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The impact of eating behavior on destination choice: The case of vegetarianism*

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between tourism and food is gaining significance, and gastronomic experiences are increasingly influencing tourists' choice of destination. This study aims to establish the correlation between food preferences and destination selection, taking into account the vegetarianism dimension. In this study, data were collected from a sample of 198 vegetarian and 251 omnivorous individuals. The data underwent analysis using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modelling and multiple group analysis. The results show a significant positive correlation between eating behavior and destination choice. The impact of eating behavior on destination choice was found to be significant among both omnivore and vegetarian groups, with a more pronounced effect observed among vegetarian individuals. Additionally, differences were observed between vegan and other vegetarian groups. Upon scrutinizing demographic variables through comparison tests, it was found that gender and adherence to a vegetarian diet were significant factors influencing the relationship between eating behavior and destination choice. No notable differences were detected in age, marital status, educational status, and income level variables. Upon examination of the existing literature, it is evident that there is a dearth of studies that specifically address the potential relationship between a vegetarian diet and tourism. While there are studies that separately examine the factors affecting food preferences (such as product labels, artificial meat, restaurant menus and staff, and guides) and destination choices, there is a lack of research that examines the relationship as a whole.

1. Introduction

The relationship between food and tourism has become an important field of study in recent years (Chen & Huang, 2018). Gastronomic experience influences the tourist's destination selection process (Bjork & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014; Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). Eating behaviors, which guide the gastronomic experience and are influenced by many factors, emerge as a result of the ongoing religious and cultural structure of individuals in their environment (Tse & Crotts, 2005). Torres (2002) argues that tourists play a key role in understanding food demand. This is because the tourist's demographic characteristics (Kim et al., 2009; Mak et al., 2012) and national culture determine which foods they choose (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Additionally, it is suggested that these factors also shape future preferences and intentions to recommend (Adongo et al., 2015).

Many studies in literature have sought to answer the question "why do people travel?" (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1977; Iso-Ahola, 1982). The motivational factors identified in these studies have been recognized as important driving forces influencing tourists' food choices (Birch & Memery, 2020), and food has been seen as only one of the components supporting the tourist's main activity. This perspective has relegated the importance of food to the background in tourism literature (Choe & Kim, 2019). However, most tourists who decide to travel to a different country or culture aim to gain experience and knowledge in connection with the motives of tasting new dishes, learning new cooking techniques, listening to new food stories (Choe & Kim, 2018), experiencing local cuisine, interacting with others over meals, social status (prestige) (Chang et al., 2021). Therefore, it is possible to say that food is a factor that directly shapes destination preference far beyond physical needs. For this very reason, it should be studied to determine how individuals with different food and beverage preferences prioritize food in their destination choices. This research will examine the extent to which the factors affecting vegetarians' food preferences (vegetarian labels, artificial meats, menu contents, waiters and guides) are effective in destination choice. The results are expected to contribute to the vegetarian/vegan nutrition literature.

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2. Literature Review

Factors Affecting Eating Behavior

Although research on food as an integral part of the tourism experience (Lee et al., 2014) has increased, it is rare that accommodation and tourism activities and food choice research are considered as a whole (Kim et al., 2010). Food choice, which is a dynamic process (Guiné et al., 2020b), is defined as a conscious or unconscious decision Herne (1995) and is influenced by a range of motivations such as culture, socio-demographic factors and lifestyle (Mak et al., 2012). For example, Chang et al., (2011) reported that animal viscera is considered a nutritious food in Eastern cultures, whereas it is not considered edible in Western Europe.

Studies on how socio-demographic factors affect food choices have generally focused on the age factor. The age factor shows that in the early stages of life, hedonic-based (according to taste and food type) (Rigo et al., 2023) and hedonistic (Aksit Asık, 2019) preferences are made, while as age increases, health-based preferences come to the fore (Ventura & Worobey, 2013). In addition, a positive relationship was found between age and the frequency of seafood consumption, which is considered to be healthy (Kim et al., 2009). The influence of gender manifests itself in meat-vegetable preference; meat is seen as a masculine preference (Vabø & Hansen, 2014) and this may be a valid factor for vegetarianism to be practiced more by women than men (Gomez et al., 2018). As education level (Kim et al., 2009) and income (Antin & Hunt, 2012) increase, it can be said that healthy foods are preferred, and low-income individuals mostly consider economic factors and access to food (Magano et al., 2023).

Types of Vegetarian Diet

While hunting and gathering constituted the dietary routine in the early periods of history (Garn & Leonard, 1989), vegetarian diets have been observed in ancient times (Larsson et al., 2003). Vegetarianism is not only a rejection of animal foods but also a change in lifestyle and belief structure. It is generally thought that vegetarian diets are preferred for health reasons (Cramer et al., 2017; Noguerol et al., 2021; Rivera & Shani, 2013). However, religious, philosophical, ethical and environmental (animal and environmental motives) reasons (Macinnis & Hodson, 2021; Ploll et al., 2020); the influence of others, sensory disgust (Radnitz et al., 2015) and parental influence (Fan et al., 2019) should not be ignored. Vegetarianism driven by ethical concerns (animal cruelty, greenhouse gas control, and other environmental factors) (Li et al., 2020) is generally associated with age and is more common among women (Guiné et al., 2020b; Steptoe et al., 1995). Nevertheless, given that more than 17 million Europeans suffer from food allergies (Bordelon, 2016), the importance of health as a reason for following an animal-free diet cannot be denied (Cramer et al., 2017).

