**Edited by: Piera Buonincontri • Luisa Errichiello • Roberto Micera**
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## Evolving the perspectives on the value of gastronomy for Mediterranean destination development

The book series entitled "Tourism Studies on the Mediterranean Region", launched in 2021 by the Institute for Studies on the Mediterranean (ISMed) of the Italian National Research Council (CNR), focuses on current research and practice in tourism in the Mediterranean area. It proposes an integrated analysis of how geopolitical, socio-economic and cultural variables are interrelated with tourism, providing a critical evaluation of policies and measures for industries and governments aimed at boosting tourism while promoting the structural transformation of the sector towards environmental, socio-economic and cultural sustainability.

The third book in the series offers novel perspectives on the value of gastronomy for the development of tourism destinations within the Mediterranean region. The volume aims to enrich the discourse on gastronomy tourism by presenting interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary empirical research, both theoretically- and practice-driven.

The chapters adopt a variety of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches and discuss cutting-edge issues as the influence of gastronomic experiences on travellers' behaviours after their holidays; the role of gastronomic heritage as an effective driver for the tourism development of destinations; how creativity can lead to new and successful gastronomic proposals.

The book is relevant both to academics, and destination managers and policymakers who can exploit reliable data and results to elaborate measures to enhance the value of gastronomy for the tourism development in the Mediterranean region. Finally, the book is also useful for students who follow undergraduate, masters and postgraduate courses.

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# 2

# Gastronomic experience as a driver of destination loyalty: Evidence from the Mediterranean area

**Simone Luongo[*], Valerio Muto[+], Fabiana Sepe[±], Anna Prisco[*]**

Abstract:

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the drivers of destination loyalty in the Mediterranean area. The proposed model starts from a framework already known in the literature, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), and proposes an innovative version of the same through the extension of the model. The research was conducted through a questionnaire submitted to Italian tourists regarding their intention to return to tourist destinations in the Mediterranean area. The data collected have been studied adopting the Partial Least Squares approach to Structural Equation Models (PLS-SEM). The results highlight that innovativeness and memorability of the culinary experiences play a key role. The chapter brings interesting theoretical and managerial implications. Under the first profile, it offers an innovative and extended version of the model, deepening the role that gastronomic experiences have on destination loyalty. From a managerial point of view, it provides a clear key to understanding which levers are to be used to stimulate tourists to return to tourist destinations.

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## 2.1 Introduction

The concept of Destination Loyalty (DL) has become increasingly important in recent years, because of companies' realization that acquiring a new consumer is far more expensive than relying on tourists to re-entrust their resorts (Um et al., 2006). According to several authors, loyalty towards a destination plays a central role in supporting the tourist resort and the tourism industry (Rohman, 2020). The biggest challenge for destination managers is to be able to develop strategies to make the destinations attractive and highly recognizable for tourists (Gursoy et al., 2014). In this regard, DL plays a central role in the development of local tourist attractions (Lemy et al., 2020). According to extant literature, one of the drivers of tourist destinations is linked to food-related experiences (Björk and Kauppinen Räisänen, 2016). As such, the study of culinary experiences within the tourism and hospitality field reflected the development in management and marketing theory. This transition entails shifting from a focus on rational decision-making to a greater emphasis on the emotional aspects of experiences (Richards, 2021). Within the field of Destination Management (DM), gastronomy, local culture and traditions are intended to influence the destination value, strengthening tourists' overall image and perception of the destination (Du Rand et al., 2003; Choe and Kim, 2018). Nowadays, more and more destinations and companies are realizing the importance of gastronomic experiences as drivers for the most important and modern tourist flows. Mediterranean countries have been long associated with gastronomy, which has always been a lever for the development of tourist destinations (Nistor and Dezsi, 2022). From the perspective of Mediterranean cuisine, "food quality" and "traditional gastronomy" are a key role for the tourists' food consumption satisfaction (Akdag et al., 2018). At the same time, Mediterranean countries have witnessed an increasing correlation between wine tasting, food experiences and tourism, which has been influenced by efforts in regional development and reimagining approaches amid the larger context of global rural restructuring (Hall and Mitchell, 2000). The research gap in the existing literature lies in the lack of comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing tourists' satisfaction and loyalty in the context of food-related activities as drivers for the development of tourist destinations. While there is a growing body of

