

Does Gastronomy Tourism Experiences Matter? Understanding Malang's Domestic Tourist Future Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to examine how gastronomic tourism, particularly through Bakso, affects tourist satisfaction, intention to return, and recommendations to others in Malang City. The study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) and includes a sample of 109 respondents. Data was collected via questionnaires distributed in January 2024. PLS SEM helps identify three key variables: Gastronomy Tourism Experience, Tourist Satisfaction, and Future Behavior, represented by 37 questionnaire items. Findings indicate that Bakso-based gastronomic tourism significantly enhances tourist satisfaction, their likelihood of returning, and their propensity to recommend Malang City. This underscores the strategic importance of local food culture in tourism development and suggests that local governments should prioritize enhancing the tourist experience and food tourism infrastructure. The study lays the groundwork for further exploration of Malang City's gastronomic tourism potential.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last 3 decades, research on food has expanded considerably across multiple disciplines, including tourism studies, due to its powerful appeal as an attraction (Ellis et al., 2018; Okumus et al., 2018; Wondirad & Verheye, 2023). The study agenda regarding the uniqueness of food, related to the term gastronomy tourism, has significantly become a crucial part of a region in optimizing local tourism potential (Apak & Gürbüz, 2023; Kim et al., 2021; Okumus et al., 2018; Pu et al., 2024). However, there remains a research gap in understanding how specific local dishes, such as Bakso Malang, contribute to the broader dynamics of gastronomy tourism, particularly in Indonesia.

Furthermore Hall, (2003) indicates that tourists exhibit varying levels of interest when engaging in culinary tourism. Gastronomy tourism ranks highest, as food is often regarded as the primary motivation for travel. The concept of gastronomy tourism refers to a type of tourism defined as travel chosen by individuals because of an interest in food for the purpose of recreation or entertainment, which includes: visits to manufacturers of gastronomic products, gastronomic festivals, fairs, events, cooking demonstrations, food tastings, as well as any activity related to food (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2021; Nistor & Dezsi, 2022; Wondirad & Verheye, 2023). This underscores the significance of gastronomy tourism in shaping travel behavior and destination choices. Moreover, the development of gastronomy tourism has become very rapid (Park & Widyanta, 2022), due to its ability to become a distinctive element of attraction for a region to be able to compete with its competitors (Tsai & Wang, 2017).

Tourist motivation increases positively in visiting a region, due to the uniqueness of iconic foods that are able to represent the value of a destination (Anton Martin et al., 2021). This uniqueness not only appeals to tourists' sensory experiences but also enhances their cultural understanding and emotional connections to the destination. Food for tourists is related to cultural experiences that can authentically lead them to learn about the local culture, through sensory pleasure through taste, smell, touch, and so on. It also relates

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to interpersonal relationships that generate feelings of joy or health concerns initiated by the cuisine in question (Ellis et al., 2018). In line with this, research by UNWTO (2017) reveals that 63% of tourists are motivated by food tourism, and 62% are interested in learning about local cuisine through cooking workshops. Consequently, it is unsurprising that travelers often dedicate around 40% of their time to exploring regional foods, as it fulfills both primary and secondary needs (Tsai & Wang, 2017). However, despite this high engagement, specific studies focusing on how local dishes like Bakso Malang influence tourist behavior remain limited.

Positive experiences in gastronomy tourism can increase visitor satisfaction with a region, which has the potential to strengthen the image of the destination and trigger recommendations to other individuals through word of mouth until there is a very large opportunity to make a return visit to the same destination (Anton Martin et al., 2021; Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2021; Pu et al., 2024; Tsai & Wang, 2017; Yang et al., 2024). This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on how Bakso Malang contributes to these positive outcomes. This explains why food, as a unique characteristic of a region, can significantly influence economic growth, socio-cultural dynamics, and environmental conditions, contributing to the concept of sustainable tourism (Apak & Gürbüz, 2023). Gastronomy tourism has successfully developed in numerous countries renowned for their cuisine. For instance, Italy is famous for pasta and pizza, India is known for curry and biryani, and Japan is globally celebrated for sushi and ramen (Pu et al., 2024; Wondirad & Verheye, 2023). As a country rich in culinary diversity, Indonesia similarly has the potential to develop gastronomic tourism on an international scale, particularly through dishes like Bakso (Rifqie Mariana et al., 2019). However, Indonesia, despite its rich culinary diversity, remains underexplored in terms of gastronomy tourism research, particularly regarding dishes like Bakso.

