
GASTRONOMY OFFER IN A FUNCTION OF CREATION AND CO-CREATION OF A RECOGNIZED HOTEL BRAND - ILLUSTRATIONS FROM HOTEL CRNI VRH

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to point out the possibility of the influence of the quality of the gastronomic offer in the restaurant of the hotel Crni vrh, on the creation or co-creation of the hotel brand. The quality items of the hotel's complete catering offer were analyzed and grouped by exploratory factor analysis into three factors (Food, Space and Personality). The results of the multiple regression analysis determined the contribution of two quality factors to the creation of the hotel brand. Also, the research came to the conclusion that the majority of visitors, after the experience gained, decide to come again to the rural and mountainous areas, and a smaller percentage to the urban environment. The importance of the research is reflected in the contribution of the existing literature, in the contribution to future more important research, as well as in finding strategic solutions for better hotel operations.

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Introduction

The entire restaurateur's offer depends to a large extent on the quality of the food offered in the restaurant's offer (Namkung & Jang, 2007). There is little research in the world that gives results related to the influence of other factors such as design,

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interior, exterior, employees, on the influence of restaurant business quality and brand creation. All recent researches mainly study the quality of the gastronomic offer, and consider it crucial for the survival of restaurants or hotels, and even destinations on the tourist market and the service market (Gajić et al., 2022). Modern business and lifestyle give increasing importance to traditional gastronomy, visits to rural and mountain areas (Medić et al., 2015). The gastronomic offer in the restaurants of such destinations allows consumers to become more thoroughly acquainted with the everyday culture and life, the traditions of the people, and to get to know the true values and spirit of the destination (Gajić et al., 2022). The experience in destinations and restaurants, where tourists can feel the spirit of history and culture, as well as traditional ones, affects their perception of the entire offer, and therefore the possibility of creating a brand, or co-creating an already existing brand (Aaker et al., 1994). Nowadays, apart from the fact that gastronomy is an integral part of the tourist destination and the tourist experience, it is also considered to be a form of art, as well as an inspiration for hobbies and entertainment (Baldwin et al., 2011). If we look at the concept of gastronomy realistically, it can be seen that this statement is correct. Through the creation of different gastronomic products, there is a need for constant improvement of the same products, beautification, work on visual and other sensory factors (Gajić et al., 2022; Pantić et al., 2021; Zrnić et al., 2021). The gastronomy of Serbia is a combination of different cultures and traditions, but it can certainly be said that despite the weak spectrum of typical traditional food, there is the possibility of preparing every dish on offer in a traditional way (Medić et al., 2015; Luković et al., 2022). Serbian cuisine has changed its characteristics for centuries depending on the different cultures and civilizations that came to these areas (Bekar & Gövce, 2019). Food can certainly be a specific representative of a destination, and influence the creation of a brand, both new and changing the existing brand in the minds of consumers (Chen & Chen., 2014). No matter how much Serbian food has undergone changes over the centuries, every user who stays in a hotel in one of the Serbian mountains or in rural areas, thinks that he is trying typical traditional Serbian food (Gajić et al., 2022). The goal of every restaurateur would be to adapt the gastronomic offer to the tradition and culture of the people, at least by preparing it in a specific way (Gilbert et al., 2004).

The goal of the research was to see the state of quality of the entire restaurant and gastronomic offer at the Crni vrh hotel on the Divčibare mountain, and based on that, to establish whether the users think that the quality offers can justify the brand that is marketed for this destination, or to create a new brand on the market. Tourist destinations support the development of quality traditional gastronomy, and consider the gastronomic offer a tourist resource, which will bring the destination to a high level on the tourist market of supply and demand. At the beginning of the research itself, two research questions were asked, which should receive an answer with the confirmation of the initial hypotheses: Can the experience they gained based on the gastronomic offer in the restaurant of the hotel Crni vrh, be a factor in creating a new brand and co-creating an existing brand in positive direction? Will tourists, because of the experience

gained in the restaurateur and gastronomic offer in the hotel, opt for the traditional gastronomy of villages and mountain destinations, or the offer of urban areas?

The importance of the research is primarily reflected in determining the quality of the existing gastronomic offer of the hotel Crni vrh. Considering that there is a very small amount of literature related to the quality of restaurant business of this hotel, the results can contribute to the importance in the theoretical and applied sense. Based on the results, it will be possible to see the current situation and devise strategic measures for corrective activities in order to improve the quality of the offer, thus creating a positive awareness among consumers and a positive impact on brand creation. Also, the results can serve for larger research on the given problem, and contribute to the literature, which is very scarce.

