

## Unique Culinary Success in Medan City as a Tourism Destination

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### Abstract

This essay analyzes and discusses the relationship between distinctive local cuisine and destination branding, utilizing consumer satisfaction as a mediating factor. **Design, methodology, and approach:** A nonprobability sampling technique combined with the judgemental sampling method was employed for the research sampling. One hundred forty tourists who had twice recently visited Medan City participated in the survey. The data were analyzed using SMART PLS and path analysis. **Research findings:** The Results revealed that while customer satisfaction greatly impacted branding destination, Unique Local Food considerably impacted customer joy. Likewise, exceptional regional cuisine significantly impacts destination branding by making tourists happy. **The empirical results** of this study offer strong support for the proposed Path analysis, which aims to take distinctive local food, customer satisfaction, and branding destinations into account simultaneously. Even though previous studies have not thoroughly explained the connection between factors, this is still the case. **Practitioners/Policy Implications:** The study suggests that Medan can effectively promote and advertise its image and cultural tourism performance since travelers know it as a city with a distinct culinary scene, leaving solid impressions. According to a study, Medan visitors do not form emotional bonds over the cuisine. **Research Limitations/Implications:** The researchers encountered challenges when collecting data for this study because most visitors were local tourists. Few domestic and international tourists were present simultaneously, making it difficult to distribute the questionnaire evenly.

**Keywords:** Unique Local Food; Customer Delight; Destination Branding

### Introduction

At this time, it is no longer an easy task for tourist places to perform to bring in tourists. Tourist locations are up against some fierce competition due to the tourist industry's quick national and global development. Visitors may have numerous options due to competition, so a tourism destination must prevail in the competition majority to choose it. Implementing a competitive strategy is implementing destinations whose environment. Greater attractive innovationMore excellent tourist attractions have been made due to increased ton amongst tourism sites. It turns out that several things can, one of those characteristics is the distinctive

local cuisine. Food serves as a means of expressing a person's identity and satisfying essential dietary needs and finances (Utami, 2018). Every area has a unique cuisine that conveys the culture and pride of its people over generations (Ī et al., 2007). This holds for all tribes in Indonesia. 633 Pitoyo tribes make up the multicultural nation of Indonesia (Pitoyo & Triwahyudi, 2018). Each tribe has a distinctive cuisine that represents it (Tsatsakis et al., 2017). Many tourist places have strengthened their marketing efforts by using food as an attraction. One of the cities on the island of Sumatra with distinctive local cuisine is the city of Medan. This selling point for the city should be promoted to attract more tourists and boost the hospitality sector throughout Medan City (Said, 2022). Medan has food tourism and works to link it with international travel and Medan City's Creative Economy in 2022. As a new tourism offering, "authentic Malay and Acehese cuisine, Padang and Batak" has been established in Medan (Hall et al., 2004). Aceh noodles, which come from Aceh, are well-known in Medan City. Durian Ucok, which should be well-known in West Sumatra and Batak, can be found and is well-known in Medan. Lontong Medan, which originates in Padang, is more well-known in Aceh. These and many other distinctive regional foods can turn Medan into a Sumatra island culinary tourism destination. Due to these factors, the city of Medan's tourism sector is rapidly growing, which may increase the number of foreign visitors. The tourism potential encourages the growth and development of many types of culinary travel. This culinary tour is one kind of tourism that supports the growth of the regional economy. By utilizing the uniqueness of its culture, customs, social structure, and political system, Medan is one city that pulls in vacationers. The cuisine of Singapore has geographical, historical, and contemporary characteristics.

This encourages visitors to try out and appreciate the local cuisine. More crucially, research demonstrates how food may be utilized to promote and brand travel locations (Chatzinakos, 2016; Handersen, 2009; Henderson, 2014; Kasimoglu, 2012; Wicaksana & Rachman, 2018). Current research on identity management and promotional strategies for tourist destinations (Chaudhuri, 2015; Malik et al., 2012; Nguyen et al., 2011) states that a strong brand is based on a distinct and enduring identity. The uniformity of various component brands' identities significantly impacts brand strength (Keller, 2003; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). In the context of a corporation, "identity" refers to the company's efforts to set itself apart from rivals, communicate its unique selling proposition, and market its goods and services in a way that makes it stand out from the crowd. This encourages vacationers to sample the local fare and enjoy doing so. Only one is required to create a powerful brand. Even more importantly, studies show that for a brand to be consistent, stand out, and hopefully be lucrative, its components must promote food as a tourist attraction. Recently, it has been suggested that a destination's ability to sustain its competitiveness over time may be influenced by its unique and memorable "food identity" (Cai, 2022;)

