

Consumer Behavior and Cognitive Factors in Relation to Gastronomic Tourism and Destination Marketing in Greece



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Abstract Tourism has developed into a distinct phenomenon in contemporary times, primarily associated with leisure and consumerism. It is worth noting that tourism is both a noteworthy branch of economic activity and a remarkable employer of many employees since it employs a sizable number of jobless people and has a seasonal character of labor. Greek Tourism, in particular, contributes to the development of new employment at a time when other industries are struggling. Culinary tourism is a significant segment of alternative tourism, earning billions of dollars globally via the purposeful pursuit of authentic, unique culinary experiences, making food the ultimate travel motivation. The nations that place a premium on culinary tourism are developing marketing opportunities. Tourists' desires to sample indigenous flavors in locations and hotels have paved the way for the growth of gastronomy tourism. The primary purpose of the study is to highlight the aspects of tourists' consumer behavior and the cognitive parameters that lead their choice (decision-making) concerning their preference regarding the tourist destination, as well as, the perceptions of tourist operators regarding gastronomy and destination marketing policies applied. The present study employs a combination of primary research with a questionnaire and a review of worldwide and local academic publications and articles on the aforementioned subject topic. A critical component of completing the questionnaire provided to visitors was preserving the participants' anonymity and ensuring that no personal information was collected to draw the right conclusions. Tourism enterprises have recognized the value placed on gastronomy tourism by domestic and international tourists, having included culinary elements into their facilities. There is also a general acknowledgment that tourism is handled in collaboration with all tourist-related foundations and civil society groups with the support of relevant ministries. Additionally, culinary tourism developers are expected to make

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measurable promotional efforts to address better the tourist preferences that influence their consumer behavior in connection to the tourism destination's marketing policy.

Keywords Gastronomic tourism · Consumer behavior · Cognition · Decision-making · Tourism destination

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1 Introduction

Tourism has always been one of the primary sources of life and income in many countries. In recent years, various types of tourism have been developed, which are defined as alternatives and cover the need for a person always to find a different and unique reason to travel. Mass tourism has been the main engine of the tourism industry for many years. Although Greece is rich in many natural and cultural values, alternative tourism has attracted the attention of traders in recent years. Health, sports, cultural, religious, and gastronomic tourism activities are the new tourist products. A lot of travel literature and promotional material of various destinations show that gastronomy's role in destination marketing has recently attracted the attention of marketers both locally and internationally. Gastronomy is the art of food and drink and the interaction of food and drinks with art, culture, and science. Greece's history, monuments, natural wealth, and scenery have always attracted the interest of various travelers worldwide. Greek products have always been accredited and used by international chefs. People that highly value good food are traveling to Greece in order to try local delicacies. The variety of Greek food on offer covers different tastes. Tourists will have the opportunity to try different dishes in Crete than those offered in the Ionian Islands, or Cyclades, and different ones in big cities, such as Athens and Thessaloniki. The aforementioned situation is further enhanced by the fact that people are traveling with the dream of experiencing intangible local cultural goods such as local cultures, lifestyles, but also food. Gastronomic products are one of the most important cultural values of a destination. The local gastronomic culture differentiates one destination from another. The gastronomic values of a destination reflect the identity of its local culture. Visitors consume the products of a destination. Local gastronomic products are reflections of local cultural identity and offer value to a destination. These products must meet the wishes and needs of the visitor. The uniqueness of local cultural values such as gastronomic culture supports sustainable competitiveness and makes it easier for advertisers to promote (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). Greece is a country with a diverse cuisine from east to west and from north to south. All the different destinations of the country have their own gastronomic culture. Therefore, the country has sufficient factors of attraction for gastronomic tourism.

Food is a critical component of tourism and has been researched in a variety of different fields. While the majority of tourism literature emphasizes the importance of food as a motivator for travel, researchers (McKercher et al., 2008) argue that the methods used to study food tourists do not examine the reasons for travel; rather, they establish only tenuous causal relationships between actions (visiting a food destination) and motives (wanting to eat Food). Thus, a more holistic approach to studying food tourists is necessary to better understand the link between tourists' motivations for travel and their involvement in food-related events. As such, this study analyzes the vacation decision-making of a group of Slow Food members with a strong interest in food in terms of the holiday places they choose and the activities they engage in while there. Additionally, food is a fundamental component of the human experience, since it is necessary for existence and has meaning and importance for individuals and society that extends beyond just subsistence. There are aesthetic and health concerns associated with food intake. The preferences of various foods, eating habits, and consumption of certain foods reflect an individual's socioeconomic status. Food has behavioral, cognitive, psychological, and cultural effects on individuals and communities as a result of its meaning. Thus, food has both concrete and intangible connotations for humans, as demonstrated by the culinary systems and cultures developed by societies. Food culture has been defined as "a culinary order characterized by the characteristics of a particular group of people" (Bessiere, 1998). According to a researcher (Başaran, 2020) traditional dishes embody a significant part of the Cultural Heritage. He indicates that the increased demand in gastronomy tourism raises the value of traditional foods.

The destination must be differentiated from the competitors in destination marketing, and its culture must be combined with the gastronomic identity. This study discusses the relationship between destination marketing and gastronomic tourism in the literature, especially sustainability, with different examples. So, this alternative form of tourism, gastronomic tourism, is treated as a new tourism product and as it seems already, has not left the world of destination marketing unmoved, since its contribution to the promotion of our country abroad and to tourists who seek new gastronomic experiences (Hall, 2006).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Gastronomy Concept

The concept of gastronomy raises a significant level of confusion, as it is primarily associated with the provision of original and often costly food. This term refers to the art of preparing quality and good food available in every type of restaurant from a typical tavern to high-end luxury restaurants. The gastronomy industry refers to the combination of good food with fine wine but is not limited exclusively to culinary experience and depends on a range of products and services (Cohen & Avieli,

2004). To a large extent, the person interested in gastronomy is also interested in the particularity of the place from which each food comes. Important terms used in the international literature on food tourism are the terms: “food tourism,” “gastronomy tourism,” and “culinary tourism”. Over the years, the term “gastronomic tourism” has been established. It is a compound word consisting of the words “gastir” and “nemo”. According to SETE (Association of Greek Tourist Enterprises), it is the art of good and delicious food, and in general, it is the science of human nutrition. The taste and the quality are not only served in luxury shops but even in a tavern. Thus, in practice, gastronomy includes the combination of good food with good wine or other beverages and is not limited exclusively to cooking but extends to a range of products and services. This term was first used in 1835 by the French Academy, where it was formalized. Already in “The Fourth Book of Pantagruel” by François Rabelais, there are references to Gastros, the God of food. Archestratos was recognized as the father of gastronomy, wherein the fourth century, his work “Idydapathy”, was a gastronomic text of antiquity that told secrets about the best food preparation and ways to find the finest. Finally, it is stated that gastronomy can be defined as any proposition referring to the historical, cultural, and interpretive influences on what a tourist should eat, when to eat, where to eat, how to eat. At the same time, as a science, it includes general rules regarding food and beverages to a destination that is part of the cultural heritage.

