

# EVALUATING THE ROLE OF STREET FOOD EXPERIENCE, DESTINATION IMAGE, AND SATISFACTION IN SHAPING TOURIST BEHAVIOR

## Abstract

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*Purpose* – This study examines how street food experiences influence domestic tourist behavior and destination image in Ho Chi Minh City. It offers insights for policymakers, tourism authorities, businesses, and street food vendors to enhance tourist engagement and position the city as a premier culinary destination.

*Methodology/Design/Approach* – A quantitative approach was used, surveying 450 domestic tourists who experienced street food in Ho Chi Minh City between January 2024 and March 2024. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling was employed to examine the relationships among street food experiences, destination image, satisfaction, and tourist behavior, with a focus on the mediating role of satisfaction.

*Findings* – Street food experiences significantly enhance the destination image and have a positive impact on tourist behavior, with satisfaction acting as a mediator. Key factors include food safety regulations, improved quality control, and the integration of digital innovations to strengthen destination branding and foster tourist loyalty.

*Originality of the research* – This study addresses a significant research gap by empirically linking street food experiences to destination image and tourist satisfaction in a Southeast Asian megacity. Unlike earlier research on gastronomy tourism, this study highlights the role of street food in urban tourism, integrating historical and contextual insights to enhance the understanding of tourist behavior.

**Keywords** Street food experiences, Destination Image, Satisfaction, Tourist Behavior, Sustainable Development Goal No.2

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## INTRODUCTION

Street food has long been viewed as a distinctive aspect of local culture, especially appealing to tourists. According to Sengel et al. (2015), food plays a crucial role in tourism development, with dining expenditures for international tourists representing over 21% of total costs for self-organized trips and more than 13% for those on organized tours. The street foods of most European, East Asian, and South Asian nations are well-known (Bandara et al., 2025). Many governments consider street food a vital element in tourism (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2022). Street food is highlighted in Vietnam as an essential tourism product (Tran et al., 2025). Despite the recognized importance of street food in tourism, there is limited research on how the street food experience impacts tourist satisfaction and destination image, particularly in Vietnam (Pham, Eves, & Lorna, 2023). Existing studies have predominantly focused on general culinary tourism, overlooking the unique role of street food in shaping urban destination branding. Understanding this relationship is vital for developing strategic policies that enhance food tourism and promote Ho Chi Minh City as a distinctive culinary destination. Local street food tourism contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goal No. 2 by promoting the local economies of the destinations (UNWTO, 2019). Street food is a crucial component of urban/city food systems, critical to achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Vignola & Oosterveer, 2022). Several prior studies have shown that local food contributes to sustainable tourism by supporting sustainable agriculture, fostering local economic growth, and ensuring environmental sustainability (Bayraktar, 2024).

Niedbala et al. (2020) further indicate that tourists typically allocate about half of their expenditures to food during their trips. As culinary tourism continues to flourish, interest in increasing is on the rise worldwide. Street food is also gaining popularity in developed countries such as North America and Europe as a convenient and affordable option that offers distinctive flavors to local people and curious tourists (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2022). Street food is increasingly important in the nutrition of European city dwellers (Wiatrowski et al., 2021). Although the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is widely acknowledged, prior research lacks empirical evidence linking street food experiences to behavior, particularly in Southeast Asia (Yang et al., 2024). Additionally, Lee et al. (2020) highlight the lack of quantitative assessments regarding the mediating role of satisfaction in this context.

Additionally, the dominant theoretical models in tourist behavior research, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), focus primarily on rational and intentional choices (Bui, 2022). However, street food consumption is often driven by spontaneity, sensory appeal, and emotional engagement, which TPB fails to fully capture in terms of the complexity of specific behaviors (Kufaine,

2024). To better capture this complexity, this study adopts the Cognitive-Affective-Behavioral (CAB) model, which integrates cognitive perceptions (destination image), affective responses (satisfaction), and behavioral intentions (Truong & Nguyen, 2023). The CAB model has been regarded as one of the most effective models for predicting customer attitude toward behavioral intention in business psychology (Yahya & Ariffin, 2022). Specifically, the CAB theory captures the direct effect of cognition on an individual's affective reaction, which in turn influences collective behavior that stimulates their motivation to engage in specific behavior (Hussin & Abdul Wahid, 2023). A customer experience is defined as the customer's direct and indirect experience of the service process, the organisation, the facilities, and other customers, shaping the customer's cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses (Mustaffa et al., 2020; Walter et al., 2010). By incorporating both rational decision-making and experiential aspects, the new framework, based on the CAB model, provides a more comprehensive understanding of how street food experiences influence tourists' satisfaction, destination image, and behavior (Dang et al., 2025; Huang et al., 2018).

Despite the growing academic interest in food tourism, several critical research gaps persist. First, there is a lack of empirical evidence linking street food experiences to destination image and tourist behavior. Existing studies primarily concentrate on high-end gastronomy rather than on the role of street food in urban tourism and destination branding (Ab Karim & Chi, 2010). Second, previous research predominantly relies on rational-choice frameworks, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which do not adequately capture the affective and sensory dimensions of street food experiences (Hussin & Abdul Wahid, 2023; Kufaine, 2024). Third, while Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Changchun have been thoroughly examined in street food tourism research, Ho Chi Minh City remains underexplored, resulting in a regional knowledge gap (Torres Chavarria & Phakdeekauksorn, 2017; Wu et al., 2024). Fourth, Rewtrakunphaiboon & Sawangdee (2022) adopted the experience economy model in the context of street food tours to understand the tourist behavioural intention; such experiences contribute to the overall satisfaction they derive from their travels, foster a sense of attachment to the destination, and influence visitors' cognitive, affective, and behavioural intentions (Alotaibi, 2024). Lastly, although food quality and authenticity are acknowledged as key determinants of satisfaction, research investigating the mediating role of satisfaction in shaping tourist behavior in urban street food contexts remains limited (Mak et al., 2012; Okumus et al., 2018).