Bakso is a traditional Indonesian food made from round meat and served with soup broth. In Indonesia, this food is a favorite for all young and old people because of the delicious and savory taste accompanied by textures and aromas that show the quality of a food (Mariana et al., 2018). Bakso is a culinary icon across Indonesia, found in nearly every province, and is deeply embedded in the country's food culture. However, Bakso from Malang stands out and captures the attention of tourists due to its diverse varieties, including fine and coarse meatballs, and an array of complementary items such as fried dumplings, yellow noodles, stuffed white tofu, stuffed fried tofu, vermicelli, and more (Hanggraito, 2021; Rifqie Mariana et al., 2019). The unique meatball variants found in Malang are among the most popular and are not available in other regions. This distinctiveness, combined with the widespread trend of Bakso as a beloved dish across Indonesia, contributes to the increasing popularity of Bakso Malang, making it easily found in restaurants and eateries even outside Malang City (Hanggraito, 2021).

Despite its significant potential, Bakso Malang has not been fully leveraged as a cornerstone of Malang's tourism strategy, which may explain the recent decline in domestic tourist visits. Bakso Malang holds significant potential for gastronomic tourism and could attract many tourists, thereby boosting economic growth. Unfortunately, despite the tourism industry contributing over 25% to the region's income, the Malang City Government has not prioritized this sector in its regional development policies (Supriono et al., 2020). This is reinforced by data on domestic tourist visits in Malang City which have decreased. In 2023, Malang City achieved tourist visits of 1,179,797, while in 2022 there were 1,377,193 domestic tourists visiting the region. This decline suggests an urgent need for a reassessment of the city's tourism strategy, particularly focusing on gastronomy tourism and its key offerings like Bakso Malang. In fact, tourism activities in Malang City have been supported by facilities in the form of 35 star hotels, 43 non-star hotels, and 505 restaurants/dining houses/cafes in 2023. However, the potential of these facilities has not been maximized, which is evident in the declining tourist numbers. By considering this aspect, it becomes essential to explore consumer behavior patterns in the context of tourism activities, with the aim of developing a more optimal regional development strategy in the future (BPS, 2024).

The Malang City government's failure to optimize its gastronomic tourism potential could have a detrimental impact on regional stability. Conversely, a well-developed gastronomic tourism sector has been proven to enhance destination image, cultivate positive tourist attitudes, and stimulate economic and socio-cultural revitalization within a region (Wondirad & Verheye, 2023). This notion is further supported by Kokkranikal & Carabelli, (2024), which emphasizes the importance of providing tourists with real-time memorable experiences to enjoy a destination and generate positive word-of-mouth feedback, a feat that gastronomic tourism achieves through a range of engaging activities. This demonstrates how crucial it is to comprehend how gastronomy tourism shapes visitor behavior. Understanding these dynamics is not only significant for enhancing tourism policies but also for maximizing the economic benefits that can be derived from leveraging local food culture. This is significant because it may serve as the foundation for enhancing the efficacy of policy. For the Malang City Government, investing in gastronomy tourism could represent a low-cost, high-impact strategy for boosting regional growth, particularly by capitalizing on local culinary treasures like Bakso Malang (Guo & Hsu, 2023).

This study is essential because while there has been a rapid expansion in academic writings concerning gastronomy and tourism, there remains a significant scarcity of empirical research demonstrating the pivotal role of local gastronomy in shaping decisions about vacation destinations (Kokkranikal & Carabelli, 2021; Wondirad & Verheye, 2023). Particularly in Indonesia, there is a lack of empirical data exploring the influence of specific local dishes, such as Bakso Malang, on tourist decision-making processes. However, there is still a lack of concrete data regarding how local gastronomy affects the choices of vacation spots, including in Indonesia. Building upon these gaps in research, this study aims to investigate how experiences in gastronomy tourism impact the development of attitudes among prospective travelers.

