



# Food-related personality traits and the moderating role of novelty-seeking in food satisfaction and travel outcomes

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Food-related personality traits and novelty-seeking travel motivation suggest conflicting projection on tourist food preference. How food-related personality traits interact with novelty pursuits to influence tourists' preferences and consumption remains unknown.
- The existing studies on tourist food preference tend to analyse food-related concepts in isolated but obscure their connection with broader tourism concepts.
- By reconnecting a food-specific concept with overall tourist novelty-seeking motivation, this study provides a more holistic understanding of the tourist experience with food.

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research on tourist food consumption acknowledges that food-related personality traits, including neophilic and neophobic tendencies, can impede or encourage tourists to try novel food at a destination. However, the travel motivation literature advocates that tourists tend to be in a general condition of seeking novel experiences, including sampling a destination's novel food. How food-related personality traits interact with novelty pursuits to influence tourists' food consumption and subsequent satisfaction and travel outcomes remains unknown. The study proposes a framework of tourist food experience that leads from food-related personality traits, novel food consumption, and satisfaction to travel outcomes. While the results support the baseline model, the moderating effect of novelty seeking demonstrates that novelty seeking does not moderate the relationship between personality traits and consumption of novel food. It does, however, moderate satisfaction with food.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourist experiences have been widely conceptualized as novelty seeking (Lee & Crompton, 1992; Weaver, McCleary, Han, & Blosser, 2009), and destinations' culinary delicacies are believed to satisfy the pursuit of novelty, adventure and cultural encounters (Fields, 2002; Hjalager & Richards, 2003; Long, 2004). While existing studies approach the relationship from a “foodies” and food tourism perspective (Getz & Robinson, 2014; Lee, Packer, & Scott, 2015; Robinson & Getz, 2014; Robinson, Anderson, & Vujicic,

2014), the present study focusses on tourist food consumption in a general context, owing to the prevailing “obligatory” nature of food consumption experience for most tourists (Quan & Wang, 2004). This group also has a larger economic and socio-cultural impact on the destination (Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2012; Torres, 2002), and thus is a relevant target market for a destination's promotion of local food resources (Henderson, 2009).

Recent studies on food consumption have explored the nuanced dimensions that can influence tourists' preference for local food in destinations. A range of factors have been reported, including food-related motivations (Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2013; Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Kim & Eves, 2012; Kivela & Crofts, 2009), food-related personality traits (or “personality traits”

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hereafter) (Kim, Suh, & Eves, 2010; Marshall & Bell, 2004), evaluation of dining experience (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2010, 2011; Wijaya, King, Nguyen, & Morrison, 2013), and satisfaction with food consumption and behavioural intention (Kim et al., 2010, 2013). These studies have drawn attention to the sensitive, ambiguous and personal nature of tourists' experience with food.

Such focus on a specific tourist activity has obscured any connection between food consumption and overall travel motivation, particularly novelty seeking. It has been found that the novelty-seeking motive significantly influences tourists' preferences for and attitudes toward tourist activities (Fields, 2002; Weaver et al., 2009). Consuming food is one of many tourist activities and travel motives, and as such, should influence tourists' preferences for food and possibly their travel outcomes. Some scholars have advocated that the pursuit of novelty would encourage tourists to try novel food (Chang et al., 2010; Cohen & Avieli, 2004), although others contend that food neophobic tendencies (fear of new foods) can still impede tourists' willingness to try novel food as they might worry about the perceived risks associated with partaking in it (Kim et al., 2010). These two divergent arguments and their interaction motivate the current study. In addition, it is not known how experiences differ between those tourists who demonstrate neophobic tendencies and avoid novel food and those who demonstrate neophilic tendencies and choose to consume it.

The present study seeks to understand how tourists' experience of food interacts with their travel motive of novelty seeking. Built on previous work (Fields, 2002; Kim et al., 2013; Lee & Crompton, 1992; Pearson, 1970), "tourist food experience" in this study is expressed in a framework that leads from tourists' food-related personality traits, to food consumption, satisfaction and travel outcomes in the form of positive word of mouth and revisit intention (Kim et al., 2010). The study has four objectives: To establish (1) how tourists' food-related personality traits (i.e. food neophilic/phobic tendencies) determine their consumption of novel food; (2) how different levels of satisfaction with food in destinations are based on neophilic and neophobic tendencies; (3) how food satisfaction is related to travel outcomes; and (4) how tourists' experience of food is moderated by their travel motive for a novel experience.