research on the impacts of food tourism, particularly on destination development (Di Clemente et al., 2020; Park and Widyanta, 2022), the specific role of local food consumption value on shaping tourist behavior remains relatively underexplored. Specifically, as also stressed by Rousta and Jamshidi (2019) existing studies have not fully elucidated the extent to which the value attributed to consuming local food influences tourists' overall satisfaction with their experiences and their subsequent loyalty to the destination. Furthermore, the existing body of literature concerning memorable food experiences shows a notable gap in the incorporation of sensory impressions as a fundamental element of food tourism investigation. Over the past ten years, only a limited number of studies have highlighted the significance of memory and its connection to food experiences (Afaq et al., 2022). By delving into this underdeveloped theme, this study sheds light on the significant role that local culinary experiences play in shaping tourists' perceptions, emotions, and overall satisfaction during their visits to a destination. Understanding the impact of local food consumption value on tourist behavior can offer valuable insights for destination managers, hospitality businesses, and policymakers in designing effective strategies to enhance tourist satisfaction and foster long-term loyalty to the destination (Choe and Kim, 2018). Consistent with the above considerations, the purpose of this chapter is to investigate the role of food experiences on tourist DL. It is essential to understand the drivers of DL to provide managers with a tool to understand which levers to use to strengthen loyalty towards a tourist destination. To investigate drivers of DL, the study uses the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and extends it with two external constructs: "Perceived experiential innovativeness" (PEI) and "Memorability of culinary experiences" (MCE). The chapter is structured as follows: in section 2, a brief literature review is presented. In Section 3, the research framework and the hypotheses development are explained, while in sections 4 and 5, the methodology, data analysis and results are described. Finally, section 6 reports the main findings and conclusion.

## 2.2   Literature review

### 2.2.1   The evolving role of gastronomy in tourist experiences

Gastronomy is a broad concept, encompassing the relationship between culture and food (Kivela and Crotts, 2006). The culture of a society is expressed in various ways (e.g., in art, literature, music) and can be considered as a set of activities usually defined as the "art of living", which provides meanings and values to life in a particular community (Hegarty and O'Mahony, 2001). These include food, art, habits and behaviors of people who experience them and feed the tradition of a territory (Hernández-Rojas and Huete Alcocer, 2021). Accordingly, gastronomy can also be defined as part of regional culture that consists in the possession of expertise and competencies related to food and drink, which improves the enjoyment and delight of eating and drinking (Santich, 2004). Sensory experiences related to culinary activities and stimulated through the tasting of typical drinks and foods are increasingly used in tourism in order to enhance the relation between people and territories (Di Clemente et al., 2019). Traditional gastronomy affects both the destination economy and the conservation of regional culture (Hernández-Rojas and Huete Alcocer, 2021). From the economic perspective, the benefits triggered by food-related tourism consumption can significantly contribute to the economic development and sustainable competitiveness of destinations and tourism firms involved (Mak et al., 2012). Moreover, the interconnection of gastronomy tourism's economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and technological aspects offer unique opportunities to both tourists and destinations (Yong et al., 2022). On the other side, gastronomic tourism promotes food and culinary heritages, by co-creating with local producers and host communities the sociability, enjoyment and sharing of regional foods in various ethno-cultural spaces, fostering social sustainability and wellbeing (Fusté-Forné and Jamal, 2020). With the evolution of gastronomic experiences beyond their fundamental purpose of merely providing food to travelers, there has been a greater focus on understanding the essence and arrangement of these experiences, their impact on customer behavior, and their significance in the realm of tourism marketing and branding (Richards, 2021). Consequently, tourist destinations are revitalizing and promoting local food for cultural awareness and market exploration (Di Clemente et al., 2019; Hernández-Rojas and Huete Alcocer,

