

Experiential festival attributes, perceived value, cultural exploration, and behavioral intentions to visit a food festival

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1 **Experiential festival attributes, perceived value, cultural exploration, and**
2 **behavioral intentions to visit a food festival**

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23 **behavioral intentions to visit a food festival**

24

25 **Abstract**

26 Based on the expectation confirmation theory and the push and pull framework, this paper
27 proposes that perceived value (PV) mediates the relationship between experiential food festival
28 attributes (EXPECO) and attendees' behavioral intentions (BIs). Further, this paper proposes
29 that cultural exploration (CULEXP) moderates the causal relationships among EXPECO, PV,
30 and BIs. A survey of 215 visitors who participated in the Slow Food Festival event in Northern
31 Cyprus was used to statistically validate the proposed research framework and hypotheses. The
32 results stemmed from the structural equation modeling show that PV partially mediated the
33 effects of EXPECO (i.e., education, entertainment, and aesthetic experience) on BIs. Moreover,
34 as predicted, the results confirm that CULEXP moderates the casual relationships among
35 EXPECO, PV, and BIs. Thus, the findings extend prior literature by highlighting the
36 importance of EXPECO and CULEXP in enhancing attendees' PV and consequent positive
37 BIs.

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39 Keywords: experience, cultural exploration, value, behavioral intention, food festival attributes

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50 **Introduction**

51 The role of events and festivals in the development of the global economy is increasing
52 worldwide at a rapid pace (S raphin, Platania, Spencer, & Modica, 2018). Tourism industry's
53 total contribution to global GDP was 10.3% in 2019 (WTTC, 2020). Reportlinker (2019)
54 indicated that the global events industry was valued at \$1,100 billion in 2018 and is expected
55 to grow at a compound annual rate of 10.3% to reach \$2,330 billion in 2026. Given the pivotal
56 role of festivals and events in the tourism industry (Yoon, Lee, & Lee, 2010), it is paramount
57 to study how policymakers can promote festivals to attract tourists toward a destination. Pizam
58 (2010) emphasized the importance of creating memorable experiences as the essence and the
59 raison d' tre of the tourism industry. Alawi, Jamjoum, and Samir (2018) noted that enhancing
60 visitors' experience quality is critical for a destination to achieve long-term sustainable tourism.
61 Pine and Gilmore (1999) introduced the concept of experience economy (EXPECO) as a new
62 strategic context where experiences should be commodified to generate additional customer
63 satisfaction and secure loyalty.

64 Emerging tourism literature has emphasized the importance of EXPECO in the tourism
65 industry worldwide (Alexiou, 2020; Chang, 2018). Hwang and Lee's (2019) study
66 demonstrated that the EXPECO increases customers' well-being perception and improves their
67 attitudes toward products, brands, attachment, and loyalty. Lee, Jeong, and Qu (2020) also
68 developed a model of EXPECO to investigate how different types of experience influence
69 visitors' satisfaction and revisit intention. Their study revealed that each dimension of the
70 EXPECO is unique and has a distinct effect on customers satisfaction and revisit intention.
71 Despite the critical role of experience in social science, particularly in human behavioral
72 studies, Chang (2018) asserted that EXPECO research is in a very early stage. They believe
73 that although much of tourist experience studies have explored psychological and behavioral
74 aspects, very little research on experiential values has been conducted in the context of tourism.

75 On the other hand, the literature concerning festivals has mainly focused on the rate of tourist
76 arrivals (Moon & Han, 2019), tourist wellbeing (Hwang & Lee, 2019), visitors' satisfaction
77 (Dieck, Jung, & Rauschnabel, 2018), and destination recommendation (Culha, 2020). Lai, Lu,
78 and Liu (2020) recommended more research should be conducted to provide a better evidence
79 and explanation of the EXPECO's outcomes. They mentioned that scholars may try to find the
80 interrelationship among relevant constructs "(e.g., *perceived values*)" in future studies.
81 Although previous research (e.g., Hwang & Lee, 2019; Lai, Lu, & Liu, 2020; Lee, Jeong, &
82 Qu, 2020) has discussed the concept of EXPECO, little attention has been paid to the
83 mechanism by which EXPECO affects visitors' behavioral intention (BI) concerning food
84 festival settings (Huang, Zhang, & Quan, 2019; Meeprom & Silanoi, 2020). Thus, the current
85 study aims to fill this void by proposing a mediating model of the experiential values in the
86 context of food festivals.

87 In contrast, Alexiou (2020) indicated the importance of exploring cultural motivation
88 and its impact on visitors' BIs. As a push factor, cultural exploration (CULEXP) allows visitors
89 to find themselves in an unknown place and experience new situations. Thus, it presents a great
90 opportunity for the visitors to refine life skills and self-develop through hands-on experiences
91 (Xu & Cheung, 2020). Furthermore, CULEXP allows visitors to may get acquainted with the
92 authentic local culture during the festival and experience its diversity and traditions by
93 interacting with the local community (Tsaour, Wang, Liu, & Huang, 2019). Schofield and
94 Thompson (2007) showed that tourists' intention to revisit a festival increases when their
95 CULEXP needs are satisfied. Although plenty of studies show cultural exploration is one of
96 the important motivational factors for travel (e.g., Gurbaskan Akyuz, 2019; Su, Johnson, &
97 O'Mahony, 2020; Yan & Halpenny, 2019); however, there is little knowledge regarding the
98 role of CULEXP in creating experiential value. The concept of CULEXP is somehow close to
99 the concept of the experience economy. Through cultural exploration, people seek unknown

100 places and experience new situations and cultures, which is similar to the escape experience.
101 Also, cultural exploration provides an opportunity for people to self-develop, which is identical
102 to the educational experience. Following Borges, Cunha, and Lopes's (2020) suggestion, more
103 comprehensive knowledge of internal and external motivations is required to understand
104 visitors' behavioral outcomes; therefore, we assumed that the interaction impacts of CULEXP
105 and EXPECO may enhance the perception of festival value and lead to positive behavioral
106 intentions among visitors.

107 The objective of this research is threefold. First, given the increasingly pivotal role of
108 PV in influencing customer experiences and consequent BI (Tajeddini et al., 2021, 2022), this
109 study investigates the mediating effect of PV on the relationship between EXPECO and
110 participants' BI. Second, this research contributes to the expectation confirmation theory and
111 the push and pull framework by empirically examining the causal relationships among
112 EXPECO, PV, CULEXP, and BI in a food festival setting (see Figure 1) (Aşan, Kaptangil, &
113 Kınay, 2020; Yuan, Wang, & Yu, 2020). Third, exploration of the possible mediating and
114 moderating effects of EXPECO on participants' BI through PV and CULEXP as push factors
115 will contribute to the existing body of knowledge emphasizing the importance of tourists'
116 experience in triggering positive BI (Aşan et al., 2020; Meeprom & Silanoi, 2020; Xu &
117 Cheung, 2020). Practically, the findings of this research will help tourism service providers
118 and policymakers who are organizing festivals to create EXPECO for attendees, thereby
119 enhancing PV, positive word-of-mouth (WOM), and revisit intention.

