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Exploring Foreign Tourists Intentions toward Novel Food in China: The Impact of Food Neophobia as a Key Moderator

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Abstract
This manuscript investigates the moderating role of food neophobia on foreign tourists' intentions towards trying novel foods in China, framed within the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Analyzing data from 136 foreign tourists in Qingdao, the study employs structural equation modeling to reveal that while subjective norms and perceived behavioral control positively influence behavioral intentions towards novel foods, attitudes do not. Crucially, food neophobia negatively moderates the effects of subjective norms and perceived behavioral control on these intentions, indicating that the fear of unfamiliar foods can dampen tourists' willingness to engage with local cuisine. These findings highlight the complex interplay between cultural openness and food neophobia in shaping culinary tourism experiences. This research contributes to understanding how destinations can better tailor their culinary offerings to attract and satisfy foreign tourists, suggesting targeted strategies to mitigate the impacts of food neophobia.
Keywords: Food Neophobia, Behaviour Intentions, Novel Foods, Foreign Tourist, TPB

Introduction

Food tourism serves as an essential sector for any country or region, drawing in additional visitors with its array of gastronomic delights (Andersson & Mossberg, 2017; Henderson, 2016). In China, for instance, regional cuisine is pivotal in enhancing destination appeal, with signature dishes reflecting the unique traits, heritage, and milieu (Okumus, Xiang & Hutchinson, 2018). Food tourism is tantamount to an exhibit of local lore and venues (Ellis, Park, Kim & Yeoman, 2018). The act of eating meets more than physiological demands; it addresses various travel-related desires like enjoyment, rest, prestige, learning, and way of life (Alireza Rousta, 2020). In this context, food is elevated beyond a mere travel necessity to

a richly experiential, tactile, and emblematic journey, accruing new layers of relevance (Mitchell & Hall, 2003). Nowadays, food is a conduit for conveying cultural narratives, honor, and emotions (Laskaris et al., 2014), allowing tourists to immerse in the emblematic, societal, and leisure dimensions of a destination (Athena H.N. Mak 2011).

The significance of culinary offerings in tourists' choice of travel destinations is increasingly acknowledged (Boniface, 2003; Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Frochot, 2003; Hall et al., 2003; Kim, Goh, and Yuan, 2010; McKercher, Okumus, and Okumus, 2008). The interconnection between local gastronomy, tourist preferences, and destination selection is well-established (du Rand & Heath, 2006; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Sánchez-Cañizares & López-Guzmán, 2012). Food tourism not only contributes to defining a destination's identity but also acts as a symbol and a medium of communication that resonates with both tourists and locals (Bessière, 1998; Scarpato & Daniele, 2003; Torres, 2002). Engaging with the community through local cuisine allows tourists to immerse themselves in the destination's identity, fostering a sense of connection (Everett & Aitchison, 2008; Frochot, 2003). Thus, food is a vital element in preserving cultural heritage and enabling a destination to stand out in the highly competitive international tourism arena (Everett and Aitchison, 2008; Lee and Arcodia, 2011). Choe et al (2019), posited that tourists' food perceptions greatly affect a destination's attractiveness and perceived value. Taste, health considerations, cost, and local cuisine's fame are critical in forming tourists' food-related attitudes. Yet, research on the consumption attitudes and intentions towards novel foods while traveling is sparse (Levitt, Zhang, DiPietro & Meng, 2017). Food neophobia, the hesitancy to sample unfamiliar foods, also shapes tourists' culinary experiences and their readiness to experiment with local dishes. Those with food neophobia tend to stick to well-known foods, potentially eschewing the unique and original flavors offered by the destination. Consequently, exploring local cuisine might not be a priority for these tourists (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). Previous studies have underscored the detrimental effect of food neophobia on the propensity to try new or ethnic cuisines (Ting et al., 2016; Canakci and Birdir, 2020; Sogari et al., 2019) and suggest it can also influence the perceived allure of novel foods at different locales (Hashemi et al., 2021; Lai et al., 2019).
In their study, Huang et al. (2019) observed that Chinese consumers' responses to food were influenced by their level of food neophobia, exhibiting unique cognitive and behavioral responses based on their neophobic tendencies. This variation confirms that food neophobia is a complex trait leading to different decision-making behaviors, highlighting the need for a deeper investigation into its cognitive and behavioral aspects, as guided by the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). While research in food neophobia is expanding (Derinalp et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2019; Payini et al., 2019), there remains a gap in understanding its influence on the behavioral intentions of foreign tourists towards novel Chinese cuisine (Derinalp et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2019).

