



Memorable Food Experience, Satisfaction, and Behavioural Intention: An Application of the S-O-R Paradigm

Experiência Gastronômica Memorável, Satisfação e Intenção Comportamental: Uma Aplicação do Paradigma S-O-R

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Abstract

This study examines how the dimensions of memorable food experiences influence tourist satisfaction and behavioural intention, and assesses the moderating role of food involvement within the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework. Data were collected from 428 domestic tourists visiting Gaziantep, a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, using purposive and convenience sampling. Structural equation modelling was applied to test the proposed relationships. The results show that all eight dimensions of memorable food experience positively influence satisfaction, with the gastronomic novelty and curiosity dimension emerging as the strongest predictor. Satisfaction, in turn, strongly increases behavioural intention. Food involvement moderates two relationships: it strengthens the effect of learning about exotic food culture on satisfaction, but weakens the effect of the gastronomic novelty and curiosity dimension on satisfaction. The study extends the S-O-R framework by conceptualising food involvement as a dimension-specific boundary condition and provides practical insights for designing more memorable and satisfying gastronomic experiences.

Keywords: Memorable Food Experience, Satisfaction, Behavioural Intention, Food Involvement, S-O-R Framework, Gastronomic Tourism.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa de que forma as dimensões da experiência gastronômica memorável influenciam a satisfação dos turistas e a intenção comportamental, e avalia o papel moderador do envolvimento alimentar no âmbito do modelo Estímulo–Organismo–Resposta (S-O-R). Os dados foram recolhidos junto de 428 turistas nacionais que visitaram Gaziantep, uma Cidade Criativa da Gastronomia da UNESCO, recorrendo a amostragem intencional e por conveniência. Foi aplicada a modelação de equações estruturais para testar as relações propostas. Os resultados mostram que todas as oito dimensões da experiência gastronômica memorável influenciam positivamente a satisfação, sendo a dimensão de novidade e curiosidade gastronômicas o preditor mais forte. A satisfação, por sua vez, aumenta significativamente a intenção comportamental. O envolvimento alimentar modera duas relações: reforça o efeito da aprendizagem sobre culturas gastronômicas exóticas na satisfação, mas enfraquece o efeito da dimensão de novidade e curiosidade gastronômicas na satisfação. O estudo amplia o modelo S-O-R ao conceptualizar o envolvimento alimentar como uma condição-limite específica de determinadas dimensões e oferece contributos práticos para a conceção de experiências gastronômicas mais memoráveis e satisfatórias.

Palavras-chave: Experiência Gastronômica Memorável, Satisfação, Intenção Comportamental, Envolvimento Alimentar, Modelo S-O-R, Turismo Gastronômico.

1. Introduction

Memorable experiences have become a crucial benchmark for destination managers, tourism enterprises, and food and beverage businesses. To remain competitive in the market and sustain their competitive advantage, businesses place significant emphasis on creating memorable experiences (Kim & Moon, 2009; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). A review of the literature reveals that experiencing the local culture enhances the memorability of a trip (Sthapit, 2017). In their study, Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013) suggest that tourists' engagement with the local life, culture, and cuisine of a destination makes their travel experiences more memorable. Similarly, Adongo, Anuga, and Dayour (2015) emphasise that local culinary experiences at a destination are among the most significant factors contributing to tourists' memorable experiences. Furthermore, Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) highlight the importance of understanding tourists' memories related to their dining experiences, as these recollections can act as a trigger in their future destination choices. Given this context, investigating tourists' memorable food experiences emerges as a topic of considerable importance.

Furthermore, tourists consume local food at the destination to understand the destination's unique culture, enrich their experiences, and create pleasant memories. Since memories significantly shape individuals' future decision-making processes, a memorable food experience is essential in cognitive processes (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Tsai, 2016). In this context, memorable experiences at a destination are believed to influence individuals' behavioural intentions. Behavioural intention, in its simplest form, is expressed as a tool for predicting tourists' future behaviour (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Memories related to gastronomic experiences, when recalled, evoke nostalgic feelings and have been found to enhance travel satisfaction (Stone et al., 2018). In line with this, a study suggests that one of the most significant factors influencing tourists' decisions to revisit England is their food



experience (Everett & Aitchison, 2008, p. 164). Additionally, food experiences are shown to be among the factors affecting tourists' satisfaction with the destination (Hall et al., 2003; Kivela & Crofts, 2006; Smith et al., 2010). Similarly, Santos et al. (2020) found that local food experiences make a significant positive contribution to tourists' overall tourism experience, although tourists differ in their patterns of local food consumption. Food experiences in destinations with a strong gastronomic focus contribute to tourists' post-trip memories, and tourists share these memories with those around them, influencing their travel decisions (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2012). Taken together, these findings suggest that food experiences at a destination contribute to tourist satisfaction and subsequent behavioural intentions.

Psychological factors such as food neophobia, food interest, and food involvement play crucial roles in understanding consumer behaviour (Caber et al., 2018, p. 1483). In the literature, studies often measure individuals' levels of food involvement by categorising them into low, medium, and high levels (Josiam et al., 2012, p. 78). Aghdaie et al. (2014) found that high levels of food involvement generate strong motivation for purchasing behaviour and positively influence purchase decisions. Somers et al. (2014) define food involvement as the extent to which food is valued in an individual's life and the priority given to food. In other words, food involvement reflects an individual's attitude toward food consumption. Therefore, an individual's attitude towards food significantly influences their experiences.

The memorable food experience, satisfaction, and behavioural intention, which form the foundation of the research model in this study, are grounded in the S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) theory. According to the S-O-R theory, environmental stimuli influence individuals' internal states, which in turn lead to certain behavioural responses. Numerous studies in tourism research have applied the S-O-R model (Lam et al., 2011; Fakfare & Sangpikul, 2022; Chen et al., 2022). Similarly, studies on tourist experiences have employed the S-O-R framework to examine a range of phenomena (Tuncer, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024; Şahin & Kılıçlar, 2023).

However, the application of the S-O-R model to tourists' food-specific experiences remains notably limited. While Horng and Hsu (2021) pioneered the use of S-O-R in a gastronomic context, their work focused on general dining experience attributes rather than the multidimensional nature of memorable food experiences. Furthermore, no study to date has examined the moderating role of food involvement within such a framework. To address these gaps, the present study conceptualises the dimensions of memorable food experience as the stimulus (S), satisfaction as the organism (O), and behavioural intention as the response (R). Additionally, it incorporates food involvement as a moderator to explain the conditions under which the memorable food experience influences satisfaction more strongly. In doing so, this study offers a theoretically integrated and context-specific model that extends the S-O-R paradigm to the domain of memorable food tourism in a UNESCO-recognised gastronomic destination.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

Recent scholarship in 2025 and 2026 has increasingly emphasised the multidimensional and affective nature of the memorable food experience. For instance, recent studies demonstrate how sensory stimuli critically shape memorable dining experiences by triggering cognitive appraisals such as meaningfulness and novelty (Kim et al., 2025). Additionally, examining the environmental dimension, Islam (2026) demonstrated that atmospheric conditions (e.g., weather) function as affective atmospheres that coalesce with food to form durable "weather-taste memory fusions". Similarly, the strategic importance of evaluating these experience attributes to meet customer expectations has been highlighted as a core competitive advantage in various gastronomic contexts (Chang et al., 2025). Furthermore, contemporary studies have expanded the scope of memorable food experience antecedents, exploring factors such as perceived authenticity (Sardesai et al., 2025) and the combined effects of taste and store atmosphere (Maulana et al., 2025). While these recent studies offer valuable insights into the formation of memorable experiences, they predominantly treat environmental and sensory factors as direct predictors. A critical gap remains in understanding the moderating psychological mechanisms, such as food involvement, that determine how these environmental stimuli (within the S-O-R framework) are processed by the organism to produce satisfaction and subsequent behavioural intentions. By addressing this, the current study moves beyond descriptive analyses to offer a deeper context-specific psychological evaluation.

