

Culinary travel experiences, quality of life and loyalty

Culinary travel
experiences

Experiencias turísticas gastronómicas, calidad de vida y lealtad

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to develop an original model in the context of food-based experiences considering new experiential variables, such as to experience quality, memorability and quality of life (QOL), and their impact on marketing outcomes, namely, satisfaction and loyalty, approached from an experience perspective.

Design/methodology/approach – An empirical approach has been adopted. Data have been collected through an online and a paper-and-pencil method, using an original questionnaire addressed to tourists who had a food-based experience during their recent holidays. Partial least squares-structural equation modelling is the technique used for data analysis.

Findings – The results confirm that local food, enjoyed through quality experiences, is a determining factor in designing memorable products, achieving tourist satisfaction, improving their QOL and encouraging loyalty to experiential food-based practices.

Research limitations – Results should be interpreted within the context of this research because of the use of a sample conveniently selected.

Practical implications – Gastronomic experiences represent a successful strategic resource for tourist destinations and professionals who want to adapt their business/destination to the new requirements of the experiential context.

Originality/value – To the best of authors' knowledge, this study is first to relate the impact of memorable and quality culinary experiences on the QOL of tourists, chasing, as a final result, loyal intentions towards a specific kind of experience (culinary) rather than towards the destination.

Keywords Partial least squares (PLS), Quality of life, Culinary tourism, Memorability, Experience loyalty, Experientiality

Paper type Research paper

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Resumen

Propósito – Este trabajo propone un modelo original en el contexto de las experiencias gastronómica que relaciona nuevas variables experienciales – Calidad de la Experiencia (EXPQ), Memorabilidad (MEM) y Calidad de vida (QOL) – con variables de resultado tradicionales del marketing turístico: satisfacción y lealtad, consideradas desde un nuevo enfoque experiencial.

Diseño/Metodología/Enfoque – Se ha optado por un enfoque empírico. Los datos han sido obtenidos por medio de una encuesta online y en papel, con un cuestionario original dirigido a turistas que han vivido una experiencia gastronómica en sus recientes vacaciones. Los datos han sido tratados con PLS-SEM.

Hallazgos – Los resultados alcanzados confirman que las experiencias gastronómicas de calidad son un factor determinante para diseñar productos turísticos memorables, lograr la satisfacción de los turistas, mejorar su calidad de vida e incentivar la lealtad hacia prácticas experienciales vinculadas a la gastronomía.

Limitaciones – Debido al uso de una muestra no-probabilística de conveniencia los resultados de este estudio sufren limitaciones en cuanto a su generalización.

Implicaciones prácticas – Las experiencias gastronómicas representan un recurso estratégico para los destinos turísticos y los profesionales del sector que quieran adaptar su negocio/destino a las nuevas exigencias del entorno experiencial.

Originalidad – Este trabajo relaciona por primera vez el impacto de las experiencias gastronómicas memorables y de calidad en la calidad de vida de los turistas, planteando como resultado final la lealtad al tipo de experiencia, más que la intención de volver a visitar el destino.

Palabras clave Experiencialidad, Turismo gastronómico, Memorabilidad, Calidad de vida, Lealtad experiencial, Ecuaciones estructurales (PLS)

Tipo de artículo Trabajo de investigación

1. Introduction

Nowadays, tourism is evolving from being a service-centric industry into an experience-centric one (Clatworthy, 2019). Products, to be successful, must deliver intangible values, more than high-end functional properties (Lashley, 2008; Palmer, 2010).

Hospitality and tourism products are experiential in their own essence (Williams, 2006). However, the experiential trend is introducing important changes in the way tourism organisations and destinations design and market their offerings, as well as the impact that the experience-based consumption may have on behavioural intentions (Serra-Cantallos *et al.*, 2018). One of the most sought results in tourism marketing has been the loyalty towards a destination expressed in terms of intentions to recommend or repeat the visit in the future (Alves *et al.*, 2019). The new experiential push exerts a centrifugal effect with respect to the visited destinations and encourages, instead, curiosity towards the newness.

Therefore, within the new experiential context, it seems interesting to look at different results than destination loyalty and explore the loyal intentions towards a specific practice that consumers reiteratedly choose in their trips.

Culinary tourism seems to be a typology especially likely to develop experiential proposals, as it can involve tourists in hands-on activities. Nowadays, food tourism has established as one of the most solid expressions of the tourism demand (Stone *et al.*, 2019) and the desire to travel with a food-based motivation is one of the biggest paradigms of the current tourism industry (Kim *et al.*, 2009).

Food consumption on holidays is no longer considered as a practice to address the need of nourishment but rather a germane aspect of the holiday experience, with potentially lasting effects on individuals' lives (Di-Clemente *et al.*, 2019b) and future behaviours (Stone *et al.*, 2019).

Food is a resource capable of engaging tourists. Such is the case that there exists a proper segment of consumers – the foodies – whose travel decisions are strongly determined by the desire of tasting typical products, learning about local culinary cultures and testing themselves with new cooking practices.

The engaging potential of food tourism finds an explanation in its memorable power (Adongo *et al.*, 2015) and impact on individuals' quality of life (QOL) (Di-Clemente *et al.*, 2019b; Mkono *et al.*, 2013).

The contact with local food and culinary cultures while on holidays has a determining role in the way travellers experience a destination (Kivela and Crotts, 2006; Wijaya *et al.*, 2017) and generates pleasant memories (Stone *et al.*, 2017). If travelling experiences are perceived as memorable, the positive emotions associated with them last beyond the journey, impact the perceptions of personal QOL (Dolnicar *et al.*, 2013) and, in turn, drive positive future behaviours (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016; Widjaja *et al.*, 2018).

The scientific literature confirms the connection between food experiences and memorability (MEM) and explores how this can positively impact the destination image and drive the tourists' intentions to purchase local food (Stone *et al.*, 2019).