In order to emphasize sustainable consumption (Guiné et al., 2020), increasing alternative protein sources such as microbial protein (MP) (Peteghem et al., 2022) and converting excess food into bioenergy (Sundin et al., 2022) to reduce carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions (Puigdueta et al., 2021). In addition, it has been found that people with high environmental motivation tend to pay more for foods with environmentally friendly labels (Rondoni & Grasso, 2021).

The vegetarian diet differs according to the types of foods that are allowed and restricted. Lacto-vegetarians consume dairy products, which are among animal-derived foods, while excluding meat from their diets. This dietary approach adopts a nutrition pattern that includes dairy products (such as yogurt, cheese, etc.) while abstaining from meat and seafood. Thus, they meet their animal protein needs through dairy products and plant-based sources (Lee et al., 2021). Lacto-ovo-vegetarianism is defined as diets that exclude meat, fish and poultry (Lee et al., 2021) but allow the consumption of dairy products (especially low-fat products) and eggs (Dwyer & Harvey, 2022). Ovo-vegetarians are vegetarians who do not consume animal foods including meat, fish, poultry, milk, but can eat eggs (Tuncay, 2018). A semi-vegetarian diet is characterized by the exclusion of beef and pork, while the consumption of seafood and poultry is allowed. Moreover, it permits the intake of fresh and dried fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, and dairy products (Boyle, 2011). Pesketarian is considered a stricter variant as it is limited to fish and seafood consumption (Gomez et al., 2018). Polo vegetarian diet is a type of vegetarianism in which only poultry meat is consumed and no red meat is consumed (Tuncay, 2018). Raw food diet encourages the consumption of organic fruits and vegetables, germinated roots and live foods that are mostly grown with animal fertilizers and not exposed to any chemicals (Cakmak & Sevinc, 2018).

Rivera & Shani (2013) characterize vegans as individuals who typically refrain from consuming any foods or ingredients derived from animals, encompassing honey and other insect-derived products.Veganism is not only about nutrition. It also includes personal views such as refusing to use animal products (leather, fur, cosmetics tested on animals, etc.) in daily life (Dwyer & Harvey, 2022), protecting animal rights, and aiming to minimize negative environmental impacts (Boyle, 2011). North et al., (2021) found that this definition is the most popular among vegan and vegetarian groups and the second most popular among omnivores. Fruitarianism, characterized as the strictest vegetarian diet, only allows the consumption of nuts and seeds, fresh or dried fruits, vegetables, honey and olive oil (Simeone et al., 2022). Satvic vegetarianism can be defined as a type of diet based on the idea of not consuming foods that are cooked at very high temperatures, fried, very salty and spicy, which are considered tamasic (dark) foods, while consuming fresh foods that are thought to increase the well-being of the

body. The idea is to increase the body's life force by eating food as fresh as possible. Meat is normally classified as rajasic or tamasic and should be avoided for this very reason.

The Effect of Food Experience on Destination Choice

With the increasing curiosity and importance attached to food, the concept of tourism has moved away from a stereotypical holiday image (Hafsa, 2020); services, industries and activities that offer food experiences have become popular (Ayaz & Yalı, 2017; Birch & Memery, 2020) and have become a factor of attraction (Wolff & Larsen, 2019). Food serves to reinforce the competitiveness and sustainability of the destination (Rand & Heath, 2006). Food plays an important role in enhancing a destination's brand value (Wolf, 2021) and increasing tourist spending (Everett & Aitchison, 2008), making it a crucial tool for marketing the destination's identity and culture (Quan & Wang, 2004).

It is possible to say that food is an integral part of the tourist experience (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). According to the answer to the question "How important is the food experience for your choice of a destination?" (Wolff & Larsen, 2019), local food is part of an unforgettable tourism and cultural experience (Kim & Eves, 2012). Because the opportunity to experience authentic food from local production (Janković et al., 2020), event innovation and socialization (Smith et al., 2010), and the taste of food (Su et al., 2020) can create awareness about a destination and attract new visitors (Boyne et al., 2002; Karim & Chi, 2010; Rand & Heath, 2006) and can determine intention to recommend (Bjork & Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2016a). It is important to highlight the existing literature supporting the relationship between eating behavior and destination choice. Previous studies such as Rimmington & Yuksel (1998) suggest that food may serve as a primary factor influencing tourists' destination choices. Food-focused tourism is driven by cultural and ethical values regarding individuals' food preferences, particularly when it comes to plant-based diets. In this context, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H_1: There is a relationship between eating behavior and destination choice.

H_{1a}: The content sub-dimension has an effect on the lifestyle sub-dimension of destination choice.

H_{1b}: Content sub-dimension has an effect on the exploration sub-dimension of destination choice.

H_{1c}: Content sub-dimension has an effect on the experience sub-dimension of destination choice.

H_{1d}: Content sub-dimension has an effect on destination choice ethics sub-dimension.

H_{1e}: The choice sub-dimension has an effect on the lifestyle sub-dimension of destination choice.

H_{1f}: The choice sub-dimension has an effect on the exploration sub-dimension of destination choice.

A review of the literature reveals that vegetarians are more likely to incorporate their dietary preferences into their decision-making processes than omnivores. These preferences are frequently associated with ethical and environmental concerns (Rivera & Shani, 2013). It is also likely that some tourists might have negative perceptions of foreign cuisines, which could lead them to avoid certain destinations based on dietary preferences (Wolff & Larsen, 2019). Consequently, it is hypothesised that the relationship between eating behavior and destination choice will be more pronounced among those who adhere to a vegetarian diet. Given this information, it is essential to examine whether a significant correlation exists between vegetarian tourists' food preferences and their destination choices. To this end, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H2: The effect of eating behavior on destination choice is higher among vegetarian participants.