2.1. Memorable food experience on Satisfaction

Food experience encompasses not only the consumption of local food and beverages in the destination but also a more comprehensive experience, incorporating elements such as the atmosphere, décor, design, service styles, and social interactions within local restaurants (Oh & Kim, 2020). Thus, the food experience is a process that includes not only the consumption of local food and beverages but also the restaurant's design, the music played, and interactions with other customers and staff. The consumption of locally produced food and beverages forms the core of the food experience (Adam et al., 2015). Sthapit (2017) states that local food and beverages contribute to making the experience unique and memorable for tourists. Similarly, Jeong and Jang (2018) emphasise that sensory attributes, such as the appearance, presentation, and aroma of local food and beverages, play a crucial role in tourists' food experiences. Therefore, the sensory characteristics of local food and beverages enrich individuals' food experiences. The atmosphere of the environments where food experiences occur also plays a significant role in enhancing the



experience (Jin et al., 2019). The ambiance, lighting, interior design, colours, service staff, their attitudes, and the overall service environment of local restaurants all positively influence individuals' food experiences (Kim et al., 2020).

The other factor that affects the food experience is social interaction. People can have a more enjoyable food experience by dining with friends or family members, enhancing the overall enjoyment (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Thus, it is suggested that eating together makes the food experience more valuable and memorable (Sthapit, 2017). Social interaction involves engagement with locals, restaurant staff, and producers or vendors in local markets during the food experience (Williams et al., 2019). Similarly, social interaction contributes to enriching individuals' food experiences, which leads to a unique and memorable experience (Stone et al., 2018). In this context, the food experience is seen to become both unique and memorable, while positively influencing satisfaction (Muskat et al., 2019). Based on all these findings, the following hypotheses have been formulated.

H₁: Memorable food experience affects satisfaction.

H_{1a}: The relaxation and energising dimension of the memorable food experience affects satisfaction.

H_{1b}: The hospitable service experience dimension of the memorable food experience affects satisfaction.

H_{1c}: The aesthetic and servicescape dimension of the memorable food experience affects satisfaction.

H_{1d}: The learning exotic food culture dimension of the memorable food experience affects satisfaction.

H_{1e}: The sensory appeal and authentic experience dimension of the memorable food experience affects satisfaction.

H_{1f}: The hedonic food experience dimension of the memorable food experience affects satisfaction.

H_{1g}: The conviviality dimension of the memorable food experience affects satisfaction.

H_{1h}: The gastronomic novelty and curiosity dimension of memorable food experience affects satisfaction.

2.2. Satisfaction and Behavioural Intention

Behavioural intention is measured through variables such as the intention to revisit and to recommend. Dining experiences at visited destinations can shape individuals' perceptions positively or negatively, thereby influencing their future travel behaviour (Tsaur & Lo, 2020; Yılmaz, 2021). Lin (2014) found that tourists' dining experiences positively impact satisfaction and strengthen their intention to revisit. In other words, a unique, memorable dining experience at a destination can encourage individuals to return to that destination. Similarly, Piramanayagam et al. (2020) empirically demonstrated that local dining experiences play a crucial role in creating memorable moments, which, in turn, enhance satisfaction and revisit intentions. Likewise, Tsai (2016) identified a positive relationship between local dining experiences and place attachment, emphasising that stronger place attachment increases tourists' likelihood of revisiting. More recently, Onat and Güneren (2024), in a study conducted in Gaziantep, demonstrated that customer satisfaction has a significant positive effect on behavioural intention within a gastronomic tourism context. Accordingly, hypothesis H2 of this study is formulated as follows:

H₂: Satisfaction influences behavioural intention.

2.3. Food Involvement

Food involvement is an important factor influencing individuals' attitudes toward local gastronomic products, experiences, and local food purchasing behaviour (Bell & Marshall, 2003; Somers et al., 2014). Similarly, food involvement guides tourists' eating behaviours and determines how they will respond to new foods during their travels (Yılmaz, 2021). Studies in the field of tourism on food involvement have empirically supported that it influences tourists' decision-making processes at various stages of their travel, such as destination selection before travel (Chen & Huang, 2018), food choices during travel (Caber et al., 2018), and the consumption of destination-specific foods (Kim & Kim, 2017; Levitt et al., 2019). Tourists' food involvement influences multiple aspects of their travel experience. Tourists with a high level of food involvement tend to closely follow the preparation and presentation processes of the food and beverages they are interested in, gathering more information about them (Kyle & Chick, 2004; Robinson & Getz, 2016). For example, a domestic tourist visiting Gaziantep may enhance their dining experience by researching and becoming familiar with the local dishes they sample. Therefore, tourists interested in local cuisine are more likely to consume local foods (Kim & Kim, 2017). Thus, food involvement positively contributes to tourists' satisfaction and influences their behavioural intentions. Finally, studies have been conducted addressing the relationships between involvement, satisfaction, and behavioural intention (Kim et al., 2015). Based on these findings, the following hypotheses have been formulated.

H₃: Food involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between memorable food experience and satisfaction.



H_{3a}: Food involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between the relaxation and energising dimension of the memorable food experience and satisfaction.

H_{3b}: Food involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between the hospitable service experience dimension of the memorable food experience and satisfaction.

H_{3c}: Food involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between the aesthetic and servicescape dimension of the memorable food experience and satisfaction.

H_{3d}: Food involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between the learning exotic food culture dimension of the memorable food experience and satisfaction.

H_{3e}: Food involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between the sensory appeal and authentic experience dimension of the memorable food experience and satisfaction.

H_{3f}: Food involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between the hedonic food experience dimension of the memorable food experience and satisfaction.

H_{3g}: Food involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between the conviviality dimension of the memorable food experience and satisfaction.

H_{3h}: Food involvement has a moderating effect on the relationship between the gastronomic novelty and curiosity dimension of the memorable food experience and satisfaction.

3. Theoretical underpinning: the S-O-R theory and research model

The S-O-R theory, which was developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), consists of three components: stimulus (S), organism (O), and response (R). The theory was proposed within the scope of environmental psychology. Fundamentally, the S-O-R theory creates a mechanism for explaining human behaviour by analysing the cognitive and emotional states of individuals affected by environmental stimuli (Shah et al., 2020). The theory posits that the stimuli (S) that affect individuals influence their emotional states (O), and these effects lead to certain responses (R). The stimulus is expressed as an external factor that affects the individual, and the organism component consists of environmental elements that trigger the cognitive and emotional processes (Song et al., 2021). The organism explains the cognitive and emotional processes that mediate the relationship between the stimulus and the individual's responses (Wu & Li, 2018). The response is defined as the final decisions and behaviours based on the individual's emotional and cognitive states (Sherman et al., 1997). In tourism research, the S-O-R framework has also been applied to destination servicescape, demonstrating how physical environmental stimuli can shape tourists' internal evaluations and subsequent behavioural responses (Küçükerin et al., 2020).

While other robust frameworks, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Integrated Experience Satisfaction Loyalty models, offer high predictive precision for general tourism behaviours, they often emphasise rational, planned cognitive processes. The S-O-R paradigm was deliberately selected for this study because dining is an inherently sensory, affective, and environmentally driven activity. S-O-R is uniquely tailored to isolate specific external sensory and social cues (Stimuli) and to demonstrate how they are internalised into affective states (Organism), which then manifest as behavioural intention (Response). This makes it the superior theoretical lens for dissecting the multidimensional nature of memorable food experiences.

3.1. Stimulus: Memorable food experience

The stimulus component in the S-O-R model refers to the external factors that affect individuals. The external factors that affect individuals include environmental elements such as sight, sound, taste, and the overall atmosphere (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The S-O-R model is also used to examine studies specifically related to food experiences, in addition to gastronomic experience studies (Horng & Hsu, 2021; Şahin & Kılıçlar, 2023; Ülker & Karamustafa, 2024). In their study, Leong et al. (2020) address the food experience using the S-O-R model. The study examines the kitchen creativity factor as the stimulus component. Similarly, Horng and Hsu (2021) investigate the food experience itself as the stimulus component. In the study by Sultan et al. (2021), the organic food value factor is used as the stimulus component within the S-O-R model. Therefore, the dimensions of memorable food experiences, such as aesthetics and servicescape, sensory appeal, and hedonic food experiences, can be appropriately associated with the model as stimulus due to their ability to affect individuals' cognitive and emotional responses.