However, the tourists' assessment of the food experiences lived on holidays and their effects beyond the journey, in terms of innovative experiential marketing outcomes, such as experiential satisfaction and loyalty and QOL, remain still unexplored and require further research (Sthapit *et al.*, 2017). To fill this gap, this research puts forward the idea that high quality and memorable culinary experiences can satisfy the expectations of experiential tourists as they:

- enhance individuals' QOL; and
- drive new loyal behaviors towards a specific typology of experience, i.e. food-based, rather than towards the destination.

This approach to behavioral intentions is original and seems more consistent with the quest of novelty and uniqueness elicited by the current experiential stream (Pearce and Kang, 2009).

Considering the preceding, the main goal of this research is to find out whether experiential encounters with local food have a positive impact on marketing outcomes such as satisfaction, but also on innovative, more emotion-based outcomes, such as MEM, QOL and experience loyalty (EXPLOY).

The contribution of this study is to empirically test whether food experiences, lived on holidays, can be positively linked with MEM and QOL and, in turn, drive loyal intentions towards a specific experiential practice, more than focussing on destination loyalty, traditionally chased in tourism marketing research.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses definition

Experientiality is defining a new competitive scenario for tourist destinations and businesses (Castañeda García *et al.*, 2018). New management and marketing tools are required to be able to meet the new requirements of the sector. The present work outlines a conceptual model which, in the context of food tourism, has in experiential quality its input variable and in MEM, QOL and experiential marketing outputs (satisfaction and loyalty) its endogenous variables.

2.1 Food tourism

Food tourism, also termed as gastronomic or culinary tourism, has become one of the emerging forms of tourism (Baah *et al.*, 2019) as a significantly growing number of tourists travelling to a destination with the unique motivation of tasting its local products and cuisine (Hall *et al.*, 2003).

From a scientific perspective, food tourism is a research topic of great interest owing to its potential power in destination branding (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016), its capability of extending the stay of tourists at a certain destination (Ignatov and Smith, 2006), the diversity of activities and events that can be drawn around local products (Mason and Paggiaro, 2009), and its implication with the sustainable development of a destination (Hjalager and Johansen, 2013).

Richards (2012) emphasises the important role of food in the new experience economy, noting that as this last has developed, so too the interest in traditional foods. Therefore, food-based tourism can be considered one of the best expressions of a new experiential approach to tourist consumption. In addition, the increasing interest in well-being and its connection with tourism experiences has developed a new trend on food and defined a new group of consumers who look at food not just for its functional value but rather as a central aspect in their lives, both during holidays and daily life.

According to Sthapit *et al.* (2017), food consumption in hospitality and tourism has been largely approached from the supply-side perspective, while the assessment of food experiences by tourists deserves further attention especially when the tourists' interest in local food has given birth to a proper market segment: "the foodies", those travellers who show a prominent interest towards culinary heritages and consider gastronomy as a complex and cultural experience (Fox, 2007; López-Guzmán and Sánchez-Cañizares, 2012). This tourism practice is assuming a growing importance in the travel industry, as it has a great potential for the design of experiential products. Food encounters are likely to be sensorial experiences that can be stored in tourists' minds as memorable (Stone *et al.*, 2019) and happy moments (Mkono *et al.*, 2013). Eating is nowadays associated with a requirement for happiness (Carrillo *et al.*, 2013), as the engagement in food experiences promotes exploration (Kim *et al.*, 2012), which has to do with the desire of knowledge. Learning is the most sought experience by tourists as it adds to personal accomplishment and self-esteem (Adongo *et al.*, 2015). In this line, memorable food experiences are valuable QOL's enhancers and effective determinants of positive behavioural intentions (Tsai, 2016; Di-Clemente *et al.*, 2019a, 2019b).

2.2 Experience quality

Within tourism and recreation research, the concept of quality, and specifically service quality, has been considered one of the major determinants of satisfaction and future behaviours (Alves *et al.*, 2019). With the rise of the experience economy, researchers and practitioners are facing some challenges in assessing the EXPQ, as it deeply differs from service quality. Kompula (2006) states that, for experiential products, emotional aspects are more influential than functional ones. From a theoretical perspective, EXPQ has been defined as the consumer's affective response to the desired social-psychological benefits and a psychological outcome for tourism customers (Fernandes and Cruz, 2016; Jin *et al.*, 2015). Dong and Siu (2013) confirm that a favourable evaluation of the experience will drive positive feelings which, in turn, will leave pleasant memories and happiness. Chen and Chen (2010) and Chen and Chen (2013) state that EXPQ may exert a positive impact on tourism businesses' performances, as it can improve tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, the concept of EXPQ deserves further attention in both its theoretical definition and empirical application. The scientific literature offers some early attempts to conceptualise and measure EXPQ. Kao *et al.* (2008) apply theatrical elements to the process of creating tourism experiences and propose immersion, surprise, participation and fun as essential elements. Cole and Scott (2004) define EXPQ using entertainment, education and community benefits, finding that the construct fully mediates the relationship between service performance and tourist's satisfaction. Wu and colleagues (Wu and Ai, 2016; Wu *et al.*, 2018) confirms the relation linking EXPQ and experience satisfaction.

By the other hand, according to Pizam (2010), the quality of the experience is what turns it memorable. Therefore, EXPQ is assumed to be a proper antecedent for memorable experiences.

In addition, following Cole and Scott (2004), the quality of the experience is determined by its capability to entertain and educate tourists. In turn, the chance to learn something new on holidays is a determinant for self-esteem or enhancements in QOL (Kim *et al.*, 2012).

According to the preceding, it seems worthy to consider a connection between EXPQ and tourists' perceptions of their QOL.

Within the specific context of culinary tourism, the number of works that test the quality of culinary experiences and its impacts on outcome variables are still scarce. [Widjaja et al. \(2018\)](#) show some initial insights confirming that EXPQ directly and positively influences the satisfaction with culinary experiences, which, in turn, has a positive effect on future behaviours. Similarly, few works recently published, stress the role of food-based activities lived on holidays as extraordinary experiences ([Goolaup et al., 2017](#)) and effective memory enhancers ([Stone et al., 2019](#); [Tsai, 2016](#); [Williams et al., 2018](#)). The causal path linking the quality of culinary experiences and QOL find some support on previous research from a theoretical perspective, however, its empirical demonstration is an original contribution of this research.

