

Factors that influence tourists for ecogastronomic destinations

Fatores que influenciam os turistas para destinos ecogastronômicos

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Abstract

This study aims to measure how the intention to visit eco-gastronomic destinations could be influenced by socially responsible consumption, social influence and eating habits. Therefore, it is of a quantitative nature and the online survey research strategy is used. The data, in turn, are analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). In general, the results demonstrate that the constituent demand of this potential tourism segment does not seem to be based on socially and environmentally responsible consumption habits, at the same time that its decisions are not based on opinions and social norms. It is also noticed that potential consumers tend to be indifferent towards the food aspect in the formulation of their visiting interest. Therefore, the main contribution of this research is the suggestion of pleasure and experience, striking elements of tourism, as some of the factors that can override central arguments of eco-gastronomy, since it is associated with tourist destinations.

Keywords: gastronomic destination; eco-gastronomy; socially responsible consumption; social influence; tourist eating habits.

Resumo

Este estudo objetivou mensurar de que maneira a intenção de visitar destinos ecogastronômicos poderia ser influenciada pelo consumo socialmente responsável, influência social e hábitos alimentares. Para tanto, sua natureza foi quantitativa e a estratégia de pesquisa utilizada foi o *survey online*. Os dados, por sua vez, foram tratados por meio da Modelagem de Equações Estruturais (MEE). Em linhas gerais, os resultados demonstram que a demanda constituinte desse potencial segmento turístico parece não ter como base os hábitos de consumo sócio e ambientalmente responsáveis, ao mesmo tempo em que não baseia as suas decisões nas opiniões e normativas sociais. Também foi percebido que os consumidores potenciais costumam ser indiferentes com o aspecto alimentício na formulação do seu interesse de visita. Logo, a principal contribuição da pesquisa está na sugestão do prazer e da experiência, elementos marcantes do turismo, como alguns dos fatores que podem sobrepor argumentos centrais da ecogastronomia uma vez que ela está associada aos destinos turísticos.

Palavras-chave: destino gastronômico; ecogastronomia; consumo socialmente responsável; influência social; hábitos alimentares do turista.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Local food is an important development attribute, given that it is unique and assists in promoting the location (ALDERIGHI; BIANCHI; LOZENZINI, 2016). Thus, regional cuisine can be a motivating factor for visitors (BERBEL-PINEDA *et al.*, 2019). In the midst of this scenario, gastronomic destinations emerge, using regional food as an incentive to tourist practices.

In recent years, however, consumer behavior has undergone some transformations, especially socio-environmental ones, a situation that is no different when it comes to food consumption. There is an increasing concern about the healthiness of food (BEVILACQUA; SILVA; SILVA, 2018) and, consequently, an accentuation of a more sustainable production system (CASTRO NETO *et al.*, 2010; NASCIMENTO; COSTA; OLIVEIRA, 2015). Faced with this new perspective, in line with global tourism trends, the phenomenon of eco-gastronomy emerged (SCHNEIDER, 2018).

The aforementioned phenomenon originates from the slow food movement, which represents the union of ethics and the pleasure of eating. Thus, it restores food's cultural dignity, protection of vegetal and animal species and of the typical regional cuisine, and proposes a revision in the search for pleasure in food (SLOW FOOD, 2007). This concerns not only the environment, but also culture and food production in the tourist destination (SCHNEIDER, 2018). These places give preference to native ingredients, absent of pesticides, in addition to prioritizing inputs from family farmers. In this way, eco-gastronomic destinations seek to attract visitors interested in local sustainability (GIZELAK-KOTULSKA *et al.*, 2011), being considered an alternative model to conventional tourism (BLANCO, 2011).

In these destinations, organic production and sustainable local

development represent significant values (CASTRO NETO *et al.*, 2010). Thus, they may be more likely to attract consumers who practice socially responsible consumption (HASFORD; FARMER, 2016; PEREIRA *et al.*, 2017). This is because, in these cases, individuals are more willing to make ecologically conscious purchasing decisions, opting, in general, for products with socio-environmental appeals (LAU, 2010). The demand, therefore, is made up of subjects who are interested in purchasing non-degrading activities (IRLENBUSCH; SAXLER, 2019), as proposed by eco-gastronomic destinations.

Furthermore, it is also assumed that the intention to visit eco-gastronomic destinations is affected by social influence. This is because, according to Batista and Lima (2013), for example, individuals inserted in environments with social and environmental concerns tend to express this behavior when choosing and consuming food. In this way, they may give preference to organic and sustainable production, perceiving gastronomy as an element that modifies social and cultural relations (BERBEL-PINEDA *et al.*, 2019), characteristics that are similar to the ideals of eco-gastronomy.

