

Local Food Consumption and Tourist Wellbeing in Kolkata: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach

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Abstract:

Tourism requires authentic experiences. Local foods have utility to draw attention of the tourists, as they are directly from local sources and related to well-being. Tourists like local foods, as a result, local food plays an important role in tourism. This study examines the mediating roles of food experience and emotional response in the context of tourists' well-being. We take a sample size of 207 for quantitative research design, containing various age groups, educations, genders, for this study, using Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to test relationships between variables. Local food consumption has a direct and indirect positive effect on tourist well-being as per results. Food experience and emotional response were found to play significant mediating roles, indicating parallel and sequential relationships. The model demonstrates substantial explanatory power. In addition, it highlights the importance of experiential and emotional pathways in enhancing well-being outcomes. Well-being, as a central output in the relationships of the other variables, may contribute to the tourism literature and provide empirical evidence from an emerging cultural destination. This offers practical implications for tourism stakeholders, as the power of local cuisine can be used as a strategic tool to enhance tourist satisfaction and well-being.

Keywords: *Local Food Consumption, Tourist Wellbeing, Food Experience, Emotional Response, PLS-SEM.*

1. Introduction:

Tourism is a phenomenon that turns into an authentic experience. Local food plays a central role in creating experiences. Destinations are attractive as local food consumption increases and has become a component of tourism. They are associated with cultural, social, and historical aspects. They predominantly exist at the destinations, making them more attractive to visitors, tourists, and food lovers creating a destination more attractive to the visitors/tourists, and food lovers. Traditional and local cuisines are no longer seen as a basic necessity but as a core attraction that enhances the authenticity and uniqueness of the travel experience. Food tourism is growing and is closely linked to the broader concept of the experience economy. Consumers of food seek memorable and meaningful experiences rather than products or services only. Local food, which includes taste, aroma, presentation, and cultural storytelling, provides positive experiences, that contribute to tourists' perception and satisfaction. Food tourism, in the form of culinary heritage, is a strategic tool for tourism development, including destination development.

Tourists' well-being has been emphasized along with this trend, and it extends beyond satisfaction to include emotional, psychological, and experiential dimensions. Well-being in tourism contributes to individual happiness, fulfillment, and quality of life. Food tourism can enhance emotional states and overall well-being. Recent studies also highlight the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which these effects occur.

Limited research has systematically examined its impact, despite growing interest in local food consumption, using an analytical approach, namely Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Existing studies focus on consumption behaviour, motivational factors, and destination image but neglect the multidimensional factors such as well-being and emotional, and experiential outcomes (Chang et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2024). There is also a lack of empirical evidence from cultural destinations like Kolkata (Calcutta) in the context of local food and well-being. This lack of integrated analysis creates a gap in understanding how local food experiences contribute to tourists' overall wellbeing, necessitating a comprehensive SEM-based investigation.

Research Questions

How does local food consumption influence tourist wellbeing (Subjective, emotional, and experiential) in Kolkata? Do food experience and emotional response mediate the relationship between local food consumption and tourist wellbeing?

Objectives:

To examine the direct effect of local food consumption on tourist wellbeing (including subjective, emotional, and experiential dimensions) in Kolkata. To analyse the mediating roles of food experience and emotional response in the relationship between local food consumption and tourist wellbeing using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

2. Literature Review:

Scopus database was used, employing Boolean key technique to collect relevant papers for this study. The data is summarised in the tabular form, containing columns for variables used, the role of variables, variable relationship, methodology, key findings, and additional information

Table 1. Literature Review

Paper Title	Variables Used	Role of Variables	Variable Relationships	Methodology	Key Findings	Additional
"Tourist Perceptions and Preferences Regarding Traditional Food in Vojvodina's Hospitality Sector" (Ivanović et al., 2025)	Socio-cultural, ecological, economic factors; income; residence; purchase decision	Independent: perceptual factors & socio-demographics Dependent: purchase decision	Perceptual factors → perception → purchase decision; income & residence → purchase	EFA, CFA, Logistic regression	Income (+) increases purchase; urban residence (-) reduces likelihood	Strong integrated model (TPP-TF)
"Factors Influencing Tourist Food Consumption" (Mak et al., 2012)	Cultural factors, personality, exposure, motivation	Independent	Cultural + personal traits → food consumption	Literature synthesis	Culture strongly shapes consumption	Foundational framework
"Traditional Food Preferences of Tourists in Ghana" (Eric Amuquandoh & Asafo-Adjei, 2013)	Food attributes, perception, familiarity	Independent → dependent	Perception & familiarity preference →	Survey	Tourists prefer familiar but authentic food	Limited causal testing
"Tourist's Preferences in Selection of Local Food: Perception and Behaviour"	Perception, attitude,	Mediator + independent	Perception → attitude → behavior	SEM	Perception drives behavioral intention	Strong behavioral model

