

## Examination of Tourists' Culinary Experience: Revisiting the Experience Economy in the Case of Hue Cuisine

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### Abstract

This research aims to examine a scale to measure the culinary experience of tourists through the case of Hue cuisine in Vietnam. It could help address the issue of measurement inconsistency in culinary experience research. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 20 domestic tourists and then through surveys with 433 tourists. Using factor analysis methods, the research revealed that tourists' culinary experience was measured by a second-order scale encompassing three interrelated dimensions. They included educational experience, escapist experience, and entersthetic experience. This culinary experience scale was found to be reliable, convergent, discriminant, and nomologically valid. The newly developed scale of culinary experience could be utilized in similar tourism contexts where the local food is unique and tasty. In addition, the research enhances tourism professionals' understanding of the significance of tourists' culinary experience. Consequently, they could improve tourists' experiences through a range of activities, such as telling stories about the local food, creating food check-in venues, and organizing local food games or contests. In terms of theoretical contribution, this research enhances the understanding of customer experience in the tourism context by validating a new second-order scale of culinary experience. The research also provides empirical evidence to demonstrate the multi-dimensional, collective, and changing nature of tourists' culinary experience, using the Experience Economy perspective.

**Keywords:** culinary experience, tourist experience, experience economy, scale

**JEL Classification:** L83, Z32, Z39

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### 1. Introduction

The notion of the tourist experience is an essential behavioral concept that has received significant attention from tourism researchers, professionals, and destination managers (Ritchie et al., 2011; Volo, 2009). Because tourism products contain intangible elements that involve tourists as customers in the process of creating and consuming products, what tourists experience becomes an essential part of tourism products (Benur & Bramwell, 2015). Providing tourists with positive or memorable experiences is an effective strategy for creating product differentiation and competitive advantage for tourism destinations and businesses, in addition to products, services, price, and quality (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Implementation of new strategies causes changes that also stimulate productivity, and performance of firms (Civelek et al., 2023). Moreover, research has shown that tourists who have a more positive experience are more likely to return and also promote destinations or tourism companies (Lai et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2020; Ritchie et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2018). This could

help attract more tourists. Providing tourists with positive experiences will benefit the growth of destinations and the tourism industry after the pandemic.

The culinary experience of tourists is a relatively new topic that has attracted the increasing interest of tourism researchers for the last ten years. According to Maslow's theory, consuming food generally relates to satisfying human physiological needs (Maslow, 1943). However, when it involves local specialties at a tourist destination, food is not just a source of nourishment but also a key component of the discovery of local culture that attracts tourists (Berbel-Pineda et al., 2019). Experiencing local cuisine has become an important part of the travel experience (Stone et al., 2018; Choe & Kim, 2019; Ramírez-Gutiérrez et al., 2021).

Several published studies analyzed the culinary experience of tourists in different tourism settings. They include the study of tourists' experiences with Egyptian food (Mohamed et al., 2020), Indian local food (Piramanayagam et al., 2020), Chengdu cuisine in China (Lai et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2020), local cuisine in Indonesia (Widjaja et al., 2020), Segovian cuisine in Spain (Antón et al., 2019), Taiwan's local food (Tsai, 2016), and Ghanaian cuisine (Adongo et al., 2015). In these studies, the scales used to measure tourists' culinary experience have varied. This measurement inconsistency issue poses difficulties for further studies. Future researchers would face a challenge in selecting a scale of culinary experience that is appropriate for their studies.

The current research addresses this issue by developing and examining the measurement scale of tourists' culinary experience and its significance. In addition, it responds to Ritchie et al. (2011)'s call that further research should focus more on the types of tourism experience. Specifically, this research aims to provide better insights into the type of culinary experiences of tourists through the case of Hue cuisine in Vietnam.

The paper consists of five sections. The first section (i.e. Introduction) presents the significance of tourist's experience and culinary experience as well as the main research objective. The Literature review section introduces the key concepts of tourist's experience and culinary experience as well as the Experience Economy framework, followed by a discussion of the research gap on measurement inconsistencies. The Methods section describes the methods used to collect and analyze qualitative data and quantitative data. The Results section reports the key findings related to the construction and validation of the second-order scale of culinary experience. The final section includes a discussion of research results, a presentation of research contributions and implications, and suggestions for future research.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Culinary experience of tourists

The tourist's experience is a complicated concept that has been defined in various ways (Chhetri et al., 2004; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020; Quan & Wang, 2004). For instance, from the psychological viewpoint, Page and Connell (2020) argued that tourists' experience is a combination of factors that shape their feelings and attitudes towards their visit. However, from the management perspective, the tourist's experience is considered as the customer's experience in the tourism sector. The tourist's experience is characterized by the consumption of services or products provided by tourism businesses (Quan & Wang, 2004). It refers to the outcome of interactions between a tourist as a customer and the components of a tourism organization or destination (Gentile et al., 2007).