Finally, it is considered that the constituent demand of the destinations in question is influenced by the travelers' eating habits. Some studies, such as that by Pinheiro (2008), provide evidence that this attribute can be decisive in consumer behavior. When considering that, in the case of tourist destinations, the choices are formed by the most diverse factors, among which are the social and psychological ones, the eating routine of individuals may influence tourist choices and practices (CARDOSO *et al.*, 2015). Thus, the tasting of regional cuisine can be an important attraction (YEONG; ANITA, 2012), especially in eco-gastronomic destinations.

The market contribution of this research stems from the investigation of a phenomenon with potential for sustainable development for the localities. As they

constitute a counterpoint to the degrading models of conventional tourism, ecogastronomic destinations deserve greater attention on the part of scholars. From an academic point of view, this study demonstrates originality by investigating together three constructs that, although have already been investigated by the academic field, have not yet been researched in an integrated manner. Thus, this article aims to investigate how the intention to visit an ecogastronomic destination can be influenced by socially responsible consumption (SRC), the social influence on food consumption (SI) and tourist eating habits (TEH).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Gastronomic Destinations

From a semantic point of view, gastronomy refers to the traditional food of a given region, while destinations refer to the places to which one wants to arrive. Therefore, gastronomic destinations can be understood as the places one wants to go in order to enjoy traditional foods. In these cases, food is responsible for boosting destinations, promoting, for example, local production, culinary festivals and restaurants (ELLIS; PARQUE; KIM; YEOMAN, 2018). However, it is usually concretized in situations where destinations contain added historical and cultural values (HILLEL; BELHASSEN; SHANI, 2013).

In this sense, Alderighi, Bianchi and Lorenzini (2016) highlight that agriculture and regional cuisine are important attributes for the tourism development of a region, especially since they can result in uniqueness and sustainability. Thus, an effective communication work in order to promote the cultural resources of destinations, among which is gastronomy, can help to leverage the activity in a given location (COHEN; AVIELI, 2004). However, managers need to deal with some issues that may be intervening, such as food preferences and customs that are natural to

visitors and may differ from local culture (SENGEL *et al.*, 2015).

In addition, it is noteworthy that cuisine plays a prominent role in travel. Through stimulating the senses, such as sight, smell and taste, it corresponds to one third of total spending on tourist visits (SENGEL *et al.*, 2015). This occurs in such a way that, according to Alderighi, Bianchi and Lozenzini (2016), gastronomic products play a significant role in the economic development of tourist destinations. Although most destinations still explore this segment at a secondary level, its potential as a motivator of activity is noticeable (LÓPEZ-GUZMÁN; CAÑIZARES, 2012).

In some cases, culinary menus are enshrined as cultural heritage in certain locations. Thus, gastronomy is a symbol of cultural expression, showing the organism of the local community to visitors (PECCINI, 2013). Once established as a native resource of a region, the culinary is usually appropriated by the tourism activity. Thus, according to Long (2018), gastronomic tourism focuses its attention on the originality of this resource, offering tourists an immersion in the local culture through flavors.

2.1.1 Eco-gastronomy

The concept of eco-gastronomy was developed by Carlo Petrini and members of the Slow Food movement, with the proposal of promoting more sustainable and healthy food models (RUBIM, 2013). The development of this movement is a counterpoint to the Fast Food culture, given the negative impacts that it can generate on the community due to the close connection with the local food production system (MIELI; MURDOCH, 2002). Still according to the same authors, it is assumed that typical products are important characteristics of cultural distinction, therefore they must be cultivated and protected.

Thus, native foods are considered endemic, given that they are part of the local ecology and have been socially and historically produced, demarcating a locality (SCHNEIDER, 2018). There is, therefore, a fight against its destructive consumption, estimating a socially and environmentally conscious posture (PIETRYKOWSKI, 2004). It proposes a philosophy of life that values the act of eating, teaches the pleasures of flavors, recognizes the origins and producers responsible for food and respects social groups (REJOWSKI; RUBIM, 2013).

In this scenario, the term eco-gastronomy appears as the union of ethics and the pleasure of eating. Its aim is to bring together respect and interest in gastronomic culture, in order to support native food cultivation, agricultural biodiversity and healthier and more sustainable models of agriculture (SLOW FOOD BRASIL, 2010). Thus, it is concerned with the environment and the production territory, in addition to aiming at the non-waste of food (SCHNEIDER, 2018). In addition, according to Tomazoni (2017), there is a preservation of local farmers and a choice for quality ingredients.

Cities that engage in the ideal of eco-gastronomy, grounded on the slow food movement, yearn primarily for the life quality of residents. In parallel, they offer tourists appropriate and ecologically responsible environments, considering not only food, but also air, soil, water and alternative sources of energy (GIZELAK-KOTULSKA *et al.*, 2011). This, in turn, is capable of sustainably boosting gastronomic tourism, since it creates authentic experiences with the local culture and highlights food's quality and flavor (MARTINS; GURGEL; MARTINS, 2016).