Jeong Shang Hong, Chen Sang, 2011; Kılç et al., 2017; Okumus, 2011; Pierree, Murphy, Laurie, Benkendoooff, Mascardo, n.d.). (Jeong Shang Hong and Chen Sang, 2011) Content that a place's capacity to entice tourists is based on the caliber of its cuisine. The importance of tourism organizations, particularly government tourism organizations, in carrying out tourism development: Two elements that have accelerated the culinary tourism industry are the role of tourism organizations, particularly government tourism organizations, specifically the Department of Tourism, as well as the marketing of visitor demand and the growth in the

number of tourist attractions in Medan City. This kind of tourism might influence how well an area develops or advances. A Medan City Culture and Tourism Office representative was the author's first point of contact, and she informed her that culinary tourism in Medan has yet to be formally established or planned despite significant interest from visitors. Culinary tourists are aware of this adventure once they arrive. They must also realize that their motivation for the trip is primarily food taste.

## Literature Review

Food is one-way local culture and history are expressed (Paramita et al., 2021). Local cuisine reflects the richness and uniqueness of the natural and biological resources in areas where locals depend on them (Nakamura & Hanazaki, 2017). Using distinctive local cuisine to attract domestic and foreign visitors can increase the welfare of the local inhabitants (Nakamura & Hanazaki, 2017; Syahrivar, 2021). According to a 2009 study by Kim, Eves, and Scarles, local meals are popular among students. Visitors because they offer enjoyable and authentic experiences and foster community via sharing. Local governments and communities must effectively manage local food in order for it to support community resilience and boost local pride (Donald, 2020). This covers how the ingredients are gathered, prepared, and given to customers. Food waste on a national scale and environmental pollution can come from poorly managed local food systems (Kafa & Jaegler, 2021). In this study, local food enjoyment explains how much people enjoy eating, trying new local cuisines, and participating in local food-related activities.

There is a saying that you have not experienced Medan unless you have eaten Lontong Padang, Aceh noodles, and UcoK Durian since it is clear from the table above that the native cuisine of the city of Medan has its distinctiveness that may make tourists feel at ease while receiving gastronomic treats. First impressions count. Thus, Medan City can use this to its advantage as a branding strategy to attract more visitors, according to Kafa & Jaegler's assertion from 2021.

Table 1. Food Local Research Subjects in Medan City

No	Types of Culinary	Uniqueness
1.	Gomak Noodles	Significantly shaped Medan-style noodles with peanut sauce.
2.	Lontong Medan	Lontong Medan frequently includes eggs or cakes in addition to vegetables, tofu, noodles, peanut sauce, chili sauce, and other ingredients.
3.	Medan Soto	Coconut milk, lime leaves, star anise, galangal, lemongrass, shallots, garlic, coriander, cumin, black pepper, ginger, turmeric, sugar, and salt as seasonings served with pieces of chicken, shrimp, beef lung or minced beef.
4.	Lemang	It is made of sticky rice baked in bamboo strips after being wrapped in banana leaves.
5.	Bika Ambon	Due to their distinctive yellow checkerboard design with fibers and holes, tourists actively seek out these affordable presents from Medan.
6.	Duck Vermicelli	The Medan Beef Vermicelli contains vermicelli, celery, sliced garlic, boiled duck, and lettuce leaves as toppings.

7.	Aceh Noodles	Aceh-made noodles are particularly well-known in Medan City. Visitors to Medan frequently request noodles combined with meat or seafood.
8.	Mashed Sweet Potato Leaves	A mortar is required to mash cassava leaves. You can also add Rimbang fruit, and Kecombrang stems to this dish.
9.	Laksa Medan	It is a dish of white vermicelli, cucumber, fish, mint leaves, and tamarind sauce.
10.	Ucok Durian	Delicious and seedless Durian
11.	Racing Noodles	This dish is known as racing noodles because of how quickly it is prepared.

The perceived utility gained from using the product is its consumption value. The concept of consumption Food consumption associated with travel has been valued. First, research lends credence to the notion that customers' decisions have historically been functional. However, because the phrase "functional value" has such a broad connotation, it has also been used in past studies of food or food tourism to refer to things like price, quality, or other particular functional or utilitarian features (such as health function) (Choe & Kim, 2018).