This study advances food tourism research and provides practical insights for destination branding by addressing these gaps. Unlike broad explorations of gastronomy tourism, this research offers a structured analysis of how street food experiences influence tourist perceptions, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. The findings will enhance destination managers' and policymakers' strategies for leveraging street food tourism in urban branding (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016)

This study is structured as follows: The introduction outlines the rationale for conducting this study. The literature review presents related theories and formulates research hypotheses. The methodology section describes the research methods employed, while the results and discussion section analyzes and interprets the findings. Finally, the implications and limitations of the research are discussed.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1. The street food

Street food is critical to food tourism (Gupta & Sajjani, 2020). It refers to prepared foodstuffs and drinks sold by hawkers, particularly on roads and similar locations (Privitera & Nesci, 2015). It is often sold at mobile food stalls and temporary eateries in crowded public areas, ranging from food carts to street-side stalls. Street food reflects the cultural essence of a society or territory and consequently adds to the appeal of a destination (Okumus et al., 2018; Putra et al., 2023). It is fast-prepared, reasonably priced, widely available, and caters to a diverse audience. Moreover, street vendors are often associated with environmental pollution, unhygienic practices, and operations in open public spaces. The lack of regulation contributes to environmental degradation and challenges in waste management (Grangxabe et al., 2024). Wijaya et al. (2018) found that the physical environment and service quality of food stalls are the most significant factors in customer satisfaction.

Street food features include historical and traditional value, locally sourced ingredients, ethical considerations, respect for local connections, adherence to health regulations, environmental respect, and promotion of local communities. These features are often prominently displayed on destination sites (Privitera & Nesci, 2015). Street food tourism specifically refers to travel motivated by the desire to experience, taste and learn about street food (ready to-eat food and beverages – including fresh fruit and vegetables); that integral to socio-economic, cultural and environmental aspects within the local territory and are typically prepared and sold by formal or informal vendors at an open-air stand, cart, food truck, or market stall, in streets and other public places for the benefit of the local population and tourists (Mnguni & Giampiccoli, 2022). Although its role in culinary tourism has been acknowledged, limited empirical research has examined its direct influence on tourist behavior, satisfaction, and destination image, particularly in urban Southeast Asian contexts like Ho Chi Minh City.

## 1.2. Street food experience

Travel experience encompasses a holistic understanding of a destination (Agapito et al., 2014). Food experiences, like travel experiences, are subjective and unique to each individual (Badu-Baiden & Kim, 2022). Specifically, a food experience results from a tourist's active interaction with food-related products at a destination (Park et al., 2023).

Lee et al. (2020) and Rewtrakunphaiboon & Sawangdee (2022) define street food experiences as a combination of sensory perceptions and social interactions related to street food consumption. The environmental context, interactions with vendors, and the sensory appeal of food all influence tourist engagement and perceptions of authenticity. Hence, customer experience is important and context-dependent in service relationships, with three distinct components: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Huang & Chen, 2022).

Despite its recognized importance, few studies have systematically explored how these experiential dimensions translate into tourist satisfaction, behavioral intentions, and destination branding.

## 1.3. The components of the street food culinary experience

Culinary experiences can be examined from various perspectives, highlighting distinct factors influencing them. From the customer's perspective, it is essential to focus on peak experiences, which contrast with everyday ones (Quan & Wang, 2004). From the supplier's view, it concerns three elements: (1) restaurant characteristics, (2) food characteristics, and (3) equipment (Nelson, 2016).

In the context of street food, quality encompasses interaction, product quality, and environmental quality (Lee et al., 2020). Thus, culinary experience synthesizes all tourist experiences during street food consumption at a specific location. Tourists increasingly seek unique regional foods and specialty dining experiences (Nelson, 2016). However, researchers often overlook the locally specific characteristics vital to street food when assessing the overall quality of culinary experiences (Okumus et al., 2018; Privitera & Nesci, 2015).

Based on the research model proposed by Lee et al. (2020), the components of the street food culinary experience include product quality, interaction quality, and environmental quality. Additionally, as Okumus et al. (2018) and Privitera & Nesci (2015) suggested, local cultural authenticity should also be considered a critical factor within the street food culinary experience. In particular, the influence of street food experiences on destination image and tourist behavior remains underexplored.

## 1.4. Satisfaction

Satisfaction is crucial to consumer behavior; however, its definition varies across different disciplines. In tourism, satisfaction is conceptualized as a traveler's emotional response to their experiences at a destination (Leung et al., 2023). It reflects how well a destination meets or exceeds expectations (Gupta et al., 2018). Kotler & Armstrong (2020) and Nguyen Huu et al. (2024) define satisfaction as the degree of fulfillment or disappointment tourists feel after comparing their expectations with actual experiences.

Alternatively, Tian-Cole et al. (2002) defined satisfaction as "the cumulative psychological state that tourists have experienced over time." Evaluating tourists' past experiences, perceptions, and activities related to the physical environment enhances our understanding of their satisfaction with tourist destinations (Prayag et al., 2020). Satisfaction with all dimensions of street food tour experiences can foster a special bond between tourists and the destination, thereby enhancing the positive destination image and promoting destination loyalty (Rewtrakunphaiboon & Sawangdee, 2022). However, there is a lack of research linking street food experiences and satisfaction to behavioral outcomes, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City.

## 1.5. Tourist Behavior

The behavioral component is the final construct in the CAB model, defined as the physical actions or behaviors of consumers that can be directly observed and measured by others (Qi & Ariffin, 2023). Based on CAB, consumer behavior results from a subsequent functional process that begins with the cognitive phase and progresses to the affective phase, ultimately culminating in the behavioral phase (Zhang et al., 2023). Consumer behavior encompasses the selection, purchase, and utilization of products and services to fulfill needs and desires (Kotler & Armstrong, 2020). Satisfaction and behavioral intention are outcomes of tourist experiences that reflect their well-being after the trip (Rewtrakunphaiboon & Sawangdee, 2022). Understanding tourist behavior is essential for the successful growth of tourism services, making this knowledge crucial for the industry's expansion and development. Insights into tourist behavior benefit all stakeholders in tourism (Pearce, 2005).

