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## Local Restaurants' Effect on Tourist Experience: A Case from Istanbul

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to employ and validate experience economy theory in local restaurant settings and to understand the dimensions of local restaurant experience from the point of view of tourists. A self-administered structured questionnaire based on the investigation of previous studies was used to collect data from tourists staying in Istanbul. Data were analyzed via exploratory factor analysis to explore different dimensions of the local food experience of tourists. Contrary to the experience economy model, which proposes four dimensions of experience, this research has identified three dimensions, for the local restaurant experience, namely entertainment and esthetics, education, and escapism. Previous research applied experience economy theory in literature, but this research is the first to employ and validate the dimensions of experience for a local restaurant setting. The findings of the study will provide a new perspective to local restaurant managers as well as destinations to manage the experience of foreign travelers.

**Keywords:** Experience economy model, Local restaurant, Food experience, Restaurant experience, Istanbul, Tourists

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## 1. Introduction

O'dell (2007) stated that experiences are subjective, non-tangible, continuous, and personal perceptions. They are not snapshots and have different dimensions. These dimensions, which, according to the experience economy model are esthetics, entertainment, education, and escapism, develop over time with unforgettable impressions and keep their value in the future (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). For instance, the experiences that restaurants provide can be summarized in these four dimensions. Restaurant atmosphere and ambiance can affect customer mood positively/negatively (esthetics) (Parsa et al., 2012); a restaurant can offer arcade games for its customers (entertainment); a restaurant can provide wine or whiskey tastings (education) (Bruwer & Alant, 2009); and a restaurant atmosphere can help visitors to escape daily life challenges (escapism) (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2018). Moreover, it is known that restaurant experience plays a critical role in tourist experience (Chen & Huang, 2019).

Larsen (2007) defined the tourist experience as a past travel-related event significant enough to be kept in long-term memory. In this respect, experiences are primarily visual and are a different event where tourists consciously "look" at something as different from everyday life (Urry, 1990). However, there have been changes in understanding the tourist experience, along with postmodernism. Thus, instead of going to tourism destinations that offer sea, sun, and sand, tourists choose to go to places that provide unique experiences such as fun, entertainment, and hedonic pleasures (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). As a result, destinations need to be creative to attract tourists (Hernandez-Rojas et al., 2021).

While evaluating destination attractiveness, the food and beverage experience is perceived by tourists as one of the most important factors, along with climate, accommodation, and scenery (Henderson, 2009; Okumus and Cetin, 2018). Several factors contribute to tourists' food experiences: authenticity, novelty, and food locality (Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014). Authentic food plays a key role in tourist food experiences (Kim et al. 2018). A growing body of literature states that experiencing authentic food is perceived by tourists as a primary reason for visiting a destination (Sengel et al. 2015; Boniface, 2017; Okumus et al., 2007; Quan & Wang, 2004). Destinations can differentiate themselves by offering authentic and quality food (Boyne et al., 2003). Moreover, local food experience plays a critical role in tourist satisfaction (Primanayagam, et al. 2020). For instance, Rimmington & Yüksel (1998) studied tourist satisfaction in Turkey. They found that food was the fourth most significant factor for tourist satisfaction and the most critical factor for revisit intention.

In this context, Tikkanen (2007) stated four food approaches in terms of travel motivations related to experience. The first approach was that food was perceived as a tourist attraction in western countries (Hjalager & Richards, 2003). Its experience allows tourists to reach their relaxation, excitement, escape, education, and lifestyle goals (Frochot, 2003). In the second approach, food is an obstacle as tourists may have had bad experiences while trying local foods in unfamiliar destinations (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). In the third approach, having local food becomes a gastronomic experience (Meler & Cerovic', 2003). The fourth approach is related to food culture (Quan and Wang, 2004), an essential criterion for destination marketing. Food culture is affected by local restaurants (Ozcelik & Akova, 2021).

Local restaurants play an essential role in influencing tourists positively and offering memorable experiences (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014) since all tourists, except for large groups, prefer to dine in local restaurants (Sims, 2009). A tourist can go to a local restaurant, try new foods, and have an unexpectedly joyful and memorable dining experience. Björk & Kauppin-

en-Räisänen (2014) added that the restaurant's physical environment, atmosphere, and tempo are factors that contribute to the local restaurant experience. Kim et al. (2009) further added that those tourists also perceived the restaurant view as necessary.

