018). Understanding the local distinctive factors is essential to comprehend the street food experiences fully. These factors contribute significantly to tourists' satisfaction, ultimately influencing their future behaviors. Understanding these factors can also help destination marketers and policymakers develop strategies to promote and enhance the street food culture, attract more tourists, and boost local economies. There is a lack of knowledge regarding the street food experience with local characteristics and its connection to related concepts such as destination image, tourist satisfaction, and behaviors. This research gap presents an opportunity for further exploration and understanding of street food contributions to the tourism industry in a destination. Therefore, in this study, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Street food experience has an impact on the destination image in the eyes of tourists.

H2: Street food experience influences the satisfaction of tourists with the destination.

H3: Street food experience affects the behaviors of tourists towards the destination.

2.2 Destination image concerning food

There are many ways to define a destination's image, but it can be summed up as "impressions" and "perceptions"; these are subjective constructs in each tourist's mind. Destination image is a system of beliefs, attitudes, ideas, and impressions a tourist has about a destination (Crompton, 1979). The comprehensive destination image includes functional, psychological, and common, unique attributes (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). The destination image is approached from both a cognitive and an affective perspective by (Beerli and Martín, 2004), who also suggest a comprehensive list of specific attributes. However, according to Echtner and Ritchie (1993), studies should consider a holistic image construct.

A holistic image is defined as "a composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression" (MacKay and Fesenmaier, 1997). As a result, the overall impression aims to include everything related to a locality's or a nation's perception in the eyes of tourists, including its physical features, cultural heritage, hospitality, safety, and reputation. It also considers tourists' emotional responses and experiences with the destination (Hsu and Scott, 2020). The destination image changes dynamically when new information is received (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). Food is a necessary and frequently enjoyable experience when visiting a new place. Local cuisine often has psychological, spiritual, and cultural significance and can result in genuine, memorable experiences at a destination. Experiences with food at a travel destination can immerse tourists, elicit positive feelings and value, and deepen the tourist's connection to the place, thus affecting their destination image (Hsu and Scott, 2020).

In the scope of this study, we want to address the overall image of the destination. Understanding the overall image of a destination is crucial for tourism stakeholders as it is significant and valuable for explaining behaviors like destination choice, intention to return, and satisfaction (Stylos *et al.*, 2016). It can also create destination marketing strategies (Tasci *et al.*, 2007). From cognitive to affective to unique images, they collectively give tourists a thorough and nearly complete impression of the locality or nation (Stylidis *et al.*, 2014). The food image is also part of the overall image. In the eyes of tourists, the perception of the destination is also influenced by its culinary reputation. This study uses the scale of the overall destination image (Bigne *et al.*, 2001; Lee *et al.*, 2019).

The image of a destination plays two important roles in individuals' behavior (Lee *et al.*, 2019). It influences the decision-making process in choosing a destination (Nelson, 2016) and the behaviors that follow the decision, including evaluation (satisfaction), engagement (on-site experience), and behavioral intentions in the future (intention to revisit and word-of-mouth) (Castro *et al.*, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2019). Numerous studies have indicated the relationship between image, satisfaction, and tourist behavior, such as return intention and word-of-mouth referrals to family and friends (Bigne *et al.*, 2001; Chi *et al.*, 2013; Lee *et al.*, 2019).

Based on the discussions above, the following hypotheses can be stated:

H4: As perceived by tourists, the image of a destination influences their satisfaction with street food and the destination experience.

H5: As perceived by tourists, the image of a destination influences their behavior regarding street food and the destination experience.

H6: Tourist satisfaction has an impact on their behavior regarding street food and the destination experience.

Based on the above discussion and hypotheses, Figure 1 proposes a research framework. The street food experience in this framework reflects not only some elements of the consumption value theory (Sheth *et al.*, 1991) but also the relationship with the location through the integrated local distinctive traits that stand for the place identity theory (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983; Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996). The consumption value theory suggests that consumers derive value from their consumption experiences based on functional (e.g., convenience, taste), emotional (e.g., enjoyment, excitement), social (e.g., socializing, bonding), and epistemic (e.g., knowledge, exploration) factors (Young *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, the place identity theory emphasizes the role of local distinctive traits in shaping individuals' connection with a particular location (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Truong *et al.*, 2018). This connection enhances the sense of authenticity and cultural immersion for tourists, leading to a more positive perception of the street food experience (Hsu and Scott, 2020). By integrating these two theories, the research framework aims to understand how both influence street food experiences.