## The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), is frequently referenced in consumer behavior studies. This theory builds on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). TPB was created to address the limitations of TRA, which assumes that human behavior is entirely governed by rational thought. By incorporating the concept of unintended behaviors, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) acknowledges that decision-making can also involve factors beyond conscious control. However, this model can be further enhanced by integrating additional elements or modifying causal relationships to suit specific contexts. Abbasi et al. (2021) and Bui (2022) suggested that an extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) model could more effectively predict and explain tourist behavior compared to the original TPB model by incorporating additional structures, such as overall destination image. Tourists heavily rely on the overall destination image when selecting specific locations (Bayramov, 2022). Soliman (2021) noted that the destination image is a crucial factor influencing travelers' decision-making, destination selection, and future behavior. However, TPB may not capture the complexity of consumer behavior (Chou et al., 2020; Groening et al., 2018). Chou et al. (2020) suggest adopting the cognitive, affective, and behavioral (CAB) model to explore the relationship between attitude and tourism behavior. This CAB will be utilized as a supporting model, with limited components related to attitude and behavior, to determine how cognitive factors influence consumer attitudes regarding purchase intentions (S. B. Yahya et al., 2022). Research in the context of street food provides substantial theoretical support for how positive experiences lead to tourists' intentions to revisit food destinations and recommend them to others (Chompupor et al., 2024).

## The Cognitive-Affective-Behavioral (CAB) model

While the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) emphasizes intentional and rational decision-making, tourist behavior, especially in the context of street food experiences, is significantly influenced by emotions and perceptions (Yang et al., 2024). The Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) model offers a more comprehensive explanation by integrating three essential components: cognition (destination image), affective (satisfaction), and behavioral responses (Hussin & Abdul Wahid, 2023; Truong & Nguyen, 2023). In this framework, the cognitive variable represents consumers' thoughts, beliefs, or awareness of products or services, the affective variable represents emotions, moods, attitudes, or feelings, and behavior refers to consumers' tendencies or physical actions toward products or services (Q. Zhang et al., 2023).

The cognition-affect-behavior paradigm describes the process by which beliefs or thoughts influence affective responses, which are either favorable or unfavorable, thereby shaping behavioral intentions (Huang et al., 2018). Considering the integration of three variables, the CAB model provides a comprehensive explanation of how consumers process information, form attitudes, and make decisions (Dang et al., 2025).

In the context of tourism, Ribeiro & Prayag (2019) highlight that customer experience is a fundamental concept in the service-dominant (SD) logic of Vargo et al. (2020), representing a post-consumption behavior that has both cognitive and affective dimensions. Moreover, satisfaction is the affective mediator, linking cognitive perceptions to customer loyalty (the behavioral outcome) (Tuong et al., 2025). Therefore, in street food tourism, customer experiences are shaped by a dynamic interplay between cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (Ribeiro & Prayag, 2019). The CAB theory is particularly suitable for explaining how a person's thoughts (cognitive), feelings (emotional/affective), and actions (behavioral) relate to their overall assessment of an object (Hussin & Abdul Wahid, 2023).

### 1.6. Destination image

Various methods exist to determine a destination image, primarily through emotions and cognitions, personal constructs in the visitor's mind. Destination image refers to the collection of thoughts, perceptions, opinions, and mental images a visitor holds about a place (Lai et al., 2024). The destination image encompasses practical, psychological, shared, and unique attributes (Paulino et al., 2021). This vision stems from a mental and affective mindset (Beerli & Martín, 2004) encompassing a comprehensive list of specific characteristics. However, Echtner & Ritchie (1993) argue that investigations should assess a holistic image construct.

MacKay & Fesenmaier (1997) describe the overall image as combining multiple products (attractions) and attributes that form a unified impression. This holistic perception encompasses aspects related to a place or country's image in the traveler's view, including physical characteristics, cultural heritage, hospitality, safety, and prestige. It also reflects visitors' emotional reactions and interactions with the destination (Hsu & Scott, 2020). The destination image varies dynamically when new data is obtained (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021). This article focuses on the holistic destination image. Understanding this image is crucial for tourism stakeholders, as it significantly influences behaviors such as destination selection, intentions to return, and overall satisfaction (Stylos et al., 2016). However, while food is increasingly recognized as a central component of destination image, research rarely examines the specific role of street food in shaping urban tourism perceptions.

### 1.7. The relationship between satisfaction with street food experience, behavior, and destination image

Street food is a vital part of a destination's heritage. It enhances tourists' understanding of culinary culture (Truong & Nguyen, 2023), leading to full sensory engagement and excitement, which evokes heightened sensations and feelings, reinforcing their involvement in the destination's regional culture (Chang et al., 2011). It makes the overall destination experience unforgettable by making it more intriguing, as it possesses tremendous potential for forging strong connections among tourists, the destination, its residents, and their history and culture (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). Regional street food offers enjoyment, excitement, and entertainment, encouraging tourists to explore, share, and appreciate the cultural differences of their host countries (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). Ozcelik & Akova (2021) found that the street food experience affects behavioral intention. Therefore, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H<sub>1</sub>: The street food experience influences destination image.
- H<sub>2</sub>: The street food experience affects tourists' satisfaction.
- H<sub>3</sub>: The street food experience influences tourist behavior.

The destination image is crucial in the tourists' selection process (Oom do Valle et al., 2006). A positive destination image has a positive influence on tourists' experiences, thereby enhancing their satisfaction with the destination (Aliedan et al., 2021; J. H. Kim, 2018; Li et al., 2021). An appealing and expectation-meeting destination image increases tourists' satisfaction. Numerous studies in tourism have demonstrated this relationship (Jeong & Kim, 2020; Li et al., 2021). Therefore, the attractive destination image can be considered an element contributing to tourists' satisfaction with the tourist destination. Thus, the article suggests the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>4</sub>: The destination image affects tourists' satisfaction.