120 **Background and literature review**

121 *Food festival and the Slow Food movement*

122 Gastronomy is the science of the connection between food and culture. Food can be
123 considered the most attractive part of a culture for tourists. The term “food festival” is a typical
124 expression for events related to food, meal preparation, and consumption (Huang et al., 2019).

125 A food festival is a form of cultural tourism that has a significant potential to attract tourists
126 and can provide an authentic cultural experience about the host community for visitors. In
127 recent years, the increased attention toward food festivals may be related to the strategic
128 importance that policymakers place on local food and wine events as destination marketing
129 strategies (Culha, 2020).

130 The Slow Food movement was started by Carlo Petrini and his team in Italy in 1989.
131 Their initial goal was to preserve regional food traditions by offering healthy foods,
132 gastronomic pleasure, and a slow pace of life. This was mainly initiated due to the growth of
133 unhealthy food patterns and dietary behavior worldwide. In addition, they aimed to promote
134 local artisans, farmers, and local foods and flavors through various activities, including
135 community gatherings, farmers' markets, training programs, food festivals, and awareness
136 sessions on food access (Bilgri, 2019).

137 *Experience economy (EXPECO)*

138 The term “experience economy” was first introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999)
139 as the next phase of economic development following the agricultural economy, the industrial
140 economy, and the more recent service economy. They asserted that businesses must organize
141 memorable events for their customers and that memories become the product, the “experience.”
142 Later, Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung (2007, p. 120) defined EXPECO from the consumer perspective
143 as “enjoyable, engaging, memorable encounters for those consuming these events.” They stated
144 that the experience of tourists includes everything they experience in a destination, including
145 their behaviors, perceptions, cognitions, and feelings.

146 Prior literature indicates that four dimensions have been used to operationalize
147 EXPECO: education, escapism, entertainment, and esthetics. Education refers to learning
148 something new (Aşan et al., 2020). According to the Pine and Gilmore (1998) EXPECO model,
149 educational experiences thoughtfully and actively capture consumers' minds and attract them

150 to obtain information and learn new things. Escapism is defined as a divergence toward a new
151 self (Piramanayagam, Sud, & Seal, 2020). During escapist experiences, individuals are entirely
152 absorbed (Piramanayagam et al., 2020; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Regarding entertainment, Pine
153 and Gilmore (1998) asserted that firms are a “stage” that gratifies and entertains customers.
154 Entertainment is one of the oldest and most popular forms of experience, often involving
155 passive engagement (Lai et al., 2020). The last dimension, esthetics, is indulged within the
156 business environment. The esthetic dimension assesses customers’ knowledge and perceptions
157 of the physical and tangible aspects of the environment (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011).

158 *Perceived value*

159 Zeithaml (1988) defined PV as “*the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a*
160 *product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given*” (p. 14). From a theoretical
161 perspective, customer PV is equal to the total benefits to the customer minus the total cost to
162 the customer (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, & Baloglu, 2017). As implied in the definition,
163 customers assess the trade-off between the benefits they gain and the price they pay for
164 obtaining those benefits (Kotler et al., 2017). Product benefits are the components that products
165 offer to meet customers’ needs and can be either actual (e.g., design attributes of the product)
166 or perceived (e.g., the reputation of the product) (Yuan et al., 2020). Cost to customers is not
167 only limited to price; it also entails the time, energy, risks, and emotional stress imposed on the
168 customer when purchasing a product (Kotler et al., 2017). Overall, consumers’ PV results from
169 their mental trade-off between perceived quality or benefit gained from goods, services, and
170 experiences and the perceived monetary and nonmonetary sacrifice they made for that (Yuan
171 et al., 2020). PV is one of the most important constructs in tourism destination development
172 studies since destination’ organizations can benefit from a high level of visitors’ perceived
173 value. This opportunity allows the organizations to gain competitive advantages and enhance

174 the sustainability of their respective tourism activities such as festivals (Kim, Byon, & Baek,
175 2020).

176 *Cultural exploration*

177 CULEXP refers to an experience (e.g., museums, festivals, theater productions, cultural
178 cuisine) in which individuals explore different cultures during a trip or participate in an event.
179 CULEXP includes meeting different people and becoming familiar with other cultures,
180 customs, and traditions. Further, it allows visitors to try a variety of local, traditional, and
181 modern cuisine, make friends and build relationships with people from different backgrounds
182 (Crompton & McKay, 1997). Cultural factors are compelling push factors that stimulate people
183 to travel or participate in an event. Usually, individuals seek opportunities to learn about other
184 cultures and experience something different when participating in various events (Pechlaner et
185 al., 2012). Pechlaner et al. (2012) identified CULEXP as the most significant reason for
186 attending a multicultural festival.

187 *Behavioral intention*

188 BI is defined as an indicator of individuals' willingness to perform a particular behavior
189 (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). Xu and Cheung (2020) suggested that BI refers to
190 individuals' subjective probability of engaging in a given behavior. From the marketing
191 perspective, customer BIs are very important because retaining existing customers seems to
192 have more financial benefits than attracting new customers in the competitive business
193 landscape. Moreover, Kim, Duncan, and Chung (2015) claimed that measuring customer intent
194 should be one of the main goals of any organization looking to maximize its profit potential by
195 stimulating consumer behavior. BI can be divided into two categories in the tourism context:
196 revisit intention and WOM (or intention to recommend to others) (Zeithaml, Berry, &
197 Parasuraman, 1996).

198

199 *Theoretical framework*

200 The term "Experience Economy" has been introduced into the strategic management
201 topic and is evolving (Okumus, Altinay, Chathoth, & Köseoglu, 2019); therefore, this
202 significant construct and its outcomes should be theoretically framed and presented more
203 clearly to promote concrete evaluation and optimization of them in practice. In this regard, we
204 came to the point that we need a new theoretical framework to measure and evaluate visitors'
205 value perception and BIs based on festival experiences and push and pull factors involving
206 among possible visitors and the festival. Therefore, expectation confirmation theory and the
207 push and pull framework together have chosen to make an appropriate theoretical framework
208 to explain the interrelationship between the current study constructs in the festival context.
209 Accordingly, based on the given theoretical framework, the proposed research model (Figure
210 1) portrays the causal relationships between EXPECO, PV, BI, and CULEXP.