3.2. Organism: Satisfaction

In the S-O-R model, the organism component creates the link between the stimulus and the response. It also represents the cognitive, emotional, and physiological states of individuals. These factors should include individuals' attitudes, values, personality, and emotional states (Kim & Moon, 2009). Although originally organism components refer to emotional factors, studies have



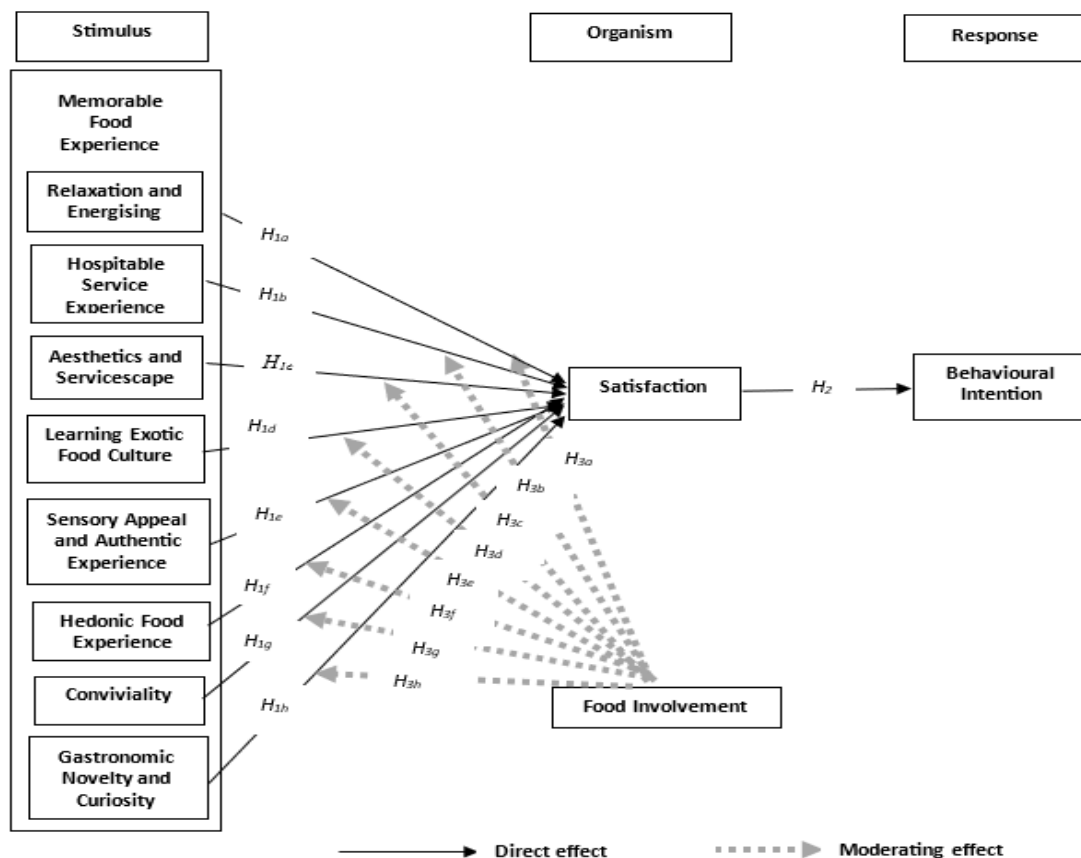
employed various variables for organism dimension (Lam et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2022). For instance, Fakfare and Sangpikul (2022) addressed the organism component with the factors of fear from external threats and satisfaction. Similarly, Jiang (2022) used the factors of entertainment and arousal as the organism component.

Wang et al. (2022) considered the organism component in their model of experience in relation to the satisfaction derived from the travel experience. Similarly, Siu et al. (2012) explored the organism component through the factors of emotion and satisfaction. Therefore, although the core of the S-O-R model is based on cognitive and emotional factors in the organism component, the studies reviewed provide evidence that satisfaction can be considered part of that component. Additionally, the memorable food experience, identified as the stimulus component, is expected to influence the satisfaction, which is considered the organism component. While some traditional frameworks conceptualise satisfaction as a final post consumption response, contemporary experiential models in tourism increasingly operationalise satisfaction as an internal affective and cognitive state of the organism that mediates the relationship between external environmental stimuli and ultimate behavioural responses (e.g., revisit or recommendation intentions) (Chen et al., 2022). In the context of gastronomic tourism, the memorable food experience (Stimulus) triggers an internal evaluative and emotional state of fulfilment (Satisfaction as the Organism), which subsequently drives the tourist's future actions (Behavioural Intention as the Response). This justifies the positioning of satisfaction as the central organismic variable in our conceptual model.

3.3. Response: Behavioural Intention

The response component in the S-O-R model is considered the result of the organism component (Sherman et al., 1997). In many studies based on the S-O-R model in the field of tourism, the response dimension is explained through factors such as repurchase intention (Rodríguez-Torrico et al., 2020), word-of-mouth communication (Wu & Li, 2018), behavioural intention (Lee, 2021; Jiang, 2022), and satisfaction (Su et al., 2020). As shown in relevant studies, the behavioural intention factor is prominent within the response component. Therefore, the behavioural intention factor can be used as the response component in this study. In light of all these considerations, the S-O-R theory can provide a theoretical foundation for the research model created in this study. In summary, the dimensions of the memorable food experience (as a stimulus) are expected to affect satisfaction, considered the organism component, and this component is expected to stimulate a specific behavioural intention as a response. The research model developed in this context and the hypotheses, supported by the relevant literature, are explained below (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research model



Source: Own Elaboration.



4. Methodology

4.1. Sample and data collection

Gaziantep was selected as the study site because it has been part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network since 2015. In addition, Gaziantep is a city with a rich culinary culture. Therefore, Gaziantep is one of the prominent destinations for gastronomic tourism. The study sample consists of domestic tourists who visited Gaziantep in September and October 2022 and experienced the region's local dishes. The data of the study were collected through a self-administered survey. Non-probability sampling methods, specifically purposive and convenience sampling, were used in data collection. The criteria for purposive sampling in this study were as follows: participants had to be over 18 years old and have experienced local dishes unique to Gaziantep. A pilot study was conducted with 70 domestic tourists to test the construct validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Based on the results of the pilot study, the questionnaire was used without modification. A total of 525 questionnaires were obtained. 42 incomplete and randomly completed questionnaires were excluded from the analysis. Mahalanobis distances were calculated to detect multivariate outliers; 55 questionnaires were excluded from the analysis. Consequently, the final analysis was conducted with 428 valid responses.

4.2. Survey instrument

The questionnaire used in this study consists of five sections. The first section includes the Memorable Food Experience Scale, developed by Badu-Baiden and Kim (2022), which has been validated and has a reliability score. The second section contains the Food Involvement Scale, developed by Kim, Suh, and Eves (2010), which is a single-dimension scale with 6 items. The third section uses the Satisfaction Scale, which is a single-dimensional, 3-item scale compiled from previous studies by Kim (2018). The fourth section measures Behavioural Intention using 3 items, based on Piramanayagam et al.'s (2020) study. Finally, the fifth section consists of questions regarding the demographic information and travel behaviour of the participants. The scales used in the study are in English. Since the scales were translated into Turkish, translation equivalence needs to be ensured. Translation equivalence refers to comparing the original and translated versions of a scale after translation (Prieto, 1992). The scales used in this study were translated first from English into Turkish and then from Turkish into English by two different researchers, who are experts in gastronomy and culinary arts and are fluent in English. The researchers confirmed that the translated expressions were clear. Subsequently, the prepared scales were sent to 15 faculty members who are experts in gastronomy and culinary arts to provide expert opinions. Based on their feedback, the item wordings were discussed, and the final version of the scale items was established. The items were rated using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

5. Results

5.1. Participants' profile

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the study are presented in Table 1. Regarding gender distribution, 52.3% of participants were female and 47.7% were male; additionally, 57% were married. Regarding education levels, 58.9% of the participants held a bachelor's degree, while 23.1% held a graduate degree. A significant proportion of the participants (77.6%) were aged 25–44. Among participants, 47.7% were employed in the private sector and 37.1% were civil servants. Moreover, the majority of the participants (50.5%) had a monthly income of 11,501 TRY or higher.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	224	52,3
	Male	204	47,7
Marital status	Married	244	57,0
	Single	184	43,0
Educational level	High School	77	18,0
	Bachelor's degree	252	58,9
	Graduate degree	99	23,1
Age	18-24 years old	65	15,2
	25-34 years old	194	45,3
	35-44 years old	138	32,2
	Over 45 years old	31	7,2
Occupation	Civil Servant	159	37,1
	Private sector employee	204	47,7
	Employer	9	2,1
	Student	32	7,5



	Housewife	24	5,6
Income level	Less than TRY 5500	75	17,5
	TRY 5501-8500	54	12,6
	TRY 8501-11500	83	19,4
	TRY 11501-14500	86	20,1
	More than TRY 14501	130	30,4

Source: Survey's data.

