

d11210533-The Influence of Local Culinary Experience on Destination Familiarity and Future Intention in Eastern Indonesia

by A Referensi

Submission date: 16-Oct-2024 08:43AM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2486600344

File name: on_Familiarity_and_Future_Intention_in_East_-_Aurelia_Leony.docx (55K)

Word count: 7378

Character count: 43605

The Influence of Local Culinary Experience on Destination Familiarity and Future Intention in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract: In Indonesia's tourism sector, particularly in the eastern regions, culinary tourism has emerged as a growing attraction. This study focuses on understanding the influence of local culinary experiences on tourists' future intentions, with destination familiarity acting as a mediating factor. The research examines whether local culinary experiences, destination familiarity, and future intention are interconnected, specifically in the context of Indonesia's eastern destinations: Makassar, Manado, Lombok, Banjarmasin, Kupang, and Balikpapan. The study utilizes a quantitative correlation design to explore the relationships between these variables. Data were collected from 360 domestic tourists who visited these locations, and responses were analyzed by SmartPLS to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The results revealed that local culinary experiences significantly affect both destination familiarity and future intention, with destination familiarity serving as a crucial mediating factor. While all independent variables demonstrated significant beta coefficients, it is important to note that local food attributes (LFA) had a minimal impact on both destination familiarity and future intention ($\beta = 0.111$, $p = 0.030$, $f^2 = 0.010$). In contrast, emotional and epistemic benefits exhibited stronger effects, indicating that enhancing the overall culinary experience is essential for fostering destination loyalty. These findings affirm the research hypotheses and emphasize the vital role of culinary experiences in shaping tourists' perceptions and intention through destination familiarity, thereby suggesting that a comprehensive approach to culinary tourism can better improve tourist retention and encourage future visits.

Keywords: *Culinary Tourism, Local Culinary Experiences, Destination Familiarity, Future Intention, Eastern Indonesia*

1. Introduction and Background

Tourism plays a vital role in the global economy, serving as a significant driver of economic growth, job creation, and cultural exchange. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) reported that the tourism sector contributed 10.4% to the global GDP in 2019, amounting to approximately 10.3 trillion USD (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2021). This substantial figure underscores the importance of tourism not only in developed nations but also in developing countries striving to enhance their economic standing. In Indonesia, the tourism industry has shown remarkable resilience and growth, presenting opportunities to boost the local economy and preserve cultural heritage. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the country welcomed 11.68 million international tourists in 2023, alongside 825 million domestic trips (Kemenparekraf, 2024). This surge in tourist arrivals indicates that Indonesia's tourism sector is rebounding from the disruptions caused by the pandemic and highlights its appeal as a travel destination. The promising growth trajectory suggests significant potential for continued expansion and innovation in the future.

A standout feature of Indonesian tourism is its diverse culinary offerings, which greatly enrich the overall experience for visitors. Local cuisine is not merely about satisfying hunger; it serves as a gateway for tourists to connect with the culture, traditions, and identity of local communities (Moral-Cuadra et al., 2023). Culinary experiences shape tourists' perceptions of destinations, influencing their satisfaction levels and likelihood of returning for future visits (Kim et al., 2022). Research conducted by Kim et al. (2021) emphasizes that specific local food attributes, such as the novelty, quality, and authenticity of the dishes, play a crucial role in fostering familiarity with a destination. Furthermore, factors like gastronomic motivation, memorable dining experiences, and overall satisfaction significantly contribute to shaping visitors' impressions and their intention to revisit (Mora et al., 2021; Moral-Cuadra et al., 2023). Thus, engaging with local culinary experiences not only enhances tourists' satisfaction but also cultivates a deeper loyalty to destinations that celebrate their culinary heritage, ultimately benefiting the

tourism industry.

Destination familiarity is another critical factor in determining tourists' future intentions, encompassing various aspects such as plans to revisit a place, the desire to return, the willingness to recommend it to others, and the likelihood of leaving positive reviews (Chang, 2018; Kim et al., 2021). Enjoying local culinary experiences significantly enhances tourists' familiarity with a destination (Choe & Kim, 2018). When tourists develop a strong sense of familiarity, it positively impacts their loyalty and the overall image of the destination (Chi et al., 2020). Visitors who feel familiar with a place are likely to hold a more favorable view of it and are more inclined to plan return visits (Kim et al., 2021). Therefore, high-quality local culinary experiences can play a vital role in enhancing tourists' familiarity with a destination, leading to increased intentions to return and recommend the destination to friends and family.