2021). These insights point to a new scenario for the tourism industry, in which tourists perceive feelings, memories and personal engagement as the added value of tourism products (Tsai, 2016; Di Clemente et al., 2019). However, this development does not affect all countries equally. In relation to these emerging trends, Pavlidis and Markantonatou (2020) argue that Greece seems to lag behind somewhat, as its tourism interactions are still primarily influenced by the anthropocentric culture of the Greeks. Nevertheless, they argue that with the general increase in tourism services, it is expected that local gastronomic offerings will also experience an overall growth. Moreover, food has different impacts in each stage of the journey. In this regard, Chen and Huang (2016) analyzed the relevance of food experiences for domestic tourists visiting Chongqing (China). Their findings demonstrated that while in the pre-trip stage food was not a relevant motivator in visiting the city, during and at the end of the trip food-related activities have been perceived to be among the most important ones. Similarly, Rousta and Jamshidi's study (2020) highlighted that the image of Shiraz (Iran) as a food destination failed in the pre-travel phase, because it did not affect the intention to visit, but positively influenced post-travel tourists' behavior in recommending destination local food and revisiting the city. Such evidence is in line with Quan and Wang's (2004) assertion that food tourism and its activities serve as a peak experience that motivates tourists to travel and visit a destination.

### 2.2.2   Destination loyalty in the field of gastronomy tourism

Because of the robust connection between gastronomy tourism and the driving force behind visiting a place (Wondirad et al., 2021), a research focus has emerged in the academic literature aimed at investigating DL within the context of gastronomy tourism (Ullah et al., 2022). DL is characterized by the behavior of returning to a specific tourist destination, motivated by a psychological inclination to visit that particular place (Halkiopoulos et al., 2022). This topic holds great relevance for tourism marketers and destination managers, as it is regarded as the most reliable predictor of future post-visit behavior and serves as a catalyst for gaining a competitive edge and achieving success in the market (Cossío-Silva et al., 2022). The perception of a tourist destination, comprising its reputation, brand identity, and perceived attractiveness, exerts a substantial impact on DL. In this regard, according to Singh et al. (2022), a positive and appealing destination image

can create a strong emotional connection with tourists and increase their likelihood to return. Other scholars suggest that both the quality of services provided by the destination and its attractions, such as natural landscapes, cultural heritage, and gastronomy lead to increased loyalty (Wang and Li, 2023). Consistent with prior research, Lacap (2019) examined the relationship between DL and gastronomy tourism with reference to the food tourist satisfaction. The results of the study reveal that when visitors are inspired by local culinary offerings and participate in food-related experiences in a destination, they cultivate a favorable perception of the destination, fostering deeper engagement and a greater likelihood of revisiting it. Accordingly, extant literature highlights that food tourist satisfaction and loyalty are influenced by several factors. San Martin et al. (2013), conceiving DL either as the intention to revisit a destination or the intention to recommend it, revealed that tourist satisfaction and experience are the main determinants of DL. The relevance of satisfaction is also confirmed by the study of Nilplub et al. (2016), which pointed out that tourist satisfaction strongly moderates the effects of personal motivations and perceived value for money on DL. In another study, Ali et al. (2020) identified food quality, perceived environmental quality, perceived value and service quality as the main attributes affecting tourist satisfaction, which in turn significantly impacts on the DL.

## 2.3    Research framework and hypotheses development

The theory of reasoned action (TRA) model was developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) to explain individuals' specific behaviors. According to the authors, the theory assumes that intention is the main predictor of personal behavior. Some scholars suggest that TRA incorporates cognitive, affective and conative components (Rosenberg and Hovland, 1960). According to this theory, individuals are rational and motivation-based in their decision-making processes and make a reasoned choice among various alternatives (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). The intention to behave in a certain way is influenced by cognitive assessments of behavior (Attitude) and social pressure (Subjective Norms). Specifically, this study considers the Behavioral Intentions as the intention of tourists to revisit a certain destination i.e. "Destination loyalty" (DL) (Neuts et al., 2013). In this sense, DL is a real behavioral intention when tourists are planning to visit a place again (Lemy et al., 2020); in fact, tourists who are really satisfied with a destination they have