Based on the background presented, this study aims to examine the impact of Bakso Malang as a key element of gastronomy tourism on overall tourist satisfaction during their visits to Malang City. The research seeks to explore how this iconic culinary offering influences tourists' experiences, contributes to their overall satisfaction, and impacts their intentions to revisit and recommend Malang to others. By understanding these dynamics, the study will provide valuable insights into the relationship between gastronomy tourism, tourist satisfaction, and the likelihood of revisits and recommendations, specifically within the context of Bakso Malang.

2. METHOD

This research follows a positivistic paradigm with an explanatory quantitative approach (Kriyantono, 2020; Neuman, 2013; Sugiyono, 2013). Using the Slovin formula on the 2023 population of domestic tourists visiting Malang City, which totaled 1,179,797 (BPS, 2024), the initial calculation suggested a sample size of 100 respondents at a 95% confidence level with a 10% margin of error. However, to account for potential non-responses and ensure robustness in the data, the sample size was slightly increased to 109 respondents. This adjustment enhances the reliability of the findings and ensures the sample adequately represents the population, allowing for accurate conclusions about the impact of Bakso Malang on tourist satisfaction, revisit intentions, and recommendations.

A 37-item closed-ended questionnaire was developed by reviewing the literature. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section consisted of respondent profiles by screening information related to gender; age; total income; and the geographical area where visitors come from. Then, the second part consists of questions related to the frequency of visits to Malang; the necessity for tourists to try Bakso when visiting Malang; and the identification of Bakso restaurants visited in Malang City. Finally, questions regarding 3 variables, namely Gastronomy Tourism Experience (X1), Tourist Satisfaction (Y1), and Future Behavior (Y2) (Martins, 2016; Pu et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2024). The questionnaire is based on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree; agree; moderately agree; agree; and strongly agree) involving representative statements. The questionnaire was distributed during January 2024.

The partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM) was used to test the Hypotheses. This study has a predictive purpose, which is to explore the influence between various concepts. PLS-SEM is very effective in testing predictive relationships between constructs and is recommended for use in tourism and hospitality research (Do Valle & Assaker, 2016). Before the questionnaire is analyzed, a validity test is carried out using construct validity, with item-total correlation using the Pearson correlation formula and the r-test or t-test. Reliability tests were conducted using the Cronbach's Alpha formula. Data analysis included descriptive and inferential techniques. Descriptive analysis categorized the average score into four categories: very low, low, high, and very high.

Figure 1 describes the research framework that can explain the research scheme in detail.

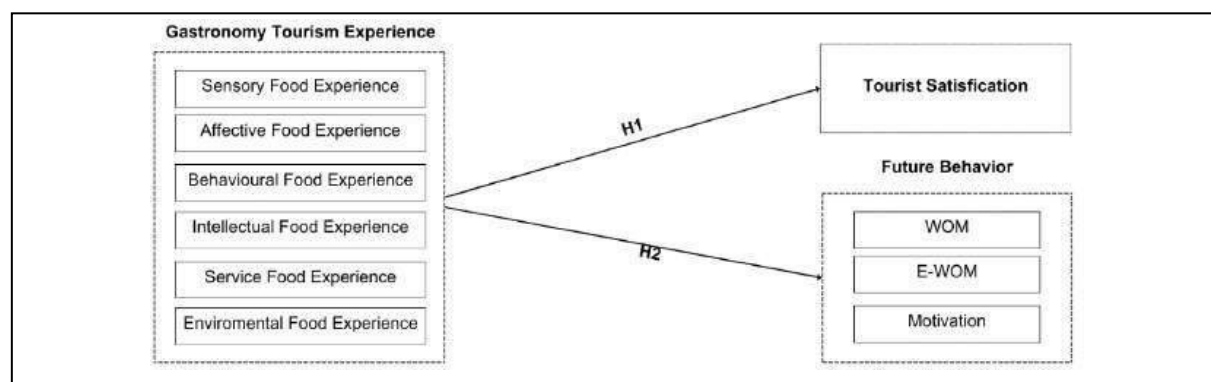


Figure 1. Research Framework

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research findings are divided into three sections: respondent profile, measurement model, and structural model.