The following hypotheses are posited:

- H1. Experience quality exerts a positive impact on experience satisfaction.
- H2. Experience quality exerts a positive impact on memorability.
- H3. Experience quality exerts a positive impact on quality of life.

2.3 Memorability

At the present time, one of the most pushing topics in experiential tourism is the identification of those aspects capable of turning a trip or a holiday into a memorable experience ([Kim and Ritchie, 2014](#)). MEM of the tourism activities can generate long-lasting memories and have a positive impact on the tourists' assessment of the experience ([Kim, 2010](#)). Several contributions in the marketing literature offer supporting evidence of how MEM of the experiences induce positive outcomes in tourism, in terms of satisfaction ([Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2013](#); [Ali et al., 2016](#)) and perceived feeling of increased happiness ([Knobloch et al., 2017](#); [Nawijn et al., 2010](#)). [Nawijn et al. \(2010\)](#) explain that after the holiday, the recollection phase is a crucial moment when tourists can remember and revive positive experiences which, in turn, will increase tourist's long-lasting happiness. [Knobloch et al. \(2017\)](#) confirm that memorable tourism experiences have eudaimonic effects, that is, provide a feeling of fulfilment which leads to personal growth, which, in turn, influences people's well-being beyond the consumption. More specifically, [Nawijn \(2011\)](#) confirms that tourism experiences contribute to everyday happiness through memories and reminiscences triggered by physical objects (photographs and souvenirs) which relight the happiness associated with past travel experiences.

According to [Stone et al. \(2017\)](#), food-based experiences are highly connected with memory and found that they play a greater role in satisfaction than other in-trip activities. The chance to get in contact with new flavours allows tourists to gain a sensorial enjoyment of local culture which facilitates the formation of positive memories and has the potential of driving future behavioural intentions ([Sthapit et al., 2017](#); [Tsai, 2016](#)).

In addition, [Sthapit and Coudounaris \(2017\)](#) state that there exists an incipient research stream exploring how memories of holidays enhance individuals' subjective well-being.

Nevertheless, the links between these two variables have not yet been explored in the specific context of food experiences, finding few antecedents in the works published by [Lin \(2014\)](#) and [Sthapit \(2018\)](#). [Lin \(2014\)](#) confirms that food experiences are stimuli eliciting psychological well-being. [Sthapit \(2018\)](#) found that memories related to food-holidays contribute to individual subjective well-being.

In line with these considerations, this research considers that food-based experiences can provide memorable moments which, in turn, enhance tourists' satisfaction and QOL. Thus, the following hypotheses are posited:

- H4.* Memorability exerts a positive impact on experience satisfaction.
- H5.* Memorability exerts a positive impact on quality of life.

2.4 Experience satisfaction

According to [Kao et al. \(2008\)](#), experiential satisfaction (EXPSAT) is a conceptual extension of service satisfaction focussed on consumers' overall evaluation of the experience after consumption. Experientiality is suggesting a change in the way satisfaction is conceived, requiring a more emotion-based assessment of this variable. New affective values are gradually integrating ([Hosany and Gilbert, 2010](#)) or even substituting, the traditional utility-based approach to satisfaction ([Agapito et al., 2013](#); [Bigné et al., 2008](#)). The scientific literature shows that a growing consensus exists on the need of incorporating emotional components in the measurement of satisfaction in tourism ([de Rojas and Camarero, 2008](#)) and several studies have already empirically proved the relationship between emotions and satisfaction ([Hosany, 2012](#)). Satisfaction is often considered a significant determinant of loyalty and future behaviours ([Chi and Qu, 2008](#); [Cronin et al., 2000](#)). Providing satisfying experiences will possibly drive loyal behaviours in the future. According to [Aziz et al. \(2012\)](#), experiential satisfaction determines the visitors' loyalty. In addition, the findings achieved by [Jin et al. \(2015\)](#), [Wu and Li \(2017\)](#) and [Wu et al. \(2018\)](#) suggest that experiential satisfaction induces tourists' loyal behaviours. Food, because of the sensorial involvement that requires to be enjoyed by tourists, is particularly given to provoke an emotional reaction in consumers and the achievement of an emotion-based satisfaction. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is established:

- H6.* Experiential satisfaction exerts a positive impact on experience loyalty.

2.5 Quality of life

Research on happiness and related concepts has traditionally been a "playground for speculative philosophy" ([Veenhoven, 2009](#)). However, it has recently caught the attention of social scientists ([Nawijn et al., 2010](#)) as the travel industry is selling products that go far beyond the achievement of satisfaction and loyal intentions, it is rather selling moments capable of determining how people feel and how fulfilling they perceive their lives ([Nawijn et al., 2013](#)). Research in tourism has largely confirmed that individuals benefit from taking holiday ([Chen and Petrick, 2016](#); [Chen et al., 2016](#)). In tourism literature, there is a consensus on considering tourism experiences as QOL's enhancers ([Kruger et al., 2013](#); [Uysal et al., 2016](#)). [Kim et al. \(2015\)](#) confirmed that, among elderly tourists, QOL's enhancements experienced while on holidays have an impact on future behaviours. [Lam and So \(2013\)](#) found a positive relationship between life satisfaction and word-of-mouth, which is a loyalty's indicator. More specifically related to the present research context, [Lin \(2014\)](#) found that culinary experiences lived on holidays exert a positive effect on the tourists' psychological well-being which, in turn, can determine future loyal behaviours. Similarly, [Kim et al. \(2012\)](#) found that well-being perceptions related to a dining out experience are the most powerful determinants of positive behavioural intentions.

