

The mediating role of mental well-being in the effect of local food experience on destination loyalty

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Abstract

This study explores the mediating role of mental well-being in the relationship between local food experience and destination loyalty. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining a quantitative survey of 420 domestic tourists in Türkiye with in-depth interviews of seven participants. The quantitative findings, analysed through PLS-SEM, indicate that local food experiences significantly influence both mental well-being and destination loyalty, and that mental well-being partially mediates this relationship. Qualitative data, analysed through interpretative phenomenological analysis, reveal six main themes: hedonism, social interaction, personal benefit, escape from routine, authenticity, and social benefit. These findings suggest that beyond sensory pleasure, meaningful social interactions and a sense of belonging contribute to well-being and encourage repeat visits. This research offers theoretical insights by integrating eudaimonic and hedonic perspectives of well-being into tourism behaviour, and practical implications for destination managers aiming to strengthen loyalty through culinary experiences.

Keywords: Local food, Destination loyalty, Mental well-being, Gastronomy tourism.

Citation: Karahan, S., & Uca Karacabey, S. (2026). The mediating role of mental well-being in the effect of local food experience on destination loyalty. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 42, 4213. <https://doi.org/10.54055/ejtr.v42i.4409>.

Publication history:

Received: 06/07/2025; Revised: 18/10/2025; 22/11/2025; Accepted: 27/11/2025; Published online: 01/02/2026;

Volume date: 01/03/2026

Coordinating editor: Jessica Mei Pung



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1. Introduction

Local foods have increasingly been recognised as important motivators for tourists, offering distinctive and memorable experiences that heighten satisfaction and influence behavioural intentions such as revisiting, recommending the destination, and fostering loyalty. (Ignatov & Smith, 2006; Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014; Faouzi *et al.*, 2023). The gastronomic value of destinations has become an important factor for tourists, who often associate authentic and flavourful food experiences with emotional connection and cultural enrichment (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2005).

Existing research has extensively explored how local food experiences influence loyalty-related outcomes such as satisfaction (Lacap, 2019), destination image (Zhu *et al.*, 2024), and place identity (Tsai, 2016). However, the mediating role of psychological factors, particularly mental well-being, remains underexplored (Godovykh, 2020). In today's demanding and fast-paced world, individuals increasingly seek experiences that contribute positively to their well-being. Tourism provides such opportunities, offering emotional and psychological benefits through pleasure, relaxation, and novelty (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; Özgürel & Baysal, 2020). Regular tourism experiences have been shown to enhance life satisfaction and foster a sense of renewal (De Bloom *et al.*, 2009). Among these, culinary tourism holds unique potential, engaging all the senses and often creating lasting emotional impressions. Positive food-related experiences may not only satisfy tourists' hedonic desires but also fulfil deeper psychological needs related to meaning, self-development, and belonging.

Mental well-being, encompassing both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions, has emerged as a crucial lens for understanding tourist behaviours (Keyes *et al.*, 2002; Tennant *et al.*, 2007). Previous research suggests that tourism experiences can positively influence well-being and that this, in turn, can affect loyalty outcomes (Vada *et al.*, 2023; Liu *et al.*, 2023). However, few studies have examined the mediating role of well-being in the specific context of local food experiences and destination loyalty (Badu-Baiden *et al.*, 2022; Lin, 2014).

Given this gap, the current study seeks to examine whether mental well-being plays a mediating role in the link between local food experience and destination loyalty. To this end, a mixed-methods design was employed: a quantitative phase using PLS-SEM was conducted with 420 domestic tourists in Türkiye, followed by qualitative in-depth interviews with seven participants using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). By integrating both statistical relationships and personal narratives, this study contributes to a richer understanding of how local food experiences influence destination loyalty, not only through hedonic enjoyment but also through their impact on mental well-being. The findings aim to offer theoretical contributions to the tourism literature and practical insights for destination managers seeking to foster long-term tourist engagement through gastronomy.

The present study focuses on domestic tourists in Türkiye, where culturally embedded food traditions, collectivist social ties, shared dining rituals, and language familiarity enable deeper emotional engagement with local communities and culinary heritage. These conditions may amplify the psychological outcomes of culinary experiences, particularly in terms of belonging and cultural meaning-making. However, such culturally embedded dynamics may not be equally experienced by international tourists, highlighting the need for future cross-cultural comparisons. In line with this purpose, the study set out to investigate two primary research questions: (1) Does mental well-being mediate the effect of local food experience on destination loyalty?, and (2) What are the implications of this experience for individual well-being and behavioural intentions?

2. Literature review

Tourists' attachment to a destination is commonly explained through loyalty indicators such as revisiting, recommending the destination to others, and sharing positive experiences (Oppermann,

2000: 80). Numerous studies have shown that local food experiences influence these loyalty-related behaviours (Badu-Baiden *et al.*, 2022; Lacap, 2019; Şengül & Türkay, 2018; Tsai, 2016; Kim & Eves, 2012; Karim & Chi, 2010; Ling *et al.*, 2010). Rather than functioning solely as a consumption activity, food serves as a cultural and experiential touchpoint that fosters identity formation and emotional bonding between tourists and destinations (Levitt *et al.*, 2017). Empirical evidence further indicates that gastronomic contexts—such as local dining or food festivals—encourage repeat visitation by creating memorable and socially embedded encounters (Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Lertputtarak, 2012; Robinson & Clifford, 2012).

Taken together, these studies suggest that local food experiences are not merely ancillary components of travel but key behavioural drivers of destination bonding. Based on this theoretical foundation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *Local food experience has a significant effect on destination loyalty.*

Mental well-being encompasses both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions of positive mental health, reflecting self-acceptance, meaningful relationships, personal growth, and a sense of purpose (Tennant *et al.*, 2007; Keyes *et al.*, 2002). Tourism contexts have been shown to enhance psychological well-being when experiences are meaningful, memorable, and personally fulfilling (Vada *et al.*, 2019; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Experiential learning and renewal during travel further contribute to well-being, as knowledge gained through tourism interactions positively affects psychological development (Karaca & Tagraf, 2021).

Local food experiences represent a specific form of tourism engagement that stimulates emotional and sensory responses while also facilitating meaning-making processes. Research suggests that food-related experiences can enhance subjective well-being by generating pleasure, enjoyment, and relaxation (Godbey, 2003; Sthapit *et al.*, 2019). Beyond hedonic benefits, food has been linked to emotional regulation and mood enhancement, indicating a reciprocal relationship between consumption and affective responses (White *et al.*, 2013; Kaur & Van, 2017; Blanchflower *et al.*, 2013; Spence, 2017). Given that culinary experiences provide both psychological and emotional value, they may play a significant role in shaping well-being outcomes within tourism settings.