2.2 Socially Responsible Consumption

In recent years, individuals' concern with the socio-environmental quality of what they consume has grown (CASTRO NETO *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it has been common for consumers to be engaged in the

search for companies with good public image, professional ethics and ecological responsibility (NASCIMENTO, 2019). Thus, socially responsible consumption is constituted. Organizations, however, take part in this behavioral attribute in order to influence consumers to purchase with arguments of sustainability (HASFORD; FARMER, 2016).

In a global context, society has realized that the act of consumption must not be associated with environmental devastation, nor with the waste of natural resources (LAU, 2010). This, however, expresses the concern of individuals with the sustainability of the planet, which is not alien to their purchasing decisions (CASTRO NETO *et al.*, 2010). However, socially responsible consumption is also coupled with sensitivity to social causes. This is because, in this axis, there are still some challenges to overcome, such as inequality and poverty reduction (PÉREZ-BAREA *et al.*, 2017).

In this scenario, it is noted that consumers have been pondering about social and environmental impacts at the time of purchase, creating mental models for the purchase of products that dialogue with their ideals (PÉREZ-BAREA, *et al.*, 2017). Although some institutions meet this latent demand due to believing in the importance of socio-environmental causes, others do so for the financial reward (WEBB; MOHR; HARRIS, 2007). In any case, human well-being begins to be perceived by organizations as a consequence of the well-being of the planet (CESAR; SANTOS; MOREIRA, 2018).

There is no way to disregard, therefore, that eco-gastronomic destinations have as one of their pillars the concern with the social and environmental causes of tourist locations (REJOWSKI; RUBIM, 2013). Thus, visitors seek experiences that reflect emotional connections with residents, in addition to getting closer to nature and the local organism (SILKES; CAI; LEHTO, 2012; CESAR; SANTOS; MOREIRA, 2018). Reasons like these lead us to believe that the constituent demand in this segment

is made up of individuals who are more prone to socially responsible consumption. Given the above, the first hypothesis of this study is developed, namely:

H1: Socially responsible consumption positively influences the intention to visit an eco-gastronomic tourist destination.

2.3 Social Influences on Food Consumption

According to social psychology studies, no individual will become an adult without acting on the influence of others (RODRIGUES, 2018). About this, Kelman (2006) argues that social conformity in the influence and acceptance of subjects occurs through other opinions and positions. However, it extends to the most diverse behaviors, including food. It is argued, for example, that children start a food association through the family, responsible for pre-determining their gastronomic habits (PEREIRA, 2013).

Still according to Kelman (2006), there are three processes through which individuals are influenced by others, namely: (1) Compliance, which occurs when an individual is influenced by another in order to achieve a favorable reaction from them, win approval or avoid disapproval b) Identification, a situation in which the individual is influenced in order to establish or maintain a satisfactory relationship; c) Internalization, occurs when the individual accepts the influence of the other in order to maintain the congruence of actions and beliefs with their own value system.

In food consumption, particularly, there is the influence of several psychological aspects developed by social contexts. As an example, one can mention the subjects' beliefs on healthy eating, their attitude towards their diet, in addition to their responsibility for the consumption and preparation of meals (TORAL; SLATER, 2007). Food consumption, therefore, plays a key role in human interactions. In addition to being a civic right, it is considered a cultural activity that starts in the first years

of life (BATISTA; LIMA, 2013; PEREIRA, 2013).

From the perspective of tourism, in particular, especially tourist destinations, the search for new experiences leads visitors to places where it's possible to enjoy the local culture, much expressed by native cuisine (LÓPEZ-GUZMÁN; CAÑIZARES, 2012). Therefore, gastronomy is consolidated as an important attraction, in such a way that flavors and their origins can be decisive in the choice of destinations (SENGEL *et al.*, 2015; ALDERIGHI; BIANCHI; LOZENZINI, 2016). However, in view of what was exposed about eating behavior, it is not possible to disregard that the visiting intention is impacted by social influences. That said, the second hypothesis of this research is proposed:

H2: The social influence on food consumption positively influences the intention to visit an eco-gastronomic destination.

2.4 Tourist Eating Habits

Eating habits correspond to the attitudes of individuals towards food, characterized by their repetition. It is the means by which subjects respond to social pressures and culturally express themselves (PINHEIRO, 2008; VAZ; BENNEMANN, 2014). According to Pinheiro (2008), food consumption depends on several factors, such as socio-cultural and religious factors, advertising influences, status and prestige attributed to food. These elements, in turn, are decisive for the formation of food choices, reflecting beliefs, patterns and social differences (FREEDMAN, 2015).

With regard to tourist activity, specifically, the consummation of eating habits in destinations not only satisfies the physiological needs of travelers, but also fosters cultural experiences, through which one can interact with the hosts (CETIN; DINCER; ERTUGRAL, 2015). Thus, it is possible to value the identity of the destination, considering that traditional cuisine adds value to the locality (SENGEL

et al., 2015; GIMENES-MINASSE, 2015). Thus, according to Yeong and Anita (2012), the tasting of local cuisine becomes a fundamental part of tourist attractions.