Moreover, the framework emphasizes that tourists' overall place identity also shapes their satisfaction with street food, reflecting their attachment and identification with the

destination's unique characteristics. The framework also considers how tourist satisfaction influences their intention to revisit and recommend a destination, aligning with the cognitive-affection-intention psychological process (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). The "hierarchy of effects" or "cognitive, affective and behavior" (CAB) model, proposed by (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961), suggests that individuals acquire knowledge about a product or destination, develop feelings or affection towards it, and then exhibit behavioral intention to revisit or recommend it. As a result, the conceptual framework explains three main theories: consumption value theory (Sheth *et al.*, 1991), place identity theory (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983), and the CAB model (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961). Consumption value theory suggests that tourists' satisfaction comes from sensory pleasure, social interactions, and the cultural significance of street food. Place identity theory suggests that tourists' connection to the destination and its unique qualities contribute to satisfaction. The CAB model emphasizes the role of tourists' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses in their street food experience. The specific relationships between street food experience, destination image, satisfaction, and tourist behaviors are illustrated in the proposed research model shown in Figure 1.
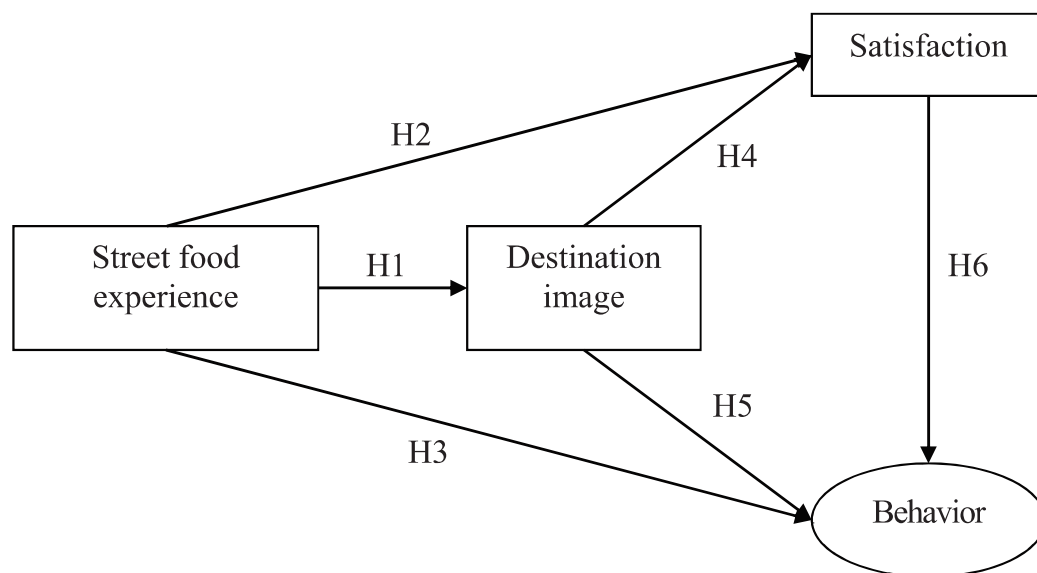

Figure 1. Research model

Source: Authors' suggestion

3. Research method

3.1 Study site: the city of Da Lat, Vietnam

Discovered by Dr. Alexandre Yersin in 1893, Da Lat is located on the Lam Vien Plateau in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Due to its high altitude and the surrounding pine forests, Da Lat's climate exhibits many characteristics of a temperate zone. The average temperature ranges from 18 to 21 degrees Celsius. The "dreamy city" is ideal for cultivating various vegetables and temperate flowers thanks to its favorable climate. This advantage has positioned Da Lat, a famous temperate region, as a destination with abundant resources and

food ingredients, attracting tourists for sightseeing and leisure and many food enthusiasts who savor Da Lat's cuisine (Ngo *et al.*, 2019).