visited, will be much more motivated to make positive word of mouth and to stay and spend more than expected in that particular destination (Neuts et al., 2013; Lemy et al., 2020). Attitude toward behavior is the result of the degree to which a certain behavior is perceived and, therefore, evaluated as favorable or unfavorable (Ajzen, 1991). The attitude, in particular, is based on the combination of the perception relative to the results that will come from the behavior and the subjective value of the expected results (Manosuthi et al., 2020). In the field of travel and tourism, several studies (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2017; Hasan et al., 2017; 2019) found that despite tourists' beliefs about the consequences of visiting a destination or the intentions of visiting a destination are variable, their attitudes based on such beliefs will affect differently and subjectively the intentions to revisit the destination and, therefore, the DL (Han and Kim, 2010). Hence, the following hypothesis has been developed:

*H1: Attitude positively influences Destination Loyalty*

Subjective Norms (SN) refer to the social pressure perceived by an individual to practice a certain behavior or not (Ajzen, 1991) or as the degree of one's perception of social approval for the accomplishment of a certain behavior (Bianchi et al., 2017). SN has a crucial role and a fundamental function regarding the normative beliefs of important referents and the motivation to conform to them (Meng et al., 2020). Normative beliefs refer to the behavioral expectations of the referents of a certain level, while the motivation to conform refers to the weight that the expectations of the referents can have towards the subjects at the base of the study. This means that individuals will be strongly influenced by the social pressure of the community and the so-called "main referents" to evaluate and implement behavior (Han and Kim, 2010). The importance of subjective norms as a driver of behavioral intentions is also recognized in the field of marketing and tourism studies (Hasan et al., 2020). The choice of a given tourist destination is strongly influenced by opinions about those who are considered "important referents" (family, friends, colleagues) (Han and Kim, 2010; Meng et al., 2020).

Hence, the following hypothesis has been developed:

*H2: Subjective Norms positively influence Destination Loyalty*

The study proposes an extension of the TRA model with two external constructs: DL and MCE. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) suggested extending the TRA model to improve the predictive power and to better adapt the model to the specific context of analyses. In this regard, several studies have extended the TRA basic model. Previous studies (e.g., Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003; Berry et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2018) demonstrated how DL is strongly influenced by customer-perceived experiential innovativeness. In particular, Kim et al. (2018) defined "experiential innovativeness", the ability of the company to create a personalized and unique experience, based on the lifestyle and values of the customer. To really have the effect, experiential innovation, unlike that of technology-based services, focuses on the commitment to develop the reference environment and the circumstances related to it, according to customer needs (Kim et al., 2020). Gastronomic tourists are those who travel in search of unique flavors and gastronomic experiences; the objective of food service providers is to surprise customers and stimulate their interest through innovative offers of products and services in order to enhance perceived experiential innovativeness by customers (Haberland and Dacin, 1992; Kunz et al., 2011). Perceived restaurant experiential innovativeness can create excitement and hedonic value towards food tasting experiences in a destination that increase the customer's propensity to revisit a certain place and hence its DL (Kunz et al., 2011).

Hence, the following hypothesis has been developed:

*H3: Perceived Experiential Innovativeness positively influence Attitude*

*H4: Perceived Experiential Innovativeness positively influence Destination Loyalty*

In line with previous studies (e.g., Hoch and Deighton, 1989; Ali et al., 2014, 2016; Kim et al., 2012; Kim, 2014, 2018; Afaq et al., 2023), extant literature points out that DL is strongly influenced by the providing memorable experience by the tourist destination. According to Kim (2010), to have a strong impact, companies should implement marketing strategies to ensure that these experiences can be permanently stored in the memory of tourists. Several scholars explored the relationship between memory and gastronomic tourism

(e.g., Quan and Wang, 2004; Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2013; Lin and Mao, 2015; Mathis et al., 2016; Tsai, 2016). In particular, Kauppinen-Räisänen et al. (2013) argue that memory and memories are able to influence customer attitudes and food acceptance and, consequently, the willingness to repeat the experience in the future. In the wake, Afaq et al. (2023) explore the relationship between food experiences and memory, with a particular focus on the impact of sensory stimuli in shaping positive food-related memories. They propose a framework that highlights the significance of sensory cues in creating lasting and enjoyable recollections associated with food. Other academics note the positive impact that tourist experiences considered by tourists as memorable, have on faithful behavior and, therefore, the propensity to revisit a certain destination (Deighton, 1988; Kim et al., 2012; Ali et al., 2014, 2016; Kim, 2014).