Background of the Study Area

The importance of a quality gastronomic offer in restaurants on the creation of a brand

The creation of an authentic brand in gastronomy is related to the acquired experience of tourists at the destination itself or in the restaurant (Ha & Jang., 2010). Gastronomy helps to create a unique impression of a tourist destination. The post-industrial era has created specific consumers, who are increasingly striving to evaluate the sensory factors of food, thereby evaluating the gastronomic offer and creating an authentic brand (Zrnić et al., 2021). Tourists are more demanding and want, in addition to the basic offer in the form of food, to receive the entire service, on the basis of which they will get to know the official culture, recognized works of art and tourist attractions, but also to have a deeper understanding of the destination, the daily life of the inhabitants and local traditions (Yi & Choi, 2012). A strong brand symbolizes not only the type of service that will be provided to the consumer, but also the type of experience that they will experience on that occasion (Woodside et al., 2009). In general, the brand is a guarantee of quality, thus increasing consumer confidence that their expectations will be met, or even exceeded (Gordin et al., 2016).

The first forms of providing food and beverage services in order to create a specific and recognizable destination, and then to generate profit, date back to the period of ancient civilizations, while the first commercial restaurants appeared much later (Šerić & Gil-Saura, 2012). Taverns in Serbian society are given the importance of an institution that has multiple functions: economic, social, cultural, political, democratic, information-communication, stage and theater, driving, and even the function of a battlefield for gender equality (Rakić & Rakić, 2010; Radović & Keković, 2014). Despite the fact that the first restaurateurs were focused on offering drinks, Serbian restaurants put food in the foreground, which is in line with the existence of a food cult (Rakić & Rakić, 2010). Restaurants that operate within the hotel, as well as those outside of that operation, create a product that is a combination of material elements and interconnected service activities (Rather & Sharma, 2016). All these elements are included in the restaurant product, which can be further broken down according to the needs of the guests, in order to satisfy their demands, and to create a brand

recognizable by consumers (Konuk, 2019). According to Chen & Chen (2014) restaurant product includes the following elements: physical product (food and beverage), service environment, quality of service delivered, location and price (Ii & Choi, 2012). The same authors claim that with the help of the quality of all the mentioned factors, it is possible to create brand or co-create an existing brand on the market.

Many researchers and theoreticians believe that in the modern period, the gastronomic offer must be adapted to new tendencies, in order to create a recognizable brand (Zrnić et al., 2021). The traditional offer is considered more acceptable for consumers, especially if we are talking about food served in restaurants in rural areas or mountain destinations (Gajić et al., 2022). Such food is considered by consumers as local food, which is desirable as a primary factor in attracting tourists, and creating a brand that will bring the same tourists back to the given destination (Gajić et al., 2022). With a quality gastronomic offer, it is possible to form the local authenticity of all the products on offer, and to create a specific image of the given destination in the mind of the consumer, in the form of its attractiveness and a special brand (Aaker et al., 1994). With a traditional or local offer, tourists feel the place and the spirit of the place and the people of that destination (Jang & Ha, 2015).

Even some researches have indicated different factors of the quality of the offer of certain restaurants that affect the satisfaction of the specific demands of the guests (Dion & Arnould, 2016). Some authors point out that these are usually factors such as the quality of the food, the quality of the overall service and the pleasant atmosphere (Nam et al., 2011; Pavlović et al., 2021; Manhas & Tukamushaba, 2015; Šerić & Gil-Saura, 2012; Šapić et al., 2019). In particular, all the mentioned factors are part of a quality gastronomic offer in restaurants, but also the main implicators for the development of a specific brand or the co-creation of an existing brand (Baldwin et al., 2011). The repeated return of consumers is conditioned by a quality gastronomic offer, their satisfaction with food, but also other factors that make up an overall positive experience for consumers (Kim et al., 2013). In addition to the impact on satisfaction and restaurant choice, Anselmsson et al (2014). found that food quality also affects the brand image in consumer perception (Zrnić et al., 2021). The quality and popularity of restaurants and other catering facilities is based on the variety of dishes. In this way, existing guests are retained and new guests are attracted (Chen & Chen, 2014). The restaurateur preserves tradition and acquires an image in the form of recognition for the content and quality of the gastronomic offer (Yi & Choi, 2012). Guests choose from alternative fast service facilities based on attributes such as location convenience, price, consistency, food quality, service quality and cleanliness (Mun et al., 2022). Guests “selective perception, selective distortion and selective retention” determine which attributes are perceived as important for their needs and become part of a lasting brand image (Nicolaidis, 2018). The main goal of the restaurant, but also of every other company, is satisfaction and value creation, which is of special importance for conquering the market. That is why creating “value and consumer satisfaction” is the heart of modern marketing thoughts and practices (Erkmen, 2019).