Considering the preceding, the present research assumes that the perceived enhancements of QOL, attributable to the culinary experience lived, may positively influence future loyal behaviours of travellers towards this kind of in-trip activity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is posited:

H7. Quality of life exerts a positive impact on experience loyalty.

2.6 Experience loyalty

Oliver (1993, p. 34) defines loyalty as a “commitment to re-buy or re-patronise a preferred product/service consistently in the future [...]”. According to Flavián *et al.* (2011), loyalty is regarded as the measure of the success of marketing strategies. The recent experiential trend in tourism brings traveller to seek unique holidays’ experiences and ever-new destinations, thus loyal behaviours, intended as the willingness to repurchase and revisit is a hard goal to achieve. Experientiality posits the following issues related to loyalty:

- novelty seeking and wanderlust are motivators for experiential tourists and discourage revisiting the same destination in the future (Pearce and Kang, 2009); and
- experiences are the principal products considered by experiential tourists; therefore, people may develop loyal attitudes towards a particular type of experience rather than to a destination or service (McKercher *et al.*, 2012).

Culinary tourism gives the chance to explore loyalty towards a specific kind of experience: food-based practices. Food tourists can possibly develop loyal attitudes towards specific experiential activities, linked to local gastronomy and cuisine and be willing to rebuy a similar experience in their next travels. Considering the preceding, this research aims at testing the causal paths linking the EXPSAT with memorable and quality food-based activities, and the perceived enhancements in QOL, as effective antecedents of EXPLOY, considering this last as the tourists’ intentions to patronise the experience, more than the revisit of the same destination.

The hypotheses and theoretical model of the research are depicted in Figure 1.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sampling strategies and data collection

The population of the study is represented by all those tourists who had at least one culinary experience during one of their holidays or trips. The sampling strategy adopted is of convenience. The food-based experiences considered in the research have been selected with a web search aimed at identifying food and drink tours, gastronomic routes, tasting experiences, culinary tours, cooking classes and workshops which allow participants to have a deep contact with the culinary cultures of the destination visited. A total of 75 experiences were selected and their participants intercepted on the Facebook® page of the enterprises providing the experiences and requiring their opinions about the experience lived. The link of the survey has been placed as a response to the tourists’ review or comment left on the Facebook wall of the enterprise providing the experience. Facebook has been chosen as the tool for the dissemination of the survey as it brings together a virtual community with over 800 million users and its popularity provides researchers with the chance to reach a significant and international sample (Kane *et al.*, 2012). Data have been collected with an original and structured questionnaire which has previously undergone a process of pre-test (15 experts among academics and practitioners) and trial (17 people of

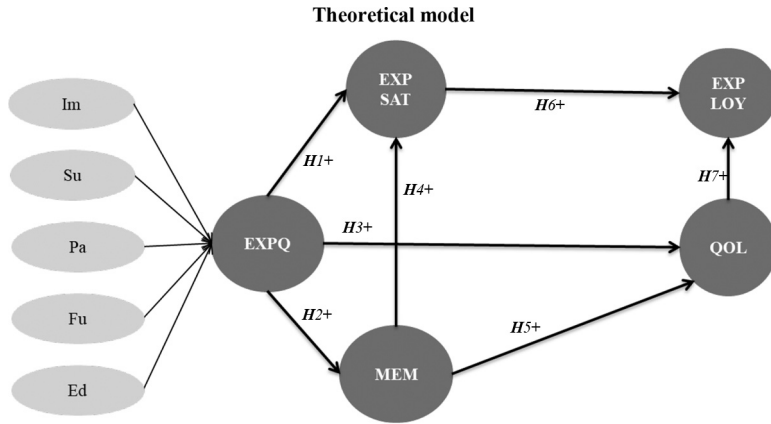


Figure 1.
Theoretical model

Notes: Im, immersion; Su, surprise; Pa, participation; Fu, fun; Ed, education; EXPQ, experience quality; EXPSAT, experience satisfaction; MEM, memorability; QOL, quality of life; EXPLOY, experience loyalty

different ages and nationalities) to ensure the effectiveness of the tool. Data collected online have been completed with a paper-and-pencil method, used to cover one experience and that allowed to reach a larger and more reliable sample. The two groups of data have been treated as a unique sample based on the results of a Levene's test that confirmed the homogeneity of their variances. Table 1 shows the technical details of the empirical work conducted.

3.2 Measurement scales

Following the recommendations put forward by Preston and Colman (2000) a seven-point Likert scale was adopted for measurements. The construct dimensionality considered for the measurement of EXPQ is a composition resulting from the ones proposed by Kao *et al.* (2008) and Cole and Scott (2004) including variables such as immersion, surprise, participation, fun and education, which seek to assess quality from a new experiential perspective. To measure memorability, this research adopts a three-item, one-dimensional approach, whose validity has already been tested by Oh *et al.* (2007), Hosany and Witham

Population	Tourists who had at least one culinary experience during one of their holidays or trips
Geographical scope	International
Data collection method	Online and paper-based survey
Sampling frames	Not available
Informants	Tourists who had at least one culinary experience during one of their holidays or trips
Population size	Unknown
Sampling technic	Non-probability convenience sampling
Fieldwork	March–September 2016
Achieved entries	563
Valid entries	425

Table 1.
Technical details of data collection

(2010), Loureiro (2014), Ali *et al.* (2016) and Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013). The operationalisation proposed by these last authors is the one selected in this study because of the suitability of the items and the similarity of the study context (wine routes). With regard to the measurement of experiential satisfaction, this construct must assess the integral evaluation and contentment that tourists perceive with regard to the food-based experience lived (Kao *et al.*, 2008). Kim *et al.* (2015) offer a significant support to the conceptual and empirical approach of this variable; therefore, the satisfaction with the experience proposed by these authors appears to be the most appropriate scale to assess experiential satisfaction in the present research. QOL measures the impact that culinary experiences can have into the individuals' personal evaluation of their lives. Measurements adopted here are based on the QOL's scale proposed by Sirgy *et al.* (2011) and slightly adapted to match the study context. The dominant approach in loyalty measures in tourism is a two-dimensional one, considering both the behavioural and the attitudinal dimension (Mechinda *et al.*, 2009). Considering the experiential nature of this study, the behavioural dimension of this variable is not applicable, thus the measurement of EXPLOY is proposed accordingly with the attitudinal scale proposed by Mechinda *et al.* (2009) and largely validated in tourism studies.