Taken together, these findings suggest that local food experiences contribute to mental well-being through hedonic pleasure, emotional regulation, and deeper eudaimonic fulfilment. Based on this theoretical rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: *Local food experience has a significant effect on mental well-being.*

Although well-being has received limited direct attention within tourism research, it has been widely examined in leisure studies, where participation in activities is understood to support positive psychological functioning. Mannell and Klieber (1997) argue that psychological well-being strengthens individuals' motivation to participate in leisure experiences, suggesting that affective gains may reinforce behavioural engagement. Within tourism, empirical evidence shows that culinary and destination-based experiences can stimulate well-being and subsequently shape behavioural intentions. For instance, Lin (2014) found that culinary experiences contribute to psychological well-being among visitors to the Bei-Tou hot springs in Taiwan, while also influencing their intention to revisit. Positive emotions have similarly been shown to drive destination preferences and loyalty behaviours (Lee & Hyun, 2016), and well-being-based tourism experiences have been associated with repeat visitation as a behavioural indicator of loyalty (Vada *et al.*, 2023).

Taken together, these findings indicate that psychological well-being does not merely result from tourism experiences but also acts as a behavioural catalyst that fosters sustained destination engagement and repeat visitation. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: *Mental well-being has a significant effect on destination loyalty.*

Research increasingly suggests that food experiences influence destination-related behavioural intentions not only directly but also through psychological mechanisms. Culinary encounters have been shown to enhance revisit intentions and recommendation behaviours by creating emotional attachment and familiarity with the destination (Lin, 2014; Ling *et al.*, 2010; Kim & Eves, 2012). These experiences support loyalty by strengthening cultural connection, social interaction, and perceived authenticity, indicating that satisfaction derived from local cuisine extends beyond sensory pleasure.

Recent studies further highlight the mediating function of well-being in this relationship. Factors such as hospitality, social interaction, neophilia, and culinary culture foster loyalty through subjective well-being (Badu-Baiden, 2022), while perceived food value influences loyalty indirectly via both subjective and psychological well-being (Liu *et al.*, 2023). Emotional tourism experiences have similarly been found to impact post-travel behavioural intentions through psychological well-being (Al-Okaily *et al.*, 2023). Together, this evidence positions well-being as an affective pathway through which culinary experiences translate into loyalty outcomes.

Accordingly, local food experiences may foster destination loyalty by enhancing tourists' mental well-being rather than solely through satisfaction or image-based mechanisms. Based on this theoretical rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: *Mental well-being mediates the effect of local food experience on destination loyalty.*

3. Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, drawing on the framework proposed by Creswell (2017). The rationale for employing a mixed-methods approach lies in its ability to capture both the statistical relationships between variables and the deeper meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences. This design was particularly appropriate for investigating the psychological dimensions of local food experiences and their impact on destination loyalty.

In the quantitative phase, data were collected through an online survey administered to 420 domestic tourists in Türkiye, who had engaged in local food experiences during their travels. The sample was selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all respondents had relevant experience with the phenomenon under study. The quantitative data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.

The qualitative phase followed with in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with seven participants selected from among the survey respondents who volunteered for follow-up interviews. A phenomenological approach was employed, aiming to explore the subjective meanings participants associated with their food-related tourism experiences. Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a method well-suited to examining lived experiences in depth (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

3.1 Measurement Instruments

The survey included standardised scales adapted from prior research:

- Local Food Experience was measured using a scale developed by Adongo *et al.* (2015), based on the Memorable Tourism Experiences Scale by Kim *et al.* (2012). The scale comprised 8 dimensions and 25 items, capturing aspects such as hedonism, cultural learning, novelty, and participation.
- Destination Loyalty was measured with a 5-item scale adapted from Zeithaml *et al.* (1996) and validated in a tourism context by Atsız and Türkmen (2020).
- Mental Well-Being was assessed using the 14-item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) developed by Tennant *et al.* (2007) and adapted into Turkish by Keldal (2015).

All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire also included demographic questions.

3.2 Validity and Reliability

A pilot test was conducted with 60 participants to assess internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha values for all scales were above 0.85, indicating high reliability. The full dataset was then subjected to a two-level measurement model analysis due to the hierarchical nature of the local food experience construct.

Construct reliability and validity were assessed through factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Discriminant Validity using the HTMT criterion. Items with low factor loadings were removed following Hair *et al.* (2014). The results confirmed that the constructs had adequate reliability and convergent and discriminant validity.

3.3 Structural Model and Mediation Testing

The hypothesised model tested the mediating role of mental well-being in the relationship between local food experience (a second-order construct) and destination loyalty. PLS-SEM was used to estimate path coefficients, R^2 , Q^2 (predictive relevance), f^2 (effect sizes), and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) to assess multicollinearity.

The Confirmatory Tetrad Analysis (CTA) determined that all constructs were reflective. Mediation analysis was performed using bootstrap resampling (5,000 subsamples), and Variance Accounted For (VAF) was calculated to determine the strength of the mediation effect, as recommended by Sarstedt *et al.* (2017).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and provided their consent. The data collection process complied with ethical guidelines on anonymity, confidentiality, and research integrity.

The study was designed with an 'exploratory sequential mixed methods design' in line with the information obtained from Creswell's (2017) study. Within the scope of mixed method, the survey technique was adopted in quantitative research and the phenomenological design was adopted in qualitative research. The reason for choosing the mixed method is that quantitative and qualitative data complement each other when used in combination and provide a more complete analysis. In the study, a questionnaire was first applied to a sample group of 420 participants selected from domestic tourists who had experienced local food during their travels in Türkiye, within the scope of quantitative research. Then, in-depth interviews were conducted with 7 participants selected among volunteers for the phenomenological design, within the scope of qualitative research. Thus, the aim was to explain the data in a more detailed and subjective dimension (Creswell, 2021). In the analysis of quantitative data,

descriptive analyses were used to evaluate demographic characteristics, and the SmartPLS 4 statistical programme was used to test hypotheses in line with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). In the analysis of qualitative data, the interpretative phenomenological analysis was adopted. The questionnaire used as a data collection tool in the study was distributed to the participants online via Google Forms. While preparing the questionnaire form, three scales were used in addition to demographic questions. The local food experience scale used was developed by Adongo *et al.* (2015), by utilizing Kim *et al.* (2012) memorable tourism experiences scale, and it consists of 8 dimensions and 25 statements. For destination loyalty, the destination loyalty scale developed by Zeithaml *et al.* (1996) and used by Atsız and Türkmen (2020) was employed. This scale was found to have a Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient greater than 0.85 and comprised one dimension and five statements. To measure mental well-being, the scale, which consists of 14 statements in one dimension, developed by Tennant *et al.* (2007) and adapted into Turkish by Keldal (2015) was used. After the scales were adapted to the study, the questionnaire, consisting of 44 items in total, was finalised by incorporating expert opinions. To assess the internal consistency of the study's measurement items, a pilot test was carried out with 60 participants. The overall Cronbach's alpha value across all scales was 0.924, demonstrating a high level of reliability.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Analysis