To answer these questions, the study used a sample of Chinese tourists in Macau as the research context. The travel volume and spending potential of mainland Chinese tourists (USD 129 billion; UNTWO, 2014) has aroused the attention of academics. However, studies on Chinese tourists' food preferences are relatively sparse, given that Chinese people are interested in food, and eating out is an important form of domestic leisure activity (Liu, 2004). As Macau is a major tourism destination for mainlanders who constitute about 70% of the Macau tourism market, Macau represents a pertinent context to study Chinese tourists' food consumption experience. More particularly, Macau has a variety of culinary styles, ranging from Chinese to western gourmet, from global food chains to distinctive local food offerings. Macau is also endowed with a novel "Macanese" cuisine as a result of the integration of Portuguese and Chinese culinary cultures during Portugal's rule of over 400 years (Wong, McKercher, & Li, 2014). Food is a unique feature of Macau and appeals to tourists from all over the world (Travel Trade Gazette UK & Ireland, 2010).

This study contributes to the extant literature by reconnecting tourists' food consumption in destinations with general tourist motives, hence providing a more holistic understanding of the tourist experience with food. Practical implications are also provided.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Framework overview

The framework for tourist food experience in the present study is built on Kim et al.'s (2010) framework, Mak et al.'s (2012) differentiation on food consumption and preference, and the literature on novelty seeking (Chang, Wall, & Chu, 2006; Lee & Crompton, 1992; Weaver et al., 2009). Kim et al. (2010) tested a framework that stems from food-related personality traits, satisfaction and loyalty. The present study extends the relationship between food-related personality traits and satisfaction by including a mediator of actual "consumption" of novel food at the visited destination (Fig. 1). "Food preference", measured by food-related personality traits, and "food consumption" are commonly, and erroneously, undifferentiated (Mak et al., 2012). In fact, food preference is the inclination to select one food item over another (Rozin & Vollmecke, 1986), hence an expressed psychological choice between two or more food items available at a destination (Chang et al., 2010). In contrast, food consumption refers to the acquisition of a foodstuff and is affected by food preferences and other factors (Randall & Sanjur, 1981). By focusing on consumption of food, the relationship between food preference and satisfaction with food is better understood and more logically connected.

The proposed framework also seeks to advance previous studies by adding the moderating effect of the novelty-seeking travel motive, to establish whether it impacts food consumption. The literature widely acknowledges that travel motivations critically impact tourist attitudes and behaviours (Fields, 2002; Weaver et al., 2009), and the moderating role of novelty seeking on tourist attitudes, perceptions and behaviours has been confirmed (Assaker & Hallak, 2013; Weaver et al., 2009; Wong & Zhao, 2014). Hence, a travel motive for novelty may not only directly affect the proposed relationships in Fig. 1, but may also act as a boundary condition moderating these relationships. Travel outcome in this research is measured by two different attributes: word of mouth and revisit intention.

### 2.2. Hypothesis development

#### 2.2.1. Food-related personality traits

The personality trait of food neophobia/philia is regarded as an important influence on tourist food preferences at a visited destination (Chang, Kivela, & Mak, 2011, 2010; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Kim et al., 2010). A neophobic tendency refers to a natural predisposition for people to dislike or to be suspicious of new and unfamiliar foodstuffs, whereas a neophilic tendency is the inclination to seek out unusual and unfamiliar foods (Fischler, 1988). Reluctance to eat and/or to avoid unfamiliar food serves as a protective function in a potentially hostile food environment. Whilst both tendencies exist within a person, the inclination to approach or withdraw from unfamiliar foodstuffs may shift, for instance, depending on the perceived total amount of novelty in an eating situation and whether the foods contain some element of familiarity (Rozin & Rozin, 1981). Novel foodstuffs with a degree of familiarity may encourage consumption (Rozin & Rozin, 1981), as may visiting a familiar food provider (Harper & Sanders, 1975). Neophobic tendencies are affected by an individual's motivation to seek out new and/or exciting experiences; thus an adventurous person will generally be more neophilic (Pliner & Hobden, 1992). The opposite shift from neophilic to neophobic tendencies may be attributed to previous bad experiences with a similar food, for example, through stimulus generalization of a conditioned taste aversion, with or without the potential for a similar bad experience (Rozin & Rozin, 1981).

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