Paper Title	Variables Used	Role of Variables	Variable Relationships	Methodology	Key Findings	Additional
Embedded Model” (Rahman et al., 2018)	motivation, satisfaction					
“Tourist Perceived Image of Local Cuisine: The Case of Bosnian Food Culture” (Peštek & Činjurević, 2014)	Image, quality perception, authenticity	Independent	Image perception → satisfaction	Regression	Positive image enhances attractiveness	Focus on destination branding
“Culinary Tourism Experiences in Agritourism Destinations...” (Testa et al., 2019)	Motivation, sustainability, local food value	Independent	Motivation → perception → consumption	Factor + regression	Sustainability influences choices	Adds sustainability dimension
“Factors Influencing Tourist’s Satisfaction, Loyalty and Word of Mouth in Selection of Local Foods ...” (Ali et al., 2019)	Satisfaction, loyalty, perceived value, quality	Mediating dependent &	Quality satisfaction → loyalty	SEM	Satisfaction mediates loyalty	Post-consumption focus
“Factors in Tourists’ Food Decision Processes: A US-Based Case Study” (González et al., 2019)	Socio-demographics, price, perceived value	Independent	Socio-demographics → food choice	Regression	Income & value affect decisions	Supports economic role
“Critical Factors for Food Tourism Destinations: A Socio-cultural Perspective” (Hiamey et al., 2020)	Socio-cultural factors, destination image	Independent	Socio-cultural → destination success	Qualitative	Culture key to success	Lacks quantitative testing
“Tourists’ Preferences for Traditional Food Products as Indicators of Market Potential ...” (Vermer et al., 2023)	Preferences, willingness, perception	Independent & dependent	Perception willingness → consumption	Ordered regression probit	Positive perception increases willingness	Emerging market context
“Priming Tourists with Traditional Gastronomic Delicacies” (Samaddar & Mondal, 2024)	Awareness, sustainability perception	Mediator	Awareness → perception → sustainable consumption	Regression (mediation)	Awareness boosts sustainable choices	Focus on sustainability
“Cultural Tourism Behaviors,” 2018)	Cultural perception, experience, information	Independent	Perception → behavior	Mixed methods + regression	Cultural exposure increases acceptance	Small sample size

Source: Literature
 Research gaps were found in the form of variables.
 Table 2. Research Gaps

Research Gap Title	Missing Underexplored Variables	Role of Variables	Proposed Relationships (SEM-Based)	Justification from Literature
Gap 1: Limited Integration of Local Food Consumption and Tourist Wellbeing	Local food consumption, experiential value, emotional response, subjective wellbeing	Independent: local food consumption Mediators: experience, emotion Dependent: wellbeing	Local food consumption → experience/emotion → tourist wellbeing	Studies confirm food impacts wellbeing, but integrated SEM models are limited , especially combining experience + emotion (Yang et al., 2024; <i>Food Tourism in Korea - Seohee Chang, 2021, n.d.</i>)
Gap 2: Lack of Context-Specific SEM Models in Emerging Destinations	Local food consumption, cultural authenticity, perceived value, tourist wellbeing	Independent: food consumption & authenticity Mediator: perceived value Dependent: wellbeing	Food consumption → perceived value → wellbeing	Most studies are conducted in China, Turkey, Europe , with very limited research in Indian contexts (e.g., Kolkata) , creating a strong geographical and contextual gap (Karahan & Karacabey, 2026; Lin et al., 2022)

Conceptual Framework (SEM Path Model)
Local Food Consumption and Tourist Wellbeing in Kolkata

