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Local Food as Antecedents of Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty: The Case of Philippines' Culinary Capital – Pampanga

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Abstract: This research endeavors to explore the significance of local foods as precursors to both tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, specifically examining tourist motivation, engagement with local cuisine, food quality, and pricing. Employing a quantitative research design, particularly the causal predictive approach, the study examines the interrelationships among these variables. A survey was conducted, gathering responses from 185 participants encompassing both local and foreign tourists who have visited Pampanga, known as the Culinary Capital of the Philippines. Utilizing Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) via WarpPLS 7.0, a comprehensive analysis of the data was conducted to test and evaluate both the measurement model and the structural model. The results underscore that positive experiences encountered by satisfied local and foreign tourists could foster loyalty towards Pampanga as a destination. These experiences are shaped by positive encounters with local food, especially concerning its quality and pricing, active engagement in food-related activities, and the fulfillment of their food-related motivations. This study significantly contributes to the existing literature by identifying pivotal factors influencing tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, specifically linked to local food. Furthermore, the findings offer valuable insights and practical recommendations for stakeholders involved in local food tourism, thereby enriching the understanding and enhancing the practices within this sector.

Keywords: Culinary tourism, local food, food related motivation, local food involvement, satisfaction, destination loyalty

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Introduction

The Philippines embraces a diverse culinary tapestry reflecting its cultural richness, blending Spanish, American, East Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander influences (Fernandez, 2019). Pampanga, dubbed the "Culinary Capital," showcases distinctive delicacies and heritage crafted by skilled artisans known as "*Pampangueño*" (Department of Tourism, 2022). Their renowned dishes have garnered national acclaim, significantly shaping the region's reputation (Lacap, 2019). Angeles City, situated prominently in Pampanga, underscores the pivotal role of local cuisine in bolstering tourists' loyalty, satisfaction, and overall destination allure (Lacap, 2019).

While tourism wields substantial economic, sociocultural, and environmental influence (Salee et al., 2022), culinary tourism, gaining rapid global traction, profoundly impacts travelers' destination preferences and experiences (Gutierrez et al., 2022). The Philippine culinary tourism sector, forecasted to reach $5.4B in 2022 and projected to surpass $21.3B by 2032, anticipates a compound annual growth rate of 14.7% (Future Market Insight, 2022). This segment claims a noteworthy portion, 3% –7% of the global tourism market, signifying the escalating demand for distinctive culinary adventures in the country.

Academic research has underscored the pivotal role of local food in shaping the tourist experience and its integral part within the tourism system (Zhang et al., 2019). Beyond its representation of national and regional identities, local cuisine embodies a community's historical and authentic narrative, often serving as a staple in their diet (Rousta & Jamshidi, 2020). The sustenance of local delicacies heavily relies on the dedicated efforts of farmers cultivating essential ingredients, crucial for offering tourists authentic local flavours (Espino et al., 2021). Akter's findings (2022) further affirm the substantial contribution of local foods in propelling tourism and destination promotion.

Nonetheless, research gaps persist in comprehending the economic impact of local food industries on tourism revenue, fostering sustainable practices within culinary ecosystems, and understanding how evolving consumer preferences influence the preservation of traditional cuisines. Technology increasingly complements these efforts, broadening tourism growth and accessibility by streamlining travel processes and expanding destinations' reach to new markets (Seal et al., 2024). Addressing these gaps can facilitate a more holistic approach to leveraging local gastronomy for sustainable tourism development.

This study focuses on exploring the impact of local food-related factors on food satisfaction and destination loyalty in Pampanga, renowned for its culinary offerings. While prior research extensively delves into the connection between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty through cultural aspects, scant attention has been paid to the role of local food and cuisine. Moreover, few studies have investigated

tourist behavior toward local food across such a diverse set of factors. This research aims to fill this gap by centering on tourist motivations related to food, engagement with local cuisine, food quality, pricing dynamics, and their collective influence on food satisfaction and subsequent destination loyalty.