Hence, the following hypothesis has been developed:

*H5: Memorability of Culinary Experiences positively influence Attitude*

*H6: Memorability of Culinary Experiences positively influence Destination Loyalty*

## 2.4    Methodology

To collect data, a questionnaire has been submitted, through Qualtrics software, to tourists visiting the city of Naples in the time span ranging from November 2022 to January 2023. It has been developed using scales derived from other studies (see Table 2.1). In particular, "Attitude" (ATT) and "Subjective norms" (SN) have been measured by two items adapted by Hansen et al. (2004), "Destination Loyalty" has been measured by five items adapted by Rahman, (2014), "Memorability of culinary experiences" has been measured by three items adapted by Di Clemente et al. (2019) and "Perceived experiential innovativeness" has been measured by three items adapted by Ding et al. (2022). To produce the Italian version, the translation and back-translations procedures have been carried out (Saunders *et al.,* 2009). All items have been measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree"). To reduce retrieval bias (Kline *et al.*, 2000; Podsakoff, 2003), the items have been intermixed from different constructs, while to reduce social desirability bias and common method bias, some guidelines to the survey

aimed at explaining the scope of the survey, and at providing contacts for further information (Saunders et al., 2009) have been added. Moreover, to select the respondents, a screening question has been included in the questionnaire to interview only those who had previously visited tourist destinations in the Mediterranean area. To assess the face validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study has been conducted on 50 respondents. The final sample consists of 300 valid responses. The characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 2.2.

### 2.4.1    Data analysis and results

The data collected have been studied adopting the Partial Least Squares approach to Structural Equation Models (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2011), using SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2015) for model evaluation. PLS-SEM is appropriate for small samples and for non-normal data (Hair et al., 2016). It consists of a two-step approach. The first is the assessment of the measurement model and the second is the assessment of the structural model.

**Table 2.1**    Measurement items.

| ITEMS | |
|---|---|
| ATT1 | SPENDING HOLIDAYS IN TOURIST DESTINATIONS WITHIN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA IS ATTRACTIVE TO ME IN MY DAILY LIFE |
| ATT2 | TOURIST DESTINATIONS WITHIN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA ARE WELL SUITED TO THE WAY IN WHICH I SPEND MY HOLIDAYS |
| SN1 | MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY THINK THAT IT IS A GOOD IDEA TO SPEND HOLIDAYS IN TOURIST DESTINATIONS WITHIN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA |
| SN2 | MOST OF MY FRIENDS AND ACQUAINTANCES THINK THAT SPENDING HOLIDAYS IN TOURIST DESTINATIONS WITHIN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA IS A GOOD IDEA |
| DL1 | I AM WILLING TO RETURN TO TOURIST DESTINATIONS WITHIN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA IN THE FUTURE |
| DL2 | I AM WILLING TO RECOMMEND TOURIST DESTINATIONS WITHIN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS AS A HOLIDAY LOCATION |

| DL3 | I HAVE A WONDERFUL IMAGE OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS WITHIN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA AS A HOLIDAY LOCATION |
|-----|-----|
| DL4 | I FEEL I AM VERY LOYAL TO TOURIST DESTINATIONS WITHIN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA AS A TRAVEL CHOICE |
| DL5 | I TEND TO REVISIT MEDITERRANEAN TOURIST DESTINATIONS |
| MCE1 | I HAVE WONDERFUL MEMORIES OF THE CULINARY EXPERIENCES I LIVED IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA |
| MCE2 | I WILL NOT FORGET THE CULINARY EXPERIENCES I LIVED IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA |
| MCE3 | I WILL REMEMBER MANY POSITIVE FEELINGS ABOUT THE CULINARY EXPERIENCES I LIVED IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA |
| PEI1 | RESTAURANTS INTERACT WITH CUSTOMERS IN INNOVATIVE WAYS TO ENHANCE THEIR CULINARY EXPERIENCES |
| PEI2 | RESTAURANTS ARE WELL-KNOWN FOR THEIR INNOVATIVE EVENTS IN DELIVERING CULINARY EXPERIENCES |
| PEI3 | RESTAURANTS DELIVER CUTTING-EDGE EXPERIENTIAL SERVICES |