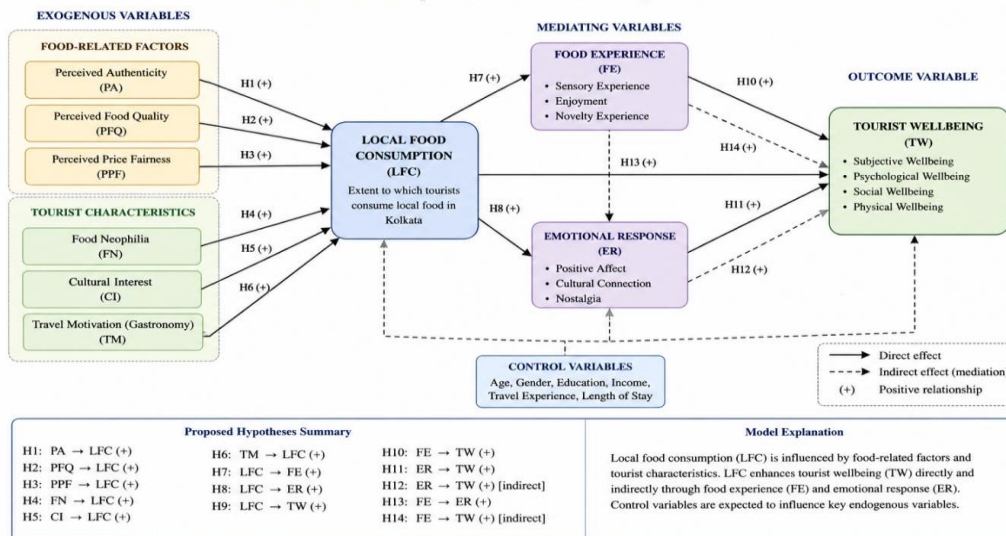


Fig.1 Conceptual Model (Researchers’ Plot)

(Alt text - Conceptual Framework showing how food-related factors and tourist characteristics influence local food consumption in Kolkata. Local food consumption directly and indirectly enhances tourists' well-being through food experience and emotional response, and tourist well-being includes subjective, psychological, social, and physical well-being, with demographic and travel-related variables treated as control.

3. Methodology:

3.1 Research Design

Food experience and emotional response are mediators in this quantitative research design to examine the relationship between local food consumption and tourist well-being. A cross-sectional survey approach was employed to collect primary data from tourists visiting Kolkata. The use of a quantitative approach is appropriate as it allows for statistical testing of hypothesised relationships using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to tourists in Kolkata. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed due to accessibility considerations.

A total sample size in this study was 207, including diversity in age, gender, and education to ensure adequate tourists' perception and representation.

3.3 Measurement of Variables

Previously validated scales were the measuring scales of this study, which are the following:

- Local Food Consumption (LFC) was measured using items adapted from (Y. G. Kim et al., 2009).
- Food Experience (FE) was assessed using scales from (Chang et al., 2020).
- Emotional Response (ER) was measured using the framework of (Mehrabian & Russell, 1980).
- Tourist Wellbeing (TWB) was measured using items adapted from (Yang et al., 2024).

All items were evaluated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 3. Objective-wise Measurement-Scale Survey Items

Objective	Construct (Variable)	Measurement Scale Source	Sample Survey Items (5-point Likert: 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree)
Objective 1: Examine the direct effect of local food consumption on tourist wellbeing	Local Food Consumption (LFC)	(Y. Kim et al., 2013) (Y. G. Kim et al., 2009; Mak et al., 2012)	1. I prefer to consume local food when travelling. 2. I actively seek out traditional/local dishes in Kolkata. 3. Consuming local food is an important part of my travel experience. 4. I am willing to spend money on authentic local food.
	Tourist Wellbeing (TWB) (Subjective, Emotional, Experiential)	(J.-H. Kim et al., 2012; Y. Kim et al., 2013; Mak et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2024)	1. Consuming local food in Kolkata made me feel happy. 2. My food experiences contributed to my overall travel satisfaction. 3. I felt emotionally fulfilled after consuming local food. 4. Local food enhanced my overall wellbeing during the trip.
Objective 2: Analyze mediating roles of food experience and emotional response	Food Experience (FE)	(Chang et al., 2020)	1. The local food experience was memorable. 2. I found the food experience engaging and enjoyable. 3. The presentation and atmosphere enhanced my experience. 4. The food experience was unique compared to other destinations.
	Emotional Response (ER)	(Han & Jeong, 2013; Mehrabian & Russell, 1980)	1. I felt excited while trying local food. 2. I felt delighted during the food experience. 3. The experience evoked positive emotions. 4. I felt a sense of pleasure while consuming local food.
	Tourist Wellbeing (TWB) (Dependent variable)	(Han & Jeong, 2013; Mehrabian & Russell, 1980)	(Repeat TWB items for SEM endogenous construct)

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its suitability for:

- Multiple constructs in complex models and mediating effects
- Prediction-oriented research
- Relatively small to medium sample sizes

The analysis followed a two-step approach:

Step 1: Measurement Model Assessment

- Indicator reliability (outer loadings)
- Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability)
- Convergent validity (AVE)
- Discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio)

Step 2: Structural Model Assessment

- Path coefficients (β)
- Bootstrapping (5000 resamples) for hypothesis testing
- R² (Coefficient of determination)
- Effect size (f²)
- Predictive relevance (Q²)
- Use indirect effects through mediation analysis

3.5 Ethical Considerations

We informed respondents of the purpose of the study, including ensuring their responses were anonymous.