One of a place's distinctive and exclusive assets that lure travelers into the competitive tourism market is locally produced and served food (Postma, Maria Buda, 2017). Local food affects how people view a location in addition to being a magnet for tourists (Everett, 2019). Eating is typically seen as one of the essential parts of the tourist experience (R, 2023). While some travelers view food as satisfying their hunger, others are compelled to try new flavors and regard it as an integral component of the journey (Apak, 2023). One of the factors influencing interest in local cuisine is tourists' desire to understand more about the sources of food and their propensity to experience food firsthand by watching the production procedures (Apak, 2023).

These researches are typical. Improving destination image, revisiting intention, and destination satisfaction are all connected to local cuisine and destination attractiveness (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006). However, a study examining the opinions of domestic tourists will unmistakably demonstrate the advantages of local cuisine for tourism branding in Medan City and help determine the impact of local food on sustainable tourism. Aesthetic values like enjoyment and amusement are connected to leisure travel and tourism-related activities like wine tasting (Paramita et al., 2021). Understanding the significance of these hedonic features is crucial when understanding how visitors behave at a location. Third, any product may be thought of as having social worth. Social values influence consumers, and they pick things that reflect the norms of their friends and acquaintances or the social image they want to project (Woermann & Rokka, 2015).

*H<sub>1</sub>: Unique Local Food has a positive effect on Customer Delight*

The term "destination image" refers to how tourists view a particular place (Fakaye, 1991). The idea of a destination image includes visitors' impressions of a site (Richie, 1993), their attitudes toward that place (Baloglu & McCleary, 2015), and the unique aspects of that place (Baloglu & McCleary, 2015) that impact their decision to travel there. Destination image is the topic most commonly explored in travel literature. Several researchers, including Chen

& and Tsai, say that the operationalization of destination image research is mainly theoretical. Due to the complexity, multidimensionality, subjectivity, and intangibility of tourism goods and services, quantifying the destination image construct can be challenging (Baloglu & McCleary, 2015).

Numerous studies have shown the significance of food in determining how people perceive a destination (Kim, 2014). While (Kaur et al., 2022; Raina et al., 2021) identified food as one of the elements of destination image, Hu and Ritchie underlined the role of food in generating destination appeal (Ritchie, 1993). Food can also be a great travel decision-maker because it provides a pleasurable sensory experience (Pitoyo & Triwahyudi, 2018) and helps in developing knowledge of the way of life in the area (Pérez Gálvez et al., 2017). Interestingly, the destination picture comprises two distinct but hierarchically interrelated cognitive or perceptual and affective components (Ritchie et al., 2021). The sum of an object's beliefs and attitudes is the mental component, which results in some internally accepted representation of the object's features (external pressures, pull attributes). On the other hand, the dynamic part refers to a person's feelings toward the thing under consideration (internal forces, push quality) (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Regarding interest in the destination image, the tourism literature reveals two key themes. First and foremost, it focuses on people's attitudes and beliefs regarding a specific location (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pikkemaat, 2004). Perceived image is the term for this (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). According to Gartner, the seen picture often comprises connected cognitive, emotional, and conative components (Gartner, 1993). According to Cai, the three elements of Keller's typology of brand image, qualities, advantages, and attitudes are consistent with Gartner's typology (Cai, 2022). Furthermore, Echtner and (Ritchie et al., 2021) outline three continuums of objective image: comprehensive, psychologically sound, and generally unique attributes. The most challenging goal sketching model has been described as this multidimensional one (Clark and Loxton), undated. In order to gauge how people understand the function of a picture, researchers often have them rate how critical specific components of the image are to them, how they feel about the image, and how likely they are to visit the image. When considered as a whole, the three-part attitude model (Baloglu & McCleary, 2015) places perceived image as one of its components. Image objectives can also be viewed as the envisioned representations of various forms of media and information.

Describe the properties of a picture as being thorough, psychologically healthy, and generally distinct (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996). Multidimensional has been used to characterize the most difficult goal-sketching model (Donaire et al., 2014). According to the perceived purpose rating of the image, people are often asked to rate the perceived features of a location, how they feel about it, and how likely they are to visit that location (Baloglu & McCleary, 2015). When considered a whole, perceived image is generally seen as an attitude construct and fits within the three-part attitude model. However, image objectives can also be thought of as projected pictures made by various sources of information and the media—methods for deciphering signals from multiple information sources, such as websites (Cathy, 2013). To better understand the brand identity of a destination, it is necessary to consider the various objectives of stakeholders in the tourism industry. This study aims to clarify policy-making to increase tourist visits from multiple stakeholders (government, companies, and communities) in the tourism and hospitality industry.