However, according to Mak, Lumbers, Eves and Chang (2012) and, more recently, Cetin, Dincer and Ertugral (2015), cuisine is often overlooked by tourist destinations, given that it is perceived only as a support resource and not as an attraction. For some years, however, Kivela and Crotta, (2006) and Gândara, Gimenes and Mascarenhas, (2009) have been calling attention to the importance of food consumption in destinations. One of the reasons why this occurs is that eating habits, especially the services associated with them, can enhance the competitiveness of tourist destinations, since they attract the interest of tourists (GIMENES-MINASSE, 2015).

In the specific case of eco-gastronomic destinations, there is a stimulus to visitation through arguments of sustainability and the promotion of ecologically responsible cuisine. Thus, a memorable gastronomic experience is greatly appreciated (CETIN; DINCER; ERTUGRAL, 2015). However, this may not be exempt from the influence of tourists' eating habits, given that it reflects their involvement with the local identity. In view of the above, the third hypothesis of this research is suggested:

H3: Tourists' eating habits positively influence the intention to visit an eco-gastronomic destination.

However, an individual's eating habits show characteristics according to the repetitions of their food choices (VAZ; BENNEMANN, 2014). Yet, according to the authors, these choices can be influenced by factors that include healthy foods. Likewise, Rubim (2013) points to the need for individuals to be well informed about food, valuing the production cycle and

taking responsibility for safeguarding their culinary heritage, traditions and culture.

That said, consumers are increasingly closer to social, ethical and environmental issues, in the context of socio-environmental responsibility (PÉREZ-BAREA et. Al., 2017). For Gândara and Gimenes (2009), food represents a return to emotions, memories and identity of a locality, demonstrating the importance of a society's culinary memory and thus contributing to social inclusion. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Socially responsible consumption positively influences eating habits.

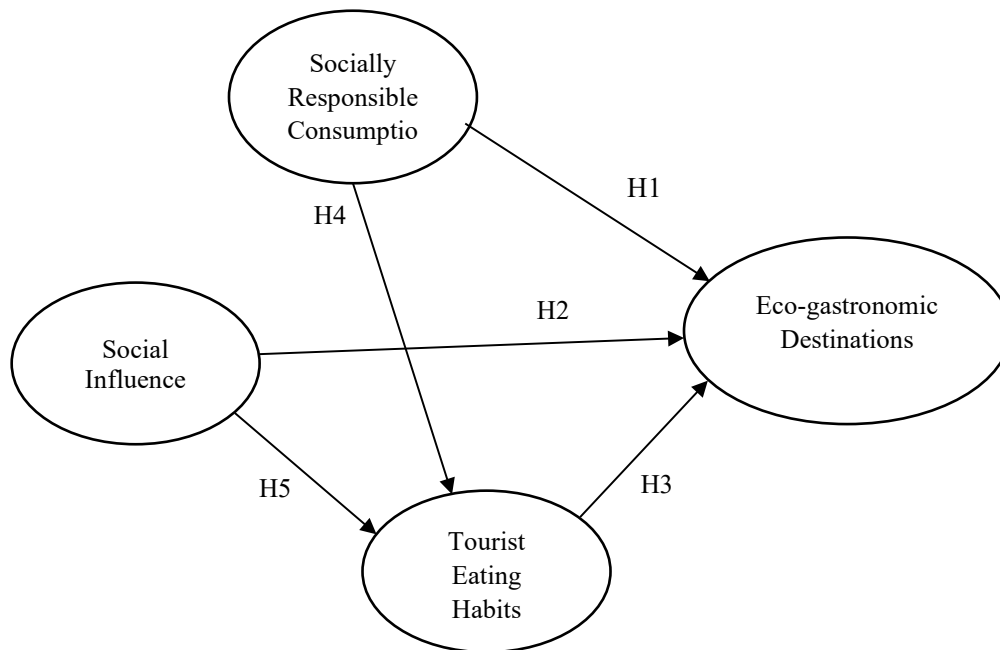
Furthermore, Batista and Lima (2013) and, more recently, Vaz and Bennemann (2018) affirm that the consumption of food is still a social act. Therefore, it goes far beyond meeting an individual's basic needs. Food is often directed to a role of social interactions, both in the family and in the community (BATISTA; LIMA, 2013; VAZ; BENNEMANN, 2018). Such interactions can, thus, lead individuals to certain food choices according to the groups to which they belong, responding, in some cases, to social and cultural pressures (VAZ; BENNEMANN, 2018).

It is also possible to emphasize that the evaluation and opinion of other individuals (family and friends, for example) has an impact on food consumption (TORAL; SLATER, 2007). This behavior has associations with eating practices, thus transforming the actions that are associated with the act of food consumption (VAZ; BENNEMANN, 2018). In view of this theoretical assumption, the fifth and last hypothesis formulated by this study can be highlighted:

H5: Social influences are positively associated with eating habits.