Eastern Indonesia boasts considerable potential in the realm of culinary tourism, with regions such as Makassar, Manado, Lombok, Banjarmasin, Kupang, and Balikpapan being renowned for their rich and diverse culinary offerings. Each of these areas has developed its own unique culinary identity that captivates both domestic and international tourists. For instance, Makassar is a popular destination known for its traditional dishes that reflect local cultural influences (Rijal, 2021). Manado stands out for its exquisite seafood and exotic flavors, establishing a distinctive culinary reputation (Koyakin et al., 2024). Lombok is celebrated for its spicy specialties like Ayam Taliwang and Sate Rembiga, enticing visitors with bold flavors (Rispati & Utami, 2019). Kupang offers unique local dishes such as Jagung Bose and Daging Se'i Goreng, which encourage tourists to return (Setiawan & Giri, 2017). Meanwhile, Banjarmasin and Balikpapan have witnessed rapid growth in their culinary tourism sectors, with local governments emphasizing the importance of this industry for economic development and sustainability (Abbas et al., 2021; Satyaningrat et al., 2023). Together, these regions exemplify the vast potential of culinary tourism to enhance the appeal of destinations and attract more visitors eager to explore the rich culinary traditions of Eastern Indonesia.

Despite the growing interest in culinary tourism, there exists a significant gap in research regarding how destination familiarity mediates the relationship between local culinary experiences and tourists' intentions to revisit, especially in Eastern Indonesia. While various studies such as Moral-Cuadra et al. (2023), Kim et al. (2021), Kim et al. (2022), and Chang et al. (2018), have explored the components of culinary tourism and their effects on satisfaction, loyalty, and future intentions, few have specifically examined how these elements interact with destination familiarity in this context. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating how local culinary experiences in Makassar, Manado, Lombok, Banjarmasin, Kupang, and Balikpapan can influence tourists' future intentions through the lens of destination familiarity. By delving into this topic, the research seeks to provide valuable insights into how local cuisine can serve as a fundamental pillar in the development and promotion of tourism in Eastern Indonesia. Ultimately, this understanding can contribute to enhancing the sustainability of the tourism sector in this vibrant region, fostering economic growth while preserving and celebrating its rich cultural heritage.

2. Literature Review

Effect between Local Culinary Experience and Destination Familiarity

Local culinary experiences have a close relationship with destination familiarity. Wolf (2016) defines local culinary experiences as a combination of culinary tourism with elements of authenticity and culture, where tourists can learn and enjoy regional specialties that reflect local traditions and culinary history. According to Kim et al. (2021), tourists' satisfaction in enjoying local food in a tourist destination is related to tourists' assessment of Local Food Attributes such as Food Novelty, Food Quality and Restaurant Quality. Eating local food allows tourists to learn about food and local culture and become more familiar with a destination. By tasting new or unexpected local food, tourists will get an unforgettable surprise and will become more familiar with the destination visited (Kim et al., 2022).

Destination familiarity is a person's ability to describe a location based on their memories and perceptions. This is influenced by visiting experience and information obtained by a person about the tourist location (Casali et al., 2020). Chi et al. (2020) found that destination familiarity positively moderates tourists' travel intentions. The

more often a person collects information about a destination, the more familiar a person is with that destination. Kim et al. (2021) also explained that through positive local food consumption experiences, tourists can also better understand and feel more familiar with a destination.

Therefore, the stronger the tourist experience of local food attributes, the greater the familiarity with the destination. Thus, the local food experience significantly affects the familiarity of the destination in the area. Based on the information described above, we can conclude the hypothesis as follows

H1: Local Culinary Experience has a significant influence on Destination Familiarity

8 Effect between Destination Familiarity and Future Intention

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Destination familiarity has a significant impact on tourists' future intentions. Chi et al. (2020) stated that a tourists' decision to return to a destination depends on the level of familiarity of the tourist with the destination. stated that familiarity with the destination significantly impacts travel intentions and has the potential to play an important role in travel decisions. Thus, it can be said that destination familiarity can reduce uncertainty and increase comfort, which in turn can increase tourists' confidence to return.

In addition, Casali et al. (2020) confirmed that a familiarity destination would form a positive destination image and increase tourist loyalty. When tourists feel familiar with a destination, tourists tend to have satisfying and memorable experiences. This is supported by Thio et al. (2024), who say that tourists' familiarity with destinations and local food influences their intention to recommend and revisit a destination. Another study conducted by Moral-Cuadra et al. (2023) found that positive perceptions of local food attributes and perceived benefits after tasting local food can strengthen tourists' responses to culinary experiences, potentially influencing tourists' intention to return to visit the destination. In the context of tourism, future intention is the desire or intention of tourists to return to visit a destination, the intention to recommend or be willing to review a destination in the future (Chang, 2018; Kim et al., 2022).