Although several studies have been conducted to investigate the culinary experiences of tourists, it is surprising that no definition has been provided to define this type of experience. However, Quan and Wang (2004) argued that the culinary experience should be considered part of the tourism experience using a management approach.

The construct of the culinary experience has been quantitatively operationalized in different tourism settings as a multi-dimensional construct (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). However, these scales had a significant variation in their dimensions. The same scale of Memorable Tourism Experiences introduced by Kim et al. (2012) was used by Tsai (2016) and Adongo et al. (2015) to measure tourists' experiences with Tainan's local food in Taiwan and local food in Ghana, respectively, but the results were different. While Tsai (2016) revealed that all seven dimensions of this scale emerged, Adongo et al. (2015) found only four dimensions and an emerging adverse experience dimension. In another study of Egyptian cuisine, Mohamed et al. (2020) discovered four other dimensions of tourists' culinary experience: sensory, intellectual, behavioral, and affective experience. Lai et al. (2020)'s study used the Experience Economy framework to validate another culinary experience scale. They revealed that all four dimensions of experience—entertainment, escapist, esthetic, and educational—appeared in tourists' experience with Chengdu cuisine in China (Lai et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2020). The measurement inconsistency in these findings reflects the complex nature of the culinary experience of tourists. It presents a challenge for other researchers to conduct further studies to examine this type of tourist experience.

Empirical evidence shows that tourists' culinary experience positively influenced their behaviors. Specifically, local food experience was found to positively impact the willingness to recommend and the intention to revisit the city of Tainan (in Taiwan) (Tsai, 2016) or revisit Cairo (the capital of Egypt) (Mohamed et al., 2020), the willingness to recommend Ghanaian cuisine to others (Adongo et al., 2015), or the word-of-mouth intentions to recommend the food in Segovia, Spain (Antón et al., 2019), as well as the electronic word-of-mouth communication intention about Chengdu cuisine (Lai et al., 2021). In addition, tourists with more positive culinary experience were more satisfied with the local food of Chengdu (Lai et al., 2020), local food in Delhi, India (Piramanayagam et al., 2020), Egyptian food (Mohamed et al., 2020), local gastronomy in Indonesia (Widjaja et al., 2020), and cooking class in Chiang Mai, Thailand (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019). Based on these results, it can be noticed that satisfaction with local food, word-of-mouth intention, and intention to return are common tourist behaviors that are significantly influenced by tourists' culinary experiences. These empirical pieces of evidence are useful to support a model to confirm the nomological validity of the culinary experience scale.

## 2.2. The Experience Economy framework

This framework was used as a theoretical basis to guide the operationalization of the culinary experience concept in this research. Pine and Gilmore presented the Experience Economy in 1999 and then, revised it in 2011 (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, 2011). These economists believe that customers have changed their needs and preferences. Customers not only consume products and services but also expect positive experiences. As a result, the economy needs to move from a service-oriented economy—that is focused on delivering quality products and services—to an experiential economy to create rich experiences for consumers (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Pine and Gilmore introduced a theoretical framework consisting of four “realms of experience”—also known as the 4E model—to help businesses understand the nature of customer experience. They include Entertainment, Esthetics, Education, and Escapism (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). These components are created by combining customers' engagement and their connections with the environment. The Entertainment experience involves experiences that customers passively—not actively or intentionally—receive through their senses, resulting in their enjoyment of the experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The Educational experience provides customers with new knowledge, insights, or skills through their active engagement (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The Esthetic experience involves customers immersing themselves in the environment but leaving it untouched and intact (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). In the Escapist experience, customers actively immerse themselves in the environment or the experience performance during consumption

(Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The “sweet spot” in the center of the framework reflects the “richest experience” that combines all four components of experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, p. 58).

The Experience Economy framework was first implemented in tourism by Oh et al. (2007). They constructed a four-dimensional scale to measure tourists' experience with bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Due to the suitability of these dimensions of experience, other researchers have extensively adapted the original scale of Oh et al. (2007) to develop new measurement scales for different types of tourism experiences. For instance, Lai et al. (2020), Lee et al. (2020), Hwang and Lyu (2015), Song et al. (2015), Loureiro (2014), Quadri-Felitti and Fiore (2013), and Hosany and Witham (2010) measured tourists' experiences with local cuisine, theme park, golf tourism, temple stay, rural accommodation, wine tourism, and cruise tourism, respectively. Although they measured different types of tourism experience, they discovered that these scales encompassed all theoretical dimensions of the experience economy. However, Bideci and Albayrak (2018) found that visitors' museum experience encompassed four components: the edutainment component that combines educational and entertainment experiences, and a new comfort component, as well as aesthetic and escapist experiences. In another research on hotel event experience, Boo and Busser (2018) introduced a new tourist experience scale with three dimensions: esthetics, entertainment, and escapism. Recently, Lebrun et al. (2021) revealed another new three-dimensional experience scale for tourists visiting nature reserves in France. It consisted of educational, escapist, and entertainment experiences (Lebrun et al., 2021). These empirical evidences show that, using the same Experience Economy framework, different dimensions could emerge and result in different experience scales. This issue reflects the changeable nature of experience, depending on the type of tourism experience and the involvement of tourists.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Research location