4.1.1 Participant Characteristics

Descriptive frequencies and percentages were computed to summarise the demographic characteristics of the sample, as reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Share
Gender	Female	248	59.0
	Male	172	41.0
Age	18–29	135	32.1
	30–39	85	20.2
	40–49	111	26.4
	50–59	51	12.1
	60 and above	38	9.0
Marital Status	Married	206	49.0
	Single	214	51.0
Education Level	Primary Education	12	2.9
	High School	58	13.8
	Associate Degree	104	24.8
	Bachelor's Degree	139	33.1
	Master's/PhD	107	25.5
Total		420	100.0

Women represented the larger share of the respondents (59%). The age structure of the sample was predominantly young, with participants aged 18–29 comprising 32.1%, followed by those aged 40–49 (26.4%). Marital status data show a balanced distribution, though single participants slightly

predominated (51%). In terms of education level, the largest proportion held a bachelor's degree (33.1%), while 25.5% had completed postgraduate education.

4.1.2. Findings on the Mediating Role of Mental Well-Being in the Effect of Local Food Experience on Destination Loyalty Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling

The fit of the model examined the mediating role of the mental well-being variable on the effect of the local food experience variable, which consists of 8 dimensions, on destination loyalty. Data analysis was conducted with the SmartPLS 4 statistical tool.

Validity of the Model

In this study, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were evaluated within the scope of validity and reliability studies. Internal consistency was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values, while convergent validity was determined by factor loadings and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Threshold values of ≥ 0.70 for factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability, as well as ≥ 0.50 for AVE, were deemed satisfactory. Items with factor loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 may be retained depending on CR and AVE values (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

In structural equation models used in social sciences studies, there are mostly structures in which multidimensional variables are tested (Becker, 2013). To measure structures consisting of more than one sub-dimension through a single main latent variable where sub-dimensions are unified, the Hierarchical Structure Modelling (Higher Level Structure Modelling) approach is applied. This is done with the PLS algorithm by combining sub-dimensions with appropriate techniques (Aybek & Karakaş, 2023).

Due to the structure of the scales in this research model, one of the variables (local food experience) consists of a hierarchical multidimensional structure. For this study, the research model was established to investigate the mediating role of the Level 1 'Mental Well-Being' variable in the relationship between the Level 2 'Local Food Experience' variable and Level 1 'Destination Loyalty' variable. In the research model, the 'Local Food Experience' superstructure (second-level construct) consists of eight first-level constructs: hedonism, revitalization, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, participation, novelty, and negative experiences. Destination Loyalty and Mental Well-Being are defined as first-order constructs since they are unidimensional.

To create the measurement model, items and 1st level dimensions were added to the model. All items assigned to the 1st level constructs of hedonism, revitalization, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, participation, novelty, and negative experiences were also assigned to the 'Local Food Experience' variable, which was structured as a 2nd level construct. 'Destination Loyalty' and 'Mental Well-being' variables were included in the model as level 1 constructs. After all assignments were completed, the internal model was created by determining the direction of the relationships between the three main variables. In Hierarchical Construct Modelling, it is recommended to first evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement model in terms of level 1 constructs and level 2 constructs, and then test the research model by considering the main variable relationships (Hair *et al.*, 2014). First, the validity and reliability analyses of all level 1 and level 2 constructs in the scales were performed separately, and then the research model was tested.

Table 2. *Results of the Measurement Model*

FIRST LEVEL CONSTRUCT	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE				
Hedonism	D1	0.757	0.788	0.789	0.555				
	D2	0.749							
	D3	0.728							
Revival	D11	0.823	0.890	0.892	0.731				
	D12	0.886							
	D13	0.855							
Meaningfulness	D14	0.795	0.765	0.815	0.556				
	D15	0.860							
	D16	0.545							
Information	D20	0.595	0.754	0.772	0.508				
	D21	0.836							
	D22	0.687							
Innovation	D5	0.768	0.696	0.701	0.537				
	D6	0.696							
Destination Loyalty	Q1	0.774	0.883	0.890	0.608				
	S2	0.814							
	S3	0.835							
	S4	0.658							
	S5	0.806							
Mental Well-being	M1	0.708	0.924	0.928	0.507				
	M2	0.743							
	M3	0.573							
	M5	0.726							
	M6	0.726							
	M8	0.778							
	M9	0.628							
	M10	0.776							
	M11	0.782							
	M12	0.559							
	M13	0.751							
	M14	0.745							
	SECOND LEVEL STRUCTURE	Dimensions				Factor Loading	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
	Local Food Experience	Hedonism				0.788	0.905	0.913	0.547
Revival		0.890							
Meaningfulness		0.765							
Information		0.754							
Innovation		0.706							

As the constructs of ‘destination loyalty’, ‘mental well-being’, and ‘local food experience’ each contained at least four indicators, Confirmatory Tetrad Analysis (CTA) was undertaken to determine the reflective or formative nature of their measurement items. Upon completing the analysis, the ‘CI low’ and ‘CI up’ ranges for the items were inspected. Indicators were deemed reflective if any interval included the value ‘0’ (Yılmaz *et al.*, 2024: 103). Considering the results of the Confirmatory Tetrad Analysis, the model was formed as a Reflective-Reflective model, one of the hierarchical component model types.

Once the CTA had been performed, analyses of reliability and validity were applied to the constructs. The process began with an inspection of factor loadings. Two items (D24 and D25) with loadings below 0.40 were discarded and the analysis rerun. Subsequently, 17 items were identified with loadings ranging from 0.40 to 0.70. Decisions about retaining these items were based on CR and AVE statistics. An AVE value higher than 0.50 is required. For constructs whose AVE fell short of this level, items with weaker loadings were reconsidered, leading to the removal of 11 items (D4, D7, D8, D9, D10, D17, D18, D19, D23, M4, and M7). Table 2 reports the internal consistency and convergent validity outcomes.