The richness and diversity of cooking ingredients have made Da Lat a potential destination for street food in general and street food culture in particular. As residents from different regions of North, Central, and South Vietnam converge, Da Lat's Street food reflects a unique blend of regional cuisines. This distinctive fusion is perhaps the essence of Da Lat's Street food culture. There are many street food dishes that visitors to Da Lat should not miss, including the delicious combination of soy milk and sweet pastries, comforting hotpot dishes on cold days, grilled delicacies that are cooked and consumed on the spot, "Da Lat Pizza" which is a grilled rice paper dish, and creamy butter ice cream and rich fruit ice cream blended with sweet and sour fruits. Da Lat boasts numerous street food stalls, including small eateries, mobile four-wheel carts, and street vendors scattered throughout major streets, small alleys, and public areas.

3.2 Research method and measurement

This study aims to determine the effect of tourists' experiences with street food on Da Lat's overall destination image and their satisfaction and behavior. As such, a survey methodology was used to collect the study's primary data. In addition, field surveys and quick interviews were conducted to supplement information for the study.

A self-administered questionnaire was developed based on a comprehensive literature review of previous related studies. In addition to questions about respondents' personal information, the questionnaire consisted of four sections: street food experience (EX), overall destination image (DI), tourist satisfaction (SA), and tourist behaviors (BE). The street food experience used ten items validated in previous studies (Lee *et al.*, 2019; Hsu and Scott, 2020) that focus mainly on the quality of the street food experience at the destination. The study also added three observed variables regarding local food characteristics to capture the freshness, variety, and authenticity of the local food offerings (Sims, 2009). By including these variables, the study sought to comprehensively understand the street food experience and its relation to local food characteristics. The scale items' wording was slightly changed to better relate them to the Da Lat Street food experience context. The overall destination image was measured with four items based on studies by Bigné *et al.* (2001) and Lee *et al.* (2019). Four items were validated from studies by Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn (2017) and Lee *et al.* (2019) to investigate how tourists are satisfied with street food and their trip to Da Lat. Four items relating to word of mouth and intent to return (Gupta and Sajnani, 2019; Lee *et al.*, 2019) measure the tourists' potential future behaviors. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to assess all items.

3.3 Sample size and data collection

The sample size was determined to be 400, which is suitable based on most guidelines for sample size in multivariate analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2010; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019). A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, and 420 were collected, resulting in 412 valid responses after data cleaning. In this study, the authors employed a convenience sampling method.

Convenience sampling was used because the selected participants were easily accessible and willing to respond to the questionnaire.

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents

Attributes		%
Age	Younger than 18	12.9
	18 - 29	49.3
	30 - 44	29.1
	45 - 60	8,0
	Older than 60	0.7
Gender	Male	58.7
	Female	41.3
Number of visits to Da Lat	First time	7.5
	2-3 times	28.6
	Less than 3 times	63.1
Number of times experienced street food in Da Lat	First time	3.4
	2-3 times	27.4
	Less than 3 times	67.7
Companions for street food experiences	Friends	33.5
	Family	36.7
	Alone	25.5
	Others	4.4
Expenditure on street food	Less than 100,000 VND	11.9
	100,000 - 500,000 VND	40.0
	500,000 - 1 million VND	36.7
	More than 1 million VND	11.4
Source of information about Da Lat's street food	Friends	69.7
	Books, newspapers, magazines	60.9
	Internet, TV	81.2
	Travel agencies	59.4
	Local residents	59.4
	Others	1.0
Location for experiencing street food in Da Lat	Night Market	66.9
	Nha Chung Street	70.6
	Hoang Dieu Street	72.3
	Nga Nam Dai hoc	63.0
	Others	8.5

Source: Authors' calculation

The survey questionnaires were directly distributed to domestic tourists experiencing street food in areas such as Night Market, Nha Chung Street, and Lam Vien Square during the COVID-19 period from March to May 2021. The questionnaires were primarily distributed in the afternoon and evening, as these are the times when tourists are most present in these areas. Table 2 summarizes the demographic profile of respondents.