3.3 Data analysis

Data have been treated with both IBM-SPSS Statistics Version 21, for descriptive analysis, and Partial least squares-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) for multivariate analysis, applied to test the predictive value of the model hypothesised. PLS-SEM was the selected method as it could suit the study better than covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) considering that: it can be used in exploratory studies, is focussed on prediction, and works with small samples (Hair *et al.*, 2012). SmartPLS 3 is the statistical software used for the assessment of the structural model (Ringle *et al.*, 2015).

4. Results

4.1 Characteristics of the sample

The sample achieved for this research features a total number of 563 individuals, of which 425 were valid and used in this analysis. Table 2 shows in detail the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample.

The female respondents (61.9%) outnumber male respondents (28.9%). The majority of the sample is comprised between the age range from 41 to 50 (24.7%), closely followed by those from 31 to 40 (21.9%). Most respondents are from the USA (26.4%), Italy (18.6%), Spain (10.6%) and Great Britain (7.3%). In general, data about place of origin are quite heterogeneous and many nationalities are represented by just one or few individuals. Most of the respondents declared to have a University level degree (65.9%). The majority of the sample lived their culinary experience in 2016 (33.4%) and 2015 (31.3%) which indicates that it was recent and easy to be recalled at the moment of responding the questionnaire. Italy (35.1%), Spain (16.9%) and Thailand (8.5%) are the countries where the major part of the sample decides to live a food-based experience as a part of their holidays. "Food tour" is the most popular activity chosen (53.9%), followed by "Cooking class" (32.9%), "Tastings" (6.8%) and "Others" (5.6%), which includes food workshops, show cooking, etc. ... This feature confirms that those tourists interested in local gastronomy, search for a participative approach to typical food, and expect something more than just sampling traditional cuisine and eating at local restaurants.

Variables	Answers	Frequency	(%)
Gender (<i>n</i> = 386)	Male	123	28.9
	Female	263	61.9
	Missing values	39	9.2
Age (<i>n</i> = 389)	Up to 30	66	15.5
	From 31 to 40	93	21.9
	From 41 to 50	105	24.7
	From 51 to 60	71	16.7
	Over 60	54	12.7
	Missing values	36	8.5
	Country of residence (<i>n</i> = 386)	USA	112
	Italy	79	18.6
	Spain	45	10.6
	UK	31	7.3
	Other nations	118	28
	Missing values	39	9.2
Education (<i>n</i> = 387)	Compulsory education	12	2.8
	High school	65	15.3
	University	280	65.9
	Other	30	7.1
	Missing values	38	8.9
Year of the experience (<i>n</i> = 425)	2016	142	33.4
	2015	133	31.3
	2014	74	17.4
	2013	41	9.6
	2012	17	4.0
	<2012	18	4.2

Table 2.
Characteristics of the sample

4.2 Model estimation

The application of the SEM procedure implies the assessment of the measurement and the structural model (Hair *et al.*, 2012) to test the validity and predictive power of the hypothesised model.

4.2.1 Measurement model assessment. The hypothesised model treats EXPQ as a second-order construct. To assess multidimensional variables, SmartPLS requires the application of a specific process: the two-step approach which implies that the dimensions of a multidimensional construct act like the second-order variables they represent.

Step 1. The second-order variable is substituted by its corresponding first-order dimensions. At this stage, all the constructs included in the model are reflective; therefore, the measurement model assessment has to be done with regard to individual item reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity (Table 3) and discriminant validity (Table 4). The individual item reliability (λ) shows acceptable values, above the threshold of 0.707 fixed by Carmines and Zeller (1979). With regard to composite reliability, all the values are within the critical levels set at 0.7–0.9 or 0.6–0.7 for exploratory studies (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). According to Hair *et al.* (2011), significant values for convergent validity should be higher than 0.50, which signifies that each construct explains at least half of the variance of its indicators. All the recorded scores are above the critical value. Finally, discriminant validity is assessed with the HTMT₁ (Franke and Sarstedt, 2019). All the values are acceptable as they are different from 1, as shown in Table 4.

Step 2. At this point, the subdimensions of the second-order construct (EXPQ) included in the model are substituted by an average score and act as indicators of the second-order

Variable/items	Loadings (λ)	Step 1 Composite reliability	AVE	Loadings (λ)	Step 2 Composite reliability	AVE
<i>Experience quality</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–
[im ₁] I felt involved during the gastronomic experience	0.905					
[im ₂] My mood changed as the gastronomic experience was taking place	0.901					
[im ₃] While having the gastronomic experience I forgot that time was passing	0.851	0.916	0.785	0.834		
[su ₁] The gastronomic experience was special	0.893					
[su ₂] The contents of the experience were fresh	0.903					
[su ₃] I lived something unexpected	0.871					
[su ₄] The experience includes some unexpected and fresh things	0.916	0.942	0.803	0.852		
[pa ₁] I felt enthusiastic about the gastronomic experience provided	0.901					
[pa ₂] I would like to have other gastronomic experiences in this destination	0.822					
[pa ₃] I had a direct participation in the gastronomic experience	0.867					
[pa ₄] I interacted with the experience guide	0.776	0.907	0.710	0.922		
[fu ₁] I had fun during the gastronomic experience	0.953					
[fu ₂] I felt excited during the gastronomic experience	0.910					
[fu ₃] I had lots of fun during the experience	0.952					
[fu ₄] I really enjoyed this gastronomic experience	0.963	0.971	0.892	0.962		
[ed ₁] Having this gastronomic experience made me want to learn more about gastronomy	0.907					
[ed ₂] This gastronomic experience made me more aware of the gastronomy value	0.912					
[ed ₃] This kind of gastronomic experiences are good options to learn about gastronomy	0.903					
[ed ₄] Having this gastronomic experience has made me more interested in knowing gastronomy around the world	0.883					
[ed ₅] This gastronomic experience expanded my knowledge about gastronomy	0.910	0.957	0.815	0.886	–	–
<i>Memorability</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–
[mem ₁] I have wonderful memories of this culinary experience	0.972			0.972		
[mem ₂] I will not forget this culinary experience	0.971			0.971		
[mem ₃] I will remember many positive things about this culinary experience	0.972	0.981	0.944	0.972	0.981	0.944