2.5 Proposition of the theoretical model

Figure 1 - Illustration of the preliminary theoretical model



Source: prepared by the authors.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to investigate the influence of the Socially Responsible Consumption (SRC), Social Influence (SI) and Tourist Eating Habits (TEH) constructs on the intention to visit an eco-gastronomic destination. This research is guided by a positivist pragmatic positioning (SACCOL, 2019), with a quantitative approach. For the study, as it should be done in others of a similar approach, it is important to plan the procedures, provide a detailed description and, furthermore, assure that they are strictly followed throughout the investigation (CRESWELL, 2010).

The adopted procedures are bibliographic research and field research. Conducting a bibliographic study is relevant for a better understanding of the presented themes. The search for materials that deal with the subject was carried out on the main research platforms, namely Capes Journals, Science Direct, SPELL, and Google Scholar. The search was directed to scientific articles related to the constructs of

this research, in order to clarify and support the presented concepts.

3.1 Population and sample

An online survey was used as a method of data collection, which is characterized by being an objective way of interrogating individuals in order to receive information related to the investigated problem from a considerable group of people, through quantitative analysis, aiming to obtain results corresponding to the collected information (GIL, 2008). In view of the impracticality in defining the totality of the members of this universe, the study sample is non-probabilistic (MALHOTRA, 2012), using convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Regarding the sampling and temporal characteristics, a single cross-section is used, indicating that the collection procedure was performed only once.

The questionnaire used as a collection instrument consists of 24 items on a 7-point Likert scale, in which 1 corresponds to total disagreement and 7

corresponds to the highest degree of agreement. In order to draw a profile of the respondents, the instrument also has seven questions related to age, sex and travel frequency. The research was shared through an online link, made available on social networks and sent by email. The questionnaire was instrumentalized through Google Forms.

The questions that make up the research instrument were extracted from scales developed and validated by other authors. After reviewing the literature, we first opted for the Socially Responsible Consumption scale developed by Webb, Mohr and Harris (2007). From this one, specifically, only two of the four

dimensions are used. This is because, as they deal more directly with consumer purchase criteria, they are more appropriate to what this study proposes.

The Social Influence construct, in turn, is measured using the scale developed by Lenox and Wolfe (1984), from which it was decided to use only one of the four dimensions. Finally, the Tourist Eating Habits construct was measured using the scale by Kim and Evis (2012). This one, in particular, deals with seven dimensions that constitute reasons for gastronomy travel, and therefore all dimensions proposed by the scale are used. In the table below, it is possible to see this information in more detail.

Table 1 - Composition of the collection instrument

Construct	Scale authorship	Items (dimensions and variables)	Code
Socially Responsible Consumption	Webb, Mohr and Harris (2007)	<u>Dimension: Criteria for environmental impacts of purchase and use</u>	
		- I avoid buying from companies that harm endangered plants or animals.	SRC01
		- Whenever possible, I walk, bike, travel by car or use public transport to help reduce air pollution	SRC02
		- I avoid using products that pollute the air	SRC03
		- I avoid buying products that pollute the water	SRC04
		- I make an effort to avoid products or services that cause environmental damage	SRC05
		- I limit my use of energy, such as electricity or natural gas, to reduce my impact on the environment	SRC06
Social Influence	Lenox and Wolfe (1984)	<u>Dimension: Ability to modify self-presentation</u>	
		- I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them.	SI01
		- When I feel that the image I am portraying is not working, I can readily change it to something that does.	SI02
Eating Habits and Cultural Experience	Kim and Evis (2012)	<u>Dimension: cultural experience</u>	
		- Tasting local food gives me the opportunity to increase my knowledge about different cultures.	HAB01
		- Tasting local food helps me to see how other people live.	HAB02
		- Tasting local food allows me to discover something new.	HAB03
		- Tasting local food in its original place is an authentic experience.	HAB04
		- It is important for me to taste local food in its original regions (countries).	HAB05
Intention to visit eco-gastronomic destinations	Prepared by the authors (2018).	Eco-gastronomy deals with gastronomy, highlighting the culture of a locality, being concerned with sustainability and environmental degradation. It takes to the most diverse bars and restaurants products that come directly from the rural producer, favoring local agricultural production. I intend to visit an eco-gastronomic tourist destination.	IVED1

Source: prepared by the authors.

After its elaboration, the questionnaire was submitted to a content validation process through the analysis of researchers in the tourism area. After receiving the recommendations of these evaluators, some items were changed and the refined instrument was subjected to a pre-test with 15 respondents, with characteristics similar to the studied population and which will be counted in the final sample of this research. The pre-test took place between 01/29/2019 and 02/01/2019, followed by the data collection period between 02/03/2019 and 02/26/2019.