211 *Expectation confirmation theory*

212 The expectation confirmation theory (ECT) (Oliver, 1977) applied to explain the
213 mediating role of PV between the relationship of EXPECO and BIs among food festival
214 visitors. ECT is a cognitive theory that interprets buyers' post-purchase satisfaction due to
215 expectancies, perceived performance, and disconfirmation of opinions. When products and
216 services perform better than individuals initially expected, the disconfirmation will be positive,
217 enhancing post-purchase or post-adoption satisfaction. According to the ECT, an individual's
218 satisfaction is directly influenced by the disconfirmation of opinions and perceptions of
219 performance. Further, individuals' satisfaction is indirectly affected by their expectations and
220 perceptions of performance via the disconfirmation of beliefs (Lai et al., 2020). According to
221 the ECT, a positive causal relationship exists between the satisfaction and BIs of customers
222 (Boo & Busser, 2018; Li, et al., 2020). Boo and Busser (2018) believe that expectation
223 confirmation plays a pivotal role in stimulating purchasing behavior and triggering BI. In

224 addition, Cho, Tan and Chiu (2020) asserted that confirmation of expectation and PV can
225 significantly influence visitors' BIs. In summary, previous ECT studies' findings have shown
226 that the relationship between customer experiences, expectations, satisfaction, and BIs has
227 great explanatory power (e.g., Chen, Wang, & Morrison, 2021; Botti, Grimaldi, Tommasetti,
228 Troisi, & Vesci, 2015).

229 We assumed that when tourists or excursionists visit a place or attend an event for the first
230 time, their BI is based on the expectations created by the brand, the popularity of the event,
231 packaging designs, facilities, or previous experiences of a similar event. In the context of the
232 present study, based on this theory, it is suggested that EXPECO creates visitors' expectation
233 confirmation, enhances their PV and willingness to revisit a destination or event, and spreads
234 positive WOM.

235 *The push and pull framework*

236 The travel destination choice and decision-making process strongly depend on travel
237 motivations and can be explained by the concept of push and pull factors (Dann, 1977).
238 However, the factors that motivate or desire to travel or visit a place, and the final decision of
239 the visitor, result from their previous (prior) need to travel (Dann, 1977; Yoo, Lee, & Lee,
240 2015). According to these factors, individuals travel because they are pushed and pulled by
241 different forces. These forces determine how an individual is pushed by internal factors (i.e.,
242 intrinsic desire) and pulled by external factors (i.e., destinations' attraction) (Crompton &
243 McKay, 1997). Push motivating forces have been helpful in explaining travel desire, while pull
244 motivating forces help consumers make destination choices (Dann, 1977). Push factors
245 comprise cognitive procedures and socio-psychological motivating forces that predispose
246 individuals to travel. In contrast, pull factors attract and cause individuals to choose a particular
247 destination. Almost all push factors arise from intangible or intrinsic desires, such as escape,
248 looking for a new experience, novelty, or adventure, CULEXP, self-discovery, dream

249 fulfillment, family togetherness, challenge, relaxation, health and fitness, status and prestige,
250 and socializing (Botha, Crompton, & Kim, 1999).

251 From the push factors perspective, cultural learning/discovery (Su, Johnson, &
252 O'Mahony, 2020) is considered as one of the main motivational factors in the tourism context.
253 Cultural motivations are explained as individuals' actions, desires, and needs to learn about and
254 engage with culture-based incentives, which are significant in pushing possible visitors to
255 travel and discover new historical and cultural experiences (Yan & Halpenny, 2019). On the
256 other hand, from the pull factors perspective, destination culture and history, and local cuisine
257 are considered some important motivational factors to impact possible visitors' decision-
258 making (Su et al., 2020). Undoubtedly, food and its related rituals and traditions are an
259 inseparable part of any destination's intangible cultural heritage, which can be promoted in
260 different ways (i.e., food festivals). From the other side, cultural exploration as a push factor
261 significantly engages visitors with culture-based destinations and plays a crucial role in the
262 generation of visitors' arrival to cultural tourism destinations. Altogether, we believe the push
263 and pull framework is the best theoretical support to explain the possible role of CULEX as a
264 push factor to attend a food festival.

265 **Hypothesis development**

266 *Mediating effect*

267 This study explains the mediating effect of PV on the relationship between EXPECO
268 and BI by applying the ECT. According to the ECT, customers' expectations, positive
269 perceptions of performance, and confirmation lead to higher levels of PV and consequently to
270 positive BI. If a product, service, or experience is better than expected (positive confirmation),
271 customers' PV and satisfaction increase (Kotler et al., 2017; Oliver, 1977).

272 One critical challenge service provider and marketers' faces is identifying essential
273 variables that determine customer PV (Dowell, Garrod, & Turner, 2019). Previous studies have

274 found predictors of PV to include attendees' involvement (Kim et al., 2015), past visits (Yuan
275 et al., 2020), and product quality (Yoon et al., 2010). Moreover, Meeprom and Silanoi (2020)
276 and Kim et al. (2015) showed that customers' repeat purchase intentions are affected by the
277 PV stemming from the products and services they consumed. Huang, Zhang, and Quan (2019)
278 showed that positive WOM is affected by memorable experiences and consequential desirable
279 attitudes. They showed that greater value perception results in a higher likelihood of repeat
280 intentions. Culha (2020) asserted that the more benefits and advantages derived from products
281 or services, the more satisfied customers are, leading to positive behaviors. Accordingly, we
282 propose that the more EXPECO, the more PV, resulting in more positive BI.

283 When studying tourism experiences in-depth, many researchers (e.g., Aşan et al., 2020;
284 Lai, Liu, & Lu, 2021; Zhang, Liu, Li, & Tan, 2021) have successfully used Pine and Gilmore's
285 (1999) EXPECO concept and its four dimensions (i.e., entertainment, education, escape, and
286 aesthetic). Previous research has shown that visitors have experienced these four realms of
287 EXPECO during their visits or whenever they participate in an activity (e.g., Aşan et al., 2020;
288 Zhang et al., 2021). Moreover, some studies have shown that these four different domains result
289 in different PV types (Lai et al., 2021). Consequently, PV further affects visitors' satisfaction
290 and memory (Lai et al., 2021; Olya, Jung, Dieck, & Ryu, 2020) and BIs (Lai et al., 2021; Lee,
291 Jeong, & Qu, 2020). The above research findings may reinforce the hypothesis that visitors can
292 have different authentic food experiences at a food festival. Depending on the festival, these
293 experiences may be related to quality, participation, education and learning, entertainment,
294 space, and design, contributing to PV. All in all, a visitor may have a good perception of the
295 festival as a complete experience package. Ultimately, this experience package (EXPECO),
296 through creating a perception value, may stimulate the visitors' willingness to return to the
297 destination or likelihood to share the experience with others. However, there is a dearth of
298 studies that empirically studied the interrelationships among EXPECO, PV, CULEXP, and BI

299 in the context of food festivals. This paper addresses this void in prior literature by examining
300 how EXPECO leads to BI through PV and CULEXP, referring to a food festival context.