Istanbul is a worldwide known tourism destination with many scenic and historical landmarks (Okumus & Cetin, 2018). 13.40 million international tourists visited Istanbul in 2019, and it is the 8<sup>th</sup> most visited city globally (Robino, 2019). Since Istanbul has a rich historical background, Istanbul offers sophisticated cuisine (Demir et al., 2018). Turkish cuisine is perceived as one of the most popular global cuisines, having a strong reputation alongside Chinese, Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese, Indian, Greek, French and Italian cuisines (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Okumus et al., 2007). Moreover, Istanbul has 31,268 local restaurants which offer many alternatives like steakhouses, kebabs, and fish restaurants (Bolat, 2019). However, to our best knowledge, there has never been a study about how local restaurants affect tourists visiting Istanbul.

Therefore, this study aims to employ and validate experience economy theory in local restaurant settings and to understand the dimensions of local restaurant experiences from the point of view of tourists.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1. The concept of experience and the experience economy model***

The term experience economy was first used by Pine & Gilmore (1999) to understand experience in different business settings. According to the authors, experiences can be defined as events that are of personal interest to individuals and are unique, unforgettable, and sustainable. In addition, the events defined as experiences do not occur spontaneously but are performed by service providers (Schmitt, 1999). Hence, Gupta & Vajic (2002) argue that experiences represent information and perceptions remaining in the minds of the consumers as a result of their interaction with the providers. In other terms, experience with a provider can be considered an act of co-creation that is subsequently remembered after the consumers' encounter with the providers (Poullsson & Kale, 2004).

Referring to the above definitions, it could be assumed that experiencing something does not necessarily mean having an experience. That is, in order to label an encounter as an experience, the consumers should feel at least one of the following : personal relevance, novelty, surprise, learning, or engagement (Poullsson & Kale, 2004). In a similar vein, Mossberg (2003, p. 27) suggests that an authentic experience needs to be a dynamic process, include a social dimension, have a meaning and joy, result in an involvement, depend on context, and relate to satisfaction. Therefore, there is a need to make a distinction between experiences and meaningful experiences. As such, meaningful experiences result from the interaction with the environment and what people learn from these interactions during their experiences.

The experience economy model of Pine & Gilmore (1999) similarly focuses on different levels of consumers' participation and their interaction with the environment and proposes four dimensions of experiences. While participation relates to consumer involvement, which can be either active or passive, interaction represents the degree of connection with the environment ranging from absorption to immersion. As a result, taken together, the authors proposed that education, entertainment, esthetic, and escapism are the main dimensions of experience. More specifically, they argued that experience goes beyond entertainment and includes different dimensions. Even entertainment is one of the oldest and common forms of experience, and education could also lead to pleasant experiences. However, education requires the active participation of an individual in contrast to entertainment.

Similarly, escapism experience results in active participation and makes people engage in events worth the time and money spent by participants. Lastly, esthetic experiences result in passive participation and immersion. In such experiences, consumers immerse themselves in the environment presented by the service providers. In other terms, they accept the environment as it is. Therefore, according to the model of Pine & Gilmore (1999), the purpose of consumers is to experience a feeling for entertainment, learning for education, and going or doing for escapism. However, for esthetic experience, the only aim is to be present in the setting.

Along with the experience economy model, other frameworks have been developed in the literature to enhance the dimensions of experience and contribute to understanding meaningful experiences. For instance, Tarssanen & Kylänen (2005) have created "the experience pyramid" which depicts key elements to form experiences. According to the model, the first element is individuality, which refers to customers feeling valued. An other element is authenticity, which relates to consumers' perception of a product as genuine. Story, the third element, helps to connect the different elements of experience. Interaction, the fourth element, is about the relations between the customer, other customers, and service providers.

Multi-sensory perception is the fifth element, and refers to the extent to which the experience can appeal to different senses. Lastly, contrast means presenting a product that is different from the daily routine of the customer. Even though these six elements of experience are crucial to customer experiences, the model of Pine & Gilmore (1999) is more focused on the dimensions of experience rather than understanding the elements creating customer experiences. Hence, we also adopted the experience economy model for our study to understand the tourist experience with local restaurants.

## ***2.2. Tourist experience and food***

After postmodernism, the concept of tourism started to gain a new meaning with the changing needs of travelers (Monaco, 2018). That is, people have started to look for new experiences such as fun activities and places that are different from sea, sun, and sand (Valek & Williams, 2018). Specifically, hedonic needs have appeared to act as motivators for tourists (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Pine & Gilmore (1999) suggested that experiences involve different parties and develop over time with unforgettable impressions. However, when applied to tourism, experiences qualify as images and represent events where tourists consciously look at something different from everyday life (Urry, 1990). Hence, tourist experience can be defined as a personal event related to past travels, which are strong enough to stay in the long-term memory (Larsen, 2007). Further, Volo (2010) argues that tourist experience refers to formations in hedonic dimensions that take place outside of usual timing and environment, appeal to the imagination of tourists, and respond to escape and entertainment needs.