5.2. Measurement model

Before evaluating the measurement model, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess common method bias (CMB) because the data were collected through a self-administered survey. All construct items were entered into an exploratory factor analysis without rotation. The results revealed that the first single factor accounted for 30.56% of the total variance, which is well below the recommended threshold of 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Therefore, common method bias is not a major concern in this study. To validate the measurement model used in the study, confirmatory factor analysis was applied to all scales employed. The Maximum Likelihood technique was employed for estimating the variables due to the normal distribution of the data (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010). Before proceeding with the analysis of the study, it is recommended to check the construct validity and discriminant validity of the measurement model (Hair et al., 2013). Although the standardised factor loadings for the measured constructs are preferred to be at least 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017), values of 0.50 and above (Hair et al., 2013; Bollen, 1989) can also be considered acceptable. As shown in Table 2, the standardised factor loadings for each variable in the measurement model range from 0.506 (AS 1) to 0.935 (CO 2), and the t-values for the variables are also at an acceptable and significant level (***: $p < 0.001$) (≥ 2.58) (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2017). Confirmatory factor analysis applied to the measurement model, the model fit values obtained ($\chi^2=2223.865$; df. =1117; χ^2 / df. =1.991; CFI=0.929; NFI=0.867; IFI=0.929; TLI=0.922; RMSEA=0.048; SRMR=0.045) are found to be within acceptable fit indices (Byrne, 2016; Kline, 2016; Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, the measurement model is acceptable and demonstrates fit validity (Table 2).

Table 2. Result of Measurement Model

Construct	Items	Factor loadings	t-value	AVE	MSV	ASV	CR	CA
Relaxation and energising				0,53	0,17	0,08	0,87	,872
	RE1	0,678	fixed*					
	RE2	0,816	14,649					
	RE3	0,802	14,443					
	RE4	0,747	13,615					
	RE5	0,732	13,387					
	RE6	0,606	11,296					
Hospitable service experience				0,59	0,33	0,17	0,89	,898
	HSE1	0,792	fixed*					
	HSE2	0,860	19,641					
	HSE3	0,871	19,937					
	HSE4	0,709	15,463					
	HSE5	0,680	14,686					
	HSE6	0,611	12,929					
Aesthetics and servicescape				0,53	0,33	0,16	0,86	,887
	AS1	0,506	fixed*					
	AS2	0,559	8,744					
	AS3	0,601	11,325					
	AS4	0,861	10,911					
	AS5	0,892	11,050					
	AS6	0,866	10,933					
Learning exotic food culture				0,67	0,46	0,28	0,91	,910
	LEFC1	0,795	fixed*					
	LEFC2	0,842	19,505					
	LEFC3	0,842	19,525					
	LEFC4	0,802	18,299					



	LEFC5	0,815	18,698					
Sensory appeal and authentic experience				0,78	0,51	0,28	0,93	,936
	SAAE1	0,872	fixed*					
	SAAE2	0,892	25,944					
	SAAE3	0,895	26,130					
	SAAE4	0,888	25,722					
Hedonic food experience				0,75	0,51	0,29	0,93	,939
	HFE1	0,871	fixed*					
	HFE2	0,888	25,824					
	HFE3	0,895	26,250					
	HFE4	0,817	22,031					
	HFE5	0,870	24,782					
Conviviality				0,73	0,47	0,27	0,89	,886
	Co1	0,776	fixed*					
	Co2	0,935	20,943					
	Co3	0,856	19,303					
Gastronomic novelty and curiosity				0,66	0,53	0,23	0,85	,850
	GNC1	0,795	fixed*					
	GNC2	0,870	18,514					
	GNC3	0,773	16,583					
Satisfaction				0,66	0,59	0,36	0,85	,856
	Sa1	0,771	fixed*					
	Sa2	0,853	18,590					
	Sa3	0,819	17,748					
Behavioural intention				0,66	0,59	0,25	0,85	,852
	BI1	0,824	fixed*					
	BI2	0,845	18,916					
	BI3	0,765	16,929					
Food involvement				0,55	0,03	0,02	0,88	,880
	FI1	0,778	fixed*					
	FI2	0,803	17,125					
	FI3	0,789	16,798					
	FI4	0,762	16,142					
	FI5	0,718	15,093					
	FI6	0,606	12,460					

Note: χ^2 : 2223,865; df: 1117; $p < 0,001$; χ^2 / df : 1,991 CFI: 0,929; NFI: 0,867; IFI: 0,929; TLI: 0,922; RMSEA: 0,048; SRMR: 0,045

(*) The indicator was fixed at 1. (***) $p < 0,001$

AVE: average variance extracted; MSV: Maximum Shared Variance Squared; ASV: Average Shared Squared Variance;

CR: Composite reliability; CA: Cronbach's alpha

Source: Survey's data.

Discriminant validity refers to testing whether all the factors in the measurement model measure constructs that are distinct from one another. The Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to test discriminant validity. According to this criterion, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each factor must be greater than the correlation of that factor with other factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In the measurement model of this study, the AVE value for each factor exceeded its correlations with all other factors (Table 3), indicating that the criterion has been met. Discriminant validity is also verified using the criteria $MSV < AVE$; $ASV < AVE$; $VAVE > \text{Factor Correlations}$. As shown in Table 3, the factors' AVE values are higher than their MSV and ASV values. Additionally, it was found that the VAVE values also show high factor correlations. Therefore, the measurement model has achieved discriminant validity.

**Table 3. Discriminant Validity of The Measurement Model**

Construct	AVE	MSV	ASV	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.RE	0,53	0,17	0,08	0,734										
2.HSE	0,59	0,33	0,17	0,414	0,771									
3.AS	0,53	0,33	0,16	0,326	0,580	0,728								
4.LEFC	0,67	0,46	0,28	0,274	0,390	0,371	0,819							
5.SAAE	0,78	0,51	0,28	0,267	0,394	0,459	0,666	0,887						
6.HFE	0,75	0,51	0,29	0,272	0,435	0,421	0,679	0,719	0,869					
7.CO	0,73	0,47	0,27	0,283	0,372	0,412	0,647	0,625	0,644	0,858				
8.GNC	0,66	0,53	0,23	0,255	0,378	0,344	0,564	0,510	0,538	0,586	0,814			
9.SA	0,66	0,59	0,36	0,391	0,539	0,521	0,655	0,651	0,659	0,691	0,729	0,815		
10.BI	0,66	0,59	0,25	0,269	0,350	0,365	0,607	0,556	0,601	0,513	0,513	0,772	0,812	
11.FI	0,55	0,03	0,02	0,106	0,178	0,197	0,143	0,192	0,138	0,149	0,187	0,177	0,164	0,746

Note: The values in italics with bold show the square root of the explained mean-variance (√AVE), while the other values in the same column show the correlations between the relevant constructs.