Given this background, our study aims to explore how food neophobia influences the intentions of foreign tourists in China to try novel foods. This examination could significantly broaden our comprehension of the dynamics between tourists' behavioral intentions and food neophobia, offering new perspectives for crafting marketing strategies for ethnic cuisine. Such insights are invaluable for marketers looking to appeal to and understand the culinary preferences and behaviors of tourists, enabling the creation of more effective promotional initiatives in the realm of food tourism.

Literature Review

Theory of Planned Behaviour in Predicting Tourist Behaviour Intentions

This study utilizes the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to analyze foreign tourists' intentions towards novel foods in China. Developed by Icek Ajzen, the TPB framework predicts human behavior by examining attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intentions (Ajzen, 1991). The efficacy of the TPB model in forecasting tourists' behavioral intentions has been corroborated in various studies (Choe & Kim, 2018; Shin & Hancer, 2016). Choe and Kim (2018) used the TPB to assess how local cuisine influences consumption at tourist destinations, while Shin and Hancer (2016) expanded the TPB to explore the intentions behind local food purchases, considering the direct and indirect effects of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and ethical norms. The TPB's application in discerning the nuances of food purchasing behavior has been thoroughly established. For example, Damit et al. (2019) utilized the TPB model to probe the behavioral intentions of non-Muslim consumers regarding halal food, identifying attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as significant factors influencing the intention to repurchase, with willingness being notably influential. Suleman et al. (2021) detected a substantial positive correlation between intentions to buy halal food and elements such as religious convictions, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, employing an augmented TPB framework. In the context of food tourism, Gülşah Akkuş et al. (2013) concluded that food tourists' intentions in Turkey are considerably shaped by attitudes and subjective norms, though perceived behavioral control was not a significant predictor. Expanding the TPB, Hashemi et al. (2021) explored how the image of a tourist destination's food, alongside food neophobia, affects international tourists' behavioral intentions in Malaysia. Wu et al. (2016) examined the attitudes of Chinese tourists in the United States, noting the influence of food safety concerns and etiquette on their willingness to try unfamiliar local foods, with safety concerns posing a negative impact.

Food Neophobia

Food neophobia can be conceptualized as a behavior centered around avoiding the consumption of certain novel foods in various food-related contexts (Lafraire et al., 2016). It is seen as a personality trait with the potential to impact customers' food preferences preventing their inclination to experiment with unfamiliar culinary offerings (Payini et al., 2019). Despite the general perception of current foods as safe, there are still individuals who are uncomfortable about trying unfamiliar food (Ting et al., 2016). Examining the evolving landscape of research on food neophobia, Brown et al (2010), delved into factors influencing the adjustment of international students to local eating habits. Their findings underscored significant disparities between Asian and European students, with cultural distance manifesting in the expression of food neophobia. Interestingly, they observed a gradual reduction in the intensity of food neophobia, particularly in terms of food intention, as Asian students adapted to the local culture over time. Siegrist et al. (2013) followed this exploration by investigating the relationship between antecedents of food neophobia and subsequent food choices. Notably, they discovered that age was positively correlated with food neophobia, while educational attainment exhibited a negative association. Individuals with higher levels of food neophobia were found to show increased aversion towards vegetables, poultry, and fish, emphasizing the pivotal role of food neophobia in shaping dietary preferences.