This increases the possibility that unclear identities would build up and alter how visitors view a location (Jenkins, 1999). It follows that it is necessary to correctly and constantly understand the objective picture created by the various marketing media objectives to construct a destination brand successfully. In order to distinguish and identify destinations in brand destinations, Cai continued to emphasize how important it is to select a variety of sustainable brand components (Cai, 2002). As a result, a brand's elements or dimensions must accurately communicate its mission and distinguish it from its competitors (Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013).

Food frequently includes several characteristics exclusive to a particular place or region, so it can be considered an objective brand identification. Numerous potential advantages result from a distinctive local and consistent culinary identity. First, in a highly competitive tourism business, a distinct and positive identity can help specific goals achieve long-term and significant advantages by differentiating destinations from competing areas (Baltescu, 2016; Yenipinar, 2016). In other words, stakeholders in the destination must establish a distinct and unified identity that can effectively reach the target market and be recognized by visitors (Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013). Clear, consistent messages that address the demands of tourists are also required by linking food with an identity that is strong and appealing.

Characteristics with a specific location can advertise "regional" food to tourists and symbolize the distinctiveness of a destination (Insu Lee, 2011). For instance, food from a specific location might act as a cognitive signal, triggering knowledge about the brand from when it was purchased. These favorable associations may affect visitors' views and feelings regarding a site, significantly impacting their behavior (Cai, 2002).

Branding is necessary to create a favorable reputation since distinctive food goods with appealing packaging alone cannot pique customer attention. According to (Nastain, 2017), a brand is more than simply a company's name and logo; it also refers to its commitment to upholding its guiding principles. Your brand is more than just an identity; it also represents the values you wish to exude to customers. The company offers utilitarian, emotional, self-expressive, and societal benefits for consumers to see the brand as distinctive and different from other items. Realizing consumer loyalty is the next step.

The ideal image and the objective stakeholder perspective conflict with promoting food in destination marketing and branding, causing challenges for numerous reasons. Due to scattered communications in regional tourist development and promotion, local web-based and regional food promotion-linked tourism activities have been investigated (Nastain, 2017). Traditional New Zealand food was the most popular among neighborhood eateries in another culinary tourism study (Nummedal et al. C, 2006). However, few restaurants employ local vocabulary to describe their cuisine and include a section on branded and promoted food and wine tastings.

According to this Australian Capital Territory case study example (L Sharples, R Mitchell, and N Macionis, 2003), industrial wines may offer opportunities to develop or reinforce regional culinary identities. However, because of some misunderstandings, local eateries do not heavily advertise the Canberra wine district. Tourism and food production organizations are advised to establish clear objectives and involve stakeholders. They join the food and tourist industries. Thus, a food's identity can be used to promote and brand a target.

Canada's government has tried to make culinary tourist products into "Branding of Country" despite Canada's natural beauty Commission has tried to promote culinary tourism as a new kind of "Branding of Country," notwithstanding Canada's natural beauty.

This is so because the majority of prosperous places have distinctive cultural characteristics. Food is regarded as an excellent representation of a particular local culture (Bessiere, 1998). According to Fox, fresh food brands are assisting Croatian tourist spots in reviving their outdated reputation and, therefore, gaining market share by drawing in more and more visitors. In other words, a purpose that adds to the destination brand has a clear and distinct food identity. Through a case study of Taiwan as a travel destination, the following research topics were explored to fulfill the objectives of this study: (a) Does the food have a distinct and unified identity throughout various travel-related media (conducted by examining travel guides and destination websites)? Is the type of food supplied at the location where the marketing materials were distributed aligned with the stakeholder perspective's goal?

*H<sub>2</sub>: Customer Delight has a positive effect on Customer Delight*

When tourists visit a location, Unik Food Local is a component of a tourist attraction that cannot be dissociated. One technique to highlight a tourism destination's distinctiveness is local food (Gheorghe & Nistoreanu, 2014; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2013). Even delicious foods can generate a distinctive ambiance so visitors will not forget the local way of life, setting, or cuisine (Gheorghe & Nistoreanu, 2014; Ottenbacher & Harrington, 2013). In addition to influencing travel motivation and behavior, memories of food and drink can affect visitors' experiences and opinions of a particular tourist site (Philip, Wolfe, 2011)

This affects various parts of the travel experience, including the dining service area (Gheorghe & Nistoreanu, 2014) the consumption of local cuisine (Woermann & Rokka, 2015), among others (Sirikaya, 2012). Researchers have conducted numerous studies on the relationship between food and specific tourist destinations, including food gastronomic tourism, culinary tourism, and culinary tourism, due to the expanding significance of food tourism. Examples of food tourism include visits to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and specific venues where individuals can taste food and engage with the unique qualities of specialist food production areas (Philip Wolfe, 2011).