An examination of the measurement model indicates that the criteria for internal consistency reliability have been met. This finding is explained by the Cronbach's alpha values for level 1 and level 2 constructs, which ranged from 0.696 (0.60 being acceptable for two-item constructs) to 0.905, as well as the CR coefficients, which ranged between 0.701 and 0.928. Furthermore, convergent validity was confirmed since factor loadings varied from 0.545 to 0.890 and AVE values from 0.507 to 0.731.

To evaluate discriminant validity, the HTMT criterion was applied. Table 3 reports the HTMT values for both level 1 and level 2 constructs.

Table 3. *Discriminant Validity Results for First-Level Constructs (HTMT Criterion)*

	Meaningfulness	Information	Revival	Destination Loyalty	Hedonism	Mental Well-being	Innovation	Local Food Experience
Meaningfulness								
Information	0.632							
Revival	0.837	0.624						
Destination Loyalty	0.632	0.515	0.566					
Hedonism	0.666	0.498	0.546	0.726				
Mental Well-being	0.841	0.710	0.808	0.675	0.628			
Innovation	0.794	0.615	0.779	0.627	0.744	0.740		
Local Food Experience	0.894	0.875	0.840	0.877	0.885	0.724	0.895	

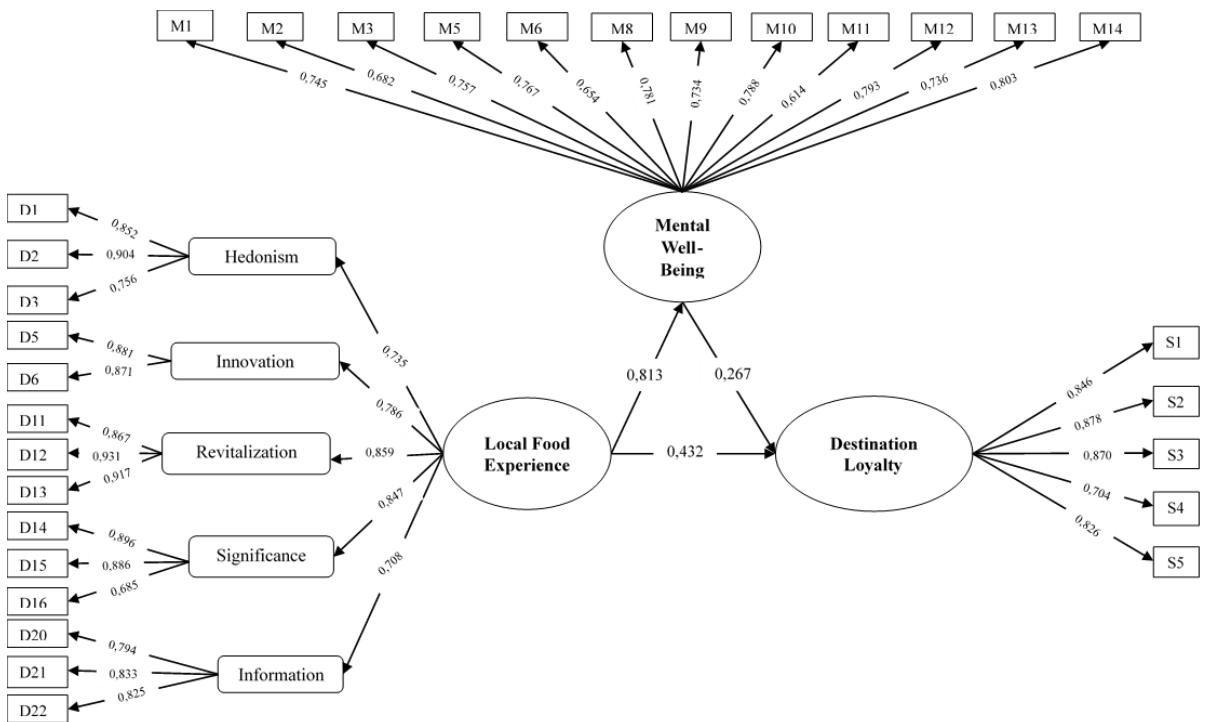


Figure 1. *Structural Equation Model.*

Although all values in the HTMT criterion table for first-order constructs were found to be below 0.85, it was observed that the values for the second-order construct 'Local Food Experience' were between 0.85 and 0.90, higher than the first-order constructs. HTMT value of 0.90 is generally accepted in theory for closely related constructs. Considering the strong interrelationships between local food experience and its sub-dimensions, these values are within acceptable limits. Therefore, based on the values presented in Table 3, it can be concluded that the HTMT values are within acceptable threshold limits and that discriminant validity is achieved.

Testing the Structural Model The structural equation model developed to test the research hypotheses is shown in Figure 1.

The PLS algorithm was used to calculate the R² and effect size (f²) of the structural model, and Blindfolding analysis was performed to calculate the predictive power (Q²). The R², f², Q², and VIF values of the structural model results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Structural Model Results*

RELATIONSHIPS	VIF	R ²	f ²	Q ²
Local Food Experience ->Destination Loyalty	2,949	0.445	0.114	0.416
Mental Well-being -> Destination Loyalty	2,949		0.043	
Local Food Experience -> Mental Well-being	1,000	0.661	1,949	0.657

In the evaluation phase of the structural model, VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values were first analysed. As seen in Table 4, VIF values below 5 indicate that there is no issue of multiple internal correlations between variables (Yilmaz *et al.*, 2024). R² expresses the explanatory power of independent variables over the dependent variable. Although R² threshold acceptance rates differ according to disciplines (Yildiz, 2021: 32), it is stated that the closer the R² coefficient is to 1, the higher the explanatory power of the independent variables on the dependent variable (Seyrek, 2023: 9; Henseler, 2009). When the R² values obtained from the model were analysed, it was determined that the independent variable explained 44% of the destination loyalty variable and 66% of the mental well-being variable. In line with these findings, the local food experience variable has a moderate level of influence on the destination loyalty variable and a strong level of influence on the mental well-being variable. During the effect size coefficient, f² values were analysed. The coefficient of effect size (f²) is calculated for each independent variable and indicates the contribution of each independent variable to explaining the dependent variable (Taşçı & Güzel, 2023). Effect size values (f²) of 0.02 and higher indicate a small effect; values of 0.15 and higher indicate a medium effect; and values of 0.35 and higher indicate a large effect (Sarwono, 2012; Furadantin, 2018; Çavuşgil & Ayhün, 2021; Taşçı & Güzel, 2023; Korkmaz & Altıntaş, 2024). In cases where the coefficient value is below 0.02, it is stated that it is not possible to consider an effect (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2017). Analysing the effect size coefficients in Table 4, the effect of local food experience on destination loyalty is small, on mental well-being is high, and the effect of mental well-being on destination loyalty is small. Since the Q² coefficients for the dependent variables are above zero, the structural model can be considered to have adequate predictive capability for the dependent constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2014; Furadantin, 2018). Since the Q² values in Table 4 are greater than zero, this shows the structural model has predictive power over destination loyalty and mental well-being variables.