(continued)

Table 3. Assessment of the measurement model

Variable/items	Loadings (λ)	Step 1 Composite reliability	AVE	Loadings (λ)	Step 2 Composite reliability	AVE
<i>Quality of life</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–
[qol ₁] Overall, this culinary experience has enriched my quality of life	0.899			0.898		
[qol ₂] My satisfaction with life in general was increased after this culinary experience	0.902			0.899		
[qol ₃] Although I have my ups and down, in general, I feel good about my life after this culinary experience	0.881			0.880		
[qol ₄] After this experience I feel that I lead a meaningful and fulfilling life.	0.913			0.911		
[qol ₅] Overall, I felt happy upon my return from this culinary experience	0.817	0.946	0.780	0.823	0.946	0.779
<i>Experience satisfaction</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–
[expsat ₁] My overall evaluation on the gastronomic destination I visited is positive	0.951			0.951		
[expsat ₂] My overall evaluation on this gastronomic experience is favourable	0.970			0.970		
[expsat ₃] I am satisfied with this gastronomic experience	0.974			0.974		
[expsat ₄] I am pleased with this gastronomic experience	0.973	0.983	0.935	0.973	0.983	0.935
<i>Experience loyalty</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–
[employ ₁] I consider myself a loyal consumer of gastronomic experiences	0.776			0.776		
[employ ₂] My next trip will most likely include a gastronomic experience	0.870			0.870		
[employ ₃] I would have more gastronomic experiences in the future	0.898			0.898		
[employ ₄] I would recommend to have this gastronomic experience to people who seek my advice	0.908			0.908		
[employ ₅] I would tell others positive things about this gastronomic experience	0.881	0.938	0.753	0.881	0.938	0.753

Notes: Im, immersion; Su, surprise; Pa, participation; Fu, fun; Ed, education; EXPQ, experience quality; EXPSAT, Experience satisfaction; MEM, memorability; QOL, quality of life; EXPLOY, experience loyalty

Table 3.

variable. The new nomological structure of the model needs to be re-assessed in its measurement validity and reliability, considering that now EXPQ is a formative construct and needs to be assessed by calculating the items' weights (Hair *et al.*, 2012) and the variance inflation factor (VIF) (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). VIF resulted to be acceptable being lower than 5 (Hair *et al.*, 2012), with an exception in *Participation* which little exceeds this threshold and that can be still acceptable according to Hair *et al.* (1995) who fix the threshold at 10. Weights are significant according to the thresholds of a one-tailed *t*-test (Table 5) performed with a 5,000-sample bootstrap, with an exception in *Immersion* which shows a non-significant value. However, the two items will not be dropped following the recommendation

made by Roberts and Thatcher (2009) who state that non-significant items should be kept in the measurement model as formative indicators are not interchangeably and dropping an indicator implies dropping a part of the construct. In addition, Hair et al. (2014) maintain that formative items should not be dropped if their loadings (λ) are higher than 0.5 (Table 3). For the assessment of the reflective constructs, the same steps implemented for the measurement of the first-order model (Step 1) must be followed. Individual item reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity (Table 3) and discriminant validity (Table 6) show acceptable value.

4.2.2 Structural model assessment. Structural model is assessed with regard to R^2 for each dependent variable and the significance of the paths (β). R^2 informs about the model's

	IM	SU	PA	FU	ED	MEM	EXPSAT	QOL	EXPLOY
IM									
SU	0.856								
PA	0.944	0.933							
FU	0.842	0.770	0.897						
ED	0.831	0.784	0.877	0.822					
MEM	0.795	0.788	0.879	0.895	0.794				
EXPSAT	0.789	0.741	0.864	0.914	0.777	0.897			
QOL	0.619	0.652	0.694	0.577	0.691	0.659	0.590		
EXPLOY	0.699	0.663	0.788	0.668	0.766	0.699	0.705	0.734	

Table 4. Discriminant validity analysis (HTMT1) (Step 1)

Notes: IM, immersion; SU, surprise; PA, participation; FU, fun; ED, education; EXPQ, experience quality; EXPSAT, experience satisfaction; MEM, memorability; QOL, quality of life; EXPLOY, experience loyalty

Construct	Items	VIF	Weights	t -test*(weights)	Loadings (λ)
EXPQ	Ed	3.371	0.204***	3.386	0.886
	Fu	3.736	0.532***	7.221	0.962
	Im	3.627	-0.015ns	0.241	0.834
	Pa	5.821	0.218*	2.698	0.922
	Su	3.789	0.140**	2.223	0.852

Table 5. Weights and significance of formative models

Notes: Critical values for a one-tailed t test: values: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$; 1.645 \rightarrow 10% level of significance; 2.327 \rightarrow 5% level of significance; 3.092 \rightarrow 1% level of significance ^{Ns}, not significant (based on $t(4,999)$, one-tailed test). 5,000 bootstrapping procedure used

	EXPLOY	EXPSAT	MEM	QOL
EXPLOY				
EXPSAT	0.705			
MEM	0.699	0.897		
QOL	0.734	0.590	0.659	

Table 6. Discriminant validity analysis (HTMT1) (Step 2)

Notes: EXPQ, experience quality; EXPSAT, experiential satisfaction; MEM, memorability; QOL, quality of life; EXPLOY, experiential Loyalty

predictive accuracy and the exogenous variables' combined effect on endogenous variables. Its admitted values fluctuate from 0 to 1. The scores close to the thresholds of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 communicate, respectively, a substantial, moderate and weak level of accuracy (Hair et al., 2013). By the other side, paths' coefficients (β) show the strength of the relationships among the variables hypothesised in the model (Hair et al., 2014). Values are standardised in a range from -1 to $+1$. Significance of the paths is tested with a Bootstrapping procedure and the explained variance of endogenous variables is obtained by multiplying the β 's values and the correlation between two variables (Falk and Miller, 1992) (Table 7).