Culinary travel involves learning about other cuisines. There is "deliberate creative activity in other eating habits - interaction involving the enjoyment, setup, and display of meals, gastronomy, food systems, or diets perceived to be linked to the cooking sector rather than a person's own." Food and drink-related tourism." Food tourism involves experiencing different cultures relating to people, places, and things (Santich, 2004). This explanation of food in tourism shows that food may boost a destination's sustainability, authenticity, economy, and community.

This definition defines culinary tourism as "intentional participation in other cultures' culinary traditions." Branding has proven to be a successful tactic for raising awareness and encouraging a positive perception in the minds of tourists (Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony, 2013). Brand association or brand image refers to brand-related information associated with a node in consumers' memories. Through brand associations, a

comprehensive and distinctive brand identity can be created. There is a strong correlation between the brand's title, branding, image, slogan, and product and the success of an organization in achieving its objectives (Fallis, 2015). These elements should also reflect the foodways' quality. According to empirical studies, many travelers choose local and cultural cuisine for diverse experiences. They were Purposeful eating (Mohd Yusof & Ismail, 2015). Since food is often associated with a region's cultural, socioeconomic, and physical features, it has a symbolic value that can help build a destination's brand (Atsuko Hashimoto, 2006). Thus, food is tied to a place. French wine is one illustration (Atsuko Hashimoto, 2006). (Everett & Aitchison, 2008) contend that a location's identity depends heavily on its relationship with its cuisine. Establishing a strong, distinctive, and compelling brand identity is necessary. Giving tourists connections between cuisine, activities, and pertinent locations is essential (Cai, 2022).

More crucially, food-related travel experiences can influence visitors' contentment and enjoyment of the destination (Updhyay & Sharma, 2014) and their likelihood of returning. According to Gursoy (2014), similar to other experiences associated with travel, the author argues that our senses of perception significantly contribute to both the psychological and physiological aspects of how we evaluate and value food (Gursoy, 2014). In particular, food's appearance, fragrance, and flavor. The significance of food in determining image goals has been shown in numerous studies (Cai, 2022; Everett, 2019; Kılıç et al., 2017; Pierree, Murphy, Laurie, Benkendooft, Mascardo, n.d.; Richie, 1993). Food is a factor in the destination image, according to Sanchez-Caizares and López-Guzmán (2012), while (Williams and Soutar (2009), 2014) discuss the significance of food in creating destination allure. Additionally, food may be a fantastic motivator for travel since it offers a pleasant sensory experience (Kar, 2021). Cognitive or perceptual; and 2) Affective are linked components. The cognitive component is the sum of an object's beliefs and attitudes that contribute to some internally accepted representation of its characteristics (external forces, attractive characteristics). On the other hand, the emotive component refers to how a person feels about the subject of the inquiry (internal strength, push attribute) (Qu et al., 2011).

Underline the vital contribution that restaurants may make to a tourism destination while discussing the topic of food-related uses in destination awareness (Miller & Duncan, 2003). They emphasize restaurants as a crucial part of tourist attractions that can affect visitors' behavior and feelings about a place. More concretely, visitors' perceptions of a destination may include local eateries. Besides dining establishments, local grocery stores, bars, vineyards, and farms are tourist attractions (Henderson, 2014). Finally, Jacobsen mentioned three factors that can affect tourists' choices of restaurants while they are away. Human characteristics, such as friendliness and service quality, are as important as the restaurant's physical layout and ambiance, food quality, and ease of access (Jacobsen, 2011).

Food can be considered a commodity and a symbol in food-related activities, such as festivals and fairs for agricultural products and food-related businesses, giving visitors rich experiences (And & Ryan, 2003). The advantages are mutual. While visitors experiment with different meals and learn about new food-related civilizations, their hosts may promote their culture and history through local cuisine (Kasimoglu, 2012). Residents and towns advertise their food and incorporate it into their identities.