Vietnam is an emerging tourist destination located in Southeast Asia. The country is renowned for its gastronomy with internationally well-known dishes, such as ‘Pho’, and ‘Banh Mi’ (Liao, 2023). There are around 3000 dishes in the traditional Vietnamese cuisine and the majority of them (approximately 60%) originate from Hue city – a popular tourism destination in the country (Polly, 2021). Hue was the royal capital of Vietnam under the Nguyen Dynasty during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Due to its unique history as the country's former capital of 143 years (1802–1945), Hue possesses a unique and diverse cuisine with many popular dishes, for example, ‘Bun Bo Hue’ or ‘Hue beef noodle soup’ (in English). They are classified into three major categories, including royal cuisine, folklore cuisine, and vegetarian cuisine (Polly, 2021). Hue cuisine is characterized by its eye-catching decoration, harmonized ingredients, and typical flavor (Polly, 2021). The city has built the brand “Hue–The Capital of Gastronomy” in Vietnam to boost tourism development. Due to its renowned cuisine as a solid competitive advantage for tourism development, Hue is an appropriate research setting for the study of the culinary experiences of tourists. A mixed-methods approach was applied to explore and then to validate a scale measuring the culinary experience in this research.

#### 3.2. Qualitative method

In the first stage, a qualitative study was conducted to initially explore the nature of the tourists' culinary experience concept. This was necessary to determine an appropriate theoretical framework to operationalize the culinary experience of tourists in the context of Hue cuisine (Vietnam).

The purposive sampling technique was applied to select potential interviewees. The selection required adult domestic tourists who visited Hue city at least once in the last five years (until September



2021) and consumed Hue local dishes during their trips. Due to the government's social distancing measures to control the pandemic, individual telephone interviews were conducted with 20 domestic tourists who agreed to participate in the research. They were recruited from various tourist groups on Facebook. This sample of 20 interviewees was sufficient because it reached the saturation point at which, the information gathered became repeated, and consequently, the interviews were ended (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). There were 60% female and 40% male interviewees. Over half (55%) were young (less than 30 years of age). The majority of the interviewed tourists (accounting for 60%) visited Hue multiple—two or more—times and consumed a variety of Hue local foods during their trips.

### 3.3. Quantitative method

A quantitative study was carried out in the second stage. The 14 measures of tourists' culinary experience used in this study were developed based on a combination of the qualitative results and the measurement items validated in previous studies applying the Experience Economy framework. They included Oh et al. (2007)'s original scale of experience in tourism and Lai et al. (2020)'s scale of culinary experience of tourists. Then, a pilot survey was conducted with 11 tourists and three tourism experts to revise and confirm the content validity of the culinary experience scale. Moreover, this pilot survey was used to finalize the questionnaire for the official survey. In the questionnaire, tourists' satisfaction with the local food was measured using three indicators borrowed from a similar scale used in Piramanayagam et al. (2020). Three other items measuring word-of-mouth intention about the local cuisine were adapted from Lai et al. (2020)'s study. All the proposed measures of constructs were anchored by the Likert scale of agreement, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Purposive sampling was used to select the survey samples. The criterion for choosing survey participants was adult Vietnamese tourists who had visited Hue in the last five years and tasted Hue specialties during their trips. Due to the social distancing measures, the survey was first launched online on the Facebook pages of Vietnamese tourists at the end of 2021, and 142 questionnaires were returned. Then, when the pandemic was under control, the survey was conducted at tourist attractions in Hue city in May and June of 2022, and 355 pen-and-paper questionnaires were completed. After data screening, 433 valid questionnaires or samples were ready for data analysis. The sample size was appropriate for the factor analysis as it was more than double the required 200 minimum sample size, as Comrey (1988) recommended. In addition, the sample size of 433 satisfied the requirement of at least 200 samples for a complicated Structural Equation Model (Kline, 2005).

The measurement scale of culinary experience was statistically validated using the strategy proposed by Comrey (1988). Specifically, as the sample was sufficiently large, it was randomly split into two smaller samples of 210 and 223, respectively. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed on the first subsample, followed by a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on the second subsample for scale construction and validation (Comrey, 1988).