Identification of Traveler Profile

The respondent profile section provides information on the distribution of respondents based on gender, age, type of work, visitor origin, frequency of visits, education level, and interest and obligation to visit the type of meatball restaurant in Malang, as illustrated in Table 1-4.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	33	30.2
Female	76	69.7
Total	109	100.0
Age	Frequency	Percentage
21-25 years old	68	62.3
26-35 years old	33	30.2
36-45 years old	8	7.3
Total	109	100.0
Income (per-month)	Frequency	Percentage
<Rp 1,000,000	14	12.8
IDR 1,000,000 - IDR 2,500,000	30	27.5
IDR 2,500,000 - IDR 5,000,000	32	29.3
IDR 5,000,000 - IDR 7,500,000	22	20.1
>Rp 7,500,000	11	10.0
Total	109	100.0
Visitor's Region of Origin	Frequency	Percentage
East Java	22	20.1
West Java	19	17.4
Central Java	19	17.4
Special Region of Yogyakarta	12	11.0
DKI Jakarta	12	11.0
Bali	2	01.8
Lampung	2	01.8
East Kalimantan	3	02.7
South Kalimantan	1	00.9
South Sumatra	3	02.7
North Sumatra	4	03.6
West Sumatra	1	00.9
South Sulawesi	4	03.6
Bengkulu	1	00.9
Banten	1	00.9
West Nusa Tenggara (NTB)	2	01.8
Central Papua	1	00.9
Total	109	100.0

The respondent group of 109 people provides a fairly complete picture of their characteristics. The majority of respondents were female, indicating that this group is dominated by women. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were in the age range of 21-45 years, with the highest number in the 21-25 years age group. This indicates that this group is predominantly young or young-middle aged individuals. Then, the majority of respondents have a monthly income of between IDR 2,500,000 to IDR 5,000,000, with the number of respondents who have income outside this range being quite small. In terms of regional origin, the majority of respondents came from the island of Java, especially East Java, followed by Central Java and West Java, indicating that the majority of visitors still come from areas in Java.

Table 2. Frequency of Visiting Malang City

Frequency of Visiting Malang City (during the year)	Frequency	Percentage
1 Time	20	18.3
2 Times	26	23.8
3 Times	24	22.0
4 Times	11	10.0
5 Times	4	03.6
>5 Times	24	22.0
Total	109	100.0

Table 2 presents data on the frequency of visits to Malang City in a year by respondents, with a total number of 109 respondents. From the data, it can be seen that the majority of respondents visit Malang City several times a year. Specifically, 18.3% of respondents visit Malang City once a year, while 23.8% visit twice, and 22.0% visit three times. As for visits four times a year, 10.0% of respondents did so. The number of respondents who visit Malang City five or more times a year is 22.0%. Thus, it can be concluded that Malang City is a fairly popular destination for respondents, with the majority of them visiting several times a year.

Table 3. Identification of Culinary Experience of Bakso Malang

Must Try Bakso Malang	Frequency	Percentage
Optional	30	27.5
Mandatory/Always	79	72.4
Total	109	100.0

The data provided shows the survey results on whether respondents find it necessary to try meatballs. Respondents were given two choices: "Optional" and "Mandatory/Always". Out of 109 respondents, 30 individuals or 27.5% mentioned that trying meatballs is not always obligatory for them. On the other hand, the majority of respondents, 79 people or 72.4%, indicated that they feel compelled or always find it necessary to try meatballs. Therefore, it can be inferred that most respondents perceive trying meatballs as important or even mandatory, whereas a minority feel that it's not always essential to try them.