301 Food festivals have always been a rich and diverse source of entertainment for attendees
302 (Beckman, Shu, & Pan, 2020). Kim et al. (2015) stated that there are many opportunities for
303 fun, entertainment, personal involvement, and experiences in the festival industry. This
304 entertainment may include performing arts such as local dance, live music bands, and singing.
305 The diverse activities in a food festival provide entertainment for all attendees due to the tight
306 connection between people's daily life and foods (Hu, 2010; Kim et al., 2015). Popescu and
307 Cobras (2012) asserted that, as an honoring of customs, civilizations, cultures, and values,
308 festivals are a vital source of entertainment to satisfy a community's desires. The authors
309 indicated that if festival entertainment schedules are carefully designed to appeal to attendees
310 from different cultures, this will result in higher levels of satisfaction and positive BI through
311 the PV. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

312 *H1: Entertainment experience is positively related to attendees' behavioral intention via*
313 *perceived value.*

314 Another realm of EXPECO is esthetics, which refers to tangible aspects of the
315 environment (festival). Examples of tangible aspects of festival include information
316 availability, program content, souvenirs, transportation, convenient parking facilities, rest
317 areas, toilet facilities (washing and hygiene), and waste and recycling facilities. If these
318 tangible aspects of a festival meet attendees' expectations, the festival value is favorably
319 assessed, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction. Several studies have recognized the
320 role of esthetics in consumer behavior, loyalty, satisfaction, decision-making, and service
321 evaluations (e.g., Culha, 2020; Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011). In the tourism literature, Vesci
322 and Botti (2019) noted that the physical environment of a festival plays a vital role in
323 determining visitors' attitudes, future patronage intentions, and willingness to recommend. In
324 the case of the Ice Music Festival (Geilo, Southern Norway), for example, it was specifically

325 shown that the aesthetic dimension affects visitors' level of satisfaction (Mehmetoglu & Engen,
326 2011). Therefore, it is assumed that:

327 *H2: Esthetic experience is positively related to attendees' behavioral intention via perceived*
328 *value.*

329 Pine and Gilmore's framework (1999) demonstrates that education, referring to
330 learning something new and different, is another realm of EXPECO. They characterized the
331 educational experience as a combination of active participation and absorption. Usually,
332 consumers gain knowledge and improve their skills when involved in an educational
333 experience. In addition, it makes them feel that they can continue to learn after the educational
334 experience, thereby increasing their demand for the learning experience (Lai et al., 2020). In
335 particular, tourists' desire for self-learning has been recognized as a critical motivating factor
336 in festival attendance (Prentice, 2004; Prentice & Andersen, 2003). Consequently, education
337 has been reported as a cognitive benefit that allows attendees to learn something new (Lai et
338 al., 2020), thus enriching their skills (Xu & Cheung, 2020; Lee, Sung, Suh, & Zhao, 2017).
339 Similarly, Song et al. (2015) suggested that the major driving factor regarding travel is the
340 visitors' desire for self-learning. They emphasized that the educational experience creates a
341 high functional value for a travel product. This leads to the following hypothesis:

342 *H3: Educational experience is positively related to attendees' behavioral intention via*
343 *perceived value.*

344 Cohen's (1979) central theory explains tourists' experiences based on their mode and
345 behavior. In the diversionary mode, tourists seek diversion or escape from a routine and
346 monotonous life (Cohen, 1979). Escapism (as one of the active dimensions of EXPECO)
347 involves the active participation of tourists.

348 Food festivals have the potential to offer appropriate venues for people interested in
349 food and beverages; they can also provide a variety of visitor experiences, including an escape
350 from daily routine (Park, Reisinger, & Kang, 2008). In a study to assess participants'

351 motivations to attend a wine and food festival, Parker et al. (2008) referred to the “change”
352 dimension, which stresses the significance of changing the pace of routine life, relieving
353 fatigue, “running away from” everyday life and enjoying days out. Numerous festival and
354 adventure tourism studies have shown a direct correlation between tourists’ escape experiences
355 and their overall satisfaction and BI concerning food and wine festivals (Lee et al., 2017), local
356 food experience escape (Piramanayagam et al., 2020), and sea-based adventure experiences
357 (Triantafillidou & Petala, 2016). It has been suggested that the more benefits derived from an
358 escape experience, the greater the PV and the more satisfied attendees are, leading to positive
359 behavioral intentions (e.g., Piramanayagam et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2017). Therefore, it is
360 assumed that:

361 *H4: Escape experience is positively related to attendees’ behavioral intention via perceived*
362 *value.*

363 ***Moderating effect***

364 Dann (1977) posited that pull factors (external forces of a destination’s attributes) and
365 push factors (motivational influences and internal/ psychological forces) could be used to
366 explain tourists’ travel decisions and choice behavior. Moreover, he stated that, despite the
367 significant role of the pull factor, the actual decision to visit a destination is a consequence of
368 individuals’ prior need for travel, referring to the push factor. If an individual has a more
369 elementary need than a specific reason for selecting a travel destination, his or her internal
370 desire becomes involved. Together, these push factors stimulate tourists’ travel decisions
371 (Dann, 1977).

372 Festivals typically allow attendees to explore new experiences, people, and cultures
373 (Pan, Xu, Lu, & Gursoy, 2021). Stylianou-Lambert (2011) asserted that “cultural attractions
374 can be museums, galleries, *festivals*, architecture, heritage sites, artistic performances, as well
375 as attractions related to *food*, dress, language, and religion” (p.405). Particularly, food and

376 culinary events can enhance visitors' experience and are significant elements in experiencing
377 local cultures (Henderson, 2009).

378 Recent studies have shown that culinary attractions and events such as food festivals or
379 excursions act as pull factors and positively relate to memorable experiences and BIs (e.g.,
380 Henderson, 2009; Hu, 2010). When attendees experience authentic food from indigenous
381 cultures at festivals, it allows them to learn about and experience a community other than their
382 own (Hu, 2010). In a comprehensive study concerning the determinants of accepting insects as
383 food, Tan et al. (2015) found a significant role of cultural exposure and individual experiences
384 in stimulating tourists' food consumption behavior. Tan et al. (2015) suggested that cultural
385 differences and motives provide the context in which people follow their interests and
386 accumulate their experiences regarding different foods. Chen and Rahman (2018) stated that
387 CULEXP is significantly related to higher knowledge acquisition and memorable experiences,
388 leading to positive BI. A study by Kim, Choe, and Kim (2022) on a sample of 1,274 tourists
389 who tasted local foods in Hong Kong showed that differences in food culture had a moderating
390 effect on the relationship between novelty/quality of food and dining satisfaction. They believe
391 that eating local food in a destination is a cultural experience and satisfies visitors who are
392 seeking cultural exploration when choosing local food at a destination. Further, the study by
393 Chen et al. (2021) based on ECT showed that travel motivations strongly influenced visitors'
394 revisit and WOM intentions via satisfaction and experiences. Some examples of the measured
395 motivational factors in their study were to understand other cultures, gain knowledge,
396 experience something new and different, get away from every day, and visit a place related to
397 personal interests. Su et al. (2020) believe that potential food visitors are motivated and
398 satisfied not only by local, new, and special food consumption but also by cultural experiences
399 associated with foods. These visitors seek food destination experiences as a combination of
400 food and food-related culture.