Table 2 provides an overview of the respondents' demographic profile. Men comprised 57.8% of the respondents, while women made up 41.3%. 12.9% of participants were under 18, 49.3% were between 18 and 29, 29.1% were from 30 to 44 years old, and 8.7% were 45 or older. Up to 63.1% of survey respondents have visited Da Lat more than three times. 67.7% of domestic respondents have experienced street food in Da Lat more than three times. Domestic tourists often eat out on the street with friends and family, equivalent to 70.2%. 40% of domestic tourists pay from 100 to 500 thousand VND and 36.7% from 500 thousand to 1 million VND for a street food experience in Da Lat. They are aware of Da Lat street food through the internet, television (81.2%), word-of-mouth from friends (69.7%), and locals (59.4%).

3.4 Data analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability testing of the measurement scale, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 22.0 software.

4. Research findings and discussions

4.1 Reliability of scale

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the most important characteristics of street food and compile a summary of tourists' perceptions of the Da Lat street food experience. The analysis of the mean values of tourists' opinions regarding street food experience, destination image, satisfaction, and future behavior shows that tourists rated these aspects at an average level, with the majority having mean scores between 3.5 and below 5.

Regarding the street food experience in Da Lat, the observed variables related to the expression of cultural identity through street food received the highest scores. For example, statements such as "Da Lat has many unique dishes" and "Da Lat's Street food is diverse and rich in ingredients and preparation methods, especially with vegetables" received agreement scores of 3.62 and 3.58 out of 5, respectively, which are the highest agreement levels among the observed variables. This indicates that the street food experience in Da Lat carries its distinct characteristics and leaves a strong impression on tourists. Although various imported street food options exist in Da Lat, such as Thai papaya salad or Japanese Takoyaki, these dishes have been modified to suit local tastes. Street food in Da Lat is based on locally available ingredients, as the city is located in a temperate climate and is

known for its abundance of vegetables, flowers, and fruits. Therefore, street food in Da Lat is often prepared with or accompanied by vegetables. This is also a deep impression that tourists have when mentioning street food in Da Lat. In addition, Da Lat has some street food dishes that, when seen in images, immediately evoke the image of the dreamy city, such as soy milk. A visitor from Hai Phong shared, "It is magical! Soy milk and pastries can be found anywhere, but just seeing a picture of a glass of soy milk, a few pastries, and a small plastic square stool immediately makes me think of Da Lat" (Quick interview on 02 May 2021). These results confirmed the role of cultural outcomes (Young *et al.*, 2018) in street food experiences in Da Lat that reflect place identity theory (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Sims, 2009). The unique street food offered in Da Lat satisfies the taste buds and visually represents the city's charm. The combination of soy milk, pastries, and the iconic small plastic square stool creates a nostalgic and enchanting image that captures the essence of Da Lat's cultural identity. This connection between food and place further reinforces the significance of cultural outcomes in shaping our perception and understanding of a destination. This suggests that the unique street food culture in Da Lat has become an integral part of the city's identity, leaving a lasting impression on visitors. It also highlights the power of visual cues to trigger nostalgic feelings and associations with a specific place. Experiencing street food helps promote the local culture, so Da Lat should maintain and further enhance the cultural identity of its street food. "In general, Da Lat's Street food does not need too many changes; it just needs more development in terms of the image of street food to make more people aware of it", said a visitor from Hue (Quick interview on 26 April 2021). These results show that local food is considered a means through which tourists have the opportunity to interact and gain a deeper understanding of the culture of the destination in general and the authentic local cuisine in particular (Lin *et al.*, 2010; Mak *et al.*, 2012; Gupta and Sajnani, 2019). This confirms previous studies' findings highlighting local food's significance in enhancing tourists' cultural experiences and promoting destination authenticity (Sims, 2009; Gupta and Sajnani, 2019). The positive perception of street food as a cultural attraction suggests that efforts should be made to promote and preserve this aspect of local cuisine to attract more tourists and foster sustainable tourism development.

On the other hand, the ambiance or food quality in the street food experience of Da Lat received the lowest level of agreement, corresponding to 3.48 out of 5. This indicates that food business owners or local authorities need to plan appropriate spaces and pay more attention to the food quality. This reality also explains why the level of satisfaction with street food in Da Lat is not high, reaching only 3.48 out of 5. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn, 2017; Ngo *et al.*, 2019), especially regarding food safety and hygiene.