3.2 Data analysis procedures

At first, data analysis occurred through descriptive statistics, using frequency, mean and standard deviation. The objective was, at this moment, to verify and delimit the sample's sociodemographic profile. Subsequently, inferential statistics were performed using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique. For that, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. This method is considered the most adequate given that its coefficients show possible relationships between latent variables, as in this study.

4 RESULTS

All the answered questionnaires, after being revised, were included in the final sample (n = 118). Thus, in the next moment, the database was imported into SPSS, followed by the analyses carried out with the help of the software.

4.1 Sociodemographic profile

The first step was to define the socio-demographic profile of the collected sample through descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. The information related to the respondents' demographic data, collected through specific questions related to this subject contained in the questionnaire, was summarized in Table 2. The individuals that compose the sample of this research are mostly male, corresponding to 67.6% of the total. The predominant level of complete education is higher education (50.8%). Finally, the annual frequency in which individuals travel was also investigated. According to Table 2, the majority, represented by 36.4% of the total, claim to travel 2 times a year, at most.

Table 2 - Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

Annual travel frequency	
No reply	5.1%
Maximum of 1 time per year	33.2%
2 times per year	36.4%
3 times per year	17%
6 times per year	2.5%
10 times per year	0.8%
24 times per year	0.8%
Never	2.5%
Others	1.7%
Gender	
Female	42.4%
Male	57.6%
Complete Educational Level	
Elementary School	0.8%
High School	17%
University education	50.8%
Postgraduate studies	31.4%

Source: field research (2019).

Also with regard to the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, some variables were extracted using a ratio scale, seeking greater numerical precision based on means and standard deviations. The information is shown in Table 3. In general, the average age of the subjects is 36.4 years old, while the average monthly

family income is R\$ 5,818.04. With the average number of people sharing a household being 3.55, the per capita income of the sample is R\$1,638.88, a value that was measured based on the quotient of the monthly family income and the number of people living in the household.

Table 3 - Socio-demographic profile of the respondents and standard deviation

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	36.40	10.197
Average monthly family income	R\$ 5,818.04	R\$ 4,824.525
Number of people in the household	3.55	1.234

Source: field research (2019).

Next, the effort was directed to analyzing the consistency of the questionnaire scales, followed by the dimensionality of the data. Thus, the next section will address these results, which are necessary to carry out the multiple regression analysis.

4.2 Measurement Model

Following the protocols of Marôco (2010), the possible existence and subsequent removal of outliers from the sample was verified. For this, the Mahalanobis Squared Distance (D^2) was used. At this stage, no discrepant indices were observed that indicated the need to extract the sample. Subsequently, a factor analysis was performed, and the items SRC03 and SRC05, both referring to Socially Responsible Consumption, were removed.

Once the core items of the constructs were refined, a new analysis was carried out. At this time, the indices resulting from the measurement model indicated a good fit of the model's adjustment. For verification purposes, the indices are presented, namely: $X^2/df (68.973/51) = 1.352$ ($p = 0.048$); GFI = 0.914; IFI = 0.983; TLI = 0.977; CFI = 0.982; NFI = 0.936; PCFI = 0.759; RMSEA = 0.055; PCLOSE = 0.383; ECVI = 1.051; MECVI = 1.109.

Still regarding the measurement model, aiming to investigate the level of adequacy of the scales, the reliability analyses were investigated using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). In both, the reference value is ≥ 0.7 (HAIR *et al.*, 2010). As noted in Table 4, all resulting indices achieve what was expected, indicating that there is internal consistency of the items in each scale.

Table 4 - Descriptive statistics, reliability and validity

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Cronbach	CR	AVE
Socially Responsible Consumption (SRC)	4.970	1.497	0.806	0.724	0.515
Social Influence (SI)	4.840	1.530	0.756	0.745	0.649
Tourist Eating Habits (TEH)	5.420	1.630	0.963	0.960	0.832
Intention to Visit Eco-Gastronomic Destinations (IVED)	6.270	1.189	--	--	--

Note. SD (Standard Deviation); CR (Composite Reliability); AVE (Average Variance Extracted)

Subsequently, the factorial, convergent and discriminant validity of the scales was verified. In the former, the standardized coefficients for each item were

verified. As all of them resulted in ≥ 0.5 , the factorial validity is established. Convergent validity was tested based on the average explained variance (AVE) indices. In this

case, the good adequacy of the values was also measured considering ≥ 0.5 . In Table 5,

it can be seen that all constructs reach the statistically acceptable reference.

Table 5 - Correlations, Shared variance and AVE

Variables	SRC	SI	TEH
SRC	0.515	0.165	0.102
SI	0.407	0.649	0.099
TEH	0.318	0.314	0.832

Note. AVE values are on the diagonal of the table (in bold), values below the diagonal are correlations, and those above it are shared variances (squared correlations).