Due to the changing nature of experience (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020) that could lead to changes in the experience dimensionality, the EFA was applied first to determine the dimensions of the culinary experience scale in the new context of Hue cuisine (Vietnam). The EFA method is considered appropriate when the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient is higher than the 0.5 threshold (Kaiser, 1974), and the Bartlett's test is significant (with  $p < 0.05$ ) (Bartlett, 1950). All factors with Eigenvalues exceeding 1 are retained in the model (Kaiser, 1960). The scale reliability is ensured if Cronbach's Alpha coefficient exceeds the 0.7 threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Then, in the second step, the CFA was employed to confirm the scale's reliability and validity. The Composite Reliability (CR) must be higher than the 0.7 threshold to ensure a scale is reliable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In addition, the scale's convergent validity is satisfied when CR exceeds 0.7, the factor loading values of all measurement items are significantly greater than the 0.5 threshold, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is higher than the 0.5 threshold (Hair et al., 2019). The

discriminant validity of the scale is achieved if the square root of AVE within a variable is greater than the correlation with all other variables (Hair et al., 2019). The first-order and second-order versions of the scale were compared to determine the best pattern of the culinary experience construct.

Ultimately, the nomological validity of the scale was tested by examining its effects on multiple consequent variables (Hair et al., 2019), namely satisfaction and word-of-mouth intention. The covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling was used to evaluate these relationships. A measurement or structural model is considered appropriate for the dataset when the key model fit indices satisfy the following thresholds: CFI  $\geq$  0.9 (Hair et al., 2014) and SRMR  $\leq$  0.08 (Hair et al., 2014). In the structural model, the relationship among variables is statistically significant if the standardized regression coefficient has a p-value smaller than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2014).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Qualitative result

The thematic analysis results indicate that four themes related to the culinary experience of tourists emerged in the case of Hue cuisine based on the sentences and phrases extracted from interviews. The interview participants mainly shared their experiences with folklore-style dishes while visiting Hue.

The first and most frequently shared experience is aesthetic. Tourists appreciated the flavor, taste, and aroma of Hue folk food. They immersed themselves in the local food through all their senses. They commented that the harmonized colors of ingredients, eye-catching decoration, and flavorsome food attracted them. In addition, they had an entertainment experience that was enjoyable, pleasant, and relaxed while consuming Hue's local dishes in the original location with their close friends or people they liked. Moreover, most of tourists had an educational experience. Their understanding of Hue people's traditional culture, lifestyle, and characters was enhanced through Hue specialties, and they learned more about Hue history, typical dishes and how they are made. The last type of experience that tourists shared was escapist. Tourists from big cities like Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh city felt they had escaped their busy routine while consuming differently flavored dishes in an imperial city's quiet environment and classical restaurants. Some felt that they lived in another time or had become Hue people.

The empirical evidence from the qualitative interviews was used to adopt similar measures in the original scales of Oh et al. (2007) and Lai et al. (2020) to finalize the survey questionnaire used in the subsequent quantitative study. They also demonstrated that the four-realm experience framework developed by Pine and Gilmore (2011) was suitable for measuring the culinary experience of tourists.

### 4.2. Quantitative result

#### 4.2.1. Sample profile

The total number of domestic tourists who participated in the official surveys was 433. Female tourists accounted for the most significant proportion (56.2%). The majority of domestic tourists were young, with 67.9% aged 18–34. Regarding the primary job or workplace, the biggest group of survey participants (37%) worked for firms and enterprises in non-tourism industries, followed by students (20.1%), and freelancers (19.2%). More than half of tourists (53.6%) earned less than 10 million VND (approximately USD 415) monthly. The majority of domestic tourists (80.3%) re-visited Hue city, in which the largest group, accounting for 35%, was those who visited Hue twice (see Table 1).

Table 1. Key characteristics of survey participants

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
<i>Gender (n = 432)</i>		
Male	187	43.3
Female	243	56.2
Other	2	0.5
<i>Age (n = 433)</i>		
18–24	136	31.4
25–34	158	36.5
35–44	51	11.8
45–54	39	9.0
55–64	35	8.1
≥ 65	14	3.2
<i>Main job/ workplace (n = 422)</i>		
non-tourism companies & businesses	156	37.0
tourism companies and businesses	10	2.4
government organizations	63	14.9
freelancer	81	19.2
student	85	20.1
others (unemployed, retired ...)	27	6.4
<i>Monthly income (in 2021, in million VND) (n = 431)</i>		
Less than 5	109	25.3
5–less than 10	122	28.3
10–less than 15	112	26.0
15–less than 20	53	12.3
20 and above	35	8.1
<i>Number of visits (n = 426)</i>		
1	84	19.7
2	149	35.0
3	82	19.2
4 and more	111	26.1

Note: The total number of participants (*n*) who answered each demographic question was different, and this issue was indicated in the table; however, there were no missing data for the main questions related to culinary experiences.