In literature, there are two different approaches to understand the tourist experience. The first approach, namely the social science approach, considers tourist experience a peak experience, which is opposed to daily routines. Therefore, the experiences such as traveling, accommodation, and eating are usually ignored because those activities are assumed to be extensions of daily experiences (Quan & Wang, 2004). However, with an opposite view, the marketing approach refers to tourists as consumers because they engage in commercial transactions. As such, these transactions could involve any type of service, including both peak and supporting experiences (Mossberg, 2007).

Regarding different experiences, eating represents a physiological need that should be satisfied for tourists as well as other individuals. Additionally, food and beverage constitute one of the

most important attractions for a destination (Jenkins, 1999), and food-related earnings count for almost one-third of tourism profit (Meler and Cerovic, 2003). Food's crucial role in the tourist experience could be explained in several ways (Hall et al., 2003). First, food is part of the local culture that is consumed by travelers. Second, food plays a vital role in the promotional activities of a destination. Similarly, Henderson (2004) mentions that food constitutes one of the critical elements of tourism marketing and development strategies.

Referring to food experience, Maslow (1943) identified food as one of people's basic needs in his hierarchy of needs. With regard to experiences depending on basic sensory stimuli, Hulten (2011) suggests that these experiences tend to stay longer in memory. Likewise, Chang (2018) found that food and beverage products remain longer than other products in the memory of study participants. This finding could be explained by the frequency of purchase and accessibility of food and beverage items in terms of time, place, and price (Chang et al., 2014). As such, repeated exposure to food and beverage products can impair memory and can be remembered more easily (Zajonc, 2001). In addition to satisfying physiological and hedonic needs, food is found to have psychological and social aspects. That is, the meals eaten on holiday allow interaction and bonding with family members, friends, and other foreign people (Hegarty & O'Mahony, 2001). Therefore, we could further argue that the food experience during traveling enables tourists to reach their goals of relaxation, excitement, escape, status, education, and lifestyle (Frochot, 2003).

### ***2.3. Restaurant experience and tourism***

In general, it is assumed that restaurants represent places that just serve food and beverage items. According to the experience economy, however, restaurants prepare, serve, and sell food, but also provide food experience (Robson, 1999). As such, restaurant services consist of a combination of tangible and intangible components. Besides, these services are composed of processes where production and consumption activities occur simultaneously and are subjectively experienced (Bojanic & Rosen, 1994). Taken together, food experience in the restaurant industry could be assessed based on how consumers perceive different processes during their consumption of food. As a result, in recent years researchers have started to investigate which factors contribute to food experience and create value for customers in the restaurant industry. In their study, Reuland et al. (1985) identified environment, product, and attitudes & behaviors of employees as three main components of hospitality services. Furthermore, when applied to the restaurant industry, previous research also determined atmosphere, food quality, and service quality as factors enhancing food experience for customers (Erkmen & Hancer, 2018; Ha & Jang, 2010; Sulek & Hensley, 2004). In addition, the intention to revisit a restaurant does not only depend on food, atmosphere, and service quality. Zeithaml (1988) also stated that perceived value is an essential factor affecting restaurant experience and customers search for value.

For the restaurant experience within the context of tourism, local restaurants play an essential role in the food experience of tourists. Even though there is no distinct definition of local restaurants, Yilmaz & Ozdemir (2017) define local restaurants as the places where menu items are determined based on the needs of local people. They added that the atmosphere is designed around local elements, and local food is presented. Moreover, local restaurants are usually located in places where local people live to meet local people's physiological, psychological, and social needs. However, food experiences of tourists other than large groups of tourists also take place in local restaurants. This explains why local restaurants are necessary to positively influence tourists' future behavior and create memorable gastronomic experiences. The factors that add value to tourists' food experi-

ence in local restaurants can be listed as authenticity, the novelty of the experience, locality of food, physical environment, and atmosphere (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2014). However, among these factors, the physical environment and atmosphere have been identified as the most important ones. Also, Kim et al. (2009) determined that the most critical factor affecting tourists' decision to have local food is the appearance of local restaurants. Therefore, food experience could be a supporting experience as an extension of daily experiences. This experience could sometimes be a part of a peak experience (Quan & Wang, 2004). That is, tourists could find the opportunity of experiencing new food items as well as having a memorable food experience.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Instrument**