This encourages future intention because tourists know what to expect and feel comfortable with the destination or environment. Therefore, based on the information described above, we can conclude the hypothesis as follows

H2: Destination Familiarity has a significant influence on Future Intention

Effect between Local Culinary Experience and Future Intention

The relationship between local culinary experience and future intention is very close and mutually influential. According to Kim et al. (2021), learning about local culture, gaining new knowledge, and engaging in positive emotions through local food consumption are essential benefits that encourage tourists to revisit and recommend the destination to others. Research by Choe & Kim (2018) also identified that positive attitudes towards local cuisine positively impact tourists' future intentions.

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However, in culinary tourism, only some empirical studies have investigated the relationship between local culinary experiences and future intentions (Kim et al., 2022). Research by Sthapit et al. (2021) states that when tourists visit local restaurants, witness locals serving local food, or learn how to cook and prepare dishes, this will affect tourists' overall perceptions and increase tourists' satisfaction with the destination. Previous culinary tourism studies have conceptualized tourists' Future Intention as the intention to repurchase local food, revisit the destination, and spread positive words about local food to others (Kim et al. 2022).

Thus, destinations that successfully promote the richness and uniqueness of their local cuisine are likely to have a greater chance of attracting tourists to revisit (Kim et al., 2021). Direct experience with local food creates a more personalized engagement, strengthens tourists' connection with the destination. This eventually leads tourists to revisit and repurchase local food and spread positive words about the local food to others. Therefore, based on the information described above, the following hypothesis can be concluded.

H3: Local Culinary Experience has a significant influence on Future Intention

15 The Mediating Role of Destination Familiarity in the Relationship between Local Culinary Experience and Future Intention

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Destination familiarity can mediate the relationship between local culinary experiences and future intention. Moral-Cuadra et al. (2023) found that positive perceptions of local food attributes and perceived satisfaction can increase tourists' loyalty to a destination. When tourists have a satisfying culinary experience, they enjoy the food and feel more connected to a particular destination, which ultimately influences their future decisions (Chi et al., 2020).

Chang et al. (2018) also mentioned that culinary tourism behavior and participating in activities such as food festivals can increase destination familiarity, which in turn also strengthens tourists' intention to return. Thio et al. (2022) also mentioned that a study involving Italian tourists as a sample showed that tourists' experience with local food has a direct and positive effect on tourists' desire to revisit the destination. Travelers who frequently participate in culinary tourism activities tend to feel more familiar with a particular destination.

Overall, this research shows that positive local culinary experiences create pleasant memories and build a deeper connection with the destination, ultimately influencing their decision to revisit. Therefore, based on the information described above, the following hypothesis can be concluded.

H4: Destination Familiarity mediates the relationship between Local Culinary Experience and Future Intention

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Measures

The questionnaire was prepared in Indonesian as the respondents were domestic tourists. The indicators for each construct measuring local food attributes, benefit sought (emotional benefit and epistemic benefit), destination familiarity, and future intention, were adapted from prior studies and modified to suit the context of this study. The questionnaire consists of eight sections. The first section is the consent form, to ensure that potential respondents are willing to complete the questionnaire. The second section contains screening questions to ensure that potential respondents meet the research criteria. The third section captured the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including sex, age, educational level, occupation, and earning. The fourth section portrayed local food attributes which were adapted from Kim et al. (2021), Sthapit et al. (2021), Kim et al. (2022), and Moral-Cuadra et al. (2023). The fifth section is benefit sought, which describes two different dimensions: emotional benefit (7 items) and epistemic benefit (5 items), adapted from previous studies by Kim et al. (2021), Moral-Cuadra et al. (2023), and Sthapit et al. (2021). The sixth section is destination familiarity which was developed from studies by Chi et al. (2020) and Kim et al. (2021). Lastly, future intention was formulated based on research by Chang et al. (2018), Kim et al. (2021), Kim et al. (2022), and Moral-Cuadra et al. (2023). All questions are answered using a five-point Likert scale (1: Strongly disagree; 5: Strongly agree).