Conversely, Dematte et al. (2014) contributed to the literature by conducting a comprehensive study on food neophobia, highlighting the moderating role of the senses. In their research, the sense of smell emerged as a potent moderator of food preference, with familiar smells eliciting a more positive reception. This sensory moderation was identified as a crucial factor for food neophobia, shedding light on the intricate relationship between sensory experiences and food attitudes. Shifting to more recent perspectives, Dolgopolova et al. (2015) suggested a unique insight by proposing that distrust in formal institutions is associated with heightened levels of food neophobia. This finding indicates an interaction effect between trust and food neophobia, particularly influencing purchase intention. In a more recent study, D'Souza (2022) explored the moderating effect of food neophobia on various variables related to game meat, showcasing the continued relevance and versatility of food neophobia as a moderating factor across diverse food choices. In the context of food tourism, tourists with higher degree of food neophobia exhibit reluctance to try novel foods, suggesting that food neophobia may be a moderating factor that may have an impact on different behavioral outcomes (Chen and Tsai, 2007).

Attitudes and Tourist Behaviour intentions towards Novel Foods

Attitudes, as defined by Eagly & Chaiken (1998), reflect an individual's feelings towards external entities and their level of approval or disapproval of a specific behavior. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) further elaborated that attitudes are formed by the product of behavioral beliefs and the evaluation of their outcomes, where behavioral beliefs signify the subjective likelihood of a behavior leading to a particular outcome.

In the realm of consumption behaviors, Shin and Hancer (2016), integrated the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) with the Theory of Reasoned Action to assess behavior intentions towards novel food, establishing attitude as a critical determinant of consumer behavior intentions. In the context of food tourism, evidence suggests that attitudes significantly influence tourists' behavioral intentions. Ryu and Han (2010), employing the Theory of Reasoned Action, deduced that attitudes and past behaviors significantly impact tourists' intentions to try local foods in New Orleans. Similarly, Choe and Kim (2018), discovered that tourists' positive attitudes towards local foods notably enhance their likelihood to recommend and dine at local restaurants in tourist areas. Levitt et al (2021), observed that positive attitudes towards food tourism contribute to more favorable behavioral intentions, though highly motivated food tourists also value the cost-effectiveness of food experiences. Menozzi et al. (2017) noted a positive shift in consumer attitudes towards novel foods containing insects after trial, influencing attitudes towards similar foods. Given this literature review, the hypothesis posited is:

H1: *There is a positive significant relationship between attitudes and tourist behaviour intentions towards novel foods.*

Subjective Norms and Tourist Behaviour intentions towards Novel Foods

Subjective norms serve as a reflection of how social influences shape individual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Thus, individuals' propensity to behave in a certain manner is highly hinged on whether the people who are close and important to them approves the particular behaviour (Shin and Hancer, 2016). Ham et al. (2015) underscored the significant link between the intention to purchase organic food and subjective norms, revealing a notably positive impact

on the intention to buy organic products. Similarly, Rachbini (2018) delved into the behavioral control of halal food in Indonesia, uncovering a significant influence of subjective norms on people's intentions to purchase halal-certified products, indicating a substantial positive correlation. In a study by Åstrø sm and Rise (2001), subjective norms emerged as a significant factor affecting the behavioral intentions of young individuals towards consuming healthy food. Furthermore, Wu et al. (2016) corroborate these findings, demonstrating that as Chinese tourists' subjective norms regarding unfamiliar local cuisine become more favorable, their intention to indulge in such delicacies escalates. Hence we hypothesize that:-

H2: *There is a positive significant relationship between subjective norms and tourist behaviour intentions towards novel foods.*

Perceived Behavioural Control and Tourist Behaviour Intentions towards Novel Foods

Starting with early research and progressing to recent findings, perceived behavioral control, conceived by Ajzen (1991) as an individual's assessment of the ease or difficulty associated with a specific behavior, has emerged as a crucial determinant in consumer behaviour studies. Vermeir and Verbeke's (2008) seminal study illuminated the significance of perceived behavioral control as a decisive factor in customers' sustainable food purchasing decisions, setting the stage for subsequent investigations. Building upon such early studies, Shin and Hancer's (2016) research provided additional insights, demonstrating that individuals exhibited a higher likelihood of purchasing local food when they perceived a higher degree of controllability or self-efficacy. Subsequent research by Menozzi et al. (2017) unveiled the substantial influence of perceived behavioural control on consumers' intentions towards novel food items, further cementing its importance in shaping consumer behavior. In the same vein, Ali et al. (2018) delved into the behavioral intentions of Chinese Muslims regarding halal food purchases, revealing the pivotal role of perceived behavioral control within cultural contexts. In a more recent study, Qi and Ploeger (2021) reaffirmed the positive relationship between perceived behavioral control and the purchase of organic food among Chinese consumers, underscoring its continued relevance. Collectively, these studies contribute to the understanding of perceived behavioral control's multifaceted impact on consumer behaviour and hence informing the following hypothesis:-