Veganism represents a more rigorous form of vegetarianism, frequently grounded in robust ethical principles pertaining to animal rights and environmental sustainability (Li et al., 2020). Consequently, the impact of dietary habits on destination selection is likely to be more pronounced among vegan individuals in comparison to other demographic groups. In light of this, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: The effect of eating behavior on destination choice is higher for vegan participants.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in two phases. The first phase used structural equation modeling to examine the potential relationship between eating behavior and destination choice. Additionally, multiple group analyses were performed to determine if the impact of eating behavior on destination choice differs significantly among vegetarian and vegan participants. In the subsequent phase, a comparative analysis was conducted to explore any disparities in destination choices between individuals adhering to omnivorous and vegetarian dietary habits, employing difference tests.

In this study, a questionnaire served as the primary data collection tool, featuring three sections. The first section comprises statements related to the demographic characteristics of the participants. In the second section, measurement items related to eating behavior are included. In the third section, measurement items related to travel preference are included. For this study, a literature review was conducted first. In this study, which was prepared to measure to what extent the eating behaviors of tourists and especially vegetarians are effective in destination choice, firstly, a literature review was conducted on eating behavior, destination choice process and vegetarian nutrition. At the end of the review, a question pool was created with statements taken from different studies in the literature (Birch & Memery, 2020; Bjork & Kauppinen-

Räisänen, 2016; Caber et al., 2018; Chen & Huang, 2018; Dilek & Fennell, 2018; Lee et al., 2015).

Expert opinions were sought to test whether the scale was reliable and valid. The opinions and suggestions of these experts in the field of nutrition and vegetarian nutrition were utilized, opinions were taken on the clarity of the statements, and some statements were made more understandable in line with the suggestions. The questionnaire form was finalized by making additions and deletions in line with the feedback received. The questionnaire form, which was submitted to the ethics committee with its revised and corrected final version, was presented to 43 people online and face-to-face and a pilot study was conducted. After the pilot study, some statements that were not understood were corrected and some statements were deleted from the question pool.

A purposive sampling approach was adopted to select respondents who could contribute meaningfully to the survey with sufficient and appropriate knowledge. For this purpose, omnivorous and vegetarian individuals, who are potential tourists, were identified as the research sample. The online questionnaire, which was created through Google forms, was contacted with the Vegan Association of Turkey and shared in their e-mail system. Additionally, the survey was shared on social media platforms, particularly on vegan/vegetarian community pages and with users. A sum of 529 responses was gathered. The gathered data underwent analysis, and surveys with low standard deviation values and responses that were far apart from each other (+/-1) were removed to ensure reliability. As a result, 449 valid survey forms were included in the analysis.

The demographic characteristics of the participants, which constitute the first part of the scale, were grouped using descriptive statistics. Subsequently, reliability and normality tests were conducted. In cases where the sample size is 300 and above, an absolute skewness value of less than 2 and an absolute kurtosis value of less than 7 are considered sufficient for normality (Kim, 2013). The data used in the study meets this criteria. Following this, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were performed. Correlation analysis was conducted to test the relationship between variables, and t-tests were applied to reveal differences between demographic characteristics and variables. Finally, the hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling and multiple group analyses with the AMOS program.

4. Results

Demographic Results

Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the participants. 60.6% of the participants were women. 53% of the participants were between the ages of 18-34. 56.1% of the participants have a bachelor's degree. At the same time, 45.4% of the participants have an income between 5000-10000TL and 51.4% of them are married. Omnivore participants represent 55.9% of the sample, while vegetarian participants represent 44.1%. Among vegetarian participants, 56.1% were vegans.

Table 1: Demographic Results

Demographic	Group	F	%
Gender	Male	177	39,4
	Female	272	60,6
Age	18-34	238	53,0
	35-54	173	38,5
	55-64	28	6,2
	65 and above	10	2,2
Education	Elementary School	4	0,9
	High School	85	18,9
	Undergraduate	252	56,1
	Post-Graduate	108	24,1
Monthly İncome (TL)	5000 TL and below	131	29,2
	5000-10000 TL	204	45,4
	10000 TL and above	114	25,4
Marital Status	Married	231	51,4
	Single	218	48,6
Type Of Nutrition	Vegetarian	198	44,1
	Omnivore	251	55,9
Vegetarian Type	Lacto Vegetarian	31	15,6
	Lacto-Ovo Vegetarian	18	9,1
	Ovo Vegetarian	8	4,0
	Satvic Vegetarian	3	1,5
	Pescatarian	16	8,1
	Vegan	111	56,1
	Raw Food Diet	1	0,5
	Macrobiotic Diet	4	2,0
	Fruitarian	1	0,5
	Missing	5	2,5

Source: Elaborated by Authors

Factor analysis, which is used to determine the dimensions of a scale (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011), is defined as a statistical technique that aims to measure variables that measure the same construct or quality by grouping them together (Buyukozturk, 2010). In the initial stages of scale development, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is generally recommended (Hurley et al., 1997). In order to determine the factor dimensions of the destination preference and food and beverage preference scales, an Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted based on the results of KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) and Barlett (Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square) tests. The KMO value of the destination preference scale was 0.836 and the KMO value of the food and beverage preference scale was 0.864, which shows that the sample size is quite suitable for factor analysis. In addition, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity test revealed statistically significant $\chi 2$ results for the destination preference scale ($\chi 2$=1,711 df=66, Sig = 000) and the food and beverage preference scale ($\chi 2$=2,450 df=55, Sig = 000), indicating that factor analysis can be applied to the variables. Varimax rotation method was used in the Exploratory Factor Analysis of the scales. By determining the eigenvalues and variance explanation percentages of the factors, it was examined whether the items were distributed appropriately to the factors. Statements with factor loadings higher than 0.4 and loading