4.1.3. Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Bootstrap analysis was conducted to test the structural relationships in the model (hypothesis testing) and to assess the statistical significance of the indicators. In the Bootstrap test, the analysis is first performed without including the intermediary variable in the model. If the indirect relationship is significant in the Bootstrap test, the calculated variance value (VAF) is found, indicating the strength of the mediation effect. If the VAF value is greater than 0.80; it is stated that there is a full mediation effect, and if it is between 0.20 to 0.80, there is a partial mediation effect. If it is less than 0.20, there is no mediation effect (Kinaş & Yılmaz, 2023). According to the results of the bootstrap analysis, the direct effect coefficients are presented as follows in Table 5.

Table 5. *Direct Effect Coefficients.*

RELATIONSHIPS	Standardised β	Standard Error	t value	p value	OUTCOME
Local Food Experience -> Destination Loyalty	0.432	0.067	6.401	0.000*	H1 Supported
Mental Well-being -> Destination Loyalty	0.267	0.073	3.675	0.000*	H2 Supported
Local Food Experience -> Mental Well-being	0.813	0.017	48.951	0.000*	H3 Supported

* $p < 0.05$ significant

According to the results obtained, local food experience significantly affects destination loyalty (Local Food Experience -> Destination Loyalty: 0.432, $t=6.401$, $p=0.000$). A one-unit increase in local food perception will increase destination loyalty by 0.432 units. Similarly, the mental well-being variable positively and significantly affects destination loyalty (Mental Well-Being -> Destination Loyalty: 0.267; $t=3.675$; $p=0.000$). A one-unit increase in mental well-being will increase destination loyalty by 0.267 units. Local food experience has a positive and significant effect on mental well-being (Local Food Experience -> Mental Well-Being: 0.813; $t=48.951$; $p=0.000$). A one-unit increase in the perception of local food experience will increase mental well-being by 0.813 units. Therefore, the alternative hypotheses are supported and the null hypotheses are rejected.

As seen in Table 6, all of the mediation conditions put forward by Baron and Kenny (1986), are met for this model. Specific indirect effects values were taken into consideration in the evaluations regarding the mediating role of the mental well-being variable in the structural equation model. By examining the p values of indirect effects, researchers determined which paths were significant. VAF values were calculated for the significant paths. The method of calculating the VAF value is as follows:

$$VAF = (\text{Specific indirect effects} - \text{Original Sample (O)}) / (\text{Total effects} - \text{Original Sample (O)})$$

Table 6. *Indirect Effect Coefficients (Mediating Role of Mental Well-Being)*

BROKERAGE RELATIONSHIP	Standardised β	Standard Error	t value	p-value	OUTCOME
Local Food Experience -> Mental Well-being -> Destination Loyalty	0.217	0.060	3.638	0.000*	H4 Supported

* $p < 0.05$ significant

In VAF calculations, if $VAF > 0.80$, there is a full mediation effect; if $0.20 \leq VAF \leq 0.80$, there is a partial mediation effect. If $VAF < 0.20$, there is no mediation effect (Çavuşgil and Ayhün, 2021: 2079). Since the path coefficient was found to be significant within the scope of the research model, the VAF calculation

regarding the mediation role was made as follows: the mediation role of mental well-being among the relevant variables was determined as partial mediation according to the values obtained;

$$VAF = (0.217) / (0.649) = 0.35 = \text{Partial Mediation}$$

The analysis determined that mental well-being has a partial mediating role with a VAF value of 0.35 in the effect of local food experience (the independent variable) on destination loyalty (the dependent variable). Accordingly, mental well-being has a mediating role in the effect of local food experience on destination loyalty. In addition, it is revealed that even without the mediating role of mental well-being, the relationship between the dependent and independent variables will continue to maintain its significance.

4.2. Qualitative Research Design Phenomenology

The qualitative part of the study uses a phenomenological approach. In this section, semi-structured interview questions were asked to seven participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals make sense of and experience local food, to gather in-depth insights into the phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989). The demographic characteristics of the interviewees are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Demographic Information of the Participants

No	Gender	Marital Status	Age	Education Level
K1	Male	Single	36	Postgraduate
K2	Female	Married	42	Bachelor's Degree
K3	Female	Single	50	Postgraduate
K4	Female	Married	45	Postgraduate
K5	Male	Married	44	Bachelor's Degree
K6	Female	Married	49	High School
K7	Male	Single	61	Postgraduate

Based on the analysis, six overarching themes emerged: Hedonism, Social Interaction, Personal Benefit, Escape from Routine, Authenticity, and Social Benefit.

Theme 1. Hedonism

The opinions of all participants regarding their local food experiences during travel revealed that hedonism-oriented emotions significantly affect the local food experience. In the interviews, participants mostly expressed the sensory pleasure they felt in their views on hedonism from the taste of local food. However, the prominent sub-themes in the coding of hedonism were formed according to views on flavour, entertainment, having a pleasant time, and excitement. Sensory stimuli create a sensitive experiential value that arouses excitement (Tuominen, 2023). Kim *et al.* (2009) state that exciting experiences and sensory appeal are two of the most important motivators for local food experiences. Allan (2016) states that the excitement and motivation to experience local food are highly significant predictors of destination loyalty.

Theme 2. Social Interaction

All participants expressed their happiness and satisfaction with the positive social interaction during the local food experience. Participants were particularly impressed by the hospitality and friendliness of local people in the social interactions that took place during local food experiences on their travels. In the interviews, it was expressed that they were happy to meet and communicate with local people,

and at the same time, it was more meaningful to have this experience with friends. Li and Qiu (2023) state that social relationships are the most important determinant of satisfaction with the tourism experience of local food. Thanks to the dishes that are unique to a destination, tourists meet local people. The positive interaction affects their behavioural intentions (Esen & Seçim, 2020: 103).

Theme 3. Personal Benefit

Individuals attach importance to personal benefits that contribute to the vital satisfaction provided by the local food experience during their travels. Under the theme of personal benefits, respondents most frequently mentioned the importance of self-development by learning new information, consuming natural foods, and a sense of belonging that helps the individual feel accepted and supported. Local food: communication between local businesses, residents, and tourists creates belonging and trust, which affects tourists' satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Esen & Seçim, 2020). Bezirgan and Koç (2014) revealed that local food is effective in creating a sense of dependence and belonging to the destination. It is stated that local food consumption increases perceived well-being and that examining this issue will create important theoretical implications for explaining well-being processes (Apaolaza *et al.*, 2018).