H3: *There is a positive significant relationship between perceived behavioural control and tourist behaviour intentions towards novel foods.*

The Moderating Role of Food Neophobia

Huang et al (2019), study validated the role of food neophobia as a barrier to the purchase of functional products, highlighting its indirect impact in shaping behavioral intentions. Furthermore, D'Souza's (2022), research demonstrated the moderating effect of food neophobia on various variables in consumer decisions, particularly evident in the context of wild game meat purchase. Similarly, Kim et al (2014), investigated the moderating role of food neophobia in the genetically modified (GM) food industry, revealing its significant impact on perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention. Hashemi et al (2021), explored the relationship between food neophobia and behavioral intention among Malaysian tourists, uncovering a significant positive correlation between destination food image and food neophobia, with the latter exerting a notable influence on tourists' behavioral intentions. In another recent study, Ting et al (2016), who has the distinction of being the first to incorporate food neophobia in extending the TPB model, found that food neophobia was only able to moderate the relationship between subjective norm and consumption behaviour

amongst Malaysians towards novel food of local native community known as the Dayak people of the East Malaysia. Their study however suffered from the limitation of using a sample that was predominantly made up of Malaysian university students. Drawing from these findings and cognizant of the lack of studies integrating food neophobia with the theory of planned behaviour (i.e. Ting et al.,2016) to understand tourist behavioural intentions towards novel foods, the formulation of three hypotheses becomes pertinent for further analysis and research: -

H4: *Food neophobia has a negative moderating effect in the relationship between attitudes and tourist behavioural intention towards novel foods.*

H5: *Food neophobia has a negative moderating effect in the relationship between subjective norms and tourist behavioural intention towards novel foods.*

H6: *Food neophobia has a negative moderating effect in the relationship between perceived behavioural control and tourist behavioural intention towards novel foods.*