Table 3. Results of mean values, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, factor loading, variance extracted, and composite reliability

Observed Variable	Mean	SD	FL	SFL	CR	AVE
The street food experience: Mean = 3.53; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.963						
EX 1. I had an excellent experience at street food stalls in Da Lat.	3.43	1.195	0.797	0.854		
EX 2. I am impressed by the street food quality in Da Lat.	3.48	1.024	0.821	0.853		
EX 3. I felt positive things about the street food products for travelers in Da Lat.	3.54	1.002	0.798	0.851		
EX 4. The street food vendors were kind and supportive in Da Lat.	3.53	1.009	0.891	0.843		
EX 5. The interaction I had with street food vendors was of a high standard.	3.52	1.057	0.876	0.805		
EX 6. I feel good about my interaction with street food vendors in Da Lat.	3.53	1.026	0.864	0.828		
EX 7. Overall, my interaction with street food vendors was excellent in Da Lat.	3.55	0.989	0.880	0.833	0.963	0.669
EX 8. The physical environment at street food stalls is excellent.	3.48	1.024	0.799	0.808		
EX 9. I am impressed with the general quality of this street food stall's physical atmosphere.	3.50	1.068	0.845	0.839		
EX 10. I believe that the environment of street food stalls in Da Lat was high quality.	3.50	0.998	0.744	0.751		
EX 11. Da Lat has many unique dishes.	3.62	0.976	0.703	0.771		
EX 12. Street food in Da Lat is diverse and rich in ingredients and preparation methods, especially with vegetables.	3.58	0.975	0.752	0.794		
EX 13. Street food in Da Lat reflects the local cultural identity.	3.57	0.947	0.736	0.794		
Destination image: Mean = 3.53; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.910						
DI 1. Street food in Da Lat provides good services.	3.47	0.990	0.815	0.819		
DI 2. Street food gave a positive image of Da Lat.	3.52	0.970	0.894	0.858		
DI 3. Street food in Da Lat has a good reputation.	3.57	0.935	0.838	0.860	0.910	0.717
DI 4. Street food in Da Lat helped to get a good image of my trip.	3.55	0.977	0.821	0.850		

Table 3. Results of mean values, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, factor loading, variance extracted, and composite reliability *(continued)*

Observed Variable	Mean	SD	FL	SFL	CR	AVE
Satisfaction: Mean = 3.48; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.928						
SA 1. The street food experience in Da Lat exceeded my expectations.	3.46	0.997	0.855	0.870		
SA 2. I really like this visit to these street food stalls.	3.43	0.945	0.875	0.911		
SA 3. The street food experience made me satisfied with my trip to Da Lat.	3.54	0.947	0.865	0.845	0.928	0.763
SA 4. The street food experience is worthwhile for me to stay in Da Lat.	3.50	0.950	0.843	0.866		
Behaviour: Mean = 3.53; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.951						
BE 1. I feel that street food in Da Lat is worth experiencing and enjoying.	3.52	1.061	0.890	0.899		
BE 2. I will recommend street food in Da Lat to my friends and family.	3.51	1.050	0.901	0.924	0.951	0.828
BE 3. I will return to experience street food and visit Da Lat in the future.	3.54	1.058	0.897	0.909		
BE 4. I will introduce Da Lat to my friends and family.	3.53	1.045	0.900	0.908		

Notes: Mean (mean value); FL (Factor Loading); SFL (Standardized Factor Loading); CR (Composite Reliability); AVE (Average Variance Extracted).

Source: Authors' calculation

The article utilizes Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and Composite Reliability (CR) to assess the reliability of the measurement scales. The Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.910 to 0.963 indicate high reliability of the scales.

Factor loading (FL), standardized factor loading (SFL), and average variance extracted (AVE) are used to measure the convergent validity of the measurement scales. The values of factor loading and standardized factor loading range from 0.703 to 0.924, which are higher than the recommended threshold of 0.5. All observed variables are properly loaded onto the proposed factor groups of the model. The average variance extracted ranges from 0.669 to 0.928, meeting the criterion of being above 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Table 4. Discriminant validity results

			Estimation coefficient	Standard error	Critical ratio	p-value
STEXP	↔	BE	0.466	0.051	9.144	***
STEXP	↔	SA	0.439	0.047	9.433	***
STEXP	↔	DI	0.393	0.045	8.749	***
BE	↔	SA	0.493	0.052	9.549	***
BE	↔	DI	0.428	0.050	8.616	***
SA	↔	DI	0.350	0.044	8.035	***