Theme 4. Escape from Routine

The participants stated that they had the opportunity to get away from the routine of daily life during their travels and that when they ate a local meal, they enjoyed a new experience in a different world. According to Iso-Ahola's (1982) escape and seeking theory, escape motivation refers to getting away from the routine of daily life, while seeking motivation is characterised by novelty, the desire to interact socially, and the desire to reward themselves. In many studies, it is seen that tourists want to experience various tourism activities for reasons such as cultural experience, thrill seeking, learning, self-realization, and escape from routine life (Demir & Demirel, 2019; Bayrakçı & Akdağ, 2016; Triantafillidou & Siomkos, 2013; Güzel, 2012). In this qualitative study, the participants expressed their opinions about the theme of the desire to escape from routine. They focused mostly on sub-themes, such as longing for the past life and getting away from daily life.

Theme 5. Originality/Authenticity

Participants frequently mentioned the importance of the authentic values of the destination they travelled to and how impressed they were by these experiences. Under the authenticity theme, participants most frequently highlighted elements such as authentic flavour, atmosphere, traditions, and customs. Studies have shown that the concept of authenticity is important in terms of tourists' expectations and motivations (George, 2001; Mantecon and Huete 2008). Given the competitive environment in the world, companies must seek differentiation (Amaro *et al.*, 2023). Choe and Kim (2018) argue that tourists show limited interest in conventional or familiar tourism products and instead pursue innovative experiences through which they can deeply explore the destination's particular cultural and traditional characteristics. Authenticity is seen as the most important attribute here (Giampiccoli *et al.*, 2020). Ha and Jang (2010) state that although the taste and service quality of food is good, if the atmosphere is bad, satisfaction will be negatively affected.

Theme 6. Social Benefit

The analysis conducted within the scope of qualitative research shows that opinions on sustainability and responsible tourism awareness were expressed. In many countries around the world, the trend of local ownership, returning to essence, and sustainability is on the rise (Yıldırım and Keleş, 2022). The participants are aware that local food consumption contributes to economic, environmental, and cultural sustainability for local people, tourists, and the planet by reducing the carbon footprint caused by food transportation (Sims, 2009; Hall *et al.*, 2007). They mentioned the importance of issues such as responsibility, climate change, the development of local people, and geographically marked products in

their views on the importance of the contributions of local food consumption to society. Tourists have positive attitudes towards the local people and the destination due to the bond they establish with local food, and show willingness to spend more. The views of the participants who act with a sustainable tourism approach are discussed under the theme of social benefit encompassing the sub-themes of sustainability and sense of responsibility. Table 6 shows the sample responses of the participants for all the themes related to the local food experience identified.

Table 6. Sample Responses to Themes

MAIN THEMES	SAMPLE ANSWERS
Hedonism	Taste (K1, K2, K3, K4, K5, K6, K7) 'If I am in other places and find a place with food I like, I go and eat there. Because of that taste, you become attached to that place with passion ...(K7)'
	Excitement (K1, K2, K3, K6, K7) 'I feel a sense of excitement and curiosity before trying local food. This makes me happy. And I also learn about something... I think it is a satisfying feeling. (K6)'
	Entertainment (K1, K3, K4) 'When I go to another city, I would first ask, 'What is famous here, what can be eaten here?' Travelling somewhere to eat is very fun for me. (K1)'
Social Interaction	Meeting new local people (K1, K2, K3, K5, K6, K7) 'If I can find and meet more local restaurants or villagers from whom I can buy organic food, or local people, I become extremely happy. (K2)'
	Hospitality (K1, K2, K3, K4, K5, K6, K7) 'All the restaurant staff are familiar with the region and its history. Hearing about that historical place from someone who lives there offers a unique perspective. Their enthusiasm for taking care of us and trying to please us made us happy and gave us a sense of security. It was as if we were visiting someone we knew. (K6)'
	Sincerity (K1, K3, K4, K7) 'It is argued that we find sincerity in those places and people. I become apprehensive when something becomes commercialised. It is the same for food. Or a destination. (K7)'
Personal Benefit	Becoming Known (K1, K3) 'For example, a very close friend of mine found that dessert shop based on my recommendations. Of course, this made me very happy. When I go there again, I will stop by. There is now a bond, creating a connection between the elements involved. (K3)'
	Learning about Local Culture (K1, K2, K4, K5, K7) 'I think; local people represent local food or the region better. When someone asks something about that region, having the knowledge to answer and a contact there makes us happy. We are satisfied with ourselves. (K1)'
	Belonging (K1, K2, K5) 'Every corner of our country is heaven, and especially the people of Anatolia are very hospitable. They value their guests. We felt like a family there. We felt valued. (K2)'
Escape from Routine	Health (K2, K4) 'If I find a small family-run restaurant like this during my travels, I feel very happy. For example, I know that the products I eat are healthy and natural. I trust what the people who sell them to me say, and when I return to my hometown, I have someone from whom I can get healthy and natural products. (K2)'
	Feeling Nostalgia (K1, K7) 'Sometimes it's not just about eating. I miss my friends there too. I want to see them too, so sometimes I go there. It's highly effective. But when I think about eating, I take action faster. (K1)'
	Getting Away from Daily Life (K2, K4, K5)

MAIN THEMES	SAMPLE ANSWERS
	'But I will never forget the beauty of that breakfast... As I say, maybe a new atmosphere away from everything... And the elements within that atmosphere...(K4)'
Authenticity	Authentic Taste (K4, K5, K7) 'If you eat local food somewhere else instead of on-site, you won't get the same taste.' Eating it on-site, the air, water, nutrition, and even the taste of the meat of the animal are different. That is why I am particularly happy when I eat local delicacies on-site. (K5)'
	Atmosphere (K2, K4, K5, K6, K7) 'I felt like I had gone to another land. I have never experienced such an atmosphere in my life. I couldn't forget it. It is one of the best memories in my life. It gives me the feeling of going again, and I enjoyed it so much... (K4)'
	Traditions and Customs (K4, K5) 'Being treated hospitably, witnessing their traditions, their talking about their local dishes, offering you a taste of the food; in other words, being in that warm communication leaves you feeling happy and joyful, and that is why you want to go back again and again. (K5)'
	Sustainability (K1, K3, K6) 'I prefer to learn about and visit the places that local people frequent rather than famous restaurants. I learn about geographical indication products. I can explore more special tastes and help others earn money. (K3)'
Social Benefit	Sense of Responsibility (K2, K7) 'I also think that, to develop tourism in rural areas and for the development of local people, small, non-commercial places should be supported. (K7)'

5. Discussion

The findings provide empirical answers to the research agenda outlined in the Introduction, particularly regarding the mediating role of mental well-being and its implications for individual well-being and behavioural intentions. The quantitative findings confirmed that mental well-being plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between local food experience and destination loyalty. While prior studies have explored mediators such as destination image (Benli & Yenipinar, 2018), satisfaction (Kızılcalıoğlu *et al.*, 2020), or culinary experience satisfaction (Güler *et al.*, 2024), the psychological mechanisms behind this connection have received limited attention. The results of this study contribute to filling this gap by identifying mental well-being as a key affective pathway.