Finally, discriminant validity was tested. Therefore, it was verified whether the AVE of each of the constructs resulted in a value higher than the shared variances. This is because, as the constructs are theoretically different, there should not be a high statistical correlation between them. As shown in Table 3, this condition is met, indicating that there is also discriminant validity.

4.3 Structural model

In accordance with the SEM protocols, the analysis of the structural model was continued. In this step, the relationships between the latent variables of the measurement model were verified. As noted in Table 6, new adjustment indices were obtained. Based on the results, it is possible to affirm that there is a good adjustment of the structural model.

Table 6 - Model fit indexes

Indexes	Results	Criteria
X^2/GI (72.328/49)	1.476	[1; 2] Good Adjustment
<i>p-value</i>	0.017	>0.05 Acceptable Adjustment*
GFI	0.912	>0.90 Good Adjustment
IFI	0.977	>0.95 Very good adjustment
TLI	0.969	>0.95 Very good adjustment
CFI	0.977	>0.95 Very good adjustment
NFI	0.933	>0.90 Good Adjustment
PCFI	0.725	[0.70; 0.80] Acceptable Adjustment
RMSEA	0.064	<0.08 Good Adjustment
PCLOSE	0.226	>0.05 Very good adjustment
EVCI	1.114	The lower the better
MEVCI	1.176	The lower the better

*Large samples are more sensitive to having significance in the p-value.

Subsequently, the coefficients of the relationships between the latent variables were verified (according to Table 7). Thus, it was possible to test the presupposed hypotheses. Considering $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$ as the statistical parameter, the hypotheses H1(+), H2(+) and H3(+) are not supported, since in all these cases the achieved index is higher than expected. Emphasis should be given to H2(+), since the relationship

assumed by it results in the highest value, indicating the greatest rejection.

The H4(+) and H5(+) hypotheses, however, are confirmed by SEM. In these cases, the resulting p-value is ≤ 0.05 , demonstrating that the assumed relationships can be statistically supported. Since the valence is positive, both can be confirmed. We highlight that H1(+) could be marginally accepted considering p-value

≤0.10. However, this parameter is not adhered to in view of greater statistical rigor.

Table 7 - Testing of research hypotheses

Hypotheses	Standardized coefficient	Unstandardized coefficient	S.E.	C.R.	p	Status
H1(+): SRC -> IVED	0.182	0.156	0.089	1.751	0.080	Unsupported
H2(+): SI -> IVED	-0.097	-0.067	-0.084	-0.796	0.426	Unsupported
H3(+): TEH -> IVED	0.161	0.140	0.088	1.584	0.113	Unsupported
H4(+): SRC -> TEH	0.251	0.247	0.098	2.508	0.012	Supported
H5(+): SI -> TEH	0.311	0.277	0.111	2.483	0.013	Supported

Note. p≤0,05; SE =Standard Error; CR = Critical Ratio.

4.4 Hypotheses analysis

According to the results indicated by the rejection of H1(+), socially responsible consumption is not enough to explain the intention to visit eco-gastronomic destinations. There is consistency with the study by Sinderlar *et al.* (2018), since, according to the authors, most consumption of sustainable food products comes from the female audience, which is the gender least represented by this sample. It is important to emphasize that this finding is surprising insofar as the interest in socio-environmental products would supposedly dialogue with the sustainable characteristic of eco-gastronomic destinations.

Thus, it is possible to understand that, although these destinations are positioned as ecologically responsible, potential consumers are not motivated by this condition. Thus, it demonstrates that this argument does not consolidate a competitive advantage for localities. According to Belem *et al.* (2017), individuals over 50 are the most susceptible to make decisions based on concern with socio-environmental issues. As the sample in this study is mostly composed of younger subjects (36.4 years old, on average), it is possible that their consumption decisions correspond more strongly to a less socially responsible and more practical routine.

H2(+), in turn, also shows rejection, being the one with the highest rate of denial of the theoretical assumption. Therefore, the study demonstrates that social influence does not explain the interest in visiting the

aforementioned destinations. Although individuals are considered incapable of acting without the influence of others (RODRIGUES, 2018) and are affected by the group to which they belong (KELMAN, 2006), this does not apply to the decision of visiting eco-gastronomic destinations. A possible explanation for this result is the influence of the subjects' individual values.

Although the social context, on which there is cultural intervention, may define consumption decisions linked to food products (VAZ; BENNEMANN, 2014), in eco-gastronomic destinations this may be more related to individual beliefs and values. As Batista and Lima (2013) point out, in the presence of unknown people, as is the case of trips, food decisions are not usually motivated by the opinion of the closest subjects. In this way, the interest in visiting destinations with gastronomic positioning would not be affected by the food evaluations of acquaintances, such as family and friends.

On the other hand, H3 (+), which suggests the anticipation of tourists' eating habits over their visit intention, is also rejected. It is possible that this result is a reflection of the absence of placing gastronomy as a central argument for differentiation in eco-gastronomic destinations. According to Cetin, Dincer and Ertugral (2015), cuisine tends to be neglected by these destinations, being positioned only as a tourist support resource and not as a consolidated attraction. This lack of positioning may be the reason why

potential consumers seem not to be motivated by food interests.