3.2. Data Collection

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The research objectives are addressed through a quantitative method using the judgmental sampling approach, because there are specific criteria that must be met to qualify as a sample for this study. The target population consists of domestic tourists who have visited and tasted local food from the six specified cities within the last six months (February-August 2024) and do not reside in any of the mentioned cities. Before data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents to ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The final questionnaire was then modified and distributed to the respondents who meet the research criteria. The questionnaires were collected by two methods, first, data collection was conducted online using Google Forms, which was distributed through social media platforms such as X, Instagram, Facebook, and others. Second, data collection was conducted onsite on 16-18 August 2024 in the cities of Makassar, Lombok and Banjarmasin, followed by 24-26 August 2024 in the city of Kupang. The questionnaires were distributed in places frequently visited by tourists, such as hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions, cafes, malls, and airports. A total of 360 questionnaires were collected, and

after the screening process, all were included in data analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis

This study adopted Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) analysis using SmartPLS 4 to examine the relationships of the proposed structural model. Additionally, Partial Least Squares (PLS) can be employed for explanatory purposes when one or more constructs can be defined as a composite. Thus, the analysis concentrates on the coefficient of determination (R^2) of the endogenous variable, along with statistical inferences regarding the path coefficients (hypothesis testing) and effect size (f^2).

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis conducted in this study. It aims to address the research hypotheses and examine the relationships between local culinary experiences, destination familiarity, and future intention. The statistical results, derived from SmartPLS, will be detailed, including beta coefficients, significance levels, and mediation effects. Additionally, this chapter will assess the influence of local food attributes, emotional benefits, and epistemic benefits on destination familiarity and future intention. The findings will be presented in tables and figures, followed by an interpretation of their implications.

4.1. Demographics of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
GENDER		
Males	89	24.72%
Females	271	75.28%
Total	360	100%
AGE		
17-23	139	38.61%
24-30	139	38.61%
31-40	56	15.56%
41-50	18	5.00%
>50	8	2.22%
Total	360	100%
EDUCATION		
Senior High School or Equal	165	45.83%
Diploma or Equal	29	8.06%
Undergraduate or Equal	162	45.00%
Post Graduate or Equal	4	1.11%
Total	360	100%
OCCUPATION		
Student	64	17.78%
Employee	152	42.22%
Professionals	24	6.67%
Entrepreneur/Business Owner	76	21.11%
Retired/Unemployed	31	8.61%
Other	13	3.61%
Total	360	100%
EARNING		
Lower than Rp 2.000.000	115	31.94%
Rp 2.000.000 – Rp 5.000.000	159	44.17%

Rp 5.000.001 – Rp 10.000.000	71	19.72%
Rp 10.000.001 – Rp 20.000.000	8	2.22%
Higher than Rp 20.000.000	7	1.94%
Total	360	100%

Table 1 shows that the tourists surveyed were female (75.28%) and male (24.72%). Approximately 77.22% of the respondents were between the ages of 17-30 years old, whereas about 22.78% were older than 30 years old. Additionally, 45% of those surveyed had a university education or higher, with 17.78% being students and 42.22% working as an employee. The mean monthly income level ranged between 2.000.000 IDR - 5.000.000 IDR.

2 4.2. Measurement Model Assessment

The reliability and validity of the constructs were evaluated to assess convergent validity through factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and Cronbach's alpha. Based on the results, five items were deleted due to low factor loadings including LFA1 (I had the opportunity to taste local food together with the local people), LFA4 (I had the opportunity to taste local food with good quality), BS1 (By eating local food, I get a memorable experience), BS4 (By eating local food, I can tell other people about my experiences), and BS7 (Eating local food reminds me of the past).

Table 2 shows that all of the item loadings were greater than the recommended value of 0.70 (Ghozali, 2021) and were acceptable for further analysis. The composite reliability estimates were greater than the suggested threshold of 0.70 (ranging from 0.88 - 0.92). Thus, the modified measurement model has good internal consistency. Convergent validity was evaluated by using AVE for each latent variable. From **Table 2**, the result showed that the AVE varied from 0.654 to 0.698, all of which were higher than the suggested threshold of 0.50 (Ghozali, 2021).

Table 3 shows a strong evidence of discriminant validity. The HTMT approach has shown to overcome bias and reliable performance to compute the parameters of the structural model. All of the HTMT value was less than 0.90, indicating that discriminant validity has been established (Ghozali, 2021).