There are more and more tourists who are looking for an authentic experience, and visit local restaurants and regularly consume local food, and in this way feel the tradition, the culture, the way of life of the people from those areas (Lu et al., 2015). Serving food and drinks is a complex process, composed of a number of factors that, if they are of high quality, can influence the consumer's perception of both the gastronomic offer and the destination (Ismail et al., 2016).

According to the study of the existing literature on the topic of the influence of the quality gastronomic offer of the restaurant, the authors set initial hypotheses:

H1: The quality of the gastronomic offer, as well as the entire restaurant offer of the hotel Crni Vrh, is at relatively satisfactory level

H2: Factors of the quality of the gastronomic offer can influence the creation and co-creation of the existing Crni vrh hotel brand

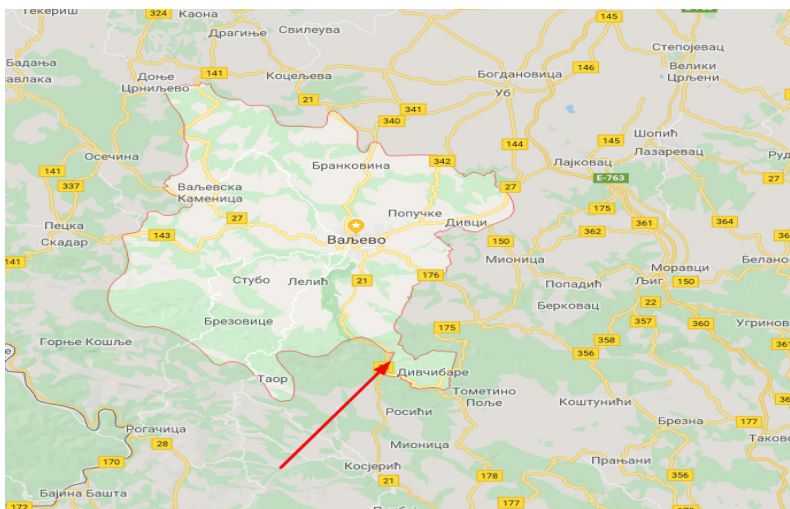
H3: Tourists, after experiencing the gastronomy of the destination, will rather visit the rural and mountain part than the urban environment.

Methods

Area of research and sample

Qualitative research was carried out, based on available literature, and quantitative based on data collected by field research, as part of a pilot volunteer research. In the period from January to July 2022, the authors surveyed 352 respondents in the restaurant of the Crni vrh hotel on the Divčibare mountain in Serbia. The hotel is located at an altitude of 980 meters and is 118 km from Belgrade. It is categorized with four stars, and has a total of 111 rooms for accommodation and one restaurant for catering to visitors.

Figure 1. The position of the hotel Crni Vrh on the Divčibare mountain



Source: <https://www.google.com/search>

Over 500 questionnaires were distributed, but a total of 352 were collected with complete answers that can be taken into consideration and further analysis. The required number of respondents according to the G*power test is 119. Considering that there were a total of 3 predictors (19 items) and 1 criterion, the required effect size was set at $\eta^2 = 0.15$, with statistical power of 0.95, and it was calculated that a sample size of 119 respondents could be appropriate for this research. Which means that the total number of respondents that the authors managed to collect is considered representative. However, it must be noted that the research is a pilot and volunteer research. Of the total number of respondents, 46.9% were female, while 53.1% were male. A total of 32.6% belonged to the age group of 20 to 35 years, followed by 40.5% from 36 to 55 years, and 26.9% over 56 years of age. There were a total of 28.9% of tourists or research participants with an average monthly income of less than 500 euros, followed by 42.3% with an income of 500-1,000 euros, and 28.8% with more than 1,000 euros. As for the educational structure of the respondents, 35% of them belong to the group with completed high school, 28.3% with higher vocational school, and 36.7% with university education. Of the total number of respondents, 25% come from Vojvodina, followed by 36.7% from the region of Belgrade and Central Serbia, and 30% from Western Serbia and only 8.3% from Southern Serbia.