A noteworthy research gap remains in understanding the specific attributes of local food that drive satisfaction and foster loyalty among tourists, highlighting the need for empirical investigation into these factors. Likewise, the intersection of local food experience and its correlation with destination loyalty remains underexplored, warranting further scholarly attention. Understanding these gaps could lead to a more comprehensive comprehension of how local food elements contribute to overall tourist satisfaction and sustained destination allegiance.

Research Framework and Hypotheses Development

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical lens of the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory is central to understanding the intricate dynamics of food-related motivations and involvement in local food experiences. Chindaprasert et al. (2015) highlighted that tourist motivations often stem from multiple sources, aligning with the premise of the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, where expectations and outcomes influence satisfaction. de Guzman et al. (2012) emphasized the need for well-planned destination development to offer unique motivations for visitation, reinforcing the theory's concept of expectations shaping satisfaction. Ullah et al. (2022) stressed the pivotal role of local food as a significant factor in tourists' motivations, echoing the theory's focus on expectations influencing satisfaction. Tourist motivation is itself a broad and multifaceted construct extending well beyond gastronomy, as evidenced in wildlife tourism contexts where distinct experiential drivers similarly shape visitor behaviour (Islam et al., 2025).

Moreover, the works of Chen and Huang (2019), Ling et al. (2017), and Lacap (2019) collectively support the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory by linking food involvement to tourists' behaviours and activities in destinations, illustrating the influence of expectations and experiences on satisfaction and involvement. This framework suggests a positive relationship between food-related motivation and involvement in local food experiences. The theoretical underpinning of the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory aligns with the multifaceted aspects of tourists' expectations, experiences, and subsequent satisfaction within the context of local food interactions. Food satisfaction can be explained through the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, which posits that satisfaction occurs when expectations are met or exceeded. In the context of food satisfaction, Xue et al. (2022) highlighted that it refers to the consumer's response post-consumption.

Expectations about food quality, price, and health concerns are critical factors influencing satisfaction (Nguyen et al., 2019). Satisfaction levels are influenced by the disconfirmation of these expectations. This study, grounded in the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, endeavors to unravel the intricate relationship between local food-related factors, food satisfaction, and destination loyalty in Pampanga, renowned for its culinary heritage. While prior research has predominantly focused on cultural aspects in shaping tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, there exists a critical void in understanding the specific role of local food and cuisine in this context. This research aims to bridge this gap by exploring diverse factors such as tourist motivations towards food, active engagement with local cuisine, food quality, pricing dynamics, and their combined impact on both food satisfaction and subsequent destination loyalty.

Recent literature underscores the necessity for empirical investigation into the specific attributes of local food that contribute to satisfaction and loyalty among tourists. Moreover, scholars highlight the unexplored terrain regarding the correlation between local food experiences and their influence on destination loyalty, advocating for further scholarly inquiry into this crucial intersection. Understanding these gaps through the lens of the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory offers an opportunity for a more comprehensive understanding of how local food elements intricately intertwine with overall tourist satisfaction and sustained allegiance to destinations.

Food Related Motivation and Involvement in Local Food

Tourist motivation does not often result from a single source (Chindaprasert et al., 2015). The development of a destination, including its marketing activities, should be well planned to provide unique motivations to visit such destinations (de Guzman et al., 2012). Tourists often have multiple travel motives, and these often include local food. For instance, Ullah et al. (2022) identified local food as having crucial value for tourists, underscoring the importance of food as one of the factors in their motivation. Increasingly, digital platforms and social media reviews also shape tourists' food-related motivations and purchase decisions, extending traditional motivational drivers into the online space (Islam et al., 2024).

Additionally, Chen and Huang (2019) expounded that local food involvement is a factor that helps determine tourists' food-related behaviors and activities in a destination. Ling et al. (2017) similarly found that food involvement subsequently increases tourists' local food experiences at a destination. The findings of Lacap (2019) further indicate that tourist motivations related to local food also leads them to engage in activities associated with the destination's food. Therefore, the subsequent hypothesis was proposed:

H1 – Food related motivation has a positive relationship and effect on involvement in local food.