Table 2: The Scale's CFA, KMO, AVE-CR Values

Dimensions	Items	KMO	Factor loadings	CR	AVE	α
Content	I1. I am interested in learning where/how the food and drink I eat is produced.	0,864	0,73	0,92	0,59	0,897
	I2. The ingredients of food and beverages should be clearly stated in menus.		0,88			
	I3. The tour guide must have knowledge about the food.		0,81			
	I4. The tour guide's making special arrangements for different diets has a positive effect on my eating intention.		0,71			
	I5. It is preferable for me to offer separate diet menus in businesses.		0,66			
	I6. Specifying the contents of food and beverages on the menus will positively influence me to choose these restaurants.		0,75			
	I7. I care about restaurant employees being knowledgeable about the food and beverages on the menu.		0,82			
	I8. Restaurant menus should frequently include foods and beverages suitable for different diets.		0,74			
Choice	C1. I have information about the V-Label logo.		0,82	0,86	0,68	0,777
	C2. I take the V-Label logo into account in my food and beverage choices.		0,81			
	C3. I prefer dishes made with artificial meat.		0,84			
Life style	LS1. Food plays an important role in my choice of destination.	0,836	0.77	0,80	0,57	0,702
	LS2. Countries/cities/tours that suit my eating and drinking preferences are a priority in my destination selection.		0.76			
	LS3. My lifestyle is very important as the main source of motivation when traveling.		0.73			
Discovery	D1. Before traveling, I do research on the culinary products of my preferred destination.		0.71	0,84	0,64	0,800
	D2. Before traveling, I do research on the hotels of my preferred destination.		0.84			
	D3. Before traveling, I do research on the restaurants of my preferred destination.		0.84			
Experience	Ex1. I can only decide places to visit based on the foods I want to experience.		0.75	0,78	0,54	0,686
	Ex 2. I like to participate in food-related activities (courses, festivals, etc.) during my travels.		0.70			
	Ex 3. Before my trip, I planned food choices to experience the local culture.		0.76			
Ethic	E1. I prefer hotels that do not use animal-based materials in their rooms.		0.81	0,84	0,63	0,746
	E2. I do not approve of the use of animals for entertainment purposes in the hotel.		0.77			
	E3. First of all, I would like to travel to regions with pet-friendly and environmentally friendly hotel certification.		0.80			

Source: Elaborated by Authors

on a single factor were considered within the scope of the analysis. As a result of EFA, the destination preference scale consists of 4 sub-dimensions with eigenvalues greater than 1; the food and beverage preference scale consists of 2 sub-dimensions with eigenvalues greater than 1.

In empirical studies, internal consistency tests are frequently conducted to define the extent to which all items in a test measure the same concept or construct and to determine scale reliability. The most popular method used for this purpose is to determine the Cronbach's Alpha value. Within the scope of the analysis, an average α value for all items in the scale can be taken into account, or an α value can be found separately for each item. It is thought that the alpha value increases as the relationship between the items in a test increases. However, a high coefficient alpha does not always mean a high degree of internal consistency. Short questions in the test may decrease the α value (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). There are studies reporting that the accepted α value in social sciences and especially in scale development studies is 0.60 (Mohamad et al., 2015). As seen in Table 2, the Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale used in the study was found to be (0.884). In addition, when the scales were evaluated separately, the α value of the 12 items that make up the destination preference scale was found to be (0.826), and the α value of the 10 items measuring eating behavior was found to be (0.845).

As seen in Table 2, the values of CR (Composite Reliability) of the scale are between 0.78 to 0.92. AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values are between 0.54 to 0.68. This shows that the convergent validity of the structure is sufficient. When the values are analysed, it is seen that the factor loads of all items are higher than 0.50. Hence, based on these findings, it can be concluded that the model is validated. Additionally, Table 3 indicates a notable and positive relationship among the structures.

Path Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

To investigate the relationship between the variables of eating behavior and destination choice, the Structural

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Analysis (N=449)

	□	Std. Error	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1. Destination Choice Scale Total	3.835	0.644	1							
2. Life style	3.777	0.931	0.744**	1						
3. Discovery	4.115	0.697	0.727**	0.403**	1					
4. Experience	3.680	0.893	0.759**	0.444**	0.472**	1				
5. Ethic	3.769	0.980	0.708**	0.311**	0.385**	0.321**	1			
6. Eating Behavior Scale Total	3.889	0.628	0.520**	0.321**	0.482**	0.308**	0.439**	1		
7. Content	4.162	0.678	0.485**	0.344**	0.452**	0.293**	0.360**	0.894**	1	
8. Choice	3.218	1,021	0.316**	0.135**	0.308**	0.178**	0.322**	0.630**	0.241**	1

**. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Elaborated by Authors

Equation Modeling (SEM) path analysis, which is based on variance and covariance, was applied. For this purpose, analyses were conducted using the covariance-based AMOS program.

To investigate the relationship between the variables of eating behavior and destination choice, the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) path analysis, which is based on variance and covariance, was applied. For this purpose, analyses were conducted using the covariance-based AMOS program.

In this context, the relationship between the independent variable of eating behavior and the dependent variable of destination choice, as well as the effects between the sub-dimensions of eating behavior and destination choice, were tested for H1, H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, H1e, H1f, H1g, H1h hypotheses. The model depicted in Figure 1 was designed to measure these effects.