4.3. Structural Model Assessment

After validating the measurement model, the next step was to examine the latent constructs in the structural model. In this study, the inner model stage will be conducted using the coefficient of determination, or R^2 . According to Hair et al. (2019), the R^2 value will be higher if there are more paths leading to the dependent variable, with values of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 considered substantial, moderate, and weak. After evaluating R^2 , the next step is to measure effect size, or f^2 , to assess the substantive impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable, with values higher than 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 depict small, medium, and large. The final stage is to evaluate predictive relevance, or Q^2 , as a measure of relevance between variables. A Q^2 value greater than 0 indicates that the model has predictive relevance, while a Q^2 value less than 0 indicates that the model has low predictive relevance (Hair et al, 2019).

Table 4 provides a comprehensive analysis of the model's predictive accuracy and relevance for destination familiarity (DF) and future intention (FI). For destination familiarity, the model achieves a notable R^2 value of 0.604, indicating that approximately 60.4% of the variation in this variable is accounted for by the model. This high R^2 value signifies that the model effectively captures the crucial factors influencing tourists' familiarity with a destination. Furthermore, a Q^2 value of 0.594 reinforces the model's strong predictive relevance.

This value suggests that the model can accurately predict destination familiarity based on the observed data, making it a valuable tool for destination managers looking to enhance tourists' familiarity with their offerings. In relation to future intention, the model exhibits an R^2 of 0.630, meaning that 63% of the variability in future intention can be explained by the included predictors. This substantial R^2 highlights the model's effectiveness in capturing the dynamics that influence tourists' intentions to revisit or recommend a destination. The Q^2 value for future intention stands at 0.547, indicating solid predictive power and reinforcing the model's utility in forecasting future behaviors based on current data.

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Table 2: Factor Loadings, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE (%)
LFA	I have the opportunity to taste local food that can convey local cultural values	0.810	0.827	0.885	0.658
	I had the opportunity to taste delicious local food	0.774			
	When I eat at local restaurants, I get good service	0.821			
	When eating at local restaurants, I feel a pleasant atmosphere	0.839			
EB	By eating local food, I relax	0.857	0.856	0.903	0.698
	By eating local food, I can make myself proud	0.807			
	By consuming local food in the area directly, I became enthusiastic	0.822			
EPB	By eating local food, I become happy	0.855	0.868	0.904	0.654
	By eating local food, I get something new	0.810			
	Eating local food served by local people in their area directly helps me to understand the local culture	0.821			
	Eating local food makes me learn how local food has a unique taste	0.807			
	Eating local food can increase my knowledge regarding different cultures	0.827			
	Local food increases my knowledge regarding different ways of cooking	0.780			
DF	I am becoming more familiar with this city after consuming local food	0.858	0.884	0.915	0.684
	I have a positive impression of this city after consuming local food	0.836			
	I feel like I have gained new knowledge about this city after consuming local food	0.798			
	I am more familiar with the culinary delights in this city than other people	0.803			
	I often collect information related to culinary delights in this city	0.838			
FI	I would recommend the local food I ate to others	0.855	0.892	0.920	0.698
	I will eat local food from the area I visited at a restaurant in my city when I go home	0.822			
	I will visit this city to try a variety of local food in the future	0.844			
	I will provide positive reviews regarding local food in this city via social media (Facebook, Blogs, Instagram, Youtube, etc.)	0.833			
	I would revisit this city to try local food if I had enough money and time	0.822			

Note: LFA: local food attributes; EB; emotional benefit; EPB: epistemic benefit; DF: destination familiarity; FI: future intention.

Table 5 shows the relationships between emotional benefits (EB), epistemic benefits (EPB), destination familiarity (DF), and future intention (FI) reveal significant effects. Specifically, the pathways EB to DF ($\beta = 0.431$, $p = 0.000$, $f^2 = 0.197$), EPB to DF ($\beta = 0.326$, $p = 0.000$, $f^2 = 0.122$), and DF to FI ($\beta = 0.425$, $p = 0.000$, $f^2 = 0.193$) exhibit strong and significant influences. This indicates that both emotional and epistemic benefits substantially contribute to tourists' familiarity with a destination, which in turn significantly impacts their future intentions.