Table 4. Identification of Bakso Malang Restaurant

Types of Meatball Restaurants in Malang	Frequency	Percentage
Bakso President Malang	56	25.1
Bakso Gun Malang	29	13.0
Bakso Kota Cak Man	48	21.5
Bakso Bakar Trowulan	21	09.4
Bakso Prima	38	17.0
Damas Meatballs	22	09.8
Bakso Cak Toha	2	00.8
Bakso Cak Kar	1	00.4
Bakso Makam Pahlawan	1	00.4
Bakso Bukit Ijo	1	00.4
Bakso Akrom Kauman	1	00.4
Bakso Bakar Pak Man	1	00.4
Fertile Meatballs	1	00.4
Bakso Kirun	1	00.4
Total	223	100.0

The data in the table illustrates the frequency and percentage of visits to various types of meatball restaurants in Malang by 109 respondents who can choose more than one of their favorite Bakso Malang restaurants. Bakso President Malang is the most frequently visited meatball restaurant by respondents, with a frequency of visits of 56 or 25.1% of the total respondents. Followed by Bakso Kota Cak Man Restaurant with a frequency of visits of 48 or 21.5%, and Bakso Prima Restaurant with a frequency of visits of 38 or 17.0%. Meanwhile, other meatball restaurants have a frequency of visits that is lower than 10% of the total respondents. From this data, it can be concluded that Bakso President Malang, Bakso Kota Cak Man, and Bakso Prima are the most popular meatball restaurants among respondents, while other restaurants have lower visitation rates.

Measurement Model

The validity test is seen through the outer loadings test and the AVE test, the indicator is declared valid outer loadings > 0.5, while the variable is considered to have a good level of validity if it has an AVE value ≥ 0.50. Reliability test using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha testing aims to test the reliability of instruments in a research model. variables can be said to be reliable if they have a Cronbach's Alpha value ≥ 0.6 or composite reliability ≥ 0.7. These findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Measurement Model

Variables	Concepts	Outer Loading	AVE	CR	Alpha
Gastronomy Experience (X1)	Sensory Food Experience				
	Bakso Malang makes a strong visual impression on me	0.711			
	Bakso Malang made a strong taste impression on me	0.781			
	Bakso Malang made a strong aroma impression on me	0.747			
	Affective Food Experience				
	Bakso Malang evokes my personal feelings and sentiments	0.768			
	I have strong emotional feelings towards Bakso Malang	0.744			
	Bakso Malang was an emotional experience for me	0.764			
	Behavioral Food Experience				
	I was physically involved in finding a new Bakso Malang restaurant	0.783			
	I was looking for a new Bakso Malang tasting experience that I had never tried before	0.818	0.640	0.926	0.906
	I was looking for an experience of tasting Bakso Malang at a different restaurant	0.781			
	Intellectual Food Experience				
	Bakso Malang made me think more about food culture	0.810			
	Bakso Malang made me think more about the origin of the food	0.620			
	Bakso Malang intrigues me with its sensory food experience	0.763			
	Bakso Malang made me understand the lifestyle of its people	0.657			
	Service Experience				
	Sellers and staff at Bakso Malang in the Malang area are very friendly	0.661			
	Bakso Malang sellers and staff in the Malang area are very helpful	0.706			
	Sellers and staff of Bakso Malang in Malang area are very humble	0.796			
	Sellers and staff of Bakso Malang in Malang area are very polite	0.7824			
	Bakso Malang vendors and staff in the area provide fast and effective service	0.873			
Enviromental Experience					
The Bakso Malang place I've been to looks aesthetically appealing	0.835				
The style of the Bakso Malang place looks impressive	0.833				
The Bakso Malang I went to looked clean and tidy	0.788				
Tourist Satisfaction					
Overall, I was satisfied with my visit to Malang because of Bakso Malang	0.904	0.589	0.968	0.965	
Compared to expectations, I was satisfied with my visit to Malang because of Bakso Malang	0.930				
Comparing with the reality, I am satisfied with my visit to Malang because of Bakso Malang	0.850				

Word of Mouth (WoM)					
	I recommend my relatives to look for Bakso Malang when visiting Malang	0.835			
	I persuade my relatives to eat Bakso Malang when they visit Malang	0.752			
Electronic Word of Mouth (e-WoM)					
Future Behavior (Intention for Return & to Recommend) (Y2)	I gave a review when I tasted Bakso Malang	0.809			
	I posted on social media about my experience trying Bakso Malang	0.809	0.802	0.924	0.876
	I spread my opinion through social media when I tried Bakso Malang	0.829			
Motivation					
	During my visit to Malang, I wanted to try Bakso Malang	0.799			
	I would like to find a different Bakso Malang restaurant to fulfill my satisfaction	0.765			