In line with this, Liu *et al.* (2023) showed that emotional, functional, and social values of food impact destination loyalty via subjective and psychological well-being. However, few studies have differentiated between hedonic (subjective) and eudaimonic (psychological) well-being within this framework. Al-okaily *et al.* (2023) also reported that emotional tourism experiences influence post-travel behavioural intentions through psychological well-being. Similarly, Badu-Baiden (2022) emphasised the role of hospitality, social interaction, neophilia, and food culture in shaping loyalty through subjective well-being. In the dining context, Zhu *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that functional, emotional, cultural, and health values of food experiences impact revisit intentions, with destination image acting as a partial mediator. These findings collectively suggest that well-being should be considered a core component of gastronomic tourism. Tourists' perceptions of food, as noted by Lai *et al.* (2017), and their psychological needs, which can vary by individual (Smith & Diekmann, 2017), directly influence emotional outcomes and loyalty behaviours. The qualitative phase enriched these insights by identifying six themes: Hedonism, Social Interaction, Personal Benefit, Escape from Routine, Authenticity, and Social Benefit. Among these, the themes of Hedonism, Social Interaction, Personal Benefit, and Authenticity emerged as particularly significant in facilitating mental well-being and shaping destination loyalty.

Participants often associated hedonic emotions –especially taste and enjoyment- with their motivation to revisit a destination. However, these sensations were not always sufficient in isolation to sustain meaningful emotional connection. For instance, K₁ described how initial impressions were based on flavour, yet her lasting motivation to return stemmed from the relationships she built with locals, which made her feel emotionally connected. She also noted that being recognised as someone with food knowledge gave her a sense of value, further encouraging repeat visits. K₃ stated that her return trips were driven more by local culinary experiences and hospitality than by the destination’s history or attractions, indicating the importance of social validation and comfort. Similarly, K₇ highlighted her tendency to reconnect with familiar locals during revisit trips, suggesting that food-related social ties enhance emotional resonance with a place.

These reflections indicate that subjective well-being may mediate the hedonic elements of food experiences, while mental well-being more broadly supports sustained destination loyalty. Moreover, dimensions like Personal and Social Benefit point to deeper meaning-making processes, such as gaining personal insight or contributing to local culture, which support the eudaimonic side of well-being. Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative results support the view that local food experiences affect destination loyalty through multiple psychological routes. These findings encourage a shift away from purely functional or image-based models of gastronomic tourism, proposing instead a multi-dimensional understanding that integrates emotion, meaning, and identity.

6. Conclusion and Implications

When the results of the quantitative analysis are considered alongside the findings from the qualitative interviews, it becomes evident that certain aspects of the local food experience—particularly flavour (Hedonism), hospitality and opportunities to connect with local people (Social Interaction), and atmosphere (Authenticity)—exert a greater influence on destination loyalty.

In relation to the impact of local food on mental well-being, participants most frequently emphasised sensory pleasure, social connection, cultural learning, authenticity, and health. However, the meaning individuals attach to these experiences—shaped by personality, expectations, and travel motivations—also plays a critical role in their mental well-being and behavioural intentions. In this regard, the well-being derived from the experience appears to explain destination loyalty more effectively than the experience alone. Given the domestic sample, the findings should be interpreted within the socio-cultural context of Türkiye, where collectivist values, regional culinary identity, and language familiarity may strengthen emotional bonds with local communities. Therefore, the transferability of the results to international tourist populations may be limited.

The findings further suggest that the desire for novelty—such as trying new local cuisines—acts as a motivator for initial visitation. In contrast, familiarity and belonging appear more significant in fostering loyalty, as they enhance mental well-being through emotional attachment. This supports the study’s core conclusion: mental well-being partially mediates the relationship between local food experience and destination loyalty. While not a full mediator, it functions as an essential psychological mechanism within this relationship.

This study demonstrates that gastronomic experience design not only enhances visitor satisfaction but also fosters long-term loyalty through positive psychological outcomes. Thus, tourism strategies should integrate local cultural heritage and producer partnerships into sustainable destination planning. Taken together, the findings have been interpreted in light of existing literature and provide both practical and theoretical implications.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the limited body of literature examining mental well-being as a mediating mechanism between local food experiences and behavioural intentions. The findings highlight that gastronomic experiences have psychological effects that extend beyond hedonic pleasure, influencing emotional states and shaping loyalty behaviours. This provides empirical support for incorporating well-being constructs into gastronomic tourism models and suggests that psychological mechanisms may differ across cultural, demographic, and contextual settings. Future research should explore how various dimensions of local food experiences influence destination loyalty through different well-being pathways.

Moreover, future studies may benefit from examining the relationships among local food experience, well-being, and loyalty within specific destination contexts. Such work could inform regional or organisational planning by revealing how local cultural attributes shape visitor experiences. For example, Inan *et al.* (2023) found that local culture, meaningfulness, vitality, and knowledge positively influenced revisit intention among backpackers, while Lin (2014) showed that culinary experiences affected spa tourists' psychological well-being, with outcomes varying according to health perception. In this regard, segment-specific studies—particularly those focused on senior or health-oriented tourists—may enrich theoretical understanding.

The phenomenological approach applied in the current study provided deep insights into diverse tourist experiences. Nevertheless, future research could adopt case study designs with larger, more homogeneous samples, enabling longitudinal comparisons and offering a more robust theoretical understanding. Additionally, exploring whether gender moderates the relationships among the variables would offer further nuance and extend the theoretical contributions of this research.

6.2 Practical Implications

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations can be proposed for destinations and tourism professionals. First, destinations should go beyond offering flavourful local dishes and focus on creating environments that reflect authentic local culture—such as hospitality, traditional service styles, and distinctive ambience—as these elements enhance mental well-being and make experiences more memorable. Service providers are encouraged to offer geographically indicated products and incorporate traditional components into their service delivery to strengthen tourists' sense of authenticity.