2.2 *Gastronomic Tourism*

Gastronomic tourism is a combination of tourism, cultural heritage, and agriculture. Different geographical parts of the world produce different goods, and societies create their cuisine with what they have. Traditions, tastes, and culinary techniques are passed down from generation to generation and become part of the cultural heritage. These lead to the attractiveness of a destination and make it possible to position and market it as a gastronomic tourism destination. Every person who travels to a destination for any reason consumes local food. Research indicates that gastronomy is part of the tourist experience and, in some cases, can be the primary motivating factor (Horng & Tsai, 2011). Anyone visiting a destination expects to see new places, meet new cultures, try different things and gain new experiences. The taste of new cooking methods and local flavors are the experiences that attract the tourist to a destination. Recent research suggests some correlation between tourists interested in wine and food and tourists interested in museums, markets, festivals, and events. According to the United Nations World Travel Association, food expenditures account for 30% of tourism revenue. 88.2% of tourists point out that “food is vital in deciding their destination.” It is worth mentioning, as confirmed by the data of the World Travel Travels Association that only 8.1% of tourists who travel for food describe themselves as “gourmand,” a fact that proves that gastronomic tourism is addressed to every tourist who visits a gastronomic destination. The primary motivating factors for every tourist of gastronomic tourism are initially monitoring the production process

of exceptional food, the visit to restaurants and festivals, local food producers, and finally the observation of different food production techniques.

In today's society, people are interested in the local, regional, and national cuisine so gastronomic motivation increases the intention to travel. Gastronomy and gastronomic heritage can be recognized as a branding mechanism for destinations (Halkiopoulou et al., 2021). In particular, it is stated that in such a competitive market, in order for companies to compete with other destinations, it is necessary to improve their culinary initiatives. Gastronomic tourism has significant potential to enhance tourist attraction and assist marketing and tourism sustainability. To apply this, local foods must be researched, studied, and applied in modern cuisine in perfect balance, used as local ingredients in various flavors (Gross & Brown, 2006). In many places, local dishes have changed to suit the tastes of foreign tourists or adapted to meet specific needs such as vegetarian alternatives of original recipes. However, this results in the loss of traditional dishes and flavors. In many countries, when it comes to food tourism, local food in the form of regional cuisine rarely exists as an essential resource in mainstream advertising. However, the number of travelers interested in food and wine was small because travel was often difficult, time-consuming, and costly.

Food has an early impact on each individual, with data indicating that immigrants alter their food culture more slowly than other aspects of their lifestyle. This demonstrates how food plays a critical role in the communication patterns and social rituals of families and other groups. Food consumption behavior is researched across disciplines and in tourism as a result of its key function (Kivela & Crotts, 2005; Telfer & Wall, 1996). It is self-evident that every traveler must consume food when visiting a tourism destination. Up to one-third of overall visitor expenditure in a place is expected to be spent on food. Food has also developed into a key component of the vacation experience. Although food was formerly thought to have a minor part in a tourist's visit, the relevance of food in tourism has grown over the last several decades. Studies on culinary destinations indicate a strong correlation between a destination's food image and a tourist's intention to visit, as well as a growing emphasis on food in destination advertising. Food tourism is classified as "culinary," "gastronomic," "cuisine," or "gourmet" tourism, reflecting the perspective of customers who see their interest in food and wine as "serious leisure." The major reason food tourists travel is to attend food-related activities. Gourmet travelers, for example, may travel to France or Italy in search of top Western food experiences. In comparison, gourmet package tours from Asian nations to Europe may include Michelin-starred restaurants (Hjalager & Richards, 2003). Numerous academic studies have concentrated on tourists who travel seeking specific culinary experiences. Food tourists as a distinct interest group are receiving more attention since they spend more, stay longer, travel more frequently, and engage in more activities than other tourists; hence, they represent an appealing target market for research (McKercher & Chan, 2005).

Food has evolved particularly from the realm of functionality as hospitality is combined with the demands of modern cuisine, which is important in today's

western lifestyle. This facilitates the recognition of food and drink from a necessity, in a modern commercial regime. The relationship between food and tourism presents significant opportunities for sustainable rural development. In particular, their connection can create jobs, leading to a reduction in unemployment and the development of local producers and cooperatives. In addition, the food represents the identity of a destination, being a symbol for each location acting as a significant promotion tool of tourism destination. Finally, food is the “authentic” representation of the destination’s culture for potential tourists, in particular through the preservation of regional identity and its contribution to regional development, while also being a key element in the context of competitiveness of marketing aspects, most importantly destination marketing as will be seen below.

Food tourism, gastronomy tourism, culinary tourism, tasting tourism, and wine tourism all refer to travel motivated by food (or wine). Food tourism, for example, is defined as “visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants, and specific locations where food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production regions are primary motivating factors for travel.” Food is also a significant motivator for some tourists, according to definitions for gastronomy tourism, tasting tourism, and gourmet tourism. Brown and Getz (2005), on the other hand, defined wine tourism as “a type of special-interest travel motivated by a desire to visit wine-producing regions or in which travelers are induced to visit wine-producing regions and wineries in particular while traveling for other purposes.” This suggests that traveling for wine may not be the primary reason for visiting a destination. On the other hand, existing research on tourist-related topics indicates that food tourists’ motivation to travel to destination locations is frequently influenced by a desire to sample local cuisine. Gastronomy plays a major role in the way tourists experience the destination and indicate that some travelers would return to the same destination for its unique gastronomy.

Gastronomy is significantly associated with the object of tourism, as food is part of the travel experience in various ways and methods. Providing good cuisine is a great pleasure, providing satisfaction to many tourists (Buhalis & Deimezi, 2004). At this point, it is worth mentioning that many tourists have as their sole travel motivation the pursuit of activities of gastronomic interest, promoting to a considerable extent gastro tourism, traveling to discover new flavors in combination with the history of the destination (Lee, 2015). In conclusion, gastronomy associated with tourism, upgrades the travel experience, attracting a particular category of tourists, the gastro tourists (Aziz et al., 2012).