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

### 2.4.2   Measurement model

For the quality of the measurement model, it was studied the reliability assessment, the convergent validity assessment and discriminant validity. To assess the reliability, it was checked that the items' loadings on their latent is higher than 0.6 (Chin, 1998, Henseler et al., 2009), that each construct's Cronbach's alpha is higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011) and that each construct's composite reliability (CR) index is higher than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011). Regarding the convergent validity assessment, it was checked that the average variance extracted (AVE) of each block is higher than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2016). As presented in Table 2.3, reliability and convergent validity have been verified. Regarding discriminant validity, it was assessed with Fornell-Larcker criterion, "i.e., the square root of AVE for each construct should be higher than its highest correlation with the other constructs". As presented in Table 2.4, the square root of AVE for each construct was higher than its highest correlation with the other constructs.
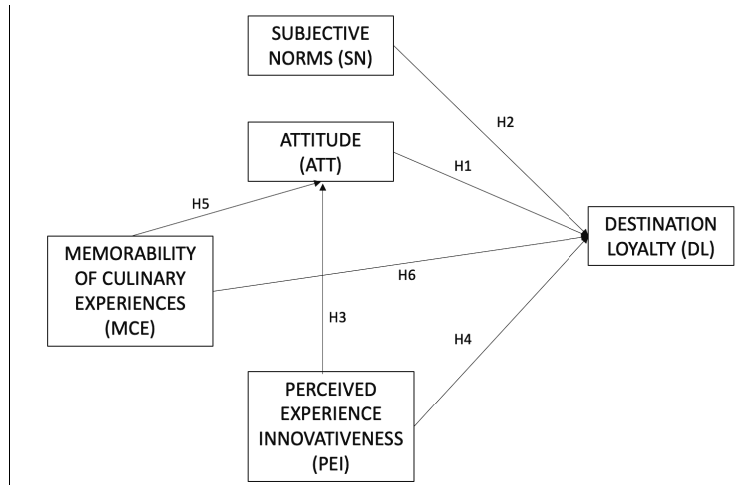
**Figure 2.1**     The proposed model.

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

### 2.4.3  Structural model

Regarding the structural model, we looked at the quality of the structural model, evaluating the R2 for the model's ability to predict the constructs. Then we use a bootstrap procedure with 5,000 resamples (Hair et al., 2016) for the hypothesis testing. Figure 2.2 and Table 2.5 show the results derived from the hypotheses testing. All the hypotheses are supported, except H3. The R2 result has shown that on ATT is 0.130, while on DL is 0.630, this means that the model has a very high explicative capacity.

**Table 2.2**     Characteristics of the sample.

| CHARACTERISTICS | TYPE | % |
|---|---|---|
| GENDER | MALE | 43% |
| | FEMALE | 57% |
| AGE | <20 | 5% |
| | 20-30 | 30% |
| | 31-40 | 43% |
| | 41-50 | 13% |
| | >50 | 9% |
| RESIDENCE | NORTH | 43% |
| | CENTRE | 35% |
| | SOUTH | 22% |

| INCOME | < 50000 EUR | 45% |
|---|---|---|
| | 50001-100000 EUR | 33% |
| | 100001-150000 EUR | 17% |
| | 150001 - 200000 EUR | 3% |
| EDUCATION | SECONDARY EDUCATION | 1% |
| | HIGHER EDUCATION | 5% |
| | BACHELOR'S DEGREE | 75% |
| | POST-GRADUATION | 19% |