From Table 5, comparing with the ideal mean value of 5,000, the averages obtained for each construct from all models show that respondents' perceptions, the average respondent ratings for these constructs are generally above the satisfactory threshold. This indicates that respondents have a good perception or assessment of the variables represented by each construct. For CA, the reliability coefficients for each model showed moderate to good levels of internal consistency among the variables, as well as in the composite reliability (CR). The AVE values indicate relatively strong convergent validity, implying that the constructs capture most of the variability in the measured variables. In the structural model, the full path model can be depicted in Figure 2.

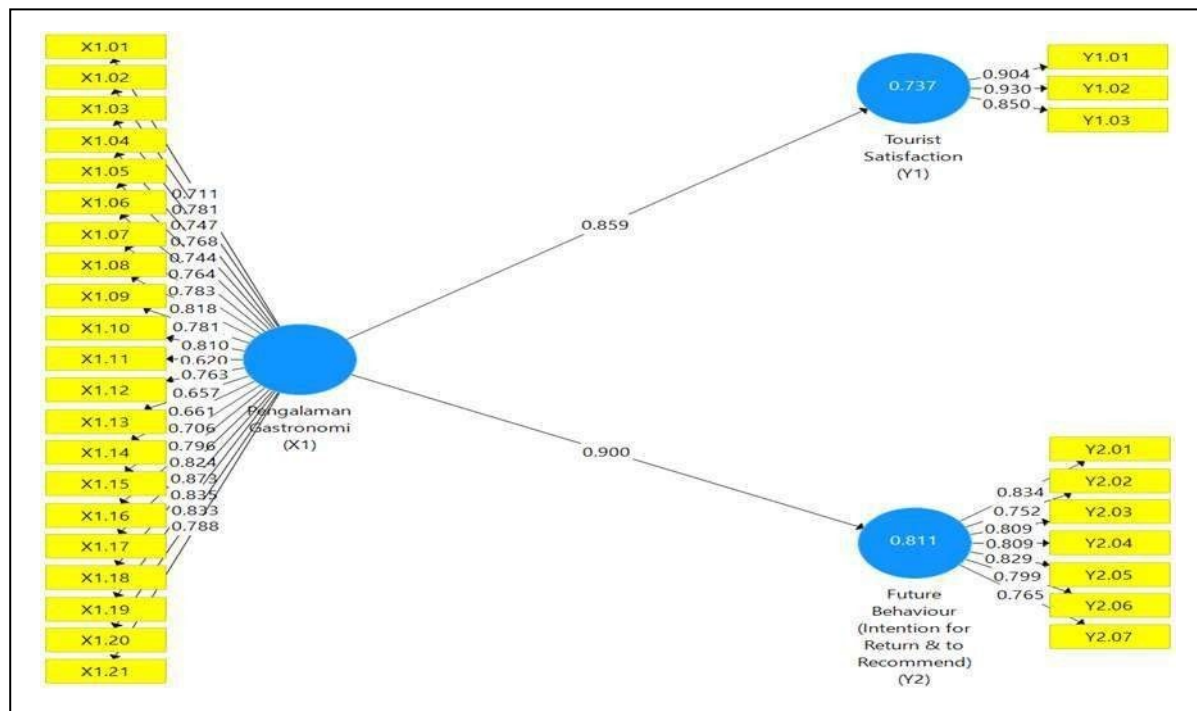


Figure 1. Full Path Model

The Full Path Model depicts the outer loadings and path coefficients for each construct and latent variable. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the full path model. In this model, the R-squared value indicates the proportion of variance explained by the predictor variables in each corresponding model. This R-squared value serves as an indicator of the predictive power of the model, representing the percentage of variance explained by the independent variables, which is 0.737 for Y1 and 0.811 for Y2. In addition, each path in the model is accompanied by the coefficient value, standard deviation, t-statistic, p-value, and evaluation of the null hypothesis (H0) through the bootstrapping procedure. The specific hypothesis testing is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

Path	Original Sample	T Statistics	P Values	Description
Gastronomy Experience (X1) -> Tourist Satisfaction (Y1)	0,859	27,050	0,000	Positive, significant
Gastronomy Experience (X1) -> Future Behavior (Intention to Return & to Recommend) (Y2)	0,900	44,494	0,000	Positive, significant

Each path in the model was evaluated, and the results made it clear that all null hypotheses were rejected based on statistically significant p values. This means that almost all alternatives to each premise in the overall model are acceptable (or not rejected). The acceptance of these hypotheses confirms several previous studies on the topic.