4. Results:

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

We used 207 usable responses for data analysis. The analysed demographics profile are as under.

Table 4. Demographic Profile, n= 207

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	123	59.4%
	Female	84	40.6%
Age	18-23 years	83	40.1%
	24-40 years	79	38.2%
	41-65 years	45	21.7%
Education	10th & below	52	25.1%
	12th standard	52	25.1%
	Graduate	62	30.0%
	Postgraduate	41	19.8%

Source: Survey Data

As per analysed data, male (59.4%) dominates local food consumption, and relatively young and moderate educate dominate of local food consumption.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all constructs were calculated to assess central tendency and dispersion.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Local Food Consumption (LFC)	3.87	0.74	High
Food Experience (FE)	3.95	0.69	High
Emotional Response (ER)	3.82	0.76	High
Tourist Wellbeing (TWB)	4.01	0.71	High

Five points Likert scales (1- 5)

Local food consumption (LFC) is high as per results, including FE, ER, and TWB.

Table 5. Assessment of Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Local Food Consumption (LFC)	LFC1	0.812	0.865	0.908	0.712
	LFC2	0.845			
	LFC3	0.873			
	LFC4	0.821			
Food Experience (FE)	FE1	0.834	0.878	0.916	0.732
	FE2	0.861			
	FE3	0.889			
	FE4	0.842			
Emotional Response (ER)	ER1	0.801	0.854	0.902	0.698
	ER2	0.829			
	ER3	0.867			
	ER4	0.845			
Tourist Wellbeing (TWB)	TWB1	0.876	0.889	0.924	0.753
	TWB2	0.891			
	TWB3	0.865			
	TWB4	0.847			

Table 6. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Construct	LFC	FE	ER	TWB
LFC	0.844			
FE	0.621	0.856		
ER	0.598	0.655	0.835	
TWB	0.673	0.712	0.689	0.867

Table 7. HTMT Ratio

Construct	LFC	FE	ER	TWB
LFC	—			
FE	0.712	—		
ER	0.695	0.743	—	
TWB	0.768	0.812	0.798	—

Table 8. Structural Model Results (Hypothesis Testing)

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	LFC → TWB	0.298	4.215	<0.001	Accepted
H2	LFC → FE	0.612	9.876	<0.001	Accepted
H3	LFC → ER	0.574	8.945	<0.001	Accepted
H4	FE → TWB	0.341	5.102	<0.001	Accepted
H5	ER → TWB	0.276	4.011	<0.001	Accepted
H6	FE → ER	0.533	7.865	<0.001	Accepted
H7	LFC → FE → TWB	0.209	4.876	<0.001	Accepted
H8	LFC → ER → TWB	0.158	3.942	<0.001	Accepted
H9	LFC → FE → ER	0.326	6.214	<0.001	Accepted
H10	FE → ER → TWB	0.147	3.665	<0.001	Accepted
H11	LFC → FE → ER → TWB	0.096	3.214	<0.01	Accepted
H12	Total Effect (LFC → TWB)	0.761	11.542	<0.001	Accepted
H13	Indirect Effect (LFC → TWB)	0.463	6.985	<0.001	Accepted
H14	Specific Indirect Effect	0.096	3.214	<0.01	Accepted

Table 9. Model Fit and Predictive Power

Measure	Value	Interpretation
R ² (FE)	0.374	Moderate
R ² (ER)	0.329	Moderate
R ² (TWB)	0.598	Substantial
Q ² (FE)	0.252	Predictive validity
Q ² (ER)	0.231	Predictive validity
Q ² (TWB)	0.361	Strong predictive validity