Source: own research

#### 4.2.2. Scale construction

The EFA was run on 210 samples using Maximum Likelihood extraction and Promax rotation to explore the dimensionality of tourists' culinary experience in a new setting (that is Hue cuisine in Vietnam). The initial EFA findings indicated that three factors emerged as they had Eigenvalues greater than 1 (6.62, 1.847, and 1.117, respectively). However, there were two cross-loading items: "The experience of Hue cuisine was enjoyable" and "The experience of Hue cuisine was fun". These items were removed one after another to ensure that the factors would be distinct and represent different concepts.

After modifications, the final results of EFA show that the data were suitable for factor analysis with the KMO value of 0.851 > 0.5 and a significant Bartlett's test with  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ,  $\lambda^2 = 1554.696$ ,  $df = 66$ . The three emerging factors accounted for 71.465% of the total variance (see Table 2). Based on the meaning of the measured items, each factor, and the Experience Economy framework,

the first two factors were named “escapist experience”, and “educational experience”. The third factor contained measurement items of both entertainment and esthetic aspects, therefore, it was termed entersthetic experience as suggested by Pine and Gilmore (2011). All three scales were reliable because their Cronbach’s alpha values exceeded the 0.7 threshold (see Table 2).

Table 2. Dimensional pattern of culinary experience

Dimension & measures	Factor loading	Mean	Variance explained (%)	Cronbach’s $\alpha$
<i>Escapist experience</i>			47.959	0.881
EPIST1–The experience with Hue cuisine made me forget my daily routine	0.452	3.89		
EPIST2–The experience with Hue cuisine made me feel that I was living in a different place or time	0.734	3.89		
EPIST3–The experience with Hue cuisine made me escape from reality	0.942	3.66		
EPIST4–The experience with Hue cuisine made me feel like someone else	0.979	3.66		
<i>Educational experience</i>			14.306	0.856
EDU1–I have had more knowledge after experiencing Hue cuisine	0.597	3.99		
EDU2–This experience stimulated my curiosity to learn new things	0.875	4.00		
EDU3–This experience helped me learn a lot	0.871	3.97		
EDU4–This experience helped me know more about Hue	0.701	4.05		
<i>Entersthetic experience</i>			9.2	0.837
ENTIC1–Hue food satisfied my senses	0.931	4.14		
ENTIC2–The experience of smelling and tasting Hue food was pleasant	0.933	4.16		
ENTIC3–Visual appearance of Hue food was attractive	0.487	4.13		
ENTIC4–The experience of Hue cuisine was relaxing	0.431	4.08		
<i>Note: Total variance explained = 71.465 %; Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value = 0.851; Bartlett’s test of sphericity: <math>\chi^2 = 1554.696</math> (<math>p = 0.000</math>)</i>				

Source: own research

#### 4.2.3. Scale validation–reliability and validity

The initial three-factor model was further validated using CFA on 223 samples. The results showed that the model fit was unsatisfactory because the CFI value of 0.884 was below the minimum 0.9 threshold, and the SRMR value of 0.0837 was higher than the maximum 0.08 threshold. Therefore, modifications were made through the correlation of error terms in order to improve the model fit (see Figure 1). After the modifications, the model fit was adequate with CFI value of 0.93 > 0.9 and SRMR value of 0.0594 < 0.08.

All three scales of experience were reliable, as the CR values were higher than 0.7 (see Table 3). In addition, the values of all factor loadings were significantly greater than 0.5 ( $p < 0.05$ ) (see Figure 1), and the AVE values exceeded the 0.5 threshold (see Table 3). Based on these results, the convergent validity of the three scales was satisfactory. The discriminant validity of these scales was ensured, as all square roots of AVE of each latent variable exceeded the correlation estimates with all other variables (Table 3).

Although the scales of the three experiential dimensions were reliable, convergent, and discriminant, high correlation values among dimensions (see Figure 1) suggest that they may reflect an overarching construct of culinary experience. This nature of experience was theoretically supported by



the “sweet spot” encompassing all dimensions of experience in the Experience Economy framework (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Therefore, a second-order model was examined, and a comparison between this model and the recently validated first-order model with three factors was carried out.