Built upon the experience economy model of Pine & Gilmore (1999), our study developed a self-administered structured questionnaire based on the investigation of previous studies to employ and validate experience economy theory in a local restaurant setting. The survey consists of two major sections. In the first section, respondents were asked to rate their restaurant experiences based on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 =strongly agree) to indicate the level of agreement with various statements. The second section of the survey included demographic and tripographic questions. While demographic questions asked respondents about gender, age, education level, income level, employment, and marital status, tripographic questions were related to travel characteristics, which are travel experiences, frequency of travel, and frequency of travel abroad.

The first part of the survey included twenty questions, and all measurement items were adopted from previous studies of Oh et al. (2007), Kivela & Crofts (2006), Kim et al. (2009), Mak et al. (2012), and Sengel et al. (2015).

#### **3.2. Data collection and sampling**

This study was conducted in Istanbul, where tourists can find various local restaurants offering different local cuisines that belong to seven different regions of Turkey. The target population of the current research included tourists visiting Istanbul during January 2019. The respondents were selected by the convenience sampling method based on accessibility, proximity, availability, and willingness to participate. 450 surveys were distributed to tourists willing to participate in the survey visiting the Eminonu, Beyazit and Sultanahmet areas in Istanbul and 313 questionnaires were returned. 87 responses were unusable due to missing information. In the end, 263 surveys were returned from participants. The surveys were collected by three different authors with the help of tablets.

#### **3.3 Data Analysis**

In the preliminary data analysis stage, univariate analysis was performed to obtain the demographic and tripographic profiles of the respondents. To validate the experience economy model and determine the dimensions of local restaurant experience, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted.

### **4. Results**

To understand the demographic profile of study participants, a frequency analysis was performed. The analysis results show that males represented 42.1% of the respondents and females

represented 47.9% of the sample. Regarding age, almost half of the participants were between the ages of 36-39, followed by the ages of 18-25 (25.9%), 40-49 (14.8%), 50-59 (5.7%), and 60 or above (1.9%). For education level, more than half of the sample held either a bachelor's or graduate degree (65.4%). People with a high school and pre-college degree counted for 19.8% and 14.8% of the study participants. Regarding income level, the results show that 205 people in the sample had an income level of at most \$49,999. While 32.7% of respondents had a yearly income level of less than \$10,000, 45.2% earned less than \$49,000 annually. Most people (68.4%) who participated in our research were currently employed. Lastly, for marital status, the findings indicate that 62.4% of the sample was composed of single people. Hence, the remaining 37.6% represents people who were married (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Variable		N	%
Gender	Male	137	42.1
	Female	126	47.9
	Total	263	100
Age	18-25	68	25.9
	26-39	136	51.7
	40-49	39	14.8
	50-59	15	5.7
	60 or above	5	1.9
	Total	263	100
Marital Status	Single	164	62.4
	Married	99	37.6
	Total	263	100
Education Level	High School	52	19.8
	Pre-College	39	14.8
	Bachelor	96	36.5
	Graduate	76	28.9
	Total	263	100
Income (TL)	Less than \$10,000	86	32.7
	\$10,000-\$49,999	119	45.2
	\$50,000-\$99,999	41	15.6
	\$100,000 or above	17	6.5
	Total	263	100
Employment	Employed	180	68.4
	Unemployed	40	15.2
	Retired	13	4.9
	Housewife /student	30	11.4
	Total	263	100

In addition to the demographic profile of the respondents, this current study also collected data about the travel characteristics of research participants. Referring to the tripographic profile (see Table 2), 14.4% of the sample had limited travel experience. More than half of the participants (52.1%) had sufficient previous travel experience. For the travel frequency in a year, the findings also show that 61.6% of respondents traveled between 1 and 3 times. While 22.4% mentioned that they traveled between 4 and 6 times, the rest indicated that they took trips more than 6 times in a

year. Lastly, the frequency results of traveling abroad reveal that many participants (70.3%) traveled to other countries at least once a year.