401 Prior literature has provided robust findings on the desire for food events and the level
 402 of attendees' satisfaction, but little attention has been paid to strengthening this relationship
 403 (Tan et al., 2015). To fill this gap, this paper, therefore, proposes that if a festival's design is
 404 based on EXPECO and, simultaneously, attendees seek a meaningful, authentic experience
 405 (i.e., CULEXP), it will significantly impact attendees' PV and BI. Accordingly, the study
 406 postulates the moderating role of CULEXP on the dimensions of the EXPECO–PV–BI. Thus,
 407 it is hypothesized that:

408 *H5a: Cultural exploration moderates the positive effects of entertainment economy on*
 409 *perceived value and BI.*

410 *H5b: Cultural exploration moderates the positive effects of esthetic economy on perceived*
 411 *value and BI.*

412 *H5c: Cultural exploration moderates the positive effects of educational economy on perceived*
 413 *value and BI.*

414 *H5d: Cultural exploration moderates the positive effects of escaping economy on perceived*
 415 *value and BI.*

416

417 **[Figure 1]**

418 **Methodology**

419 *Research philosophy and development of measurements*

420 Multi-item measurement scales were used to measure the model constructs. CULEXP
 421 was measured by using eight items developed by Crompton and McKay (1997). Sample items
 422 included the following: "I want there to be a sense of discovery" and "I want to experience
 423 customs and cultures." Three items obtained from Kim et al. (2015) were used to evaluate PV.
 424 Sample items included the following: "Compared to the time I have spent, it is worth attending
 425 the festival" and "Compared to the effort I have made, it is worth attending the festival."
 426 EXPECO was measured by 24 items developed by Oh et al. (2007). Sample items included the
 427 following: "It is a real learning experience," "The setting is very attractive," "I really enjoy

428 watching what others were doing,” and “I feel like I am living in a different time or place.”
429 Finally, three items based on the study of Zeithaml et al. (1996) were used to measure BI.
430 Sample items included the following: “I would like to come back to this festival in the future”
431 and “I would recommend this festival to my friends or others.” All constructs were measured
432 using a five-point Likert scale, with extremes being 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly
433 agree.

434 *Data collection procedure*

435 A survey questionnaire was designed to explore visitors’ perceptions of the impact of
436 EXPECO, PV, and CULEXP on BI. The research was conducted at the Slow Food Festival in
437 Büyükkonuk, a renowned tourist destination in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.
438 Büyükkonuk (Komi Kebir) was chosen as the festival venue as it represents a traditional
439 Cypriot and indigenous eco-village. The festival was well-designed and -organized for both
440 exhibitors and participants. The festival was held outdoors, including booths and local
441 restaurants, which welcomed visitors. Turkish and Turkish Cypriot exhibitors brought their
442 food for display and sale. Some of them started preparing food, breads, cakes, and pastries
443 during the day in order to show the cooking recipe to the visitors. One of the authors, who
444 personally attended the festival, started randomly distributing the questionnaire plus an
445 envelope among visitors, asking them to fill it out, put the questionnaire in the envelope, and
446 deliver it to one of the booths or restaurants at their convenience. End of the day, envelopes
447 were collected from all the festival booths and local restaurants.

448 Of the 215 questionnaires distributed among the festival participants, 198 were
449 completed and returned (92.1% effective response rate). The sample comprised 44.9% (n = 89)
450 males and 55.1% (n = 109) females. About 53% (n = 104) of the respondents were married,
451 and the remainder (n = 94) were single; in addition, 53% (n = 105) were aged between 38 and
452 47, with around 30% (n = 61) aged between 28 and 37. In terms of education, 53.5% (n = 106)

453 of respondents had completed vocational education and 14.6% (n = 29) had university degrees.
454 Most visitors were locals (85%).

455 Several measures were taken to minimize potential common method bias before and
456 during the process of data collection (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). First,
457 the questionnaire consisted of only 30 items. Therefore, it was short enough to avoid fatigue
458 and confusion, which could harm respondents' cognitive efforts to respond accurately. Second,
459 the order of the measurement items was counterbalanced, reducing the risk of the respondents
460 "guessing" the answers. Third, to avoid a negative impact on the response rate, demographic
461 information items were placed at the end of the questionnaire, which increased the likelihood
462 of respondents answering previous items explicitly and honestly. Fourth, the questionnaire was
463 prepared in English and Turkish (the official language in Northern Cyprus). A bilingual
464 language expert translated the whole questionnaire from the English language into the Turkish
465 language to create the Turkish questionnaire. Moreover, the back-translation procedure was
466 used to assess whether the translated version was comparable to the original version. Finally,
467 the content and the face validity of the questionnaires for both English and Turkish versions
468 were assessed by three subject experts and 15 potential respondents. Comments from the
469 subject experts and potential respondents were incorporated into the final questionnaire design.

470 ***Data analysis***

471 All items were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the
472 convergent and discriminant validity of the study measurements using AMOS 26.0. A
473 structural model was then applied to test the proposed hypotheses empirically.

474

475 **Results**

476 *Measurement model testing*

477 A series of CFAs have been conducted to test the factorial validity of the measures via
478 maximum likelihood estimation. First, the seven-factor base model (M0) was identified, where
479 (F1) entertainment, (F2) esthetic, (F3) education, (F4) escape, (F5) PV, (F6) CULEXP, and
480 (F7) BI were considered as separate factors. The proposed model (M0) was then compared
481 with the substitute model (M2). A set of fit indices was used to evaluate the structural model.
482 The results in Table 1 demonstrated that the hypothesized seven-factor model, ($\chi^2 = 483.21$, df
483 $= 384$; $\chi^2 / df = 1.26$; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.869; Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.958;
484 Goodness Fit Index (GFI) = 0.869; Root Mean square Residual (RMR) = 0.055, Root Mean
485 Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.036) had an acceptable fit to the data.

486 [Table 1]

487

488 *Constructs' validity and reliability*

489 In the next step, the validity and reliability of the constructs were tested (Table 2). The
490 factor loadings of all items in each construct were satisfactory; and ranged from 0.528 to 0.957,
491 exceeding the threshold of 0.5. The Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.852 to 0.927 and
492 were above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7. All composite reliability values were
493 above 0.7, exceeding the acceptable value of 0.6 set by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson
494 (2010). The average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.519 to 0.705, above the
495 acceptable value of 0.50. These results support the convergent validity of the constructs
496 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The square root of the AVE for each construct was larger than its
497 inter-construct correlations (from 0.720 to 0.840), which supports the discriminant validity of
498 all variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010).