**H<sub>3</sub>:** *Unique Local Food has a positive effect on Destination Branding, with Customer Delight as Mediating Variable*

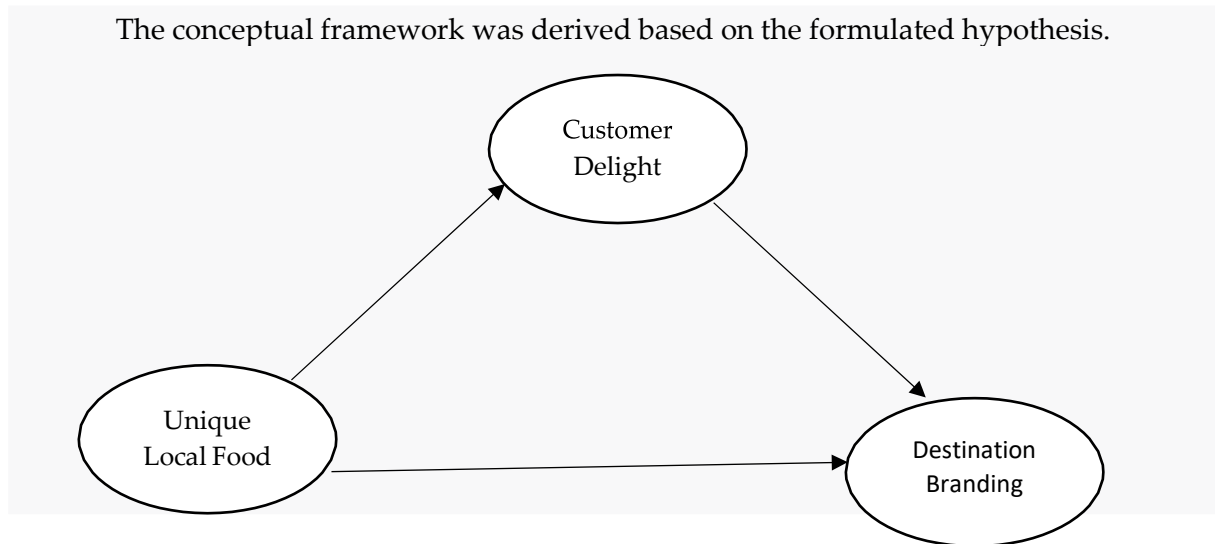


Figure 1 illustrates the planned research.

## Research Methods

Sampling in this quantitative study was conducted intentionally. Respondents must travel to Medan City in order to be eligible. Table 1 shows that women comprised most responders (N = 92, or 65.71%). N = 54 respondents, or 38.57%, were under 34. Most respondents (N = 64 or 45.71%) with bachelor's degrees (N = 34 or 45.71%) were managers by occupation. Each response was given a Likert 5.0 scale score. Every quantifiable aspect of goals is based on a framework for food identification. The background details of stakeholder goals, such as gender and age, are also questioned, along with questions regarding position, current position, length of current employment, and current. The job was conducted between 1 July and 30 July 2023. The questionnaire was self-administered and sent to 140 tourists who had visited tourist destinations in Medan City according to predetermined respondent criteria

Table 2: Descriptive profile of the stakeholders in the destination (N = 140)

Profile		n	%
Sex	Man	48	34.29
	Woman	92	65.71
Age	< 30	54	38.57
	31 – 40	44	31.43
	41 – 50	31	22.14
	50 >	11	7.85
Job title	Officer	44	31.43

	Owner	8	5.71
	Manager	64	45.71
	Professional	14	10.00
	Other	10	7.14

The Likert Scale was used as the measurement in this study. Path Analysis with Smart PLS is the data analysis method employed. Table 2 explains the variable assessment items used to gauge Unique Food Local, Customer Delight, and Destination Branding, which current researchers have embraced.

**Table 3** Measurement of Item's Variables

Variable	Reference	Items
Unique Local Food	Caber et al. (20	I Enjoy the local food of Medan city delicious
		I am very Locavorism with Kota culinary Medan
		I feel confident in the Authenticity culinary city of Medan
		I feel Pride enjoys Local food.
Customer Delight	Loureiro and Kastenholtz (2011)	I am happier than I anticipated with Medan City.

Variable	Reference	Items
		While in Medan City, I had a great time.
		In Medan City, I had a pleasant surprise.
Destination Brandin	Baggio, (2017) Maxim, (2019)	As a result of the distinctiveness of the cuisine, I have a positive impression of tourist attractions.
		I spent much time watching tourism actors perform. Introducing regional cuisine is fascinating. City of Medan
		I like the characteristics of local food, which can boost the city's destination branding. Medan
		The message conveyed by the perpetrator Tourism related to local food is exciting.
		The truth of the message conveyed tourism actors about the uniqueness of local food
		The actions of tourism actors in emotional trigger tourists to like local food

		Conformity between the messages conveyed by tourism actors with the reality experienced by tourists in the city of Medan
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Source: Processed by researchers

## The Findings and Discussion

The researcher initially looked at the validity and reliability of the online survey given to 140 participants based on the outcomes of this investigation. Table 4 below presents the loading, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) values.