Measures

The authors used a modified version of the questionnaire for determining the quality factors established by the author Ali Solunoglu, in his research entitled Perceived Food Quality, Satisfaction, Brand Image In Restaurants And Recommendation Intention Relation (2020). Cronbach's alpha values are given for each of the factors. More precisely, the coefficient is used to measure the reliability of each item or scale given. Values are given in parentheses for each of them, and It can be seen that the reliability of each factor in this research is with high value. Three factors were established with the following items: Factor 1 – Food (Quality food, Fresh food, Sensory preferences (smell, taste, visual appearance of food), HACCP standards are followed, Homemade food, Homemade drinks, The traditional way of preparing food, Mark of origin on the product, Local domestic products available in restaurant, Preparing food on the spot, $\alpha=0,832$), Factor 2 – Space (Specific exterior and interior, Hygiene at the satisfactory level, Availability of information, good signalization; $\alpha=0,769$) and Factor 3 - Personality (Assistance to tourists is always available from the service provider, Every guest is treated individually, Service providers do their job correctly, Service providers provide all information, Service providers know foreign languages; $\alpha=0,817$). The criterion Creating/Co-creating Brand contains four variables with their reliability values: The quality of the complete tourist offer can create a brand ($\alpha=0,720$), Price influences brand creation ($\alpha=0,802$), A gastronomic offer can create a brand ($\alpha=0,790$), Marketing can influence brand creation ($\alpha=0,815$).

Data analysis

Respondents expressed their views on five-point Likert scales. The respondents evaluate the stated findings on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “absolute dissatisfaction”, 2-“dissatisfaction”, 3-“dont have opinion”, 4 -“satisfaction”, “while 5 means “absolute satisfaction”. Data analysis was performed using the statistical program IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences SPSS 22). Parametric statistics were used to analyze the results, as it was established that the distribution of the data is normal. Values of Skewness and Kurtosis (Sk and Ku) are in the range $-1.5 - 1.5$ (according to Tabacnick and Fidell (2013)). A descriptive statistical analysis was performed in order to determine the value of each of the items, and in order to negate one of the initial hypotheses, which concerns the achieved quality of the gastronomic offer in the restaurant of the hotel Crni vrh. After that, the authors performed an exploratory factor analysis, in order to group the items into a certain number of factors, and determine the percentage of variance explained, as well as the percentage of saturation for each factor. Factor analysis determines group membership for each item, where all variables in one group are highly correlated with each other, but are weakly correlated with variables in other groups. Multiple regression analysis confirmed the influence of factors on brand creation or co-creation. This analysis is used when there is a determination of the influence of one dependent and several independent variables. Using binary logistic regression, the authors tried to determine to what extent the respondents, after the experience gained, decide to visit the rural and mountainous area again, or decide to stay in the city.

Results

Research design included the following steps: identifying the problem, setting research questions, determining the model with goal setting and hypotheses, determining the sample, collecting data through field research and available literature, analyzing and processing data, making concluding remarks. Table 1. provides an overview of the average ratings and standard deviation values for each item that is grouped into one of the three listed factors.

Table 1. Descriptive values for quality items

	m	sd
All safety standards of the space have been achieved	3.15	.871
Quality food	4.44	.771
Fresh food	3.87	.815
Sensory preferences (smell, taste, visual appearance of food)	3.67	.777
HACCP standards are followed	3.31	.601
Homemade food	2.45	.753
Homemade drinks	2.87	.794
The traditional way of preparing food	3.46	.776
Mark of origin on the product	2.07	.329
Local domestic products available in restaurant	2.33	.630

	m	sd
Preparing food on the spot	3.34	.570
Specific exterior and interior	3.57	.778
Hygiene at the satisfactory level	4.06	.910
Availability of information, good signalization	3.62	.782
Assistance to tourists is always available from the service provider	3.20	.886
Every guest is treated individually	3.85	.852
Service providers do their job correctly	2.71	.895
Service providers provide all information	3.78	.746
Service providers know foreign languages	3.77	.906
The quality of the complete tourist offer can create a brand	4.08	.915
Price influences brand creation	3.60	.820
A gastronomic offer can create a brand	3.85	.740
Marketing can influence brand creation	4.05	.683
FOOD	3.16	.560
SPACE	3.75	.830
PERSONALITY	3.46	.790
CREATING/CO-CREATING BRAND	3.89	.850

