

CONVERTING A LOCAL MARKET INTO A TOURIST DESTINATION: THE CASE OF PLAZA DE MERCADO LAS FERIAS, BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

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ABSTRACT

Local markets function as nexuses for historical narratives, gastronomic heritage, cultural practices and traditional customs. Recent initiatives have focused on revitalising and increasing visibility of these elements through gastronomic offers for tourists. Gastronomical tourism is considered an engine of economic development for societies. Many tourists travel specifically to try restaurants and local cuisine, experiences that can be accomplished at local markets. Moreover, buying food is the third general cost of any trip. For these reasons, this research characterises the local market 'Las Ferias' in Bogotá, Colombia, through the perception of its visitors and information from vendors, with the aim of proposing strategies that transform this local market into a touristic and gastronomic destination. This research employed a mixed methodology approach. To collect information, vendors from various business types at the local market were interviewed. Additionally, surveys were administered to visitors to understand their motivations for visiting, perceptions, intentions to revisit and likelihood of recommending the local market to others. The results show that this local market is not yet considered a tourist destination or a place of gastronomic interest. It is visited mainly by people living in nearby areas, primarily for their personal supply. Visitors appreciate the variety of products, quality and prices, as well as the cleanliness of the place. Among the strategies that can be proposed to transform local market 'Las Ferias' into a tourist destination are organising gastronomic festivals, implementing promotional strategies through social media using storytelling. The improvement of security in the surrounding areas and expanding parking facilities is necessary.

Keywords: local market, tourist destination, gastronomic tourism, visit motivators, revisit intention.

1 INTRODUCTION

The local markets known in Spanish as *plazas de mercado*, are informal working spaces for families and/or farmers in Latin America [1]. Local markets constitute an important economic axis, being the main form of income and living of families [2]. In Colombia, marketplaces have been designated as tangible cultural heritage by Mincultura (Ministry of Culture). The way of obtaining food in Latin American countries used to be based on the purchase of food in the marketplaces, however, over time this has been changing, starting to buy food, vegetables and fruits in shops or retail shops. In addition, *plazas de mercado* are meeting places of *convivium*, where besides buying fresh and healthy products, families also find knowledge from the vendors and farmers, who know the properties and uses of food, which have been historically used as medicinal and healthy solutions, likewise in the marketplaces culture can be preserved, transmitted, and created, since in these spaces the regions can be recognised by their crops, products, and their uses.

Also, travellers are attracted by cultural background through tasting local food finding *plazas de mercado* as a destination. There they learn about endemic foods, regional cuisine, and recipes, therefore, they become closer to the national culture and ancestral knowledge [3].



According to Thompson [4], interest in farmers' markets has been increasing since the 1970s. This rise in interest highlights the value of agricultural production and enhances food tourism experiences. In 2013, the World Tourism Organization recognised gastronomy and culinary arts as a touristic product and declared them part of intangible cultural heritage, a decision supported by UNESCO [5], [6]. As a result, many places have seen an opportunity to boost tourism by transforming authenticity and heritage into commodities, leading to the prominence of all actors involved in the process, which in turn promotes economic growth, sustainability, and empowerment [5].

Considering the reasons stated above, it is important to highlight marketplaces *plazas de mercado* as places of tourist interests, essential to enhance the economic development of families working in this sector and strengthen their promotion of these places to both local and foreigner tourists. In this study researchers will focus on Las Ferias local market which is located in the northwest of Bogotá, Colombia. The aim of the study was to explore the perception of visitors to the Las Ferias local market, as well as to investigate whether this local market currently receives visits from national and international tourists, also to propose strategies to promote this local market as a tourist destination.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Influence of gastronomy in destination image

Destination image refers to the perception tourists have of a travel destination, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and overall impressions that influence their decision-making process [7]–[9]. Previous studies focus on the importance of understanding destination image formation, which impacts tourists' behaviour, satisfaction, and intentions to recommend a place [10]. In addition, destination image involves considering tourists' experiences, perceptions, and sense of place, which can vary between domestic and international visitors [11]. Payel et al. [12] explore destination image through factors such as hygiene, attractions and value for money which significantly influences tourists' choices when selecting tourist attraction, those elements are present when visiting a local market.