Food Satisfaction

Xue et al. (2022) contended that customer satisfaction related to food should refer to the consumer's response after receiving their food. In relation to food satisfaction, prior studies have identified food quality and price as antecedents of its attainment. Several studies have also identified the components that make up food quality. Nguyen et al. (2019) identified taste, price, and health concerns as food quality factors affecting local food satisfaction. Further, Ziku et al. (2019) identified healthiness, freshness, taste, and temperature as food quality attributes, echoing comparable quality dimensions identified among specialty food and beverage establishments in Malaysia (Lee et al., 2018).

Overall, when tourists are satisfied with the quality of the local food, it leads to satisfaction; more broadly, such quality-related value drivers have also been shown to shape satisfaction and commitment across other hospitality contexts (Fuchs et al., 2026). Meanwhile, other researchers (Chen & Huang, 2019; Lacap, 2019) have expounded that when tourists include food as their motivation for travel and involve themselves in local food, this may result in positive satisfaction. Thus, it is proposed that:

H2a – Food related motivation has a positive relationship and effect on food satisfaction.
H2b – Local food quality has a positive relationship and effect on food satisfaction.
H2c – Price has a positive relationship and effect on food satisfaction.
H2d – Involvement in local food has a positive relationship and effect on food satisfaction.

Destination Loyalty

Determining and retaining tourist loyalty benefits a destination's success and helps increase economic revenue. Prior research indicates that destination loyalty is shaped by tourists' inclination to recommend the destination to others, their willingness to speak positively about it, and their intention to revisit in the future (Hernandez-Rojas et al., 2022; Lacap, 2019; Nasir et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). Co-creative, technology-enabled destination experiences have likewise been shown to strengthen tourists' loyalty towards a destination (Konar et al., 2024). Numerous researchers have demonstrated that the antecedents of destination loyalty include food-related motivation (Chen & Huang, 2019), satisfaction (Nguyen et al., 2019; Zhang et

al., 2019), and involvement (Lacap, 2019; Rehman et al., 2021). Therefore, it is proposed that:

H3a – Food related motivation has a positive relationship and effect on destination loyalty.
H3b – Food satisfaction has a positive relationship and effect on destination loyalty.
H3c – Involvement in local food has a positive relationship and effect on destination loyalty.

Based on the review of the foregoing literature, the conceptual model (Figure 1) was proposed, and the preceding hypotheses were generated.