RE: Relaxation and energising; **HSE:** Hospitable service experience; **AS:** Aesthetics and servicescape; **LEFC:** Learning exotic food culture; **SAAE:** Sensory appeal and authentic experience; **HFE:** Hedonic food experience; **CO:** Conviviality; **GNC:** Gastronomic novelty and curiosity; **SA:** Satisfaction; **BI:** Behavioural intention; **FI:** Food involvement

Source: Survey's data.

5.3. Structural model

The structural model, tested on the entire sample, was evaluated using goodness-of-fit indices. The results demonstrated that the model exhibited acceptable fit indices (CMIN=1953.058, df=863, CMIN/df=2.263 ($p < 0.001$), CFI=0.923, NFI=0.871, IFI=0.923, TLI=0.916, RMSEA=0.054, SRMR=0.049) and fell within the acceptable fit range (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013; Hair et al., 2017) (Table 4). Consequently, the structural model exhibits an acceptable fit.

Table 4. Results of the Structural Model

	Hypotheses			β	t-value	p	R ²	Support
H _{1a}	Relaxation and energising	→	Satisfaction	0,083	2,129	0,033	0,728	✓
H _{1b}	Hospitable service experience	→	Satisfaction	0,102	2,147	0,032	0,728	✓
H _{1c}	Aesthetics and servicescape	→	Satisfaction	0,096	2,049	0,040	0,728	✓
H _{1d}	Learning exotic food culture	→	Satisfaction	0,126	2,236	0,025	0,728	✓
H _{1e}	Sensory appeal and authentic experience	→	Satisfaction	0,116	2,045	0,041	0,728	✓
H _{1f}	Hedonic food experience	→	Satisfaction	0,114	1,972	0,049	0,728	✓
H _{1g}	Conviviality	→	Satisfaction	0,158	2,905	0,004	0,728	✓
H _{1h}	Gastronomic novelty and curiosity	→	Satisfaction	0,343	6,631	***	0,728	✓
H ₂	Satisfaction	→	Behavioural intention	0,772	13,613	***	0,597	✓

Note: β : Standardised path coefficients ✓: Support (***) : $p < 0.001$; $p < 0.05$

t-value: ≥ 2.58 ($p < 0.001$); ≥ 1.96 ($p < 0.05$)

χ^2 : 1953,058; df: 863; $p < 0.001$; χ^2/df : 2,263 CFI: 0.923; NFI: 0.871; IFI: 0.923; TLI: 0.916; RMSEA: 0.054; SRMR: 0.049

Source: Survey's data.

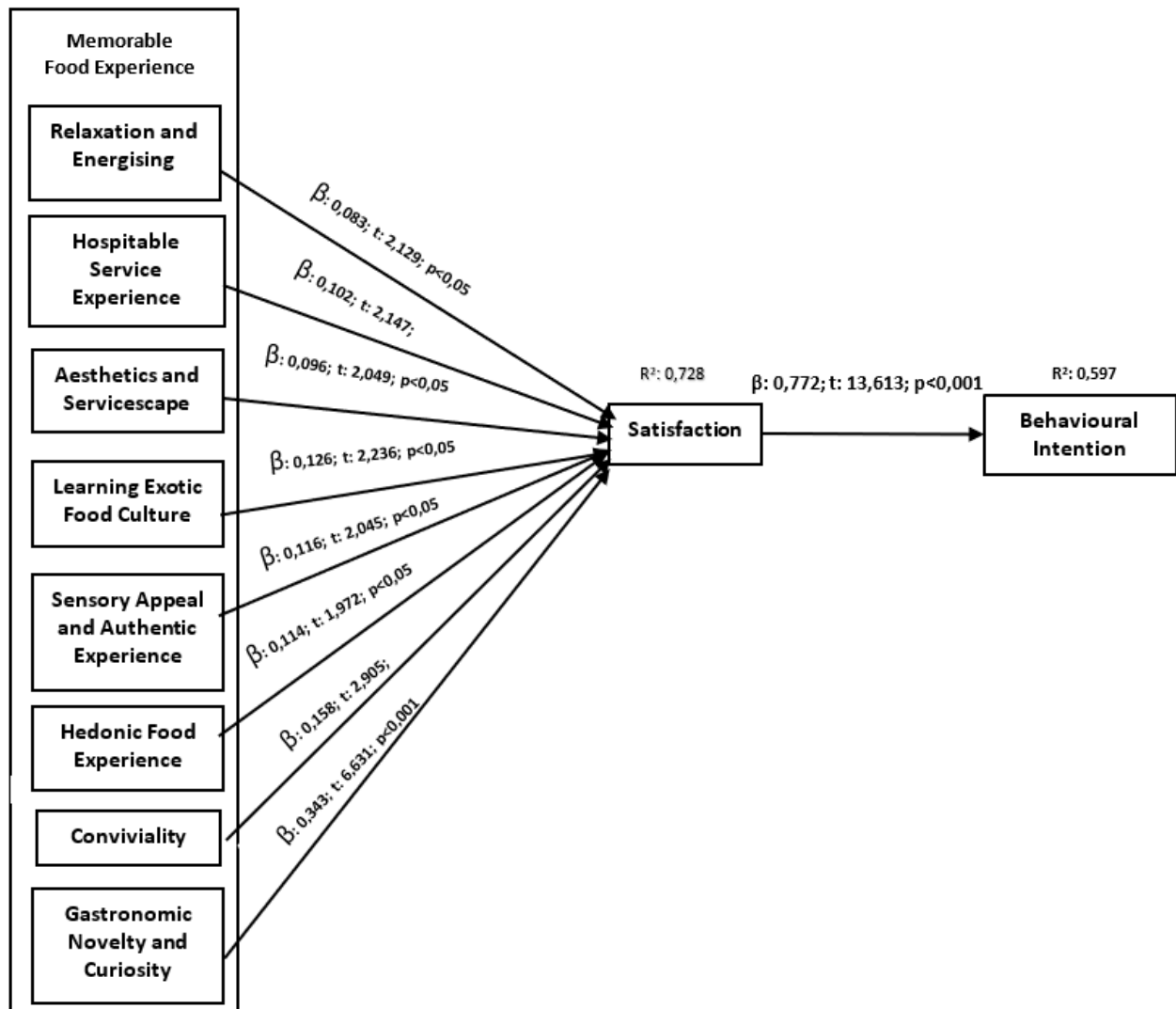
In the structural model test of the sample, β values, t-values, p-values, and R² values were considered. Additionally, when interpreting the standardised path coefficients in the measurement model, the effect size classification proposed by Kline (2016) was considered. According to Kline (2016), beta coefficients below 0.10 indicate a low level of effect, beta coefficients between 0.11 and 0.49 indicate a moderate level of effect, and beta coefficients above 0.50 indicate a high level of effect. Furthermore, whether the hypotheses were supported was determined based on whether the t-values were outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96 and the significance level of the path between the variables (Hair et al., 2011). Accordingly, the hypotheses H_{1a}, H_{1b}, H_{1c}, H_{1d}, H_{1e}, H_{1f}, H_{1g}, H_{1h}, and H₂ were supported. When examining the standardised path coefficients of the supported hypotheses, H_{1a} and H_{1c} showed a low level of effect, H_{1b}, H_{1d}, H_{1e}, H_{1f}, H_{1g}, and H_{1h} showed a moderate level of effect, and H₂ showed a high level of



effect (Kline, 2016). Additionally, R^2 was used to determine the percentage of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. For instance, the memorable food experience variable explains satisfaction at a rate of 72.8%

According to the findings, the dimension of learning exotic food culture from the memorable food experience has been shown to have moderate, positive, and statistically significant impact on satisfaction ($\beta=0.126$, $t=2.236$, $p<0.05$). In other words, the experience of learning about different food cultures during their food experiences in Gaziantep leads to an increase in the satisfaction of domestic tourists. Therefore, the hypothesis "The learning exotic food culture aspect of the memorable food experience affects satisfaction." (H1d) is supported.

Figure 2. Result of the Structural Equation Model



Source: Own Elaboration.