2.3 Gastronomic Tourist Profile

The term “gastronomic tourism” is commonly used to describe the relationship between tourists and their food-related activities. Gastronomic tourists are initially associated with their level of interest in local food, distinguishing themselves from gourmet tourists and farmers. From the marketing point of view, gastronomic tourists

can be distinguished into three different types based on their participation rate in gastronomic tourism activities, starting from the higher participation in food activities and moving to a lower participation rate (McKercher et al., 2008).

Also, according to Hjalager & Richards (2003), who offered a phenomenological model of gastronomic experiences in tourism, tourists are distinguished into leisure tourists and test tourists. Recreational gastronomy tourists are conservative, while for them, food-related entertainment is limited to non-participatory watching. For gastronomic tourists, the consumption of food is not simply intended to satisfy hunger but aims to provide knowledge about the destination's local or regional cuisine and culture. According to Cankül and Demir (2018) travel agencies organize gastronomy tours under culture tours. Therefore, they prefer exceptional restaurants "where only the locals eat." In particular, they visit farms and crops, participate in cooking classes, visit cheesemakers, and prefer to fish with professionals to discover new flavors and high gastronomy. Another research highlights the role of high-end Michelin-accredited restaurants in the creation and development of gastronomy tourism (Meneguel et al., 2019).

It is also mentioned that for gastro tourists, food and alcohol consumption is a way to meet friends and enjoy life, while at the same time, their gastronomic tourism activities are part of their image and prestige. According to Hall (2006), gastronomic tourists are mostly middle-aged, highly educated, middle-income women who travel mainly during the summer months, accompanied by a spouse/partner and mostly without children. Finally, highly adventurous and experienced travelers appear with a pure and deep interest in the cultural elements of the destination they are visiting. Demographic factors include age, gender, marital status, level of education, occupation, and income that reflect the socio-economic and demographic situation of the tourist. These are essential variables in explaining fluctuations in food consumption in different contexts. According to SETE research, the most common ages of gastro tourists are (mainly) 30–50 years old and then 51–64 years old, with professional reputation and high income. In particular, this category of tourists spends a significant percentage of its travel budget on activities of gastronomic interest, coming mainly from the USA, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Britain (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000).

2.4 Consumer Behavior and Gastronomic Tourism

Consumer behavior mainly refers to obtaining and organizing any form of information that form via the evaluation process positive perceptions toward a product or service in order to complete a purchase. In the tourism sector, the consumer's buying behavior is remarkable, as it refers to any investment that does not have an actual profit rate. It is a high-involvement purchase, as the decision encompasses a sufficient amount of time and the cost is relatively high. There are essential factors that must be taken into account, economic and social that influences the decision of the tourist-consumer (Halkiopoulou et al., 2020). Initially, the consumer customer recognizes

the need for travel and then looks for the necessary information in order to evaluate each alternative destination. The next step is related to the degree of satisfaction with the purchase or the service he has chosen (Lee, 2015).

2.5 *Gastronomic Tourist and Cognition (Decision-Making)*

A choice is the consequence of a mental process in which a certain action is chosen from a range of accessible possibilities. Thus, decision-making is the process via which this particular outcome appears. Economics, psychology, sociology, management, and marketing sciences all study this process. The purpose of the research is to better understand why, how, and when individuals make choices. According to decision-making theories and consumer culture research, visitors' behavior is impacted by their personal traits and motives. For example, in Pearce's (1991) travel career ladder, places were chosen based on the lifestyle, personality, and motivational profile of each individual. Numerous decision-making models incorporated this pattern of human traits. The FLAG (fits-like-a-glove) choice model used in this study is based on practice theory and implies that each individual's decision is heavily impacted by prior experiences. According to FLAG theory, visitors' travel selections and activity preferences within a place may be impacted significantly by their past personal experiences and traits. Not only is food necessary for survival, but it also has psycho-sensorial, social, and symbolic implications. Tourism study into food began with studies on agriculture and production, the food services industry, and food hygiene, with the rising recognition of the role of food in tourism over the previous two decades. Indeed, recent studies examining the function of food in the tourism experience have revealed that, under some situations, food may serve as a key motivator for travel. McKercher & Chan (2005) study differs from the majority of previous food tourism studies pointing that eating food is a mandatory activity for all tourists and arguing that "food" may not be sufficient to establish a particular interest group. These writers argue that food tourism research should take a more comprehensive approach (McKercher & Chan, 2005; McKercher et al., 2008). Henderson (2009) examined studies on food in tourism and identified four distinct themes:

- Food, tourism, and tourists are all inevitably linked.
- Possibilities for commercialization of food as a tourism product.
- Food marketing to visitors.
- Food tourism as a tool for destination development and overall development.

Henderson's (2009) research adds a fifth sector: food production and services. Food plays a critical part in hospitality services and may have an effect on tourists' pleasure with the place. Henderson (2009) examined food production from a demand-side viewpoint, as well as culinary schools for tourists visiting a certain area. Henderson (2009) notes that the first topic is the connection between cuisine, tourism, and visitors. Food can be regarded as intrinsically linked to certain places or as

a global phenomenon. Due to global migration and fast technological advancement, classic foods such as sushi, pizza, and hamburgers are now available in every metropolitan city on the planet. On the other hand, cuisine reflects local culture, and tourists' tolerance for novel foods varies according to place. Food may also serve as a symbol of a country's identity, which should be utilized with caution while marketing a place. Numerous food service providers are torn between internationalizing meals and including indigenous components into their menus, as food consumption is an integral element of tourists' entire experience in a place. There are three types of decision-making models now available: microeconomic models, cognitive models, and interpretative frameworks. Microeconomic analysis is predicated on the concept of the economic person. Money is utilized to get happiness and enhance utility, and pricing influences decision-making. The cognitive method places a premium on socio-psychological factors and processes in decision-making, using both structural and process models.

The evolution of decision-making models in tourism is examined chronologically, which assumes that a tourist is a rational decision-maker, which assumes that a tourist's choices are not always rational. According to Sirakaya and Woodside's study, one of the next research topics in decision-making might be to examine underlying characteristics impacting choosing behavior, such as lifestyle. Their self-image impacts their travel behavior selections; moreover, an individual's travel behavior patterns are inextricably linked to the ideas and values that they adopt. However, tourist activities are frequently determined after the visitor arrives at the site (McKercher & Chan, 2005). When examining tourist decision-making as a process and the interpretative approach to decision-making, there are two stages involved in tourist decision-making. The first stage is making the decision to travel to a certain place, and the second stage is making the decision to engage in activities while there. Consumer behavior influences the creation of new decision-making models in tourism. Consumer culture theory aims to illuminate how consumers aggressively rework and alter symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, commercial locations, or products in order to express their unique personal and social circumstances, as well as their identities and personal lifestyle objectives.