Gastronomical destination image can be defined as a place where food plays a central role in shaping overall image and identity of the location [13], [14]. Indeed, gastronomical destination image plays a crucial role in tourism, influencing travellers' decisions and satisfaction levels. Previous studies emphasise the significance of gastronomic experiences in shaping tourists' perceptions of a destination [15], [16]. Kaur and Kaur [17] highlighted the importance of local cuisine in attracting both domestic and international tourists.

2.2 Local market as a tourism destination

Local market can be defined as a marketplace where local producers and consumers interact to exchange goods, services, and resources within a specific region, fostering economic, social, and cultural development [18], [19]. Local markets play a vital role in tourism destinations by showcasing local products and enhancing the overall tourist experience [20]. The local food culture is recognised as a key factor in destination marketing and development, highlighting the importance of local culinary experiences in attracting tourists [21].

To transform a local's market into a tourist destination, it should offer a unique experience by showcasing local produce, local cuisine, local and organic foods, promoting events and create a regional food identity, serving as a distribution channel, enabling direct interaction



between farmers and consumers, and providing educational opportunities [22]. In addition, To become a tourist destination, a local's market should forming a region's food identity and provide entertaining experiences and as entertainment factor significantly impacts visitor experience value and satisfaction, enhancing its appeal [22], [23].

2.3 Gastronomic tourism

Gastronomy in the field of tourism can be understood as a representation of the culture of a community, which can be tasted and experienced [24]. The relationship between gastronomy and tourism is developed through the recognition of gastronomy as a cultural expression. This means that food and its scope of production and consumption comprise geographical, social, political, and economic elements [25], [26]. Furthermore, consumption of local and authentic food contributes to the sustainability of a region, supports local agriculture and local food production, improves destination incentive, and in particular, are strong agents for the development of a local destination brand [27].

2.4 Strategies to potentialise local markets as tourism destination

Previous studies developed strategies to potentiate local markets and gastronomy in tourism [28]. Those strategies include developing emotional marketing plans to enhance the visibility of local markets [29], promoting interactions between tourists and home producers, providing information about gastronomic heritage and regional products and regional meals [30], [31], providing cultural experiences, trough histories related to heritage, and developing eco-friendly tourism [32], [33].

Previous research highlights the importance to develop branding and destination image in enhancing the competitiveness of local markets ad a tourist destination, with social media acting as a moderator in this process [34]–[36]. By effectively communicating sustainability of local foods, tourism can enhance local markets, attracting consumers through engaging product features and emotional attributes [37].

3 METHODOLOGY

This research developed a mixed methodology by integrating different methodologies, researchers can explore beyond traditional boundaries, enhance the depth of analysis, and address wicked problems effectively [38], [39]. The aim of this research was to explore the perception of visitors to the Las Ferias local market, as well as to investigate whether this local market currently receives visits from national and international tourists.

Initially, 618 questionnaires were collected from Las Ferias local market visitors. Following a rigorous data cleaning process to ensure quality and reliability, the final sample consisted of 516 valid questionnaires. This data refinement step eliminated incomplete or inconsistent responses, resulting in a more robust dataset for analysis. The questionnaire was administered in person by students belonging to a research incubator who were previously trained to perform the task. Tablets were used, and the data was collected using QuestionPro. To ensure data quality, the information was gathered on different days of the week and during peak visitor hours.

The questionnaire was structured in four sections: demographics, visit motivators, perception of the market square, and finally, revisit intention and recommendation. Previous studies that have developed these elements were used as input for its development [22], [23], [40]–[46].



To complement and validate the questionnaire findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a representative vendor from each type of sales stand. These interviews were recorded with explicit consent from the participants and subsequently transcribed verbatim for thorough analysis.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from our mixed-method data collection approach. We will first discuss the results obtained from questionnaires administered to visitors of the Las Ferias local market, followed by insights gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted with vendors at this local market.