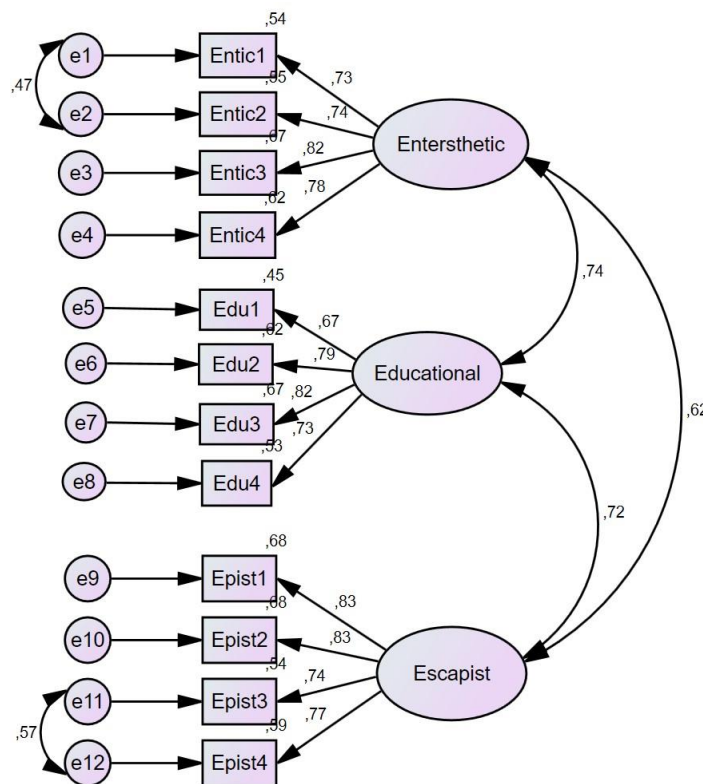
Table 3. Validity and reliability indicators for the experiential factors

	Escapist	Educational	Entersthetic	AVE	CR
Escapist	<b>0.790</b>			0.624	0.869
Educational	0.723	<b>0.753</b>		0.568	0.839
Entersthetic	0.623	0.738	<b>0.770</b>	0.593	0.853

Note: The square roots of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are highlighted in bold.

Source: own research

Figure 1. The first-order three-factor model of culinary experience

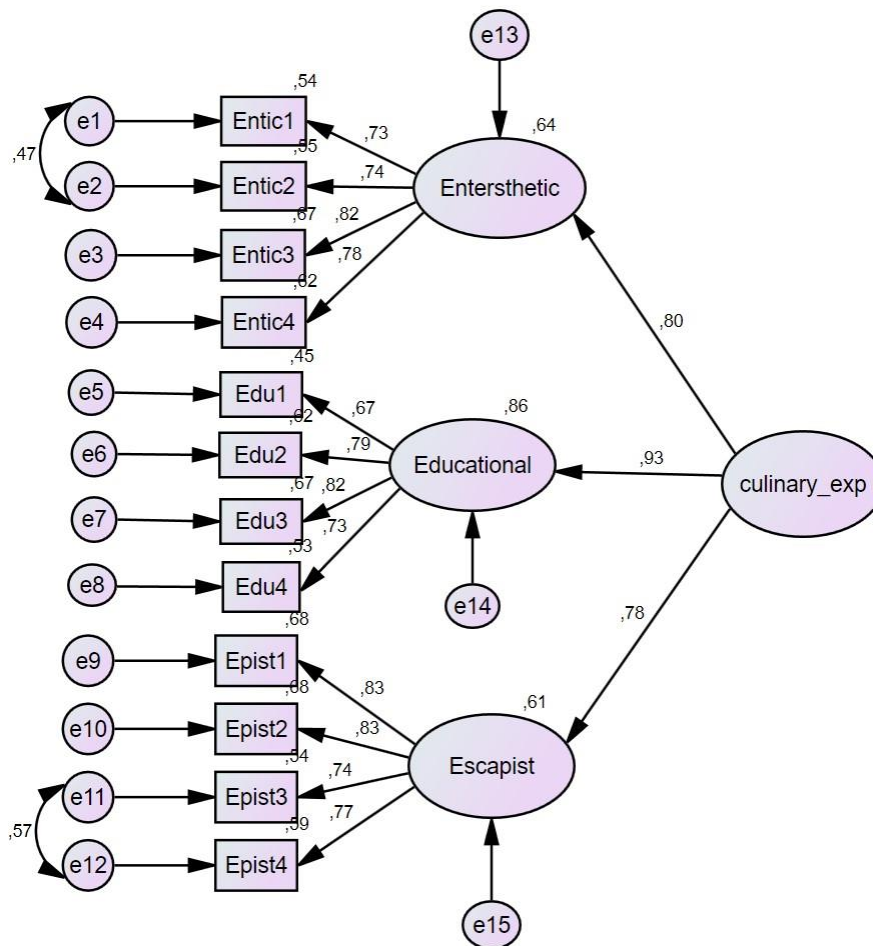


Source: own research

The results show that the second-order model fit reasonably with the data (CFI = 0.93 > 0.9 and SRMR = 0.0594 < 0.08). Compared to the first-order model, the second-order model had equal good-fit values; hence, it was acceptable (Brown, 2006). Moreover, the three first-order dimensions highly loaded on the second-order factor with the loading values of 0.797, 0.925, and 0.78, respectively, supporting that the second-order scale was reflective and acceptable (Brown, 2006) (see Figure 2). The educational experience was the strongest dimension due to the highest loading value. Moreover, the second-order construct of culinary experience was reliable and convergent with CR value of 0.875 > 0.7 and AVE value of 0.7 > 0.5. Based on these statistical findings, it can be argued that the second-order model of culinary experience had satisfactory reliability and convergent validity. It was more parsimonious than the first-order model, supporting the collective nature of the experience construct.