2.6 Destination Marketing Concept-Context

The concept of destination marketing applies essential marketing and branding strategies in every region, city, and nation. Tourists are led to a choice of destination before selecting transport and accommodation, making destination marketing a significant issue in the development and growth of tourism (Murphy et al., 2000). Therefore, a variety of experiences and services must be provided to optimally promote a destination while maintaining and increasing its popularity. It is estimated that food is an integral part of the cultural heritage of each place, with gastronomic tourism playing a significant role in promoting each destination. Hotels and tourism businesses should

integrate local gastronomy, with the aim of more effective promotion of their destination. The use of social media also plays an important role. It is observed that many businesses have their page on Instagram or Facebook, through which every gastronomic event is promoted, able to attract several tourists to the specific destination. In conclusion, the gastronomic experience is one of the main reasons people prefer to travel to a place. At the same time, the consumption of food is not the only goal of tourists. In particular, the largest volume of tourists is interested in learning the origin in combination with the way food is produced, proving the ever-increasing demand for unique gastronomic experiences. Businesses are encouraged to diversify their culinary offerings in order to satisfy even the most discerning customers. Sánchez-Cañizares and López-Guzmán (2012) highlights the opportunity to design a specific tourism product and to promote a destination through its gastronomy.

Tourists are looking for “series of experiences” achieved through the combination of various products and services. For visitors, the product is the overall experience, covering all aspects, formed by their expectations. According to Middleton and Clarke (2012), the offer of total tourism can be defined in five main parts: destination facilities and services, destination accessibility (including transportation), images, perceptions, and costs. In addition, a tourist destination is a unit that includes a complex system of initiatives, plans, actions, and a variety of roles and environmental factors that interact for their performance. According to other research, tourists generally perceive their visit as hollistic experience, even though different businesses offer their services. Their visit consists of a structured series of services and products, which operate separately. The value chain reflects the number of different factors involved in providing tourism-related services and products. It is a structured set of businesses, interactions, resources, and knowledge which create and deliver value to the final consumer. This creates the need to integrate supply chain activities by identifying consumer needs through product development, production, and distribution. Stakeholders in the value chain have to deal with issues such as the integration, collaboration, networking of their activities. In tourism marketing, it is essential to determine tourists’ motives in order to create the desire to travel. Factors that form tourists’ motivation to visit a specific destination are environment and climate related, as well as, cultural, economic, and psychological.

2.7 Gastronomic Tourism in Greece

After analyzing the concepts of gastronomy and gastronomic tourism, in this section, we will study the Greek gastronomic offer by referring to areas of Greece with a unique gastronomic identity, with more characteristic Santorini Chios, Crete, and areas in the rest of Greece. In particular, it is mentioned that gastronomy is an important and valuable cultural heritage, capturing the way of life of an area through food and drink. The products that characterize the Greek cuisine are widely based on the Mediterranean diet such as olive oil, herbs, vegetables, honey, Greek yogurt, and

cheeses, giving extraordinary well-being in combination with the wine. In the Peloponnese, an area of purely rustic cuisine, the areas are combined to create island and mountain dishes. The main ingredient is olive oil in combination with the production of olives. Similar to the cuisine of the Peloponnese is the cuisine of Thessaly, with many elements from Macedonia. The key ingredient of the diet is meat, highly used on local dishes. The characteristics of the mainland cuisine are pies and the abundance of dairy products due to the rustic character of the region, while in Macedonia, the main characteristics are the peppers and a variety of cabbage (Katsoni, 2020). On the other hand, the Ionian and Aegean islands are characterized by different flavors, without spicy elements and highly digestible foods. At the same time, fish is the basis of a variety of dishes. Ionian islands cuisine is highly influenced by the Italian one.

3 Research Design—Methods

3.1 Purpose of the Research

The objective of the following research is to gain an understanding of how an alternative form of tourism in Greece—gastronomy tourism—operates and how it functions as a tourist attraction through destination marketing. To do research effectively, specific objectives must be established: To begin, the concept of “gastronomic tourism” should be thoroughly researched, as it is a distinct and modern form of tourism. Following that, places of Greece that must provide a truly unique gastronomic experience for tourists should be studied, as well as areas that tourists like. Additionally, it is critical for study to comprehend the notion of destination marketing and how Greece uses gastronomy to entice travelers with delectable quests. Finally, travelers’ perceptions and knowledge about gastronomy tourism in Greece should be analyzed.

3.2 Research Questions

- [RQ1] What is the value to investigate Gastronomic Tourism as a modern type of Tourism?
- [RQ2] What is the importance of Gastronomic Tourism in Tourism Destination Marketing?
- [RQ3] What are the cognitive parameters that influence the decision-making regarding gastronomic tourism and the choice of the final tourist destination?
- [RQ4] Investigation of the case study of Greece regarding the field of gastronomy and the policies of attracting tourists that it adopts?
- [RQ5] Analysis of the concept of destination marketing and how gastronomy is used in Greece to attract tourists with tasty quests?

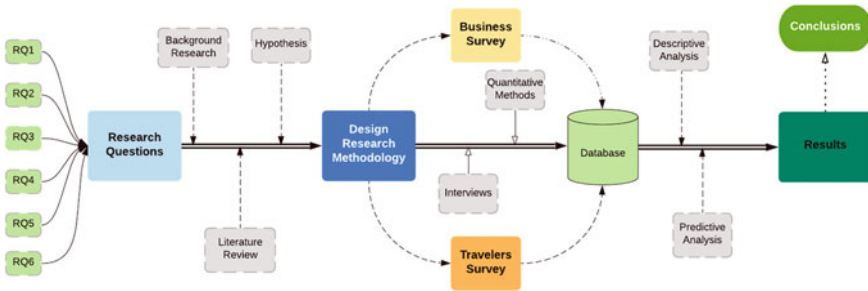


Fig. 1 Research questions flowchart

- [RQ6] What is the opinion and knowledge of tourists on gastronomic tourism in Greece?

The secondary investigation, and particularly the bibliographic review, involved the examination of linked themes via papers, books, and internet sources. The primary survey was conducted using two questionnaires. The set of questions is the same for all respondents, so the results are more precise and lead to a more accurate conclusion. The surveys had both closed-ended questions with standardized responses and some open-ended questions. Likert scale was used, as well as multiple-choice. Tourism experts responded to the first questionnaire. There was telephone conversation or email communication with everyone (Fig. 1).