The demographic profile of the surveyed population reveals diverse characteristics. The largest age group of visitors (22.48%) falls within the 31–40 years range, closely followed by those aged 51–60 years (21.32%). There is a slight gender imbalance, with females comprising 52.23% of visitors and males 47.48%. Marital status data shows that 41.47% of respondents are married, while 29.26% are single. Occupationally, there is an even split between employed and self-employed individuals, each accounting for 34.69% of respondents. Educational attainment varies, with 29.26% having completed a professional degree and 26.55% having finished high school. Notably, while the majority of respondents (63.37%) reside in various Bogotá neighbourhoods, a significant proportion (36.05%) are local residents of the Las Ferias neighbourhood, where the market square is situated (see Table 1).

Analysis of the survey responses revealed diverse motivations for visiting the Las Ferias local market. The overwhelming majority (86.24%) of respondents cited personal consumption as their primary reason for visiting. Commercial purposes accounted for a smaller but significant portion of visits, with 5.81% of respondents coming to stock their mini-markets or convenience stores, and 5.62% sourcing supplies for their restaurants. Interestingly, only a marginal 2.33% of visitors reported tourism or leisure as their main purpose (see Fig. 1).

To assess the factors motivating visitors to Las Ferias local market. The study examined eleven variables: product quality, price, product variety, hygiene, hours of operation, culinary offerings, security, location, access, parking options, and bathroom facilities. The results revealed that product quality was the strongest motivator, with 84.5% of respondents strongly agreeing on its importance. Price followed closely, with 82.56% strongly agreeing it influenced their decision to visit. Product variety ranked third, as 80.43% strongly agreed it was a motivating factor. Hygiene also played a significant role, with 76.36% of respondents strongly agreeing it motivated their visit (see Fig. 2).

When asked the visitors about the perceptions at Las Ferias local market, eight variables were considered: handicrafts, cultural experience, exclusive regional products, good service, culinary preparations, product variety, product quality and price. The findings revealed high levels of satisfaction, with 77.13% of respondents strongly agreeing that Las Ferias local market offered a wide variety of products. Additionally, 72.48% strongly agreed that the service was excellent, while 70.74% strongly endorsed the quality of the products available (see Fig. 3).

When asking visitors to Las Ferias local market about their likelihood to recommend various aspects of their experience. Overall, 73.64% of respondents indicated they would be highly likely to recommend the local market in general. Breaking down the specific offerings, 77.52% of surveyed visitors expressed a high likelihood of recommending the fruits and



Table 1: Demographics.

Variable	N	%
Age		
Under 18 years old	10	1.94
18–30 years old	102	19.77
31–40 years old	116	22.48
41–50 years old	104	20.16
51–60 years old	110	21.32
Over 60 years old	74	14.34
Gender		
Feminine	270	52.33
Masculine	245	47.48
Other	1	0.19
Marital status		
Single	151	29.26
Married	214	41.47
Not married but living with partner	99	19.19
Divorced	25	4.84
Widowed	27	5.23
Occupation		
Student	34	6.59
Employee	179	34.69
Self-employed	179	34.69
Housewife/house husband	63	12.21
Retired	58	11.24
Unemployed	3	0.58
Education level		
Elementary school	34	6.59
High school	137	26.55
Associate degree	135	26.16
Bachelor's degree	151	29.26
Postgraduate degree	39	7.56
Master's degree	19	3.68
Doctoral degree	1	0.19
Place of residence		
Las Ferias neighbourhood	186	36.05
Other neighbourhood	327	63.37
Other Colombian city	3	0.58
Abroad	0	0.00