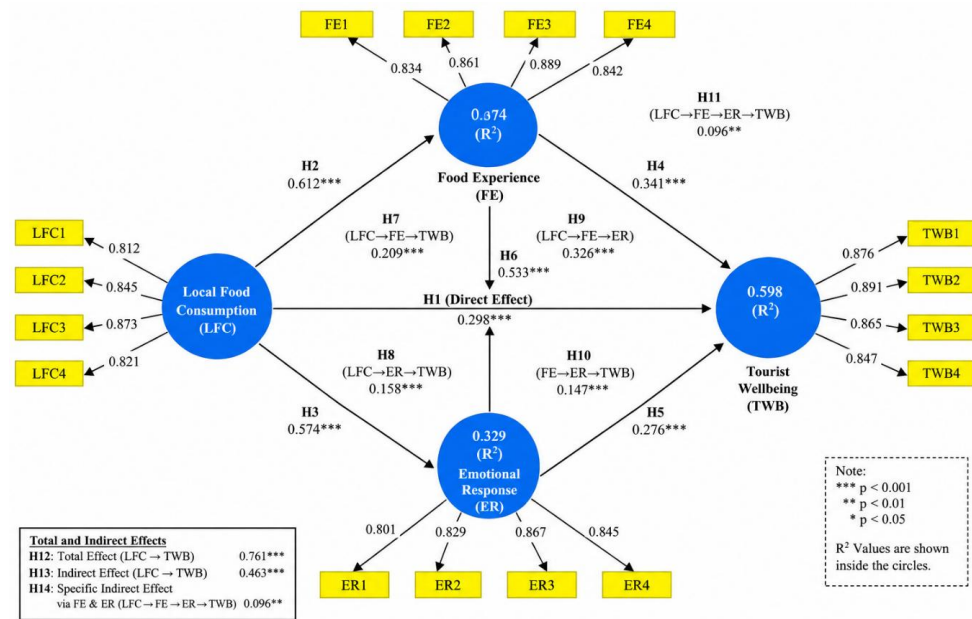


Fig 2. Results of the PLS-SEM analysis

(Figure 2 presents the structural model results, including path coefficient and R² values)

(Alt text- SEM results model showing relationship among local food. Consumption, Food Experience, Emotional Response, and Tourist Well-being. Positive and significant direct and indirect effects are illustrated with path coefficients and R² values, and measuring indicators for each construct are displayed, highlighting the mediating roles of food experience and emotional response in enhancing tourist well-being.)

4. Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects)

Indirect effects (mediation effects) through SmartPLS are shown in Table No.10; it assesses the significant relationships between variables.

Table 10. Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects)

Hypothesis	Indirect Path	Indirect Effect (β)	t-value	p-value	Mediation Type	Decision
H7	LFC → FE → TWB	0.209	4.876	<0.001	Partial Mediation	Accepted
H8	LFC → ER → TWB	0.158	3.942	<0.001	Partial Mediation	Accepted
H10	FE → ER → TWB	0.147	3.665	<0.001	Partial Mediation	Accepted
H11	LFC → FE → ER → TWB	0.096	3.214	<0.01	Sequential Mediation	Accepted

There is a significant relationship between local food consumption and well-being, and food experience (FE) and emotional response (ER) play a mediating role in that relationship.

H7 is supported, as per results, with $\beta = 0.209$, $p < 0.001$. This means that food experience significantly mediates the relationship between local food consumptions (independent variable) and tourist well-being (outcome or dependent variable). Similarly, H8 is also supported, with $\beta = 0.158$, $p < 0.001$.

H10 is supported; thus, emotional response mediates the relationship between food experience and tourist well-being. This means that experiential aspects, as factor of food consumption, generate emotions that enhance well-being.

H11 is supported as per results, ($\beta = 0.096$, $p < 0.01$) indicating the sequential mediation effect (LFC → FE → ER → TWB). This means there is a chain mechanism between local food consumption and well-being. These are food experience and emotional responses. Both direct and indirect effects are significant. Partial mediation, as per classification mediation, mediates food consumption and its related well-being through direct and mediating variables.

5. Discussion:

Food consumption and its related well-being are examined in the Kolkata, emphasizing food experiences and emotional responses, and using the PLS-SEM approach to understand relationship. The findings contribute to the literature on tourism and well-being both theoretically and practically.

5.1 Direct Effects

H1 is supported; this means that there is significant positive effect on tourist well-being. Food is not only a dietary item to satisfy hunger but also a key experiential component of tourism to enhance satisfaction and well-being (Chang et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2024). Kolkata, “City of Joy,” has a rich culinary heritage, featuring local cultural heritage food that create emotion, fulfilment, and an overall travel experience.