Table 4 CA, CR & AVE

Statement		$\alpha$	CR	AVE
Unique Food Local (X)		.954	.879	.856
X1-1	.917			
X1-2	.955			
X1-3	.950			
X1-4	.928			
Customer Delight (Z)		.916	.947	.856
Z1-1	.904			
Z1-2	.927			
Z1-3	.945			
Destination Branding (Y)		.942	.967	.747
Y1-1	.910			
Y1-2	.919			
Y1-3	.791			
Y1-4	.909			
Y1-5	.908			
Y1-6	.791			
Y1-7	.720			

Source: Processed by researchers

The table presented above offers a comprehensive overview of the variables under consideration. This research aims to estimate the mean and standard deviation of such variables. According to the average pull factor of 3.702 (0.707), respondents are more internally driven by pull factors than by push factors, which are, on average, 4.11,6 (0.605)., Indicating that satisfaction with attractiveness is commonly regarded as a reasonable average close to 4), the average value for experience quality is 3.874 (0.447). Because the mean value, 3.903 (0.633), is close to 4 (satisfied), this study shows that respondents are typically satisfied. With a mean respondent score of 4.217 (0.624) against 3.858 (0.606), the loyalty construct demonstrates a more significant commitment to restoring significance than to attractions.

## Measurement models

The data analysis revealed that respondents were more influenced by internal factors, as evidenced by an average pull factor of 3.702 (standard deviation = 0.707) and an average push factor of 4.116 (standard deviation = 0.605). The VIF collinearity test yielded a total result of 2.274. This implies that it is possible to control the variability of the study procedure in its entirety. Subsequently, a two-stage assessment approach was employed to scrutinize the proposed models. The initial step involved evaluating the reliability and validity of the model test measure, and it was determined that both criteria were satisfied. The factor loading for each item in the study yielded values over 0.6, indicating a statistically significant relationship. All entries in the factor-loading matrix exhibit values beyond the threshold of 0.6. The composite reliability scores (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha values were all over the point of 0.7, indicating their importance. Additionally, the mean variance of extracted values (AVE) exceeded the minimum requirement of 0.5. This study aimed to test the discriminant validity of the constructs by employing the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio. This approach was chosen due to the lack of reliable discriminant validity in the Fornell-Lack criteria and cross-loading evaluation, as discussed in previous studies. According to Henseler et al. (2015), including variable constructs with an accuracy level of 0.9 falls within the acceptable range of research findings (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2015).

## Structural models

A structural model evaluation and the outcomes of hypothesis testing indicate that the model is fit, with a goodness of fit value of 0.689 (Hair et al., 2017). Unique Food Local Variation accounted for the remaining 26.8% of the variance, while Customer Delight and Branding Destination explained 73.2%. Additional metrics include the average path coefficient (0.732), adjusted R<sup>2</sup> and R<sup>2</sup> (0.626), and the average inflation factor variance (1.694) to assess the model's robustness and further examination of the anticipated link between the variables' results seen in Table 4. significantlation exists between Customer Delight and Unique Food Local ( $r = 0.856$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, there is a Strong link between destination branding and consumer satisfaction ( $r = 0.728$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, and H<sub>3</sub> are allowed when reas H<sub>0</sub> is rejected due to Unique Food Local's considerable effect on destination branding through CustomerDelight ( $= 0.700$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

The factors tested exhibit a unidirectional link.

Table 5. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

Construct	Customer Delight	Destination Brandin	Unique Food Local
Unique Food Local	.925		
Customer Delight	.794	.864	
Destination Brandin	.851	.700	.938

Table 6. This study examines the factors' direct, indirect, and total effects.

The proposed hypothesis	Direct effect		Indirect effect		Total effect	
	$\beta$	t-value	$\beta$	t-value	$\beta$	t-value
Unique Food Local → Customer Delight	.856	6.650				6.650 **
Customer Delight → Destination Branding	.728	6.673				6.673 **
Unique Food Local → Destination Branding → Customer Delight			.700	6.087		6.087 **

\* Sig  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*sig  $p < 0.01$ .

## Results and Discussion

This study indicates that the city's unique native gastronomy will serve as the primary draw for tourists, given Medan's reputation as one of Indonesia's gastronomic hubs. Sims reference earlier research that contends that since local food is so contentious, including it in destination marketing and sustainable tourism offers may present substantial challenges (Sims, 2009). This phenomenon can be attributed to the increased utilization of locally sourced food items in 2016. Several studies (e.g., Gálvez et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2009; Wijaya et al., 2017) have been undertaken to examine the demand side of tourism, specifically focusing on the experiences and motivations of tourists about consuming local food.