Tourists' future tourism participation and related behaviors often depend on tourists' absolute evaluations of destination memories, which are estimated as their intention to revisit and recommend the destination to others and friends (Barnes et al., 2016). In other words, tourists' perceptions of unforgettable experiences will impact their behaviors, such as intentions to return and suggest the destination (Ali et al., 2016). When tourists' visit experiences at a specific place are engaging and enhanced, their chances of repeat tourism increase, and they may also recommend the destination to others (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Therefore, a memorable culinary experience motivates one to return to that destination and try similar foods again. Similarly, a study by Gupta et al. (2018) highlighted that the significant reason foreign tourists return is the outstanding street food experiences (Gupta & Sajjani, 2020). Likewise, S. Kim et al. (2019) found that tourists' intention to revisit is influenced by their enjoyable culinary experiences. Ji et al. (2016) also confirmed that tourists' behaviors and intentions to revisit, including word of mouth (WOM), depend on their prior experiences with street food. Visitors with better vital emotional experiences tend to share their experiences with others more (J. (Jamie) Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017). Hence, the study offers the hypothesis:

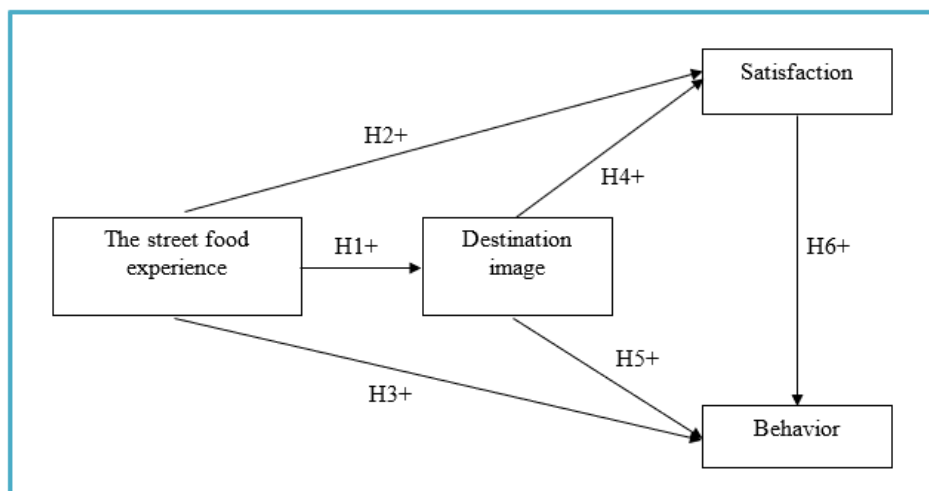
- H<sub>5</sub>: The destination image affects tourist behavior.

In the tourism industry, various experiences are considered crucial factors in developing positive perceptions of destinations, and street food is recognized as a significant attraction that encourages tourists to visit destinations (Mohamad et al., 2022). Given the increasing importance of experiential value in determining significant outcomes, executives and organizations in the tourism industry must understand the factors that affect tourists' experiences. Specifically, the quality of satisfying experiences between suppliers and customers contributes to building a positive image and behavioral intentions. Mak et al. (2012) examined tourists' culinary experiences at destinations and how these experiences could impact their overall satisfaction. Furthermore, they argued that tourist behavior and attitudes towards food consumption include characteristics of visitors, the destination's food, and the destination environment. Y. G. Kim et al. (2013) demonstrated that experiencing local cuisine leads to a positive national image and may motivate the intention to revisit this place for culinary tourism. Accordingly, the study proposes the final hypothesis:

- H<sub>6</sub>: Tourists' satisfaction affects tourist behavior.

Based on the evaluation above, the study proposes the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1, which integrates the Cognitive–Affective–Behavior (CAB) model, aligning with prior research on street food tourism (Hsu & Scott, 2020; Truong & Nguyen, 2023), by examining the relationship between street food experience, destination image, satisfaction, and tourist behavior in Ho Chi Minh City.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Source: Authors, 2024; Truong & Nguyen, 2023

This proposed model is particularly relevant to street food tourism, where both rational assessments and emotional and sensory experiences drive tourist behavior. Tourists are often influenced by the authenticity, novelty, and social interaction associated with street food, all of which significantly impact their satisfaction (L. L. D. Pham, Eves, & Wang, 2023). Unlike the TPB, which emphasizes deliberate decision-making, the CAB model acknowledges the crucial role of spontaneity, sensory appeal, and emotional responses in shaping tourist behavior (Truong & Nguyen, 2023). Cifci et al. (2022) identified a significant and positive relationship between tourists' experiences of street food, destination image, and intentions. Therefore, this study adopts the Cognitive–Affective–Behavioral (CAB) model to elucidate the relationship between street food experiences, destination image, satisfaction, and tourist behavior. This approach effectively captures how street food influences tourist behavior and rational decision-making, emotional engagement, and overall experience, leading to positive behavioral outcomes, such as revisitation and word-of-mouth recommendations.

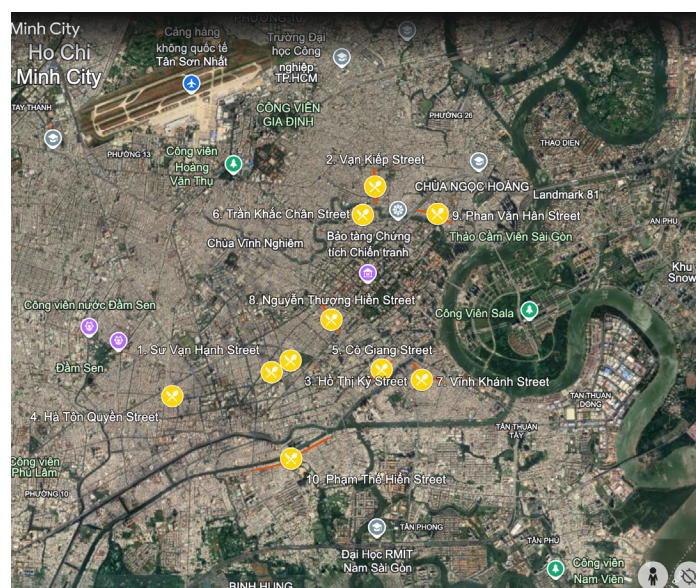
## 2. METHODOLOGY RESEARCH

### 2.1. Study context

Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon, serves as Vietnam's economic and commercial powerhouse and remains one of the most attractive (X. H. Pham & Bui, 2019) in Asia (X. H. Pham & Bui, 2019). The city's cultural fabric is deeply intertwined with its culinary heritage, where Eastern and Western influences converge to create a dynamic blend of tradition and modernity. As the heart of southern Vietnam and a strategic intersection connecting the northern, southern, eastern, and western regions, Ho Chi Minh City has long played a pivotal role in shaping Vietnam's culinary identity (Nguyen & Le, 2024). Culinary tourism has emerged as a significant driver of the city's tourism sector, contributing to domestic and international visitor engagement. According to Phan & Chan (2022), cuisine is a fundamental component of Vietnam's tourism industry, with Ho Chi Minh City standing out as a leading gastronomic hub. Street food, in particular, is a defining aspect of the city's food culture, attracting local and international visitors. Beyond sightseeing, tourists are drawn to the city's diverse culinary offerings, which enhance their overall travel experience and reinforce a positive image of the destination. However, despite its rich gastronomic strategy, Ho Chi Minh City's culinary tourism remains underdeveloped globally. The absence of internationally competitive food streets limits its potential as a top-tier culinary destination, highlighting the need for strategic development and global positioning.