In the current situation, Bakso Malang has become an icon of gastronomic tourism in Indonesia, attracting tourists who wish to taste the distinctive cuisine of Malang. Its popularity has made Bakso Malang a major attraction for visitors, especially young people, while also creating business opportunities for the local food industry. Each Bakso restaurant in Malang offers unique menu variations, such as fried dumplings and stuffed tofu, enriching the culinary experience for tourists (Hanggraito, 2021). However, differences in quality and quantity at each restaurant affect tourist satisfaction. This satisfaction plays a crucial role in gastronomic tourism, as it can determine whether tourists will recommend or return to Malang (Anton Martin et al., 2021).

City development through gastronomy plays an important role in enriching destination resources and attracting tourists. Unfortunately, research highlighting the management aspects of this development is limited. As a result, travelers have a limited understanding of culinary-themed brands and destinations (Guo & Hsu, 2023). Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the influence of gastronomic experiences on tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit Malang City. Based on the results of data analysis and hypothesis testing conducted using Partial Least Square (SmartPLS) version 3.0, this study found that gastronomic experiences significantly influence tourist satisfaction as well as future behavioral intentions, including return visits and recommendations. The results of the analysis show that a positive culinary experience with local food, particularly Bakso Malang, directly increases tourist satisfaction and encourages them to recommend Malang City as a tourist destination to others. Hypothesis testing confirmed that the gastronomic experience variable (X1) has a positive and significant relationship to tourist satisfaction (Y1) and revisit intentions (Y2), with the null hypothesis being entirely rejected.

The influence of the variable Gastronomic Experience (X1) on Visitor Satisfaction (Y1) and Intention to Return (Y2) is based on various factors supported by research. First of all, empirical studies have highlighted the important role of gastronomic experiences in shaping visitor satisfaction in the context of tourism. When highlighting Malang City's signature Bakso as a gastronomic tourism attraction shows that food is able to take on a very crucial role in developing the tourism industry. This is in line with research by Tsai & Wang, (2017) which states that the food image of a tourist destination is significantly able to influence tourists' behavioral intentions towards culinary tourism. Furthermore, strengthened through research Kim et al. (2021) shows that tourism in a destination can be seen from how tourists recognize cognitive signs related to local food cuisine and taste, which is reflected in how they choose menus as the main experience in culinary tourism. This is evident from the study's findings, which reveal that every tourist visiting Malang City has been able to identify various types of Malang Meatballs that suit their personal preferences. This shows a similarity with research conducted by Mariana et al., (2019), which identified that the existence of tourists' preference for Bakso is supported by their preferences for taste, price, convenience of place, satisfying portions, popular brands, and nutritional content that complements the taste of meatballs. Additionally, Hanggraito, (2021) supports the idea that Bakso Malang can positively motivate tourists to visit, serving as a foundation for tourism development rooted in cultural capital. Therefore, the development of gastronomy tourism in Malang City will be effective when tourists can identify and appreciate the taste of this local food, linking it with a satisfying and memorable travel experience. This underscores the importance of enhancing local culinary experiences as a key component of Malang City's tourism development strategy.

Positive gastronomic experiences contribute significantly to overall satisfaction, as they are often associated with emotional responses, cultural immersion and social interaction. Such experiences evoke pleasant emotions and create memorable moments, increasing the perceived value of the visit (Guo & Hsu, 2023). In addition, gastronomic experiences serve as a manifestation of destination authenticity, allowing visitors to engage with local culture and traditions (Ellis et al., 2018). Therefore, visitors who perceive gastronomic offerings as authentic are more likely to express higher levels of satisfaction and intention to

revisit. Research has also highlighted the social aspect of the dining experience, emphasizing its role in forming social relationships and increasing satisfaction (Anton Martin et al., 2021).