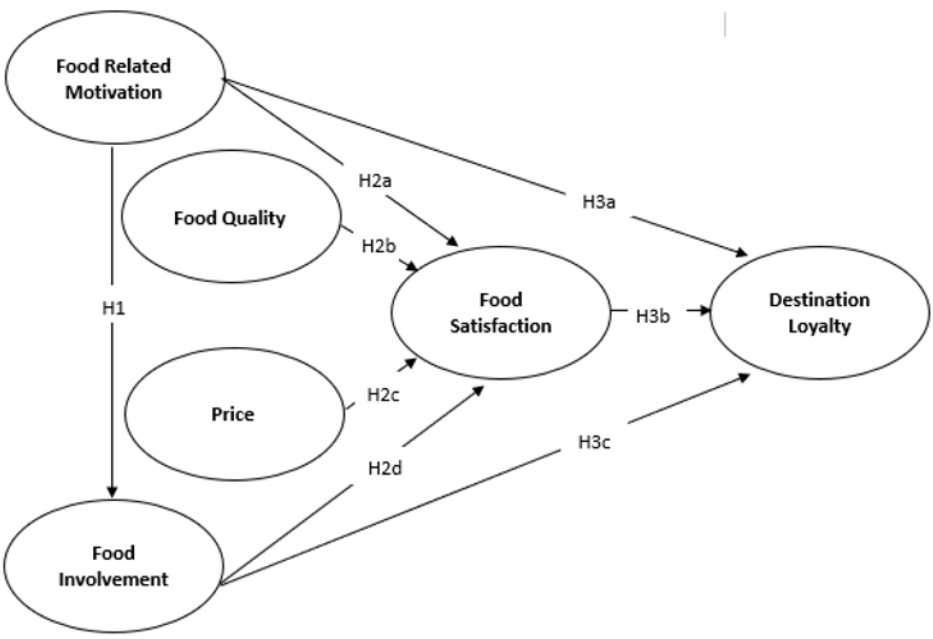

Figure 1. Research framework

Methodology

Research Instrument

Based on the extensive literature review and developed hypotheses, a survey questionnaire was developed. The instrument disseminated to the respondents consisted of an informed consent, profile of the participants of the study and the

survey questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of 34 measurement items, which were corroborated by prior studies and worded in order to correspond with the latent variables pertaining to Food Related Motivation (Chen & Huang, 2019; Ghanem, 2019; Lacap, 2019), Food Involvement (Chen & Huang, 2019; Lacap, 2019), Food Quality (Cordova-Buiza et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2019; Ziku et al., 2019), Price (Muskat et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2019; Zeng & Li, 2021); Food Satisfaction (Chen & Huang, 2019; Lacap, 2019; Jaiswal et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2019) and Destination Loyalty (Hernandez-Rojas et al., 2022; Lacap, 2019; Muskat et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019;) using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis

A causal-predictive research design was used in the current study to evaluate the significant relationship and effect of the factors influencing food satisfaction and destination loyalty in terms of food related motivation, food involvement, food quality, and price. As this study utilized a Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach, this research design was deemed appropriate (Chin et al., 2020). The use of the PLS-SEM approach is highly recommended for tourism and gastronomy research due to its methodological benefits and statistical power (Aybek & Karakas, 2022; do Valle & Assaker, 2015). WarpPLS 7.0 was used to compute the hypothesized relationships of the current study.

Results

Respondents' Profile

Participants of the study were tourists who had visited the Culinary Capital of the Philippines – Pampanga in the last five years. The sample size was computed using the G*Power 3.0 software program (UCLA) with a statistical power of .95, a medium effect size of 0.15, and an alpha set at .05 for multiple regression and 5 predictors. A sample size of 135 was computed, thus the collected sample size of 185 was sufficient.

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic profile of the respondents which reveal that the majority of the generation cohort (Year Born) of the respondents was Gen Z) (1996–2015) at 59.46% (110) and the least was Gen X (1965–1976) and Boomers (1946–1964), both at 6.49% (12). In terms of gender, majority were female at 50.81% (94). As to marital status, majority were single at 78.38% (145) and annulled, the least, at 1.08% (2). In relation to type of tourists, majority were locals at 98.38% (182) with most of the nationality being Filipino at 98.92% (183). Data on occupation revealed that the majority were college students at 51.35% (95) and

the least were unemployed at 2.70% (5). Purpose of visit indicates that the majority were for leisure at 50.27% (93) and the least, with 3.78% (7), for business trip.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Generational Cohort (Year Born)	Boomers: 1946–1964	12	6.49
	Gen X: 1965–1976	12	6.49
	Millennials: 1977–1995	51	27.57
	Gen Z: 1996–2015	110	59.46
Gender	Male	89	48.11
	Female	94	50.81
	Others	2	1.08
Marital Status	Single	145	78.38
	Married	35	18.92
	Annulled	2	1.08
	Widowed	3	1.62
Type of Tourist	Local	182	98.38
	Foreign	3	1.62
Nationality	Filipino	183	98.92
	Non-Filipino	2	1.08
Occupation	College student	95	51.35
	Employed	66	35.68
	Self-employed	19	10.27
	Unemployed	5	2.70
Purpose of Visit	Leisure	93	50.27
	Meeting or event	20	10.81
	Visiting friends/family	53	28.65
	Business trip	7	3.78
	Others	12	6.49

Measurement Validation

Given that the study employed PLS-SEM, validity and reliability tests were incorporated as part of the assessment of the measurement model (research instrument). To estimate the reliability of each construct, composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha (CA) were calculated. The values of CR and CA must be at least 0.70. However, a more relaxed criterion for the coefficient of CA and CR is that one of these measures should be equal to or greater than 0.70. Thus, the items for the latent variables were maintained having met the criteria (Kock & Lynn, 2012).