The discriminant validity of the second-order culinary experience construct was validated using the entire measurement model between the culinary experience and tourists' satisfaction and word-of-mouth intention. The results show that this full measurement model had an adequate fit with CFI value of  $0.95 > 0.9$  and SRMR value of  $0.0671 < 0.08$ . All the scales were reliable with all CR values exceeding 0.7, and convergent with all AVE values exceeding 0.5 (see Table 4). More importantly, the second-order culinary experience construct discriminated from the two outcome constructs as the criterion recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was satisfied (see Table 4).

Figure 2. The second-order scale of culinary experience



Source: own research

Table 4. Validity and reliability indicators for the second-order culinary experience scale

	Culinary experience	Satisfaction	Word-of-mouth intention	AVE	CR
Culinary experience	<b>0.801</b>			0.642	0.839
Satisfaction	0.747	<b>0.909</b>		0.827	0.935
Word-of-mouth intention	0.717	0.813	<b>0.907</b>	0.823	0.933

Note: The square roots of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are highlighted in bold.

Source: own research

#### 4.2.4. Nomological validity—effect of the culinary experience

The nomological validity of the second-order scale of culinary experience was tested through the relations between culinary experience and multiple consequential constructs, including satisfaction and word-of-mouth intention. The positive effect of culinary experience on satisfaction was established based on the empirical evidence of a similar relationship between culinary experience and satisfaction with Chengdu cuisine (Lai et al., 2020), local food in Delhi, India (Piramanayagam et al., 2020), Egyptian cuisine (Mohamed et al., 2020). In addition, a direct positive impact of culinary experience on word-of-mouth intention was specified based on similar results obtained in the study on Ghanaian cuisine (Adongo et al., 2015), or Segovian local food (Antón et al., 2019). Moreover, the positive relation between satisfaction and word-of-mouth intention in this nomological network was empirically supported by the findings in a study on Chengdu cuisine conducted by Lai et al. (2020).

The relationships within the nomological network were tested using the structural model and bootstrapping technique with 2000 bootstrap samples. The model had adequate fit with CFI value of  $0.95 > 0.9$  and SRMR value of  $0.0671 < 0.08$ . All the relationships were found to be significantly robust with all p-values less than 0.05 (see Table 5 and Figure 3). Therefore, the nomological validity of the culinary experience was validated. This finding reflects the usefulness and significance of the second-order culinary experience scale.

Table 5. Nomological validity test result

Nomological relationship	Standardized estimate	p
Culinary experience -> satisfaction	0.747	0.001
Culinary experience -> WOM intention	0.249	0.005
Satisfaction -> WOM intention	0.627	0.001
$\lambda^2 (127) = 427.5$ ( $p=0.000$ ), CFI = 0.95; SRMR = 0.0671		

Note: (\*): The outcomes of coefficient estimates and associated two-tailed p-values of the t-tests were obtained using bootstrap standard errors and 2000 bootstrap samples.