Table 3: Discriminant validity. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Local Food Experience	0.780	0.892	0.863	0.767	
(2) Emotional Benefit				0.825	
(3) Epistemic Benefit		0.719		0.762	
(4) Destination Familiarity					
(5) Future Intention		0.702	0.794	0.822	

Table 4: Model's Predictive Accuracy and Relevance

	R ²	Q ²
Destination Familiarity (DF)	0.604	0.594
Future Intention (FI)	0.630	0.547

Table 5: Direct Result of Path Coefficient (β)

	β	T-value	p-value	f ²	Decision
LFA -> DF	0.111	1.425	0.030	0.010	Rejected
LFA -> FI	0.144	2.173	0.154	0.018	Accepted
EB -> DF	0.431	7.834	0.000	0.197	Accepted
EB -> FI	0.019	0.288	0.773	0.000	Rejected
EPB -> DF	0.326	4.779	0.000	0.122	Accepted
EPB -> FI	0.298	3.800	0.000	0.097	Accepted
DF -> FI	0.425	5.422	0.000	0.193	Accepted

Note: LFA: local food attributes; EB; emotional benefit; EPB: epistemic benefit; DF: destination familiarity; FI: future intention.

In contrast, the effect of local food attributes (LFA) on destination familiarity is relatively weak, with a coefficient of ($\beta = 0.111$, $p = 0.030$, $f^2 = 0.010$), suggesting only a minimal influence. Additionally, the pathways LFA to FI ($p > 0.05$) and EB to FI ($p > 0.05$) do not demonstrate significance. The f^2 values further clarify these relationships, indicating that EB has a large effect on DF, EPB has a moderate effect on DF, and DF itself has a moderate effect on FI. Conversely, LFA has a negligible effect on both DF and FI.

Table 6: Indirect Result of Path Coefficient (β)

	β	T-value	p-value	Decision
EB -> DF -> FI	0.183	4.410	0.000	Accepted
EPB -> DF -> FI	0.139	3.992	0.000	Accepted
LFA -> DF -> FI	0.047	1.296	0.195	Rejected

Note: LFA: local food attributes; EB; emotional benefit; EPB: epistemic benefit; DF: destination familiarity; FI: future intention.

The results in **Table 6** indicate that emotional benefit and epistemic benefit significantly influence future intention through destination familiarity. Emotional benefit ($\beta = 0.183$, $p < 0.05$) significantly affects future intention through full mediation by destination familiarity. Meanwhile, epistemic benefit ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.05$) positively influences destination familiarity through partial mediation. However, local food attributes ($\beta = 0.047$, $p > 0.05$) do not have a significant indirect effect, meaning they do not sufficiently impact destination familiarity or future intention.

Discussion

2 The results of the analysis show that the local culinary experience variable significantly influences destination familiarity and future intention, following previous research that highlights the relationship between local culinary experiences with increased destination familiarity and revisit intentions (Chi et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021). These results corroborate that when tourists interact with local food attributes such as food novelty, food quality, and restaurant quality, can increase their understanding and attachment to the destination. Interesting culinary experiences not only satisfy tourists physically but also play an important role in building positive memories that contribute to their sense of familiarity with the place visited (Kim et al., 2022).

Tourists who consume local food from the six cities studied, namely Makassar, Manado, Lombok, Banjarmasin, Kupang, and Balikpapan, can feel the epistemic and emotional benefits directly from culinary experiences in their home regions. The epistemic benefits they gain, such as new knowledge about local cooking culture and traditions, as well as the sense of satisfaction that comes from learning something unique and different, are in line with the research of Kim et al. (2021). In addition, emotional benefits in the form of a sense of comfort, happiness, and satisfaction gained from tasting specialties, such as Ayam Taliwang from Lombok or Coto Makassar, 2 so play an important role in building an emotional attachment to the destination (Moral-Cuadra et al., 2023). This is in line with the results of this study where the highest value of factor loadings on emotional benefits is BS2 (By eating local food, I relax), this shows that tourists feel more relaxed after eating local food directly in their home region. The new knowledge gained by tourists and the sense of comfort and happiness that tourists get from trying local food typical of eastern Indonesia develop positive attitudes and intentions to recommend to others to try local food typical of eastern Indonesia.

5 However, the effect of the local food attributes variable on 14 re intention is not significant in this study, in contrast to the findings of several previous studies which state that local food attributes, such as quality and uniqueness, strongly influence tourists' intention to return (Choe & Kim, 2018). This could be due to differences in tourists' perceptions and experiences of culinary attributes in the region under study. Factors such as personal preferences, diverse tourist expectations, or uneven service quality in the region may influence their assessment of local food. In addition, the cultural context and the level of development of the tourism sector in the study area have not been able to provide a strong enough culinary experience to significantly shape return visit intentions. Based on field observations made by the researcher during a visit to Makassar, many places that serve local food there tend to provide less adequate information, so this could be a factor that causes tourists to feel less familiar. As a result, tourists may be less interested in returning to visit.