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

**Table 2.3**    Reliability and convergent validity.

| | OUTER LOADING | CRONBACH'S ALPHA | COMPOSITE RELIABILITY | AVERAGE VARIANCE EXTRACTED (AVE) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ATT1 | 0,847 | 0,735 | 0,792 | 0,787 |
| ATT2 | 0,925 | | | |
| SN1 | 0,978 | 0,944 | 0,971 | 0,946 |
| SN2 | 0,967 | | | |
| PEI1 | 0,906 | 0,856 | 0,874 | 0,777 |
| PEI2 | 0,916 | | | |
| PEI3 | 0,819 | | | |
| DL1 | 0,882 | 0,943 | 0,945 | 0,816 |
| DL2 | 0,929 | | | |
| DL3 | 0,887 | | | |
| DL4 | 0,924 | | | |
| DL5 | 0,893 | | | |
| MCE1 | 0,864 | 0,942 | 0,943 | 0,813 |
| MCE2 | 0,885 | | | |
| MCE3 | 0,871 | | | |
| MCE4 | 0,946 | | | |
| MCE5 | 0,938 | | | |

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

**Table 2.4**    Discriminant validity.

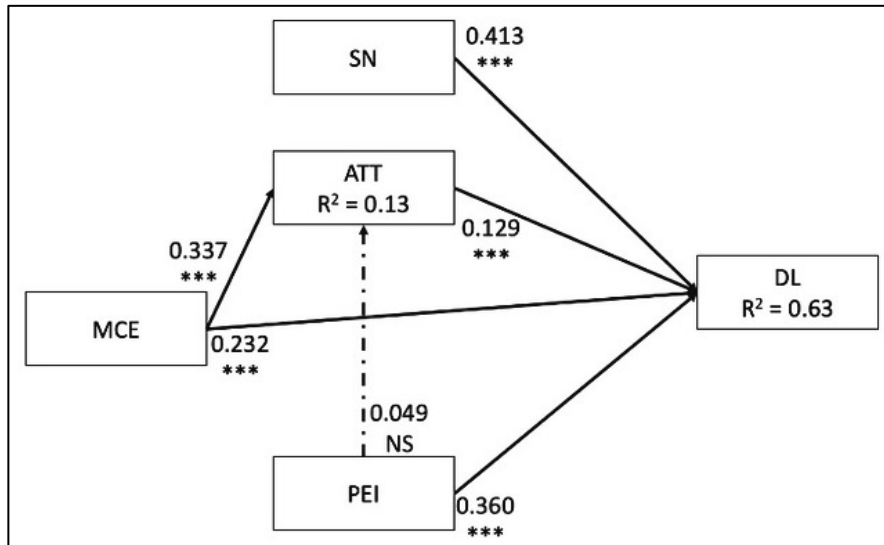| | ATT | DL | MCE | PEI | SN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ATT | 0,887 | | | | |
| DL | 0,442 | 0,903 | | | |
| MCE | 0,357 | 0,490 | 0,902 | | |
| PEI | 0,189 | 0,591 | 0,414 | 0,881 | |
| SN | 0,391 | 0,595 | 0,151 | 0,266 | 0,973 |

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

**Figure 2.2**   Results of the structural equation model.

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

**Table 2.5**   Hypotheses testing.

| Hp | Relations | Original sample | Sample mean | Standard deviation | T statistics | P values | Support |
|----|-----------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|----------|---------|
| H1 | ATT -> DL | 0,129 | 0,128 | 0,039 | 3,290 | 0,001 | Yes |
| H2 | SN -> DL | 0,414 | 0,413 | 0,035 | 11,701 | 0,000 | Yes |
| H3 | PEI -> ATT | 0,049 | 0,051 | 0,058 | 0,840 | 0,401 | No |
| H4 | PEI -> DL | 0,360 | 0,360 | 0,041 | 8,776 | 0,000 | Yes |
| H5 | MCE-> ATT | 0,337 | 0,339 | 0,050 | 6,719 | 0,000 | Yes |
| H4 | MCE -> DL | 0,232 | 0,233 | 0,047 | 4,982 | 0,000 | Yes |