Source: own research

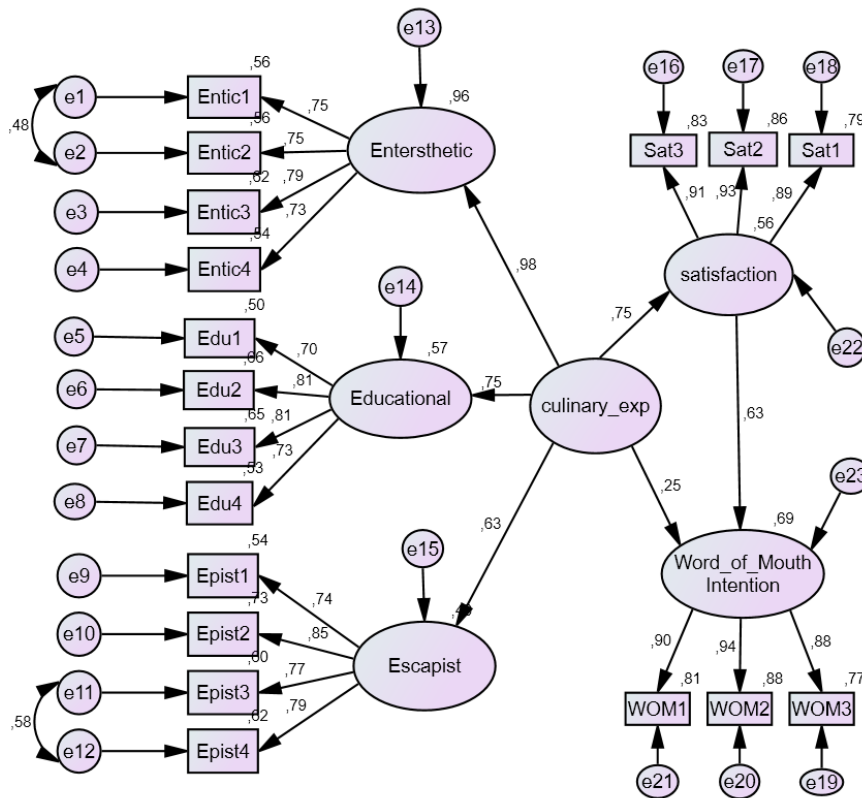
## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The qualitative and quantitative results suggest that the Experience Economy framework presented by Pine and Gilmore (2011) is empirically appropriate to measure the culinary experience of tourists. In the case of Hue cuisine (Vietnam), the culinary experience was found to be an overarching construct of three interrelated dimensions: educational, escapist and entersthetic experience. The entersthetic component emerged as a mixture of esthetic and entertainment experience. These two experience components share the common feature of reflecting tourists' passive involvement in food consumption. This fusion was theoretically anticipated by Pine and Gilmore (2011) since they even reserved the term "entersthetic" for it (p.64). It can be argued that, in the case of Hue cuisine, tourists would be passively impressed by the food itself (e.g., food decoration, appearance, and flavor) and also by the different atmosphere through their senses. Consequently, it could lead to a blending of entertainment and esthetic experiences retained in their memories.

Furthermore, the emergence of three dimensions in the culinary experience confirms the multi-dimensional nature of tourists' experience, as found in many other tourism experience studies (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). However, this dimensional pattern of culinary experience is different from the four-dimensional theoretical framework introduced by Pine and Gilmore (2011), the original experience measures validated by Oh et al. (2007), and the first-time culinary experience scale proposed by Lai et al. (2020). This may be explained by the changing nature of tourists' experience (Godovykh &

Tasci, 2020). The change in dimensionality discovered in this research supports the similar results of Lebrun et al. (2021), Boo and Busser (2018), and Bideci and Albayrak (2018), as reviewed in the previous section.

Figure 3. The effect of culinary experience on satisfaction and word-of-mouth intention



Source: own research

These findings provide a theoretical contribution to the existing literature of tourism experiences. They give a better understanding of the nature of the culinary experience of tourists. More specifically, the current research introduces a newly validated second-order reflective scale of culinary experience with three interrelated dimensions: educational, escapist and entersthetic experience. This is one of the primary studies that reflect the collective nature of the culinary experience by showing that it is an overarching concept of three first-order correlated experience components. Moreover, the research confirms the complex multi-dimensionality of the culinary experience using the Experience Economy framework. It also demonstrates the usefulness of this theoretical framework as a strong foundation for operationalizing the culinary experience of tourists. However, compared to the four dimensions of experience found in the case of Chengdu cuisine in China (Lai et al., 2020), the difference in the number of dimensions that emerged in the case of Hue cuisine in this research suggests that culinary experiences may vary depending on the tourism context.

In terms of implications, the newly developed scale of culinary experience has the potential to be utilized in similar tourism contexts, in which the local food is unique and tasty. Furthermore, the research helps destination managers and tourism professionals better understand the significance of tourists' culinary experience through its dimensions and effects on tourists' satisfaction and word-of-mouth intention. Consequently, they could enhance all dimensions of tourists' experiences with the local cuisine by involving them in various activities. For instance, they should encourage storytelling about the local dishes to increase tourists' educational experience. Moreover, the creation of food

check-in locations and the organization of games or contests related to the local cuisine could help attract tourists and improve their entertainment and esthetic experiences. Restaurants could also offer tourists the chance to engage in do-it-yourself activities while enjoying local food to enhance their escapist experience.

Nevertheless, as in every research study, it is necessary to acknowledge certain limitations. Firstly, the size of two sub-samples used to test the scale just met the recommended minimum threshold of 200. Therefore, future research should have a larger sample size and be conducted in similar tourism settings, especially in destinations where culinary tourism has developed, in order to confirm the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, this research is limited to domestic tourists because all international commercial flights to Vietnam were suspended to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic spreading. Hence, upcoming studies should include international tourists to evaluate the applicability of the recently validated second-order scale of culinary experience.

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