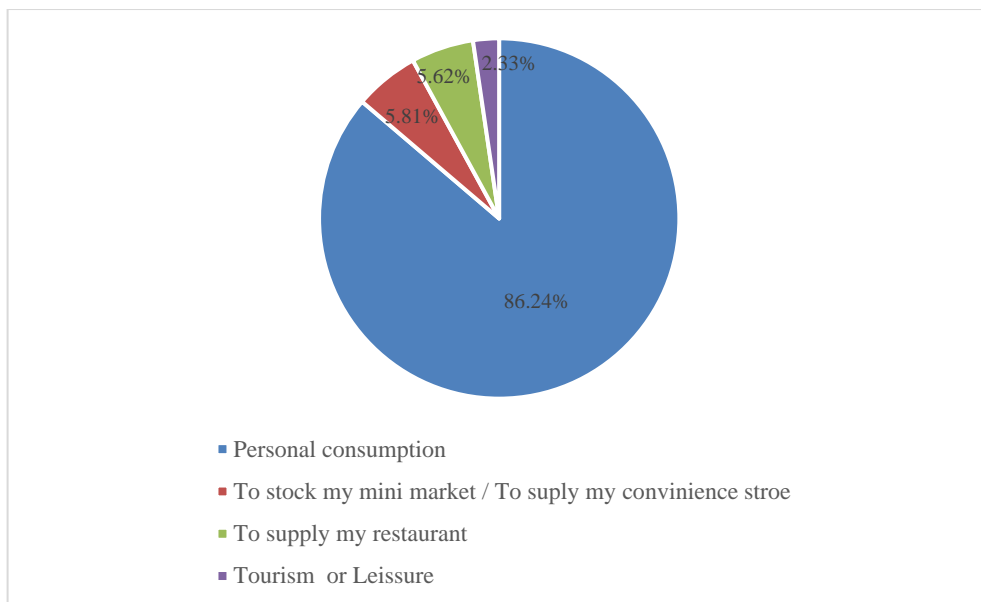


Figure 1: Reason of visit.

vegetables available. However, the recommendation rate for meals was notably lower, with only 42.25% of respondents indicating they would be highly likely to recommend the food options (see Fig. 5).

When asking to visitors to Las Ferias local market, their answers revealed strong intentions for return visits. 82.75% of respondents indicated that they would be highly likely to revisit, while an additional 15.5% stated it was likely. This suggests an overwhelmingly positive reception, with a total of 98.25% of visitors expressing a probable or highly probable intention to return (see Fig. 4).

To complement and validate the survey results, in-depth interviews were conducted with vendors at the Las Ferias local market. These interviews revealed several key insights: Firstly, the market offers a diverse array of products that are both representative and native to the region, presenting a unique selling point for potential tourism promotion. The vendors emphasised the cultural and gastronomic significance of these local offerings, which could serve as a cornerstone for marketing strategies. Secondly, the market's strategic location within the city was highlighted as a major advantage. Vendors consistently noted that the market's accessibility makes it not only convenient for regular shoppers but also positions it as an easily reachable destination for tourists exploring Bogotá.

Vendors see strong tourism potential in the market, emphasising its cultural heritage, history, and gastronomic offerings. They note that foreign tourists particularly value local agricultural products, more so than locals. This insight could be key for tourism strategies. However, currently few tourists visit the market, with most visitors being Bogotá residents, as confirmed by survey data. This gap between the market's tourism potential and its current visitor profile indicates an opportunity for focused tourism development and marketing efforts to attract more diverse visitors and capitalise on the market's unique appeal.