499 [Table 2]

500

501 *Descriptive analysis*

502 Table 3 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations among study
 503 constructs. As indicated in Table 3, BI is positively correlated with educational experience (r
 504 = 0.524, $p < 0.001$), esthetic experience ($r = 0.516$, $p < 0.001$), entertainment experience ($r =$
 505 0.519, $p < 0.001$), escape experience ($r = 0.290$, $p < 0.001$), PV ($r = 0.662$, $p < 0.001$), and
 506 CULEXP ($r = 0.343$, $p < 0.001$).

507 **[Table 3]**

508

509 *Assessing the mediating effect of PV*

510 The results of the direct and indirect tests are displayed in Table 4. Three components
 511 of visitor's EXPECO (education, entertainment, and esthetics) were identified as significant
 512 predictors of visitors' BI. The results demonstrate that education ($\beta = 0.317$, $p < 0.001$),
 513 entertainment ($\beta = 0.290$, $p < 0.001$), esthetics ($\beta = 0.307$, $p < 0.001$), and escape ($\beta = -0.044$,
 514 $p = \text{n.s.}$) are positively related to BI. Next, PV was entered as the mediator between the
 515 components of EXPECO and BI. The findings indicate that PV partially mediates the effect of
 516 education ($\beta = 0.282$, $p < 0.001$), entertainment ($\beta = 0.278$, $p < .001$), and esthetics ($\beta = 0.265$,
 517 $p < 0.001$) on BI, supporting H1, H2, H3. However, the results do not show a mediating effect
 518 of PV in the causal relationship between escape and BI ($\beta = 0.081$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), not supporting
 519 H4.

520 In addition, Sobel test was applied to measure the statistical significance of intermediary
 521 impact of PV between EXPECO's dimensions and BI. The result of Sobel test also showed that
 522 PV significantly mediated the impact of education on BI ($t = 3.925$, $p < 0.001$), entertainment
 523 on BI ($t = 3.816$, $p < 0.001$), and esthetic on BI ($t = 3.408$, $p < 0.001$). However, the results of
 524 Sobel test also did not support the mediating impact of PV between escape experience and BI
 525 ($t = 1.180$, n.s.).

[Table 4]

526

527

528

529 *Assessing the moderating effect*

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The results of the direct and interaction tests are displayed in Table 5. In the direct test, CULEXP was identified as a significant antecedent of PV ($\beta = 0.389$, $p < 0.001$) and visitors' BI ($\beta = 0.434$, $p < 0.001$). Interaction effects of the independent variables and moderator on PV and BI were tested. The findings demonstrate significant positive interaction effects of education \times CULEXP ($\beta = 0.483$, $p < 0.001$), entertainment \times CULEXP ($\beta = 0.497$, $p < 0.001$), esthetics \times CULEXP ($\beta = 0.494$, $p < 0.001$), and escape \times CULEXP ($\beta = 0.354$, $p < 0.001$) on visitors' PV and BI.

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In addition, we plotted the EXPECO's dimensions*CULEXP interaction at two levels of CULEXP (e.g., +1 SD, -1 SD; Bauer and Curran, 2005) and conducted a simple slope test to re-examine the nature of the constructs' interaction. The interactions are graphically displayed in Figure 2. Panel A, indicates that CULEXP strengthens the positive relationship between educational experience and PV-BI. Panel B indicates that CULEXP strengthens the positive relationship between entertainment experience and PV-BI. Panel C indicates that CULEXP strengthens the positive relationship between esthetic experience and PV-BI. In addition, Panel D indicates that CULEXP dampens the negative relationship between escape experience and PV-BI.

546

[Table 5]

547

[Figure 2]

548

549

The findings of path analysis (direct, mediating, and moderating) are graphically displayed in Figure 3. Interaction effects are indicated as bold lines and non-significant effects

550 showed as dotted lines. The beta coefficient (β) values are significant at the level of $*p < 0.001$
551 (2-tailed).

552 [Figure 3]

553 **Conclusion**

554 *Discussion*

555 This paper empirically examined interrelationships among experiential food festival
556 attributes, perceived value, cultural exploration, and behavioral intention to visit food festivals
557 by referring to a sample of visitors attending the SLOW food festival. The findings indicate
558 that PV mediates the impact of EXPECO on BI. The results are consistent with those of other
559 studies that BI is affected by positive and memorable experiences, the consequential desirable
560 attitude, and more significant value perceptions (Huang et al., 2019; Kumar, Panda, &
561 Adhikari, 2022; Moon & Han, 2019). Moreover, customers' PV not only results in customer
562 satisfaction but also impacts repurchase intention and loyalty (Alrawadieh, Prayag,
563 Alrawadieh, & Alsalamdeen, 2019; Moon & Han, 2019). Visitors encounter unique experiences
564 during their participation in the festival, which affects their evaluation and satisfaction with the
565 features and facilities of the festival. They are more likely to be satisfied when realize the value
566 of a unique experience, and this perception of value and satisfaction will affect their BIs. These
567 results also are in line with and support the ECT. The findings reveal that food festivals with
568 high experiential food festival attributes meet and exceed customers' expectations, enhance
569 their PV, and lead to positive BIs (e.g., willingness to revisit intention and positive WOM).

570 Among the four dimensions of EXPECO, educational experience showed the most
571 substantial direct and indirect influence on BI via PV. Pine and Gilmore (1999) assert that
572 through educational experiences, visitors absorb the events at a destination while actively
573 participating through mind-and-body interactions. They believe that educational dimension

574 reflects active participation. visitors who actively participates in an event's activities directly
575 affects the performance or event becomes part of their experiences. For example, displaying a
576 variety of foods, especially local foods, at festivals, showing visitors how to prepare them, and
577 providing an opportunity to allow them to try and learn new knowledge along with engaging
578 in interactions with local people are pieces of evidence of absorption and active participation
579 of attendees. In the case of the current study, with educational experiences, visitors absorbed
580 the food festival attributes at a destination and actively participated via the interactive
581 engagement at the food festival. The researched Slow Food Festival allowed participants to
582 take a closer look at how different dishes are cooked and even allowed them to try the cooking
583 process themselves. According to the results, participants' knowledge, information, and
584 skills—both general and specific—increased through educational experiences at the Slow Food
585 Festival. In addition, education has been repeatedly found to be a stimulator for food festival
586 visitors (Culha, 2020; Lai et al., 2020) and significantly related to their levels of satisfaction
587 and future decision-making. These results are in line with Lai et al. (2020) study findings about
588 ethnic cuisine, which show that educational experience has significant direct effects on visitors'
589 satisfaction and their memory and indirectly on their WOM. We believe that visitors have
590 satisfying educational experiences only if the event activities with specific and different
591 contents trigger their active participation in acquiring knowledge or skills. The results
592 demonstrated that the Slow food festival could provide an opportunity to enable visitors to
593 enjoy the foods more by learning about its ingredients, processes, and history, through which
594 also enhances their value perception and BI of the event.