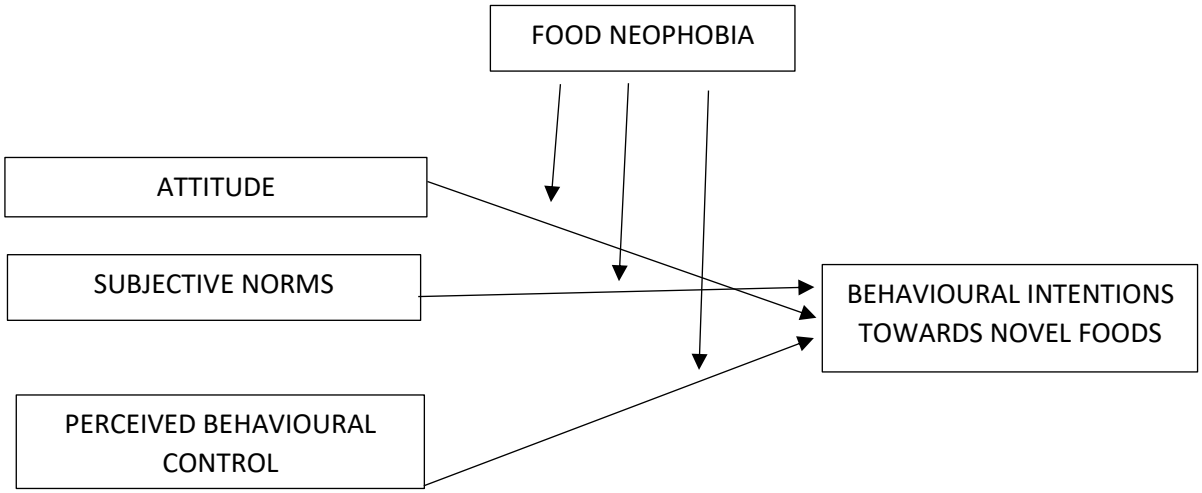

Figure 1: Research Framework

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

In line with the objectives of the study, the study targeted foreign tourist who visited China. The sample size proposed by G*Power was 74. However, the study sought to collect double the amount and a total of 148 responses were obtained out of which only 136 responses were valid for analysis. The research adopted a purposive sampling strategy to ensure that responses were obtained from relevant respondents who fulfilled two criteria's namely i. foreigners visiting China and ii. an attempt was made to try novel foods in China. The responses were collected from foreign tourist who were vising Qingdao a city located in the eastern coast of China in the province of Shandong and is relatively popular amongst foreign tourists. The city's coastal location, pleasant climate, interesting landmarks and a vibrant cultural scene makes it a popular destination amongst foreign tourists. Data were collected from 3 main tourist attractions namely, Qingdao Olympic Sailing Centre, Qingdao Underwater World and Badagun Scenic Area. Data was collected over a 2-month period starting from 1st of April 2023 till 31st of May 2023.

Instrument and Measurements

The study adopted questionnaires as the main means of collecting data from respondents. The questionnaire comprised measurement scales representing all the variables of the study that were adapted from past studies with established and valid scales. All the questionnaire items were anchored on a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree. Respondents completed 6 items representing attitude that were adapted from Levitt et al., (2019). Similarly, subjective norms were measured via 4-item scale adapted from Shin and Hancer (2016) while for perceived behavioural control the study adapted a measurement scale consisting of 3 items from Wu et al. (2016). Behavioural intentions were measured using 3-item scale that were also adapted from Wu et al. (2016) while food neophobia was measured via a 10-item scale consisting of 5 negative and 5 positive statements adapted from Pliner and Hobden (1992). The questionnaires were presented to the sample respondents via a questionnaire app known as "Questionnaire Star". Three research assistants were deployed to three questionnaire collection sites equipped with electronic tablets. These tablets were handed to tourists on-site, allowing them to conveniently complete the questionnaire. Once the questionnaires were completed the respondents were presented with souvenirs (i.e. refrigerator magnets of tourist attractions in Qingdao China) as an inducement for them to participate and complete the questionnaire. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in table 1 as follows: -

Table 1
Summary of Demographic Profile of Respondents

No	ITEMS	CATEGORY	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	78	57.4%
		Female	58	42.6%
2.	Age	18 – 24 years	76	55.9%
		25 – 34 years	32	23.5%
		35 – 44 years	14	10.3%
		45 – 54 years	7	5.1%
		Above 55 years	7	5.1%
3.	Educational Level	Bachelor /Masters	86	63.2%
		Certificate/Diploma	38	27.9%
		High School	12	8.8%
4.	Marital Status	Single	101	74.2%
		Married	35	25.8%
5.	Length of Stay	7 days	13	9.5%
		8 – 14 days	27	19.8%
		15 – 21 days	54	39.7%
		22 – 29 days	40	29.4%
		Above 30 days	2	1.5%

Results

The data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS version 3.2.7 for structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), beginning with the validation of the measurement model and proceeding to the evaluation of the structural model. The assessment of the measurement model involved examining factor loadings, along with the reliability and validity of the items within the proposed model. Following the recommendations by Hair et al. (2019), construct validity and reliability were evaluated through factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Acceptable research standards stipulate factor loadings should be at least 0.5, AVE values should also be a minimum of 0.5, and the CR value must be 0.70 or higher for adequate reliability (Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2019). According to Table 2, all constructs within the study met these established thresholds, indicating satisfactory reliability and validity.

Table 2
Measurement Model Evaluation

Variables	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Attitude	AT1	0.803	0.945	0.706
	AT2	0.862		
	AT3	0.856		
	AT4	0.878		
	AT5	0.814		
	AT6	0.824		
Subjective Norms	SN1	0.861	0.928	0.788
	SN2	0.903		
	SN3	0.919		
	SN4	0.867		
Perceived Behavioural Control	PBC1	0.890	0.894	0.768
	PBC2	0.890		
	PBC3	0.848		
Behavioural Intentions	BI1	0.905	0.868	0.798
	BI2	0.901		
	BI3	0.874		
Food Neophobia	FN1	0.835	0.964	0.672
	FN2	0.792		
	FN3	0.826		
	FN4	0.830		
	FN5	0.790		
	FN6	0.796		
	FN7	0.855		
	FN8	0.826		