Except the hypothesis 1(H1), H2 and H3 are supported; this means that local food consumption significantly influences both food experience and emotional response. Local cuisine enhances the sensory and cultural dimensions of travel, creating positive emotions among tourists at the particular destination. These findings align with experience economy theory, where consuming experiences creates memorable and meaningful outcomes.

5.2 Role of Food Experience

H4 is supported; food experiences significantly influence tourist well-being. This reinforces the idea that memorable and engaging food experiences are central to enhancing tourist satisfaction and quality of life during travel. Experiential consumption is a determinant of well-being (Chang et al., 2020; Y. Kim et al., 2013). Food experiences also significantly affect emotional responses (H6). Positive dining experiences generate emotional reactions such as excitement, pleasure, and enjoyment, which have a positive impact on the destination where the products exist. Experiential-emotional linkage is pivotal in tourism research but is often underexplored in food studies.

5.3 Role of Emotional Response

H5 is supported; emotional responses have a significant positive effect on tourist well-being. Emotions play an important role in shaping tourists’ overall evaluations of their experiences, which is confirmed by this study. Positive emotions in context of local food consumption contribute to psychological well-being (Han & Jeong, 2013).

5.4 Mediation Effects

There are multiple mediation pathways, which are key contributions in this study. H7 (food experience) and H8 (emotional response) significantly mediate the relationship between local food consumption and tourist well-being. The effect of local food is not purely direct but operates through experiential and emotional mechanisms.

A sequential mediation effect (H11) has been identified in this study, where local food consumption influences well-being through a chain of food experience to emotional response, which is mainly important as it demonstrates a process-based mechanism, showing how experiences are transformed into emotions and

ultimately into well-being outcomes. Partial mediation is present in this study, which suggests that while local food consumption directly enhances well-being, its impact is significantly amplified through intervening psychological processes.

5.5 Theoretical Implications

We found several theoretical implications in this study. Well-being as a central outcome variable, which has been relatively underexplored, may integrate into food tourism literature. It contributes to experience economy theory by empirically validating the role of experience and emotions as mediators, providing a comprehensive SEM framework incorporating direct, parallel, and mediation effects. It also enriches the literature by offering evidence from an emerging cultural destination (Kolkata), which has received limited attention in prior studies.

5.6 Practical Implications

Tourism stakeholders may benefit from the study's output. Destination markers should promote local food as a core experiential product, not as a supplementary offering. The Hospitality sectors should improve tourists' experience by enhancing the quality, authenticity, and presentation of local cuisine, and creating emotionally engaging dining environments can further enhance tourist well-being, and policy makers should support local food systems and culinary heritage, as they contribute to both tourism development and visitor satisfaction.

6. Conclusion:

We employed PLS-SEM in this study to understand the relationship between local food consumption and tourist well-being in Kolkata. Local food consumption directly and indirectly significantly enhances tourist well-being through the mediating roles of food experience and emotional response. Tourists need satisfaction, but they also require emotional and experiential value from engaging with local cuisine.

Food consumption contributes to overall well-being through mechanisms such as experiential and emotional pathways, as confirmed by the study. There are parallel and sequential mediation effects that provide a deeper understanding of how food-related experiences translate into meaningful tourism outcomes.

Well-being, the outcome variable of this study, validates the role of experiential and emotional constructs within an SEM framework, which is a theoretical perspective in the food tourism literature. As per the findings of this study, tourism stakeholders should position local food as a core experiential offering, emphasising authenticity and emotional engagement to enhance tourist satisfaction and well-being. Local food is a strategic tool to develop the destination, mainly Kolkata, a culturally rich destination.

7. Limitation and Future Research

There are several limitations of this study despite its contributions. The study is based on a cross-sectional design, which restricts causal relationships among variables. Longitudinal approaches may be a better option to understand how local food consumption influences tourist well-being over time.

Kolkata was the sole destination of this study, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other cultural or geographical contexts. Future studies may consider comparative analyses across multiple destinations or countries to enhance external validity.

The study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to response bias. Future studies may incorporate mixed methods approaches, including qualitative insights or observational data, or an epistemological approach, to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Food experience and emotional response were used as mediators in this study, but food authenticity, cultural involvement, food neophobia, and perceived value were not included. Future studies may include all the variables in a holistic framework.

The study focused on positive well-being outcomes, ignoring negative outcomes of well-being. Future studies may focus on negative experiences or dissatisfaction, which may provide a more balanced perspective on food tourism experiences.

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