According to the findings presented in Figure 2, the dimension of memorable food experience related to gastronomic novelty and curiosity has a positive, moderate, and statistically significant effect on satisfaction ($\beta=0.343$, $t=6.631$, $p<0.001$). This relationship supports the eighth hypothesis of the study (H1h). Furthermore, under the second hypothesis of the research model, it has been demonstrated that satisfaction positively, strongly, and statistically significantly affects behavioural intention ($\beta=0.772$, $t=13.613$, $p<0.001$). In other words, local tourists visiting Gaziantep, who are satisfied with their food experiences, are more likely to exhibit strong behavioural intentions. Thus, hypothesis H2 is supported. After examining the structural equation modelling of the entire sample, we present the analysis phase focused on the moderating role of food involvement.



5.4. Moderating Effect Analysis Results

Before conducting the path analysis model, it is necessary to standardise the values of the exogenous (independent) variables and the moderator variable if they are continuous (Aiken et al., 1991). The data for these variables were standardised using SPSS 26 software. After standardisation, an interaction effect variable was created by multiplying the standardised exogenous variables by the moderator variable. More specifically, the hospitable service experience dimension of the memorable food experience was multiplied by the food involvement variable, resulting in the interaction term $zHSE \times zFI$.

Table 5. Path Analysis on The Moderating Role of Food Involvement

Hypotheses	Variable	β	Standard error	t-value	p-value	R ²	Decision
H_{3a}	RE → SA	0,324	0,037	7,138	***		Reject
	FI → SA	0,125	0,037	2,760	0,006		
	RE * FI → SA	-0,053	0,037	-1,177	0,239	0,13	
H_{3b}	HSE → SA	0,466	0,035	10,812	***		Reject
	FI → SA	0,087	0,035	2,042	0,041		
	HSE * FI → SA	-0,053	0,037	-1,234	0,217	0,23	
H_{3c}	AS → SA	0,418	0,036	9,501	***		Reject
	FI → SA	0,094	0,036	2,132	0,033		
	AS * FI → SA	-0,012	0,033	-0,275	0,783	0,19	
H_{3d}	LEFC → SA	0,568	0,032	14,520	***		Accept
	FI → SA	0,092	0,032	2,357	0,018		
	LEFC * FI → SA	0,100	0,034	2,573	0,010	0,35	
H_{3e}	SAAE → SA	0,565	0,033	14,070	***		Reject
	FI → SA	0,061	0,033	1,518	0,129		
	SAAE * FI → SA	0,020	0,034	0,512	0,609	0,33	
H_{3f}	HFE → SA	0,576	0,032	14,574	***		Reject
	FI → SA	0,086	0,032	2,190	0,029		
	HFE * FI → SA	0,012	0,036	0,307	0,759	0,35	
H_{3g}	CO → SA	0,611	0,031	16,006	***		Reject
	FI → SA	0,074	0,031	1,944	0,052		
	CO * FI → SA	-0,007	0,033	-0,190	0,850	0,39	
H_{3h}	GNC → SA	0,626	0,031	16,623	***		Accept
	FI → SA	0,057	0,031	1,514	0,130		
	GNC * FI → SA	-0,074	0,030	-2,001	0,045	0,41	

Note: β : Standardised path coefficients, (***): $p < 0,001$; ($p < 0,05$)

RE: Relaxation and energising; **HSE:** Hospitable service experience; **AS:** Aesthetics and servicescape; **LEFC:** Learning exotic food culture; **SAAE:** Sensory appeal and authentic experience; **HFE:** Hedonic food experience; **CO:** Conviviality; **GNC:** Gastronomic novelty and curiosity; **SA:** Satisfaction; **FI:** Food involvement

Source: Survey's data.

In the path analysis model, a statistically significant effect of the interaction term between the independent variable and the moderator on the dependent variable indicates that the hypothesis regarding the moderating role is supported (Frazier et al., 2004). Based on this, hypotheses H3d and H3h, which examine the moderating role of food involvement, are supported whereas hypotheses H3a, H3b, H3c, H3e, H3f, and H3g are not supported ($p < 0,001$; $p < 0,05$). A slope test is performed after identifying a significant moderating effect.



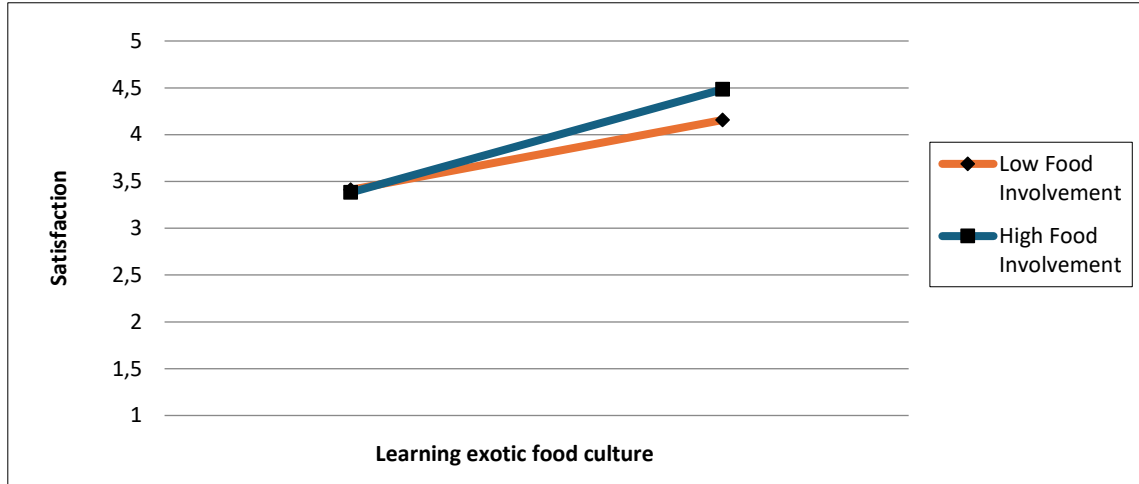
Table 6. The Moderating Role of Food Involvement

Variable	Food Involvement					
	High			Low		
	β	t-value	p-value	β	t-value	p-value
LEFC $\rightarrow$ SA	0,551	12,321	0,000	0,373	8,341	0,000
GNC $\rightarrow$ SA	0,450	10,062	0,000	0,568	12,701	0,000

LEFC: Learning exotic food culture; GNC: Gastronomic novelty and curiosity; SA: Satisfaction

Source: Survey's data.

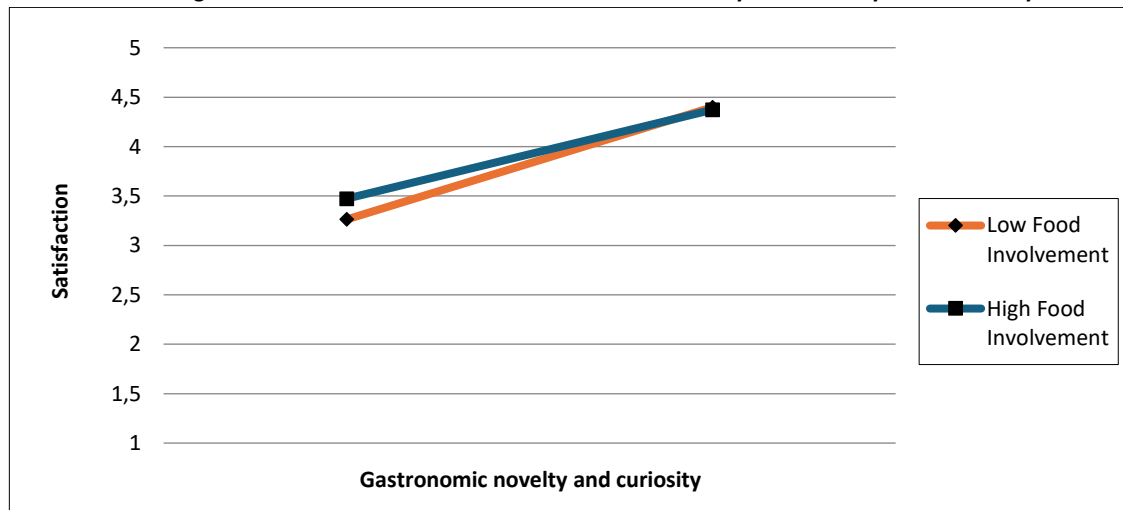
Figure 3. The Moderating Role of Food Involvement in the Effect of Learning exotic food culture on Satisfaction



Source: Own Elaboration.