	FN9	0.820		
	FN10	0.826		

Conversely, calculation of the HTMT involved reducing the mean correlation between items assessing distinct constructs by the geometric mean of the correlation between items assessing the same construct, as outlined by Henseler et al. (2015). The HTMT values observed in this study (Table 3) were found to be lower than the established cutoff value of 0.85, indicating a reasonable level of discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3
Discriminant Validity ($HTMT_{0.85}$)

Main Constructs	AT	SN	PCB	BI
AT				
SN	0.342			
PCB	0.232	0.546		
BI	0.432	0.654	0.675	

Note: AT= Attitude, SN= Subjective Norms, PCB= Perceived Behavioural Control, BI = Behavioural Intention

In this research, the predictive strength of the model was evaluated by examining the internal model's ability to explain the variation in the dependent variable, which is quantified by the R2 value (coefficient of determination). The R2 value indicates the extent to which the independent variables explain the variation in the dependent variable. For this study, the behavioral intention was explained by 88.4% of the variance within the model. According to benchmarks set by Ana, Helena, and Jose (2015), an R2 value ranging from 0.25 to 0.5 is considered to have weak explanatory power, a value between 0.5 and 0.75 indicates moderate explanatory power, and a value above 0.75 is viewed as demonstrating strong explanatory power. Given this framework, the model utilized in the study exhibited strong explanatory power, significantly exceeding the threshold for a robust predictive capability.Top of Form

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was utilized to determine the collinearity of the data. The VIF assesses whether a predictor demonstrates a strong linear relationship with other predictors, with concerns arising if the VIF exceeds 10 (Myers, 1990). In the current study, the VIF values for each construct ranged from a minimum of 3.25 to a maximum of 5.83, indicating that multicollinearity is unlikely to be a problem in the dataset. To evaluate the structural model, the study employed bootstrapping with 5,000 replications, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019), to test the proposed hypotheses. The analysis did not reveal a direct link between attitude (H1) towards novel foods and behavioral intention, indicating that attitude alone does not significantly predict the intention to try novel foods. However, subjective norms (H2) and perceived behavioral control (H3) were both found to have a significant direct relationship with behavioral intention, as depicted in Table 4. Regarding the role of food neophobia as a moderating variable, the study discovered that it did not moderate the relationship between attitude and behavioral intention (H4), challenging the initial expectations. On the other hand, the moderating effects of food neophobia were clearly observed in the dynamics between subjective norms (H5), perceived behavioral control (H6),

and behavioral intention towards novel foods. Therefore, apart from hypotheses 1 and 4, hypotheses 2, 3, 5, and 6 received empirical support from the study's findings.

Table 4
Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses	Relationships	Path Coefficients	P Values	Decision
H1	AT→ BI	0.143	0.095	Not Supported
H2	SN→BI	0.187	0.036	Supported
H3	PCB→BI	0.184	0.006	Supported
H4	FN*AT→ BI	-0.163	0.082	Not Supported
H5	FN*SN → BI	-0.163	0.026	Supported
H6	FN*PCB→BI	-0.179	0.039	Supported

Discussion

Anchored on the theory of planned behaviour, the study sought to investigate foreign tourist behavior intentions towards novel food in China. Since research on food neophobia is gaining traction, the study also incorporated food neophobia and extended the TPB model by testing its moderating impact in the hypothesized relationships. In so far as the direct relationships were concerned, the study found that only subjective norms and perceived behavioural control to have a positive and significant impact on behaviour intention towards novel foods amongst foreign tourists in China.