**Table 2: Tripographic Profile of Respondents**

Variable		N	%
Travel experience	Very little	38	14.4
	Some	88	33.5
	Much	98	37.3
	Significant	39	14.8
	Total	263	100
Travel frequency (annual)	1-3	162	61.6
	4-6	59	22.4
	6 or above	42	16.0
	Total	263	100
Travel abroad (annual)	Once in a few years	52	19.8
	Once in two years	36	9.9
	Once a year	61	23.2
	Two times a year	65	24.7
	More than two times a year	59	22.4
	Total	263	100

In the second phase of the analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to understand how local restaurant experiences were gathered under which dimensions. Before interpreting the results for EFA, the current research first employed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin method to assess the appropriateness of measurement items for factor analysis. The results show that the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was found to be 0.93, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was 2945.569 ( $p < 0.001$ ), supporting the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix (see Table 3). Overall, these findings revealed that the measurement scale is suitable for EFA.

**Table 3: The results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sample Adequacy		.936
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2945.659
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

For the results of EFA, this study has identified three factors with eigenvalues above one (see Table 4). All these three factors together explained 59.8% of the total variance.

**Table 4: Factor analysis and explained Variance for local restaurant experience**

Factors	Initial eigenvalues			Sum of squared loadings			Rotation sum of squared loadings		
	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	9.545	47.725	47.725	9.545	47.725	47.725	5.488	27.439	27.439
2	1.393	6.964	54.689	1.393	6.964	54.689	3.359	16.796	44.235
3	1.032	5.160	59.849	1.032	5.160	59.849	3.123	15.614	59.849



4	.925	4.625	64.474
5	.859	4.293	68.767
6	.759	3.794	72.561
7	.629	3.147	75.708
8	.607	3.036	78.744
9	.504	2.520	81.264
10	.483	2.417	83.681
11	.457	2.287	85.968
12	.439	2.193	88.161
13	.398	1.988	90.149

Method: Principal Component Analysis

More precisely, our research adopted seventeen items from Pine and Gilmore's study (1999) regarding entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism. Moreover, three additional items were borrowed from earlier research regarding neophobia, authenticity, and togetherness (Kim et al., 2009; Mak et al., 2012; Sengel et al., 2015) since the study was conducted in the restaurant industry. Taken together, three factors were identified for local restaurant experience out of these 20 items. The items specified for education and escapism dimensions were in line with the previous findings in the literature. However, the items regarding entertainment, esthetics, neophobia, authenticity, and togetherness were found to be grouped under the same dimension.

The three factors identified for local restaurant experience as a result of factor analysis are presented in Table 5. Since the items for education and escapism were grouped under the same factors in previous literature, these factors were named the same as in the literature. However, the remaining items for entertainment, esthetics, neophobia, authenticity, and togetherness were re-named as entertainment and esthetics.

**Table 5: Factor analysis results for local restaurant experience scale**

Factor	Factor Loading	Explained Variance (%)
It is fun to eat at local restaurants	0.766	
Local restaurants provide a good atmosphere	0.730	
I find the authentic atmosphere of local restaurants appealing	0.682	
Physical setting of the local restaurants improves my experience	0.655	
The idea of consuming local food at local restaurants makes me feel excited	0.625	
Eating in local restaurants and consuming local food in its origin is an authentic experience	0.616	
Entertainment and Esthetics		<b>27.439</b>
It is fun to eat food with different styles at local restaurants than I am accustomed to (e.g. using chop sticks)	0.614	
I enjoy watching food demonstrations and services at local restaurants	0.561	
I would like to eat at local restaurants to try foods that I am not familiar with	0.549	
The waiters and local customers of local restaurants are usually approachable and open for interaction	0.539	
The presentation of the food at local restaurants is important to me	0.533	
Local restaurant experiences are usually surprising	0.533	

	I would like to learn how to cook local food	0.801	
	I would like to observe a cooking demonstration at a local restaurant	0.801	
Education	I collect information about the local culture by eating local food in local restaurants	0.615	<b>44.235</b>
	I am curious to learn more about local food and cultures by dining at local restaurants	0.606	
	Local restaurant experiences let me imagine being someone else	0.862	
	I usually escape from reality while I am eating at local restaurants	0.803	
Escape	I feel immersed in the local restaurants while I am trying the local food	0.675	<b>59.849</b>
	I feel like I am in a different time or place while I am eating at local restaurants	0.582	

### 5. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this research is to understand the dimensions of local restaurant experience by applying the experience economy model of Pine & Gilmore (1999). Specifically, our study aims to employ and validate experience economy theory in a local restaurant setting. The current study used a measurement scale built upon items adapted from previous literature (Kim et al., 2009; Mak et al., 2012; Pine and Gimore, 1999; Sengel et al., 2015) to understand the dimension of local restaurant experience better. The empirical findings of our research show that education and escapism represent dimensions of tourists' local restaurant experience, and entertainment and esthetics are not two distinct dimensions. As opposed to the experience economy model of Pine & Gilmore (1999), entertainment and esthetics together act as a single dimension for the local restaurant experience. In other terms, our study results provided partial support for the experience economy model of Pine and Gilmore.