Culinary tourism can also be defined as a form of experience that allows individuals to explore and understand aspects of different cultures through food-related activities. These activities not only aim to enjoy local cuisine, but also serve as a means to learn and spread knowledge about the culture and people of a tourism destination. In this case, food acts as an effective medium to live and internalize cultural experiences. Culinary tourism involves interacting with the traditions, customs and values of local communities through culinary activities, which in turn enriches tourists' understanding of cultural diversity. These experiences provide opportunities for tourists to engage in cultural consumption, as well as being driven by personal motivations to understand more about the culture of the destination visited. Therefore, culinary tourism plays an important role in promoting cross-cultural understanding and enhancing appreciation of cultural diversity through food as a medium of interaction and learning (Ellis et al., 2018).

In addition, Travelers who enjoy a satisfying culinary experience in a destination are likely to experience a positive change in attitude towards the place, which in turn increases their overall level of satisfaction. This pleasant experience not only contributes to an increase in the subjective well-being of the tourists, but also influences their intention to revisit the destination in the future. Furthermore, this experience may trigger positive word of mouth and increase their intention to recommend the destination to others. This study examines the psychological mechanisms underlying the relationship between culinary tourism experiences and travelers' subjective well-being, using the above model approach. The findings of this study ultimately provide important insights into the factors that play a role in enhancing travelers' subjective well-being and how culinary experiences can later become a key element in destination promotion strategies to increase return visits and recommendations from tourists (Yang et al., 2024).

Thus, the influence of the variable Gastronomic Experience (X1) on Visitor Satisfaction (Y1) and Intention to Return (Y2) is multifaceted, covering emotional, cultural, and social dimensions, as supported by empirical evidence in tourism research. Thus, the results of this study support the hypothesis that a positive gastronomic experience can increase tourists' satisfaction and encourage their intention to revisit and provide positive recommendations. This research is in line with previous studies that emphasize the importance of local food as a key attraction in tourism. Therefore, further development and promotion of culinary specialties such as Bakso Malang is highly recommended to enhance tourism attractiveness as well as local economic growth.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that gastronomic experiences, particularly through Bakso Malang, play a pivotal role in enhancing traveler satisfaction, intentions to revisit, and recommendations, aligning with existing research on the significance of local cuisine in tourism. The positive influence of culinary tourism on tourist behavior underscores the need for strategic utilization of local food culture in tourism development. Despite its potential, Malang City's tourism industry, which contributes significantly to local revenue, has not been adequately prioritized by local government, as reflected in the decline of domestic tourist arrivals from 1,377,193 in 2022 to 1,179,797 in 2023. The findings suggest that optimizing culinary tourism, especially by promoting Bakso Malang, can substantially contribute to economic growth and enhance Malang's appeal as a tourist destination. To capitalize on this potential, it is recommended that policymakers focus on developing comprehensive gastronomy tourism strategies that include improving infrastructure and services related to the culinary experience. Additionally, organizing food festivals, cooking demonstrations, and tasting events can further attract tourists, offering unique experiences that encourage positive word-of-mouth and repeat visits. For practitioners, there is a need to collaborate with local businesses and communities to create engaging and authentic culinary experiences that resonate with tourists. This can involve curating culinary tours, enhancing the presentation and storytelling of local dishes, and ensuring high-quality service at dining establishments. For researchers, this study highlights the importance of further exploring the emotional, sensory, and intellectual dimensions of gastronomy tourism. Future research could investigate how these dimensions specifically influence different tourist segments and their long-term loyalty to a destination. Moreover, examining the effectiveness of various gastronomy tourism initiatives in driving economic growth and cultural preservation would provide valuable insights for both academics and practitioners. In summary, leveraging the cultural and economic potential of Bakso Malang and other local culinary offerings can significantly enhance Malang City's tourism industry. A collaborative approach involving government, businesses, and communities is crucial to creating a cohesive gastronomy tourism strategy that not only boosts economic growth but also strengthens the cultural identity of the region.

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