Due to the normal distribution of the data, a covariance matrix was created using the Maximum Likelihood estimation method. According to the path analysis conducted on the relationship between eating behavior dimensions and destination choice dimensions, the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was calculated as 0.900, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) as 0.916, Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) as 0.871, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) as 0.917, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) as 0.062, and x2/df as 2.744. Based on these results, it can be said that the fit index values of the SEM model designed to test hypotheses H1, H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, H1e, H1f, H1g, H1h proposed in the study are at an acceptable level. According to the test results, there is a

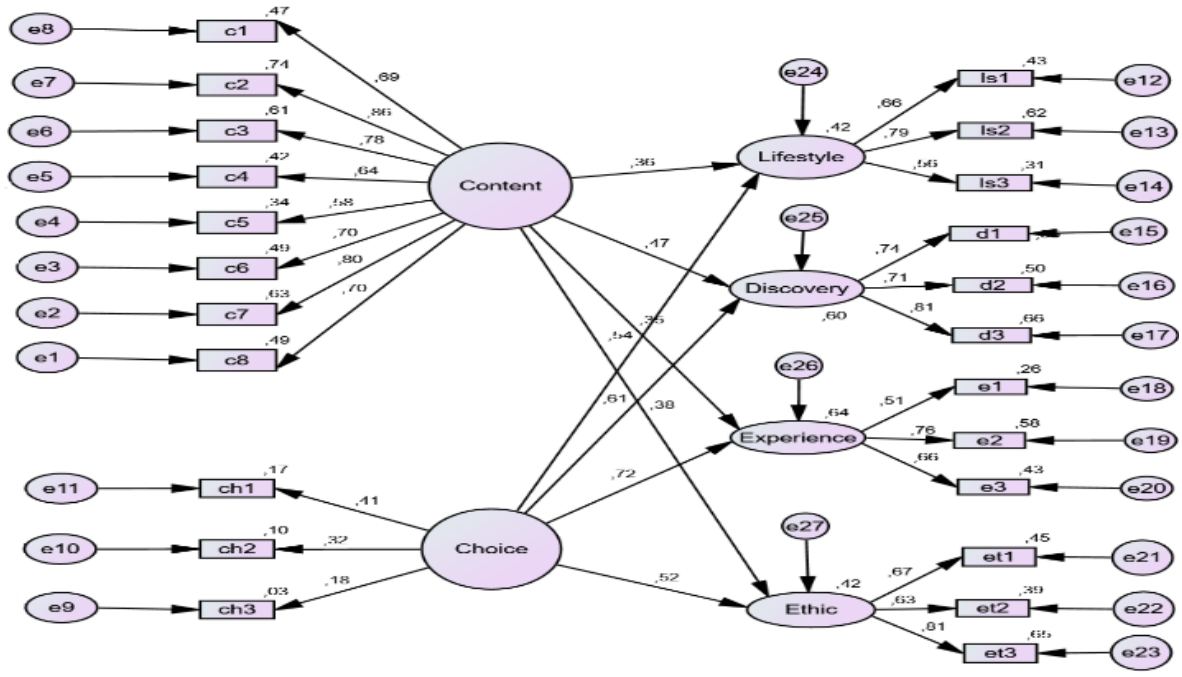

Figure 1:Structural Equation Model of Eating Behavior and Destination Choice

Source: Elaborated by Authors

Table 4: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypotheses	Z	SE	CR	Estimate	p
H₁: *There is a relationship between eating behavior and destination choice.*		,246	4,884	,999	0,00
H₁ₐ: *Content sub-dimension has an effect on destination choice lifestyle sub-dimension.*		,069	5,901	0,365	0,00
H₁ᵦ: *Content sub-dimension has an effect on the exploration sub-dimension of destination choice.*		,059	8,112	0,473	0,00
H₁c: *Content sub-dimension has an effect on destination choice experience sub-dimension.*		,065	5,322	0,347	0,00
H₁d: *Content sub-dimension has an effect on destination choice ethics sub-dimension.*		,082	6,292	0,381	0,00
H₁e: *Choice sub-dimension has an effect on destination choice lifestyle sub-dimension.*		,522	2,908	0,540	,004
H₁f: *The choice sub-dimension has an effect on the exploration sub-dimension ofdestination choice.*		,521	2,993	0,614	,003
H₁g: *Choice sub-dimension has an effect on destination choice experience sub-dimension.*		,615	2,921	0,724	,003
H₁h: *Choice sub-dimension has an effect on destination choice ethics sub-dimension.*		,608	2,913	0,521	,004
H₂: *The effect of eating behaviour on destination choice is higher amongvegetarians.*	2,390	,056	10,854	,566	0,00
H₃: *The effect of eating behaviour on destination choice is higher amongvegans.*	2,570	,127	4,905	,666	0,00

Source: Elaborated by Authors

significant positive relationship (β= .99; p<0.001) between the independent variable of food choice behavior and the dependent variable of destination choice. Regression weights related to the measurement model are shown in Table 4.

In addition, according to the SEM results, it was determined that the content dimension, which is a sub-dimension of behavior, had a significant effect on the lifestyle dimension (β=.36; p<0.05); discovery dimension (β= .47; p<0.05); experience dimension (β= .35; p<0.05) and ethical dimension (β= .38; p<0.05). The other sub-dimension of the eating behavior scale, the choice dimension, was found to have a significant effect on the lifestyle dimension (β= .54; p<0.05); exploration dimension (β= .61; p<0.05); experience dimension (β= .72; p<0.05) and ethical dimension (β= .52; p<0.05). In line with these findings, it was seen that all dimensions of eating behavior, which is the independent variable, affect all dimensions of destination choice, which is the dependent variable, and hypotheses *H₁ₐ*, *H₁ᵦ*, *H₁c*, *H₁d*, *H₁e*, *H₁f*, *H₁g*, *H₁h* were supported.