The values of the CR and CA for each variable, as shown in Table 2, indicates that all constructs were highly reliable.

Table 2. Validity and reliability of constructs

Construct	Items	Statements	Factor Loading	Average Variance Extracted	Composite Reliability	Crobach's Alpha
Food Related Motivation (FRM)	FRM1	Food plays an important role in my destination choice.	0.771	0.620	0.907	0.877
	FRM2	Prior to my travel, I plan food choices to experience local culture.	0.783			
	FRM3	I decide on destinations to visit based on the foods I want to experience.	0.805			
	FRM4	The availability of different types of local food as a destination in important to me when choosing it.	0.820			
	FRM5	Prior to my trip, one thing I anticipate is eating the food there.	0.783			
	FRM6	I like trying different styles or types of food during travel.	0.762			
Involvement in Local Food (ILF)	ILF1	Interesting	0.790	0.663	0.940	**0.927**
	ILF2	Appealing	0.773			
	ILF3	Valuable	0.818			
	ILF4	Exciting	0.817			
	ILF5	Stimulating	0.860			
	ILF6	Desirable	0.835			
	ILF7	Wanted	0.801			
	ILF8	Mean a lot	0.843			
Local Food Quality (LFQ)	LFQ1	Local food is delicious Local food is nutritious and healthy	0.769	0.636	0.933	0.918
	LFQ2	Local food smells appetizing	0.760			
	LFQ3	Local food presentation and display is visually appealing	0.842			

Table 2. (con't)

Construct	Items	Statements	Factor Loading	Average Variance Extracted	Composite Reliability	Crobach's Alpha
	LFQ4	Local food presentation and display is visually appealing	0.734			
	LFQ5	Local food served is fresh	0.835			
	LFQ6	Local food is served at appropriate temperature	0.829			
	LFQ7	Quality of local food served is consistent	0.839			
	LFQ8	There is a variety of local food choices	0.763			
Price (PRC)	PRC1	Local food is reasonably priced.	0.957	0.916	0.956	0.908
	PRC2	Local food is worth my money	0.957			
Food Satisfaction (FSAT)	FSAT1	I am satisfied with my overall food experience	0.829	0.687	0.939	0.924
	FSAT2	Tasting local food is a unique and memorable experience	0.782			
	FSAT3	My choice to taste the local food was a wise one	0.768			
	FSAT4	I felt that the food I was able to partake was what I wanted	0.856			
	FSAT5	The food experience gave me a sense of joy	0.859			
	FSAT6	I am contented with the local food and choices in the destination	0.838			
	FSAT7	My food tasting experience met my expectations	0.862			
Destination Loyalty (DLOY)	DLOY1	I would recommend Pampanga as a tourist destination to others	0.921	0.833	0.937	0.900
	DLOY2	I would say positive things about Pampanga as a tourist destination to others	0.914			
	DLOY3	I would visit Pampanga again in the future.	0.902			

Convergent and discriminant validity tests were also conducted. A construct is said to be convergent valid when the factor loading of each item is at least 0.5 or higher (Hair et al., 2016; Kock, 2014). Likewise, discriminant validity includes the determination of average variance extracted (AVEs). The values of AVE must be at least 0.5 or higher (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Kock & Lynn, 2012). Altogether, discriminant validity also consists of the analysis of the correlations among constructs with square roots of AVEs (Kock, 2017; Lacap, 2019). The diagonal values must be larger than the values to their left in the same row (Kock, 2017). Table 3 shows that the items used in the study have discriminant validity. This implies that the constructs analytically vary from one another. Generally, discriminant validity can be accepted for this measurement model and supports the discriminant validity between the constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker criterion