The questions were designed to ascertain their understanding of the term “gastronomic tourism,” their use of promotional strategies, and their perception of the sector of gastronomic tourism in Greece. The questionnaires were delivered to more than four companies, but responses were not quick, necessitating additional communication in each case. The second questionnaire sought to ascertain travelers’ understanding of gastronomic tourism in general and Greek food in particular. Aim was to examine their familiarity with Greek cuisine before visiting a Greek destination and their experience during their stay. The distribution was made to employees of enterprises based abroad, as well as to members of Facebook groups devoted to Greek tourism. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, none of the two questionnaires received a high response rate, thus the sample of tourists contains no more than 152 responses, while the sample of professionals contains four (4) respondents.

4 Results

4.1 Sample Characteristics

The results of the survey conducted with 2 questionnaires, using Google platform (Google Forms). During the second part, the research was conducted with a sample

of 152 foreign tourists who have visited Greece at least once and consequently have tasted Greek food. The first question concerns the gender of the people who participated in the research.

As far as the research sample is concerned, 55.3% are female, while 44.7% are male. Regarding the age groups, the largest percentage belongs to the group of 31–43 years (48%), followed by the age groups of 18–30 years (24.3%) and 44–56 years (24.3%) and then the 18–30 years (3.3%). The majority with a percentage of 47%, as it seems, holds a bachelor’s degree, followed by those with a Master with a percentage of 39.5%. Then, with lower percentages follow those who have graduated from College (7.2%) and those who have a Ph.D. (5.9%). At the employment level, the largest percentage (39.5%) is employed in professional-managerial occupations. Immediately after, follow those employed with intermediate occupations (32.2%). The lowest percentages are held by those employed with routine-manual occupations (19.7%). Few are students (3.9%), full-time parents (2.6%) and retirees are last (2%).

Regarding the place of residence of the respondents, 36 declare Sweden as their place of permanent residence, 34 Germany, 27 Italy, 21 England, 16 France, 5 the Netherlands, 4 Spain, 3 Greece and 3 Denmark while just 1 Switzerland, Serbia, and Iceland (Fig. 2).

Continuing with the nationalities of the respondents, we see a number of 36 people having Swedish nationality (Fig. 3). They are followed by 29 Germans, 26 Italians, 18 English, 17 French, 8 people of Greek nationality, 6 Spanish, 5 Dutch, 3 Danes. Finally, South Africans, Indians, Icelanders, and Serbians accounted of 0.7% each. Regarding the religion of the respondents, 42.1% of them are Catholics, 21.1% are non-religious, 11.8% follow another Christian religion, 11.2% are Protestants, 5.9% represent the Christian Orthodox. While, 4.6% have chosen “Other”, their answerers consist of two spirituals and a Lutheran. Then Buddhists with 2.6% and a Hindu with 0.7%. Of the total number of respondents, 42.8% are married, 33.6% are single, while 23.7% are in a long-term relationship.

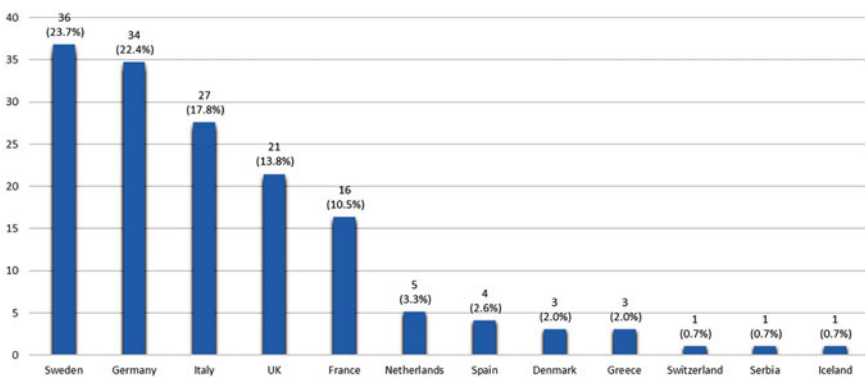


Fig. 2 Sample characteristics (country of residence)

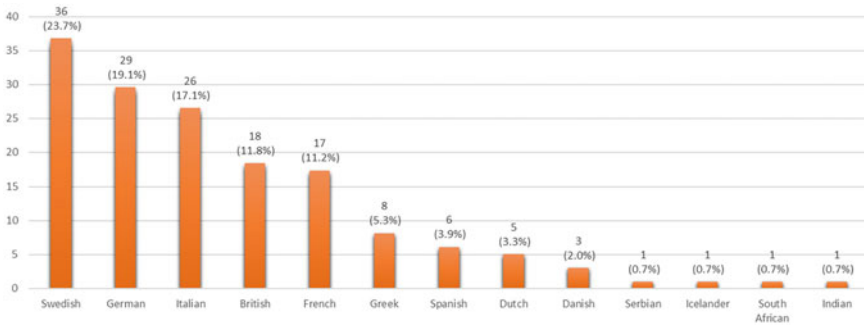


Fig. 3 Sample characteristics (nationality)

It is then observed that only 33.6% have children, while a large percentage of 66.4% say they have no children. Below are the tourists’ choices as to who they choose to travel with. Most answered that they like to travel with friends (35.5%), with their partner (31.6%) and with their family (22.4%). Then smaller percentages, those who travel alone (5.9%) and those who prefer traveling with organized groups (3.9%). Regarding the annual family income of the respondents, the largest percentage (44.7%) preferred not to answer. The immediately higher percentage (17.8%) indicates an annual income over € 50,000. Immediately after are those (13.8%) whose income ranges from 30,001–40,000 €, while follows the percentage (13.2%) which declares income 40,001–50,000 €. Finally, we have smaller percentages of 7.9% and 2.6% that declare income of 20,001–30,000 € and 0–20,000 €, respectively.

Concluding with the demographic data, the different types and dietary trends that exist and whether the respondents follow any of them will be examined. It seems that the vast majority of 96.7% do not follow a vegan diet, while only 3.3% are vegan. Also vegetarians cover 14.5%. Those who avoid gluten are 7.9%, while 92.1% do not avoid it. 17.9% follow a low fat diet. Finally, 22.4% of the respondents prefer organic products. Regarding accommodation, the majority prefers 4 * hotels (66.4%) followed by Airbnb (63.8%), 5 * hotels (32.9%) and 3-star hotels and below (25.7%). All-inclusive hotels account for (17.1%), and Bed and Breakfast (10.5%) (Fig. 4). The type of Breakfast that most people choose, 50% prefer the continental breakfast, 30.9% choose English breakfast, while there is a percentage of 13.2% who choose Greek breakfast. Finally, the answer “Other” consists of answers such as drink only coffee in the morning, not having breakfast, only fruit, or smoothies (vegan) (Fig. 5).