Furthermore, Mak, Lumbers, Eves and Chang (2012), reaffirmed by Sengel *et al.* (2015), draw attention to some elements that can negatively influence the consumption of gastronomic products, such as the destinations investigated in this study. According to the authors, neophobia, for example, an attribute that refers to the aversion to anything new, can explain the refusal of unknown foods, such as those present in tourist destinations. In this case, there is resistance to the variety of products offered by the local cuisine. Thus, food would not be enough to motivate consumers to visit eco-gastronomic destinations.

Additionally, it is highlighted that the H4(+), in turn, is confirmed, pointing out that the consumption of socially responsible products has an influence on the formulation of individuals' eating habits. This is in line with the study by Vaz and Bennemann (2014), since, according to the authors, healthier behaviors, such as what happens in socially responsible consumption, usually reverberate on the food choices of individuals.

In many cases, eating habits act as an identity and memory factor. About this, Rubem (2013) states that food rituals usually have the role of safeguarding the gastronomic heritage of cultures. This may be the reason why consumption behaviors that prioritize the socio-environmental aspect explain food choices. In this context, it cannot be ignored that consumers have considered the social and environmental impacts of their consumption decisions, creating mental models for the acquisition of products that dialogue with their ethical ideals (PÉREZ-BAREA, *et al.*, 2017).

Finally, confirmation of H5(+) is presented. In view of this finding, it is elucidated that social influence also explains the formulation of individuals' eating habits. This result is in line with the studies by Batista and Lima (2013) and, more recently, with Vaz and Bennemann (2018). This is because, according to the

authors, food is not just a physical need, but above all a collective act in which there are different social interactions.

Such interactions, according to Toral and Slater (2007), have a direct and substantial impact on food consumption. Some actions, such as food preparation and utensils used for ingestion (VAZ; BENNEMANN, 2018) are usually formulated and guided by social influences. It is not by chance that the assessment and opinion of other individuals is so relevant to subjects' eating habits.

5 CONCLUSION

As expected, this study investigates the strength of some behavioral attributes (socially responsible consumption, social influence and tourist eating habits) on the intention to visit eco-gastronomic destinations. Additionally, it evaluates two possible precedents for tourist eating habits.

Differently from what was expected by theoretical assumptions, socially responsible consumption, social influence and tourist eating habits do not seem to motivate interest in visitation. This contradicts the environmental, social and gastronomic characteristics that can be fostered by these destinations and suggests that there may be an incongruity between the positioning of such destinations and their potential demand.

In fact, interest in visiting these locations is not stimulated by socially and environmentally responsible behavior, even though theoretical assumptions indicate that eco-gastronomy is intended to be an alternative and sustainable food model. It is possible that, in the case of destinations with this positioning, the motivation is more strongly linked to hedonism and the experiential appeal of tourist activity than to the argument of gastronomic sustainability.

According to the findings of this research, it is also concluded that the opinion of the social groups with which one has a close relationship, such as family and friends, does not explain the visiting

intention. At this point, it is believed that the constituent demand of eco-gastronomic destinations is formulated by individuals whose particular values are more assertive regarding tourist consumption behavior than the social norms and group standards.

Another unexpected finding is the indifference of the subjects' eating habits regarding the intention to visit eco-gastronomic destinations. It is prudent to believe, in this case, that the gastronomic quality is not decisive in the visiting interest. This may be associated with psychological reasons, such as neophobia (aversion to anything new), which could imply repulsion or dislike for foods that are different from the usual, such as those present during a trip.

As a complementary analysis, it is found that the formulation of individuals' eating habits is explained in parallel by socially responsible consumption and social influence. This is in line with what was expected, since food, in addition to being a physiological need, is a social act, loaded with cultural influences rooted in the macro-environment of consumers. Nevertheless, food choices do not seem to imply visiting intention.

The elementary results of this work point to some academic and managerial contributions. For the academy, they highlight that, although there are theoretical relationships between the investigated constructs, there is no consistency between them in the context of eco-gastronomic destinations. Thus, it fosters the discussion that some alternative and sustainable models of tourism activity are, in fact, another hedonic opportunity.

To strategists and marketing professionals, this study presents, as one of the main contributions, the need to point out the argument of ecogastronomy in destinations to the hedonic and experiential quality resulting from it. This is because, in the case of tourism, social, environmental and gastronomic characteristics do not seem to be the determining components of demand.

It is noteworthy that the limitations of this study are the regional concentration

of the sample and the impossibility of a probabilistic sampling. Therefore, the results may vary depending on context and psychological factors. For future studies, it is suggested to investigate in greater depth how pleasure and experience, which are outstanding elements of tourism, can overlap central arguments of ecogastronomy when it is associated with tourist destinations.

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