Contrary to past studies, attitude was found to be insignificantly related to behavior intention towards novel foods thereby rejecting the hypothesis (H1). This finding did come as a major contradiction to past findings that showed strong evidence of the predictive power of attitude in shaping behaviour intention in the context of food tourism (Levitt et al., 2021; Choe and Kim, 2018). Perhaps, the major reason for the insignificant relationship could be attributed to the fact the context of research may have been unfamiliar to foreign tourists and the limited exposure tourists may have had with Chinese cuisines that are novel or exotic in nature. Hence, their attitudes towards these foods may be based on limited information, stereotypes or misconception, rather than authentic experiences and understanding of Chinese cuisines. We can also infer that foreign tourists did not necessarily find novel foods in China enjoyable, pleasurable, pleasant, rewarding and satisfactory (which are the major tenets of attitude within the TPB literature) in shaping their intention of wanting to try novel foods in the first place.

Conversely, the study identified that both subjective norms and perceived behavioral control significantly forecast tourists' behavioral intentions towards novel foods, affirming hypotheses (H3) and (H4). This implies that while individual attitudes may not directly predict the intention to try novel foods, the impact of social norms, influential individuals, and the perceived social pressure felt by an individual can positively influence their intention to sample novel cuisines. This is in line with findings by Shin and Hancer (2016) and aligns with Wu et al.'s (2016) research. Additionally, the study shows a positive link between perceived behavioral control and tourists' intentions to try novel foods, suggesting that the likelihood of a tourist engaging with new culinary experiences also depends on their confidence in their ability to do so, a notion that emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy as supported by

Menozzi et al. (2017). This positive relationship between perceived behavioral control and behavioral intention is consistent across various contexts of food purchasing behavior, as observed in studies by Ali et al. (2018) and Qi and Ploeger (2021). As for the moderating role of food neophobia, the study found that its moderating impact was not evident in the relationship between attitude and behaviour intention against the backdrop of preceding insignificant direct effect between both the variables observed in our study. Hence, hypothesis (H4) was not supported. Our findings indicate that while food neophobia is believed to negatively influence the attitude and behaviour intention towards novel food, food neophobia might not always negatively impact the translation of positive attitudes into behavior intention as per the perspectives of foreign tourists' intention of trying out novel foods in China. There could be other factors such as social norms, cultural context and past experiences influencing one's attitudes. However, the study found that food neophobia was able to negatively moderate the relationship between subjective norms and tourist behaviour intention towards novel foods thereby supporting hypothesis (H5). This meant that despite the fact that social influence may compel one to try novel foods, an individual's inherent neophobic traits, feelings or tendencies may weaken the role of social norms in influencing their behaviour intentions as corroborated by the findings of Ting et al. (2016). The moderating effect of food neophobia was also evident in the relationship between perceived behavioural control and tourist behaviour intention towards novel foods which meant that hypothesis (H6) was supported. Our findings indicate that since food neophobia is often associated with a reluctance of wanting to try owing to one's perception of risk, the heightened perception of risk may undermine sense of control one has over their behaviour. Even if the respondents believed they have the ability to try novel foods, the perceived risk associated with unfamiliar foods may lead them to doubt their control over the outcome, thus reducing their behavior intention.

Implications

The study has made significant theoretical contributions in a number of ways. Firstly, the study has successfully expanded the TPB theory by incorporating food neophobia as a moderating variable in a single integrated model to investigate foreign tourist behavioural intentions towards novel foods in China, the investigation of which remains scarce in the present literature (Ting et al.,2016). By filling this gap, the study contributes to a better understanding of tourist behavior in culinary tourism contexts, particularly in cross-cultural settings such as China. Secondly, our study also confirms that there have been inconsistencies between the findings of the present study and past studies pertaining to the role of attitude in shaping behaviour intention (i.e. Levitt et al., 2021; Choe and Kim, 2018). Our findings highlight that attitudes may not always be able impact behaviour intention. People may experience cognitive dissonance prompting them to adjust their attitudes or rationalize their behaviour to reduce discomfort. Thirdly, the salience of food neophobia as a negative moderator has also been confirmed in our study which showed its detrimental effects in weakening the relationships between subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and tourist behavioural intentions towards novel foods. The integration of food neophobia within the TPB framework acknowledges the influence of individual differences in terms of fear or reluctance towards trying new foods on the relationship between subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and behavior intention. Hence, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay of factors influencing tourist behavior

intentions towards novel foods. The study therefore makes important contributions to the growing body of literature on behaviour intention and culinary tourism.