To test the second hypothesis of the study, "the effect of diet on the relationship between eating behavior and destination choice", multiple group analysis was applied using AMOS software. In cases where the moderating variable consists of two or more subgroups such as gender, marital status, educational status, SEM-based multiple group analysis can be used to test moderating effects. The aim here is to test whether the effect of X on Y is significantly different between groups (Gurbuz, 2021). The path diagram shows that the path from eating behavior to destination choice is significant for the omnivore group (β= .42; p<.01) and the vegetarian group (β= .57; p<.01). However, when the standardised beta coefficients are examined, this effect is higher for vegetarians. In line with these findings, H_2 hypothesis is supported.

To test the third hypothesis of the study, "the effect of veganism on the relationship between eating behavior and destination choice", multiple group analysis was applied using AMOS software. In the path diagram, for lacto group (β= .17; p<.01), pescetarian group (β= .16; p<.01), lacto-ovo group (β=.13; p<,01), it is seen that the path from eating behavior to destination choice is significant. In addition, it is seen in the path diagram that the path from eating behavior to destination choice is significant for the vegan group (β= .67; p<.01). Considering these values, the effect of eating behavior on destination choice is significant for all vegetarian groups included in the analysis. However, when the standardised beta coefficients are considered, this effectis higher for vegans. In line with these findings, hypothesis H_3 is supported.

Comparison Tests

Independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to determine the differences between the food preferences, the choice of destination and the demographic characteristics of the participants. As seen in Table 5, the results showed statistically significant differences between age and the destination choice scale total score (F=2.502; p=0.042), the experience sub-dimension (F=2.541; p=0.039), and the ethics sub-dimensions (F=5.231; p=0.000). The age group '35-54 years' was identified as the differentiating group in the destination choice scale and ethics sub-dimension, with lower scores compared to other groups (p<0.05). No significant differences were found between groups based on education level. Significant differences were found in the selection sub-dimension (F=3.007; p=0.050) and ethics sub-dimensions (F=7.819; p=0.000) based on income level. Participants with an income of '5000-10000 TL' scored higher in the selection sub-dimension of the food preference scale compared to those with other income levels. However, participants with an income of '10000 TL and above' scored lower in the ethics sub-dimension (p<0.05)

Women scored higher than men in the eating behavior scale total (t=3.413; p=0.16), selection sub-dimension (t=1.992; p=0.047), content sub-dimension (t=1.990; p=0.047), and destination choice scale total (t=3.755; p=0.000), lifestyle sub-dimension (t=1.968; p=0.050), exploration sub-dimension (t=2.506; p=0.013), experience

Total/Sub-dimensions Scales (N=449)

	Eating Behavior Scale Total Mean±SD	Choice Mean±SD	Content Mean±SD	Destination Choice Scale Mean±SD	Life style Mean±SD	Discovery Mean±SD	Experience Mean±SD	Ethic Mean±SD
Gender t / p	3,413/,016*	1,992/,047*	1,990/,047*	3,755/,000*	1,968/,050	2,506/,013*	2,152/,032*	4,356/,000*
Marital status t / p	,080/ 936	2,017/,044*	-,848/ ,397	2,101/,036*	,293/ ,770	1,003/ ,316	,450/ ,653	4,091/,000*
Vegetarian /Not t / p	4,022/,000*	6,936/,000*	1,356/ ,176	3,093/,002*	3,453/,001*	3,592/,000*	3,805/,000*	4,572/,000*
Age F / p	,347 / ,846	2,371 / ,052	0,911 / ,457	2,502/,042*	,883 / ,474	,398 / ,810	2,541/,039*	5,231/,000*
Educational Status F/ p	1,439 / ,231	1,472 /,221	1,725 /,161	,699 /,553	2,208 /,086	1,027 /,380	,488 /,691	,738 /,530
Income rate F/ p	,718 / ,488	3,007/,050*	,979 / ,376	1,527 / ,218	,044 / ,957	,125 / ,883	,806 / ,447	7,819/,000*

*t: Independent-Samples T Test, F: One-Way ANOVA, * It is statistically significant since p< 0.05*
Source: Elaborated by Authors

sub-dimension (t=2.152; p=0.032), and ethics sub-dimension (t=4.356; p=0.000), and this difference was statistically significant (p<0.05).

Based on the marital status variable, it was found that singles scored higher than married individuals in the selection sub-dimension (t=2.017; p=0.044), destination choice scale total (t=2.101; p=0.036), and ethics sub-dimensions (t=4.091; p<0.00), with statistically significant differences (p<0.05). Lastly, with regards to vegetarianism, statistically significant differences were found in the total eating behavior scale (t=4.022; p=0.00), selection sub-dimension (t=6.936; p=0.000), total destination choice scale (t=3.093; p<0.002), exploration (t=3.592; p=0.000), and ethics sub-dimension (t=4.572; p=0.000). In all scale totals and sub-dimensions where a difference was observed, the mean scores of vegetarians were found to be higher than those of non-vegetarians (p<0.05).