The endogenous variables are explained in a moderate-substantial percentage. EXPQ explains approximately 78% of MEM of the culinary experience lived. Experience satisfaction is explained by EXPQ (46.3%) and MEM (35.9%). These two variables together can determine almost the totality (82%) of the variable. Experiential loyalty is determined in its 58.7% by EXPSAT and QOL, which contribute almost equally with a percentage of, respectively, 28.4% and 30.2%. R^2 confirms that the model boasts a moderate-substantial predictive power. Table 8 shows that the β coefficients resulted to be significant, therefore, the hypothesised relationships are empirically supported (Table 8).

Table 7.
Effects on
endogenous
variables

Hypotheses	R^2	Direct effect (β)	Correlation	Explained variance (%)
<i>Memory</i>				
$H1_+$: EXPQ \rightarrow MEM	0.785 (substantial)	0.886	0.886	78.5
<i>Experience Satisfaction</i>				
$H2_+$: EXPQ \rightarrow EXPSAT	0.822 (substantial)	0.522	0.887	46.3
$H4_+$: MEM \rightarrow EXPSAT		0.411	0.874	35.9
<i>Quality of life</i>				
$H3_+$: EXPQ \rightarrow QOL	0.435 (weak-moderate)	0.373	0.644	24.0
$H5_+$: MEM \rightarrow QOL		0.306	0.637	19.4
<i>Experience loyalty</i>				
$H6_+$: EXPSAT \rightarrow EXPLOY	0.587 (moderate-substantial)	0.422	0.675	28.4
$H7_+$: QOL \rightarrow EXPLOY		0.442	0.684	30.2

Notes: EXPQ, experience quality; EXPSAT, experience satisfaction; MEM, memorability; QOL, quality of life; EXPLOY, experience loyalty

Table 8.
Structural model
results

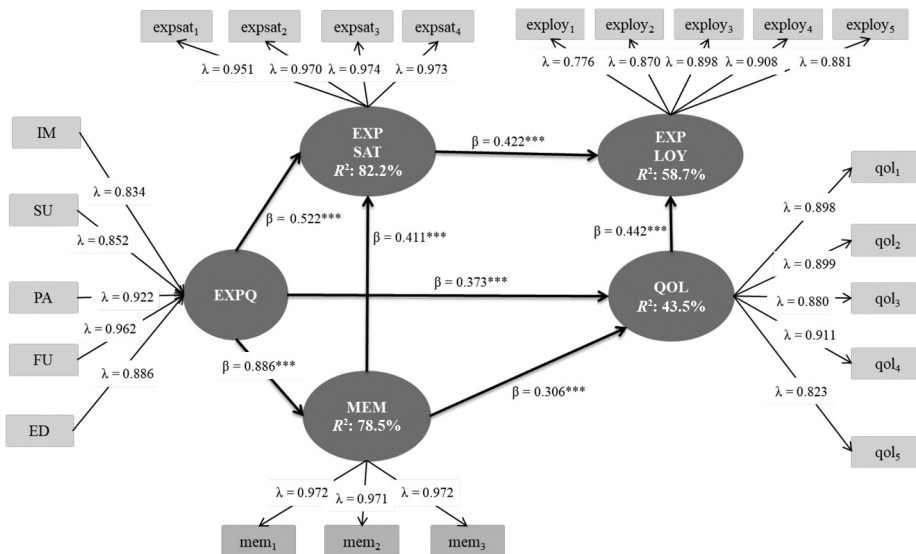
Hypotheses	Direct effect (β)	T statistics (bootstrap)	Hypotheses' test
$H1$: EXPQ \rightarrow MEM	0.886	56.157***	Supported
$H2$: EXPQ \rightarrow EXPSAT	0.522	7.748***	Supported
$H3$: EXPQ \rightarrow QOL	0.373	4.511***	Supported
$H4$: MEM \rightarrow EXPSAT	0.411	5.944***	Supported
$H5$: MEM \rightarrow QOL	0.306	3.513***	Supported
$H6$: EXPSAT \rightarrow EXPLOY	0.422	6.464***	Supported
$H7$: QOL \rightarrow EXPLOY	0.442	8.181***	Supported

Notes: EXPQ, experience quality; EXPSAT, experience satisfaction; MEM, memorability; QOL, quality of life; EXPLOY, experience Loyalty *Critical values for a one-tailed t test: t-values: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; ns not significant (based on $t(4,999)$, one-tailed test); $t(0.05; 4,999) = 1.645$; $t(0.01; 4,999) = 2.327$; $t(0.001; 4,999) = 3.092$ 5,000 bootstrapping procedure used

The results recorded for both measurement and structural model analysis are graphically presented in Figure 2.