This section described the items of the administered questionnaires. The results of the alternative types of tourism are chosen by the respondents. 28.3% answered that choose sometimes gastronomic tourism, also 28.3% do not often choose gastronomic tourism, (21.7%) never, while in smaller percentages 15.8% and 5.9% choose this form most of the time or always respectively.

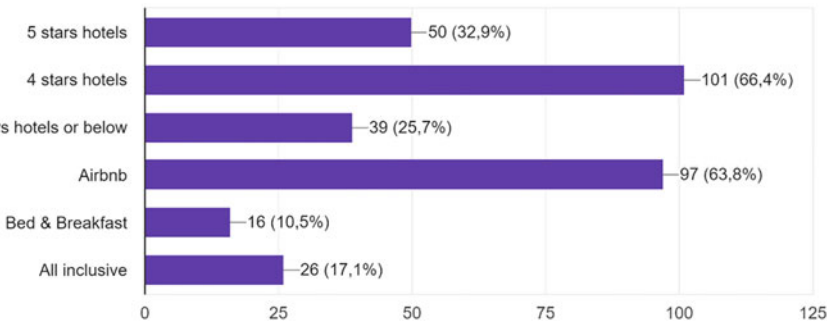
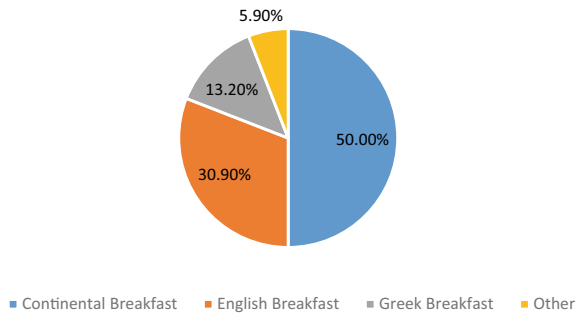


Fig. 4 Accommodation in travel destination

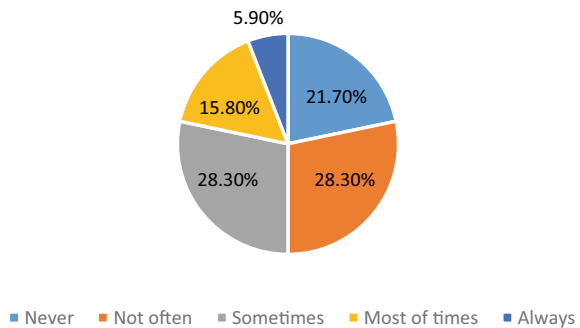
Fig. 5 Which type of breakfast do you prefer?



Q1: Do you choose gastronomic tourism and how often?

Regarding gastronomic tourism, a large percentage of 62.5% do not choose it at all as a type of tourism, followed by those who do not choose it often 22.4%, those who choose it sometimes 13.2% and those who choose it most times 2% (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6 Gastronomic tourism



Q2: Do you know what gastronomic tourism means?

115 people responded to the fresh products. 78 people consider Michelin-starred restaurants very important, while 59 people consider street food very important followed by those that chose luxury restaurants (51) and expensive food (36).

Q3: How important gastronomic tourism is for you?

The importance of gastronomic tourism for the respondents is quite shared, with most saying it's somewhat important (35.5%), 30.9% saying it's important, and 13.8% saying it's very important to them. Finally a small percentage of 3.3% does not give any importance to gastronomic tourism.

Q4: What characteristics define gastronomy for you?

In this question we try to find out how gastronomy is defined from the personal point of view of each visitor/tourist. 75.7% people responded to the fresh produce. 51.3% people consider Michelin-starred restaurants very important, while 38.8% people consider street food very important. Next are those who chose luxury restaurants 33.6% and expensive food 23.7% (Fig. 7).

Q5: I have visited a destination for its gastronomy?

Some people (33%) held a more neutral attitude in whether they have visited a destination for its gastronomy. 16% have visited a destination for this reason, and another 22% also support this view. While in percentages 16% and 13% do not seem to agree (Fig. 8).

Q6: Greece is a destination of gastronomic interest?

The majority are very happy with the gastronomic experience they had in Greece. 66 out of 152 people answered that they completely agree with this (44%), while another 72 people also agree (47%). Only 10 people had a more neutral attitude (6%) (Fig. 8).

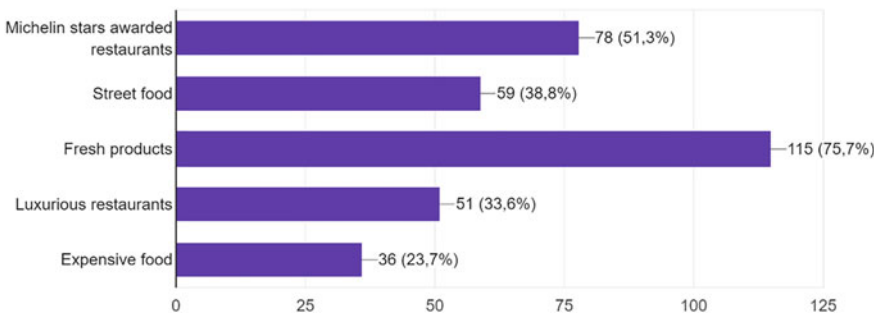


Fig. 7 Decision-making about gastronomy

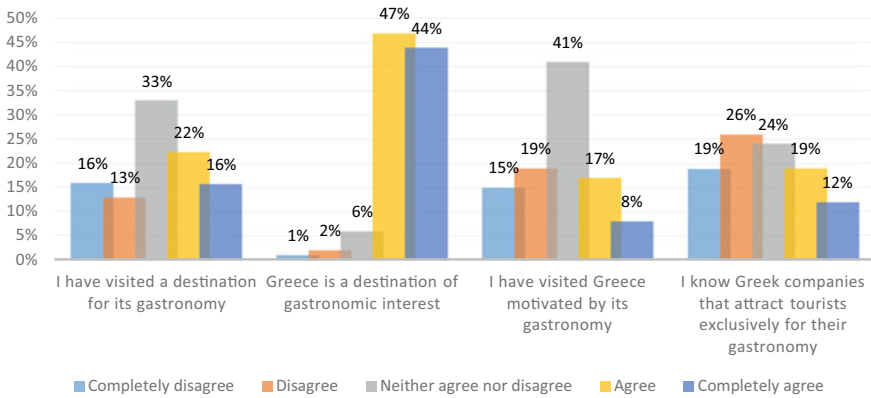


Fig. 8 Gastronomy destination

Q7: I have visited Greece motivated by its gastronomy?