According to Nguyen & Le (2024), with over 300 years of formation and development, Ho Chi Minh City boasts numerous ancient architectural works, historical sites, and a rich museum system. One cannot overlook Saigon's culinary culture, where various cultural influences from both East and West converge, blending ancient and modern elements. Discussing Saigonese cuisine today inevitably highlights the diversity and continuous evolution of street food. Alongside traditional dishes, appealing yet straightforward street food items that cater to the dynamic lifestyle and captivate the city's youth have gained popularity. These include mixed rice paper, grilled rice paper, salads, snails, skewers, mango shakes, and more. Additionally, the city's food streets offer a plethora of snacks, street foods, and renowned specialties from other regions and nations, including milk tea, tteokbokki, hotpot, grilled dishes, Hue-style beef noodle soup, Quang noodles, and Vietnamese pancakes. Figure 2 illustrates some of the most popular Vietnamese street foods in Ho Chi Minh City, which are indicated with yellow icons, where locals and domestic tourists can enjoy authentic local dishes.

Figure 2: Overview of Vietnamese street foods in Ho Chi Minh City



Source: From <https://earth.google.com/>

Ho Chi Minh City's culinary landscape is a vibrant tapestry woven from diverse influences, reflecting its rich history and cultural amalgamation. This diversity has positioned the city as a premier gastronomic destination in South Asia. In 2019, Vietnam was honored as "Asia's Leading Culinary Destination" at the World Travel Awards, underscoring the nation's rich and varied cuisine (Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, 2020). However, in 2025, Vietnam was notably absent from Tripadvisor's list of top culinary destinations, indicating a need for renewed efforts to bolster its global culinary standing (Anh Minh, 2025).

## 2.2. Data Analysis

This study employed a quantitative research methodology, utilizing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the proposed model's complex relationships and mediating effects (Seočanac, 2024). PLS-SEM is particularly well-suited for tourism research, as it effectively handles intricate models and remains robust with smaller sample sizes (Hair et al., 2017, 2019; Sarstedt et al., 2014; Seočanac, 2024). Following the guidelines established by Hair Jr. et al. (2014), data analysis was conducted in two stages: measurement model assessment and structural model assessment.

In the first stage, the measurement model was evaluated to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (CA) and composite reliability (CR), confirming that the constructs demonstrated a high degree of internal coherence (Hair et al., 2017). The study examined the observed variables' outer loadings ( $\lambda$ ) to establish convergent validity. It calculated the average variance extracted (AVE), verifying whether the indicators were positively correlated within their respective constructs. Discriminant validity was subsequently evaluated to ascertain whether each construct was distinct from the others in the model. The Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied, where discriminant validity was established if the square root of AVE for each construct was more significant than its correlations with the other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The second stage assessed the structural model, focusing on its explanatory power ( $R^2$ ) and multicollinearity (Variance Inflation Factor—VIF). Additionally, path coefficients were analyzed to determine the strength and significance of relationships between independent and dependent variables. This comprehensive two-stage approach ensured that the study's findings were statistically rigorous and theoretically sound.

## 2.3. Measurement scales

This study developed a multidimensional measurement scale to examine the determinants of street food experiences among tourists in Ho Chi Minh City (Table 1). The Street Food Experience Scale (13 items) was adapted from (Okumus et al., 2018; Privitera & Nesci, 2015; Truong & Nguyen, 2023), while the Destination Image Measure (4 items) was derived from the work of (Lee et al., 2020; Styliadis, Belhassen, et al., 2017; Styliadis, Shani, et al., 2017; Truong & Nguyen, 2023). Furthermore, the constructs of Satisfaction (4 items) and Behavioral Intentions (4 items) were adapted from studies by Castro et al. (2007) and Truong & Nguyen (2023).

Table 1. Measurement scales

Scale	Code	Measurement scales	Sources
Street Food Experience	CLSP1	I had an excellent experience at the street food vendors in Ho Chi Minh City	(Lee et al., 2020; Okumus et al., 2018)
	CLSP2	I am impressed by the quality of street food in Ho Chi Minh City	
	CLSP3	I feel positively about the street food products for tourists in Ho Chi Minh City	
	CLMT1	The street food vendors in Ho Chi Minh City are open and friendly	
	CLMT2	I interact frequently with street food vendors	
	CLMT3	I enjoy interacting with the street food vendors in Ho Chi Minh City	
	CLTT1	Overall, the quality of interactions between street food vendors and customers in Ho Chi Minh City is excellent	
	CLTT2	The space and environment at the street food vendors are great	
	CLTT3	I am impressed with the overall quality of the atmosphere at the street food vendors	
	CLTT4	I believe that the environment of the street food vendors is of high quality	
Destination Image	VHDP1	Ho Chi Minh City has many unique dishes	(Okumus et al., 2018; Privitera & Nesci, 2015)
	VHDP2	The street food in Ho Chi Minh City is diverse and rich in both ingredients and preparation methods	
	VHDP3	The street food in Ho Chi Minh City reflects the local cultural identity	
Destination Image	HADD1	Street food in Ho Chi Minh City offers good service	(Lee et al., 2020; Stylidis, Belhassen, et al., 2017; Stylidis, Shani, et al., 2017)
	HADD2	Street food creates a positive image for Ho Chi Minh City	
	HADD3	Street food in Ho Chi Minh City is famous	
	HADD4	Street food in Ho Chi Minh City enhances the image of my trip	
Satisfaction	HL1	The street food experience in Ho Chi Minh City exceeded my expectations	(Castro et al., 2007)
	HL2	I truly enjoyed the trip to these street food vendors	
	HL3	Experiencing the street food made me satisfied with my trip to Ho Chi Minh City	
	HL4	The street food experience was valuable enough for me to stay in Ho Chi Minh City	
Behavior	HV1	I feel that street food in Ho Chi Minh City is worth experiencing and enjoying	(Castro et al., 2007; Truong & Nguyen, 2023)
	HV2	I will recommend street food in Ho Chi Minh City to my friends and family	
	HV3	I will return to experience street food and tourism in Ho Chi Minh City in the future	
	HV4	I will recommend Ho Chi Minh City to my family and friends	

Source: Authors, 2024

A structured questionnaire was designed to capture responses from domestic tourists who actively engaged with the street food of Ho Chi Minh City. To comprehensively assess respondents' perceptions, the street food vendor survey used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument, all survey items underwent rigorous pre-testing and were refined based on the feedback received.