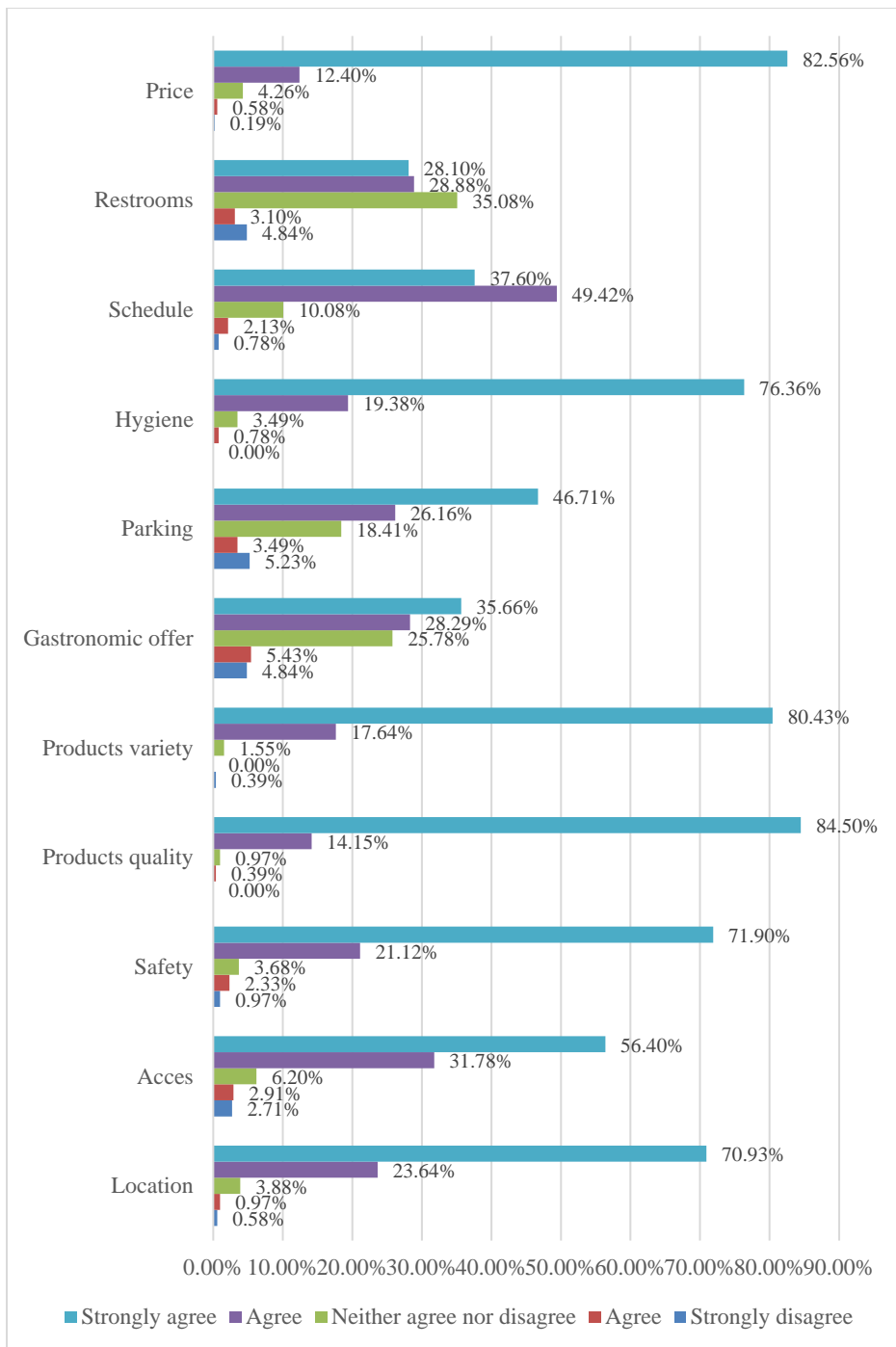


Figure 2: Visit motivators.