The study also reveals that how visitors engage with an attraction affects their perception of it, which boosts repeat business and referrals to other visitors. Travelers like the range of locations available, but DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations) face increased competition. Destinations for destination marketing are increasingly important (Pike & Page, 2014). The literature on destination marketing suggests that to stand out from the competition; each area should highlight its tangible and intangible qualities. Identifying and promoting local cuisines and cultural activities closely tied to specific locations can significantly influence vacation campaigns (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2006; McKercher et al., 2008; Okumus et al., 2018). Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) assert that regional cuisine exhibits significant potential for economic development. Tourism establishments can draw in visitors and enhance their overall travel experience, providing opportunities for the hotel sector, tourism industry, and local developments to promote and market their offerings (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016).

Second, according to this research, food serves as a vehicle for expressing regional customs and culture (Chairy & Syahrivar, 2019; Wijaya, 2019). Local food also highlights its diversity and richness in a location where inhabitants rely on natural and biological resources (Nakamura & Hanazaki, 2017). By adopting distinctive local cuisine to attract domestic and international tourists, the welfare of the local population can be increased (Jung et al., 2015; Chairy & Syahrivar, 2019). According to earlier research by Kim, Eves, and Scarles (2009),



tourists value regional cuisine because it promotes community and delivers an exciting and authentic experience. While traveling, share. Local communities need to feel more pride in themselves and be more resilient.

The government and local communities should properly manage food. This covers the manners in which it is created, distributed to customers, and acquired (McDaniel, Soto Mas, & Sussman, 2021). National food waste and contaminated environments can result from poorly managed local food systems (Chairy et al., 2020; Dusoruth, Peterson, & Schmitt, 2018). The level of interest people have in trying out new regional dishes and engaging in regional culinary pursuits is what this study refers to as local food delight.

Customer satisfaction and customer delight are conceptually distinct. Consumer happiness is about providing "positive surprises" instead of meeting or exceeding consumer expectations for product performance (Berman, 2005). 'Surprise' naturally refers to going above and beyond what the customer anticipates. Oliver, Rust, and Varki (1997) put forth three predictors of excitement: surprise consumption, arousal, and positive affect. They could best describe joy as "Services and Products capable of unexpectedly pleasing performance." (Oliver, Rust, and Varki, 1997). Companies must offer features that go above and beyond what customers believe should be included in goods and services to surprise customers and ultimately induce a "fun" state. These features must go above and beyond how customers expect products and services to function. Although offering the most excellent hotel room service can only boost client happiness, surprising clients with birthday parties will do the same because it goes above and beyond the typical expectations for the company's services (McNeilly & Barr, 2006; Barnes, Colli)

## Conclusion

In order to promote Medan as a culinary destination, this study assesses the relationship between distinctive regional food and customer happiness. This study came up with two important conclusions. First, this research lends credence to the idea that Medan City will become a popular tourism destination for foodies from around Indonesia and beyond, thanks to its unique local cuisine model. The sentence "I have not been to Medan if I have not enjoyed lontong Medan" will emerge. Even if durian ucok is an exceptional phenomenon, Aceh noodles, a Medan-only delicacy, are extraordinary. The city of Medan gains a considerable benefit from this. Previous research has shown that one of the primary motivators for returning to a tourist destination. For instance, earlier research by Chairy and Syahrivar (2019) demonstrates that Bika Ambon Durian Ucok, Lontong Medan, and Mie Aceh are some of the attractions that draw both domestic and foreign visitors to Medan, Indonesia.

The enjoyment of local cuisine has a favorable impact on the intention to return, according to a prior study by Jung et al. (2015) conducted in the context of regional food festivals. A previous study by Crotts et al. (2008) claimed that eating local cuisine is a critical factor influencing return intention. Positive food-related experiences might bring back pleasant recollections of travel destinations. In our opinion, the desire to return. We are returning to a vacation spot. For instance, earlier research by Chairy and Syahrivar (2019) shows that Bika Ambon Durian Uco, Lontong Medan, and Mie Aceh are some tourist destinations that draw local and foreign visitors to Medan, Indonesia. According to a previous study by Jung et al. (2015) conducted in the context of local food festivals, savoring local cuisine positively affects the intention to return. Based on a previous study conducted by Crotts et al. (2008), the consumption of local cuisine emerges as a significant factor influencing the inclination of travelers to revisit a destination. Attractive recollections associated with eating can elicit joyful reminiscences of previous travel destinations. According to our perspective, there is a desire to return.

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