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4, a software well-suited for PLS-SEM applications in tourism research (Ali et al., 2018; Seočanac, 2024; Usakli & Kucukergin, 2018). To enhance the validity and generalizability of the findings, random sampling techniques were employed across multiple street food locations, ensuring that each potential respondent had an equal opportunity to participate and thereby mitigating selection bias (Ahmed, 2024; Olsen, 2008). Moreover, recognizing the potential influence of social desirability bias, where respondents may provide answers perceived as more socially acceptable rather than reflecting their genuine opinions, the study implemented several control measures to mitigate this bias. Anonymity was emphasized to encourage honest responses, and indirect questioning techniques were incorporated to minimize response distortion (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; Larson, 2019).

This study applies a rigorous methodology and offers empirical insights into the complex relationships among street food experiences, tourist satisfaction, destination image, and behavioral intentions in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings enhance our understanding of how culinary tourism affects visitor perceptions and engagement, offering valuable insights for destination marketing and management strategies.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Survey forms were distributed directly to street food experience tourists, mainly in the afternoon and evening, as tourists are most present in the street food areas (Figure 2). The sample size was determined based on a distribution value corresponding to a 95% confidence level, estimating 50% of the population, with a margin of error of 0.05, resulting in a required sample size of 400. This is appropriate for most multivariate analysis studies (B. Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019; B. G. Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Four hundred fifty survey forms were distributed to domestic tourists, yielding 430 responses. After data cleaning, 421 valid responses remained. Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the sample. Among the participants, 40.9% of the sample is male and 59.1% female. With the frequency of time to visit street food, 24.7% of the sample are first-time visitors, 29.9% have visited twice, and 45.4% have visited more than three times. The length of stay in Ho Chi Minh City was as follows: the majority of domestic tourists stayed for 4-7 days, at 29.5%, with 27.3% of the sample staying 1-3 days, 8– 10 days at 26.6%, and 16.6% staying more than 10 days. These results align with the findings of Giang (2022), who reported that domestic tourists stay in the city for an average of 3.6 days (61.1% stay 1-3 days, 31.1% stay 4-7 days), and the length of stay of international tourists is just 1-2 days. However, international tourists chose Ho Chi Minh City for its diverse local foods. The findings contribute to local government navigating more effective strategies to attract international tourists to stay longer.

Table 2: Demographic profile of the sample

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	172	40.9
	Female	249	59.1
Frequency of visit	1 first time	104	24.7
	2 – 3 times	126	29.9
	More than 3 times	191	45.4
Length of stay	1- 3 days	115	27.3
	4 – 7 days	124	29.5
	8 - 10- days	112	26.6
	More than 10 days	70	16.6

Source: Authors, 2024

#### 3.1. Measurement model assessment

In this stage, data were examined to confirm their reliability and validity. First, the study affirms the scale's reliability through CR and CA. Table 3 indicates that the construct scales of the research model are above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). The measures demonstrated reliability (see Table 3). The paper tested convergent validity, which was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE) method. According to Hair et al. (2014, 2017) and Sarstedt et al. (2021), convergent validity is achieved when the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds the threshold of 0.5, allowing the observed variables to explain more than 50% of the construct's variance. Additionally, Table 3 shows that all values of  $\lambda$  are above 0.7, meeting the requirement (Hair Jr. et al., 2014), which ensures that the construct adequately explains its respective variance.

Table 3: Data validity and explanatory power

Concept	Code	Item	CA	CR	AVE	$\lambda$	$R^{2_{\text{exp}}}$	VIF
Environmental quality	CLMT	3	0.701	0.832	0.623	0.768		1.281-1.439
Product quality	CLSP	3	0.721	0.842	0.641	0.783		1.319-1.511
Interaction quality	CLTT	4	0.782	0.859	0.604	0.753		1.462-1.681
Destination image	HADD	4	0.746	0.839	0.567	0.720	0.136	1.321-1.656
Satisfaction	HL	4	0.718	0.825	0.541	0.711	0.161	1.307-1.403
Behavior	HV	4	0.721	0.827	0.545	0.722	0.270	1.309-1.444
Local cultural identity	VHDP	3	0.726	0.846	0.646	0.800		1.420-1.447

Source: Authors, 2024

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Ab Hamid et al., 2017; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This criterion indicates that if the square root of each concept's AVE (bolded in Table 4) is more significant than its intercorrelations (lowercase numbers), then the concepts are distinct (Henseler et al., 2015). The values in Table 4 confirm that discriminant validity is satisfied. Finally, the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) in Table 3 are below the cutoff of 0.5 (Hair Jr. et al., 2014), indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern.