5. Discussion of results

The results show the importance of offering experiential value within the context of culinary tourism. The model shows a substantial-moderate capacity to explain the endogenous variables considered (Table 8). EXPQ resulted to be a strong predictor of MEM, explaining the 78.5% of its variance. Path coefficient from EXPQ to MEM is highly significant (β : 0.886***). Previous studies suggest the conceptual links existing between EXPQ and MEM (Pizam, 2010), but their direct causal relationship has never been supported by empirical evidence. Thus, the results achieved here represent an original outcome, confirming that experiential aspects of tourism services' quality are fundamental requirements to provide memorable experiences to consumers, which, in turn, is proved to have direct and indirect effects on satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, EXPQ is the fund to be a good antecedent and has a positive causal relationship over two experiential outcomes: EXPSAT (R^2 : 46.3%; β : 0.522***) and QOL (R^2 : 24.0%; β : 0.373***). These results are in line with the findings of Wu and colleagues (Wu and Ai, 2016; Wu et al., 2018), Kao et al. (2008) and Jin et al. (2015) who confirmed the EXPQ and EXPSAT connection in the context, respectively, of golf tourism, theme parks and water parks. This research adds to this knowledge confirming this causal path in the culinary food context. MEM is the major determinant of EXPSAT, explaining the 46.5% of its total explained variance (80%). The causality path that links these two variables is significant (β : 0.411) confirming the influence of memorability on the positive evaluation of tourism experiences. Therefore, in line with previous scientific results



Notes: IM, immersion; SU, surprise; PA, participation; FU, fun; ED, education; EXPQ, experience quality; EXPSAT, experiential satisfaction; MEM, memorability; QOL, quality of life; EXPLOY, experiential loyalty. R^2 = variable's explained variance; λ = item's loadings; β = direct effect

Figure 2. Measurement and structural model assessment

(Ali *et al.*, 2016; Quadri-Felitti and Fiore, 2013), within the experiential context, MEM is confirmed as a germane attribute for achieving the tourists' satisfaction. The causal relationship between MEM and QOL has found empirical support (β : 0.306**), which is in line with similar outcomes achieved by Lin (2014) and Sthapit (2018) confirming that food-based experiences contribute to tourists' QOL through memories. EXPLOY is well explained (R^2 : 58.7%) by both EXPSAT and QOL. The causal path linking this variable resulted to be significant (H_6 , β : 0.422***; H_7 , β : 0.442***) confirming that experiential satisfaction and QOL have a positive impact on EXPLOY, that is, the tourists' intention to repeat a similar experience in future holidays. These results, by the one side, prove a largely studied relationship in tourism literature: the one between satisfaction and loyalty (Chi and Qu, 2008; Cronin *et al.*, 2000) and, by the other side, provide further evidences for a recently explored causal path linking QOL and future behavioural intentions. The findings of this study are in line with similar outcomes achieved by Kim *et al.* (2015), Lam and So (2013), Lin (2014) and Kim *et al.* (2012). However, it is also an original output, in comparison with previous findings, as this research considers loyalty with an innovative approach, focussed on the tourists' intentions to patronise a specific experience (food-based) in their next travels and trips.

6. Conclusions and management implications

In this research, it is explored how the experientiality of culinary activities practiced while on holidays positively contribute to marketing outcomes such as satisfaction, QOL and loyalty. This study contributes to the literature on experiential tourism by providing insights into new or little-explored relationships, such as those linking EXPQ, MEM, QOL and EXPLOY, in a food tourism context.

The results achieved shed some new light on the experientiality issue in tourism, that is, how to deliver experiential value to tourists. Culinary experiences are considered as proper objects to develop experiential encounters at a destination as they elicit positive emotions and feelings that last beyond the journey.

The theoretical arrangement of the present research considered that the experiential quality of food-tourism activities, practiced on holidays, provide memorable experiences capable of improving individuals' QOL, which in turn fosters tourists' satisfaction and drives future behaviour intentions. The empirical test of the structural model confirmed the hypothesised relationships and showed a good predictive power of the model. The results of the research lead to the following conclusions and practical implications for the sector:

- EXPQ is a central element in delivering MEM (Pizam, 2010) and satisfaction (Widjaja *et al.*, 2018) to culinary tourists who look for experiential values. In addition, this research confirms an original connection linking EXPQ and QOL.
- The assessment of EXPQ lived depends on how surprising, funny, engaging and educative the proposed activities are (Kao *et al.*, 2008; Cole and Scott, 2004). The educational facet of the experience is the seed capable of enhancing memories and driving future positive behaviours (Sthapit *et al.*, 2017).
- Food and food-based activities are resources particularly given to generate good memories (Stone *et al.*, 2017). The results achieved in reference with the MEM variable should encourage marketers to formulate strategies that reinforce the memorable value of their tourism proposals. Practitioners should recognise the role of food-based activities as memory and QOL's enhancers and try to get the advantage of it by drawing new offerings capable of impacting the consumers' memory, beyond the holidays' time.

- QOL is confirmed as a significant antecedent of EXPLOY. The perception that a specific experience lived on holidays can have a positive effect on personal QOL is confirmed to be a valuable predictor of the intentions to repurchase a similar experience in future travels and destinations (Lin, 2014). This result puts forward the need of a new conceptualisation of loyalty in tourism, no longer linked to the destination or a specific service, but rather to the kind of the experience itself (Pearce and Kang, 2009). This can help in clustering tourists according to the type of experience they feel loyal to. As a consequence, destination's managers and practitioners can outline experiential marketing strategies focussed on the group of tourists they wish to attract according to the kind of experience they usually patronise in their trips or holidays.

In conclusion, food-based experiences are identified as new essential tools for the sector's qualification towards experientiality. Destination managers can find the results achieved of help in designing new experiential offerings and can lead tourism practitioners in the challenge of increasing the tourism industry's competitiveness.

Quality is increasingly expected to focus on emotional/subjective values more than on functional/objective attributes of the service/product. MEM and QOL are innovative elements that can contribute, by the one side, to the achievement of a better performance of tourism businesses, and by the other, to reaching higher levels of satisfaction and new loyal attitudes towards a specific in-trip typology of activities.

The main limitation of this work is the use of a non-probabilistic sampling strategy, which affects the generalisability of the results. Future research lines should consider a qualitative approach to get a deeper understanding of the tourists' assessments of the experiential variables considered. In addition, it would be useful to add knowledge to the research on EXPQ, to achieve a better understanding of its components/facets, and on MEM with empirical works addressing whether the memories of outstanding food-based experiences lived on holidays can impact the positive evaluations of individuals' QOL over the long term.

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