First, three factors identified in this current research accounted for 59.84% of the total explained variance for the local restaurant experience. The first factor measured entertainment, and esthetics explained most of the total variance for the local restaurant experience. The second factor was related to education and accounted for 16.79% of the total variance. Lastly, the third factor measured escapism. Regarding the first factor, atmosphere, physical environment, and local food reflecting the local culture and entertainment evolved around having novel food items in local restaurants. This was highly associated with the entertainment and esthetics dimension of local restaurant experience.

The second factor, education, relates to learning about cooking, different cooking methods, local culture, and curiosity for different cuisines. Lastly, the third factor, namely escapism, is found to be highly associated with escaping from reality, time, and place. Overall, these three distinct factors show that the most critical dimension for the local restaurant experience is experiencing new food and different environments, which, in turn, results in an enjoyable experience. Following entertainment and esthetics, travelers also visit local restaurants to learn about a new culture and different cuisine. Moreover, escaping from daily routines is another important dimension of the local food experience. Second, our research identified entertainment and esthetics as a single factor rather than two different factors. This finding contradicts the experience economy model of Pine and Gilmore (1999). However, the contradictory result can be explained with the study context, the local restaurant setting. In their study for ethnic cuisine, Lai et al. (2020) found that esthetic experience positively and significantly influences entertainment experience. Therefore, we can assume that esthetic experience is the source of entertainment experience in

local restaurants. That is, tourists may perceive the unique atmosphere, physical environment, and different food presentations as enjoyable.

The results of our study provide a theoretical contribution to the literature to better understand the local restaurant experience of tourists. First, this current research tried to understand whether the four dimensions of experience economy theory apply to local restaurant settings. Prior research investigated the experience economy model in the food and beverage industry; these studies usually directly adopted the dimensions of experience and tested their effects on satisfaction, revisit intention, or both (Lai et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2021). Similarly, regarding other tourism and hospitality contexts, previous literature mostly borrows the four dimensions of the experience economy model to examine their influence on satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Hwang & Han, 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011; Oh et al., 2007). Thus, to our best knowledge, our study is the first research to test the dimensions of the experience economy model for restaurant experience and show that local restaurant experience can be grouped under three dimensions rather than four.

In addition to theoretical significance, this study also provides implications for local restaurants. First of all, the study findings imply that local restaurateurs need to pay attention to the atmosphere and physical environment of the restaurant setting. That is, the restaurant's interior design and ambiance should reflect the local culture of the destination to satisfy the entertainment dimension of the restaurant experience. Second, local restaurants should enable customers to learn about new food items and new cultures regarding education. With this in mind, service employees need to be well trained about menu items in order to provide detailed explanations. Third, local restaurants play an important role for destination attractiveness and return to a destination. Thus, restaurant executives need to work together with destination marketing organizations in order to promote their restaurants.

One strategy for restaurants could be to make food preparation sites visible to customers. As such, tourists may find the opportunity to see different cooking techniques unique to different cultures. An other strategy could also be to have creative and distinct presentations of food items. In such a way, guests could learn about different food presentations and have an enjoyable time, contributing to their entertainment experience. Lastly, for satisfying the escapism dimension of the local restaurant experience, local restaurateurs may benefit from the implications above. The physical environment and atmosphere reflecting local culture with unique food preparation and presentation styles may make travelers feel distant from daily routines.

### **Limitations and future research**

The current study is not without limitations, and it affords opportunities for future research. First, this study was geographically limited by studying local restaurants in Istanbul. Future studies may investigate the effects of local restaurants on tourist experiences in different cities. In addition to this, the sample size was limited. In future studies, the sample size might be increased. Even though quantitative research is considered the most helpful and widely used research tool (Ann & Blum, 2020), this method might provide limited information, and qualitative research can discover further information to understand the effects of local restaurants on tourist experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, face-to-face interviews and focus groups would be helpful to have more information from tourists regarding their restaurant experiences. In the future, local restaurant operators might be interviewed to have more information about the tourist experience. Finally, this study does not cover the pricing component of the restaurant experience. In the future, several studies might be made regarding the pricing component of the restaurant experience.

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