Table 4: Fornell–Larcker Criterion

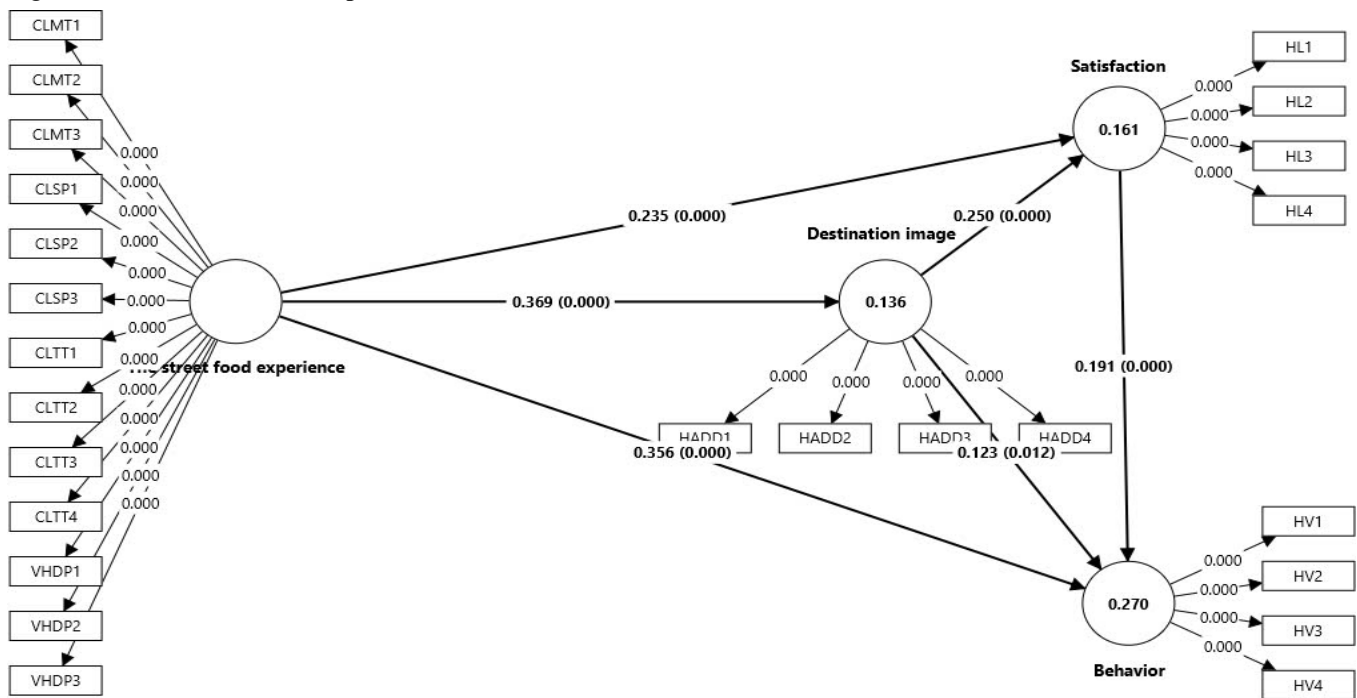
Concept	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Environmental quality (1)	0.623	<b>0.789</b>						
Product quality (2)	0.641	0.669	<b>0.800</b>					
Interaction quality (3)	0.604	0.622	0.634	<b>0.777</b>				
Destination image (4)	0.567	0.247	0.238	0.321	<b>0.753</b>			
Satisfaction (5)	0.541	0.185	0.244	0.238	0.336	<b>0.736</b>		
Behavior (6)	0.545	0.380	0.327	0.308	0.318	0.347	<b>0.738</b>	
The street food experience (7)	0.646	0.306	0.304	0.268	0.310	0.317	0.412	<b>0.804</b>

Source: Authors, 2024

### 3.2. Structural model assessment

The coefficient of determination,  $R^2$ , measures the extent to which independent variables explain the variation in the dependent variable in the model (Hair Jr. et al., 2014). Specifically, in the study, the street food experience factor is influenced by tourists' behavior toward the destination image, with an  $R^2$  value of 0.270, as presented in Table 3 and Figure 3. Meanwhile, the  $R^2$  coefficients of the satisfaction and destination image factors are 0.161 and 0.136, respectively, indicating only moderate and weak predictive power (Hair et al., 2017). In this study, all  $R^2$  values in the research model are sufficient to explain the variation in the street food experience, as  $R^2$  must always be interpreted within the research context (Hair Jr. et al., 2014).

Figure 3: Outcomes of the Proposed Model



Source: Authors, 2024

Table 5: Path coefficients: Total effects

Relationship	$\beta$	T-value	P-value
The street food experience → Destination image	0.369	6.855	0.000
The street food experience → Satisfaction	0.327	5.668	0.000
The street food experience → Behavior	0.464	9.820	0.000
Destination image → Satisfaction	0.250	4.209	0.000
Destination image → Behavior	0.170	3.213	0.001
Satisfaction → Behavior	0.191	4.427	0.000

Source: Authors, 2024

Path coefficient analysis revealed that street food experiences have a significant impact on destination image ( $\beta = 0.369$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.327$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and tourist behavior ( $\beta = 0.464$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The mediating role of satisfaction was also confirmed. However, compared to other Vietnamese cities, such as Da Lat ( $\beta = 0.544$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) (Truong & Nguyen, 2023), where authenticity plays a stronger role in shaping destination image, Ho Chi Minh City's highly commercialized and diverse street food culture has a more pronounced impact on behavioral outcomes, driving repeat visits and recommendations.

The study further confirmed that destination image and satisfaction mediate the relationship between street food experiences and tourist behavior. The bootstrapping results ( $N=5000$ ) indicate that all proposed hypotheses  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$ ,  $H_4$ ,  $H_5$ , and  $H_6$  are accepted with 95% confidence ( $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ ). Specifically, in Ho Chi Minh City, destination image ( $\beta = 0.250$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) affects tourist behavior ( $\beta = 0.191$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), reinforcing the interplay between perception, emotional responses, and behavior in food tourism.

This finding aligns with prior research (Bayraktar, 2024; Hsu & Scott, 2020; Lee et al., 2020), providing empirical support for the Cognitive–Affective–Behavior (CAB) model. The results highlight that Ho Chi Minh City's street food tourism thrives on diversity and accessibility, making it an attractive urban culinary destination.

The street food experience also influences tourists' satisfaction and future behavior (Ozcelik & Akova, 2021; Yang et al., 2024). Therefore, the hypotheses  $H_2$  and  $H_3$  are also confirmed. The findings underscore that sensory appeal, authenticity, and cultural significance are essential in shaping positive perceptions of street food experiences.

Figure 3 and Table 5 indicate that the destination image has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction, aligning with previous studies (Darwis et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2020; Styliadis, Belhassen, et al., 2017). Additionally, the destination image has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction and revisit behavior (Utama et al., 2025), confirming hypotheses  $H_4$  and  $H_5$ . The study also found a positive relationship between satisfaction and behavior ( $H_6$ ), consistent with prior findings (Pham, Eves, & Wang, 2023; Torres Chavarria & Phakdee-auksorn, 2017).