Few people have visited Greece motivated by its gastronomy. These percentages are one 17% and one 8%. Again, it is observed that many have a more neutral opinion (41%). While 19% and 15% hardly agree at all and not at all respectively (Fig. 8).

Q8: I know Greek companies that attract tourists exclusively for their gastronomy?

Also, most of them notice that they do not know Greek companies exclusively for their gastronomy. 26% do not agree, while 19% do not agree at all. 37 people accounting for 24% are in the middle, while 19% agree and 12% completely agree (Fig. 8).

Q9: In which area have you eaten the best Greek food in Greece?

There is variety in the areas visited by our tourists with specific preferences from specific nationalities. In Crete, most people have eaten the best food (23.7%), while many acknowledge the food in Athens (18.4%). They are followed by Zakynthos (7.9%), Corfu (5.9%), and Mykonos (5.9%).

Slightly lower percentages are observed in Kefalonia (5.3%), Santorini (5.3%), and Sifnos (4.6%). Finally, very small percentages mention Kythira (2.6%), Lefkada (2%), Skiathos (2%), Ios (2%). With a percentage of 1.3% each, follow Ioannina, Kalamata, Ithaca, Mani, and Thessaloniki. While finally, there were answers that occupy 0.7% each. These are Andros, Halkidiki, Ikaria, Koufonisi, Nafplio, Naxos, Paros, Peloponnese, Pelion, Rhodes as well as “Northern, Central Greece, and Ionian Islands” and “It depends on the type of food” (Fig. 9).

Q11: How much money did you spend per person on your food? Daily budget on food?

Regarding Daily budget on food the amount spent by tourists for daily meals per person varies with most common answer the amount of 25–50 € (39.5%). 29.6%

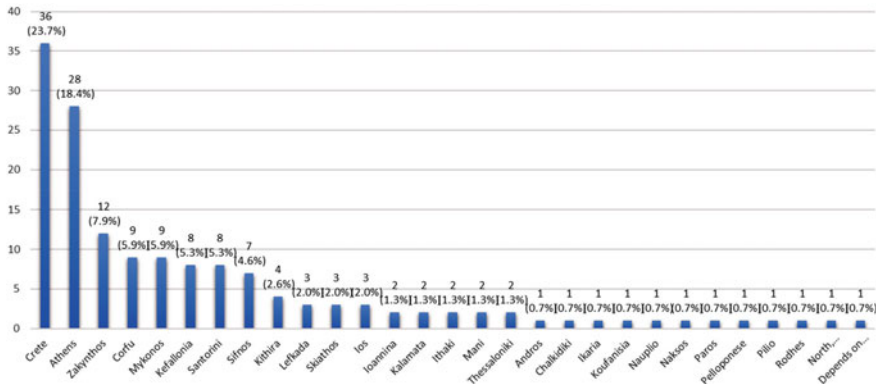


Fig. 9 In which area have you eaten the best Greek food in Greece

have spent 0–25 €, 26.3% between 50 and 75 € and finally only 4.6% between 75 and 100 €.

The next question concerns the most important Greek dishes. Unanimously, with a percentage of 76.3%, the village salad is first, while the souvlaki comes second with a percentage of 67.1% and the tzatziki comes third with a percentage of 50.7%. They are followed by moussaka 38.2%, spinach pie 27.6%, dolmathakia 13.8%, and courgettes-balls 13.2% (Fig. 10).

Q12: Choose the 3 most important Greek foods?

Based on the answers of the respondents about which Greek dishes they have tried, it was observed that 65.8% have tried moussaka, 51.3% have tried pastitsio, revithada has tried only 17.8%, wedding pilaf 21.7%, snails 17.1%, and sofrito only 7.9%. Next is the meat pie that 25.7% have tried, while 55.6% have tried Cretan dako. Almost everyone has tried Choriatiiki and souvlaki, with percentages of 99.3% and 86.2% respectively. Lachanodolmades has been tasted by 39.5%, while stuffed by 55.9%. In

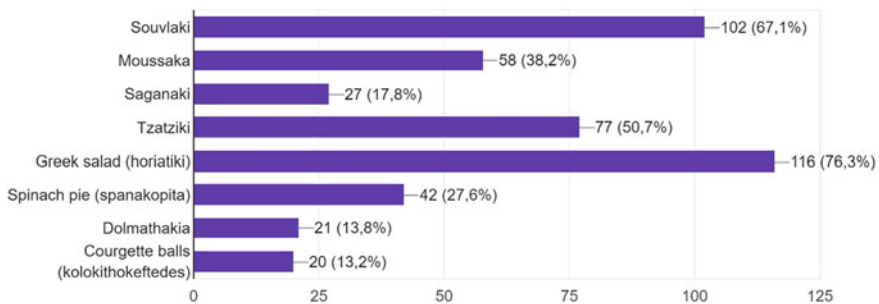


Fig. 10 Greek gastronomy products

contrast, cod pie (5.9%) and garlic cod 15.1% do not have high percentages. Finally, courgette-balls have a high-test rate 71.1%.

Q13: How did you find out about the gastronomy of Greece?

The means by which tourists were informed vary. First in the ranking, with a percentage of 54.6% is Instagram and second Facebook 38.2%. It is followed by Youtube 36.2%, Pinterest 32.9%, television 30.9%, the press 16.4%, Twitter 13.8% and radio 4.6% (Fig. 11). An important percentage is the answer “Other,” where the answers received were the following: There are those who did not know Greek food at all, those who knew it from their partner, because their origin is Greek even though they have not lived in Greece, by documentaries, colleagues, and tour guides. Most, however, knew about Greek gastronomy from friends 41.9% (Fig. 12).