11 In addition, destination familiarity proved to play an important role in mediating the relationship between local culinary experience and future intention. This is in line with research by Casali et al. (2020) which states that destination familiarity can strengthen loyalty and a positive image of a destination in the eyes of tourists. This familiarity creates a greater sense of comfort and trust and increases tourists' confidence in a destination. In other words, when tourists feel more familiar with a place, through rich and authentic local culinary experiences, their sense of attachment to the destination will be stronger, which in turn encourages them to visit again or recommend the place to others. Therefore, destination familiarity acts as an important bridge connecting local culinary experience with future intention.

In the context of direct and indirect effects, based on the results of the analysis, it is known that the direct effect between emotional benefit (EB) and future intention (FI) is not significant, which means that EB itself is not strong enough to influence FI directly. However, when mediation through destination familiarity (DF) is taken into account, the indirect effect between EB and FI becomes significant ($\beta = 0.183$, $p < 0.05$), indicating full mediation. This means that for EB to have a significant effect on FI, the DF variable must be present as a mediator. It seems that simply feeling happy or comfortable in a place is not enough to directly influence one's intention to return to that destination. However, as one becomes more familiar with the destination, that familiarity can influence their intention to return in the future.

This is in contrast to partial mediation, where both direct and indirect effects on future intention (FI) are significant. In such a situation, even though mediation is present, in the context of this study through destination familiarity (DF) the direct effect of the independent variable on future intention (FI) remains significant. Thus, either

with or without mediation, future intention (FI) remains affected. This suggests that there is a strong enough direct path to influence return visit intentions, although mediation through destination familiarity (DF) also makes an additional contribution to the relationship. For example, in the case of EPB, both the direct effect on FI ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.05$) and the indirect effect through DF ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.05$) are significant, so the mediation in this case is partial.

Overall, this research confirms the importance of local culinary experiences in creating traveler familiarity and loyalty to a destination. Authentic, high-quality culinary experiences are capable of creating deep emotional and cognitive attachments, which ultimately contribute to increased repeat visit intentions as well as destination recommendations to others. In this context, Destination familiarity plays a key role as a significant mediator. Destination familiarity, or the degree to which tourists know and understand a destination, increases tourists' sense of comfort, attachment and trust in the destination. The more travelers feel familiar with the destination through culinary experiences, the higher their likelihood of developing loyalty and intention to revisit in the future. Destination familiarity facilitates a stronger relationship between positive culinary experiences and loyalty, as this sense of familiarity makes travelers feel more emotionally and cognitively connected to the destination.

5. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, researchers see several important managerial implications that can be applied by tourist destination management and local governments, especially in optimizing the local culinary experience as an attraction to increase tourist familiarity and loyalty. With the finding that local culinary experience has a significant effect on destination familiarity and future intention, several strategic recommendations can be implied.

The results show that local food attributes such as food novelty, food quality, and restaurant quality play an important role in shaping destination familiarity, although their direct effect on future intention is not significant in this study. Nevertheless, the quality of local food remains an important factor in creating a memorable experience for tourists. The researcher suggests that local culinary businesses should continue to ensure that the food served is not only delicious but also reflects the uniqueness of the local culture. For example, in regions such as Lombok and Makassar that have a wealth of culinary specialties such as Ayam Taliwang and Coto Makassar, local food businesses need to maintain the authenticity of traditional recipes and cooking techniques.

Based on these findings, researchers recommend that local governments organize culinary festivals. For example, Makassar annually organizes a culinary festival in September with a different theme to highlight the uniqueness of local food and culture. This has proven effective, based on data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy which shows that in 2023, the festival attracted 471,000 visitors (Kemenparekraf, 2024)

Emotional benefits, such as feelings of happiness and satisfaction, have a strong influence on destination familiarity and a significant direct effect on tourist satisfaction. Therefore, the researcher suggests that culinary business managers should focus on the emotional aspects of creating a pleasant culinary experience. For example, local restaurants can be designed in such a way as to create a comfortable and pleasant atmosphere for visitors. This can be done by creating a warm atmosphere, both in terms of decoration and service. Friendly and welcoming service can greatly contribute to increasing the emotional engagement of travelers, making them feel more connected to the place and the food they are enjoying.

With the current trends in mind, local food entrepreneurs have a great opportunity to capitalize on the aesthetic value in the design and presentation of their establishments. They can adopt interesting and unique design concepts that not only attract attention but also create a memorable visual experience. This strategy naturally targets specific groups of travelers, such as the younger generation or visitors looking for an unusual culinary experience. With this approach, restaurants can attract more visitors who want to try culinary destinations that are rich in local culture and uniqueness.