However, the impact levels of the factors differ. Based on Table 5, the street food experiences have a more substantial influence on behavior than destination image ( $0.464 > 0.170$ ). Similarly, the street food experience factor also significantly impacts tourist satisfaction more than when influenced by the destination image ( $0.327 > 0.250$ ). Regarding the level of impact, the street food experience is the most decisive influencing factor on tourist behavior ( $\beta = 0.464$ ), followed by the impact of the street food experience on the destination image ( $\beta = 0.369$ ). The destination image has the least impact on tourist behavior ( $\beta = 0.170$ ). These findings reinforce the importance of curating high-quality and authentic street food experiences to maximize positive behavioral intentions among tourists.

The empirical evidence supported the cognitive-affective-behavior (CAB) model (Hussin & Abdul Wahid, 2023; Zhang et al., 2018), emphasizing that Ho Chi Minh City's food tourism thrives on diversity and accessibility, making it an attractive urban culinary destination. In contrast, studies on culturally embedded food destinations, such as Da Lat (Truong & Nguyen, 2023), suggest that authenticity fosters deeper tourist engagement and stronger emotional attachment ( $\beta = 0.379$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These insights underscore the importance of developing tailored marketing strategies that align with the distinct strengths of each destination. In Ho Chi Minh City, this approach leverages convenience and variety while emphasizing cultural heritage in traditional food hubs.

In addition to evaluating the  $R^2$  of the dependent variables in the research model, the change in  $R^2$  when a specific independent variable is removed from the model can be used to assess whether this removed variable significantly impacts the dependent variable. This measure is called the effect size  $f^2$ —the values of  $f^2$  range from 0.017 to 0.157, indicating that the destination image substantially enhances tourists' perceptions of street food, reinforcing its role in influencing behavior.

## CONCLUSION

The research findings demonstrate that all concepts align with the data, achieving both convergence and discriminant validity. This indicates that the components of the street food experience influence the destination image of Ho Chi Minh City, as well as tourist satisfaction and behavior. Specifically, the results reveal a positive correlation between the street food experience and the destination image, indicating that the street food experience has a significant influence on tourists' perceptions of Ho Chi Minh City. This aligns with the findings from KAR et al. (2024), Lee et al. (2020), and Ozcelik & Akova (2021), reaffirming the connection between street food experiences and destination image. A well-curated street food culture enhances destination branding, strengthening Ho Chi Minh City's position as a leading culinary tourism hub.

Furthermore, the study reveals that a strong and positive destination image enhances tourist satisfaction. This is consistent with previous research in the tourism field, such as the work of KAR et al. (2024), Styliadis, Belhassen et al. (2017), and Styliadis, Shani et al. (2017). A favorable destination image significantly boosts tourist satisfaction, further driving positive behavioral intentions.

Additionally, the study highlights the strong influence of tourist satisfaction on behavior. The findings suggest that higher satisfaction levels are associated with increased positive behavioral intentions, aligning with the results of Gupta & Sajjani (2020). These insights offer critical managerial implications for enhancing tourist loyalty by ensuring satisfying street food experiences and strengthening the city's overall destination branding strategy. Key managerial insights suggest that improving food safety regulations, enhancing quality control, and leveraging digital can elevate Ho Chi Minh City's culinary reputation.

### **Managerial Implications**

This study provides both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it utilizes the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) model, expanding the discourse on tourist behavior by emphasizing sensory appeal, authenticity, and emotional engagement as critical factors in food tourism experiences (Y. G. Kim et al., 2013; Truong & Nguyen, 2023). Additionally, the study offers empirical validation of the impact of street food on destination image, satisfaction, and loyalty (Lee et al., 2020). From a practical standpoint, the findings give actionable insights for policymakers, tourism authorities, and food vendors to enhance Ho Chi Minh City's position as a premier street food destination. Specifically, the study emphasizes the importance of environmental quality in street food stalls, highlighting the importance of reducing single-use plastics, implementing recycling practices, and minimizing food waste as key actions, as the findings of Bayraktar (2024).

While street food vending is recognized for contributing to poverty alleviation and employment generation, it is also associated with inadequate infrastructure, including poor waste management practices and the presence of dumping sites (Grangxabe et al., 2024). Strengthening food safety regulations is vital for preserving the reputation and attraction of street food tourism. To ensure compliance, policymakers should implement stricter hygiene standards, conduct regular inspections, and provide vendor training programs to ensure adherence to these standards. Food hygiene ensures access to safe and nutritious food, contributing to Sustainable Development Goal No. 2's target of improving nutrition, as suggested by Sharma (2025). Furthermore, a digital food safety rating system should be integrated into tourism applications to help visitors make informed choices about safe dining options.

Enhancing destination marketing can further elevate the appeal of street food tourism. Tourism authorities should integrate street food culture into promotional campaigns, emphasizing its authenticity and safety. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged to support certified vendors, helping them brand their stands as high-quality, trustworthy establishments that adhere to international hygiene standards.

Enhancing food tourism experiences through curated and immersive activities can attract more visitors. Destination managers should develop guided food tours incorporating cultural storytelling to enhance the overall experience. These tours enable tourists to engage deeply with local culinary traditions while maintaining safety and hygiene measures.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

Street food experiences vary by region, area, and country, necessitating further research to validate findings across different contexts. Future studies should examine regional variations in tourist satisfaction and behavior while considering control variables such as the length of stay and frequency of visit to explore potential variations in tourist experiences. Additionally, quality methods such as in-depth interviews, ethnographic research, or sentiment analysis of user-generated content (UGC) from platforms like Tripadvisor and Instagram should be incorporated to provide deeper insights into tourists' sensory and emotional responses to street food experiences. Future research should also explore the impact of digital transformation, including food delivery services, online reviews, and social media engagement, on tourists' perceptions and behaviors in urban destinations. Moreover, the study focused solely on domestic tourists in Ho Chi Minh City; further research could apply Multigroup Analysis to evaluate the different behaviors of domestic and international tourists regarding street food experiences in Ho Chi Minh City. The further findings could enhance the generalizability of the results.

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