Source: author's research. *m – arithmetic means, sd- standard deviation

A total of 19 items representing the quality factors of the gastronomic service, which were evaluated by the respondents in the restaurant of the hotel Crni vrh, were included. It can be seen that the item Quality food, which belongs to Factor 1-Food, has the highest average rating ($m=4.44$, $sd=0.771$). The item Mark of origin on the product has the lowest average rating from this group of factors, with an arithmetic value of 2.07. Regarding Factor 2 - Space, the item Hygiene at the satisfactory level ($m=4.06$) received the highest rating, and the item Specific exterior and interior ($m=3.57$) received the lowest rating. In Factor 3 – Personality, the item Every guest is treated individually ($m=3.85$), and the item Service providers do their job correctly ($m=2.71$) has the lowest score. Given that a five-point Likert scale was used (table 1), and the average scores obtained for each item above 3, approximately the descriptive value of “satisfaction” on the given scale, and that the factors are also with an average score slightly above 3, it can be considered that visitors are relatively satisfied with the service at the hotel. We can say that the initial hypothesis H 1 has been confirmed, that the quality of the service is at a relatively satisfactory level.

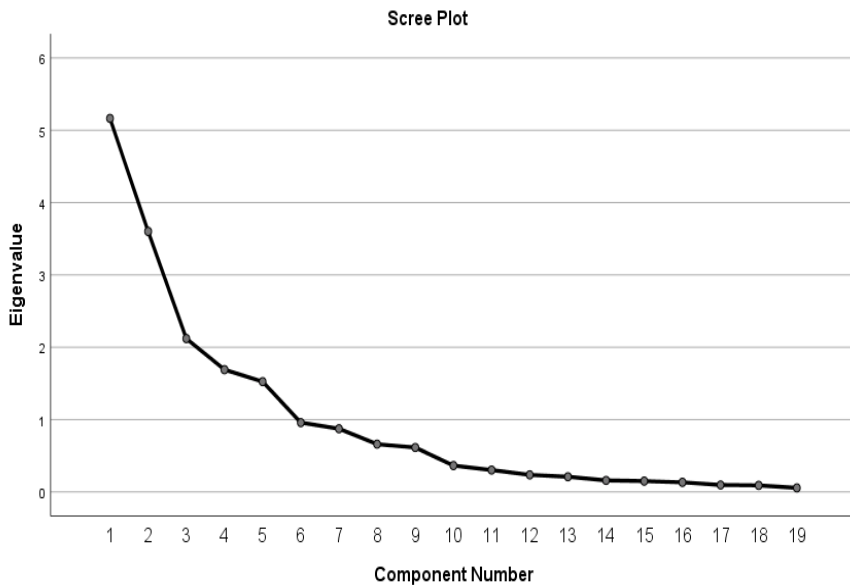
Exploratory factor analysis determined the existence of exactly three factors out of all 19 grouped items. The first factor shows the highest saturation percentage of 27.1%, while the last one shows the lowest percentage. A total of 57.2% of the variance was explained, as can be seen from the data in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of exploratory factor analysis (number of factors and percentage of saturation)

		Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings ^a
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
Food	5.164	27.179	27.179	5.164	27.179	27.179	4.928
Space	3.602	18.956	46.135	3.602	18.956	46.135	3.377
Personality	2.120	11.157	57.292	2.120	11.157	57.292	2.400

Source: author's research

Also, observing the scree plot, exactly three factors were established. Figure 2. gives an insight into the scree plot model, exploratory factor analysis. The inflection point of the curve is observed exactly at the third factor. It is a plot of eigenvalues and factor number according to the order of extraction. This plot is used to determine the optimal number of factors to be retained in the final solution.

Figure 2. Display of the number of factors according to the scree plot model

Source: author's research

After determining the number of factors, it is necessary to analyze the impact of all three obtained factors on the possibility of creating or co-creating a brand (values of predictors and criterion variables are given in Table 1). With this aim, a multiple regression analysis was performed.

The values obtained by multiple regression analysis show that the model is reliable, more precisely, that it fits the data well: $R^2 = 71.2\%$; $F(3, 352) = 72.907$ with a statistical significance value of $p = 0.00$. The model explains a total of 71.2% of the variance. Table 3. shows the partial contributions of each factor that has the function of a predictor for the criterion variable - brand creation.