The dimensions of learning exotic food culture ($\beta=0.568$, $t=14.520$, $p<0.001$) and food involvement ($\beta=0.092$, $t=2.357$, $p<0.05$) positively affect satisfaction (Table 5). The interaction between learning about exotic food culture and food involvement on satisfaction was statistically significant ($\beta=0.100$, $t=2.573$, $p<0.05$). In other words, food involvement plays an important role in the effect of learning about exotic food culture on domestic tourists' satisfaction with food experiences in Gaziantep. Additionally, the model explains 35% of the variance in satisfaction. Therefore, the H3d hypothesis of the study is supported. Differences in the levels of food involvement in the relationship between learning about exotic food culture and satisfaction are indicated in Table 6 and shown in Figure 3. As learning about exotic food culture increases, the satisfaction rates of domestic tourists with both low ($\beta=0.373$, $t=8.341$, $p<0.001$) and high ($\beta=0.551$, $t=12.321$, $p<0.001$) food involvement also increase.

Figure 4. The Moderating Role of Food Involvement in the Gastronomic Novelty and Curiosity in Gastronomy on Satisfaction



Source: Own Elaboration.



The moderating effect of food involvement on the relationship between the gastronomic novelty-and-curiosity dimension and satisfaction was statistically significant ($\beta=-0.074$, $t=-2.001$, $p<0.05$). This finding indicates that food involvement plays a moderating role in this relationship. Furthermore, the model explains 41% of the variance in satisfaction. Based on this, H3h is supported. According to the simple-slope analysis presented in Table 6 and Figure 4, the effects of gastronomic novelty and curiosity on satisfaction are significant for both high ($\beta=0.450$, $t=10.062$, $p<0.001$) and low ($\beta=0.568$, $t=12.701$, $p<0.001$) levels of food involvement. Contrary to expectations, the effect is stronger for domestic tourists with low food involvement than for those with high food involvement. In other words, as food involvement increases, the impact of gastronomic novelty and curiosity on satisfaction slightly diminishes.

6. Discussion

This study examined the relationships among eight dimensions of memorable food experience, satisfaction, and behavioural intention within the S-O-R framework, and investigated the moderating role of food involvement. The findings provide strong support for the proposed stimulus–organism–response sequence. All eight dimensions of memorable food experience positively influenced satisfaction, while satisfaction had a strong positive effect on behavioural intention. Together, the dimensions of memorable food experience explained 72.8% of the variance in satisfaction, while satisfaction explained 59.7% of the variance in behavioural intention. However, the effects of the individual experience dimensions differed considerably, and food involvement moderated only two of the eight relationships between memorable food experience and satisfaction.

First, the positive effects of all eight dimensions of memorable food experience on satisfaction reinforce previous evidence that tourists' evaluations of gastronomic experiences extend beyond the food product itself. Earlier studies have shown that memorable food experiences incorporate sensory, cultural, social, service-related, and environmental components (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2019). The present findings extend this evidence by demonstrating that relaxation and energising, hospitable service, aesthetics and servicescape, learning exotic food culture, sensory appeal and authenticity, hedonic experience, conviviality, and gastronomic novelty and curiosity all contribute significantly to satisfaction. This result is also consistent with research showing that the physical and social environment of restaurants, sensory characteristics of food, authenticity, and service interactions shape customers' dining experiences and evaluations (Jeong & Jang, 2018; Jin et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2020; Muskat et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, the dimensions differed substantially in their explanatory importance. Gastronomic novelty and curiosity had the strongest effect on satisfaction, followed by conviviality, whereas relaxation, energising, aesthetics and servicescape had comparatively weaker effects. The prominence of novelty and curiosity is consistent with research emphasising the role of distinctive, authentic, and novel gastronomic stimuli in generating memorable experiences. Recent evidence indicates that sensory stimuli can generate memorable dining experiences through cognitive evaluations of novelty and meaningfulness (Kim et al., 2025), while authenticity and the combination of taste and atmosphere have also been identified as important antecedents of memorable dining experiences (Maulana et al., 2025; Sardesai et al., 2025). The present findings suggest that, in a strongly gastronomy-oriented destination such as Gaziantep, tourists may derive greater satisfaction from discovering distinctive foods and expanding their gastronomic knowledge than from more general environmental attributes.

The relatively smaller effects of relaxation, energising, aesthetics, and servicescape should therefore not be interpreted as indicating that these attributes are unimportant. Previous research has demonstrated that ambience, interior design, service environments, and other servicescape characteristics affect dining evaluations (Jin et al., 2019; Kim & Moon, 2009; Kim et al., 2020). However, their effects may be less pronounced when the principal motivation for visiting the destination is associated with its distinctive gastronomy. In Gaziantep, the culinary product itself—particularly its novelty, cultural distinctiveness, authenticity, and opportunities for learning—may be more salient than the broader physical environment in which consumption occurs. This finding adds nuance to previous research by showing that the relative contribution of different experience attributes may depend on the destination's gastronomic characteristics and positioning.

Conviviality also emerged as one of the strongest predictors of satisfaction. This finding supports previous research suggesting that gastronomic tourism is inherently social and that sharing food experiences with companions, local residents, restaurant staff, and other participants contributes to the memorability of these experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Sthapit, 2017; Stone et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2019). The results, therefore, suggest that memorable food tourism should not be understood only in terms of food quality or sensory consumption. Social interaction constitutes an important part of the experience and contributes independently to tourists' satisfaction.

Second, satisfaction had a strong positive effect on behavioural intention. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that positive culinary and dining experiences increase tourist satisfaction and, in turn, strengthen intentions to revisit



and recommend a destination (Lin, 2014; Muskat et al., 2019; Onat & Güneren, 2024; Piramanayagam et al., 2020). It also supports the broader tourism literature, which shows that memorable experiences and satisfaction contribute to subsequent behavioural responses (Assaker & Hallak, 2013; Huang & Hsu, 2009; Oh et al., 2007). In the context of local food consumption, Tsai (2016) likewise found that gastronomic experiences contribute to place attachment and future destination-related behaviour. The strong satisfaction–behavioural intention relationship identified here, therefore, reinforces the organism–response mechanism proposed by S-O-R: tourists’ internal evaluation of their gastronomic experience provides an important mechanism through which experiential stimuli are translated into future behavioural intentions.

Third, the moderation analysis provides one of the study’s most distinctive findings. Food involvement moderated only two of the eight relationships between memorable food experience and satisfaction: learning exotic food culture and gastronomic novelty and curiosity. Previous research has established that food involvement influences tourists’ food choices, information-seeking behaviour, destination-related decisions, and local food consumption (Caber et al., 2018; Chen & Huang, 2018; Kim et al., 2015; Levitt et al., 2019; Robinson & Getz, 2016). However, the present findings show that food involvement does not uniformly affect how tourists evaluate all components of a memorable food experience. Rather, its moderating influence appears to be dimension-specific.

More specifically, food involvement strengthened the positive relationship between learning exotic food culture and satisfaction. Tourists with greater food involvement are generally more interested in food-related information and more willing to engage deeply with gastronomic experiences (Robinson & Getz, 2016). It is therefore reasonable to expect that the satisfaction derived from learning about unfamiliar culinary practices, ingredients, preparation methods, and local food culture grows stronger as involvement increases. This finding extends previous work on food involvement by showing that its influence is not limited to food selection or consumption behaviour but also shapes how tourists cognitively process the cultural-learning component of gastronomic experiences.