5. Conclusion and Implications

The objective of this study was to examine the impact of tourists' food preferences on their destination choice and the relationship between the two. Furthermore, the study examined whether there were differences between individuals with omnivorous and vegetarian dietary habits. A total of 198 vegetarians and 251 omnivores participated in the study. Initially, the research examined the relationship between potential tourists' eating behavior and destination choices. Subsequently, the impact of dietary patterns on the relationship between eating behavior and destination choice was investigated. Finally, the study explored the influence of veganism, a stricter dietary pattern, on the relationship between eating behavior and destination choice.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study demonstrate that dietary preferences play a significant role in destination selection. Vegetarian and vegan tourists, in particular, tend to favour destinations that align with their dietary requirements, reflecting a combination of ethical and environmental considerations. The study also revealed that vegan and vegetarian tourists attach greater importance to hotels and destinations that demonstrate a commitment to animal rights and environmental sustainability. This group is increasingly seeking out tourism businesses that do not harm animals and are environmentally conscious.

One of the primary objectives of the study is to ascertain the influence of vegetarian individuals' lifestyles, habits, and expectations on their choice of destination. The results of the structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis revealed a significant relationship between eating behaviors and destination selection. These findings demonstrate that the choice and content dimensions that constitute eating behaviors exert an influence on destination selection dimensions, including lifestyle, experience, discovery and ethics. Rimmington and Yuksel (1998) also proposed in their studies that food is a crucial factor in tourist attraction. Consequently, it can be concluded that individuals' eating behaviors play a pivotal role in destination selection.

It is generally accepted that tourists with a particular interest in gastronomy will choose a destination based on the availability of food services, which play an important role in their overall satisfaction (Nield et al., 2000). As posited by Chang et al. (2010), tourists' knowledge of food has been found to influence their attitudes and expand the range of options available to them. Cohen and Avieli (2004) highlighted that tourists are unlikely to visit destinations that do not align with their food preferences. Li et al. (2020) posited that participation in tours offering vegan food options is a motivating factor for tourists. Additionally, Rivera & Shani (2013) revealed in their study that vegetarian tourists do not prefer countries and tours that do not have meat-free restaurants. Furthermore, Gupta et al. (2020) stated that tourists may avoid food consumption if they lack sufficient information about local restaurants.

In addition to these findings, it can be posited that prospective tourists who place a high value on the provision of detailed information regarding the contents of

food and beverage items on menus, as well as the depth of knowledge exhibited by tour guides and waiters on the subject of food, tend to view food as the primary motivating factor in their decision-making process regarding the selection of a destination. This study demonstrates that vegetarian tourists prioritise destinations that align with their dietary preferences, that their eating behaviors are shaped by ethical considerations, and that this influences their hotel and destination selection. It can be inferred that some destinations may be less preferred due to differing food preferences.

The findings indicated that vegetarian individuals engaged in more extensive research on hotels, restaurants, and kitchen products in the regions they visited. These individuals planned their food preferences in advance, perceived food and food activities as experiential elements, and enjoyed participating in such activities in the regions they travelled to. These results are consistent with the study of Lee et al. (2015), which revealed that tourists' participation in food activities in a destination is affected by their lifestyles. In order to gain insight into the influence of dietary habits and destination preferences on distinct dietary groups, a multigroup analysis and difference tests were conducted between omnivorous and vegetarian participants. The findings indicate that eating behavior is a factor influencing destination selection for both groups. In particular, there are notable differences between the ethical stances of vegetarian participants. Chang et al. (2011) proposed that tourists evaluate food according to their own gastronomic principles. Similar studies by Folgado-Fernández et al. (2017) and Benli & Yenipınar (2018) have indicated that food experiences play an important role in destination selection. Bjork and Kauppinen-Räisänen (2016) similarly identified food as a pivotal factor in destination selection.

In their study, Sheldon and Fox (1988) asserted that tourists from disparate gastronomic cultures ascribe disparate values to food services when making destination selections. The findings of this study indicate that this discrepancy is attributable to the vegetarian cohort. It can therefore be posited that vegetarianism constitutes a significant variable in the selection of tourist destinations. Furthermore, it was observed that the highest effect among the vegetarian groups was observed in vegans who adhere to a strict dietary regimen. In light of the growing importance of ethical values, it can be posited that these preferences are reflected in the hotel and restaurant choices of tourists who are sensitive to animal rights. These tourists tend to prefer hotels that do not serve animal products and do not use animals for entertainment purposes. This situation is also consistent with the findings of the Dilek & Fennell (2018) study, which indicates that vegetarians prioritise hotels that are sensitive to the environment and animals.

Additionally, in our study, it was found that participants placed less importance on clearly stating ingredients in menus and on tour guides and waiters having knowledge about the food. However, there is a discrepancy between these findings and those of (Birch & Memery, 2020), who found that clearly stating ingredients in menus is important to participants. This difference may stem from various factors among participants' preferences and expectations or the cultural diversity of the region where the study was conducted. Also, it was found that vegetarian individuals prefer foods that adhere to ethical labels and may also prefer meals made with artificial meat that aligns with their lifestyle. This finding is consistent with the results of a similar study by (Stremmel et al., 2022), which found that consumers are more likely to prefer products labeled as vegan. Particularly, potential tourists who value vegan labels in their food choices tend to prioritize the experiential dimension and seek to experience local culture beyond just eating.