595 Regarding the second dimension of EXPECO, the results show that entertainment
596 experience is positively related to visitors' BI via PV. Entertainment experience commonly
597 occurs when a consumer passively observes the activities, and their participation in destination
598 activities will not directly impact the event activities; however, they typically absorb

599 entertaining offerings by the event. (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999).
600 Entertainment is generally an inseparable part of famous food festivals in the world. Through
601 side activities and entertainments like competitions, singing, acrobats, etc., food festival
602 policymakers try to take attendees' attention to the festival. They believe that visitors become
603 excited and absorbed when they are amazed by the entertainment held at the festival. Even such
604 entertainment can consider a festival's competitive strategy and enhance attendees' perceived
605 festival values. In line with previous studies (Culha, 2020; Ding & Lee, 2017; Manthiou, Lee,
606 Tang, & Chiang, 2014), the findings revealed that the entertainment experience is an antecedent
607 of visitors' festival overall experiences, satisfaction, and positive behavioral intention. Visitors
608 to the Slow food festival in Büyükkonuk had the chance to enjoy performing arts such as folk
609 music and local dances, which was planned by the festival's policymakers. Festival planners
610 had invited famous local traditional singing and dancing groups to perform various programs
611 for the attendees in several sessions during the day of the festival. Visitors also had the
612 opportunity to visit festival booths and see how traditional dishes and different types of local
613 bread are prepared and cooked, which, in turn, has been a form of entertainment for them.
614 Overall, the findings revealed that the Slow food festival successfully provided unique
615 programs to entertain and absorb visitors, enhancing their satisfaction, perceived value and
616 positive BIs of the event.

617 The results also confirm that esthetic experience is positively related to visitors' BI via
618 PV. Aesthetic experiences for festival attendees refer to their overall evaluation of the festival's
619 physical environment. The esthetic experience is based on participants' assessment of the
620 physical environment or the general atmosphere. This involves passive participation but more
621 contemplation, attention, and reflection on what is seen or experienced. Dieck, Jung, and
622 Rauschnabel (2018) and Aşan, Kaptangil, and Kınay (2020), believe that aesthetic experiences
623 are a very strong type of experience and are considered as one of the important predictors of

624 overall experiences. According to the results, attendees had aesthetic experiences through
625 passive participation in the food festival. Other studies (e.g., Dieck et al., 2018; Mehmetoglu
626 and Engen, 2011; Lee et al., 2017; Oh et al., 2007), also confirmed that aesthetic experience is
627 one of the most dominating dimensions of EXPECO. In addition, attendees perceived festival
628 value mediates the relationship between aesthetic experiences and BI. This important type of
629 EXPECO, which occur with attendees' immersion in the festivals, creates a positive perception
630 of festival value, which converts into satisfaction, and ultimately positively impacts visitors'
631 future decisions. This result is the line with findings reported by Lee et al. (2017) and Culha
632 (2020) that esthetics is a significant element affecting visitors' future BIs (i.e., revisit intention
633 and WOM). This study indicated that all the aesthetic attributes of the festival impact the
634 quality of the visitors' experiences to the Büyükkonuk Slow Food Festival. Further, this study
635 revealed that the quality of products and the beauty of other amenities have overall the
636 significant influence on visitors' PV, their WOM and intention to revisit the Slow Food festival.

637 Contrary to previous studies' findings (e.g., Lee & Lee, 2019; Mehmetoglu & Engen,
638 2011), the current study results did not confirm hypothesis 4, that escape experience is not
639 significantly related to visitors' BI via PV. An escape experience provides ample opportunity
640 to escape from everyday life, relax, and enjoy one's excursion. Obviously, cultural festivals
641 (i.e., food festivals) should be organized with different or unique content that emphasizes and
642 creates escape experiences for attendees at the festival venue. However, cultural visitors have
643 various motivations and seek not necessarily escape but also other types of experiences at
644 festival sites (Lee & Lee, 2019). We believe that the main reason hypothesis 4 was not
645 supported is related to the festival's duration: a one-day festival may not be sufficient for
646 visitors to step out of everyday life. Perhaps the day visitors gathered at the festival was not
647 enough to socialize with others. A brief look at other popular food festivals (i.e., St. Moritz
648 Gourmet Festival, nine days; New Orleans Wine & Food Experience, five days) shows that

649 most are held over more than one day, perhaps to give attendees a chance to immerse
650 themselves in an environment outside of everyday life and have more time to find and interact
651 with others. In addition, as explained previously, escape experiences are so immersive that
652 consumers feel they have become involved in another place or time. Crompton and McKay
653 (1997) believe that one domain that should be incorporated into a festival's motivational
654 instruments is recovery equilibrium (relaxation/escape), socialization, and external
655 interaction/socialization. Thus, the second possible reason for the lack of support for hypothesis
656 4 may be that most visitors were local and indigenous, so they may not have felt they were in
657 a different place and visit different people.

658 Moreover, as predicted, the findings show that higher PV and BI result from the
659 interaction of CULEXP and EXPECO. The interaction analysis results confirm that visitors
660 who experience high EXPECO, along with CULEXP, better understand the value of the festival
661 such that their BI increases. The festival organizers tried to use the historical and cultural
662 themes and provide traditional cuisines in traditional ways to develop the event attributes to
663 attract more visitors and create a cultural image in the festival destination. The findings
664 demonstrated that all these attempts were fruitful in creating a situation for those visitors
665 looking for different cultures and experiences in different dimensions and enhancing their PV
666 and BIs regarding the Slow food festival. This finding aligns with Chen and Rahman's (2018)
667 study, which found that CULEXP is significantly related to higher knowledge acquired and
668 memorable experience, leading to positive BI. According to the push and pull framework,
669 people who pursue CULEXP are attracted to cultural attractions (festivals) isolated from their
670 ordinary place of residence to gain new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural
671 needs. The findings are also consistent with Duran and Hamarat's (2014) viewpoints, who
672 asserted that cultural exploration is one of the significant push factors for attending events.
673 They believe that festivals should design based on at least one cultural theme reflecting the

674 event and destination cultural heritage simultaneously. Festival organizers should always
675 consider destinations' cultural identity, authenticity, and diversity to create value and attract
676 more visitors.

677 *Theoretical contribution*

678 This study assessed the mediating effect of PV on the causal relationship between
679 EXPECO and BI. Research on EXPECO is necessary for tourism contexts since there are
680 insufficient studies in this field and the processes by which individuals transform and
681 personalize an event into something personally meaningful at different stages of consumption
682 (Chang, 2018). Thus, while it has been widely acknowledged that visitors' experiences are
683 meaningful and have positive outcomes (Mair & Weber, 2019), there is little knowledge of
684 how experiences impact visitors' BI through PV (Lai et al., 2020). Notably, despite the
685 importance of customer value, few studies have explored the relationship between experiential
686 festival attributes, visitors' PV, and BI in the food festival context (Huang et al., 2019; Lai et
687 al., 2020). To fill this gap, by applying ECT, this study has proposed a research framework
688 portraying the interrelationships among EXPECO, PV, CULEXP, and BI. Knowing about each
689 dimension of the EXPECO and their magnitude effects on visitors' PV and BIs will
690 significantly contribute to the prior literature as these dimensions of EXPECO directly relates
691 to visitors' cognitive and affective psychology.