	FRM	ILF	LFQ	PRC	FSAT	DLOY
FRM	0.788					
ILF	0.651	0.814				
LFQ	0.521	0.655	0.797			
PRC	0.445	0.583	0.683	0.957		
FSAT	0.504	0.701	0.735	0.675	0.829	
DLOY	0.412	0.511	0.511	0.547	0.679	0.913

Note: FRM – Food Related Motivation; ILF – Involvement in Local Food; LFQ – Local Food Quality; PRC – Price; FSAT – Food Satisfaction; DLOY – Destination Loyalty

Structural Equation Modelling Analysis

After successfully assessing the measurement model, the structural model was analyzed. Figure 2 and Table 4 present the PLS path model and the direct effects of each structural path. Analysis of the data shows that food related motivation has a positive and significant effect on involvement in local food ($\beta = 0.749$, $p < 0.001$), with a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.561$). Therefore, H1 is supported.

Food related motivation was found to be insignificantly related to food satisfaction ($\beta = 0.023$, $p = 0.375$). In short, food related motivation did not significantly affect food satisfaction, hence, H2a is not supported. On the other hand, local food quality has a positive and significant relationship on food satisfaction ($\beta = 0.354$, $p = <0.001$), with a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.262$). Further, data shows that price has a positive and significant effect on food satisfaction ($\beta = 0.225$, $p = <0.001$), with a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.152$). Moreover, involvement in local food

has a positive and significant effect on food satisfaction (β = 0.340, p = <0.001), with a medium effect size (f^2 = 0.244). Thus, H2b, H2c and H2d are supported.

In relation to food related motivation, data shows that it has a positive and significant effect on destination loyalty (β = 0.227, p = 0.020), with a small effect size (f^2 = 0.071). Furthermore, food satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on destination loyalty (β = 0.614, p = <0.001), with a large effect size (f^2 = 0.417). Therefore, both H3a and H3b are supported. Nonetheless, involvement in local food was found to be insignificantly related to destination loyalty (β = 0.343, p = 0.344). Hence, H3c is not supported.