In contrast, food involvement weakened the positive relationship between the gastronomic novelty and curiosity dimension and satisfaction. Although novelty and curiosity increased satisfaction at both high and low levels of food involvement, the effect was stronger among tourists with low food involvement. This is a particularly interesting result. Tourists who are already highly involved with food may possess greater gastronomic knowledge and experience and may therefore require more distinctive or sophisticated stimuli to perceive an experience as genuinely novel. By contrast, tourists with lower food involvement may encounter unfamiliar foods and culinary practices less frequently, making novelty and discovery more influential in their satisfaction. This interpretation is consistent with the broader understanding of involvement as reflecting the personal relevance and importance of food in an individual’s life (Bell & Marshall, 2003; Somers et al., 2014).

Finally, food involvement did not significantly moderate the effects of relaxation and energising, hospitable service, aesthetics and servicescape, sensory appeal and authenticity, hedonic food experience, or conviviality on satisfaction. These non-significant moderation effects are theoretically informative rather than merely unsupported hypotheses. They suggest that certain aspects of memorable food experiences generate satisfaction relatively independently of tourists’ pre-existing level of food involvement. Enjoyable social interaction, hospitable treatment, sensory pleasure, authenticity, and an appealing environment may therefore have broad experiential value for gastronomic tourists irrespective of the personal importance they attach to food. Overall, the moderation results indicate that food involvement acts as a selective boundary condition within the S-O-R process rather than as a general amplifier of memorable food experiences.

7. Conclusions

This study examined how the multidimensional components of memorable food experiences influence tourist satisfaction and behavioural intention and whether these relationships depend on tourists’ level of food involvement. The findings support the proposed S-O-R process: the dimensions of memorable food experience function as stimuli that influence satisfaction as an internal evaluative state, which in turn strongly determines behavioural intention.

All eight dimensions of memorable food experience positively influenced satisfaction, although their effects varied substantially. Gastronomic novelty and curiosity emerged as the strongest predictors, followed by conviviality, indicating the particular importance of discovery, cultural distinctiveness, and social interaction in creating satisfying gastronomic experiences. Satisfaction, in turn, strongly increased behavioural intention, confirming its central role in translating memorable food experiences into tourists’ intentions to revisit and recommend.

The moderation findings provide further insight by demonstrating that food involvement does not affect all components of the gastronomic experience equally. Higher food involvement strengthened the contribution of learning about exotic food culture to satisfaction but weakened the effect of gastronomic novelty and curiosity. The remaining six relationships were unaffected by food involvement. Thus, rather than functioning as a universal moderator, food involvement represents a dimension-specific boundary condition that changes how particular cognitive and exploratory elements of food experiences translate into satisfaction.



Overall, the findings demonstrate that memorable gastronomic experiences arise from the interplay among sensory, cultural, social, environmental, hedonic, and service-related components. However, the relative importance of these components varies, and tourists' personal relationship with food further conditions some of these effects.

7.1. Theoretical implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the literature on gastronomic tourism and memorable experiences. First, it extends the application of the S-O-R framework to memorable food experiences by operationalising the stimulus not as a single environmental attribute but as a multidimensional experiential construct. The results demonstrate that sensory, environmental, service-related, social, cultural-learning, hedonic, and novelty-related dimensions can simultaneously function as stimuli that shape satisfaction as an organismic response and, subsequently, behavioural intention. This provides a more fine-grained application of S-O-R to gastronomic tourism than models based on isolated environmental or dining attributes.

Second, the findings reinforce the theoretical role of satisfaction as the organism component connecting external experiential stimuli with subsequent behavioural responses. The strong relationship between satisfaction and behavioural intention demonstrates that memorable food experiences do not directly determine the final behavioural outcome; instead, tourists first evaluate and internalise their experience through satisfaction, which then influences future behavioural intentions. This supports the sequential logic underlying the proposed stimulus–organism–response model.

Third, the study identifies substantial differences in the relative importance of the eight experience dimensions. Gastronomic novelty, curiosity, and conviviality contributed more strongly to satisfaction than relaxation, energising, aesthetics, and servicescape. This demonstrates that multidimensional experience attributes should not be assumed to contribute equally to the organismic response and highlights the value of disaggregating memorable food experiences into their constituent dimensions.

Fourth, and most importantly, the study extends the S-O-R framework by incorporating food involvement as a boundary condition. Rather than uniformly intensifying stimulus–organism relationships, food involvement strengthened one relationship, weakened another, and had no significant moderating effect on the remaining six. This finding provides a more contingent understanding of S-O-R processes in gastronomic tourism. Individual characteristics do not necessarily amplify the influence of all environmental and experiential stimuli in the same direction; instead, their role depends on the specific type of stimulus being processed. Food involvement should therefore be conceptualised as a selective rather than universal moderator of gastronomic experience formation.

7.2. Practical implications

The findings also provide several implications for restaurant managers, destination management organisations, and other stakeholders in gastronomic destinations. First, because gastronomic novelty and curiosity had the strongest effect on satisfaction, managers should give particular attention to opportunities for discovery and differentiation. Restaurants can highlight distinctive regional dishes, ingredients, preparation techniques, and culinary traditions rather than simply offering food that tourists can easily encounter elsewhere. Menus, staff interactions, and other communication tools can explain what makes a dish distinctive and encourage visitors to explore unfamiliar aspects of the destination's gastronomy.

Second, the relatively strong role of conviviality suggests that managers should design gastronomic experiences as both social and culinary encounters. Opportunities for interaction with restaurant staff, local residents, producers, and travelling companions can enhance tourists' experiences. Shared dining formats, visible food preparation, interaction with chefs or producers, and local food events can strengthen the social dimension of gastronomic consumption.

Third, the positive effect of learning exotic food culture, combined with its stronger effect among highly food-involved tourists, indicates the importance of incorporating cultural learning and storytelling into the dining experience. Restaurant staff should be able to communicate the history, provenance, ingredients, preparation methods, and cultural meaning of local dishes. Highly food-involved visitors may be particularly receptive to detailed explanations, culinary demonstrations, workshops, market visits, or opportunities to interact with producers.

Fourth, the moderation effect involving gastronomic novelty suggests that segmentation may be beneficial. Tourists with lower food involvement appear particularly responsive to novelty and discovery, whereas highly food-involved tourists may require more specialised and distinctive gastronomic experiences to generate the same sense of novelty. Managers can therefore differentiate between accessible discovery experiences for general tourists and deeper, more sophisticated culinary experiences for food enthusiasts.

Finally, the fact that all eight experience dimensions significantly increased satisfaction means that managers should not disregard service, ambience, sensory appeal, authenticity, relaxation, or hedonic enjoyment simply because some effects were smaller. Instead, gastronomic destinations should provide a coherent overall experience while prioritising those attributes shown to be



particularly influential. For Gaziantep as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, this means combining distinctive local cuisine with cultural interpretation, hospitable service, social interaction, and opportunities for visitors to explore and learn about the destination's culinary heritage.

7.3. Limitations and future research directions

This study has several limitations that also provide opportunities for future research. First, the research was conducted in Gaziantep, a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, and the findings therefore reflect the characteristics of a destination with a particularly strong gastronomic identity. Future studies could replicate the model in other UNESCO Cities of Gastronomy, including Hatay and Afyonkarahisar, and compare the relative importance of memorable food experience dimensions across destinations. Second, the sample comprised domestic tourists. International visitors may evaluate authenticity, novelty, cultural learning, and other dimensions differently because of their cultural backgrounds and prior gastronomic experiences. Future studies could therefore compare domestic and international tourists or conduct cross-cultural research across gastronomic destinations. Third, although this study examined food involvement as an individual-level moderator, other psychological characteristics may also condition the formation of memorable food experiences. Future studies could examine variables such as food neophobia and food image or investigate whether combinations of individual characteristics produce different responses to gastronomic stimuli. Finally, the study focuses on behavioural intention rather than observed post-visit behaviour. Longitudinal research could investigate whether memorable food experiences and satisfaction subsequently translate into actual revisits, recommendations, or other forms of destination loyalty.

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Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence tools (ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, and Grammarly) were used solely to assist with language editing and translation of the manuscript. They were not used for data analysis, interpretation of results, or generation of scientific content. The authors take full responsibility for the scientific content, study design, data analysis, interpretation of the findings, and conclusions presented in this manuscript.

Credit author statement

All authors have contributed equally. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Declaration of competing interest: None

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