Source: Authors' calculation

In addition, the research concepts are interrelated, and all have values smaller than 1, with a p-value less than 0.05, ensuring discriminant validity (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

4.2 The results of the model fit test (CFA)

To assess the reliability of the CFA model, the study used the standards of Hair *et al.* (2010). The results of the model fit test, as presented in Figure 1, show that the model has a Chi-square value of 960.224, degrees of freedom (df) of 423, a Chi-square/df ratio of 3.570 (less than 5, which is acceptable), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) of 0.922, comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.930, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) of 0.835, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.079. These results indicate that the model fits the data collected from the field.
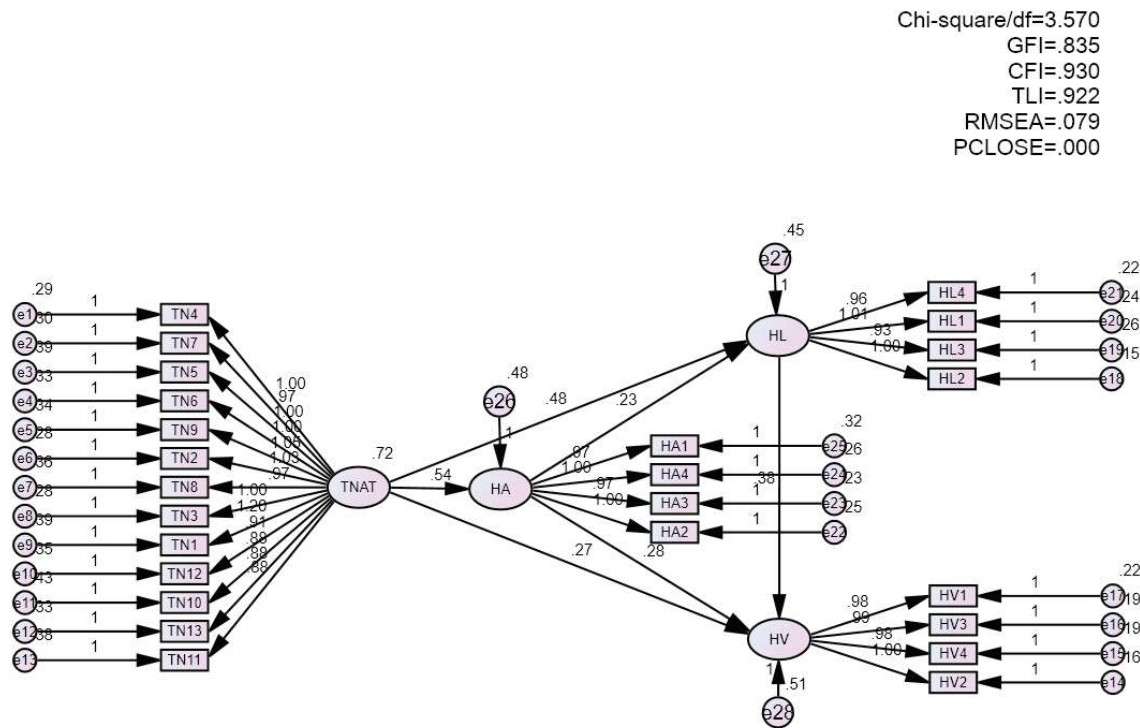

Figure 2. Results of the research model fit test

Source: Authors' calculation

4.3 Evaluation of structural relationships and hypothesis testing

According to the research model, Table 5 shows the results of hypothesis testing regarding the relationships among street food experience, destination image, satisfaction, and future behaviors. Hypothesis H1 states that the street food experience impacts the destination image of Da Lat. The research findings supported this hypothesis. These results are consistent with previous studies (Horng and Tsai, 2010; Young *et al.*, 2018; Lee *et al.*, 2019; Hsu and Scott, 2020). Additionally, the results also indicate that the local culinary factor plays an important role in the tourists' experience, and thus, it can be said that the distinctive street food experience has a positive influence on the image of Da Lat (Young *et al.*, 2018; Hsu and Scott, 2020).