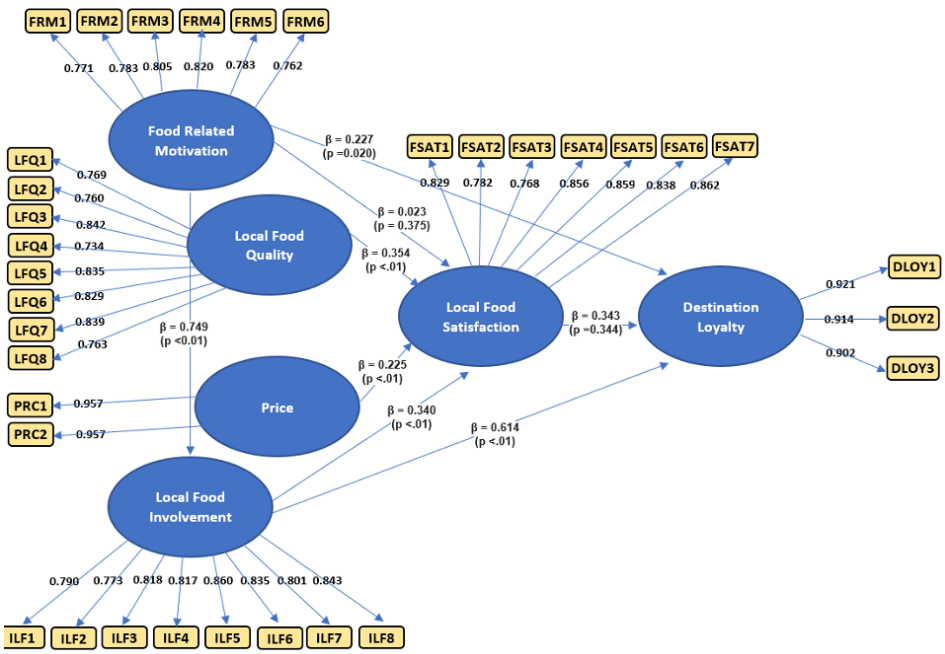

Figure 2. Structural model

Table 4. Results for hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient	p-Value	Interpretation	Standard Error	Effect Size	Effect Size Interpretation	Decision
H1. FRM → ILF	0.749	<0.001	Significant	0.063	0.561	Large	Supported
H2a. FRM → FSAT	0.023	0.375	Not Significant	0.073	0.014	N/A	Not Supported
H2b. LFQ → FSAT	0.354	<0.001	Significant	0.068	0.262	Medium	Supported

Table 4. (con't)

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient	p-Value	Interpretation	Standard Error	Effect Size	Effect Size Interpretation	Decision
H2c. PRC → FSAT	0.225	<0.001	Significant	0.070	0.152	Medium	Supported
H2d. ILF → FSAT	0.340	<0.001	Significant	0.069	0.244	Medium	Supported
H3a. FRM → DLOY	0.227	0.020	Significant	0.071	0.071	Small	Supported
H3b. FSAT → DLOY	0.614	<0.001	Significant	0.065	0.417	Large	Supported
H3c. ILF → DLOY	0.343	0.344	Not Significant	0.073	0.015	N/A	Not Supported

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this study underscore the intricate interplay between tourist motivations, local food involvement, satisfaction, and destination loyalty, shedding light on the multifaceted dynamics within the realm of culinary tourism. It becomes evident that when tourists are motivated by the allure of local food, their heightened involvement in partaking and engagement with such culinary experiences significantly influences their level of satisfaction. This aligns with Akyuz's research (2019), emphasizing the intrinsic link between travel motivation and involvement in local food experiences. Moreover, the study corroborates previous findings indicating that high motivation for food exploration does lead to increased involvement with the local cuisine (Chen & Huang, 2019; Lacap, 2019).

Regarding factors influencing food satisfaction, the study unveils the pivotal role of local food quality and pricing dynamics in shaping tourists' contentment. Consistent with prior research, the provision of high-quality local food substantially enhances satisfaction, echoing findings from studies by Zhang et al. (2019) and Muskat et al. (2019). Similarly, the positive impact of price on satisfaction aligns with previous works, signifying that perceived value contributes significantly to overall satisfaction (Che Abdullah & Abd Rahman, 2022; Sunaryo, 2019; Zhong & Moon, 2020). Furthermore, tourists' immersion and enjoyment in local food experiences markedly elevate their satisfaction levels, resonating with earlier studies highlighting the role of involvement in enhancing satisfaction (Chen & Huang, 2019; Lacap, 2019; Rodríguez-Gutiérrez, 2020). However, the lack of a direct relationship between food-related motivations and food satisfaction, consistent with Chen & Huang (2019) but conflicting with Lacap (2019), suggests a need for further investigation into this intricate connection.

In terms of destination loyalty, the study reinforces the significance of food-related motivations and satisfaction with local food quality and pricing. Positive evaluations of local food and pricing significantly increase tourists' likelihood to revisit and recommend the destination, aligning with previous research by Rehman et al. (2021), Zeng and Li (2021), as well as Lacap (2019); this mirrors broader evidence that community-embedded, sustainable heritage tourism development fosters similar loyalty outcomes (Yanying et al., 2026). Importantly, the prominence of food quality satisfaction emerges as a significant driver of loyalty, emphasizing the pivotal role of ensuring a positive local food experience for tourists.