Sustainable management is also important to maintain the long-term appeal of culinary destinations. Based on the findings that epistemic benefits (such as learning and new knowledge) have a significant effect on future intention, researchers believe that culinary tourism can be an educational tool that enriches the tourist experience. By involving local communities in culinary activities and providing training to improve their skills, destinations can

offer sustainable culinary experiences while supporting the local economy. Local governments can organize events that combine hands-on experiences and local culture, providing opportunities for tourists to deepen their understanding of local culture. By creating interactive and informative programs, such as workshops, art performances, and cultural festivals, tourists can not only enjoy the beauty of local culture but also actively participate in the activities. This will provide a more immersive and meaningful experience, and increase tourists' appreciation of the traditions and cultural values that exist in the area.

By implementing these recommendations, researchers believe destinations, culinary businesses, and local governments can do their part to increase traveler loyalty through more immersive and authentic culinary experiences. Research data supports that an approach that focuses on improving culinary quality, emotional engagement, and destination familiarity can create a sustainable tourism ecosystem and support long-term growth.

Conclusion

16 In conclusion, this research provides significant insights into the vital role of local culinary experiences in shaping destination familiarity and future intentions among tourists in Eastern Indonesia. The findings reveal that engaging with local cuisine not only enhances tourists' understanding and appreciation of a destination but also serves as a strong predictor of their likelihood to return and recommend the location to others. This relationship underscores the importance of both emotional and epistemic benefits derived from local food, illustrating how these experiences contribute to a deeper connection between tourists and the destinations they explore. By participating in local culinary activities, tourists develop not just a taste for the food but also a cultural understanding of the region, which enriches their overall travel experience.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the necessity of maintaining high standards in local food attributes, such as uniqueness, quality, and authenticity, to create positive tourist experiences. While the direct impact of these attributes on future intentions was not found to be statistically significant, their role in cultivating memorable and enjoyable experiences is crucial. Tourists who encounter delightful culinary offerings are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the destination, which can translate into increased intentions to revisit and recommend the location to others. The research highlights that tourists value not only the taste but also the story and cultural significance behind the local dishes, reinforcing the idea that culinary experiences are a key part of the travel narrative.

15 The findings also reveal that destination familiarity plays a critical mediating role in the connection between local culinary experiences and tourists' intentions to return. This emphasizes the notion that when tourists feel familiar with a place, especially through rich and authentic local culinary experiences, they are more inclined to develop a sense of attachment that enhances their loyalty. This connection fosters a cycle where satisfied tourists become advocates for the local cuisine, promoting it to their friends and family and sharing their experiences on social media. In turn, this user-generated content acts as an organic form of marketing, attracting more visitors who are eager to partake in similar culinary adventures.

Additionally, this research advocates for the integration of local culinary experiences into tourism strategies, emphasizing their potential to create lasting emotional and cognitive attachments that drive repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth. By focusing on enhancing culinary offerings, emotional engagement, and destination familiarity, tourism managers can create a sustainable tourism ecosystem that benefits not only the tourists but also the local community and economy. This strategic approach ensures that culinary experiences are not merely an afterthought but are woven into the very fabric of the travel experience, promoting a deeper connection between visitors and the cultural heritage of the region.

Overall, as destinations strive to provide authentic and immersive culinary experiences, they will be better positioned to attract and retain visitors. This approach contributes to the vibrant and enduring growth of the tourism industry in Eastern Indonesia, ensuring that the rich cultural heritage and culinary traditions of the region are celebrated and preserved for future generations. By recognizing the significance of local culinary experiences in tourism, destination managers can foster a tourism environment that is not only profitable but also respectful and appreciative of the local culture and community.

Moreover, this study also sheds light on the potential role of collaboration between local stakeholders, such as government bodies, culinary entrepreneurs, and tourism operators, in promoting and preserving the region's unique food heritage. By working together to elevate local food experiences, these stakeholders can ensure that culinary tourism remains a vital and sustainable part of Eastern Indonesia's tourism landscape. This collaborative approach can help create innovative food-related events, culinary tours, and educational programs that further enhance tourists' engagement with the region's rich gastronomic culture. Ultimately, such efforts not only contribute to the growth of the local economy but also help protect and perpetuate the cultural diversity that makes Eastern Indonesia a compelling destination for culinary explorers.

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