In this study, differences based on demographic characteristics were also investigated using comparison tests. Previous research has indicated that gender influences food preferences (Glew, 1970; Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2011). The analysis results revealed that both women and men are influenced by eating behavior in their destination choices. Additionally, the findings suggest that women exhibit different behaviors than men in their dietary preferences. Women may be more inclined to prefer products labeled as vegan and incorporate artificial meat consumption into their diets. Furthermore, women are more interested in menu contents and expect tour guides and waitstaff to be knowledgeable about the food, which aligns with the findings of Caber et al. (2018). Chen & Huang (2018) found that women in China perceive food as a more significant motivator before travel compared to men, which is consistent with the results of this study. Additionally, compared to married participants, unmarried individuals are more open-minded about artificial meat, tend to make restaurant choices based on menu contents, prioritize ethical factors in destination choices, and value animal rights more. According to the data, participants' food choices and ethical views vary significantly based on income level. As income increases, ethical concerns and attention to choices tend to increase.

Finally, it was concluded that age, marital status, education level, and income level do not significantly influence the priority tourists place on nutrition while traveling. This finding is partially consistent with the study by Gomez et al., (2018). In the same study, it was found that age, nationality, and income level influence priorities, but variables such as gender and education level do not affect priorities.

Practical implications

The findings of this study provide insights that are relevant to the tourism industry. Destinations that cater to vegetarian and vegan tourists can enhance their marketability by expanding plant-based food options, organising food-focused events, and promoting sustainable

and ethical practices. Furthermore, tourism professionals could consider developing food-themed tours and experiences that emphasize vegetarian and vegan-friendly local cuisines. Providing training for restaurant staff and tour guides to better understand these dietary needs can also improve the overall tourist experience.

Understanding the differences between vegan and omnivore tourists is essential for service providers, destination developers, managers, entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders in the travel industry. By considering various consumer segments, understanding industry trends, adapting to changing tourist preferences, adjusting marketing strategies accordingly, and diversifying their services, stakeholders can stay competitive in the market. Therefore, some recommendations are provided:

• Enhancing Gastronomic Experiences: Destinations can increase their potential to attract tourists by emphasizing local flavors and gastronomic experiences. However, it is observed that individuals with vegetarian and vegan diets are sometimes overlooked or not sufficiently considered during these efforts. Considering that these individuals constitute a separate and increasingly popular market segment, focusing on vegetarian and vegan options is crucial. Therefore, tourism businesses should offer gastronomic experiences that highlight local plant-based cuisines in their destinations to attract vegan and vegetarian tourists. Such experiences can be supported by activities such as local food festivals, vegan/vegetarian cooking workshops and food tours.

• Education and Awareness Programs: It is of significant importance that tour guides and restaurant staff possess a comprehensive understanding of vegan and vegetarian dietary preferences. In particular, they should be conversant with the ingredients of food and beverages, tourists' preferences, allergic conditions and ethical sensitivities. By providing detailed information on the content of food and beverages offered to tourists, satisfaction levels of this special group of tourists can be significantly increased. Local businesses, destination developers and other stakeholders need to be supported in understanding the preferences and needs of vegetarian and vegan tourists. In this context, training and awareness programs should be organized at regular intervals.

• Emphasizing Sustainability and Ethical Values: It is recommended that the tourism sector adopt more sustainable practices. Destinations should prioritize sustainable ethical values. It would be beneficial to increase environmentally friendly and animal-friendly practices and to ensure that vegetarian/vegan hotel certificates are used more widely. It is expected that these certificates will positively affect the destination preferences of the relevant tourist groups. These practices may attract not only vegetarian tourists but also carnivorous tourists who care about ethical values.

• Internet and Marketing Strategies: The effective utilization of digital platforms and social media is of paramount importance for the promotion of plant-based food options and sustainable destinations, particularly in order to reach those who adhere to a vegetarian or vegan diet. Direct communication through social media remains one of the most efficacious methods for engaging with this target audience.

Recommendations for Researchers

This study acknowledges the limitations inherent in its sample size and the reliance on participant-reported data, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to the entire vegetarian tourist population. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct broader and more diverse studies in the future to address this limitation. Given the constraints posed by factors such as the pandemic, time, and cost, the study was primarily conducted through online channels with fewer face-to-face interviews. However, it's crucial to remember this when interpreting the results.

In future research, employing face-to-face interview methods and soliciting individual opinions from participants may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This could enhance the generalizability of the findings and contribute to more precise conclusions. By adopting such approaches, researchers can potentially increase the reliability and validity of their results, ultimately advancing our understanding of vegetarian tourists' preferences and behaviors.

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The impact of eating behavior on destination choice: The case of vegetarianism

Abstract

The relationship between tourism and food is gaining significance, and gastronomic experiences are increasingly influencing tourists' choice of destination. This study aims to establish the correlation between food preferences and destination selection, taking into account the vegetarianism dimension. In this study, data were collected from a sample of 198 vegetarian and 251 omnivorous individuals. The data underwent analysis using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modelling and multiple group analysis. The results show a significant positive correlation between eating behaviour and destination choice. The impact of eating behaviour on destination choice was found to be significant among both omnivore and vegetarian groups, with a more pronounced effect observed among vegetarian individuals. Additionally, differences were observed between vegan and other vegetarian groups. Upon scrutinising demographic variables through comparison tests, it was found that gender and adherence to a vegetarian diet were significant factors influencing the relationship between eating behaviour and destination choice. No notable differences were detected in age, marital status, educational status, and income level variables. Upon examination of the existing literature, it is evident that there is a dearth of studies that specifically address the potential relationship between a vegetarian diet and tourism. While there are studies that separately examine the factors affecting food preferences (such as product labels, artificial meat, restaurant menus and staff, and guides) and destination choices, there is a lack of research that examines the relationship as a whole.

Keywords: *Eating Behavior, Destination Choice, Vegetarianism.*

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Pınar Yeşilçimen:	*Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing*	*60%*
Hilmi Bahadır Akın:	*Conceptualism, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision*	*40%*

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