Table 5. Results of hypothesis testing regarding the relationships among the factors

Path coefficient			Hypothesis	Estimate	S.E.	t-value	p-value	Conclusion
HA	←	TNAT	H1	0.544	0.049	11.039	***	Accept
HL	←	TNAT	H2	0.481	0.055	8.735	***	Accept
HL	←	HA	H4	0.233	0.055	4.205	***	Accept
HV	←	TNAT	H3	0.265	0.063	4.184	***	Accept
HV	←	HL	H6	0.379	0.061	6.238	***	Accept
HV	←	HA	H5	0.276	0.061	4.536	***	Accept

Source: Authors' calculation

The street food experience also directly impacts customer satisfaction (and the future behavior of tourists. These results also indicate that the distinct culinary culture of Da Lat compared to other regions, along with the residents' characteristics, play an important role in enhancing the destination image in the eyes of tourists and greatly influencing their satisfaction. Thus, hypotheses H2 and H3 of the research model are also supported.

Regarding the destination image, the results in the figure and table show that the destination image has a positive effect on customer satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous studies in tourism worldwide (Lee *et al.*, 2019; Stylidis *et al.*, 2017). The destination image directly influences customer satisfaction. The destination image also impacts the behavior of returning or recommending Da Lat Street food to other people. These results support hypotheses H4 and H5 of the research model.

Furthermore, the study also observed the relationship between the satisfaction factor and the behavior of tourists (H6), and the results show that the satisfaction factor impacts the behavior factor. This result is consistent with the findings of Torres Chavarria and Phakdee-Auksorn (2017) in their study conducted in Thailand.

The supported hypothesis of this study offers empirical support for the CAB model (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961; Zhang *et al.*, 2018), which highlights the processes of cognition, emotion, and behavior in the context of food tourism. It can be seen that the research model is affirmed. This demonstrates the important role of the street food experience in shaping and maintaining the destination image, as well as directly contributing to customer satisfaction with the destination and serving as a significant factor in encouraging tourists to return and recommend the experience and destination in the future.

5. Conclusion

This study has made significant theoretical and practical contributions to exploring the impact of street food experiences on destination image, satisfaction, and the future behavior of tourists. Theoretical contributions include providing a research model that enhances the evidence on the role of street food experiences, particularly those related to local culinary culture, in the causal relationships with destination image, satisfaction, and future behavior of

tourists. The results of the research model confirm the causal relationships among the factors: (i) street food experiences impact destination image, (ii) street food experiences impact tourist satisfaction, (iii) street food experiences impact the future behavior of tourists, (iv) destination image impacts tourist satisfaction, (v) destination image impacts future behavior of tourists, (vi) tourist satisfaction impacts future behavior of tourists. The empirical evidence in Da Lat, Vietnam, affirms these causal relationships proposed in the research model. When tourists have positive street food experiences, their perception of the destination image is also positive, leading to higher satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth behavior, and a higher likelihood of returning to the destination. This emphasizes the importance of cultural consumption value in the street food experience through distinctive characteristics that contribute to the peak experience as an affective component of the destination (Quan and Wang, 2004; Young *et al.*, 2018). The emotional aspects of street food experiences are crucial for a destination's identity and reputation. Understanding these aspects can help marketers enhance their strategies to promote and market their unique food offerings. Tourists' feelings and connections with local cuisine can lead to memorable experiences, increased satisfaction, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Pham *et al.*, 2023). This reinforces the processes of cognition, affection, and behavior in tourism research (Zhang *et al.*, 2018), particularly in food tourism. Thus, understanding the emotional aspects of the street food experience can significantly contribute to a destination's overall experience and may lead to more identification of the destination from a tourist's perspective. According to the study, travelers' intentions to promote a place to others are also significantly influenced by their perceptions of the destination's positive image and higher satisfaction levels. This underlines the significance of street food experiences in determining a destination's identity and reputation among travelers.

A positive destination image also enhances tourist satisfaction and influences their future behavior. Moreover, tourist satisfaction at the destination plays a crucial role in their decision to return and engage in positive word-of-mouth for the destination. Methodologically, this study reaffirms and complements the measurement scale of street food experience concepts by incorporating authentic elements into the group of factors representing street food experiences. However, further research is needed to validate this measurement scale in different contexts and expand its application.