The study also emphasises the importance of social interaction. Engaging with local communities not only strengthens emotional bonds and improves mental well-being but also encourages loyalty behaviours. Initiatives such as involving residents in culinary demonstrations or interactive food preparation activities may foster deeper connections between visitors and the destination.

Destination management organisations should identify the key product attributes valued by their target audiences and tailor their offerings accordingly to maximise satisfaction and loyalty. Aligning experiences with visitor expectations is likely to result in more fulfilling outcomes. Furthermore, qualitative evidence from this study indicates growing visitor sensitivity toward sustainability and responsible tourism. This aligns with global trends and national strategies in Türkiye that emphasise local, essential, and environmentally conscious practices. Public initiatives aimed at increasing sustainability literacy through community training programmes can help integrate these values into the tourism ecosystem.

Finally, collaboration among civil society, public institutions, and universities is essential to ensure that gastronomy tourism develops responsibly and sustainably. As Türkiye continues to invest in year-round

tourism—including rural, health, and congress tourism—integrating local food experiences into these segments can contribute to tourist well-being and promote positive behavioural intentions. Destination managers should therefore prioritise experience-driven strategies such as curated food routes, community-based culinary events, and collaborations with local producers and chefs to foster meaningful engagement, emotional attachment, and repeat visitation.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, which enabled a comprehensive examination of both the statistical relationships and the experiential meanings associated with local food experiences. Nevertheless, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

First, the quantitative phase included only domestic tourists in Türkiye. This cultural context may strengthen the influence of local food experiences on mental well-being and destination loyalty, limiting the generalisability of the results to tourists from different cultural backgrounds. Future studies may address this limitation by incorporating international samples or conducting cross-cultural comparisons.

Second, the qualitative phase was conducted with a small number of participants, consistent with the aims of phenomenological research, which prioritises depth over breadth. While this design provides rich insights, it may limit the diversity of narratives across different socio-demographic groups. Future research could include larger qualitative samples or employ additional qualitative techniques, such as focus groups or observational methods, to broaden the range of perspectives.

Third, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow for examining how relationships between variables evolve over time. Longitudinal or repeated-measures research designs could offer a stronger understanding of how local food experiences and mental well-being develop throughout different stages of the travel process.

Finally, although this study examined the mediating role of mental well-being, it did not include potential moderating variables that may affect the strength of the relationships among local food experience, mental well-being, and destination loyalty. Incorporating moderating factors—such as personality traits, openness to trying new foods, nostalgia proneness, or sustainability sensitivity—may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which these relationships vary.

In light of these methodological limitations, future studies that include more diverse samples, integrate a temporal dimension, and consider additional moderating variables may further enhance the understanding of the links between local food experiences, well-being, and destination loyalty within the context of gastronomy tourism.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Author's Note

This article is derived from the doctoral dissertation titled 'The Mediating Role of Mental Well-Being in the Effect of Local Food Experience on Destination Loyalty' completed by Dr. Selda Karahan under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Selda Uca Karacabey at Kocaeli University, Türkiye.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Sample Questionnaire Form

1. **Gender:** () Female () Male
2. **Age:** () 18–29 () 30–39 () 40–49 () 50–59 () 60 and above
3. **Marital Status:** () Married () Single
4. **Education Level:**
() Primary School () High School () Associate Degree () Bachelor’s Degree () Master’s/Doctorate
5. **Average Monthly Income:**
() 10,000 TL or below () 10,001–15,000 TL () 15,001–20,000 TL () 20,001 TL or above
6. **Have you ever experienced local food during a trip you took within Türkiye?**
If your answer is “No,” please end the questionnaire here.
() Yes () No

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements based on your previous local food experience. Only one option should be selected for each statement.

- (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree (4) Agree
(5) Strongly Agree

Section 1: Local Food Experience Scale		1	2	3	4	5
Experiencing local food was exciting.	D1					
Experiencing local food was enjoyable.	D2					
The local foods were delicious.	D3					
It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.	D4					
It was a unique experience.	D5					
It was different from my previous experiences.	D6					
It was a new experience.	D7					
It allowed me to get to know the local culture more closely.	D8					
The food servers were friendly.	D9					
It was an authentic food culture experience.	D10					
I felt free.	D11					
I felt renewed.	D12					
I felt refreshed.	D13					

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I ate meaningful food through this experience.	D14					
I ate important food through this experience.	D15					
I gained knowledge about myself.	D16					
I participated in the preparation of local dishes.	D17					
I took part in the combination and cooking of ingredients.	D18					
I tried new foods.	D19					
I learned how new foods are prepared.	D20					
I discovered new information.	D21					
I learned the history of local foods.	D22					
Local food vendors were fair in pricing.	D23					
There was litter around the food-serving areas.	D24					
I experienced diarrhea/stomach discomfort.	D25					
Section 2: Mental Well-Being Scale		1	2	3	4	5
I felt more optimistic about the future.	M1					
I felt useful.	M2					
I felt relaxed.	M3					
I received attention from local residents.	M4					
I felt energetic during the experience.	M5					
I was good at coping with problems.	M6					
I was open-minded during the experience.	M7					
I felt good about myself.	M8					
I felt close to local people.	M9					
I felt safe.	M10					
I was able to make my own decisions.	M11					
I felt loved.	M12					
This experience encouraged me to take an interest in new things.	M13					
I felt cheerful.	M14					
Section 3: Loyalty Scale		1	2	3	4	5

I share my positive opinions about this local food experience with others.	S1					
I recommend this experience to acquaintances seeking advice on local foods.	S2					
I encourage my friends and/or family to visit the place where I had this local food experience.	S3					
When I want to eat local food again, my first choice would be this place.	S4					
I would like to revisit the place where I had this local food experience.	S5					

Appendix 2. Semi-Structured Interview Form

No	Interview Questions
1	What does experiencing local food mean to you during your travels?
2	Does the local cuisine of a destination generally influence your travel preferences?
3	During which of your past trips have you experienced local foods?
4	During which trip did you have the most memorable local food experience?
5	What was your main reason for visiting the destination you mentioned?
6	How did you feel when you tasted the local dishes specific to that destination?
7	Do you have any unforgettable memories related to your local food experiences during your travels?
8	How did interacting with local producers and residents while tasting local foods make you feel?
9	What are your opinions about the places where you tasted the local flavors?
10	Why would you like to experience this again in the future?
11	How did the people you told about this destination and its local foods react, and how did their reactions make you feel?

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