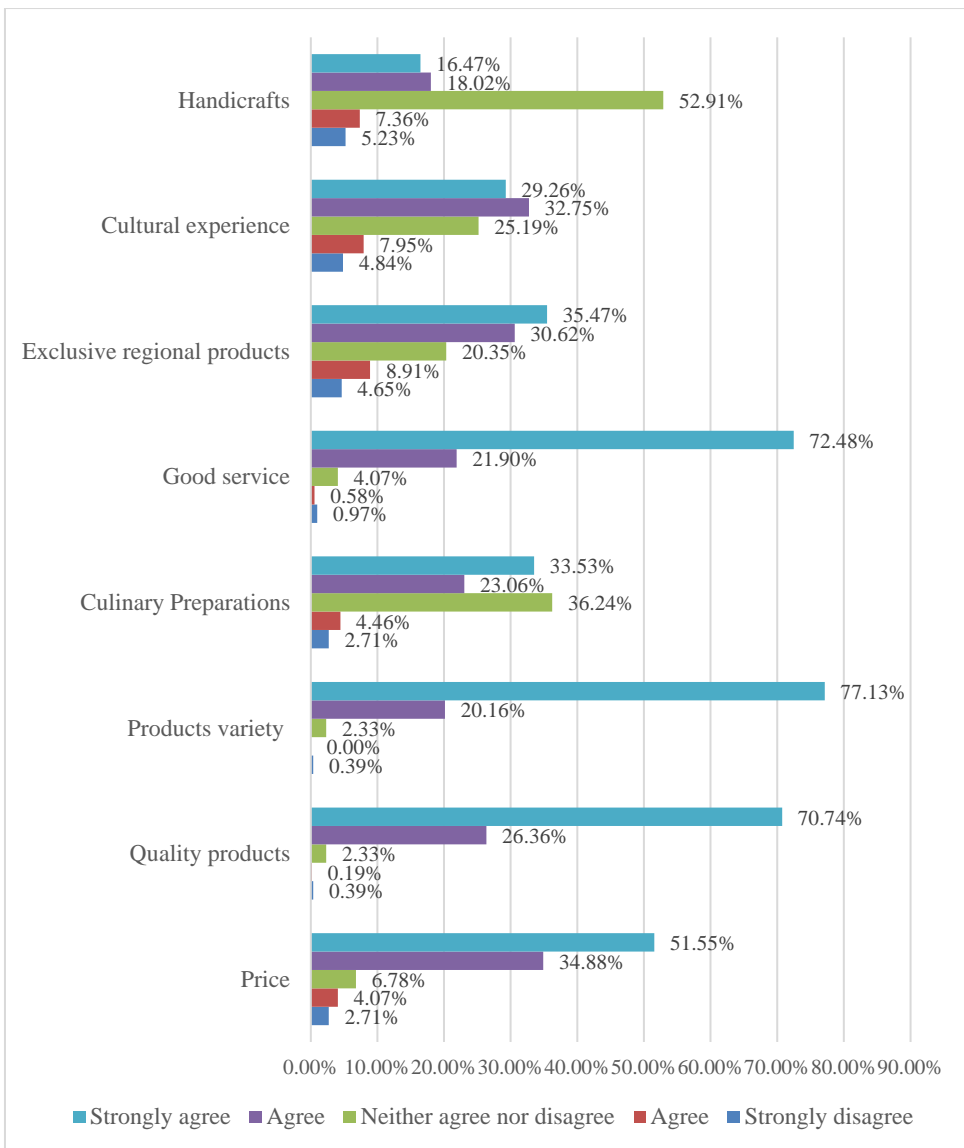


Figure 3: Visitors’ perceptions.

The market’s potential as a tourist attraction lies in showcasing its product origins. A significant portion of products comes directly from farmers in nearby municipalities, while others are sourced through Corabastos, Bogotá’s major wholesale market. Finally, vendors note minimal promotional activities for the market, citing only the ‘Fritanga fest’ as memorable. They advocate for increased advertising across diverse media channels to boost the market’s appeal as a tourist destination. Crucially, vendors identify improving security in the market’s vicinity as a critical issue that must be addressed to successfully transform the market into a tourist attraction.

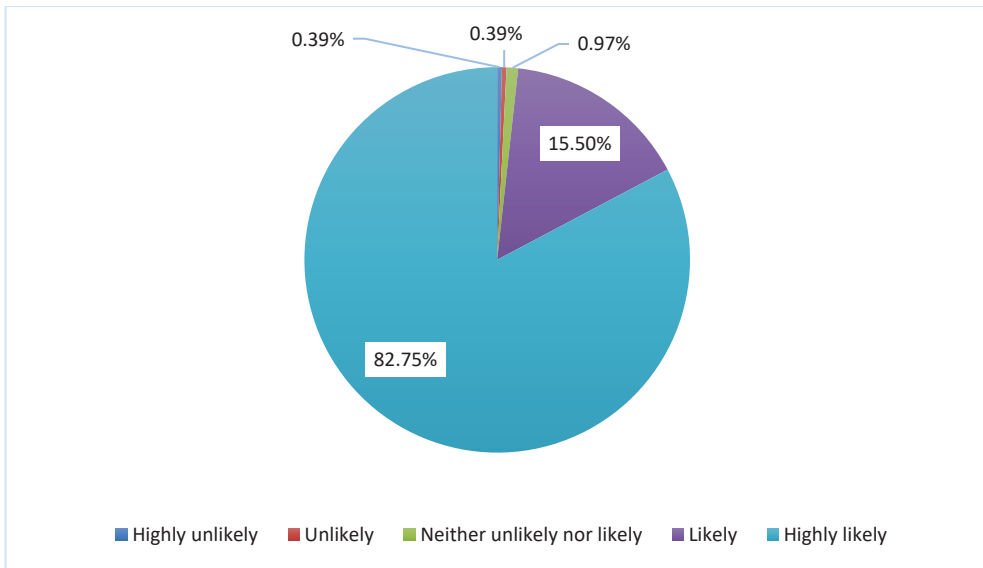


Figure 4: Revisit intention.