The results show that all six hypotheses were supported, providing important grounds for proposing policy recommendations to government agencies and departments to stimulate customer loyalty at a tourist destination by ensuring customer satisfaction with street food experiences and enhancing the destination's image in customers' eyes.

Firstly, it is necessary to improve and ensure street food quality. Despite being attractive, street food carries risks in terms of quality, especially food safety issues. Due to the nature of the street food business, which is often mobile and without fixed selling locations, managing street food vendors faces many challenges. Additionally, there is limited exposure to basic knowledge and regulations on food safety for vendors. Purchasing cheap ingredients with unclear origins also poses potential risks of food poisoning. According to quick interviews,

tourists have raised concerns about the source of ingredients used in street food and the hygiene practices of vendors, which could deter them from trying local food offerings. This recommendation is also mentioned in the Ngo *et al.* (2019) study. Therefore, organizing training sessions on food safety for street food vendors is crucial. The city needs to establish strict regulations on food safety. Furthermore, Da Lat can increase the workforce for street food sales management by mobilizing neighborhood leaders to inspect and supervise street food activities or enabling street food vendors to monitor each other. These local forces are close to the community, responsible, and have the spirit to ensure food safety. With training on food safety and management skills, street food safety will become much easier. Additionally, the city can promote certain business methods to help street food vendors attract customers and ensure food safety (e.g., offering discounts on remaining dishes at the end of the day, which not only complies with food safety regulations but also creates a friendly and trustworthy image for customers).

Secondly, it is necessary to popularize and enhance the quality of interaction for street food vendors. Quick service is one of the advantages of street food in Da Lat, creating satisfaction for tourists and local customers. Street food vendors in Da Lat are extremely friendly, always smiling and engaging with their customers, leaving a lasting impression on tourists regarding street food and the overall image of Da Lat as a destination. However, there are still many establishments with little or poor interaction, which leads to dissatisfaction and even anger among tourists. Therefore, the city's tourism management authorities should address popularizing and improving the quality of interaction for street food vendors. For phenomena such as scams or overcharging tourists, the city authorities should implement awareness-raising programs for vendors and necessary measures such as penalties. To address the inconsistency in the interaction of street food vendors, training sessions should be conducted to promote proper interaction techniques for street food vendors in Da Lat, aiming to enhance their awareness and responsibility in their business activities, as well as provide guidance on skills to handle any situations that may arise between the service providers and consumers, thereby improving the quality of interaction for street food vendors in Da Lat.

Thirdly, it is important to establish, preserve, and promote the unique characteristics of Da Lat's Street food. The government should implement policies to encourage and maintain the distinctive features of street food. Furthermore, each individual can contribute to preserving the culinary culture of the local area by sharing local cooking tips or recipes for traditional dishes on various platforms to raise awareness and introduce them to a broader audience.

Fourthly, it is important to build and enhance the destination image of Da Lat by promoting street food experiences to increase tourist satisfaction. The destination's image influences the decision to travel to a destination in the eyes of tourists, which is acquired through various channels such as the Internet and word-of-mouth from friends. Therefore, building and improving the destination image is a matter of great importance. Da Lat already has a positive image as a destination, especially regarding its natural beauty and climate. We can further enhance the destination image of Da Lat through the element of street food experiences,

as street food reflects the cultural identity of the locality and sets Da Lat apart from other destinations, attracting the interest of many tourists. Through food review websites, social media platforms, or travel agencies, we can provide attractive and unique lists of street food to bring the street food experience of Da Lat closer to tourists. Creative animated images and short promotional videos showcasing Da Lat's Street food can be uploaded online.

Furthermore, the city can organize festivals, competitions, and voting events related to street food to attract public attention (e.g., the "Top 10 Most Unique Street Food in Da Lat" competition). Designing high-quality and reasonably priced street food tours in Da Lat that offer unique menus and suitable time, space, and pricing can also be effective. Another option is to organize street food fairs as part of the city's festival activities (e.g., the Da Lat Flower Festival held every two years).

This study has several limitations. Measuring street food experiences with unique characteristics should be validated in different research contexts to promote its broader application in future studies. This trend is receiving attention, expanding research on local experiences, particularly unique and distinctive culinary experiences. Comparative studies between domestic and international tourists should also be encouraged to provide insights into the differences in perceptions among tourists and to develop more suitable products and services for each segment.

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