692 To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this is the first quantitative study to have
693 examined the moderating role of CULEXP via a causal relationship study in the context of a
694 food festival (Borges et al., 2020). This research fills a gap in the literature by examining the
695 moderating role of CULEXP as a critical push factor to allow the evaluation of visitors'
696 willingness to return and recommend to others (Xu & Cheung, 2020). Furthermore, the
697 moderating effect by which CULEXP strengthens this process enriches knowledge regarding
698 the power of push factors based on the push and pull framework (Borges et al., 2020). From

699 the push factor perspective, this paper deeply explored the multidimensional experiences
700 generated by the EXPECO and CULEXP in the context of food festivals. The study highlights
701 that cultural motivation has a significant and direct interaction effects on four dimensions of
702 the EXPECO and consequently on PV and BIs, which, in turn, has a valuable theoretical
703 contribution to the studies related to the expansion of destination tourism through cultural
704 festivals.

705 *Practical implications*

706 The results provide meaningful and valuable implications for policymakers, organizers,
707 and marketers in festival management that may be applied to more effectively allocate limited
708 resources. By creating various opportunities for visitors, festivals can increase their EXPECO,
709 resulting in positive WOM and revisit intentions. It is vital for policymakers and organizers to
710 understand and appreciate visitors' needs, tastes, preferences, and expected experiences at food
711 festivals. By understanding the pivotal role of EXPECO and CULEXP, organizers can provide
712 a wide range of services to create different experiences for participants. Festival organizers
713 must reform their policies, plans, and tactics to create situations to promote more social,
714 cultural, and educational opportunities and create an environment that focuses on participation,
715 pleasure, enjoyment, and social status.

716 This study measured four dimensions of EXPECO, in which entertainment experience
717 showed the most critical dimension and demonstrated the most substantial direct and indirect
718 influence on attendees' BI via value perceptions. In the present study festival, attendees visited
719 not only various food stands and local restaurants and got acquainted with different local food
720 but also witnessed local dances and songs. It is argued that, there should be an opportunity for
721 everyone to try a range of dishes plus entertainment in the food festivals. In this regards,
722 outdoor or indoor entertainment should first meet the general festival's criteria, then be
723 appropriate and ideal for food festivals, food fairs, and food exhibitions to provide a situation

724 to leave a lasting impression on attendees. Exciting and unique food-themed entertainment
725 would be a strategy to attract visitors from different age ranges. For example, we can refer to
726 food-themed entertainment including the roller-skating vegetables (exciting for the children
727 and providing unique and memorable photo opportunities), the acrobatic food makers (e.g.,
728 acrobatic pizza makers), food scientists (e.g., offering foods with lab dishes), and so on.
729 Overall, it is recommended to food festivals, policymakers consider different types of
730 entertainment to provide more opportunities for visitors to enjoy and increase their value
731 perceptions and positive behavioral intentions.

732 Physical environment quality, such as the infrastructure quality of the venue, the beauty
733 of stands, the cleanness and sanitary of the area, and interaction quality, including the
734 interaction with the festival exhibitors, should also be considered, as attendees' overall
735 perceptions of aesthetic experiences, which impact on their PV and BI of visiting food festivals.
736 Festival policymakers and presenters must consider and manage the quality of access. Festival
737 management may also provide participants with car parking and convenient transportation to
738 enable them to participate in the festival even if they do not have a private car, which can
739 enhance the festival's quality and the attendees' aesthetic experiences.

740 From the educational perspective, the current study's findings provide a valuable
741 guideline for food festival policymakers. Attendees' educational experience can be promoted
742 at the food festivals by educating them on the knowledge of the local cuisine, bread, pastry,
743 jam, and pickled vegetables and their ingredients, features, processing, and also their history
744 and origins. Cooking and baking training and other relevant information can be provided by
745 exhibitors, local restaurateurs, and chefs at the festival. It would be even better if some famous
746 national and international chefs were invited to the food festival. By having more knowledge
747 of the local foods, attendees would be more satisfied with and memorize their educational
748 experience.

749 Furthermore, escape experiences can be advertised as ways to get away from typical
750 food and routine behavior, meet new people, famous chefs, and celebrities. Moreover, festival
751 marketers may emphasize the importance of attending such festivals for building self-
752 confidence and fundamental changes in their physical and mental health through testing
753 different foods, familiarity with the therapeutic properties of foods, and, most importantly,
754 interaction with people. Also, it is recommended that the festival providers consider the
755 festival's duration; increasing the time or number of festivals' days may also promote escape
756 experiences. For those who are tired of their day-to-day routine and need new experiences,
757 spending two or three days in a different environment and engaging in various activities may
758 provoke their escape experiences.

759 In addition, festival policymakers must develop appropriate marketing promotional
760 strategies to attract first-time attendees. For example, to create a good sense of the food festival
761 for the participants, the festival management can pay more attention to validating the food
762 festival, promoting the food festival as one of the most important destination festivals, and
763 maintaining its credibility, which in turn leads to increasing attendees' PV, revisit intentions
764 and positive WOM for the next food festival. In addition, to enhance visitor involvement,
765 individuals can be drawn into the consumption phase by being allowed to test what is on offer.
766 In this way, festival organizers can enable participants to have exciting experiences, such as
767 tasting new and exotic foods or trying new ways of eating and drinking. In addition, inviting
768 food celebrities to festivals may be a valuable competitive strategy to increase festival and
769 destination credibility with visitors. Finally, familiarizing participants with ingredients and
770 their uses, foods, and cooking may create memorable experiences for them.

771 *Limitations and future research*

772 Although this research investigates the interrelationships between EXPECO, PV,
773 CULEXP, and BI, a more in-depth, qualitative study is needed to identify the precise

774 mechanism between these constructs. BI is considered a single concept in this paper, and future
775 research can examine this variable as a multidimensional construct comprising revisit intention
776 and WOM or even electronic-WOM. Further, future researchers can test different types of PV,
777 such as quality, emotional, price, and social indicators, as mediators in the proposed
778 framework. Third, it is recommended that researchers identify other push and pull factors other
779 than CULEXP as moderators that increase visitors' PV and BI. Next, due to cultural and
780 destination facilities differences, festivals may have different characteristics and provide
781 different experiences for visitors from other destinations. Therefore, it is suggested that future
782 research in the context of food festivals may conduct in other destinations to gain more insights
783 related to the study constructs and generalize the study findings.

784

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