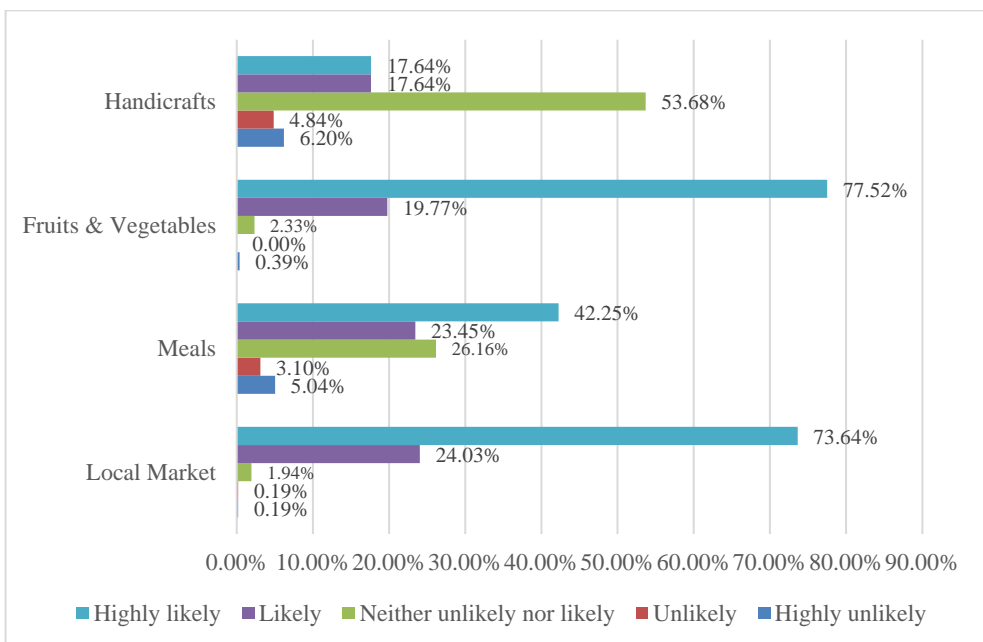


Figure 5: Intention of recommendation.



5 CONCLUSIONS

Currently, the Las Ferias local market is visited mostly by people from different neighbourhoods in the city of Bogotá. Of the 100% surveyed, only 2.33% are domestic tourists, indicating that this local market is not currently considered a tourist destination. The vast majority of visitors come to this local market to stock up on products for their own consumption. Likewise, the main motivators for visiting are product quality, prices, product variety, facility cleanliness, security within the premises, and its location. When studying visitors' perceptions of Las Ferias local market, they highlight the high quality and variety of its products, as well as the good service offered by the vendors. Finally, 82.75% of visitors have a strong intention to revisit, and the vast majority would recommend this market square to friends and family, emphasising that the main reason for recommending the market square would be to purchase fruits and vegetables.

According to Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen [47] food is an important element that gives relevance and recognition to any place around the world. Highlighting that nowadays food is a new tourism attraction, and that places that lack of natural resources to boost tourism rely on their food and local gastronomy to promote itself as a tourist destination.

Results of this research indicates that transforming a local market into a tourist destination requires the strategic use of promotional tools, particularly social media. This method has proved effective in educating potential visitors about local markets and encouraging them to explore these vibrant spaces. Storytelling, in particular, is a powerful technique employed by established tourist-oriented local markets to vividly portray the life, culture, and societal nuances of their region.

Future studies should focus on developing comprehensive strategies to promote local market as tourist attractions across Latin America. This approach should emphasise preserving the authenticity and cultural significance of regional cuisines and local products, which are often central to these markets' appeal. Additionally, researchers could focus on compiling detailed information about local products, including their origins, cultural importance, and health benefits. This knowledge can then be effectively communicated to visitors, enhancing their understanding and appreciation of the market's offerings and the broader regional heritage.

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