The managerial implications of the study on foreign tourists' behavior intentions towards novel foods in China, particularly with the incorporation of food neophobia as a moderating variable, are significant for various stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry. Since subjective norms was significantly associated with tourist behavioural intention, policy makers and destination marketers can consider collaborating with local communities, cultural organizations and popular social media influencers to shape positive social norms around trying novel foods among foreign tourists. The use of social media influencers more so internationally renowned influencers that the current generation can relate to and identify with will certainly aid in forming better perceptions of subjective norms amongst foreign tourists. They can help in improving the social acceptance and desirability of adventurous eating experiences and influence tourists' perceptions of subjective norms; encouraging behavior intentions aligned with novel culinary exploration. In so far as perceived behavioural control is concerned, tourism operators can consider introducing culturally immersive experiences incorporating culinary elements to enhance tourists' perceptions of perceived behavioral control. Provision of opportunities i.e. hands-on participation in cooking workshops, market visits, and food tastings may enhance tourist confidence levels and empower them to be in control of their food-related decisions and in so doing increase their behavior intentions towards trying novel foods. Additionally, tourism authorities and operators can also consider providing informative and educational resources i.e. destination websites, travel blogs and interactive apps about the local cuisines, ingredients used, cooking techniques, the social traditions surrounding the cuisines, health benefits as well as recommended dishes which will certainly help tourists make informed choices and feel more confident in their culinary explorations.

This research sheds light on the critical role of addressing food neophobia within the sphere of culinary tourism, suggesting that strategies aimed at mitigating such fears could significantly boost tourists' eagerness to engage with new dining experiences. To counteract neophobia, culinary stakeholders and destination managers might implement focused marketing strategies that underscore the safety, authenticity, cultural importance, and traditions of unfamiliar foods, alongside emphasizing positive social norms. This could help diminish neophobic reactions and inspire tourists to venture into novel culinary territories. Additionally, enhancing English language skills among food service providers could mitigate barriers for tourists, particularly those hesitant due to language obstacles, further encouraging them to explore unfamiliar dishes. Training for staff on how to interact with and accommodate tourists showing neophobic tendencies could lessen tourists' anxieties, increasing their willingness to try new foods. Making menus more accessible and visually appealing to international visitors, with detailed descriptions and high-quality images of dishes, could also tempt those wary of novel foods. Offering a mix of familiar and novel dishes could serve as an effective method for gradually introducing tourists to new culinary experiences, fostering a sense of comfort and openness towards trying unfamiliar foods. Such initiatives are poised to not only enhance tourists' self-efficacy but also to gradually diminish their food neophobic inclinations, enriching their culinary tourism experience.

Limitations and Future Studies

While the study provides valuable insights into the relationship between food neophobia and behavior intentions towards novel foods among foreign tourists, the study is certainly not free from limitations. The study may have had a limited sample size comprising foreign tourist thus affecting the generalizability of the study. Future researchers should consider expanding the sample size to enhance the generalizability of the study. The study mainly focused on foreign tourist visiting China which can be improved by future researchers by exploring cross-cultural variations of behaviour intentions and food neophobic tendencies amongst tourist visiting different countries. Additional analysis comparing food neophobic tendencies amongst foreign tourist from different nationalities and cultures visiting the same country at a given period of time will add more colour about food neophobic behaviours. Conversely, the study was cross-sectional in nature and could not account for changes in behaviour intentions and food neophobia amongst over time. Future researchers can consider carrying out longitudinal studies to track behaviour intentions and identify factors influencing changes in food neophobic tendencies. Additionally, the study may have relied predominantly on quantitative methods and might have overlooked the nuanced experiences and perceptions of tourists regarding novel foods and food neophobia. Future researchers could consider integrating qualitative methodologies, such as interviews or focus groups, to delve deeper into tourists' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors linked to culinary exploration, thus enriching our understanding of these phenomena. While research on food neophobia continues to gain traction, little is known about the effect of various intervention strategies in reducing food neophobic behaviour amongst tourists. Hence, it Is suggested that future studies examine the effectiveness of interventions such as exposure therapy, educational programs, or sensory experiences in reducing food neophobia and promoting culinary exploration among tourists.

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