Table 3. Results of multiple regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.(p)
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.065	0.117		0.554	0.580
Food	0.190	0.033	0.245	5.810	0.000
Space	-0.150	0.085	-0.092	-1.765	0.059
Personality	0.058	0.004	0.761	13.575	0.000

Source: author’s research. *Dependent Variable: creating or co-creating brand; Predictors: food, space, personality

Looking at the results from the table, it can be seen that two factors show a contribution in influencing the creation or co-creation of the brand, based on the quality of the gastronomic offer in the restaurant operating within the hotel Crni vrh. Only factor 2 (Space) is at the very limit of statistical significance ($p = 0.05$), which is considered to have no influence on the criterion variable. Hypothesis H2 that quality factors can statistically significantly predict brand creation was partially confirmed. Thus, the answer to the first research question was obtained.

In order to determine the visitor’s decision, whether after the experience gained on the mountain and during the stay at the hotel Crni vrh, they decide to visit the rural and mountain area again, or they still decide for the urban environment, a binary logistic regression was performed. Due to the value of the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test, it can be seen that the model can be applied. The value of p, in this type of regression must exceed 0.05, which can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Justification of the application of the model and results of binary logistic regression values

Step	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	45.789	8	.090
village and mountain	96.2%	57.8%	
Urban destination	3.2%		
Nagelkerke R Square – 28.8%			
H3- CONFIRMED			

Source: author’s research

The Table 4. shows the Nagelkerke R Square value of 28.8%, which indicates the percentage of variance explained. A total of 96.2% of respondents decide to come back to the village or to the mountain after their stay in the hotel and experience with the

gastronomic offer in the hotel's restaurant. However, only 3.2% of respondents prefer urban areas. The percentage of correct grouping is 57.8%. Hypothesis H3 is confirmed, but the second research question is also answered.

Conclusion with limitations and future implications

The gastronomic offer has always been an indispensable part of the entire tourist offer of the destination. However, in recent decades, gastronomy has gained increasing importance as an attractor of tourists to certain destinations. The modern way of life draws more and more people towards the return to nature, traditional values and the discovery of old cultures and habits. In this context, traditional gastronomy is gaining more and more importance. Restaurateurs are aware of the fact that with a good quality gastronomic offer, they can influence the creation of satisfied and loyal consumers. Destinations like Serbia are still completely undiscovered and almost unknown to some tourists. However, in order to attract as many tourists as possible, it is necessary to create a brand or strengthen it, if it already exists. Creating or co-creating a brand in the rural or mountainous areas of Serbia is also the task of hospitality employers, and the success of marketing the gastronomic offer to the public. Aware of the specifics of preparing food in a traditional way, they are fully capable of creating a hotel or destination brand.

In accordance with the available literature, the authors of the manuscript carried out field research on the Divčibare mountain in Serbia. The survey was distributed to visitors of the restaurant that operates within the hotel Crni vrh, in the period from January to July 2022. Out of the total number of questionnaires, 352 validly completed questionnaires were collected. The G*power test model shows that 119 is a sufficient number for a representative sample, but a much larger number of valid sheets was obtained, which speaks of the achieved representativeness of the sample. Two research questions were asked, concerning the influence of the quality of the gastronomic offer on the creation and co-creation of the hotel brand, as well as whether tourists, after the experience they had, return to the village and the mountain, or prefer to go to urban areas. Also, in accordance with the research questions, three hypotheses were set.

Descriptive statistical analysis confirmed the satisfactory quality of the gastronomic and complete restaurant offer of Hotel Crni vrh. This confirmed the first starting hypothesis, that the quality is at relatively satisfactory level. Then, through exploratory factor analysis, the items were grouped into exactly three factors (food, space and personality), which was confirmed mathematically by Horn's parallel model, as well as the scree plot model. Through multiple regression analysis, the partial contribution of each factor to the possibility of creating and co-creating a hotel brand was determined, thereby partially confirming hypothesis H2. After that, the authors started determining the second research question, which is followed by hypothesis H3, and that is whether the visitors after the experience will still decide to visit the village and the mountain or whether they will still decide for the urban environment. The results show that 96.2% of respondents decided to visit the village and mountain destination again.

There were limitations during the research in a theoretical and applied sense. The lack of existing literature on this issue is one of the limiting factors. In addition, visitors' non-cooperation with interviewers was also prevalent. The fear of the pandemic and socializing without distance is still present among some visitors. Consequently, this research can be important in supplementing the existing literature, as well as being part of a wider and more significant research on the same topic. Also, noticing shortcomings in the quality of service, employers will at least be able to assume mistakes and devise strategic measures for future successful business, survival on the market and to deal with increasingly strong competition.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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