However, the inconclusive relationship between local food involvement and destination loyalty, in line with Chen and Huang (2019) but conflicting with Lacap (2019), calls for deeper investigation into this variable. Overall, these findings underscore the crucial influence of local food experiences in shaping tourists' satisfaction and loyalty, emphasizing the pivotal role of quality, pricing, and immersion in fostering enduring connections between tourists and destinations like Pampanga.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study provides both theoretical and practical implications. In terms of its theoretical implication, Rousta and Jamshidi (2020) reported that an understanding of food in tourism value remains an underdeveloped area of research. Given this gap, the model proposed in this research explains the factors influencing tourists' behaviour towards local food and provides comprehensive insight into their sources of satisfaction and destination loyalty. This study analyzes tourists' experiences of local food, specifically the relationships and effects of food-related motivation, food quality, price, and food involvement on tourists' food satisfaction and destination loyalty.

By testing these factors in the proposed model, it advances previous research models by showing that these higher-order constructs also relate to tourists' food satisfaction and destination loyalty. Further, by using PLS-SEM as a data analysis technique, this study contributes methodologically to the growing number of tourism-related studies that use this modeling technique. The data show that the model provides a meaningful understanding of the dynamics among the constructs identified in the study, offering a substantiated conceptualization of their relationship to tourists' food satisfaction and destination loyalty.

As to its practical implications, the results of the study show that local food quality and price affect tourists' food satisfaction. Thus, local tourism authorities should emphasize to local food establishments the importance of ensuring the quality of local food while ensuring that its price gives meaning to the tourist experience. As highlighted in the results of the study, local food quality attributes such as being

delicious, healthy, appetizing, presentable, fresh, consistent, and varied influence tourists' food satisfaction evaluations. Thus, managers of food establishments should put in place quality control guidelines to guarantee that tourists receive not only reliable service but also local food of paramount quality. Beyond food quality itself, cultivating strong staff engagement and internal communication within food establishments can further reinforce consistent service delivery and, in turn, tourists' overall satisfaction (Sun et al., 2025).

These establishments should also take advantage of maintaining and creating local signature dishes that could establish their own culinary identity as part of their marketing campaigns. Moreover, food-related motivation, as well as food satisfaction, generates positive tourist experiences and increases loyalty towards the destination. Thus, strategic marketing campaigns integrating the importance of local food and delicacies are a fundamental component that Pampanga tourism organizations and food establishments should emphasize in their continuous efforts to sustain their branding as the Culinary Capital of the Philippines.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the current study contributes to food tourism research and development in Pampanga, it is not without limitations. First, the majority of respondents were local tourists and students in higher education; future studies should include more foreign tourists and a broader range of generational cohorts to improve the generalizability of the results. Given that the sample skewed heavily toward Gen Z respondents, subsequent research could examine whether generational differences—such as those observed between Gen Z, Millennials, and other digital-native or digital-immigrant cohorts—shape food-related satisfaction and loyalty outcomes differently (Islam et al., 2026; Yan et al., 2025).

Moreover, while the psycho-demographic profile of the respondents was gathered, it was not incorporated into the model; its moderating role may therefore be explored in future research. Furthermore, the study focused only on tourists visiting Pampanga, so its findings cannot be generalized to other tourism destinations; future studies could extend this framework to other geographical contexts.

Concomitantly, other interacting factors that may influence tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty were not incorporated into the proposed model; other justified constructs and theories may therefore be examined in relation to tourist behavior and destination loyalty. For instance, sustainability-oriented practices in food tourism, and the gap that can exist between tourists' pro-environmental attitudes and actual behavior, warrant further qualitative inquiry (Fuchs & Konar, 2025), as does the growing role of AI-enabled and technology-mediated tourist experiences in shaping food-related engagement (Weimei et al., 2025).

Lastly, since the study used PLS-SEM as its data analysis technique, additional fit techniques not addressed here may be explored, as only four antecedents of food satisfaction and three antecedents of destination loyalty were considered and may not fully capture other factors influencing satisfaction and loyalty. Future studies may include availability, authenticity, service attributes, atmospheric factors, consumer attitudes, and broader food tourism values in relation to tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty.

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