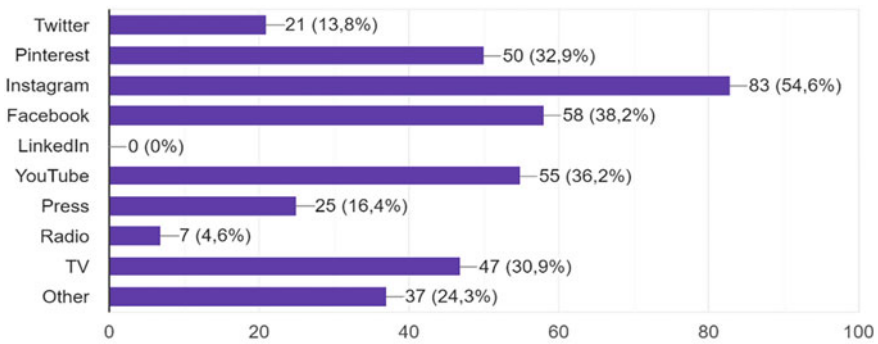


Fig. 11 Formal information sources about Greek gastronomy

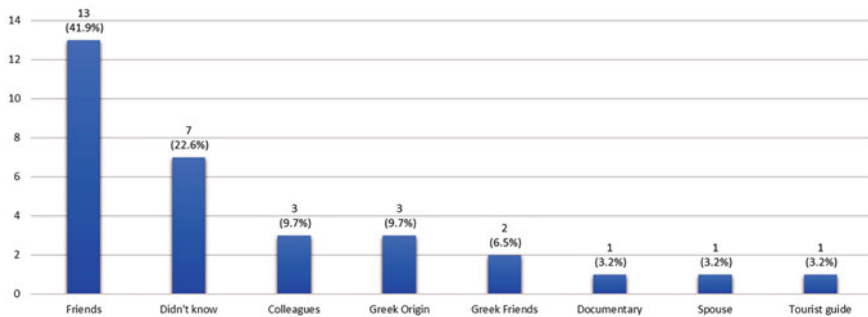


Fig. 12 Informal sources about Greek gastronomy (other option)

5 Discussion

Completing the research on gastronomic tourism in Greece and its contribution to destination marketing, the results obtained have positive and negative conclusions. Initially, in the answers to of tourism professionals, gastronomic tourism is more common in the areas of the respondents compared to other alternative types of tourism. However, there is a need for improvement and more emphasis should be given in order to further develop and promote gastronomic tourism. It was pointed that the development of gastronomy in the region could increase companies' turnover and government's revenues and more significant further promote the tourist destination. They did not mention particular obstacles to develop gastronomic tourism. Their personal efforts to implement it have had positive results. However, factors that make its development difficult have been identified the lack of funding and lack of strategic tourism planning. Tourists seem to seek the taste of Greek flavors, so it would be good to overcome the obstacles to offer them the entire experience. They believe that they offer as much as they can to provide a gastronomic experience that tourists are looking for.

Moreover, they are trained in new dietary trends and habits and apply these new tactics in practice and at a significant level. Of course, it is a not so good time for gastronomic tourism, as for any other type of tourism, due to the pandemic of Covid-19. Nevertheless, it might be a good time for a proper tourism redesign strategy resolving any fundamental problems that have arisen during the pandemic.

According to the majority, the success factors of gastronomic tourism, are mainly the hosting of a place, the strong internet presence, accessibility, and finally, the connection with tradition and cultural heritage. Especially for the latter's development, there could be the creation and implementation of a gastronomic map combined with archaeological and cultural excursions, since Greece is an ideal country to combine them having a wealth of archaeological and historical sites.

Tourism professionals who participated in the sample, underline that using the media (mainly: Instagram, Facebook, press, radio, etc.) is the best way to obtain the desired results (Halkiopoulos et al., 2021). However, they would spend more money to promote their businesses especially with innovative e-Tour Facilitator Platforms Supporting marketing strategies (Panteli et al., 2021).

Regarding tourists' survey the largest sample of tourists surveyed is aged 31–43 years, which means that they are at the most productive age category or at the age they already have a family or are preparing to create. This is proved by 42.8% who say they are married and 23.8% in a long-term relationship. It is also observed that a large percentage already have children (33.6%). The most significant percentage of the sample are Swedes, Germans, and Italians. Most say they are Catholics and prefer to travel with their partner or friends and then with their family.

It is impossible to draw a clear conclusion since many chose not to answer concerning family income. There is not a large percentage of tourists having particular eating habits, except for organic products (22.4%). In terms of accommodation, they prefer 4* hotels and Airbnb with continental breakfast. A small number of course

(13.2%), shows that some are familiar with the Greek breakfast and prefer it. So, this could be an incentive for its even greater promotion, since it could have a variety of Greek foods and options, greatly promoting Greek cuisine, and combining the organic and fresh products that one can find in many areas of Greece, highly preferred by tourists. Gastronomic tourism comes third in the preferences of tourists, first the cultural and then the nature loving. It makes sense since 30.9% have answered that they consider it very important, and 58 people have answered that they have visited a destination for its gastronomy. An excellent image for promoting Greek products is observed since 113 people consider Greece a destination of gastronomic interest. It is also observed that Crete and Athens are the predominant places for tourists who have tried and will eat good Greek food. Regarding the daily cost for the meals, there are not very high prices, since the highest percentages are the prices 0–25 € and 25–50 € and the vast majority had a high level of satisfaction regarding the culinary experience in Greece.

The three most promoted Greek dishes seem to be souvlaki, choriatiiki, and tzatziki, as they are the ones that the respondents have chosen as the most important of Greek gastronomy. The majority have tried the Greek salad, which stands out. Gastronomic tourism strengthens local identity (Sormaz et al., 2016). What is observed is that many local recipes such as (sofrito, revithada, meat pie, etc.) have not been particularly tried by tourists. So, observing that most people knew about the gastronomy of Greece through social media, maybe more effort should be made to promote local delicacies from various areas of Greece. A gastronomic lecture could be helpful to people coming to our country or a food festival with exclusively Greek food from all over Greece. Also, cooking schools and chefs can be trained, while complex foods with local flavor, aroma, and ingredients can be developed without jeopardizing the local culture and tradition.

6 Conclusion

Although gastronomic tourism is widely established in the highly competitive worldwide tourism sector, scholarly research indicates that it is still underdeveloped. From the perspective of food consumption, it is critical to understand the needs, desires, and wishes of tourists, both for hosting organizations and tourism personnel, as well as for the tourists themselves. As a result, the hospitality industry requires an in-depth understanding of the elements that influence tourists' food intake and how they finally choose culinary products. The purpose of this study was to clarify the profile of tourist consumer behavior through the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, while also capturing cognitive elements, specifically how tourists make decisions about culinary tourism and tourist destinations. The model offered in this study clarified the emotional, functional, attitude, and social values that influence tourist behavior and provided a complete explanation of tourist food, their motives, and sources of satisfaction. Tourism food consumption patterns, tourism prospects, and sociological aspects were all incorporated into a framework in this study in

order to discover the most critical factors influencing the behavior and marketing of tourism food.

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