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

## 2.5   Discussion

The results confirm that both H1 and H2 are supported, hence both the attitude and the subjective norms positively influence the intention to return to a tourist destination. These results confirm the validity of the TRA model as shown by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Moreover, results support previous studies in the field of travel and tourism that found that attitude positively influences DL (Han and Kim, 2010; Bianchi et al., 2017; Hasan et al., 2017; Hasan et al., 2019) and

subjective norms positively influence DL. Regarding the extension of the model, all the hypotheses have been accepted except for H3. The results confirm previous studies. In particular, in line with some authors the propensity to revisit a certain tourist location is influenced by the innovativeness of food experience (Haberland and Dacin, 1992; Kunz et al., 2011). At the same time, the results show the positive influence of MCE, confirming previous studies that showed the key role of the memorability of food experience and tourism destination (Kauppinen-Räisänen et al., 2013; Ali et al., 2014, 2016; Kim, 2014).

## 2.6   Theoretical and practical implications

This book chapter provides both theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical point of view, consistent with previous studies, this work confirms the relationships between the variables related to the TRA model. However, to date, there are no studies that have adapted the TRA model to understand the factors that influence tourists to return to a tourist destination. Furthermore, there are no studies that have extended the TRA framework with the constructs of "Perceived experiential innovativeness" (PEI) and "Memorability of culinary experiences" (MCE). As emerges from our findings, within the culinary tourism field, experientiality may lead to new positive results for tourist destinations. These considerations lead to a new scenario for the tourism industry where memories and personal emotions, such as perceived innovativeness, represent the added value that consumers seek in tourism destinations. These results are in line with Richards' (2021) consideration that there is now a heightened recognition of the hedonistic elements of consumption, increased consumer engagement in experiences, and a deeper consideration of the relational dimension of these encounters. The culinary sector and, particularly, food tourism, is a particularly suitable field for the enhancement of experientiality. The emphasis on experientiality in the food and wine sector aligns with the principles of the experience economy, where experiences become a critical driver of value for consumers (Forlani et al., 2022). This finding can advance the understanding of how the experience economy operates in this specific domain, shedding light on its impact on consumer behavior and preferences. Looking ahead, tourism and gastronomy businesses working within the Mediterranean countries should develop plans to capitalize on their rich Mediterranean cuisine

and diet as valuable resources for future strategic plans (Pavlidis and Markantonatou, 2020). Theoretical implications may involve delving into the emotional and sensory dimensions of experientiality within the food and wine sector. Understanding how these elements influence consumers' perceptions and evaluations can contribute to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms driving experiential consumption behavior. Tourism managers should take into consideration the role of typical food and food-based activities as MCL and PEI have a great impact on DL. Thus, practitioners should take advantage of it by building and offering new products/services capable of impacting tourists' memory over the long-term. In such a context, future research can identify specific experiential elements that are most relevant and effective in the food and wine sector. Understanding these elements can inform businesses in this industry about the aspects they should emphasize to create meaningful and enjoyable experiences for their customers. Moreover, further research could also explore how technology, such as virtual reality or augmented reality, can be integrated into food tourism experiences to enhance experientiality further. Research in this area may offer insights into the role of technology in creating immersive and interactive culinary journeys.

## 2.7   Conclusion

This work represents of one of the first attempts to measure the experiential value of culinary experiences lived in tourist destinations and its effect on marketing results, in terms of future loyal intentions towards a tourist destination. Specifically, this research provides useful strategies for increasing the competitiveness of tourist destinations in the new experiential scenario. Accordingly, tourism practitioners are constantly in search of turning their tourist services into experiential offerings to be competitive in the international arena. This book chapter provides an empirical analysis on how both PEI and MCE affect both attitudes to visit a destination and the DL. This work has some limitations that offer hints for future research. First, the application of a convenience sample does not allow to generalize the results. These ones should be understood within the context of this book chapter, and future research lines should be regarded to different tourism practices and tourist destinations, as this work mainly concentrates on Mediterranean destinations, in order to check how experiential

variables work in other contexts. The survey's respondents have been intercepted at different moments after their visit to the destination, thus, the vivacity of their memories and the consequent judgements about the experience they were asked, could be different due to the time passed since the visit occurred. Accordingly, future studies could consider the standardization of the moments in which data are collected and the repetition of the survey over time.

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